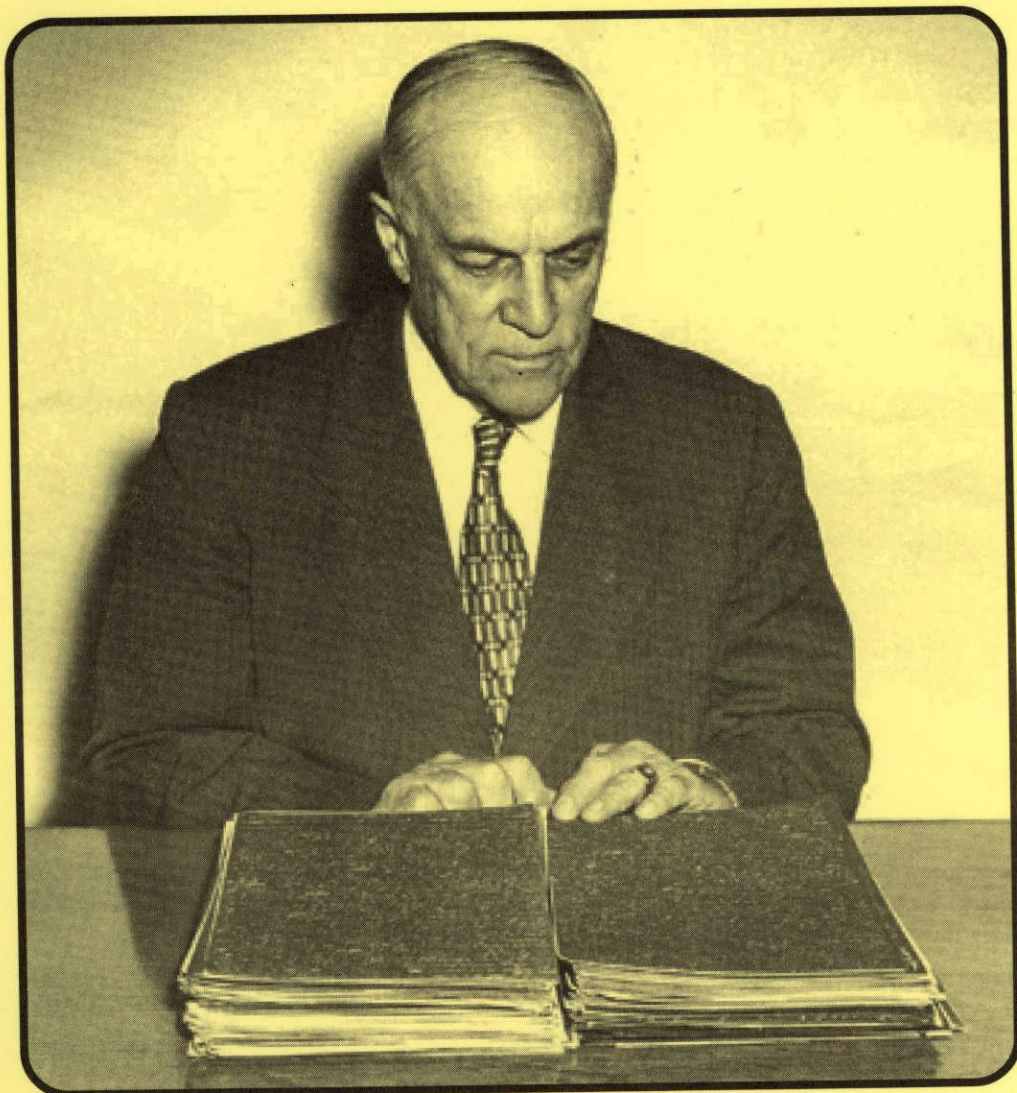


*The John Whitmer
Historical Association
Journal*



Israel A. Smith and a photostatic copy of the
Book of Mormon printer's manuscript, circa 1947.

Volume Twenty-Two
2002

**The
John Whitmer
Historical Association
Journal**



John Whitmer, circa 1870, courtesy Community of Christ Archives, H991.3

**Volume 22
2002**

The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal

2002

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Contents

Volume 22 — 2002

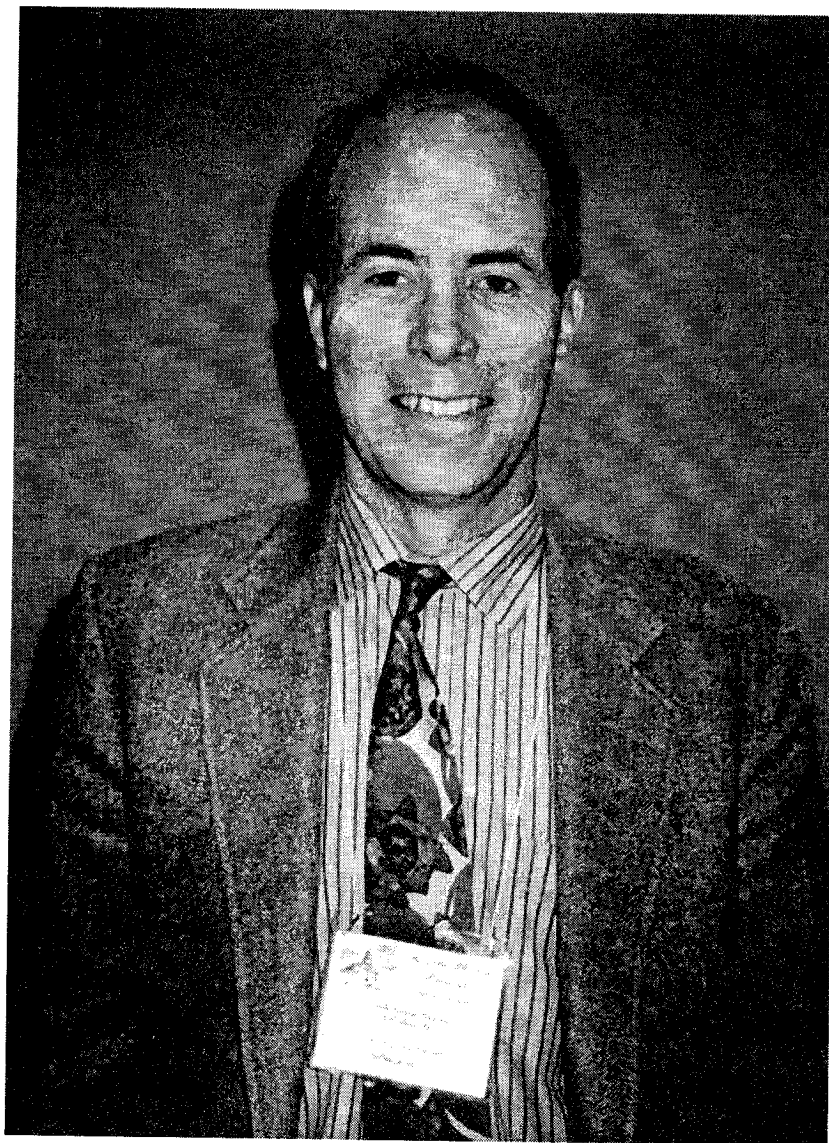
Articles

The Community of Christ and the Search for a Usable Past Stephen C. LeSueur	1
Beating Plowshares into Swords: The Community of Christ and War Paul M. Edwards	25
Validation of Historical Inquiry: A Dialogue Roger D. Launius	43
Joseph Smith's Family Dynamics Dan Vogel	51
From the Dust to the Dusty: The Rise and Pall of the Book of Mormon in the Life and Ministry of Joseph Smith Jr. Robert A. Gunderson	75
"So we built a good little Temple to worship in": Mormonism on the Pedernales— Texas, 1847–1851 Melvin C. Johnson	89
The United Order of Enoch in Independence Gregory Smith	99

Book Reviews

<i>Four Zins: A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier</i> by Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward reviewed by Beth Anderson	119
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<i>More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910</i> by Kathryn M. Daynes reviewed by M. Guy Bishop	120
<i>Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History</i> by Philip Jenkins reviewed by Brett W. Jagger	122
<i>Religion and the Challenge of Modernity: The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the United States Today</i> by Danny L. Jorgensen and Joni Wilson reviewed by David A. Allred	123
<i>Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons</i> by Jan Shipps reviewed by Henry H. Goldman.....	126
<i>Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters</i> by John R. Sillito and Susan Staker reviewed by Norma Anne Holik.....	127
<i>America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-First Century</i> by Peter W. Williams reviewed by Eric Paul Rogers.....	128
<i>Obscure Believers—The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler</i> by Biloine Whiting Young reviewed by Jessie L. Embry	130



Stephen C. LeSueur
Sterling McMurrin 2001 lecture
Photo courtesy of Community of Christ Archives, D3031.16

The Community of Christ and the Search for a Usable Past

Stephen C. LeSueur¹

Introduction

When I was growing up, a local television station would televise a Sunday session of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon or LDS) Church conference for the Saints living in the Los Angeles, California, area. Those of you who have attended or seen Mormon conferences know that they are not designed for young boys. I was, as I recall, a constant annoyance to my parents, squirming impatiently as men old enough to be my grandfather's father appeared on the screen and in grave, quivering voices bore testimony of Joseph Smith Jr. and Jesus Christ and Mormonism as the only true and living church on the Earth. For grownups, it was two hours of inspiration; but for someone six or seven years old, it was about the worst use of TV time imaginable.

There was, however, one Mormon speaker who could hold me in my seat, and that was Elder Paul H. Dunn of the First Council of Seventy. Dunn, who was younger than my dad, was probably the most popular speaker in the church during the Post World War II era, at least among the young people, because he entertained instead of preached and taught us gospel principles while telling stories from his life. Before the war, he played baseball for the St. Louis Cardinals and pitched against some of the most feared batsmen of his day: Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, and Willie Mays. In the U. S. Marines, he and fellow church member Harold Brown faced many tests of faith as they were harassed and ridiculed by unrighteous soldiers in their unit. The stories were inspiring, and Dunn always learned valuable lessons from these experiences: lessons about persistence, honesty, humility and God's love and goodness. They were about patriotism too, as when Brother Brown was shot and died in Elder Dunn's arms, requesting that Dunn tell his mother that he had been faithful to the principles she taught him and that Dunn tell the young people of America that it was a privilege to

¹ Stephen C. LeSueur is author of *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987). He lives in Arlington, Virginia, and is editor of *Washington Technology*, a business magazine published by PostNewsweek Tech Media. This article was originally presented as the Sterling McMurrin lecture at the John Whitmer Historical Association 2001 meeting.

lay down his life for them. Mormon parents would alert their children whenever Dunn was an announced speaker, for when God handed out talents, Dunn was given the talent for communicating with the church's youth. His tales from modern life spoke directly to our own experiences, inspiring and giving us strength.

As it turned out, however, many of the faith-promoting stories that Elder Dunn told about himself were false.² This came to light in February 1991 after a Brigham Young University (BYU) instructor investigated the stories and then turned over his research to the *Arizona Republic*. Dunn never played for the Cardinals, probably never pitched against any baseball greats. His good friend Brother Brown was never shot, never died, and was alive and well and living all those twenty-five years that Dunn had been telling the story of how he died patriotically in his arms. So it was with many of Dunn's other stories about baseball and war. Some church members were critical of Dunn. The BYU instructor, Lynn Packer, said two members of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles told him that if the truth about Dunn's fabrications became public, it would shake the faith of some members.³ Elder Dunn, when confronted by an *Arizona Republic* reporter, admitted that he made up many of the stories, but said his motives were "pure and innocent": to teach principles of the gospel. "You take the scriptures. The Bible is not an historical account of the creation. It's not an historical, accurate account of all the events that transpired . . . , but it is a verification of God's concern for man and men's relationship to God. History, then, becomes a vehicle by which you teach."⁴

Dunn's attorney, who was present at the interview with the *Arizona Republic* reporter, said Dunn was practicing the storyteller's creed, which includes these three lines:

I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge,
That myth is more potent than history.
That dreams are more powerful than facts.⁵

² Details of the Dunn controversy are found in a series of articles in *Sunstone* 15 (September 1991): 28–57.

³ Vern Anderson, The Associated Press, 12 August 1991. Reprinted as "Packer Says Mormon Church Lied to Defend Dunn," in *Sunstone* 15 (September 1991): 33.

⁴ "Paul Dunn's Comments," *Sunstone* 15 (September 1991): 45. *Arizona Republic* reporter Richard Robertson interviewed Paul Dunn on 4 January 1991 accompanied by Dunn's attorney, Jim Jardine, and Richard Eyre.

⁵ James Jardine quoting Robert Fulghum in Lynn Packer, "Paul H. Dunn Fields of Dreams," *Sunstone* 15 (September 1991): 42.

Many church members accepted Elder Dunn's explanation, emphasizing that the facts of a story are much less important than the essential truthfulness of its message; and besides, the past is never fully recoverable anyway, even by historians. William Wilson, a Mormon folklorist, expressed this view when he said in defense of Dunn that, "for many good storytellers, the points made in stories or the influences exerted on audiences are far more important than specific details of the stories themselves."⁶

I tell this story because the Community of Christ, for a number of years now, has been facing similar questions about stories from its own past, trying to decide which stories are true, which are false, and how much the factual truthfulness of events even matters. These questions surround such issues as Joseph Smith's role in the practice of plural marriage, his First Vision, and the origin of the Book of Mormon. Historical inquiry has undermined confidence in the factual accuracy of the traditional stories church leaders have told about these events. At the same time, the Community of Christ has been moving toward theological positions that render many of the founding stories irrelevant or useless in terms of explaining and legitimizing emerging church practices and teachings. Community of Christ President Grant McMurray acknowledged this state of affairs when, two years ago at the annual meeting of the John Whitmer Historical Association, he called for remythologizing the church's history. He said:

In my role as a church leader I have consistently sought to embrace the revisionist understandings of our history that have emerged over the past forty years, while continuing to use that story in new ways, in effect to create a new and empowering mythology that will serve as an effective foundation for our future. We are now speaking about "transformation," which is about change. Change usually means discontinuity from the past, but I believe the hope of our movement is not discontinuity with the past but in telling the story with new images that build upon, but transcend, the historical documentation.⁷

In essence, McMurray wants new stories of the Community of Christ's past that: (1) reflect a more modern understanding of the history by taking into account—rather than ignoring—the discoveries and insights of recent Mormon historians, (2) reflect the changing directions of the church, such as its emphasis on peace and de-emphasis on identifying itself as the anti-polygamy Mormons, and (3) serve to inspire and bolster commitment in the

⁶ William A. Wilson, "The Spinners of Tales," *Sunstone* 15 (September 1991): 51.

⁷ W. Grant McMurray, "History and Mission in Tension: A View from Both Sides," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 20 (2000): 45.

same way as did the faith-promoting histories of the past.

This article will explore the relationship between history and myth—how one finds its way into the other—and in this exploration make some observations about what this means for the Community of Christ as it attempts to remake both its history and sacred myths. I recognize that this undertaking requires that I bring to bear three disciplines—mythology, historiography, and the history of the Community of Christ—an ambitious task even for scholars trained in these disciplines, and so I run the risk of demonstrating the aphorism that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing (or in my case, a foolish thing). I hope this discussion, if not entirely agreeable to the reader's view of the world, will at least be provocative and thus useful in bringing clarity to the ongoing debate.

Mormonism, Myth and the Usable Past

The term “myth” is commonly used to describe something that is false or untrue, especially a widely held belief. For example, we might say it's a myth that George Washington chopped down a cherry tree, or that you'll get stomach cramps if you go swimming right after eating. But in calling for new myths about the past, President McMurray emphasized that he was not calling for a fabricated past or propaganda, saying:

I hope everyone understands mythology has to do with truth, not with falsehood. It has to do with telling a story and setting it in a framework that communicates, that may not be dependent on the absolute historical veracity of the story itself, but distilling from that story empowerment that permits you to deal with your faith, to deal with the future, to ground the movement in a substantial way.⁸

McMurray's vision of myth's role within religion is consistent with the way social scientists, anthropologists, and literary scholars view myths today. Myths are stories that are freighted with lessons and meaning that go well beyond the events or facts of those stories. Myth often narrates a sacred history of events “that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the ‘beginnings,’” according to philosopher and historian Mircea Eliade.⁹ In this sense, myth is an account of a “creation,” how something was produced or began to be. “The myth,” wrote Eliade, “is regarded as a sacred story, and

⁸ W. Grant McMurray, “History and Mission in Tension: A View from Both Sides,” John Whitmer Historical Association 1999 meeting, audiocassette tape. This statement was made in answer to a question from the audience.

⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1963), 5.

hence, a 'true history,' because it always deals with *realities*."¹⁰ Another important element of myth is that it is exemplary and thus can serve as a model for human action. Myths can be about the distant past, such as the beginning of the world or ancient Jerusalem; or myths can be about events in the immediate past. When I was a missionary in Norway, I was told stories by other missionaries that had mythic qualities. I heard, for example, about two missionaries in Australia who, as a joke, conferred the priesthood on a fire hydrant and were struck deaf and dumb. A missionary in Mexico neglected to put his temple garments back on after playing in a preparation day basketball game and was killed in a car accident. His companion, who did put his garments back on, escaped unharmed. These and other stories were repeated often among the missionaries, usually with the introduction: "Did you hear about the missionaries who . . .?" On returning home, I learned that these and the many other missionary stories I had been told— and which I, in turn, told others— were repeated by missionaries in probably all the missions throughout the world, though with slightly different characters and settings. But while we were missionaries, we believed the stories to be true, and their inherent messages— don't make light of our sacred calling, obey the commandments, resist the temptations of Satan and the world— shaped our thinking and actions.

The concept of myth can also be applied to the secular world. In *American Myth, American Reality*, James Robertson used it to examine Americans' beliefs about themselves and their history, including such concepts as individualism, Manifest Destiny, the role of the government, and the use of violence as a means to achieve innocence and redemption. The stories that Americans tell about themselves, he wrote, can be arranged around four basic questions: What is the purpose of America? What is the place of the individual? What is the nature of the community? What is power for?¹¹ He described myth in this way:

Myths are stories: they are attitudes extracted from stories; they are 'the way things are' as people in a particular society believe them to be; and they are the models people refer to when they try to understand their world and its behavior. . . . Myths are not deliberately, or necessarily consciously, fictitious. . . . Myths are not rational, at least in the sense that they are not controlled by what we believe to be logic. They are sometimes based on

¹⁰ Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 6.

¹¹ James Oliver Robertson, *American Myth, American Reality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 21.

faith, on belief rather than reason, on ideals rather than realities.¹²

Like Elder Paul Dunn's inspirational stories, myths are stories about the past whose broad meaning is much more important than the literal or factual accuracy of their details. But as was the case with Dunn's stories, there appears to be an expectation among the listeners and believers of religious myth that the myth is grounded in reality, that facts or historical events will, for the most part, support the myth.

I have raised this issue of myth because President McMurray isn't the only one in the Community of Christ calling for new stories that can inspire and unite the people. In the essay, "Christ-centered Boredom: History and Historians," Paul M. Edwards wrote: "The story of the movement—that founding myth which has sustained us for nearly fifteen decades—is neither as powerful as it once was, nor does it represent the tradition we have formulated."¹³ Danny L. Jorgensen and Edward A. Warner also have argued for recasting the stories in a way that speak more powerfully to what it means to be members of the Community of Christ. Both men emphasize that history is different from myth, and that to confuse the two is to invite intellectual and spiritual confusion.

Warner wrote: "Since its inception, the Latter-day Saints have had a pronounced tendency to want to literalize their myths, their scriptures, and their testimonies—reducing them to historicisms, empiricisms, dogmas, and spiritual irrelevance. We need the wisdom of letting history be history, and myths, stories, and testimonies be some other personal, poetic, and subjective vehicle."¹⁴

These men were not suggesting that Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) historians abandon traditional, critical methods of historical inquiry or that such history should be supplanted by myth. But I think that all of them, like McMurray, were arguing that the movement needs to be reinvigorated with new stories and myths, the kind that spring from real events and then transcend them. All of these men lamented the tendency of LDS and RLDS members to interpret their history literally, to regard history as sacred myth. As McMurray said, church members shouldn't

¹² Robertson, *American Myth, American Reality*, xv.

¹³ Paul M. Edwards, "Christ-centered Boredom: History and Historians," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 18 (1998): 35.

¹⁴ Edward A. Warner, "From 'Sacred Fudge' to 'Christ-Centered Boredom' and Other JWHA Historical Interpretations," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 21 (2001): 8. See also Danny L. Jorgensen, "Beyond Modernity: The Future of the RLDS Church," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 18 (1998): 16.

confuse history with theology, because when the received history proves less than accurate, the theology loses its power.

I don't intend to explore specifically what each of these men had in mind regarding what either church history or the new myths should be. I suspect there would be as much disagreement as agreement. But I think it accurate to say these men were expressing a view shared by many others that the traditional history—the one embodied in Inez Smith Davis's *Story of the Church*—no longer suffices. It neither portrays the Community of Christ history accurately, nor does the story speak to the members' hearts or bond them together. The historian might say that what McMurray and others are seeking is a usable past, a history that simultaneously ties church members to the past, while giving meaning to the present and setting guideposts for the future.

This search for a usable past is common among nations, organizations, and groups of people. It's an ongoing process, usually subtle, though not necessarily so. In recent decades, the search for a usable past has been an explicit goal among such groups as African Americans, Native Americans, and women. These groups, having been largely ignored in mainstream histories of U.S. politics and culture, have sought to fashion histories that more accurately reflect their experiences and contributions and that provide greater meaning to their lives. (Those familiar with this literature know that while the best of these histories has contributed valuable insights into political history and culture, some heavy-handed attempts to forge a usable past read more like propaganda than actual history.) Within the Community of Christ, however, the push for new stories isn't coming from those on the margin, but from the church's intellectuals and the church president himself. It is no secret that recent historical scholarship has cast doubt on many aspects of the traditional stories surrounding the church's beginnings, and this, of course, plays a strong role in the desire for stories more consistent with the historian's understanding of Mormonism and its place in American society. But perhaps more importantly, the Community of Christ has been and is undergoing fundamental change, and the proponents of change, like President McMurray, are seeking interpretations of history that will ground the new church order in the past, provide cohesion and meaning, and help legitimize the church's new direction with the sanction of inherited values and traditions.

In his essay, "The Search for a Usable Past," historian Henry Steele Commager argued that the United States, in its infancy, faced this problem of

needing to create a usable past.¹⁵ A nation, he said, is a community of recollections, collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret. Its people share common memories, sacrifices, glories, afflictions, and sorrows.¹⁶ How does a country without a past of its own acquire one?

Commager argued that American artists and writers of fiction and non-fiction—Irving, Cooper, Bryant, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Emerson, Lowell, and Holmes—provided the basic stories and themes that became America's heritage or usable past. I won't go into detail; the story lines are well known: the founding of Jamestown, Pocahontas saving John Smith, the Pilgrims, the first Thanksgiving, Roger Williams fleeing to Rhode Island, William Penn treating the Indians, Benjamin Franklin walking the streets of Philadelphia carrying rolls of bread under his arms, the Boston Tea Party, Paul Revere, the Declaration of Independence, Betsy Ross sewing the flag, the Liberty Bell, Washington crossing the Delaware, Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge, Washington at Yorktown. We have our memories of heroic episodes: "Give me liberty or give me death"; "If they mean to have a war, let it begin here"; "I have not yet begun to fight." We have our shrines: Plymouth Rock, Independence Hall, Bunker Hill, Mount Vernon, and Monticello. All of the stories are real events supported in various degrees by the historical record. But the key point here is that in the retelling, these events were imbued with messages and lessons about our national character that transcended the events themselves. The stories taught us that the United States is an innocent, pristine, and blessed land; and that Americans are fiercely individualistic, enterprising, God-fearing, brave, and destined to conquer the land. The historical events became the foundation for the shared memories and myths that bound us together as a nation. Commager wrote:

Nothing in the history of American nationalism is more impressive than the speed and the lavishness with which Americans provided themselves with a usable past: history, legends, symbols, paintings, sculpture, monuments, shrines, holy days, ballads, patriotic songs, heroes, and—with some difficulty—villains.¹⁷

Joseph Smith and the early Mormons also faced the task of creating a usable past. Religious historians of the early nineteenth century tell us that Mormonism was just one of many new religions attempting to restore the primitive Christian church. Driving these religious movements was a shared

¹⁵ Henry Steele Commager, *The Search for a Usable Past and Other Essays in Historiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 3–4.

¹⁶ Commager, *The Search for a Usable Past*, 4–5.

¹⁷ Commager, *The Search for a Usable Past*, 13.

belief that the church established by Christ and his apostles had disappeared. Consequently, many sought to uncover the true elements of that church and at the same time restore the church's original authority. This desire was not unique to Mormonism. But Joseph Smith, a master at creating a usable past, provided a powerful and persuasive story line that connected early Mormons—the latter-day Saints—with the Saints from the biblical era.

In the Bible, for example, the Mormons discovered references, not just to a general falling away and restoration of the gospel—for those references could have referred to any of the new religions springing up—but to the Mormons themselves. For example, we have the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel referring to the stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph, which Mormons interpreted as a prophecy foretelling that the Book of Mormon would take a place alongside the Bible as holy scripture.¹⁸ We also have the Old Testament prophet Isaiah foretelling that Professor Charles Anthon would reject the Book of Mormon, telling Martin Harris, “I cannot read a sealed book.”¹⁹

The Book of Mormon itself established Joseph's and the church's connection to the past. Ancient American prophets prophesied about Joseph's role in history, referring both to Joseph and his father by name.²⁰ The Book of Mormon also said that Joseph came from the tribe of Joseph. Hence the connection back to both New and Old Testament times.

Everything Joseph saw and touched, it seemed, connected Mormonism with the past. Give him an ancient manuscript, and it's the writings of the ancient prophet Abraham. If he finds a skeleton, it's the skeleton of an ancient Nephite warrior. A new place of settlement? It used to be the Garden of Eden. A pile of stones was not just any pile of stones, but an altar built by Adam to offer sacrifice to God. Earthquakes, meteor showers, political upheavals, wars—all were connected to the present establishment of the church and kingdom, creating, in Jorgensen's words, a sacred version of Manifest Destiny. Mormonism was God's true church, the stone cut from the mountain without hands that the prophet Daniel said would roll forward and engulf all other religious and political kingdoms.

What Joseph did—just how deliberately is a question we'll never cease

¹⁸ See Ezekiel 37:15–19. Compare 2 Nephi 3:12, *The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1969), hereafter referred to as LDS version.

¹⁹ See Isaiah 29:11–14. Compare 2 Nephi 27:15–26, LDS version.

²⁰ See 2 Nephi 3:14–15, LDS version.

debating—was create a usable past. The stories and history he told legitimized the Mormons' activities, connected them to the Bible's mythical past—to the main characters in the Time of beginning—gave them faith and hope, and strengthened their commitment to the church.

I'll mention one more example of creating a usable past. Joseph's death in June 1844 put the church's future in grave doubt. The various contenders to lead the church sought to demonstrate that their leadership was grounded in the past, that is, represented the continuation of Joseph's mission. Within each group, new stories arose that legitimized the contender's claim. In LDS histories, for example, we are told that when Brigham Young spoke at a special meeting following Joseph's death, "the people were greatly astonished, for President Young stood transfigured before them and they beheld the Prophet Joseph Smith and heard his voice as naturally as ever they did when he was living."²¹ In RLDS histories, there is the blessing given to young Joseph III by his father in Liberty Jail, as well as later revelations to members of the Reorganization that Joseph III was chosen by God to lead the church.²²

The subtle interplay of doctrine and memory is an interesting thing. Those who joined the Reorganization had different recollections of the origins and practice of Nauvoo doctrines and activities than did those who followed Brigham Young, and over time, what was remembered, as recorded in the participants' reminiscences, became increasingly more consistent with the accepted doctrines of their respective churches. Over time, each church fashioned from those memories a usable past, one that connected it to Joseph Smith and through Joseph to all the prophets and God's people all the way back to Adam.

To be RLDS—and, in my view, LDS—is aptly described by Roger Launius, who wrote, "To be RLDS is to *feel* deep within one's being that one is linked with God's people from every age and to know the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit in one's own life and journey."²³

This, I believe, is what the Community of Christ is seeking today: new myths that will revive this feeling, the feeling of connectedness with the

²¹ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History: A History of the Church from the Birth of Joseph Smith to the Present Time, with Introductory Chapters on the Antiquity of the Gospel and the "Falling Away"* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1940), 388.

²² See D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844," *BYU Studies* 16 (winter 1976): 222–232.

²³ Roger D. Launius, "The RLDS Church and the Decade of Decision," *Sunstone* 19 (September 1996): 51.

sacred cosmos, not just through the individual directly with God, but also to connect the church as a whole through its heritage and history in a continuous stream from ancient times to the present. The loss of kinship with the people of biblical times is perhaps reflected in the elimination of "latter day saints" from the church name.

History and the Refinement of Myth

Edwards, Jorgensen, McMurray and others have lamented the tendency of Community of Christ members to literalize myths, to confuse them with history and to treat history as theology or sacred myth. According to Eliade, this approach to history and myth is typical not just of Mormons, but of Christianity. "For the Christian," Eliade wrote, "Jesus Christ is not a mythical personage: on the contrary, he is a historical personage; his greatness itself is founded upon that absolute historicity."²⁴ Mormonism's tendency from the very beginning to treat its history as theology or sacred myth is not surprising, given the Mormons' close identification with biblical prophets, people, and events. They were, after all, restoring that which had been lost and were practicing the gospel as the ancients had before them. They regarded the stories and incidents in the Bible as historically real events, accurately described (except for the plain and precious parts removed by corrupt popes and priests). Being saints of the latter days, they saw their own history as evidence of God's handiwork, again, similar to the biblical histories of the earlier saints, and similar to Mormon's history of the Nephites and Lamanites. History, especially their own history, was the record of God's works here on Earth, the unfolding story of humankind's destiny.²⁵

²⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, translated by Philip Mairet (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 30.

²⁵ J. H. Plumb contends that this view of history as the unfolding of human destiny originated with the Jews and was inherited by Christianity. He wrote: "The concept that within the history of mankind itself a process was at work which would mould his future, and lead man to situations totally different from his past, seems to have found its first expression amongst the Jews." History taught the Jews that they have a special future or destiny, and so history "became an intimate part of destiny." Moreover, the past was no longer static, but a dynamic, unfolding story. The Christian past, said Plumb, was a narrative past that started at a precise moment in time and, like the Jewish past, was a story of unfolding events that revealed the purpose of God and humanity. Interestingly, Plumb says the Protestant reformers that followed centuries later regarded themselves at "the new Israel," much like

Thus, the various branches of Mormonism have treated history as scripture. They expect and require that their histories become, in the words of RLDS Church historian Samuel A. Burgess, a “record of God’s dealings with man” that “help us better to do our present work and build the church.”²⁶

The Utah church adheres strongly to the idea that religious history, properly understood, reveals God’s workings through God’s servants, the prophets, and God’s chosen people. Mormon Apostle Boyd K. Packer has been a chief spokesperson for this view. In a talk later published in *BYU Studies*, he warned Mormon historians and teachers that history should be used for building faith, and that history, if improperly used, can destroy faith.²⁷ For Elder Packer, history tells the story of good and evil, much like the Book of Mormon, which, incidentally, he said is “a very reliable history of the Church in ancient times.”²⁸ Like Mormon or Moroni, the historian should be a partisan who carefully selects facts and evidence to teach and build faith. If you think historians must write non-partisan, objective histories, Packer said, you might as well argue that the Book of Mormon is not true because it doesn’t tell the story from the Lamanites point of view. “We should not be ashamed to be committed, to be converted, to be biased in favor of the Lord,” he said.²⁹ Although Packer’s talk to church teachers was published more than twenty years ago, his views in this regard prevail in Mormon churches and universities today. The historian’s role, he said, is to help people to “see in every hour and in every moment of the existence of

Joseph Smith and his followers regarded themselves as both the literal descendants of Israel and the latter-day Saints. See J. H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 68, 69, 77, 84.

²⁶ Quoted in W. Grant McMurray, “‘As Historians and Not as Partisans’: The Writing of Official History in the RLDS Church,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 6 (1986): 49.

²⁷ Elder Boyd K. Packer, “The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater than the Intellect,” *BYU Studies* 21 (summer 1981): 266. Packer said: “A destroyer of faith—particularly one within the Church, and more particularly one who is employed specifically to build faith—places himself in great spiritual jeopardy. He is serving the wrong master, and unless he repents, he will not be among the faithful in the eternities” (266).

²⁸ Packer, “The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater than the Intellect,” 273.

²⁹ Packer, “The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater than the Intellect,” 269.

the Church . . . the overruling, almighty hand of [God].”³⁰

This view of the historian’s task, and specifically of what religious history should be, was something that occupied much of Sterling M. McMurrin’s attention. In his essay, “Religion and the Denial of History,” McMurrin wrote that most Western religions believe that the inherited theology of their religion has been passed down to them through an unbroken chain of revelation and prophets.³¹ In the case of Mormonism, as I mentioned earlier, that chain starts with the Old Testament prophets—even Adam and the Garden of Eden at the beginning of Time—and continues through two channels: the New Testament and the Book of Mormon. While that chain was broken during the Great Apostasy, it was restored through direct contact with prophets from earlier times, including Elijah, Elias, Moses, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Moroni, and, of course, God the Father and Jesus Christ. Moreover, selected scriptures from the Old and New Testaments further legitimized the claims of the mended chain with their references to the falling away and restoration, as did the Book of Mormon, with its more explicit references to Joseph Smith’s coming mission.

The study of religious history, however, threatens this view, McMurrin said, because such study shows that religious institutions and theology are not absolute, unchanging truths passed on unaltered from generation to generation; rather, religious institutions, doctrines, and practices are the result of historical processes and development, much like other aspects of culture and society. McMurrin wrote:

It is not a comforting thing for religionists reared in the framework of the traditional faith to discover, for instance, that among such ancient worthies as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose historicity is itself not beyond doubt, are to be found the typical primitivisms that define the childhood of religion and morals: polytheism magic, polygamy, wife purchase, human sacrifice, casuistry, and the making of religion a profitable bargaining with God.

Or it is disappointing to those accustomed to the simple, naive narrative on the history of their church to discover the compromising complexities of religious origins—that Christianity, for instance, arose in a world familiar with dying and rising savior gods, or that much of its precious liturgy is taken from the unwashed heathen and some of its basic

³⁰ Quoting Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, April 1904, page 2, in Packer, “The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater than the Intellect,” 277.

³¹ Sterling M. McMurrin, “Religion and the Denial of History,” *Sunstone* 7 (March–April 1982): 46–49.

philosophy and theology from the unchurched pagan philosophers.³²

In essence, McMurrin said, those who delve into the history of religion discover the richness and complexity of “what seemed so simple, the meanness of what seemed so high, the gradual development of what had been believed to be already complete.”³³

This type of understanding frightens the theologians who regard themselves as protectors of the faith, he said, and consequently they seek to discredit historians and shield their followers from a historical view of their religion.

Wherever possible such theologians seize control of the writing of history and its interpretation. They disguise themselves as historians, make history an appendage to theology, and write theology which the trusting reader believes is history. They celebrate the past and enjoy every ounce of support they can wring from it. But they are deniers of history, because they hold that in some strange way that which is with us today was always with us in the past and that nothing genuinely important for religion or morals has really happened in time.³⁴

In later years, McMurrin was highly critical of efforts by the Mormon leadership to stifle discussions of Mormon doctrine and history in journals and conferences like the Sunstone Symposium. In a 1993 interview at Sunstone, in fact, McMurrin labeled Elder Packer’s activities in this regard as “a total disaster for the Church.”³⁵ McMurrin argued that the chief threat to intellectual and moral integrity of the church was its opposition to events like Sunstone. Yet, although McMurrin and Packer held diametrically opposed views on the purpose of religious history, both men agreed on one thing: historical inquiry is dangerous to and even destructive of church and faith—destructive, that is, of church and faith as Packer understood it. McMurrin, speaking of the theologians and protectors of the faith who sought to keep the complexities of their history hidden from rank-and-file members, wrote this:

What they [the protectors] know is that the faith will never be the same if they admit that religion has genuinely had a history, that not only has it had a past, but that things really happened during that past. They are entirely right in supposing that to admit history would produce a different kind of

³² McMurrin, “Religion and the Denial of History,” 47–48.

³³ McMurrin, “Religion and the Denial of History,” 48.

³⁴ McMurrin, “Religion and the Denial of History,” 48.

³⁵ “McMurrin, “McMurrin’s Heresies, History, and Humor: A Conversation with Sterling McMurrin,” *Sunstone* 18 (April 1995): 62. This interview with McMurrin was conducted by L. Jackson Newell at the 1993 Sunstone Symposium.

religion, a kind which they do not like, that often makes people less amenable to authoritarianism and churchly control.³⁶

Historian J. H. Plumb also regarded the modern practice of historical analysis as destructive. In the book, *The Death of the Past*, Plumb contrasted what he called the “past” with “history” or modern historical analysis. He used the term the “past” to describe a pre-modern approach to history. In this sense, the past consists of the stories that a society tells about itself, about its neighbors, its enemies, its religions, its practices and laws—about how all these things developed over time. Like history, the past presents an interpretation of events, but the chief function of the past is not to bring understanding or insight, but to control. “The past,” Plumb wrote, “is always a created ideology with a purpose, designed to control individuals, or motivate societies, or inspire classes.”³⁷ The past—these stories that a society or church or group tells about itself—is used to sanctify institutions of government, legitimize authority and status, justify class structure, provide moral example, and invest individuals and nature with a sense of destiny.³⁸

Plumb’s definition of the past is very similar to the concept of myth and, to a lesser degree, to what Commager and others have called a “usable past.” All consist of stories, told as if true and generally believed to be true, but which place less importance on factual accuracy than on the messages and values conveyed. They are used to unify, give purpose, prescribe morals and behavior, and serve as a guide for the future.

History—the modern practice of historical research and writing—also involves the selection of facts, interpretation of events, telling of stories. But historians, said Plumb, try to understand history on its own terms, and not in the service of religion or national destiny or morality or the sanctity of institutions. In trying to reconstruct events and understand the societies that previously existed, the historian strives for empathy and objectivity, imagination, and the withholding of judgment.³⁹ The historical process involves self-criticism, discovery, the relentless testing of generalizations, the purposeful search for documentation.⁴⁰ Historians try, as best they are able, to examine the past with detachment and insight and comprehension, “to see things as they were, irrespective of what conflict this might create with what

³⁶ McMurrin, “Religion and the Denial of History,” 48.

³⁷ Plumb, *Death of the Past*, 17.

³⁸ Plumb, *Death of the Past*, 11.

³⁹ Plumb, *Death of the Past*, 135.

⁴⁰ Plumb, *Death of the Past*, 109.

the wise ones of one's own society make of the past."⁴¹ Consequently, Plumb wrote, historians have "been active agents in the destruction of the past to which society has so frequently turned to acquire either confidence or justification or both."⁴²

Thus, both Plumb and McMurrin regarded history as destructive, destructive of the blinders that narrow a society's vision and induce acceptance of the way things are. Plumb, for example, had a strong faith in the progressive nature of historiography, believing that as each successive generation of historian breaks down the old myths and stories, the new, refined stories constructed by historians would enrich understanding of society and institutions. Plumb acknowledged that history's truths are not absolute. What historians see is very much influenced by where they stand—by their culture, class, religion, et cetera. Nevertheless, he believed that the iterative process of historical analysis would, over time, yield insights and benefits.

His view is not unlike that of William H. McNeill, who referred to historical writing as a combination of myth and history, which he called mythistory.⁴³ Here McNeill was not speaking of myth in the same way the term was used earlier in this article, but intended simply that myth mean something that is false, while history is—or aspires to be—true. Absolute or complete truth, he says, "is an unattainable goal, however delectable as an ideal," and so the end result of historical inquiry is always something that contains both falsehood and truth.⁴⁴ Each successive generation of historians chips away the erroneous assumptions and conclusions of previous historians and expands the knowledge and understanding of past events. That's the history part. At the same time, however, a historian's limitations allow false or misleading information to remain in the history, or perhaps permit new falsehoods to creep in. That's the myth part. The end result is a mythistory.

But that doesn't mean that there is no difference between one mythistory and another, McNeill said. Despite the historian's inability to write completely objective history, McNeill believes that modern historical methods enable historians to write progressively better histories. McNeill had faith in the proposition that: "ever-evolving mythistories will indeed become

⁴¹ Plumb, *Death of the Past*, 13–14.

⁴² Plumb, *Death of the Past*, 144.

⁴³ William H. McNeill, *Mythistory and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 19.

⁴⁴ McNeill, *Mythistory and Other Essays*, 19.

truer and more adequate to public life, emphasizing the really important aspects of human encounters and omitting irrelevant background noise more efficiently so that men and women will know how to act more wisely than is possible for us today.”⁴⁵

McMurrin likewise held a favorable view of history, especially religious history:

There is no intellectual pursuit more calculated to make a free person of an ordinary person, to free him from his own cultural bondage, and no history is more liberating than the history of religion. . . . The most genuine and humane sophistication attaches to a person who is aware of history, for he has had his vision freed from the blinders imposed by his own place and time and therefore knows more of himself and his own world by knowing more of others and their worlds.⁴⁶

I have a similar faith. I believe that the study of history enriches both the historian and reader, that its end products are empathy, humility, and a greater appreciation for the human condition. I think the limitations of language and culture are more pervasive than Plumb and McNeill might acknowledge. I also think that the questions we historians ask are unquestionably influenced by our present-day circumstances, by our own interest in the answers. But I don't view this as disqualifying. We, of course, must be vigilant, be aware of our biases, test our ideas, debate them with those who disagree. We take up relevant issues to obtain insights, not to produce propaganda.⁴⁷ The result is often the destruction of myth and the discarding of the usable past.

Conclusion

So how are we to understand the relationship between history and myth? What does this mean for the Community of Christ and its attempt to create

⁴⁵ McNeill, *Mythistory and Other Essays*, 20–21.

⁴⁶ McMurrin, “Religion and the Denial of History,” 47.

⁴⁷ Here I agree with John Tosh, who wrote that historians should investigate themes of topical relevance, not as a propaganda exercise, “but in the conviction that there are valuable insights to be learnt from the findings of historical scholarship. No doubt those insights are less clear-cut than the champions of ‘scientific’ history would care to admit. If society looks to historians for ‘answers’ in the sense of firm predictions and unequivocal generalizations, it will be disappointed. What will emerge from the pursuit of ‘relevance’ is something less tangible but in the long run more valuable—a surer sense of the possibilities latent in our present condition.” *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods, and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (New York: Longman, 1999), 214.

new myths from its history?

First, Mormonism's myths have been built on real events, or at least on events that are believed to be real. But the events—the facts and details of the past—are not myth themselves. Rather, they are the framework on which myth is built. The stories from the Bible—the creation, Noah and the flood, the Israelite's captivity in Egypt, Noah and the flood, Jesus, the apostle Paul—can be subjects of historical and scientific inquiry. But these stories become myth by the messages and meaning that believers attach to them. The story of Noah and the ark, for example, tells how God dealt with the righteous and the wicked and serves as a model for human behavior: If people trust God, obey the commandments, and ignore the taunts of the worldly non-believers, they will be blessed. The Book of Mormon is filled with stories that convey these same mythic messages. So too are Joseph Smith's history, Paul Dunn's stories, and the stories I told fellow LDS missionaries. Those that believe the myths' inspirational messages also believe the events occurred essentially as told. (When believers shrug off evidence that a particular faith-promoting story did not really occur, as was the case with Paul Dunn's stories, it's not because believers don't require a historical basis for their religious myths. Rather, it's because they are confident their myths are supported by other events that are "real.")

In reading President Grant McMurray's account of how the church leadership decided on the name Community of Christ, I saw the framework for a mythic story that would serve to unite the church behind the new direction. The basic facts are these. In 1994 the general officers of the church met in a mountain retreat to talk about faith and mission. There were long discussions, tears, and struggling with the spirit. But from those discussions emerged the church's mission statement and then, unexpectedly, a conversation about the church's name that led ultimately to a new hymn and a new name, the Community of Christ. The mere facts of the story—the chronology, who attended, who said what to whom—can probably be verified by the historian. But the story also conveys the message that God is guiding the church and that it is heading in the right direction, even if the destination is not yet clear. The story also presents a model showing church members how they are to seek and receive inspiration. I would venture to say that the path to discerning God's mind and will—as traveled by McMurray and other leaders at the Colorado retreat—is far different from the model given us by Joseph Smith.

One could reasonably point out that historians, like prophets and other creators of myth, also do more with their stories than merely regurgitate dry

facts about what happened in the past. The historian selects and organizes his material to tell a story, and much of what's interesting about the historian's story is not what happened, but his interpretation of why it happened and what it means. But a historian's interpretations of the past are—or, at least, should be—much more modest than the mythmaker's lessons and messages. The historian is aware that the present age and society is vastly different from previous societies, and that while the historian's task is to understand the past, he or she must do so on its terms, respecting differences and being cautious of drawing too many lessons or parallels to this time. As the historian John Tosh wrote, "Everything in the historian's training militates against presenting the past as a fixed single-track sequence of events."⁴⁸ History is chaotic and full of surprises. Violence and greed often triumph over the God-fearing and meek. Not every prophecy is fulfilled; not every prayer is answered. For the historian, the factual truthfulness of the story is just as important as the interpretation. The historian does not alter the facts to fit the myth; as Plumb pointed out, the historian presents his facts and interpretations "irrespective of what conflict this might create with what the wise ones of one's own society make of the past."⁴⁹

It is interesting to note that many people in the Community of Christ who are calling for a remythologizing of their history also have bemoaned the fact that church members have viewed their history as sacred theology. Whether or not this should be so, it should be noted that if the church moves toward this view—that is, toward the view that history and myth are separate and distinct modes of understanding the world—then it would be a sharp break with the worldview held by Joseph Smith and his early followers. For them, God was an active participant in history, and history as written by humankind was the story of God's handiwork on Earth. This view is apparent not only in the histories and reminiscences of the Saints, but also in the documents and proofs they created, such as the testimonies of the Book of Mormon witnesses who bore witness to what they saw, touched, and heard.

I do not think believers can completely separate myth from history. Myths carry powerful messages and lessons because the believing group really believes the mythical events happened. When believers stop believing in the historical events underlying a myth, its power is diminished and changed. Its ability to shape attitudes and behavior will change. Consider, for

⁴⁸ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 8.

⁴⁹ Plumb, *Death of the Past*, 13–14.

example, the biblical story of the Garden of Eden and the creation. Some Christians accept the Genesis account as an accurate description of how this world came into being, a historical account as reliable as any history one might read. Another group of Christians views the creation account as allegory, not literally true, but containing truths about God, humankind, and their relationship to God and the world. These Christians also believe that the creation account was given by God through revelation to the prophets, and that God gave this specific account because it contains many important Truths—not literal, historic truths—but the sacred, capital “T” Truths. The temple ceremony in the Utah church reinforces this approach for Mormons who do not accept the literal view of the creation account. Finally, a third group, which includes both Christians and non-believers, views the creation account as neither literal truth nor revelatory Truth. But they do understand that the Genesis account has many similarities with creation myths told by other religions and cultures; consequently, people in this group are still moved or touched by this story, because it contains within it clues to the spiritual psyche, and reflects some of the deepest and most profound spiritual longings shared by all humankind throughout the ages.

But with this said, the ability of the creation myth to shape people’s thinking and move them to action is very different for this third group. So it is with other biblical stories. Those who believe that Jesus really did live, die, and rise again in historical time, and that Joseph Smith was visited by heavenly beings, was given real gold plates, which he translated as the literal history of people who lived hundreds of years before on this continent—the religion of these believers will be dramatically different from the religion of those who regard these only as profound stories with important lessons about life and humankind. I would also suggest that myths hold their power for people in this latter group because so many other people believe the mythical stories actually as reported. That is, the creation story conveys a sense of the profound precisely because so many cultures and people have told it and retold it as true.

So I believe that if the Community of Christ was to separate its history and myths—that is, if members were to no longer regard the sacred stories as real events that can be experienced with all the senses and documented and treated as historical events—then it would be creating a dramatically different kind of religion than the one created by Joseph Smith. Much of what would be shared in common with Joseph’s religion, would likely be shared in common with many other religions.

That brings me to another point. As many of Community of Christ

historians have made quite clear, the Community of Christ has been moving away from Joseph Smith's teachings and practices for some time. The Reorganization movement was, to a large degree, a rejection of Joseph's Nauvoo doctrines and developments. Initially, the Reorganization rejected polygamy, temple rituals, and the centralization of authority; over time, it quietly discarded belief in the plurality of Gods, eternal progression, baptism for the dead, and the Godhead as three separate and distinct beings. It is one of those little ironies of history that Joseph Smith III presided over the effective dismantling of what the Utah Mormons regard as his father's greatest contributions to religion. This view of the Community of Christ's historical development—that is, this view that the church has been moving away from Joseph Smith's Nauvoo teachings and practices—is consistent with Sterling McMurrin's view that religion develops as part of a historical process, that the doctrines and traditions of a church are mixed with the material and intellectual life of the society in which it exists. This view, I believe, makes Joseph Smith less central to the Community of Christ history. The interesting questions for historians are not: "Who was this man Joseph Smith? What were his motives? What was he trying to accomplish? But rather, Who were these people who joined Mormonism? What were their motives? What were they trying to accomplish? Obviously, their vision of religion coincided to a large degree with Joseph's, but not entirely and only for a brief period of time. The further in time we move away from Joseph, the further the Community of Christ moves away from him and develops its own personality and doctrines.

As the Community of Christ now tries to identify existing doctrines and practices that have carried over from the early days, I hear many people mention the concept of a strong sense of community as reflected by efforts to establish United Orders after Joseph's death. But while Joseph Smith did indeed preach and urge the establishment of such economic communities, his ideas initially came from Sidney Rigdon, a preacher for the Disciples of Christ, and his congregation. Perhaps this is where the real roots of the Community of Christ lie, with Rigdon and the other communitarian groups that arose during this period.

Similarly, the Community of Christ's emphasis on peace has historians looking for its historical roots in the early church. Perhaps it's there, but I

haven't seen it. Neither did former church historian Richard Howard.⁵⁰ It's a later development, I think. The most common theme I've seen is one of dissent. The Community of Christ history is dominated by disputes pitting individual conscience versus obedience to authority or conformity to the group. Mormonism began as a dissent against the denominations and sects of its day. But those who eventually heeded the Gurley-Briggs call to gather under the Reorganization were dissenters from Mormonism's Nauvoo developments (and probably from some earlier ones as well). Joseph Smith III's presence helped to hold together the disparate group of believers, but disagreement and dissent were common. Eventually Jason Briggs fell away. The third prophet and leader, Fredrick M. Smith, even offered his resignation at one point. Large numbers of congregations have defected in recent years in order to follow Mormonism's "true" path. As I read Community of Christ history, I was reminded of Thomas Jefferson's assertion that a little rebellion now and then is the medicine necessary for the sound health of government, and by its extension, the rights and liberty of the people.⁵¹ By this measure, sound government and liberty thrive in the Community of Christ, though one wonders whether the organization itself can long survive such constant turmoil. But even if dissent, and not peace, is a theme that runs consistently through church history, church members have arrived at peace as a primary theological principle, and so the task of the historian is to uncover how they got there. It may be that peace was a recent and learned behavior, rather than one inherent in the genes.

In a related matter, there has been some discussion among Community of Christ historians in recent years about how boring the study of Mormon history has become: the same topics reexamined endlessly, a lack of a broader view of Mormonism in the context of American culture and society, the irrelevance of some aspects of history, and the dearth of young scholars to fill the places of the old. My own view is that recent changes in the Community of Christ should create an atmosphere favorable to creative, innovative historians. The church appears ready to accept that its theology is not a straight line of unbroken Truth handed down from the ancient prophets to Joseph Smith and thereafter to the succeeding prophets. Rather,

⁵⁰ Richard P. Howard, "The Quest for Traces of a Peace Gene in Restoration History," Sterling McMurrin lecture given at the John Whitmer Historical Association 1999 meeting, audiocassette tape.

⁵¹ Letter to James Madison, January 30, 1787, in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, edited by Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 417.

the institutional church and its theology is, as Sterling McMurrin said, part of a historical process that, like other institutions and cultural constructs, is continually evolving in the rough-and-tumble sweep of history. This view should be very liberating, for it allows church members to break with Joseph without breaking with the church.

Consequently, the time is ripe for re-examining church origins. An understanding of who members are requires an honest assessment of the Nauvoo period, of what was rejected and why, of what was retained and why. Yes, Robert Flanders did this, but I have a hard time believing that Flanders is the last word from the Reorganization on this period.⁵² I recommend, for example, that you take a new look at polygamy's development. Although Community of Christ historians generally accept that Joseph was involved with polygamy, your histories present a vastly different—and much more timid—view of its origins and practice than do Utah historians. Community of Christ histories suggest that polygamy arose in Nauvoo as an *accidental* consequence of celestial marriage, and that Joseph somehow fell into it but later may have regretted it. In contrast, histories of the Utah church have Joseph thinking about polygamy as early as 1831, possibly trying it out with one or more women in Kirtland before going on a spree in Nauvoo, with Joseph's only regret being that he had to do it behind Emma's back because she stubbornly wouldn't approve. I think this would be a marvelous time for someone from the Community of Christ to take a clear-eyed view of polygamy. I say clear-eyed because the question regarding Joseph's involvement—did he or didn't he?—is no longer relevant to the church's mythic past. As the church moves away from Joseph being central to its identity and theology, members can take an unbiased look at those events. They will be in the unique position of being insiders of Mormonism, but not bound to perpetuate the mythic past.

Historical inquiry also will lead to an examination of more recent history to uncover the roots of new developments, such as the emphasis on peace and the granting of priesthood to women. Perhaps too, some topics that at one time occupied historians' interest will lose their relevance, for those topics no longer provide clues to church identity (though, hopefully, people always will have a burning interest in the 1838 Mormon War and all its related issues, such as how many Danites can dance on the head of a pin).

⁵² Robert B. Flanders, *Nauvoo Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).

The believing Mormon historian wears two hats: one as historian and one as creator of myth. As historians, we are, as McMurrin and Plumb observed, destroyers of the traditions and myths that dominate a religious organization or society. I relish this role, not as a destroyer of faith, but as a destroyer of ideas and beliefs that are not grounded in reason and evidence and experience. The historian demands that Paul Dunn's stories be true, not just the message, but the events themselves. We demand that the personal stories and testimonies told at church meetings be true. That is how historians fashion their insights and credit them with validity.

But the believing historian wears another hat. Members of the Community of Christ are believers in religious myth. Maybe they don't believe all the stories. Some might regard the creation story as allegory. Perhaps, too, this is how they view stories regarding Noah and the flood, the city of Enoch, and the entire Book of Mormon. But ultimately, personal testimony or belief is based on experience, real events, which believers have imbued with religious meaning, thus creating myth from personal history.

I disagree with those who say that history and theology, or history and myth, are separate concepts. They might be for scholars, but not for the believers, not in the past and not today. Myth, the stories that convey religion's truths, are built on real events, or at least events believed to be real. The problem with the Community of Christ is not that people have confused history with theology and myth, for it always has been such, but rather that the theology has moved away from the mythic history that once supported it. Questions about what Joseph saw in the grove and when he saw it, how he obtained the plates, who saw those plates, what Joseph knew about polygamy and when he knew it, what kind of blessing Joseph gave to his son, what he said in that blessing and when he said it—these were all important elements of the myths that previously sustained the church, and thus were important subjects of historical inquiry. But these events, whether real or not, are no longer central to the Community of Christ theology. This is an exciting time to be a Community of Christ historian. The field is wide open. Church members are no longer bound by old myths because those myths do not adequately explain who they are. It's up to historians to discover the historical processes that got the church where it is today. It will be up to the people to find within those events the sacred truths that turn them into myth.

Beating Plowshares into Swords: The Community of Christ and War

Paul M. Edwards¹

Personal Comments about Peace, War, and Mother

One of my earliest memories is of Frederick Madison Smith (third president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and incidentally my grandfather) working in his blacksmith shop. He was a large powerful man with inclinations considered masculine: a love of physical things, work, and creation by strength and sweat. After a long day dealing with idealized Christianity he returned to his farm at the edge of Independence, Missouri, and worked for an hour or so in the shop set up in an old chicken coop. There he loved to take broken farm equipment and turn it into instruments of war. I have to this day a beautiful bowie knife made from a plow blade and beaten into its form with the heat of the fire and the power of his arms.

Fred M. was a good man. But like most men he was paradoxical. He held a passionate belief in democracy but matched it with a commitment to unified command and supreme control. He did not feel prophetic but led by prophetic utterance that, if not divinely inspired, was at least divinely received. There was little about him that would suggest he wished to do anyone harm. He spent his time quietly reading, studying, praying, pondering, and on occasion shooting wayward chickens through his study window with a .32 Colt automatic pistol. It would never have occurred to him that he was violent or that his love of weapons was some subconscious aggression against his fellow beings.

My educator mother (Alice Smith Edwards), on the other hand, loved warriors. She did not have any real appreciation for the historical realities or personal costs of war. Rather she loved the romance of lost causes gallantly defended, heroic defeats, and tragic victories. A volunteer ambulance mechanic with the Stanford University Ambulance Corps during World War I, she never forgave her father for refusing to allow her to go overseas with her unit. She would never have believed her views were violent.

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My father (F. Henry Edwards) was a pacifist. Not a “march in the parade pacifist” but an honest-to-God believer who endured an extended prison term for his refusal to serve in the British military. He was a loving man who proclaimed peace while being an aggressive administrator, an authoritarian father, a fierce infighter, and an ambitious and unforgiving opponent.

The education my community provided me responded to society's demands that I read and write and do sums. In addition, for my generation we were taught to act in response to the anxieties of World War II. War appeared as a national event to be understood in terms of chronology.

The church that occupied a great percentage of my childhood was, as I grew up, on a war footing: Bible stories and Book of Mormon adventures were mingled with scrap drives, Red Cross classes, blood collections, and victory gardens. Tithes and obligation somehow got confused with bandage wrappings and war bonds, and the community came together for memorials for the dead and even an occasional prayer for church members being attacked by U.S. bombers.

Yet, from none of these sources did I learn about war. My patriotic grandfather never told me about war. My compassionate mother never talked with me about war. My pacifist father never said a word to me about war. My education told me little about war.

What I find most difficult to understand is why my church never discussed this topic with me. Never during an incredibly long tenure of Sunday school did my church teach me about war as a human activity or a moral disaster. Never did I hear any questions about the legitimacy of war. There was no guidance about involvement or any interest in me when I made my own decision to be involved.

All these persons and/or institutions were Christians of a sort. Most of them at least professed peace; all feared violence. But they never talked with me about war. This attitude reflected then, as it does now, the incongruity of the Community of Christ affirmations concerning peace. In my opinion both the peace being pursued and the epistemological means by which it is being pursued are so poorly constructed as to make the possibility of even meager success doubtful.

Why Is This So?

Let me tell you why I think this is so. There are seven points to my consideration:

1. Given almost any set of rational criteria, it is difficult to identify a tradition of peace within the Community of Christ.

2. It makes little difference if peace is seen as the lack of conflict (pax) or shalom in the Hebrew tradition with justice essential for peace. Even understood as broadly as Perry B. Yoder's definition of shalom, it is contrary to the very essence of the institutional beliefs. Peace can never be a penultimate goal because by its very nature it threatens the ultimate goal.²

3. The commitment of the contemporary body is not to the end of violence. Rather it is directed to the ultimate victory of a different mindset.

4. Failure to recognize and identify conflict—like silence about war—stems from a failure to acknowledge that disagreement is not a case of right versus wrong, but between equally valid interpretations of right.

5. The peace vision has been linked to community behavior and thus is neither realistic nor honest. In the community, violent acts go unidentified, and the face of enemy is proclaimed. While the pursuit of peace may aid the community, peace is not a community effort.

6. Violence and conflict are characterized as essentially human activities noted in general but identified in the particular. This ignores the reality that enemy making is primarily a community occupation.

7. Peace is not a serious endeavor. That is, there is little relation between discussion and behavior.

What Makes Me Say This?

Why do I make these comments? To understand my reasons, I must begin with an affirmation about humanity. I need to acknowledge these affirmations before I can go on to discuss the seven issues. The total of my life experience leads me to believe that human existence is created prior to human essence. That is, we are born with a set of gene potentials over which we have absolutely no control. Because of this, humanity in general is very much alike. Human essence, however, is based on decisions the individual makes and thus, humans in particular are very different.

Those who are interested in such things will note that what I have said is defined by existentialism.³ I hope this will not prejudice the reader against my continued comments. But I want to go a little further to what is being called

² Perry B. Yoder, "Shalom: The Bible's Peace," reprinted in *PS275 Ministry of Shalom* (Independence, Missouri: Temple School, 2001), 2–4. Peace is (1) a material state of being, (2) relationships of prosperity and abundance, (3) the sense of freedom from danger. The problem, of course, is expanded by the fact that the Community of Christ emphasis is not on shalom.

³ My own particular bent to this view is reflected best in what has recently been called nexistentialism, a comment on the works of Colin Wilson.

nexistentialism (with an N), which offers a somewhat more positive affirmation of the role of value decisions.

For many people it is enough to exist, and their lives are spent in the gradual adjustments needed to make their inheritance fit the exigencies of the moment. Such people will move through life expanding their existence but remaining little more than they were at birth.

There are others, however, for whom existence will not be enough. They seek to be someone, to be particularized, to be a person. They have a lifetime of decisions from which the answer can be evaluated.

Men and women owe their existence to the bodily pleasures and the psychological fantasies of their mother and father. They owe their essence to no one but themselves. Their decisions made—both over the extensions of their lives and in the immediate of their reactions—are both the results and the source of their determination to be someone particular. To be someone, not a neighborhood, not a species or a gender, not a community of Christ but a—*emphasis on a*—person. This is not to suggest that identity is not aided by human relationships, simply that they are only authentic if individual.

Obviously both who I am and who I want to be are changed by the fact of my decisions. I alone am responsible. I make my decisions within the options dealt me by whatever forces are close enough, and powerful enough, to deal. But only I can give them essence. I acknowledge that these decisions are of more value to me than the needs of the community or the demands of an organization.

Paramount among these decisions for me—and I provide this information only for illustration—is that I will never consciously choose to destroy the essence of another person. Nor will I choose to belittle their power to make decisions. Nor will I ever select to destroy my own essence nor make a decision that anticipates the destruction of my essence as payment for some other value. I can bargain away my existence if I must, but not my essence.

These decisions have been made on the basis of understanding myself. For while I acknowledge what death and destruction do to others, the far more important issue is this: I know what such action does to me.

This is not the place for a long discourse on love nor, I suspect, am I the one to be making it. But the connection is so obvious that I must say something. Just as loving is both my commitment and my responsibility, so is violence. In the best of circumstances one acknowledges (at least nexistentialists do) that love is something that you possess and is based on who you are, not who the loved one may be. I love because the person is

significant in my essence: meaningful and necessary to me. But that fact imposes nothing—no obligation, no responsibility—on them, only on me! Just as we sometimes say God loves us because of who God is and not because of whom we are, so in that image we do likewise.⁴

Violence is no less a personal commitment. Violence is not the fault of “other.” He/she/it is not the source of violence, you are. True, enemy may be the most unacceptable, arrogant, obnoxious miscreant you ever met, but if violence is to occur, it results from the decision of the one being violent.

From my perspective, therefore, the persuasive argument against war is not that communities talk about peace; who honestly cares? Or that Jesus doesn’t like war, even if it’s true, so what? Or that the meek will inherit the Earth; if you still believe that there is prime land in Nauvoo for sale.

The best argument I know against violence (war) is that I do not choose to *be* a violator, a person who destroys. There are many others like me. It is not all that difficult to understand. The catch is that if you want me to join with you in your peace club, I must ask only this of you: *Explain to me how it will be possible for me to maintain my essence in your world if I cannot use violence to resist your open aggression?*

As long as you, your community, and your beliefs are solidified on the sacrifice of my essence, I not only consider you against peace but also believe that you are most likely violent and dangerous. *My father, you see, would have given up my freedom for the sake of his salvation.*

Is it any wonder I grow cautious when I hear you whispering “peace” against the ear of my essence? I applaud my father’s willingness to take responsibility for his decision, but the reasoning behind his affirmations frightens me. This view is reminiscent of Alma 12 through 19 in the Book of Mormon (Community of Christ version) when the parents, seeking to keep their pledge of peace, watch while their children go to war to defend the family values.

I consider such a decision to be treason against humanity. For unlike my father, I am least willing to sin for the sake of loyalty. I am willing to violate the exceptions of my community to preserve your uniqueness. I am willing to endanger my existence. And, having made that decision, I am willing (though in no way happy about it) to pay the price required.

⁴ It is not the case, despite what is sung in the hymn, “O how I love Jesus, Because He first loved me.” “O How I Love Jesus,” words by Frederick Whitfield, 1855.

The clever among you will retort, "Gotcha! You are willing to destroy me for the sake of your individualism even if not for your salvation."

No, that is not really what I said. I said I am willing to resort to violence to prevent the destruction of my essence. I am even willing to endanger my existence for the preservation of your essence. If the community seeks to violate my essence by means that can only be resisted by violence, well—to put it bluntly—I will be as violent. And I will be as violent as necessary up to that point where my actions begin to be destructive to my essence.

From this framework, then, let's look at the seven difficulties in our endeavor.

1. The Community of Christ Has Little Peace Tradition.

While I am reluctant to acknowledge it too widely, I hold Andrew Bolton, coordinator of the Peace and Justice Team for the Community of Christ, in the greatest respect. He is a Christian gentleman, and I have a deep affection for him. But I believe his stated position on peace in the Community of Christ, affirmations for future considerations, and his selected biblical injunctions are not only flawed but also wrong. Never have such fallacies been clothed in such elaborate words woven into such seductive expressions. His views are so contradictory to what I consider to be both correct and Christian, that I suspect at least one of us needs to spend some time in purgatory.

Despite some rather brilliant and heroic efforts by historians and theologians to breathe peace into an old war-horse,⁵ I see little within the Community of Christ tradition that might be called peaceful and even less in the outreach that promotes peace unless, of course, you assume that peace is defined as community or violence as individualism. If anything, the church seems to envision some form of environmental "peacefulness," or maybe just the absence of armed conflict with the Mothers of Israel.

Not only were the early Saints self-centered and arrogant, they also armed themselves in anticipation of provoking violence. They traditionally pushed neighbors out of their territory, invoked divine intervention to confound their enemies, formed armies, unleashed war movements, and supported the United States in its numerous wars. They promoted themselves as an isolated and superior community, and were—just as we are today—first-rate enemy makers.

⁵ Andrew Bolton, Anthony Chvala-Smith, and Richard Howard have all provided peace justifications they found in the movement's history.

It is not necessary to catalogue the issues that provoke conflict rather than peace. We would recognize them if we were to look: kingdom building, authority, truth, elitism, priesthood, gathering, temple exclusion, rebaptism, reformations, and revelation. No less so today hierarchy, acceptance by fiat, and paternalism are harmonious. Nor are resident theologians promoters of peace any more than resident historians are. Add to the list the thereness of the Temple as opposed to the hereness of daily lives, some encouraged confrontational peer pressure—often referred to in the military as mutual surveillance—and peace is hard to locate.

More significant, perhaps, is the fact that membership and identity, policy and direction, goals and ambitions are not peaceful they are aggressive. We learned a long time ago that making what we want happen does not happen without, albeit a sort of quiet and friendly, aggression. The purpose of the church is to win: to win converts, to win souls, to win causes, to win affirmations, to win respect, and be offered a seat on the platform with the other religious folks. And the value of these goals gives credence to the violence necessary to proclaim them.⁶

2. Peace as It Is Now Defined Is Contrary to Community of Christ Ultimate Goals

Restorationism by definition is not a peaceful concept. The desire to “restore” anything, especially a primitive church, is a revolutionary program. Certainly kingdom building is not a peaceful cause, and the sort of kingdom we describe cannot be built without conflict, perhaps even Armageddon. The term “restoration” reflects a belief in deconstruction. If we think peace is a harmonious community, why do we deliberately attack the status quo of people who do not see it as we do and seek to lure them to accept our idea of the truth?

Seriously, is not the presentation of peace more a program than it is a belief? Isn't it, like the Temple, endowments, Zion, Faith to Grow, Communities of Joy, and discipleship encouraged as motivational endorsement designed to give meaning and substance to a movement sometimes short on meaning and substance?

Actually, what has so far been identified as the movement's search for peace is primarily tinkering with compromise. Peace seeking in the movement has been little more than the effort to secure freedom from either

⁶ The goodness of our cause and the importance of our mission, as illustration, are seen as justification for paying staff less than adequate wages.

ridicule or constraints. The beliefs and affirmations of the founding fathers and mothers did not make us either popular or appreciated. We created enemies by our passion. Thus the Reorganization was born in the pragmatic and well-intentioned effort to compromise the strangest of our distinctions and to distance us from the harsher affirmations of our founders.

The complexity in this pacification (or Americanization as the Mormons call it) is not just that it is increasingly difficult for us to identify the intentions of our founders. More than that, it is more difficult for us to comprehend the passion of their investment. They were passionate because they believed; we are peaceful because we do not. Peace is a gentle career when you have nothing left to fight for.

Look for a moment at the change in the name of the church. I am not aware of any really compelling argument, save inconvenience, against changing the name of the church. The name is fine. What I find sad is the incomprehension of the staying power of passion: the failure to comprehend that the effect of an identity, for which several generations fought and suffered more than one indignity, is now of such little value. It is not so much the history of the name that is important as it is the *naming of this history*.

What names, traditions, and affiliations have provided in the past are not so much values as they are evidence of a faith articulated through shared, often-difficult, experience. Simple faith in God is getting to be a difficult product to sell. Response to a movement that promises a community of joy to replace roots, where peace is substituted for passion, may be getting even more difficult.

I am respectful of the current desire to be a peace movement. I can think of no finer tribute to the members of the denomination called Community of Christ than for them to go down in the struggle, lending the slender weight of their convictions to the peaceful side of the scales of justice. It is from this respect that I express my concerns about the pursuit of peace. If in the process of seeking peace the wrong definitions have been supplied, the wrong sources identified, the wrong virtues expounded, the wrong response addressed, then the results of the effort will be ineffective and most certainly not a cure. The answer cannot be yet another paradox baptized.

It is not that as a movement we do not generally find violence appalling. It is rather that we have failed to give the name violence to those things about us that are the most violent, such as the mistreatment of people and the power brokerage of the "old person's network."

3. We Are Not Committed to Peace but to a Different Mindset.

We are not alone, of course, for any church that bases its conceptions on the Christian tradition is not really a peace church. Such a movement is at war with human nature and sin (if indeed they are different). No matter how wonderful it sounds from the pulpit or how many selected passages can be articulated in the defense, I find no evidence that God was against violence or war. Biblically and traditionally God is a creator of elitism, a lover of nationalism, a proponent of aggression, a fan of capital punishment, deep into retribution, always pushing people to use their talents and reap the rewards of goodness. In the main, God herself appears to have ZAPPED as many folks as Captain Marvel.

The biblical Jesus—Jesus the Man, the historical Jesus—or however Jesus is identified this month, did not mind zapping a fig tree now and then or throwing someone out of the temple. Nor did he have any hesitation in bawling out his disciples in front of each other, criticizing his friends, ignoring his family, and demanding his own way. He was not only moody but, on occasion, was arrogant, stubborn, and downright disagreeable.

So, is Jesus against war? I doubt it.

But that is not really the point, is it? When you tell me today that Jesus is against war, is it any different from the information you gave me in the last generation that Jesus was against dancing and card playing? Does it make any more difference now what Jesus wants than it did twenty years ago? It is not learning that Jesus is for or against something that makes the difference in the lives of most people. Rather it is the more difficult question that asks if what Jesus wants, after 2,000 years of effort, has anything to do with anything.

It is not Jesus' priorities but the priority of Jesus that will make the difference. Few, I believe, take Jesus very seriously. And if we do not take Jesus seriously, what then is the great merit in restructuring our myth to meet our current priorities?

I don't believe that Jesus loves the poor more than anyone else. Dr. Andrew Bolton, seeing the question coming, wrote "is the fire service (department) unjust in giving more attention to the burning house than to the ten thousand houses not on fire?"⁷ Probably not! But God, I thought,

⁷ Andrew Bolton, "Economic and Social Justice in the Early Restoration Stories: Reclaiming the Epistemological Privilege of the Poor" unpublished paper, 1. Paper in possession of author. Used with permission.

was a lover, not a fixer. We need to face the fact that the divine record on fixing things leaves a great deal to be desired.

Besides, I am offended by the presumption that the other houses are not also burning down. Or that poverty is the spiritual fire that consumes us. Poverty is bad, I agree. But whom do you know whose spiritual house and emotional home is not on fire? Why is the firefighter worrying about your house while my child dies of cancer? If God is biased toward the poor, if Jesus loves the poor more than others, have we not now simply provided a metaphysical dimension to the increasingly obvious reality that the universe is irrational at best, unfair at the least, and that God, if God cares at all, took sides long ago?

Religion is the affirmation by participants of a view that stands in contrast to human essence. It is, as British philosopher and Nobel laureate Bernard Russell suggested, a law against everything that humans were created to be and do. Because it is contra-human if it is to change or alter humans, it must be pursued, provoked, protected, and preached. That is, it must be imposed. People will not naturally seek to buy what the righteous has to give away. Over the passing centuries, time has not brought us any closer to the Garden of Eden than the day we got kicked out.

Truth is a value judgment and thus must be held and defended against those who find value in promoting a cause that they see as being of greater value. When men and women live by values well defined by their choice, then they are involved in the determination of good and better. Acting on the value determinations of good, better, and best is never peaceful.

It is into this confrontation that dogmatic pluralists insert their symbolic compromise by asserting that the particularities of all religions are insignificant. That is, they assert with some pride that every point of view is equally as valid (or invalid) as every other point of view. Of course, holding this point of view is seen as more valid than holding to a dogmatic point of view.

The opposite point of view, that of an increasingly dogmatic exclusivity, assumes that the particulars of all religion but one (theirs) are insignificant. That is, if one has discovered truth—even a truth—it is proof in itself that other views are untrue.

There are not only good reasons to think that both of these two positions are mistaken, but reason to suggest they are dangerous. Regardless, neither are great motivations for peace.

4. We Are Silent about War and Violence.

Part of the difficulty lies in our unwillingness to deal with violence. The social value of traumatic events comes from the resulting collective “debates over causes, conditions and consequences of those events.” In the initial phase the serious questions rise to the top: “Why did it happen?” or “Could we have prevented it?” But time passes and boundaries weaken and the trauma becomes a part of the social fabric. Soon the events become “stereotyped and selectively distorted” as they are reformulated into stories designed to strengthen collective memories.⁸ Before long, the Restorationists are other.

I would suggest that we are not really very honest either in the identification of violence or the source of violent acts. Peace does not come from avoiding conflict; it comes from recognizing the insignificance of immediate irritations when compared to greater values. We are too polite. We are too politically correct. We are just too nice, and we put up with the most incredible malarkey in the name of avoiding aggravation.

At the risk of being exiled from the reservation, those Great Plains Indians, who now wish to be compensated for the advance of the white man, are only native to the Great Plains if people deny the presence of the San Arc and Diggers from whom they stole the land two generations before, or going back five hundred years, from the Clovis and pre-Clovis tribes. Mexican Americans, if their claim is rational, are really Spanish American or even Texas American, and most native Americans spoke Russian. Or, if the Book of Mormon is your thing, they spoke Hebrew.

I do not want to insult anyone. I just grow angry from the constant pressure presented by the latest sensitivity group emerging. Come on folks, where do I find the point that the other person’s nose stops interfering with my fist? It is from such nonsense that conflict is born, where violence is created. Real violence is found in the violation of essence, in mistreatment, in paternalism and materialism, in letters from the Human Resource Department changing insurance companies once more, in make-do work, in committees with no authority, and sermons with no message, and in attacks on individual dignity.

When I speak of violence I mean that point at which the motivation for destructive action overpowers the reasons, causes, and beliefs violated by such an action. Violence occurs at that moment, often no longer than a

⁸ Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory* (London, England: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 201.

nano-second, when the effects of violence become acceptable. Violence is a passion and will only be countered by a more powerful passion. If the restraining beliefs are less powerful than we thought, or the motivation for violence more demanding than we anticipated, violence will be born.

If we will seriously address peace, we might want to ease back on attacking the international miseries and concentrate on threats to individual essence and the violations of integrity. We might want, some year, to give the peace prize not to someone who will bring fame to our name (what public relations calls branding) but to someone who has refrained from dropping too much soot on the fresh snow of human relations.

5. We Seek Peace in the Community.

Violence is the end product of enemy making. Enemy making is the cornerstone of competition; it is the life blood of capitalism; it is the motivation for missionary efforts; it is a significant side effect of ambition; it is the source of business for the Cyclone Fence company; it is the motivation for rosewood furniture and corner offices; and, let's face it, it is the eighth (if generally unspoken) principle of the modern world.

Enemy making emerges from the passion that drives people into defense and confrontation. Passion that, despite what *Seven Habits* author Stephen Covey and other best-selling comic books suggest, does not result in win-win situations.

Spokespersons for the Community of Christ, it might be argued, are suggesting that the answer to violence is found in being less human and by adopting the community as a place where the compromise of core values can disengage the threats of passion. Perhaps I do not read them correctly, but if this is the message, *I obviously disagree*.

Compromise is peaceful. It is also passionless. The ultimate passions of human essence—love, desire, divine relationships, truth, being, acceptance—are passions that cannot easily be compromised and remain alive.

I believe the answer to violence does not lie in making ourselves less human (less passionate) but rather in the positive affirmation of being human. Human essence feeds on passion, but a passion that carries with it built-in restraints.

Communities are necessary and probably okay. They are, however, the primary source of enemy identification. Enemies are made because of the belief that others owe us something. Unfortunately that is the nature of community: a collection of folks who think the collection owes them something. Enemy is always created by subdivision, competition, the

unknown, and the ones we think should love us for ourselves rather than for themselves. Enemy making is putting a face on the fears, on frustration, on the challenges and challengers to dignity. Thus it is that the achievement of universal prosperity and the pursuit of the general well-being requires the sacrifice of more important values.

It is one of those interesting facts about war that those involved are generally reluctant to kill. Studies, primarily by author S. L. A. Marshall, have shown that a large percentage of soldiers on the firing line do not fire their weapons. The percentage of those who fired was low during the Civil War and World War I; it rose a bit during World War II, dropped some during the Korean War, and rose dramatically in the Vietnam War. It is also interesting to consider that actual firing occurs twice as often with crew-served weapons such as machine guns, artillery pieces, or tanks. What Marshall pointed out, and he saw it as a lessening of military power, was that the isolation of troops—what he called the “empty battlefield”—made it more difficult to get young men and women to kill. What Marshall suggested is that it takes a community to maintain a killing level.⁹

The community is appealing, but when the community fails to fulfill the many desired values, and the eventual personal acknowledgment arrives that you will not (you cannot) win, the face of enemy emerges from the community. When nexistentialism rejects many worldly values and traditional messages of salvation, assuming they are totally unwarranted, they give the impression they are nihilistic. That is not true. Nexistentialists are simply aware that suffering is an essential characteristic of human involvement and the cost of involvement is the loss of passion.

French philosophers Albert Camus¹⁰ and John Paul Sartre say it far more poetically, and French philosopher Gabriel Marcel more lovingly, but the simple fact is this: *If anything has value it is, and always will be, the source of considerable pain.* The depth of commitment to values defines the intensity of the pain. The general values set by ordinary men and women are impossible to achieve. And were it possible in some way to achieve them, it would require the constant and unjustifiable sacrifice of superior values to do so.

⁹ S. L. A. Marshall, *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), chapter five.

¹⁰ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1955); Jean Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963); and Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

6. We Identify Individuals as the Source of Violence.

French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau said it well: "Man [is] subject to very few evils not of his own creation. It has indeed cost us not a little trouble to make ourselves as wretched as we are."¹¹ I am fully aware of, and existentially committed to, the idea that human beings are, at the best, disciplined animals, not necessarily bad or good, but just animals. They will do almost anything once their blood begins to boil or their hearts are turned to stone. Unduly pressured or seriously frightened, a person's reaction is limited only by the degree to which they have concern for a more powerful value than existence. There is a breaking point for most of us, often not too far into the experience, where even the most strongly held beliefs are not sufficient to prevent an unacceptable response. As bad as this realization can be, it is also a key to the best weapon to prevent it. And there lies the paradox.

I have a violent temper, the result obviously of character flaws. I have the vivid memory of pinning down a neighborhood friend with full intention to hit him with a rock. I did not. But acknowledging the dangers of my temper has given birth to the strongest restraint. I know I boil over on occasion and that my actions may disturb or even harm others. But there are limits. Because I know the destroying character of released anger, I will not push my response to the point of winning by violence. In the end I will let you win if the only other outcome is to give free reign to the power dormant within an unrestrained temper.

The restraint on my temper is a hold on my passion. There is no need to preach to the choir. The desires to keep things simple, clean, and politically acceptable are restraints that in turn destroy the passion for life and for belief. If I cannot love to the point of defense, then it is most certainly true that I must limit the degree to which I love.

7. No One Takes It Seriously.

This is not meant to sound harsh. My point is only that there are few levels, where the peace conviction affects the behavior.

There is a tendency among the proponents of non-violence of the Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi variety to build on the assumption that violence is the harming of the physical self, or, failing that, the suppression of someone poor. We know, of course, that despite the value of their

¹¹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *A Dissertation on the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality of Mankind*. Accessed at http://www.constitution.org/jjr/ineq_05.htm on 29 May 2002.

contribution and a considered effort to treat people with dignity, the proponents of non-violence are nevertheless revolutionaries. If you think otherwise you might ask some of the uncouneted people whose lives were disrupted, whose income was denied, whose way of life (however we might not like it) was destroyed, if they consider these peaceful revolutions. A revolution is not peaceful nor is it pretty. The only redeeming quality in revolution is that it may be necessary.

Is there anyone out there with soul so tough or skin so thick that they do not realize that hundreds, if not in fact thousands, of members of the old RLDS Church have been violated, hurt, shaken, dismayed, and sometimes exiled by seemingly irrational decisions? These were decisions to deny a claim to authority, to ordain women, to call apostles by presidential letter, to deny heritage, to abandon singular baptism, to change the name of the church, to deny its particularities, to sell the hospital, to close Herald House, or to quietly drop the word "Saints" from the *Herald*.

The same is true of the more modern peace person who creates a stew of personal and social ethics that is a mixture of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Henry David Thoreau's civil disobedience, Leo Tolstoy's ahinsa, all cooked by Mahatma Ghandi and appropriated by Martin Luther King Jr., seeing fit to replace violence with what they called "nonviolent direct action." This is more doublespeak. It is the same misuse of the language that makes me no longer "fat" but "gravitationally challenged." It is distorting and damaging.

"Is it not," my friend and critic Andrew Bolton asked, "a different revolution with fewer killed?" That is the point, isn't it? If killing is your definition of lack of peace, if killing is what makes war so bad, then perhaps the fewer number of deaths is meaningful. But, dear friends, war is far beyond killing. War is the destruction of human beings, those killed, those wounded, those trained, those who are victorious, as well as those who lose. War (revolution) is about the destruction of humanity, and that happens in confrontation regardless of the causes.

Violence emerges from the inequality of the concept of equality. Think for a minute of the peace efforts that promoted the end of universal conscription following World War II. They were well meant, but they had the effect of determining that the poor and uneducated would fight in Korea and Vietnam. Equality is primarily a meaningless word where wants, values, and needs are relative. And fair—fair is not the issue—fair is not going to happen.

Fair is not possible because we are not created fairly. We are not placed in a fair environment. Nor apparently does divinity operate on a level playing

field. I am angry because it is unfair. I wonder why it is that God has time to address the organizational process of changing a name but seems totally uninterested in child abuse. I wonder why strong-minded feminists watch *Pretty Woman* over and over again. I wonder why good things continue to happen to bad people. I wonder why destructive policies are deemed legitimate when initiated by organizations claiming to do well. I wonder why killing a police officer is more damning than killing a teacher, or why the Kansas City Chiefs who play in the shadow of the Temple cannot keep a healthy quarterback. And, recalling poet Robert Browning's promise, "Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, The last of life, for which the first was made,"¹² I wonder why good men and women, who have fought for a lifetime of decent reminiscences, lose their memories in the last of life.

Life is not fair: "And that is my final answer." Why do we assume the wounded are more compassionate than the healers? And who, if you really look, is not already wounded? People who assume fair or equal as a requirement for justice on the road to peace are not, well, they are not being fair. And they are not going to find peace.

What Is the Answer?

Having voiced my opinions, it might be assumed I have an answer. You know, of course, that even if I did, you would not listen to it. I hope that you will not confuse the fact that I am serving bitter wine with possessing sour grapes. The merits of my understandings are diminished by my lack of community value. If you question this idea, take a look at the Community of Christ's gradual transference of wisdom from the knowledgeable to the popular.

You see I have not won a Pulitzer prize, made two million dollars in the dog-food business, played tight end for the Denver Broncos, or even appeared as a long-lost relative on *Oprah*. I am simply acknowledging the fact that people of the twenty-first century—and World Church ministers—have concluded that presentation is more significant than content. And since this presentation has little or no glamour, and certainly will not get a bite on *Entertainment Tonight*, the content is meaningless.

But for myself—and among friends as well as enemy makers—I affirm my belief in the power of individuality: individuality, not exclusivity. This power will not exist in community because when you move beyond self, even to one

¹² Robert Browning, "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 1864. Accessed at <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/rp/poems/browning16.html> on 29 May 2002.

other person, you define a body, a community, a gender, a nation, and you begin the conflict of exclusivity. When you are exclusive, you create problems. Problems tend to grow into causes and causes eventually into revolutions. Have we learned nothing from three thousand years of recorded history? Do we not realize that the passion must be in the individual and not in the community? Community passion fails under the weight of its own need to compromise. Each new step to combine with others, for any reason other perhaps, than the pragmatic pooling of resources, is a process in the externalization of others. Each step increases the distance possible between relationships.

To have friends alienates you from those who are not your friends. Wasn't it *The Man from La Mancha* who illustrated to us how love breaks up friendships? Just having best friends alienates all your other friends. To select one from all over the world to be your significant other denies the selectivity of all others in the world. To win the prize, to be granted the grant, to get the job, to sit above the salt, all these things are baby steps in the long journey to enemy making.

People who support competitive games, provide employee-of-the-month parking spaces, or establish pay levels either do not understand reality or believe in some simplistic manner that equality can exist in the same world as rewarded competition and instant gratification. What is at stake is the belief that an identified value is so pragmatically imbedded in us by now that we can do nothing else. But, please, do not assume that this is the road to peace. The road to peace leads through the individual's determination.

To believe in something so powerfully that it carries with it the ethics of all other beliefs is to make those other beliefs simply matters of convenience. Am I toying here with anarchism? Of course. I am also toying with radicalism. Both positions require that you live in the present. But remember: while one can choose to be an anarchist or a radical, one can never be required to be an anarchist or a radical. When the community is more important than the individual, the individual becomes enemy. Peace is not found between enemies but between essences equal in their right, if not in their ability, to be individuals.

Conclusion

1. The church cannot successfully be a restoration (religious) movement—that is, seeking some divinely revealed and universally applied values—and still be at peace with the world. Those goals are contradictory.

2. The Community of Christ's understanding of peace as the lacking of passion reduces us and our vision to the same level of cosmetics that men and women have always applied in an effort to cover up, rather than cure, the many other diseases on the body religious. Let's return for just a moment to the question of essence. The danger is that groups— even churches— tend to be increasingly interested in existence when the humane pursuit (and I would assume God) is more dependent on an interest in essence.

3. People with convictions, with beliefs, and with passions do not find the concept of peace as a goal more significant than the life of passion. For many people, a value that is devoid of passion may well not be worth fighting for. But it is, at the same time, not really worth living for.

Validation of Historical Inquiry: A Dialogue

Roger D. Launius¹

Editor's Note

This is not a typical article that appears in this journal. It is an email exchange about an article and represents an on-going discussion about the topic. The reader cared enough to contact the author and seek clarification. You may want to read the article under discussion. However, the real thrust is to validate the process.

February 2001

Dear Roger,

I read your article titled "The RLDS Church and the Decade of Decision."² You and your opinions have been the object of much discussion on the *theology-l@graceland.edu* site.

Some feel that you are merely giving your opinion as to things that have transpired in the RLDS Church. Some have felt that you are speaking against the Church. I feel that you have told what happened rather accurately. Others agree with me as to the accuracy of your conclusions.

So, what I desire to know is, how much of what you said in your article do you feel was your opinion only, and how much do you consider was fact?
J. Doe

Dear J. Doe,

Thank you for your e-mail. The paper you read is one of several publications that I prepared between 1986 and the present relating to the history of the Reorganized Church in the twentieth century. The others include:

"A New Historiographical Frontier: The Reorganized Church in the Twentieth Century," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 6 (1986): 53-63.

¹ Roger D. Launius was chief historian of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Washington, D.C., for twelve years. He now works for the Smithsonian Institution. A graduate of Graceland College, he received a Ph.D. from Louisiana State University. He has written books and articles on aerospace history, nineteenth-century American religious and political history, and baseball.

² Roger D. Launius, "The RLDS Church and the Decade of Decision," *Sunstone* 19 (September 1996): 45-55. Access the article at <http://www.forthnt.com/~connections/decade.htm>

"An Ambivalent Rejection: Baptism for the Dead and the Reorganized Church Experience," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23 (summer 1990): 61-84.

"Whither Reorganization Historiography?" *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990): 24-37.

* *Let Contention Cease: The Dynamics of Dissent in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, Missouri: Graceland/Park Press, 1991, second edition 1993). Edited with W. B. "Pat" Spillman.

"At the Barricades of the Gospel: The Conspiracy Theme in RLDS History," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 13 (1993): 3-17.

"Second among Equals: The Reorganized Church, Black Americans, and the American Mainstream," *Restoration Studies V*, Darlene Caswell, editor (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1993), 126-138.

"A Black Woman in a White Man's Church: Amy E. Robbins and the Reorganization," *Journal of Mormon History* 19 (fall 1993): 64-85.

* "Coming of Age? The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the 1960s," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28 (summer 1995): 31-57.

"An American Prophet Abroad: Joseph Smith III's Missionary Trip to the British Isles, 1903," *Restoration Studies VI*, Wayne Ham and Joni Wilson, editors (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1995), 87-99.

* "The RLDS Church and the Decade of Decision," *Sunstone* 19 (September 1996): 45-55.

* "Neither Mormon nor Protestant? The Reorganized Church and the Challenge of Identity," *Mormon Identities in Transition*, Douglas Davies, editor (London: Cassell, 1996), 52-60.

"Pretender to the Throne? R. C. Evans and the Problem of Presidential Succession in the Reorganization," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30 (summer 1997): 81-102.

* "The Reorganized Church, the Decade of Decision, and the Abilene Paradox," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31 (Spring 1998): 47-65.

I have marked with an asterisk (*) those items that most directly relate to the issues that concern you. I note the other articles as a means of indicating that my studies of the twentieth-century experience of the RLDS Church are much broader than just the theological reformation of the last forty years. Additionally, I should add that I have a article with the title, "The Contemporary RLDS Identity Crisis: A Decade of Decision," *Religion and the Challenge of Modernity: The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ in the United States*

Today, Danny L. Jorgensen and Joni Wilson, editors (Binghamton, New York: Global Publications, 2001).

I researched and wrote "The RLDS Church and the Decade of Decision" as a means of coming to grips with what seemed to me a fundamental crisis of identity being experienced among the members and leaders of the religious institution as it shed its sectarian nature and moved more into the Protestant mainstream. From the very beginning of the RLDS Church in the 1850s, the institution and its membership defined themselves in relation to both radical Mormonism on one hand and standard American Protestantism on the other.

Several years ago Clare D. Vlahos brilliantly described what could only be considered a tightrope on which the Reorganized Church had walked as it both sought "to be reasonable to gentiles and legitimate to Mormons."³ In the 1960s the church began to abandon its traditional goal of "legitimacy" to Mormons in favor of a greater reasonableness to other elements of Christianity. I believe this created a crisis of identity as the RLDS Church has failed thus far to define for itself a role that will enable it to enjoy future success as a separate institution.

I describe in the "The RLDS Church and the Decade of Decision" the process leading to that movement away from the traditional RLDS consensus in a relatively straightforward manner. What I said is little different from what other scholars have said about this process. Along those lines see:

- * Howard Booth, "Recent Shifts in Restoration Thought," *Restoration Studies I*, Maurice L. Draper and Clare D. Vlahos, editors (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1980), 162-175.
- * Larry W. Conrad and Paul Shupe, "An RLDS Reformation? Construing the Task of RLDS Theology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (summer 1985): 92-103.
- * Larry W. Conrad, "Dissent among Dissenters: Theological Dimensions of Dissent in the Reorganization," *Let Contention Cease: The Dynamics of Dissent in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Roger D. Launius and W. B. "Pat" Spillman, editors (Independence, Missouri: Graceland/Park Press, 1991), 199-239.
- * Lawrence Foster, "The RLDS Paradigm Shift: Some Lessons from the

³ Clare D. Vlahos, "Images of Orthodoxy: Self-Identity in Early Reorganization Apologetics," *Restoration Studies I*, Maurice L. Draper and Clare D. Vlahos, editors (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1980), 176.

- Transformation of the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims)," unpublished paper presented at the Mormon History Association Annual Meeting, Park City, Utah, May 21, 1994.
- * W. Paul Jones, "Demythologizing and Symbolizing the RLDS Tradition," *Restoration Studies V*, Darlene Caswell, editor (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1993), 109–115.
 - * William J. Knapp, "Professionalizing Religious Education in the Church: The 'New Curriculum Controversy,'" *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 2 (1982): 47–59.
 - W. Grant McMurray, "The Reorganization in Nineteenth-Century America: Identity or Historiographical Problem?" *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 2 (1982): 3–11.
 - William D. Russell, "The Fundamentalist Schism, 1958–Present," *Let Contention Cease: The Dynamics of Dissent in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Roger D. Launius and W. B. "Pat" Spillman, editors (Independence, Missouri: Graceland/Park Press, 1991), 125–151.
 - * W. B. "Pat" Spillman, "Dissent and the Future of the Church," *Let Contention Cease: The Dynamics of Dissent in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Roger D. Launius and W. B. "Pat" Spillman, editors (Independence, Missouri: Graceland/Park Press, 1991), 259–292.
 - Clare D. Vlahos, "Images of Orthodoxy: Self-Identity in Early Reorganization Apologetics," *Restoration Studies I*, Maurice L. Draper and Clare D. Vlahos, editors (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1980), 176–186.

Again, I have marked with an asterisk (*) those items that most directly relate to the issues that concern you.

I do not believe that what I had to say about the process of theological reformation between the 1960s and the present is particularly controversial, and it certainly does not represent historical revisionism. I was a little surprised to read on the theology-1 website that some thought this was nothing more than my opinion. If it is opinion, then it is opinion shared by several other scholars who have investigated the subject in some detail.

Perhaps this discussion of the process of theological reformation will be revised by future scholars using other perhaps more extensive sources. If so, I urge them to be about the task. I will add that historians are seriously hamstrung by the lack of official records that may be used in considering recent historical issues. For instance, all the minutes of ruling bodies in the RLDS Church are closed until fifty years after the fact. We will not know for

years what took place in the Joint Council as it considered issues from the 1950s on. The papers of many RLDS officials deposited in the RLDS Archives also have exceptionally restrictive access requirements. And many of the oral histories conducted with senior RLDS officials are closed. This makes it exceptionally difficult for anyone to understand what was taking place inside the RLDS hierarchy. Researchers are constrained to work from published sources and a few open collections. I would urge anyone with an interest to explore the issues raised in my paper by using additional sources; perhaps they will reach other appropriate conclusions.

What is fully my opinion in the paper is the last part in which I describe a process for returning to a distinctive place on the continuum between mainstream Protestantism and radical Utah Mormonism. My prescription is oriented toward reinterpreting three traditional Restoration distinctives—the Book of Mormon, the ideal of Zion, and belief in continuing revolution—for a new era. In this sense, the essay moves from historical analysis to policy advocacy. That is the major reason I published it in *Sunstone*, which is not a journal of historical scholarship but a magazine of religious thought. One may accept or reject any or all of the essay, including these prescriptive comments, as they see fit. I would urge them to undertake a serious exploration of the issues raised, however, and to reach defensible conclusions of their own rather than accept anyone else's position.

Having said all of this, let me suggest that I'm not sure exactly that there is a difference between "fact" and "opinion." Bear with me here, I will try to be both brief and clear. Scholars have been wrestling for some time now with an epistemological questioning of whether or not anything is truly knowable, in other words whether or not there are "facts" in any absolute sense. The fundamental philosophical thrust of recent historical inquiry has led to a blurring of the line between fact and fiction, between history and poetry, between the unrecoverable past and our memory of it. According to Robert F. Berkhofer, the philosophy of history presently in vogue essentially denies factuality. He claims, that the "transmutation of so much—some would say all—of the referential side of history into the presentational and narrative side destroys the effect of overall factual authority claimed for historical productions."⁴

Hayden White, a leader in the linguistic turn in historical analysis, argues

⁴ Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., "The Challenge of Poetics to (Normal) Historical Practice," *Poetics Today* 9 (1988): 435–452.

that historical writing is not simply noting “facts” in a chronological sequence, since that does not offer any understanding whatsoever. It involves the historian consciously fashioning a story, an “emplotment” in White’s jargon, that achieves coherence only through the decryptions and glossing of the historian.⁵

All of this activity has raised the specter of the inexact character of historical “truth,” and of its relationship to myth and memory and the reality of an unrecoverable past. “Truths” have differed from time to time and place to place with reckless abandon and enormous variety. Religious, social, ethnic, national, language, and other types of groups over time have held a remarkably diverse set of truths, all internally consistent and rational. Choice between them is present everywhere both in the past and the present; my idea of fact dissolves into your idea of opinion almost as soon as it is articulated. We see this reinforced everywhere about us today, and mostly we shake our heads and misunderstand the versions of truth espoused by various groups about themselves and about those excluded from their fellowship.

Because of this inexact nature of truth—indeed I’m not sure that truth really exists or if it does that it is knowable—any debate about fact and opinion seems to me to be rather fruitless. I am quite willing to allow anyone to believe whatever they think appropriate based on their own investigations and careful reasoning.

I do not now, and never have claimed, that what I write is the last word on any subject. What you and others are doing in considering this essay is exactly what I hoped would take place when I wrote it. In so doing, it validates that the products of historical inquiry are relevant to the larger questions being considered by those who are not historical professionals. I have always believed that the search for historical knowledge came through each person’s study and presentation, modified or embraced or rejected by others on the same quest. I revise what has gone before; others following my path revise my work. That is the historical enterprise, as I understand it. To see that others are considering what I have written, rather than ignoring it, is perhaps the highest compliment any historian might be paid. It is also rare, for at least in the RLDS Church historical study has been essentially ignored.

⁵ Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki, editors (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 41–62.

I want people to question what I have to say. I don't want anyone to accept what I have to say on anything at face value, or for that matter what anyone else says either. I do believe that everyone has a responsibility to investigate the subject for all issues that matter to them, to amass as much information as possible, and to transform that information into usable knowledge that is both rational and defensible to others with alternative positions. Rejecting out of hand a position without undertaking that exploration abdicates to others the individual's responsibility to develop into the most whole human being possible.

Unfortunately, too many adherents to Mormonism—whether LDS or RLDS—are willing to accept that all “truth” rests ultimately with the church and its leadership, and are unwilling to accept any position that does not reinforce conceptions taught by them. For instance, my LDS friends are constrained to accept as true the following statement: “Joseph Smith was a genuine seer and prophet, and the Book of Mormon is true.” Mormon leaders have asserted that if either one or the other is true, because both are linked, the truth of the other is warranted. Without acceptance of these truths as espoused by the church's leadership, Mormonism would and probably should fall of its own weight. This is a misguided and ultimately a dangerous conclusion that abdicates responsibility for one's own beliefs. I believe this may be one of the most serious problems of human society. It is a mentality that fosters all manner of abuses as people go along with decisions without due consideration.

I think historians can help with this process by offering perspectives that enable people to explore a range of explanations. Moving between these two poles we construct our historical narratives so that they will be of value to the group, wrestling with the complex weavings of myth and memory as they relate to the unrecoverable past of the religious group. Our constructions are different, in part because we are each different individuals with unique experiences and perceptions, but our allegiances are also different. I would argue that differing visions of the past are healthy and important attributes of the marketplace of ideas and the varieties of expression they offer leave the RLDS identity richer and more clearly defined. I have been endlessly struck by what can be learned and how our community can be enriched by looking at the same issue from a variety of perspectives.

I hope this discussion is of some help.

Sincerely,

Roger D. Launius

Joseph Smith's Family Dynamics

Dan Vogel¹

In a 1943 letter to Reorganized Church historian S. A. Burgess, Mormon historian Dale Morgan wrote: "I think [Joseph Smith] was a man subjected to a singular environmental pressure, and that his behavior must be interpreted as the effect of this pressure upon distinctive psycho-physiological components of his character."² This essay will argue that the "singular environmental pressure" motivating Smith's behavior came primarily from his own family, and that Smith began his religious career, in part, to resolve family conflict.

An examination of Joseph Smith in the context of his family environment has been largely neglected and his relationship with his parents barely explored.³ Since the late 1950s, family therapists have become increasingly aware of the importance of understanding the individual within the context of his/her family of origin. My approach to Joseph Smith is informed by family-systems theory, which views the family as an organism-like system that seeks to maintain emotional equilibrium (or homeostasis).⁴

¹ Dan Vogel is the author of several books on Mormon history, including the award-winning, five-volume series-in-progress, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996-). He is the editor of *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), a contributor to *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History*, Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, editors (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), and coeditor with Brent Lee Metcalfe of *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), among others. He presented this article at the John Whitmer Historical Association 1996 meeting and at the Sunstone Symposium in 1997.

² John Philip Walker, editor, *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 44.

³ An exception is found in C. Jess Groesbeck, "The Smiths and Their Dreams and Visions," *Sunstone* 12 (March 1988): 22-29. While Groesbeck touches on some of the same themes as this essay, he comes to the subject from a Jungian perspective and emphasizes the symbolic content of Joseph Smith, Sr.'s, dreams, which wife Lucy recounted in 1845. Contrastingly, this essay will draw on other psychological perspectives and focus on events of considerably more historical weight.

⁴ For examples of works that treat the family as a system, see Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and James Framo, editors, *Intensive Family Therapy: Theoretical and Practical Aspects* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and Gerald H. Zuk, editors, *Family Therapy and Disturbed Families* (Palo Alto, California:

Therapists Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and James L. Framo explain the important insights gleaned from this approach to the family:

A turning point in psychiatric thinking was achieved when it was realized that symptoms served to balance forces within the family as well as intrapsychic forces. A deep, unconscious, multiperson motivational structure was found to exist in every family. Behavior, rather than being determined solely by an individual's own psychic forces, was found to be determined, in part, by the motive systems of important others who could gratify or frustrate. It was learned that there is always cross-complicity in what people do to each other, and that the giving, getting, and withholding is reciprocal. Family therapists began to get some inkling of the interlocking, homeostatic system of the family and how, in extremely intricate fashion, the intrapsychic struggles were blended into a transactional whole. If one family member got better, another one had to balance the system and get sick.⁵

In a dysfunctional family, a family where one or both of the parents are emotionally impaired, the family system seeks balance in neurotic or even pathological ways. An imbalance between the parents greatly affects the family system, especially the children, who usually seek to save the marriage. Again, Boszormenyi-Nagy and Framo explain: "There are a number of typical family problems which appear repeatedly. One of the most common results from the parents being so overwhelmed with their introjects that there is essentially no marriage and the children, for their own survival, are engaged in attempts to save their parents' marriage."⁶

Science and Behavior Books, 1967); Alfred A. Messer, *The Individual in His Family: An Adapted Study* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1970); R. D. Laing, *Politics of the Family and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972); Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and Geraldine M. Spark, *Invisible Loyalties: Reciprocity in Intergenerational Family Therapy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); David Kantor and William Lehr, *Inside the Family* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1975); Philip J. Guerin, editor, *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Gardner Press, 1976); Augustus Y. Napier and Carl A. Whitaker, *The Family Crucible* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); Stephen J. Schultz, *Family Systems Therapy: An Introduction* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1984); Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, *Between Give and Take: A Clinical Guide to Contextual Therapy* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1986); Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, *Foundations of Contextual Therapy* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1987); and John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw on the Family* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, 1988).

⁵ Boszormenyi-Nagy and Framo, *Intensive Family Therapy*, xvii.

⁶ Boszormenyi-Nagy and Framo, *Intensive Family Therapy*, 172.

I would argue that the marriage relationship of Joseph Smith's parents—Lucy and Joseph Sr.—like so many marriages, was essentially dysfunctional, that it was marked by religious conflict and severe financial burden, and that this had occurred even before Joseph Jr.'s birth on 23 December 1805 in Sharon, Vermont.⁷ It was Joseph Sr.'s ginseng misadventure and inept business management that caused their store in Randolph to collapse, eventually forcing them to sell their Tunbridge farm, probably in 1803 or 1804, to liquidate their debts. Their marriage in 1796 had begun with favorable circumstances, having property given them by Asael Smith and a present of \$1,000 by Lucy's brother and business partner. Already overextended financially, Joseph Sr. unwisely chose to invest all his proceeds on a ginseng venture to China rather than pay his creditors in the usual fashion. It was a gamble and he lost. Left penniless and propertyless, Joseph and Lucy took refuge on her father's land in Sharon. If Lucy did not feel some resentment toward her husband, Joseph Sr. was undoubtedly humiliated by the experience.⁸

Also prior to their residence in Sharon, Joseph Sr. and Lucy's differing religious views had surfaced. Under pressure from his father and older brother, Joseph Sr. had requested Lucy to stop attending the local Methodist camp meetings. Lucy obeyed her husband, but later said she was "very much hurt" by his actions, although at the time she kept her feelings to herself. Lucy likely resented her husband's lack of support, for he had put the feelings of his father and brother before her's.⁹

⁷ My emphasis on Smith family conflict is similar to the views expressed by Marvin S. Hill in *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 10–11. Richard Bushman, on the other hand, described Lucy and Joseph's relationship as essentially harmonious. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 33–36, although he does recognize the early religious differences between Joseph Sr. and Lucy (39).

⁸ These events are described in Lucy Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 24–26, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah. This document is conveniently found in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:243–247; hereafter abbreviated as *EMD*). Quotations from manuscript sources have been slightly modified for readability. See also Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 29–30.

⁹ See L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," Frag. 2 (*EMD* 1:250). Groesbeck sees this event as leading to an "emotional split" in Lucy and Joseph Sr.'s marriage relationship ("The Smiths and Their Dreams and Visions," 24).

But there was more to their religious differences than Lucy was willing to reveal in her history. Early in their marriage he, along with his father Asael and eldest brother Jesse, helped found a Universalist Society in Tunbridge, Vermont.¹⁰ Although he may have at times flirted with Methodism, he was seriously committed to Universalist doctrine. Son William wrote that his father's belief in universal salvation "often brought him in Contact with the advocates of the doctrin[e] of endless misery."¹¹ Joseph Sr.'s Universalism sharply conflicted with Lucy's New England Puritan leanings, which eventually drew her to the Presbyterian church. Although vague about her husband's religious beliefs, Lucy nevertheless hinted that there was conflict, stating that in response to her husband's request to discontinue attending the revival meetings she "pray[ed] to the Lord that he would so influence the heart of my husband that he would one day be induced to rec[e]ive the Gospel whenever it was preached."¹² Stripped of its appeal to a Mormon audience, the statement reveals Lucy's desire for her own religious views to prevail. And through the Book of Mormon, they eventually did.

Contributing to the dysfunctionality of their marriage was Lucy's admitted periodic bouts with depression and suicidal fantasies and Joseph Sr.'s struggle with low self-esteem and alcoholism.¹³ Following the death of

¹⁰ Tunbridge Town Record, 6 December 1797, Book A, 188, Tunbridge Town Clerk's Office, Tunbridge, Vermont (EMD 1:633-634).

¹¹ On Joseph Smith's membership in the Universalist church, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage: Influences of Grandfathers Solomon Mack and Asael Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 106, 207 note 185, 211 note 205. For William Smith's comment, see "Notes Written on 'Chambers' Life of Joseph Smith," circa 1875, 28-29, LDS Church Archives (EMD 1:487).

¹² L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," Frag. 2, (EMD 1:250).

¹³ Joseph Smith Sr.'s excessive drinking was observed by his Palmyra/Manchester neighbors. See, for example, E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unraveled* (Painesville, Ohio: E. D. Howe, 1834), 249-251, 262; Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by William H. Kelley, 17 September 1884, 2, E. L. Kelley Papers; Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri. I use the term "alcoholic" to emphasize the serious effect Joseph Sr.'s excessive drinking had on his interpersonal relationships. By present standards, his sustained public drunkenness, such as that described by the residents of Palmyra and Manchester, more than qualifies him as an alcoholic. To those who may shy away from this term, I would argue that it is a mistake (both in life and in historical analysis) to either deny or minimize the seriousness of substance abuse and its impact on the family system. Groesbeck has also emphasized Joseph Sr.'s drinking problem (see "The Smiths and Their Dreams and Visions," 24).

her sister Lovina probably in 1794, the nineteen-year-old Lucy fell into a deep depression, which she later recalled had the effect of "preying upon my health and was lik[e]ly to be a serious injury to me . . . I did not feel as though life was worth seeking after."¹⁴ In less than two years she had married but was still experiencing what she called an "aching void within."¹⁵

Despite a deep and abiding faith in God, Joseph Sr. evidently struggled with a drinking problem. Before his assembled family in 1834, Joseph Sr. expressed some misgivings about his past, both as a father and a husband. "I have not always set that example before my family that I ought," he said. "I have not been diligent in teaching them the commandments of the Lord, but have rather manifested a light and trifling mind. . . . which has been a cause of grief to my family."¹⁶ His lack of attention to the commandments was likely due in part to his belief in universal salvation. When blessing his son Hyrum at this family gathering, Joseph Sr. revealed a specific behavior that had distressed his family: "Thou has always stood by thy father, and reached forth the helping hand to lift him up when he was in affliction; and though he has been out of the way [through wine], thou has never forsaken him nor laughed him to scorn."¹⁷ Joseph Sr.'s drinking must have been considerable for him to have acknowledged it as a family problem.¹⁸ Certainly it seriously impaired his ability to connect with others and contributed to his emotional unavailability to his wife and children. Lucy did not complain about her husband's excessive drinking in her written history, but Joseph Sr.'s blessing on Hyrum implies that he was special in not scorning his father for this weakness. Indeed, one would have expected the Presbyterian part of the family to be especially critical given that church's strict position on

¹⁴ L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 19–20 (*EMD* 1:233–234).

¹⁵ L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 23 (*EMD* 1:242).

¹⁶ Joseph Smith Sr., Introductory Comments, Patriarchal Blessing Book 1:1–2, LDS Church Archives (*EMD* 1:468–469).

¹⁷ Original blessing in Hyrum Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives (Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, 190 note 5; *EMD* 1:470 note 11 adds "through wine").

¹⁸ Although Joseph Sr.'s drinking problem was evident to his New York neighbors, it is likely that his excessive drinking extended back to his years in Vermont and New Hampshire, although there is no direct record of it. I would even suggest that his drinking habits had become a matter of contention in the early years of Joseph and Lucy's marriage and was a contributing factor in young Joseph's refusal to drink either wine or brandy in preparation for his leg operation (Groesbeck has also considered the latter possibility in "The Smiths and Their Dreams and Visions," 27).

temperance.¹⁹

Despite her own difficulties, Lucy was a high-strung, out-spoken, take-charge kind of woman, who acted as her husband's enabler and emotional caretaker. One finds her in this role even after his death, protecting his memory as she dictated her history in 1845 with either complete silence or carefully constructed excuses. She failed to mention, for instance, that Joseph Sr. was in Pennsylvania looking for treasure with Joseph Jr. and others at the time they lost their Manchester, New York, farm in 1825. Instead, she asserted that he was in the South Bainbridge and Colesville, New York, areas performing legitimate business: that is, attempting to obtain a loan for the next year's wheat harvest.²⁰ The reality was that Joseph Sr. had unwisely decided, following the death of their land agent in 1822, to invest his money in building a house rather than saving it for the eventual appointment of a new land agent. He took a chance, perhaps counting on Alvin's help. However, with Alvin's death in 1823 and the appointment of a new land agent in 1824, Joseph Sr. again lost everything. He was in his mid-fifties, and it was extremely doubtful that he would ever recover from this financial reversal.

In many ways Joseph Sr. was not unlike Lucy's own father, who for many years unsuccessfully sought to obtain riches. "I have tried and reached much after property and several times obtained it," Solomon Mack recalled in his autobiography, "but by misfortunes time after time I lost it."²¹ Solomon—like Joseph Sr.—was also a Universalist who admittedly neglected the commandments and resisted his orthodox wife's importunities until his conversion about 1810. And like her mother, Lucy patiently, faithfully, and for the most part silently bore with her situation. In her history, Lucy said very little about her relationship with her father, probably because for a majority of Lucy's childhood he was absent from the home, either serving in the military or traveling on business ventures, which possibly explains her

¹⁹ Gain Robinson's membership in Palmyra's Presbyterian Church, for instance, was suspended in 1828 for "an immoderate and in=temperate use of spiritous liquors to the great injury of his christian character and usefulness" ("Records of the Session of the Presbyterian Church in Palmyra," volume 2, page 1, Western Presbyterian Church, Palmyra, New York).

²⁰ L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 51–58 (*EMD* 1:312–322).

²¹ Solomon Mack, *A Narratire [sic] of the Life of Solomon Mack* (Windsor, Vermont: Solomon Mack, [circa 1811]), 21, cited in Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, 53.

attraction to a man who was essentially unavailable to her emotionally.²²

I would also argue that the Smith children were drawn into their parents' marriage in an attempt to save it: first Alvin, then young Joseph.²³ In the years before his untimely death in 1823, Alvin seemed to function almost as a surrogate husband and father. Alvin's industry enabled the Smiths to make the first two payments on their Manchester farm, for which he was a co-signer; he also ran the farm and took charge of constructing the family's house. Alvin's central role is abundantly clear in Lucy's history. Reflecting on the loss of the farm in 1825, Lucy stated: "everything which meets my eyes reminds me of my beloved Alvin[.] . . . there is scarcely anything that I see which has not passed through [the] hands of that faithful boy and afterwards been carefully ar[r]anged precisely according to his plan by his brothers who survived him."²⁴

Alvin's sensibilities and leadership qualities are also evident in his handling of Joseph's 1823 announcement of his vision of the angel and gold plates. Instead of being overcome with excitement to the neglect of his duties, Alvin postponed Joseph's full account of the event until the following evening after the completion of the family's daily work.

The expansion of Alvin's role is perhaps further evidence of Joseph Sr.'s dysfunctionality. Lacking a strong father, Alvin provided the stability the family system needed in a way particularly understood by firstborn children.²⁵ Here I allude to the research done by the Bach Institute and the University of Minnesota, which has resulted in a generalized theory of birth order characteristics. According to this research, each child is unconsciously assigned a role depending on their birth order that serves a specific need of the family system.²⁶ Their description of firstborns fits well with what we

²² Family therapists will immediately recognize Lucy's attraction to a man like her father as her attempt to work out the "unfinished business" of her childhood.

²³ This view is similar to that of Groesbeck's, who stated that "Alvin and Joseph seemed specifically set apart to compensate for the failure of the father" ("The Smiths and Their Dreams and Visions," 23, 27-28).

²⁴ L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 91-92 (*EMD* 1:378).

²⁵ Although Lucy Smith had given birth to an unnamed son prior to Alvin who was either still-born or died immediately after birth, from a family-systems perspective Alvin is regarded as the firstborn since he was actually there to respond to the production needs of the family.

²⁶ On the effects of birth order generally, see Lucille K. Forer, *Birth Order and Life Roles* (Springfield, Illinois: Thomas, 1969); Bradford Wilson, *First Child, Second Child: Your Birth Order Profile* (New York: Kensington Publishing, 1981); Walker

know about Alvin, which can be summarized as follows: firstborns carry the productivity needs of the family system and react to and identify most with the father (the productivity manager). They respond to the conscious, explicit family rules, and emulate the family's dominant values and themes. Being other-oriented and socially aware, firsts will be most conscious of social norms and images. In words normally expected from a departing father, Alvin took great pains to pass his care-taking role on to his siblings before dying on 19 November 1823.

The significance of Alvin's death in the development of Joseph Smith's career as a prophet cannot be overemphasized. The sudden loss of Alvin created a vacuum in the family system, plunging it into a period of serious instability and conflict.²⁷ This is consistent with the findings of Dr. Murray Bowen, who recognized that "the death of an important child can shake the family equilibrium for years." Bowen described what he calls an "Emotional Shock Wave," or a "network of underground 'after shocks' of serious life events that can occur anywhere in the extended family system in the months or years following serious emotional events in a family." This phenomenon was first detected in multigenerational family research where a "series of major life events occurred in multiple, separate members of the extended family in the time interval after the serious illness and death of a significant family member." Further research revealed that "some version of this

Toman, *Family Constellation: Its Effects on Personality and Behavior* (New York: Springer Publishing, 1976); Cecile Ernst, *Birth Order: Its Influence on Personality* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983). On birth order as it relates to family-systems theory, see A. R. Anderson, J. E. Rhetts, J. A. Anderson, J. Churchill, and J. M. Bach, "A Systems Model of Family Ordinal Position," unpublished manuscript (Minneapolis: The Bach Institute and The University of Minnesota, 1974); Nathalia Zimmerman, Leslie E. Collins, Jerome M. Bach, "Ordinal Position, Cognitive Style, and Competence: A Systemic Approach to Supervision," *Clinical Supervisor* 4 (fall 1986): 7-23; and John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw on the Family* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 1988), 33-35. Admittedly the generalized descriptions of birth-order characteristics is based on subjective observations rather than controlled testing. Future study may or may not support such observations, either in part or in whole.

²⁷ Groesbeck observed that after Alvin's death "the split in the family was more pronounced than ever before" ("The Smiths and Their Dreams and Visions," 28).

³² Murray Bowen, "Family Reaction to Death," *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice*, Philip J. Guerin Jr., editor (New York: Gardner Press, 1976), 339-340.

phenomenon appeared in a sufficiently high percentage of all families, and a check for the 'shock wave' is done routinely in all family histories." The symptoms in a shock wave can include the "full range of emotional symptoms from mild depression, to phobias, to psychotic episodes" as well as "social dysfunctions" such as "drinking, failures in school or business, abortions and illegitimate births, an increase in accidents, and the full range of behavior disorders."³²

I would suggest that the Smith family experienced an "emotional shock wave" following Alvin's death that lasted several years, and that this wave was particularly strong because of the tremendously important role Alvin had played. Within a period of two-and-one-half years following Alvin's death, the Smith family experienced an economic crisis with the loss of the farm in 1825, a religious crisis with the division of the family during the Palmyra revival of 1824/1825, and a legal crisis with Joseph Jr.'s public humiliation at South Bainbridge in March 1826.³³ Perhaps these events were among the "after shocks" following Alvin's death as described by Bowen. One perhaps discerns the power and persistence of this "shock wave" when more than three years later Joseph Jr. told his parents of his plans to marry because, as Lucy remembered, "he had felt so lonely ever since Alvin's death."³⁴

Religious discussion in the Smith household undoubtedly reached unprecedented intensity when Lucy, Hyrum, Samuel, and Sophronia joined Palmyra's Presbyterian church during the revival of 1824/1825.³⁵ William remembered that during this time his mother "continued her importunities and exertions to interest us in the importance of seeking for the salvation of our immortal souls, until almost all of the family became either converted or

³³ On Smith's March 1826 court hearing in South Bainbridge, New York, see D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 44–46.

³⁴ L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 52 (*EMD* 1:312).

³⁵ I reject all attempts to date Smith family membership in the local Presbyterian church to 1820 on grounds that Lucy said it had followed Alvin's death and that it was in conjunction with the revival in Palmyra, which occurred in 1824/1825 (Lucy, Preliminary Manuscript," 49–50 [*EMD* 1:306–307]). Additionally, William said his mother and the others joined when Benjamin Stockton was minister of the church and Stockton was not appointed until 18 February 1824 (William Smith, "Notes Written on 'Chamber's Life of Joseph Smith,' " circa 1875, 29, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah (*EMD* 1:487)). See also Marvin S. Hill, "The First Vision Controversy: A Critique and Reconciliation," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (summer 1982): 31–46.

seriously inclined.”³⁶ Lucy’s pressure would have been especially irritating to Joseph Sr. since he harbored ill feelings toward the Reverend Benjamin Stockton, who was the minister of the church. In delivering Alvin’s funeral sermon, Stockton imprudently “intimated very strongly that he had gone to hell” because he was not a member of a denomination.³⁷ Joseph Sr. was incensed by the minister’s remarks and ultimately, as Lucy recorded, “refused going any more, either for my gratification, or any other person’s.”³⁸ Joseph Sr. could not have been happy that his wife and some of his children had joined the church headed by a minister he so despised.

It is likely that Smith family conversation during this period centered on two issues: first, the fate of Alvin. Had Alvin gone to hell as the minister implied? Did the subsequent membership of Lucy and the others in the Presbyterian church not imply agreement with the minister concerning Alvin’s fate? Or were they perhaps themselves conflicted about the matter? Regardless, the matter of Alvin’s fate would have greatly raised the stakes in the debate over religion in the Smith household and would have served to highlight the differences between Joseph Sr.’s Universalism and Lucy’s Calvinism.

A second issue concerned the authority of Joseph Sr.’s dreams, the first of which occurred in 1811, and Joseph Jr.’s first vision, which Smith said occurred in 1820 or 1821. Both had revealed that all religious denominations were spiritually dead and under condemnation.³⁹ When Lucy joined the Presbyterian church, she chose to ignore the import of their revelations. Lucy’s making a point that neither Joseph nor her husband had forbidden her to join the Presbyterian church is her way of obscuring the fact that there

³⁶ William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Steam Book and Job Office, 1883), 7 (EMD 1:495).

³⁷ “W[illia]m. B. Smith’s Last Statement,” [Letter of John W. Peterson to Editor], *Zion’s Ensign* (Independence, Missouri) 5 (13 January 1894): 6 (EMD 1:513).

³⁸ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 90 (EMD 1:307).

³⁹ Lucy dated her husband’s first dream-vision to April 1811, following the sectarian strife he experienced in Royalton. Joseph Sr. was told in his dream that “the world . . . now lieth inanimate and dumb, in regard to the true religion, or plan of salvation” (L. Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 57 [EMD 1:255]). “From this [time] forward,” Lucy said, “my husband seemed more confirmed than ever, in the opinion that there was no order or class of religionists that knew any more concerning the Kingdom of God, than those of the world, or such as made no profession of religion whatever” (*Biographical Sketches*, 57–58 [EMD 1:256]).

was conflict over the matter. It only tells us that the two Joseph's were not forceful or overtly coercive with their views, or perhaps they were aware of the futility of such an effort given Lucy's determination. It does not tell us about Lucy's attitude toward the religious views of her husband and son. However, we get an indirect glimpse into Lucy's opinion when she quoted young Joseph saying, "you will not stay with them long for you are mistaken in them [and] you do not know the wickedness of their hearts."⁴⁰ This implies conflict as well as resistance on Lucy's part. Even when Joseph prophesied against one of the Presbyterian officials, Lucy admitted she was skeptical and surprised when it was fulfilled within the year. Yet, despite the fulfillment of her son's remarkable prediction, she and the others continued to regularly attend the Presbyterian church until about September 1828.

Joseph was evidently strongly affected by the conflict in his family, especially over religion. On the night of Joseph's claimed first interview with the heavenly messenger about the plates, Lucy reported that her family stayed up late into the evening "conversing upon the subject of the diversity of churches that had risen up in the world and the many thousand opinions in existence as to the truths contained in scripture."⁴¹ Lucy likely concealed the intensity of this discussion since young Joseph's reaction was more extreme than on any previous occasion; his anxiety was so great that he lay awake the entire night contemplating his family's situation, whether or not an angel actually appeared. It was likely his family's religious turmoil that stirred Joseph, in the words of his mother, "to reflect more deeply than common persons of his age upon everything of a religious nature."⁴²

For a time, the Smith family rallied around young Joseph, sitting up late into the night listening to his stories. If Joseph wished to divert his family's attention to himself and his mission to obtain the plates, it had the desired effect. As Lucy later recalled: "We were convinced that God was about to bring to light something that we might stay our minds upon[,] something that we could get a more definite idea of than anything which had been taught us heretofore and we rejoiced in it with exceeding great joy[,] the sweetest union and happiness pervaded our house[,] no jar nor discord disturbed our peace and tranquility reigned in our midst."⁴³

Two months later, however, Alvin's sudden death derailed Joseph's

⁴⁰ L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 50 (*EMD* 1:307).

⁴¹ L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 40 (*EMD* 1:289).

⁴² L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 40 (*EMD* 1:289).

⁴³ L. Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 43 (*EMD* 1:296).

plans. Alvin's close association with the plates made discussion of the record uncomfortable for the Smiths, and Joseph lost his central place in the family's evening conversations. When the plates were not obtained the following year as promised, Joseph's hold on his family momentarily slipped. Soon after, Lucy and the other members of the family joined the Presbyterian church, and the simmering differences between Lucy and Joseph Sr.'s religious views came to full boil.

Young Joseph found the revival that occurred in Palmyra in 1824–1825 particularly disturbing, for it succeeded in dividing his family: he and his father on one side, and his mother, brothers Hyrum and Samuel, and sister Sophronia on the other. Like his father, Joseph too resisted his mother's "continued . . . importunities and exertions" to convert him to Presbyterianism, although for slightly different reasons. Where Joseph Sr. was decisive in his refusal to attend church with his wife, young Joseph was ambivalent. Although he wanted to "feel & shout" with the other family members, he said he could "feel nothing."⁴⁴ He later admitted that although he was partial to the Methodists, he was ultimately unable to make a decision in the matter. Evidently the religious tension between his parents left him emotionally numb and spiritually blocked.⁴⁵ Thus rather than seeing Smith's religion as a facade or mere pretense as Fawn Brodie concluded,⁴⁶ I would argue that Smith's search for religious identity was sincere but due to his family's religious turmoil he became spiritually frustrated to the point of experiencing severe emotional pain, which resulted in his obsession with religion rather than his rejection of it. Much in the same way that someone with an abscessed tooth becomes tooth-centered and can think of nothing else, Smith became sectarian-centered because that was the source of his pain as he perceived it.

It would take years for the Smith family to achieve a measure of stability and equilibrium, which was largely acquired through the founding of Joseph

⁴⁴ Alexander Neibaur, Journal, 24 May 1844, LDS Church Archives (*EMD* 1:189).

⁴⁵ Marvin S. Hill has also recognized family strife as the source of Joseph's religious ambivalence, observing with usual insight and perception: "Conceivably [Smith] was made numb by the enduring tension between his mother and his father regarding religion. The tension in the family must have been considerable for Joseph to have had 'deep and often poignant' feelings at this time and yet been unable to yield to the revivalist's message and his mother's pleas" (Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, 10, 11).

⁴⁶ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).

Smith's church.⁴⁷ In performing this function, Smith was responding to the needs of the family system as generally perceived by fourthborns. Fourth children feel responsible for the family system as a whole, being especially sensitive to its unification or homeostatic needs. As summarized by Nathalia Zimmerman, Leslie E. Collins, and Jerome M. Bach, "Their identity and sense of well-being depends to a considerable degree upon the extent to which they succeed in maintaining the dynamic homeostasis of the whole family. . . . Fourth children are the damage control officers of familial and other interpersonal systems, since their feeling of well-being is most vulnerable to tension or 'pain' which is system-wide in its impact."⁴⁸ They have also been described as the "family radar," picking up and identifying with every action and interaction in the family system. They catch and collect the unresolved family tensions, particularly any relational tension in the system. From a behavioral point of view, fourth children feel very responsible yet powerless and helpless to really do anything about what is going on in the family. They may resort to "cutesy mascot-like behavior" to distract the family's pain, or become disruptive and thereby become the family's scapegoat.

Smith seems to have possessed traits consistent with the foregoing description. Comparing himself to the drunken Noah, Joseph Sr. touched on the damage-control concerns of the fourthborn when blessing Joseph Jr. in 1834, saying, "Thou hast stood by thy father, and like Shem, would have covered his nakedness, rather than see him exposed to shame."⁴⁹ Other concerns of the fourthborn seem reflected in Smith's disclosure that in his youth he possessed "a light, and too often, vain mind, exhibiting a foolish and trifling conversation."⁵⁰ One might also remember Smith's confession that when the angel appeared in 1823 he was in the act of repenting for his

⁴⁷ I would argue that Hyrum, the next oldest Smith child, could not bring balance to the Smith family since he was essentially aligned with his mother, not only as a Presbyterian but, as suggested by birth-order research, also in other subtle ways. Thus Zimmerman, Collins, and Bach find that a secondborn "responds to covert, unconscious rules" of the family system and "reacts to and identifies most with mother" (Zimmerman, Collins, and Bach, "Ordinal Position, Cognitive Style, and Competence," 13, 15–16).

⁴⁸ Zimmerman, Collins, and Bach, "Ordinal Position, Cognitive Style, and Competence," 19, 20.

⁴⁹ Patriarchal Blessing Book 1: 3–4 (EMD 1:471).

⁵⁰ Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery, *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio) 1 (December 1834): 40 (EMD 1:42).

light-mindedness and levity, revealing also that his disposition was naturally light and cheery.⁵¹ If jocularly was Smith's way of distracting his family's pain, then his occasional fights with neighbors, public drunkenness, and trouble with the law were possible manifestations of Smith's scapegoating.⁵²

A major turning point in Smith's career occurred when he was exposed to public ridicule and official sanction in March 1826 for his treasure-seeking activities in South Bainbridge. During the trial, according to recorder William D. Purple, Joseph Sr. testified that "both he and his son were mortified that this wonderful power which God had so miraculously given him should be used only in search of filthy lucre, or its equivalent in earthly treasures." If the trial served to redirect Smith's energies, his treasure-seeking father suggested a possible course when he told Judge Albert Neely that "his constant prayer to his Heavenly Father was to manifest His will concerning this marvelous power" and that he "trusted that the Son of Righteousness would some day illumine the heart of the boy, and enable him to see His will concerning him."⁵³ In August 1827, during a visit to Harmony, Pennsylvania, the scene of some of his treasure-seeking activities and the home of his new wife Emma Hale, Smith promised Emma's father, Isaac, that he would give up money digging and stone gazing.⁵⁴ Soon after his return to Manchester Smith procured the plates and opened a new chapter in his career.

Given Joseph Smith's family situation, it is not surprising to find fragments of disguised autobiography in the Book of Mormon. It was fitting

⁵¹ Joseph Smith, Manuscript History of the Church, Book A-1, 5 and Note C, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives (*EMD* 1:63, 144); also Joseph Smith Jr., et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, B. H. Roberts, editor, seven volumes, second edition revised (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948 printing), 1: 9–10.

⁵² Smith's fights, according to his former neighbors in Manchester, New York, usually occurred in conjunction with excessive drinking (see, for example, Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 250, 258, 262, 268).

⁵³ W. D. Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism. Historical Reminiscences of the Town of Afton," *Chenango Union* 30 (3 May 1877): 3.

⁵⁴ Peter Ingersoll, who dated the event to August 1827, claimed: "Joseph wept, and acknowledged he could not see in a stone now, nor never could; and that his former pretensions in that respect, were all false. He then promised to give up his old habits of digging for money and looking into stones" (Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 234–235). According to Isaac Hale, "Smith stated to me, that he had given up what he called 'glass-looking,' and that he expected to work hard for a living, and was willing to do so" (*Sisquahanna Register, and Northern Pennsylvanian* 9 [1 May 1834]; compare Howe, 262).

that Joseph began his book with a family that in many ways was comparable to his own. Both families left the land of their inheritance to find a land of promise. Both families were severely conflicted over religion, particularly the validity of the fathers' visions. Like Smith's father, Lehi received several visions, mostly in dreams. One of Lehi's dreams—one in which his family struggled to reach the tree of life amid the scorn of the world (1 Nephi 8⁵⁵)—is remarkably similar to a dream that Lucy remembered Joseph Sr. having about 1813, only that some of Lehi's children do not make it to the tree. Thus Smith transformed his father's dream of family unity into the reality of family division.

Like Smith, Nephi—Lehi's fourth son—was an ardent defender of his father's visions. The two oldest sons, Laman and Lemuel, on the other hand, became fierce opposers of Lehi's dreams, which they regarded as nothing more than the "foolish imaginations of his heart" (1 Nephi 2:11, 17:20). Even Lehi's wife Sariah "complained against" him, disparagingly calling him a "visionary man" (5:3). Nephi never failed his father and with brother Sam endured abuse and harassment from Laman and Lemuel. So Nephi's family, much like the Smith family, was seriously split over the father's visions.⁵⁶

Something of Smith's feelings and attitudes about his family situation is revealed through Nephi's words and actions. Nephi desired to experience the same vision that his father had of the tree of life, and it was not long before he excelled his father in visions and scriptural interpretation. Nephi gave his father's dreams greater authority, not only in becoming a second witness to them but because he experienced them in open vision rather than in a dream (2:16, 3:1, 11:1, 15:1). That the Book of Mormon was essentially supportive of Joseph Sr.'s dreams was recognized by Abner Cole, editor of the *Palmyra Reflector*, who understood in 1831 that the book "corresponded precisely with revelations made to, and predictions made by the elder Smith, a number of years before."⁵⁷

Nephi not only expounded the meaning of his father's visions, but added to and corrected them. In one instance he stated that his father had

⁵⁵ Book of Mormon references are to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints version.

⁵⁶ It is important to note that the major complaint of Sariah and the older sons against Lehi's dreams was that they resulted in the unnecessary loss of their inheritance (1 Nephi 2:11, 5:2, 17:20–22). Consequently, Lehi, like Joseph Sr., was responsible for his family's severe financial loss and a period of near starvation before reaching their promised land.

⁵⁷ *Palmyra Reflector* 2 (14 February 1831): 101.

overlooked the “filthiness” of the river of water in his dream, which he then interpreted as “a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked” (1 Nephi 15:27–29). Significantly Nephi added an element to his father’s vision that was inconsistent with Joseph Sr.’s belief in Universalism.⁵⁸ In his final exhortation to his family shortly before his death, Lehi declared that there is an “eternal gulf of misery and woe,” suggesting that he had accepted Nephi’s interpretation of the river of water (2 Nephi 1:12–14; compare 1 Nephi 15:27–30; see also 1 Nephi 12:18, 15:26–28, 30). This perhaps reflected Smith’s own wish that his aging father would also abandon Universalism, accept his gifted son’s reinterpretations of his dreams, and repent before it was too late.

The story of Nephi’s beheading of Laban possibly reflects an aspect of Smith’s relationship with his father. Where Lehi possibly represented the idealized, inspired-dreamer father—the side of Joseph Sr. with which Smith wished to identify—the drunken Laban might have represented the other side of Joseph Sr., the side that Smith most hated about his father.⁵⁹ Laban’s death enabled Nephi to get possession of the brass plates containing the Hebrew scriptures, which Laban had locked away in his treasury, thereby preventing the Nephite nation from perishing in unbelief. Thus Smith—like Nephi—perhaps wished to free the Bible from the bad father’s control and hand it over to the inspired-dreamer father.⁶⁰ Nephi’s beheading of Laban, therefore, might reflect Smith’s wish to put an end to Joseph Sr.’s intellectualization of the Bible, a tendency he had inherited from his father, Asael, and reinforced by his leanings toward Universalism.⁶¹

⁵⁸ For a study of the Book of Mormon’s sustained attack on Unitarian–Universalism, see Dan Vogel, “Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon,” in Brent Lee Metcalfe, editor, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 21–52.

⁵⁹ Contrastingly, both Drs. Bill Morain and Robert D. Anderson have associated Laban primarily with Dr. Nathan Smith, who performed surgery on Smith’s leg in 1813 (Bill Morain, “Joseph Smith and the Sword of Laban,” paper presented at the Mormon History Association 1993 meeting; Robert D. Anderson, *The Book of Mormon as Autobiography: The Psychobiography of Joseph Smith* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, forthcoming]). While I do not completely object to their interpretation, I believe identification with Joseph Sr. a less remote meaning.

⁶⁰ Like nineteenth-century family Bibles, the brass plates contained the genealogy of its owner, enabling Lehi to discover that he and Laban were related, which perhaps suggests the closeness the two characters shared in Smith’s mind.

⁶¹ On learning of Lucy and Joseph Sr.’s attendance at the Methodist revival in

In the book of Ether, the father-son dynamics in the stories of Kib (chapter 7:3–10) and Omer (chapter 8:1–8) have possible relevance to the Smith family. In both stories, the father-kings are overthrown by one of their sons and subsequently restored by a younger. This theme also appears in disguised form in several additional stories in Ether (7:11–27, 8:9–15, 13:22–24). Not unlike Nephi's rivalry with his older brothers over his father's visions, the frequency at which this scenario is played out in Ether is a sure indication that it was a deeply psychological issue for Smith. In fact, throughout his account of Jaredite history Smith consistently ignored firstborn inheritance in favor of a younger son's succession to the throne. Applied to Smith's family situation, Smith apparently wished to restore his father as leader and patriarch of the family, then with the latter's blessing succeed him.

To summarize, I would argue that in response to the combined pressure of Alvin's death and the demands of his family role, Smith scapegoated himself in a variety of ways in an attempt to restore balance to his family. A major obstacle to uniting his family religiously was his father's dream-visions, which had convinced him to remain independent of the existing churches. Founding a new church fulfilled Joseph Sr.'s expectations and allowed him to participate without denying his dreams. While the contents of the Book of Mormon perhaps caused him to reassess his Universalism, early in the translation Joseph Sr. learned from King Benjamin that those like Alvin—those “who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them”—were saved through Jesus' atonement (Mosiah 3:11, 15:24). Thus it was no longer necessary for him to adhere to Universalist doctrine in order to save Alvin, and Lucy and the others could belong to a church without consigning their beloved Alvin to hell. It is probably more than coincidence that Lucy and the others stopped attending the Presbyterian church following her and her husband's visit to Harmony about September 1828, at

Tunbridge, Asael Smith angrily threw Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* into the house and, according to Lucy, bid him to read it “untill he believed it” (“Preliminary Manuscript,” Frag. 2 [EMD 1:250]). In a letter intended to be read after his death (1830), Asael advised his children to “search the scriptures and consult sound [reas]on” (Letter of 10 April 1799, as published in Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, 125). Vermonters remembered Joseph Sr. saying that the “bible was the work of priestcraft” and that Paine's work was the “best commentary” (Green Mountain Boys to Thomas C. Sharp, 15 February 1844, Thomas C. Sharp and Allied Anti-Mormon Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut [EMD 1:597]).

which time, possibly, she read King Benjamin's speech in the opening chapters of Mosiah.

Regardless, the final result was that Smith united his family within his newly founded church. Something of Smith's self-perception came through in his angry response to criticism from brother William in 1835: "I brought salvation to my father's house, as an instrument in the hands of God when they were in a miserable situation."⁶² Smith could not give the family the social status that Alvin had, but he nevertheless managed to resolve their religious crisis and improve their worldly situation.

It may be interesting to note that Smith's family setting is consistent with what is generally known about the lives of impostors. Here I allude to psychiatrist Phyllis Greenacre's study of several celebrated impostors, which was first brought to bear on the study of Joseph Smith in 1971 by Fawn Brodie.⁶³ However, I must qualify my use of the term "impostor" when applied to Joseph Smith, for I do not use the term in quite the same way that Brodie and Greenacre do. In fact, I am not interested in debating whether or not Smith was (in the cosmic sense) a "true" prophet, for even if one concludes Smith constructed fake plates and dictated a contrived history of ancient America, the question remains: could a "true" prophet—if there is such a thing—use deception to advance God's cause? Perhaps, yes.⁶⁴ Accordingly I use the term "impostor" in the sense that Smith was consciously aware that he possessed no real gold plates, and although I hold the opinion that Smith constructed plates from scrap tin, which he allowed some individuals to feel through a cloth or heft in a box, I am fully aware that this is far from determining whether or not he was a "true" prophet. At

⁶² Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2:343; see also Dean C. Jessee, editor, *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Journal, 1832–1842* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 2:118.

⁶³ Phyllis Greenacre, "The Imposter," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 27 (1958): 359–382. Fawn Brodie mentioned Greenacre's study in the supplement of the second edition of her book *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 418–419. In a 1981 interview, Brodie expressed some regret that she had not utilized Greenacre's study more fully. See Shirley E. Stephenson, "Fawn McKay Brodie: An Oral History Interview," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14 (summer 1981): 105, 109. Regrettably Greenacre's study has not been updated.

⁶⁴ Consider the biblical example of Jacob, who received a firstborn's blessing by deceiving his blind father Isaac. For a discussion of Smith's willingness to use deception, see Dan Vogel, " 'Prophet Puzzle' Revisited," paper read at the Mormon History Association Meeting, Snowbird, Utah, 18 May 1996.

some level Smith may have believed he was a prophet, perhaps even inspired to use deception in performing his mission, but his willingness to deceive others, whether well intended or not, nevertheless qualifies him as an impostor. He may have been a prophet—whatever that means—but perhaps to instill confidence and faith in others he pretended to be more.

Greenacre described parental conflict as a significant factor in the impostor's development. "In those cases in which an early history was obtainable," Greenacre observed, "the parents were at odds, the mother frequently despising, reproaching, or attacking the father who either remained detached from the child or removed himself by death or desertion."⁶⁵ Greenacre would not have been surprised to discover that Joseph Smith's parents were conflicted over religion and that his father was an alcoholic and hence emotionally absent from the family system.

The impostor obviously suffers from an identity crisis, which Greenacre described as "a struggle between two dominant identities in the individual: the temporary focused and strongly assertive imposturous one, and the frequently amazingly crude and poorly knit one from which the impostor has emerged."⁶⁶ In psychoanalytic fashion, Greenacre attempted to discover the possible origin of the impostor's identity problems, which she believed began in infancy and resulted from an unusual and intense attachment by the mother. "From birth," Greenacre observed, "the mother has regarded the infant with extreme possessive and ambivalent concern and constant watchfulness. Whether this appeared as marked anxiety and guilt, or as great pride, seems less important than the fact that the attachment was extreme. . . . The intense maternal attachment to which the future impostor is subject, as if he were a part of the mother, undermines his sense of a separate self and the development of his own identity."⁶⁷ Given Lucy's increasing alienation from her husband, it is not improbable that she would have sought a closer attachment with her children. The timing of Joseph Smith's birth immediately following the financial and religious crisis in Lucy and Joseph Sr.'s relationship is significant since the infant Joseph would have been the most available object for Lucy's attachment needs. During young Joseph's 1813 leg operation, Lucy uncontrollably rushed into the room twice and finally had to be detained outside the room until the operation was completed. It is likely that this traumatic event intensified Lucy's attachment

⁶⁵ Greenacre, "The Imposter," 367–368, 369.

⁶⁶ Greenacre, "The Imposter," 364.

⁶⁷ Greenacre, "The Imposter," 367, 369.

to the six- or seven-year-old Joseph.

In the oedipal phase, Greenacre believed the impostor experiences profound frustration due largely to his inability to relieve the normal oedipal pressures through a positive identification with the father. For this child, she observed, the oedipal conflict becomes both “sharp” and “insoluble.”⁶⁸ Greenacre believed that parental conflict is internalized by the child, ultimately becoming one of the “compulsive pressures” leading to the impostor’s career and, surprisingly, gets played out in the imposture. A purpose of the imposture, noted Greenacre, is the “living out of an oedipal conflict through revival of the earliest definite image of the father.”⁶⁹

Since the initial form of Joseph’s imposture was that of a treasure seer, one can look to the father’s example and find that indeed the son’s earliest impressions of him were probably that of a treasure-seeking rodsman and visionary dreamer. The origins of Joseph Sr.’s treasure-seeking activities do not date to the Wood affair of 1800, as some have erroneously concluded, but apparently to the years immediately following Joseph Jr.’s birth.⁷⁰ According to James C. Brewster, in connection with the use of seer stones and mineral rods to hunt treasure in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Sr. said, “I know more about money digging, than any man in this generation, for I have been in the business more than thirty years.”⁷¹ Because the context of the statement seems to have been 1837, a strict reading would point to 1807 for the origin of Joseph Sr.’s treasure-seeking activities. Recalling the Smith

⁶⁸ Greenacre, “The Imposter,” 369.

⁶⁹ Greenacre, “The Imposter,” 370–371.

⁷⁰ Barnes Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle and Co., 1867), 43–64 (*EMD* 1:599–621), was first to erroneously connect Joseph Sr. with the Poultney, Vermont, rodsman. Richard L. Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 24 (fall 1984): 489–560, has adequately refuted Frisbie’s claims. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 87–89, tried to rescue Frisbie’s theory by incorrectly identifying the Joseph Smith Sr. family with another “Joseph Smith” in the 1800 Poultney census (see *EMD* 1:639–640). Groesbeck sees Joseph Sr.’s preoccupation with treasure-seeking as “an attempt to recover a loss he could never fully accept” (Groesbeck, “The Smiths and Their Dreams and Visions,” 24). If correct, this would date his treasure hunting to after the failure of his ginseng venture and the loss of his Randolph store about 1802.

⁷¹ James Colin Brewster, *Very Important! To the Mormon Money Diggers. Why Do the Mormons Rage, and the People Imagine a Vain Thing?* ([Springfield, Illinois]: n.p., [20 March 1843]), 5.

family's residence in Sharon, Judge Daniel Woodward remembered in 1870 that "Joseph Smith, Sr., was, at times, engaged in hunting for Captain Kidd's buried treasure."⁷² Unfortunately we do not know the details of Joseph Sr.'s treasure-seeking activities in Vermont or how much folk magic he had absorbed by that time.⁷³ Possible insight, however, is provided by the residents of Strafford, a town adjacent to Tunbridge, who, in responding to Joseph Smith's 1844 "Appeal to the Green Mountain Boys," wrote: "you was old enough when you left here to remember a great many things about him [Joseph Sr.] and how he used to tel[l] about your being born with a veil over your face, and that he intended to procure a stone for you to see all over the world with."⁷⁴ If an authentic reminiscence, the young Joseph was not merely observing his father's treasure-seeking activities, but receiving early encouragement to participate.

Magic was just one aspect of Joseph Sr.'s unorthodox and personal blend of religion, which included a series of dream-visions. It is likely that Joseph Sr. emphasized his supernatural gifts as a rod worker and inspired dreamer, for by the world's standards he was a failure in most other areas of his life. Coupled with this image of the inspired dreamer was also the dichotomous image of Joseph Sr. as the drunken, irreligious failure, which was probably reinforced by Lucy's continued efforts at converting him. Undoubtedly young Joseph had difficulty synthesizing his father's contradictions. Greenacre described the impostor's preoccupation with the despised father, and how that relationship relates to the imposture itself: "In so far as *the imposture* is accomplished, it is *the* [symbolic] *killing of the father through the complete displacement of him* . . . It is indeed striking in the cases of the great

⁷² "Birthplace and Early Residence of Joseph Smith, Jr.," *Historical Magazine* 8 (November 1870): 315–316 (*EMD* 1:624–625).

⁷³ More definite and detailed information about Joseph Sr.'s use of a rod comes from the more fully documented New York period (see, for example, *EMD* 1:553).

⁷⁴ Green Mountain Boys to Thomas C. Sharp, 15 February 1844, 3, Thomas C. Sharp and Allied Anti-Mormon Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut (*EMD* 1:597). Following their residence on their Sharon/Royalton farm, the Smith family returned to Tunbridge "a short time" in 1808 before returning to Royalton, where they remained until 1811. Since Joseph would have been less than three years of age in 1808, the residents of Strafford probably had contact with the Smiths through their subsequent visits with Smith family members in Tunbridge during their residence in Royalton.

impostors of history how much the fraud is clearly directed *at* the father.”⁷⁵ Because the impostor might also revive the “earliest definite image of the father,” Greenacre observed that he does not simply attack and displace the father but that there can be “repeated fluctuation between attack and identification.”⁷⁶ I would argue that this is precisely the case with Joseph Smith, that his imposture was primarily directed at his father, that the result was the complete displacement of him as the spiritual leader of the family, and that Smith fluctuated between identifying and attacking his father.

That the early accounts of Smith’s encounters with the angel were told in a treasure-seeking context, or rather in conformity with treasure-seeking expectations, should alert one to the possibility that Smith’s imposture was fundamentally directed at his father.⁷⁷ I would also argue that Smith’s emotional outburst following his father’s baptism on 6 April 1830, as described by both Lucy Smith and Joseph Knight, is dramatic evidence that Smith’s primary goal had been his father. According to Lucy, “Joseph stood on the shore when his father came out of the water and as he took him by the hand he cried out Oh! my God I have lived to see my father baptized into the true church of Jesus Christ and he covered his face . . . in his fathers bosom and wept aloud for joy.”⁷⁸ I would suggest that Smith’s relief was equal only to his original concern for his father.

Obviously Joseph Smith identified with his father’s spiritual gifts, both as a treasure-seeker and visionary. Being named after his father was strong incentive for young Smith to emulate his father. And like so many children of alcoholics, Smith identified with his father’s pain to the extent that he too

⁷⁵ Greenacre, “The Impostor,” 370–371; emphasis Greenacre’s.

⁷⁶ Greenacre, “The Imposter,” 371.

⁷⁷ See Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 112–149.

⁷⁸ L. Smith, “Preliminary Manuscript,” 114 (*EMD* 1:417). Joseph Knight, who was present when Joseph Sr. and Martin Harris were baptized, remembered: “Joseph was fild with the Spirit to a grate Degree to see his Father and Mr Harris that he had Bin with so much he Bust out with greaf and Joy and Seamed as tho the world Could not hold him[.] he went out into the Lot and appeard to want to git out of site of every Body and would sob and Crie and Seamed to Be so full that he could not live[.] oliver and I went after him and Came to him and after a while he Came in[.] But he was the most wrot upon that I ever saw any man[.] But his joy seemed to Be full[.] I think he saw the grate work he had Begun and was Desirus to Carry it out” (Joseph Knight, Sr., “Manuscript of the History of Joseph Smith,” circa 1835–1847, 7, LDS Church Archives).

would struggle with excessive drinking.⁷⁹

Through his translation of the Book of Mormon and founding of the Church of Christ, Smith superseded and displaced his father as the spiritual leader of the family. This tendency was evident even during his early career as a treasure-seer. When Josiah Stowell came to Manchester in 1825, he came to hire young Joseph, not his father. The nineteen-year-old Joseph was the leading treasure seer of the company, although Joseph Sr. was present.⁸⁰ Manchester neighbor William Stafford witnessed one instance in which the father consulted the son regarding the location of a treasure on his own property.⁸¹

The identification with and displacement of the father is also evident in the Book of Mormon. As previously discussed, Nephi—like Smith—both identified with and superseded his father in visions and revelations. Nephi eventually proved himself the true spiritual leader of the family when Lehi was “truly chastened because of his murmuring against the Lord” (1 Nephi 16:25). Only Nephi remained faithful to the Lord, exhorting his family “in the energy of my soul” to exercise faith (verse 24). If one interprets Nephi’s encounter with Laban as relating to Smith’s relationship with his father, then Smith wished not only to supersede but, as Greenacre noted, to symbolically kill and displace the father. It is important to note that succession of younger sons to the throne in the book of Ether is always done while the fathers are still living and with their consent.

If the causes leading to the impostor’s career remain illusive, the effect is certain. Simply put: the impostor hopes to gain some advantage—whether material, psychological, or spiritual—that would otherwise remain unattainable to him. As Brodie insightfully concluded: “The basic inner conflict in Joseph Smith’s life was not . . . a conflict between his telling the truth or not telling the truth, but rather between what he really was and what

⁷⁹ On Joseph Jr.’s drinking, see, for example, Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 249–250, 258, 268; and Martin Harris statement in “Kirtland Council Minute Book,” 28–29, entry of 12 February 1834, LDS Church Archives.

⁸⁰ The account of Palmyra resident Hiram Jackway is perhaps relevant in this regard. Jackway recalled during an 1881 interview with RLDS missionaries William and Edmund Kelley: “Joe and his father got drunk once . . . in the hay field; Joe and his father wrestled, and Joe threw the old man down, and he cried.” Responding to the Kelleys’ question as to why Joseph Sr. cried, Jackway said: “Because Joe was the best man I guess” (William H. Kelley, “The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon,” *The Saints’ Herald* 28 [1 June 1881]: 166).

⁸¹ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 238–239.

he most desperately wanted to be.”⁸² Although I generally disagree with Brodie’s emphasis, concluding elsewhere that Smith was morally conflicted about his use of deception, the fact remains: despite all the good intentions he may have had for others, Joseph Smith was the unhappy son of an impoverished farmer of no consequence in the world, and he desperately wanted to rise above his father’s poverty and obscurity to become someone of social and religious significance. And he did.

⁸² Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 417.

From the Dust to the Dusty: The Rise and Pall of the Book of Mormon in the Life and Ministry of Joseph Smith Jr.

Robert A. Gunderson¹

Introduction

It has often been said that history equals data plus interpretation. This article is an interpretation. It is my reading of the common fund of data available on the origins of the religious movement known as Mormonism. I do not expect that any person reading this will discover any new material. Neither have I attempted to minutely document my assertions, as I am fully aware that support for other interpretations could also be cited. The record is not indisputable for two reasons: because the data is incomplete, and because the data that is available is at times contradictory. But, I submit, this article posits a thesis that has emerged from my study of the data, not the marshalling of data to support a pre-conceived thesis. It is my thesis that within a significantly brief span of time, Joseph Smith Jr. first produced, proclaimed, and then effectively dismissed the Book of Mormon as the source of authoritative religious doctrine. I do not wish to imply Joseph ever denied or denigrated the Book of Mormon; he simply stopped using it.

Focus

The Book of Mormon, more than any other factor, was the defining element in the establishment of the religious movement commonly known as Mormonism. Long before doctrine or organization, the focus of Joseph Smith Jr., and his close family and associates, was entirely on Joseph's sense of divine calling to procure and translate the plates and to publish the book. This document was touted by the young prophet and his followers to be the repository of the "plain and precious" truth of the Christian gospel that had become corrupted and obscure over the centuries. The movement consistently held that the Book of Mormon contained "the fullness of the gospel."² Joseph and the early church believed it was brought forth by divine initiative to "shew unto the remnant of the house of Israel [native

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² See Doctrine and Covenants 17:2d, 26:2a, 42:5a, Community of Christ version, except as noted.

Americans] what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers . . . and also to the convincing of Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”³ That those expectations failed to materialize was both the cause and the result of the early church leader’s attitude toward the book.

There is a tragic irony in the development of Mormonism. For both proponents and detractors, the focus on the Book of Mormon quickly shifted from its message to its origin. There is a sense in which this shift of focus was natural. For detractors, the Book of Mormon was a threat to the authority of the Bible and, by association, a threat to their authority as interpreters of the Bible. Attacking the credibility of the self-proclaimed prophet was the easiest approach to maintaining the status quo, the vested interest of the establishment. Young Joseph was an easy target. He had no credentials that were recognized by the religious and academic community. He came from the margins of society with fantastic claims and only the testimony of associates to back them up. His only real assets were his somewhat “homespun” winning personality and the book itself. Those who gave the Book of Mormon a fair reading tended to be impressed. But most brushed it aside because of the improbability of the story of its origins.

Joseph and those closely associated with the production of the Book of Mormon also seem to have been more impressed with the process of the production of the book and the divine authority this implied than with its message. In one sense this was understandable, as the experience of divine inspiration is undoubtedly awesome. In my opinion, the founders of Mormonism made a strategic error in sharing the Book of Mormon with the world. Instead of focusing on the message of the book and allowing it to speak for itself, they tended to react defensively to the criticism of the prophet and his story. They seemed as concerned to convince people of Joseph’s prophetic powers as to work at understanding and sharing the theological insights, the “plain and precious truths,” which they claimed the book contained. When the book was discussed in the early writings and reflections of its supporters, it tended to be cited as evidence of divine inspiration and authority, proof that Joseph was a prophet. The stories shared with the public and the testimonies recorded tend more to assert that

³ Book of Mormon (Independence, Missouri: Board of Publication of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1966), opposite copyright page.

the book is true than to discuss and explore the truth it contains.⁴ There is a sense in which this focus was also natural for the young church. It was easier to rely on a living prophet to dispense “truth” than struggle to comprehend the theological implications contained in the new scripture.⁵ I feel that Joseph himself must bear the primary burden of blame for this development. He was the only one who could have kept the focus on the message and away from himself and the authority he possessed and dispensed. I found no evidence he tried to do so.

Based on his own account, Joseph encountered disbelief, rejection, and ridicule from the religious establishment from the first time he shared his story of divine encounter.⁶ Initially he was believed only by his family, who also became a target of disparagement because of their support. Even in later years, when he had gathered a sizable following, Joseph’s reflections on those early experiences tended to focus on the persecution to which he was subjected. Far too early and too often, Joseph’s focus and that of the early church was on their negative treatment at the hands of their neighbors. Their concern, while natural, was reactive rather than proactive. They allowed society to set the agenda. Thus, the Book of Mormon was early on turned into a symbol of the movement rather than the reason and justification for the movement.

Failed Expectations

The rejection by many in established society of the young prophet and his “golden Bible” was followed by another significant rejection. The fledgling church that initially grew among the family and friends of those

⁴ “Thus, when Mormon missionaries taught the basics of their faith, preaching from the Bible, emphasizing the ‘authenticity of the Book of Mormon,’ and interpreting through the authoritative light of Joseph Smith’s revelations, people were moved.” Steven C. Harper, “Missionaries in the American Religious Marketplace: Mormon Proselyting in the 1830s,” *Journal of Mormon History* 24 (fall 1998): 26.

⁵ I am well aware that early conversion to Mormonism is more complex than this paragraph would imply. The “plainness” and rationality of the book’s theology and its compatibility with Biblical teaching also were significant. For an excellent discussion of this issue, see Steven C. Harper, “Infallible Proofs, Both Human and Divine: The Persuasiveness of Mormonism for Early Converts” in *Religion and American Culture* 10 (winter 2000): 99 and following.

⁶ See Joseph Smith, “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons* 2 (15 March and 1 April 1842): 727–728, 748–749.

associated with the production of the Book of Mormon soon undertook its first intentional mission: to take its message to the native Americans. In the fall of 1830, Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, Peter Whitmer Jr., and Ziba Peterson were commissioned to "go unto the Lamanites, and preach my gospel unto them" (Doctrine and Covenants 17:3a). These "Lamanites" were to be found in "the wilderness" (Doctrine and Covenants 31:1b), a term understood both literally and symbolically. The group soon set out for the western frontier. Their expectation was that the native Americans (all rather lumped together as a homogeneous mass in the minds of the young New Englanders) would readily embrace the Book of Mormon as a record of their ancestors. They expected fulfillment of the prophecy in the book that its words would, "cry from the dust" (II Nephi 2:40) to the "Lamanites" who were literal descendants of the writers of the book. These "Lamanites" would remember that they were a remnant of the House of Israel and embrace the covenants and promises made to them in these, their ancient scriptures. They would accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah, binding Jew and Gentile into one covenant people.

As is known, that expectation failed miserably. The Native Americans encountered in the Western Reserve of Ohio and later on the borders of Missouri were largely unimpressed and unresponsive. It is true that the missionaries encountered significant difficulties in attempting to carry out their mission. The governments and the vested economic interests on the frontier combined to restrict access to the Native Americans. Although the missionaries made an effort, sometimes at significant personal risk, sustained contact was thwarted. Joseph himself defied the law on one occasion to preach to the "Lamanites" on his trip to Independence in 1831. A variety of individuals tried to continue such ministry, some consistently and some, including Joseph, sporadically. But mainly the expectation of enthusiastic support for and acceptance of Book of Mormon history and prophecies among the native Americans simply did not occur. There is little record of these failed efforts or even comment about them from the church leadership. It appears that this primary intention and purpose of the Book of Mormon was shelved quietly as the leadership turned its attention to confronting other religions, developing the church organization, and engaging in communitarian experimentation.

It seems to me that the apparent ease with which Joseph and his supporters effectively abandoned their mission to the Lamanites indicates their lack of appreciation of the significance of the book's theological message. This failure to gain support among native Americans marked, I

believe, the quiet retirement of the Book of Mormon as the central justification of the new movement in the ministry of the young prophet. While it continued to hold a place of honor as proof of his prophetic gift, it increasingly sat on the shelf gathering dust while Joseph turned his attention, scripturally, to the Bible and to the on-going process of contemporary revelation. Success in attracting the attention of Sidney Rigdon and his communitarian experiments provided Joseph and his associates a positive diversion from the disappointment of the failed Book of Mormon imperatives.

A second expectation held by the early church leaders with respect to the Book of Mormon was its natural appeal to Jews. The book claims to describe three separate migrations of people of Jewish stock or ancestry from the Middle East to America in pre-Christian times. Their God was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their leaders were prophets in the best Old Testament mold. They carried and revered early Jewish scriptures. Their history mirrored that of the Jewish people in repeated "piety-prosperity" cycles.⁷ The difference between the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament was that many of the "Jews" of the Book of Mormon accepted, in prophecy and in person, Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The blending of Jewish and Christian theology and history gave the Book of Mormon its unique flavor and was supposed to provide the catalyst for bringing about the reconciliation, or at least the harmonious parallel fulfillment of the prophetic promise, of these faiths. This restoration of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland and the establishment of restored Christianity in its fullness and purity in America were seen by the early church as defining developments heralding the Second Coming of Christ and the millennial triumph.

Joseph and the early church leaders seemed to have understood the Jewish issue not in terms of conversion from Judaism to Christianity but rather as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and expectation. They expected the Jews would return to their ancestral homeland, build up Jerusalem again, including the rebuilding of their temple, but then, with the witness of the Book of Mormon, become convinced that Jesus Christ is indeed their Messiah. To further this process, the spring conference of 1840 held at Nauvoo, commissioned Orson Hyde to travel to Jerusalem and, on the Mount of Olives, "dedicate" the land for the gathering of scattered Judah. This was accomplished in October 1841. Yet the act was entirely

⁷ See Dan Vogel, "The Book of Mormon and the Providential View of History," unpublished manuscript, Community of Christ Library.

symbolic as the church leadership made no significant effort to share the Book of Mormon with the Jewish population in Israel, America, or elsewhere. Rather, the expectation was that God was moving independently to effect the restoration of Israel. The church's responsibility was seen to be prayerful support for, and triumphant discernment of, God's activity among the Jewish people while the church effected parallel development of the "New Jerusalem," including a new temple, in America among the remnant of the house of Israel that had been "broken off" in ancient times, for example, the "Lamanites," or native Americans.⁸

The Evidence

Interpreters of history rightly pride themselves on marshalling documentary evidence to support their particular thesis or perspective. While I would like to be able to quote some heretofore undiscovered admission by Joseph, or one who knew his mind on the subject, to the effect that the Book of Mormon had become irrelevant to the mission and development of the movement, to my knowledge, none exists. Rather, Joseph continued to proclaim, both internally and publicly, that the book was central to the movement. For example, in November 1841 Joseph apparently recorded this occurrence, "Sunday, 28.—I spent the day in the council with the Twelve Apostles at the house of President Young, conversing with them upon a variety of subjects. . . . I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."⁹ Joseph's most public proclamation of the value of the Book of Mormon is probably the "Wentworth Letter." In it he described to the prominent newspaper man the divine origin of the book and affirmed that, "This book also tells us that our Saviour made his appearance upon this continent after his resurrection, that he planted the gospel here in all its fulness, and richness, and power, and blessing."¹⁰

In the face of such positive affirmation, on what basis can my thesis be supported? The evidence that Joseph increasingly left the Book of Mormon

⁸ See II Nephi chapter 2.

⁹ Quoted from the Documentary History of the Church (volume 4, page 461) in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith: Taken from His Sermons and Writings as They Are Found in the Documentary History and Other Publications of the Church and Written or Published in the Days of the Prophet's Ministry* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1951), 194.

¹⁰ Joseph Smith, "Church History," *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 March 1842): 707.

on the shelf gathering dust through the later years of his ministry is entirely negative. There is simply less and less evidence that he used the teachings of the book. In this regard, I would hasten to affirm that the thesis is not new. In a well-documented 1984 article in *Dialogue*, historian Grant Underwood investigated published citations of the Book of Mormon in the pre-Utah period of church history. Underwood provides substantial statistical support for his comment:

As we step back to take a larger look at Book of Mormon usage in early years, we can make a number of general observations. First, compared to the Bible, the Book of Mormon was hardly cited at all. . . . To a people who have come to prize the Book of Mormon as “the keystone” of their religion, it may come as a surprise to learn that in the early literature the Bible was cited nearly twenty times more frequently than the Book of Mormon. Such a ratio is corroborated in the unpublished sources as well. During his proselyting peregrinations at this period of time, Orson Pratt kept a fairly detailed record of the scriptures used in his sermons. Bible passages were listed ten times more frequently than Book of Mormon ones. *Moreover, in the 173 Nauvoo discourses of the prophet Joseph Smith for which contemporary records exist, only two Book of Mormon passages have been cited while dozens of biblical passages were.*¹¹ (My italics for emphasis).

In 1835, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon prepared and delivered what have come to be known as the Lectures on Faith. They were subsequently published as the “Doctrine” part of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants and were advertised at the time as being authoritative. “It may be well, for the information of the churches abroad, to say, that this book will contain the important revelations on doctrine and church government now extant, and will, we trust, give them a perfect understanding of the doctrine believed by this society.”¹² The lectures were the core curriculum for elders being sent to the mission field at the time, and are, understandably, geared for their facing the public. However, I think it is significant that five years after the Book of Mormon was first published it was virtually ignored by Smith and Rigdon in defining the doctrinal beliefs of the church. The lectures, by my count, contain 123 biblical references (not counting the “begats” section in Lecture 2), and only 7 Book of Mormon references. All seven references are in the first lecture and are simply examples of the exercise of faith by past religious

¹¹ Grant Underwood, “Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17 (autumn 1984): 52–53.

¹² *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (May 1835): 122.

figures. No point of doctrine is supported or clarified from the Book of Mormon.

A second significant public statement by Joseph Smith Jr., entirely intended for the benefit of church members, was his prayer at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in 1836. In the prayer Joseph made nine biblical references, thirty-four modern revelation references, and four Book of Mormon references.¹³ Finally, in the widely publicized doctrinal "King Follet Sermon"¹⁴ in 1844, again intended mainly for church members, Joseph explicitly stated that he would base his doctrinal proofs on the Bible. In addition to many biblical references he cited the Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham, and Doctrine and Covenants, but *never* cited the Book of Mormon. It seems clear that in the life and ministry of Joseph Smith Jr., the Book of Mormon had been entirely retired as a doctrinal resource within a very few years of its publication.

By contrast, the Book of Mormon seems to have been in significant demand by the membership throughout the lifetime of Joseph Smith Jr. as indicated by its rate of publication. While it is well documented that early expectations for sale and distribution of the 5,000 copies of the first edition of the book (1830 Palmyra) were not quickly realized, causing both financial hardship and disillusionment among some early church leaders, the publication rate of subsequent editions supports the conclusion that demand kept pace with the growth of the church. It is unclear whether the Kirtland edition (1837) was for 3,000 or 5,000 copies. In 1840, 2,000 copies were published at Nauvoo (printed in Cincinnati), and the same plates were apparently used in 1842 to print another 1,500 copies. Additionally, 4,050 copies were printed in Liverpool, England, in 1841 by the team of apostles doing missionary work there. Thus, during the lifetime of the founding prophet, either 15,550 or 17,550 copies of the Book of Mormon were printed depending on which figures are accepted.¹⁵ While it is even more difficult to obtain reliable figures for church membership during this period, estimates range from 20,000 to 100,000 at the death of Joseph in 1844.¹⁶ Also

¹³ See Doctrine and Covenants Section 109, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints version.

¹⁴ *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 August 1844): 612.

¹⁵ Royal Skousen, "Book of Mormon Editions," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 175.

¹⁶ Susan Easton Black, *Early Members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, volume I*, (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), i.

unknown is the number of books lost throughout the period due to disaffection, persecution, and distribution to people who never joined the church. The absence of better data precludes making any unequivocal statements on the issue. Nonetheless, even using the high estimate for church membership and low estimate for publication, it seems reasonably clear that publication of the Book of Mormon did keep pace with the growth in membership of the church. It seems likely that each family, and certainly each elder, had a copy. The book apparently was widely available to the membership and was used by missionaries and local leaders in their teaching and preaching.¹⁷ Yet there is little evidence that the central leadership of the church, Joseph in particular, either used or encouraged the use of the Book of Mormon.



Appearance and form of the Book of Mormon printer's manuscript, circa 1903.

Photo courtesy Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri, D1738.15

¹⁷ There is substantial recorded testimony of early members as to the significant role of the Book of Mormon in their conversion to Mormonism. See Harper, "Infallible Proofs," for several typical citations.

It is, I believe, significant that many of the esoteric doctrines developed at Nauvoo were totally unknown to those who were converted to the church away from the center. Upon their migration to Nauvoo many were surprised and dismayed by what they found being taught, which was contrary to the plain and straightforward “fullness” of the Christian gospel of the Book of Mormon by which they had been converted.¹⁸

While there can be no direct correlation between the relatively infrequent citation of the Book of Mormon in publications of the time and Joseph’s apparent loss of interest in its message, it is fair to say that Joseph’s extant writings and discourses fail to show any particular awareness of, or concern about, this trend. It is, I believe, a fair assumption that such lack of official usage was consistent with his own views. Underwood and others have pointed out that the frequent references to the Bible in these same published works and recorded verbal presentations can be attributed to the desire on the part of church writers and speakers to get a fair hearing from the public, that tended to accept the authority of the Bible and to be “put off” by the Book of Mormon. Yet, whether intentional or not, whether fully appreciated or not, the practice of using the Bible as the authority for Mormonism’s interpretation of the gospel positioned the movement as simply another of the many Protestant denominations who were vying for followers. It seriously undermined the church’s claim that the Book of Mormon presented the gospel in “plain and precious” terms; that the book presented the gospel unadulterated by centuries of mis-copying, mis-translating, and intentional changes by self-serving church authorities.

¹⁸ The church leadership appears to have given specific instruction to field missionaries and local leaders not to share publicly what it called “the mysteries” being developed and taught at Nauvoo. In a letter by Hyrum Smith the following statement is telling: “An elder has no business to undertake to preach mysteries in any part of the world. . . . Neither has any elder any authority to preach any mysterious thing to any branch of the church unless he has a direct commandment from God to do so. Let the matter of the grand councils of heaven, and the making of gods, worlds, and devils *entirely alone*: for you are not called to teach any such doctrine—for neither you nor the people are capacitated to understand any such principles—less so to teach them. For when God commands men to teach such principles the saints will receive them. Therefore beware what you teach! for the mysteries of God are not given to all men; and unto those to whom they are given they are placed under restrictions to impart only such as God will command them. . . and let the mysteries alone until by and bye” (*italics in original*). *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 March 1844): 474.

I am well aware that the evidence I have cited above is largely circumstantial. Neither Joseph nor any of his close supporters, other than some people who became disaffected from Joseph, ever denied the Book of Mormon nor admitted their disaffection from it.¹⁹ Yet, I believe the record is consistently in favor of my thesis.

The Power of the Prophetic

If one accepts the idea that Joseph did indeed put the Book of Mormon on the shelf to gather dust, the question “Why?” looms large. At this point, the discussion moves into an area in which some historians are uncomfortable. This area leaves, to some degree, the objective and enters the subjective. There are certainly many factors contributing to the situation, and it is far beyond the scope of this article to explore them. I do, however, wish to provide some food for thought on the issue.

The focus of Joseph and his early supporters on the existence and process of his prophetic gift rather than the content of what that gift conveyed is a curious phenomenon. While the gift that facilitated the translation of the Book of Mormon and the historic setting of the book are unusual and lend themselves to skepticism by “objective” historians, they are not unique, as some have pointed out. But, in my opinion, the message of the Book of Mormon, the theology it upholds, was and is solidly Christian. Certainly, it challenged some of the interpretations of some of the denominations first confronted by it. But those early missionaries who relied on it stood firmly in face-to-face competition with those who espoused other views.²⁰ Few objective Christian scholars and theologians of today have any substantive issues with its teachings. The Old Testament context of the book in no way compromises its Christianity. Rather, it provides an overt blending of Old and New of the type Christianity has struggled to accomplish throughout its history. As many commentators have stated, the book is either a work of inspiration or of genius. Joseph’s apparent treatment of the book leads me to judge it to be a work of inspiration the extent of which Joseph

¹⁹ On 2 October 1841, Joseph deposited the manuscript of the Book of Mormon in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House. One witness quoted Joseph as having remarked on this action, “I have had trouble enough with this thing” (Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon; Evidence of Divine Power in the “Coming Forth” of the Book of Mormon*, volume 1 (Independence, Missouri: Zion’s Printing and Publishing, 1951): 218. This quote itself is, of course, open to interpretation.

²⁰ Harper, “Infallible Truths.”

himself failed to appreciate. The opportunity of Joseph and his associates to share the “plain and precious” restoration of the Christian gospel was lost by their focusing on the process rather than the message the process produced. Why did this occur?

Many historians and commentators have reflected on the social, cultural, and psychological factors that contributed to the shape of the movement that grew up around Joseph. Millennialism, communitarianism, and restorationism all were prominent themes that colored the early direction of the church. Others have searched the historical record for secular sources from which Joseph might have gleaned the material for the Book of Mormon and other “inspired” writings and pronouncements.²¹ In more recent times, in efforts to make Mormon church history more objective and scholarly, I feel we have tended to shy away from the most critical element in the development of the movement. I contend that the history of any religious movement, and most certainly the history of Mormonism, must fully take into account the inspiration factor. While psychologists and sociologists can contribute to our understanding of why people did and said what they were observed to have done and said, the testimony of divine inspiration must also be given proper weight. Because such inspiration is difficult to deal with objectively is no reason to suppose it does not exist or that it has no bearing on the issues, particularly the motivations of those involved. I believe that religious historians must grapple with the highly subjective and ephemeral phenomenon of spiritual realities that are central to religious belief and practice if they are to have any hope of understanding their subject. The question is not whether spiritual factors must be considered but how to deal with them in a balanced and object manner.²²

Joseph’s personal characteristics and the social, cultural context in which he did what he did are certainly relevant to understanding the Book of Mormon and Mormonism. But the factor I believe was most critical in shaping the character of the early church was Joseph’s use of his prophetic gift. It is my interpretation of the historical record that in the early days of Joseph’s encounters with the Divine, he was both naïve and open. He appears to have been genuinely humble and was willing to be directed. He

²¹ It is characteristic of “scientific” culture that some scholars can only accept results for which they can show causes. Rather than admit such insubstantial causes as divine inspiration, these scholars reach for every possible secular cause, no matter how improbable.

²² See Harper, “Infallible Truths.”

was, in a word, available to the Divine and willing to be an instrument for the accomplishment of this “great and marvelous work [that] is about to come forth” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:1a). This does not imply that Joseph was simply passive; he struggled with his attitude and focus. But he did seem to exhibit confidence in the process. He seems to have understood that the exercise of the gift was directly related to his making himself available to the Divine in humility and faith.²³

I believe this state of availability was characterized by a substantial suppression of the ego. I suggest, however, that such suppression was largely unconscious; Joseph simply was focused on the task at hand rather than himself. It appears to me that this situation existed through the dictation of the Book of Mormon and is also evident in some of the early revelations, notably the so called “Moses Revelations” that initiated Joseph’s subsequent biblical revisions.²⁴ My reasoning for this interpretation is two-fold: first, at that point in his life, Joseph had neither the skill nor the resources to create the documents in question independently from divine inspiration, and second, it appears that Joseph did not really understand the theological significance of what he was dictating. By the time he obtained the training and sophistication to deal with the concepts, he had moved on from the prophetic to the administrative task, and theologically, to new innovations such as endowments, multiple gods, and other “mysteries” intended not for the restoration of “pure” Christianity but as a benefit for the elect. As the Book of Mormon provided no support for these innovations, Joseph simply let it gather dust.

A change from Joseph’s functioning as the channel for divine revelation to that of asserting himself as God’s spokesperson is evident when Joseph began to use his prophetic gift for administrative matters, personal guidance, and direction for his associates. In reading those revelations that deal with personal and organizational issues, many of which have been canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants, one can discern over time a growing intrusion of ego and a concern for personal and institutional affirmation and standing.

²³ See Doctrine and Covenants 2 (July 1828), which is a remarkable “revelatory” self-criticism by Joseph.

²⁴ Joseph seems to have received at least the first two Moses Revelations “out of the blue,” which implies divine initiative rather than the human struggling for understanding that characterized many of the later revelations. Only later did he realize the Moses Revelations provided a revised telling of the Genesis creation story and actively sought divine insight. See Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1969), 70 and following.

In the face of persecution, Joseph and the church increasingly relied on “revelation” to demonstrate God’s support and favor for them as opposed to their “enemies.” Moreover, as Joseph became increasingly concerned with church organization and administration, he employed his prophetic stature (if not the prophetic gift) in a different way, one that is somewhat incompatible with the earlier process of revelation.

Religious scholars have long discerned two parallel but distinct functions in religion. Often termed “prophetic” and “priestly,” the first has to do with bringing God, or God’s word to people, while the second has to do with bringing people to God or what has been discerned to be God’s word or way. I would submit that Joseph’s prophetic gift was both appropriate and effective in revealing God’s word, but was less appropriate and effective in performing the priestly role. By that I do not mean to imply that the priestly or ecclesiastical function does not require divine inspiration, but rather that it requires inspiration of a different type. This second type is more amenable to human manipulation. But that is a topic for another article.

I suggest here that Joseph’s prophetic gift functioned well only under conditions of suppressed ego and fully focussed objectivity, for example, when Joseph was “humble and full of love.” When Joseph tried to press his gift into the service of his own agenda, however well intentioned, the gift became increasingly fallible and Joseph was increasingly left to his own devices and imagination. When a prophet forgets that he speaks at the sufferance and impetus of God, and claims the gift as his own, the results are almost certain to be tragic. I believe that Joseph rightly discerned that the Book of Mormon was brought forth by the gift and power of God, a position he never abandoned. It is to his credit that he never claimed the same level or degree of inspiration for many of his later theological pronouncements. We would do well to do the same.

and receive "endowments and blessings" in the Zodiac temple. Some members actually did join their co-religionists in the Lone Star state.²

The Cutlerites were no exception. Alpheus Cutler, an intimate of Joseph Smith before his murder in 1844 and a member of the Council of Fifty, as well as a leader at Winter Quarters, led the Church of Jesus Christ (Cutlerite) from 1853 until his death in 1864. Cutler and his followers, first in Mills County and then Fremont County, Iowa, lived their own form of Mormonism without a temple, although this sect, as with other branches of the Mormons, included a form of sacred rites. According to Cutlerite expert Danny L. Jorgensen, Cutler's sacred ritualism "involved a secretive initiation, assignment of a sacred personal identity, passwords to the celestial world, endowments (or blessings), ritual cleansing by water and anointings with oil, the receipt of a sacred undergarment, and ritual reenactment of sacred myths."³ Other ordinances included baptism by proxy for the salvation of the dead as well as monogamous celestial marriage. The endowment of the first generation, coupled with the quickly decreasing numbers of followers after the death of Cutler in 1864, eventually limited ordinances to the ritual baptism for the dead.⁴

Thus among the members of the Mormon diaspora, the environs of a temple were not necessary for the rites associated with it. The Cutlerites practiced them in Iowa, and the Wightites, discussed more fully below, did the same in Texas before building the Pedernales temple. Brigham Young, at the request of many of his Latter-day Saints at Winter Quarters, Iowa, years before the Endowment House was built in Salt Lake City, approved the

² "Correspondence of Bishop George Miller," *Northern Islander* (1855): 151, 152, 155; David Rich Lewis, "'For Life, the Resurrection, and Life Everlasting': James J. Strang and Strangite Mormon Polygamy," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 66 (summer 1983): 274–291; John Quist, "Polygamy among James Strang and His Followers," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 34, 38; *Frontier Guardian* 1 (7 Feb 1849): 2; Michael D. Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, two volumes (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 1:224; revelation to William Smith, 20 March 1850, in *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald* (April 1850): 4 pages, photocopy; Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith, *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, six volumes (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1951–1970), 3:35. George Miller's newspaper articles may be compared with *The Life of George Miller, Written by Himself*, edited by H. W. Mills, as "De Tal Palo Astilla," in *Annual Publications of the Southern Historical Society* (1917): 88–156.

³ Danny L. Jorgensen, "The Fiery Darts of the Adversary: An Interpretation of Early Cutlerism," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990): 75.

⁴ Jorgensen, "The Fiery Darts of the Adversary," 67–70, 74, 75–76, 83.

“So we built a good little Temple to worship in”: Mormonism on the Pedernales— Texas, 1847–1851

Melvin C. Johnson¹

The first functional, active Mormon temple west of the Mississippi River no longer exists. A significant, if little known, fact about the Lyman Wight colony, a small independent Mormon group, is that its members performed the endowment ceremony and baptized their dead from 1849 to 1851 in their own temple. It was built on the banks of the Pedernales River in the small Mormon colony known as Zodiac, located in Gillespie County, Texas. This should not be surprising, for temple building was not limited to the Utah Mormon church. The Wightites and the Strangites, as well as other sects, either built temples or participated in temple ritualism. Some leading contenders to the mantle of Joseph Smith were aware of the Texas temple and were either spurred by it or desired to partake in its sacred rites.

Examples abound. For instance, a year after James Strang took his first plural wife (1849) in Michigan, former Bishop George Miller and his polygamous family arrived at Beaver Island from Wight's Texas colony. Miller undoubtedly brought the news that the Wightites had built and were using a temple. Implementation of earlier Strangite plans for construction had begun the previous fall; however, the Michigan design with its twelve towers and a great hall was never finished.

William Smith, self-professed successor to Joseph Smith Jr., wanted to merge his religious organization with that of Wight, according to the minutes of the Covington conference (1850). This included a plan for Smith's church group to immigrate to Texas. There they were to unite with the Wightites

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performance of eternal sealings, marriages, and adoptions.⁵ The Strangites, the Wightites, and the Utah church, attempted to build, built, or used other buildings for rites associated with Mormon temple ritual.

The social and material landscape of Zodiac Mormonism included an infrastructure of temple ritualism, economic exclusiveness, and plural marriage, which fused the sacred and the secular in this frontier community of faith. From their early beginnings in Wisconsin, the Wightites had defined social, familial, and individual needs in religious terms. The role of Apostle Lyman Wight as the community prophet and leader provided direct, authoritarian guidance. The Zodiac temple with its rituals defined the focus of family and individual goals. Temple ritualism bound the community together: husbands and wives, parents and children, leaders and followers. It gifted (endowed) families with continuity, transcending mortality, sublimating death to eternal life, unraveling the bindings of secular time and space. Those at Zodiac believed their temple work endowed them beyond the grave with everlasting exaltation: for themselves, their families, and their familial dead. The environment of Zodiac, Lamoni Wight wrote many years later, had presented his family and friends with the opportunity to worship "according to our desires, unity, peace, and harmony prevailing."⁶

John Hawley remembered that, "Lyman told us we must build a house for to attend to the baptism for the dead and also the ordinance of washing of feet and a general endowment in the wilderness. So we . . . built a good little Temple to worship in." It was completed on 17 February 1849, the first Mormon temple west of the Mississippi. The large, two-story log building functioned as a multi-purpose center for Zodiac, a company storehouse as well as an upstairs room for temple ritual. Of the two Mormon schools enumerated in the census of 1850, one met in the building. The Zodiac High Council gave permission for William Leyland to hold his classes in the large room on the second floor. Herman Hale Smith, an RLDS historian and descendent of a Zodiac family, incorrectly believed that the building was "only in name" a temple.⁷ It was, in fact, a functioning Mormon temple on the Texas frontier.

⁵ Richard Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846-1852 "And Should We Die . . ."* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 189-191.

⁶ Levi Lamoni Wight, "Autobiography of L. L. Wight," *Journal of History* 9 (July 1916): 265.

⁷ John Hawley, "Autobiography of John Hawley," unpublished manuscript, 1889, Community of Christ Library-Archives, 7; "The Mormon Colony (Zodiac) Near Fredericksburg, Texas," in the Cotter Collection, unpublished manuscripts

Various ordinances performed in the Zodiac temple involved married and unmarried individuals. The rites included the distinctive rites of baptism for the dead; washings of feet, head, and body; a general endowment; various anointings; adoptions; the sealing (marriage) of men and women for time and eternity; and the setting apart of kings, queens, and priests for eternity. Zodiac ritualism, at least once, reorganized families as well as uniting them. In the spring of 1849, the Leyland siblings, who hated George Miller, their stepfather, encouraged Lyman Wight to use the ceremonies to separate them from Miller's rule. William Leyland noted in his journal that on 8 April 1849 he received the endowment portion of "the washing of feet under the hands of the Twelve High Counsellors and their presidents along with sixteen elders and their presidents and on the 9[th] received the washings of the body and anointing." The following month, William Leyland and his sisters Sophia, Sarah, and Eliza were adopted into the Lyman Wight family. Although the girls were only "adopted until they were of age," William wrote that he was "adopted under the oath and covenant of the priesthood unto my salvation or damnation until I could save my father and raise him to be a king and priest."⁸

compiled by John Cotter and Dorothea (Weinehiemer) Cotter, in the Pioneer Heritage Memorial Library, Fredericksburg, Texas, 1969; William Leyland Journal, in Heman Hale Smith, "The Lyman Wight Colony in Texas," manuscript prepared for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Lamoni, Iowa, 1920), 21, 25, Community of Christ Library-Archives. Heman H. Smith (son of Heman C. Smith and grandson of Spencer Smith, both members of Zodiac), the great-grandson of Lyman Wight and a church leader and historian for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, prepared the manuscript from the Lyman Wight Journal, Spencer Smith Journal, and William Leyland Journal, all later destroyed by fire. H. H. Smith wrote that the Zodiac temple was a temple only in name.

⁸ William Leyland Journal, in Smith, "Lyman Wight Colony," 21-22. John Hawley either considered the type of ceremony in which Leyland participated as either not an endowment or was unaware that Leyland had received anointings and washings without the sealing ceremony to a woman for time and eternity. Hawley carefully distinguished, in the Temple Lot Case at page 455, the difference between the first ordinances and marriage sealing, noting that while in Salt Lake City young men could receive the first part of the endowment without the sealing ceremony for time and eternity, such was not the case at Zodiac. Hawley's temple experiences are recorded in three different documents: John Hawley to Bro. Joseph, *The Saints' Herald* (28 June 1884): 412; Hawley, "Autobiography of John Hawley," 7; and *The*

John Hawley is the only individual to experience and compare the endowment ritual of both Wightite and Utah branches of Mormonism. He celebrated the ceremony at Zodiac (1851) and later in Utah (1856). Under sworn oath in the Temple Lot Case (1893), he compared and contrasted in federal court the various ordinances and clothing associated with these rituals.

The reader should be aware that Hawley was testifying in the Temple Lot Case on behalf of the RLDS Church, which defended Joseph Smith well into the twentieth century against the accusation that he was the foundation of Mormon polygamy. John was a devout member of the RLDS Church during the last four decades of his life. His "Autobiography" described his endowment ceremony to his first wife, Harriet Hobart, near Austin in 1846. In the Temple Lot testimony, Hawley was referring to the endowment with his second wife, Sylvia Johnson, in 1851, as well as its comparison to the ceremonies of the Endowment House in Salt Lake City. Hawley's writings during the 1880s and 1890s clearly indicate a bias against Brigham Young and the LDS Church, understating the complexity of Wightite attitudes toward polygamy. For instance, family lore mentions that John Hawley nearly became a polygamist, but he never mentions that fact or his own brother's role in it. His brother George was a plural husband for nearly ten years in Texas and the Utah Territory. Nor do John Hawley's writings reveal that he served as the presiding elder of the LDS Church in Pine Valley, Utah Territory, during the 1860s.⁹ Thus his writings, in light of his reticence about

Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Complainant, vs. The Church of Christ at Independence, et al. (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald House, 1893): 451–462.

⁹ John Hawley to Bro. Joseph, 412; Hawley, "Autobiography of John Hawley," 6–7; T. R. Turk, "Mormons in Texas: The Lyman Wight Colony," typescript manuscript, 1987, photocopy, LDS Archives. Turk, 44–45, 46–47, who incorrectly dates George Hawley's marriage to Ann Hadfield in either 1848 or 1849; Hawley, Temple Lot Case, 452, 453, 457; *Journal History of the Church*, 173: 22 March 1863; 180: 8 May 1864, 3; and 198: 31 December 1866, 2, LDS Archives. The marriages of the Hawley siblings on 4 July 1846 took place at or near Sycamore Springs, four miles north of Austin, revealing once again the continuing Mormon pattern during the second half of the nineteenth century that eternal marriage sealings could take place outside of a temple. For examples, see Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy*, 1: 54, 191, 494–495, and 657, on such sealings being performed from 1842 to 1845 before the Nauvoo temple was dedicated and at page 657 for examples in 1846 after the Saints had abandoned the Nauvoo temple.

Wightite polygamy, about his temple experiences become compelling with their forthright and lucid descriptions of them.

His testimony stated that, to the best of his personal understanding, Brigham Young and Lyman Wight both believed they had the priesthood authority to seal men and women together for time and eternity in an endowment ceremony. Participants in each sect's rite used holy clothing known as "garments." Unlike the Utah Mormons, the Wightites of Zodiac wore their religious garments only for special occasions, including sealing ceremonies and for burial. They believed the garment robes were patterned on a design worn by the ancient prophet Moroni, an angelic messenger who Joseph Smith said had visited him. This outer garment was a loose frock without markings, described as an "entire covering of linen," leaving bare only the extremities of the hands, feet, and head. The garment and an apron, a facsimile of those supposedly worn by Adam and Eve after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, were bare of markings. In contrast, so Hawley testified, the Utah garment was always worn by the initiated, who were counseled never to take it off, even to leaving one leg in the garment while bathing. The Utah apron and the tight-fitting garment, joined together at the waist and legs to make one piece of clothing, had special markings. The temple clothing also included a robe with a "bandage" that came down from the shoulders, moccasins, and a cap.

Hawley testified he first encountered endowment practices in Zodiac, that "Lyman Wight was the first person that taught [to Hawley] anything about endowments according to my best recollection." The Zodiac endowment, he alleged, involved only matrimonial concerns, the sealing of a man and women "together in order to enjoy each other's society in eternity." He described the doctrine as "spiritual wife marriage," a negative term used by the RLDS (and others) during that era to attack the plural marriage practices of Utah Mormonism, the language of which was guaranteed to offend LDS sensibilities. Hawley testified further that sealings for time and eternity were performed for monogamous as well as polygamous couples at Zodiac.

Nonetheless, having more than one concurrent wife, according to Hawley, led to the accrual of extra spiritual advantages: "Those that were in spiritual marriage were said to be in polygamy, as well as those that were not. The understanding was that they would enjoy the same glory as others, but the ones that had more than one wife would enjoy a greater portion of it." He further offered that it "was not a necessary and logical sequence" that those that had been married for time and eternity would have to practice the

doctrine of plural marriage. If a man took more than one wife, however, then his "glory which was in eternity would be greater" than the husband who had only one wife.¹⁰

Wight was always concerned that the rite of eternal marriage orders, or patriarchal marriage, be correctly performed, and that couples were married for eternity as well as time. He earlier had ordained Pierce Hawley, John's father, as a patriarch because, in Mormon theology, he would have the authority to determine an individual's family line through the power of his office. Pierce Hawley discerned that his son was from the tribe of Ephraim and of the royal blood and lineage of Joseph of Egypt. Antebellum eternal marriage under the Wightite system, like other Mormon factions, did not have to be performed in a temple.¹¹

An example follows. In 1846, Lyman Wight and Pierce Hawley had made marriage selections for John Hawley (Harriet Hobart), Priscilla Hawley (John Young), and George Hawley (Ann Hadfield). On 4 July, presumably at Sycamore Springs to the north of Austin, Texas, with Pierce Hawley and Otis Hobart officiating, John Hawley was ordained a king and priest and anointed with oil after having his feet first washed. John washed Harriet's feet, anointed her head with oil, and ordained her a queen. Lyman Wight sealed John and Harriet for time and eternity. Hawley testified later that the use of "the power of the priesthood" differentiated religious sealings from civil rites. The Mormons used them "instead of the legal form of marriage and at that time we looked upon it as being more binding for eternity than the other form of marriage."¹²

Hawley compared the Utah and Zodiac ceremonies. He asserted that the rites he underwent at the Endowment House were "not the same endowments that I took under Lyman Wight's administration." The Zodiac endowment consisted of only the one ceremony, including the following ordinances: the washing of feet, an anointing with oil, and the ordaining of the initiates as "kings, queens, and priests," which Hawley averred consisted "the sum and substance" of the Zodiac endowment. The Utah endowments, however, distinguished between marriage and resurrection ordinances. His testimony cited that "Wilford Woodruff did the anointing and washing and Brigham Young did the sealing" for Hawley and his wife in the Endowment

¹⁰ Hawley, Temple Lot Case, 453–456.

¹¹ Hawley, "Autobiography of John Hawley," 6, 7.

¹² Turk, 43, 52, 83; Hawley, Temple Lot Case, 452; Hawley, "Autobiography of John Hawley," 6, 7, 10–11.

House. Unlike the Zodiac endowment, the couples in Hawley's ceremony at Salt Lake were separated by gender in different rooms. The Utah endowment involved the washing and anointing with oil of the entire body and feet of the initiate.

Hawley stated that the Utah endowment did not include ordinations of the celebrants as kings, queens, and priests. The Utah rituals included two other major additions that differed from the Texas rite. They required the participants to swear oaths "to avenge the blood of the prophets" in addition to the resurrection and marriage ordinances. The Utah penalty for revealing the "grip and oath" associated with the avenging of the Smiths "was disembowelment." Brigham Young had added a second endowment, wrote Hawley, that included "an anointing and setting apart for the resurrection, and" a power to be called "to rise from the dead, and to raise others." The candidate then received "a name we would be called for from the grave by."¹³

The issue of privacy also differentiated the endowment ceremonies of Zodiac and Utah. Hawley testified that at Zodiac anyone could attend. At Salt Lake City, "it was done secretly and no one was permitted to see them only the officers and the ones talking the endowments. No one else was present or permitted to be present simply because no one else had any business there and they were not permitted to be there." The availability of facilities was probably one reason for the difference in practice. Zodiac was a frontier community with a two-story log building, its only community building other than the mill, and it served as the temple, the storehouse, the high council meeting place, and one of the schools. The Endowment House in Salt Lake City, on the other hand, had, according to Hawley, "a good many departments" with "a reception room, a small stairway to the veil, and it was pretty much all on the ground floor. Had dressing rooms, washing rooms, a prayer circle, and an altar."¹⁴ The Mormons of Utah had the time, the opportunity, and the security to build a private structure in which to house a much more intricate ceremony than that at Zodiac.

Temple ordinances continued at Zodiac from 1849 to 1851, including baptism for the dead. On 10 February 1851, Lyman Wight signed an attestation of purpose concerning the principle of such baptism. He was convinced by scripture, the words of Joseph Smith, and "twenty years in the cause of God," the Zodiac leader wrote, "that baptism for the dead is one of the most essential ordinances given to us by Christ our redeemer." Only a

¹³ Hawley to Bro. Joseph, 412; Hawley, Temple Lot Case, 453, 454, 457, 458.

¹⁴ Hawley, Temple Lot Case, 454, 456.

covenanted people, he declared further, dedicated “even unto the principle of all they have and being placed under the contrroll of the Almighty God” could build an appropriate house and font for the sanctification of God’s followers. Wight averred that never before, in his opinion, had a site before been worthy of such an edifice and for the rites held within it. According to Wight, “the Lord Almighty [had] accepted” the Zodiac temple.¹⁵ That same day of 10 February 1851, Stephen Curtis administered the rite to Lyman Wight as a proxy candidate for his grandfather, Levi Wight, and to Harriet Benton Wight, proxy for Levi Wight’s wife, Susanna Wight. Official witnesses were Pierce Hawley, Sarah Schroeder, Joseph D. Goodale, and George Hawley.

Half a dozen more sessions were held from 11 February to 11 March 1851. The women normally used their maiden names rather than those of their husbands. Recorders included John Young and Stephen Curtis, with Andrew Ballantyne, Stephen Curtis, and J. D. Goodale as administrators of the ritual. Proxy candidates included Pierce and Sarah Schrader (Schroeder) Hawley; George Montague Sr., and his plural wife Eliza Segar; Stephen Z. Curtis; John F. Miller and Margaret Frances Andrews; Ralph Jenkins and Verona Brace; Irvin Carter and Mary Ann Six; Jennet Turnbull and Andrew Ballantyne. Witnesses included George Hawley, John Hawley, Priscilla Hawley, I. F. Carter, Spencer Smith, Rodney Bray (Brace), Andrew Ballantyne, George W. Bird, Pierce Hawley, E. W. Curtis, Eber Johnson, William Ballantyne, Alaxe St. Mary, (Marion) Frances Andrews, J. S. Goodale, and Margaret Ballantyne.¹⁶

Lyman Wight’s attestation of and participation in baptism for the dead at Zodiac clearly revealed his rejection of the post-Joseph churches of Nauvoo and Salt Lake City. It was his rebuff to the authority of Brigham Young and the rites performed in the Nauvoo temple. Wight obviously believed the Nauvoo temple was not worthy of religious rituals, thus underlining the futility of its ordinances before the Lord and the world. The implications of the Texas directive are clear: the worthiness of such rites could only be performed by a covenanted people who had dedicated all they owned and who had been accepted and directed by the Lord God Almighty. The

¹⁵ Lyman Wight, “Revelation on Baptism for the Dead,” 10 February 1851, Archives of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa.

¹⁶ Baptism for the dead Record, Lyman Wight Records in Zodiac, February and March 1851, RLDS Archives. The author has included parenthetical corrections and annotations to clarify the identification of certain individuals.

conclusion of that train of logic was equally clear: Lyman Wight, not Brigham Young, was the Lord's appointed messenger. Obviously, Wight believed some form of common-stock association was the religious and economic foundation necessary for a covenanted people, rather than the stewardship and tithing programs of Utah Mormonism. The document of 10 February 1851 logically infers that Lyman Wight believed not only he could officiate in such a position but also only the Mormons of Zodiac, with Wight at their head, could build an acceptable temple and worthily perform its rites.

The writings of John Hawley and William Leyland and records of baptism for the dead reveal the extent of Zodiac temple activities. They involved the wearing of garments, the receiving of endowments, and the performance of other religious rituals. It is obvious that the statements of Wight, Hawley, and Leyland as well as the records for baptism of the dead reveal an active and functioning Mormon temple on the banks of the Pedernales River in frontier Texas before the Civil War. The Zodiac temple was the first Mormon temple west of the Mississippi River. It no longer exists, but its record does.



Herman Millner at Zodiac, Texas, 1960, in photo by G. E. Tickemyer.
All that remains are a few stones and yellow clay
used between the upright log walls.

Photo courtesy of Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri, D947.5.

The United Order of Enoch in Independence

Gregory Smith¹

“Purchase all the lands in Jackson County that can be purchased.” “The Lord will gather as many as will believe and harken [*sic*] unto his voice. (Obey Him).” “The Saints will hardly escape unless they go to Zion.”² A Latter Day Saint evidently penciled these notes in the margins of a 1911 edition of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) Doctrine and Covenants. No other handwritten notes were made in the volume leading one to believe that the purchase of land in Jackson County was the central message of the book. These words paraphrased some of the statements of Joseph Smith Jr. from the 1830s that continued to shape and express the faith of church members some ninety years later.

These sentiments also undoubtedly influenced the 1909 General Conference held in Lamoni, Iowa, when the RLDS Church authorized another organization of the United Order of Enoch. Official organization by the church was enacted on 26 October 1909 in Independence, Missouri. Incorporation had been opposed in two circuit courts in Independence and Kansas City, but after further review, legal incorporation was granted by the state of Missouri on 11 May 1910. The new order was granted a charter by the Missouri secretary of state under the provisions of law for benevolent and educational associations. The officers of the United Order of Enoch were Edmund L. Kelley, presiding bishop; Frederick Madison Smith, of the First Presidency; and Ellis Short, an Independence bishop.

The community of Independence, Missouri, formed in the 1820s, was considered the last outpost of civilization before entering the great American desert. Although not the actual beginning point of the Santa Fe Trail, Independence was the major outfitting post for the California, Oregon, and Santa Fe trails. The town prospered with the businesses that supplied and repaired wagons for long treks. Joseph Smith's Mormons had been run from town in the early 1830s. Culturally, Independence was a southern town; slavery was an important element in the economy of Jackson County.

¹ Gregory Smith lives in Lee's Summit, Missouri, and is currently employed in health care management.

² Doctrine and Covenants (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald House, 1911). Copy 5, see pages 210, 59, and 120. Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.

By 1910, Independence had been surpassed by Kansas City in growth and economic development some forty years earlier. The population of Independence in 1910 was 9,859 people, some 3,000 people more than in 1900. Independence at this time was considering becoming of suburb of Kansas City but later decided to continue standing on its own. The local newspaper, edited by a Tennessean, Colonel William Southern Jr., took pride in his father who refused to take the Oath of Allegiance, which prevented the senior Southern from practicing law in Missouri. The *Independence Examiner* faithfully reported the meetings of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The most famous resident of Independence by 1900 was Charles Gudgell, the father of American Hereford cattle breeders. Forrest "Phog" Allen, later the legendary basketball coach at the University of Kansas, learned the game as a youth in Independence. In 1908, a young man with thick eyeglasses, named Harry Truman, had listened to William Jennings Bryan stump for the U.S. presidency on the courthouse square. The Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and Christian churches founded in the 1820s and 1830s still existed. Many business and civic leaders, in prominent social circles, belonged to the Presbyterian Church and Christian Church. The most significant contribution of the RLDS Church to the community by 1910 was the opening of the Independence Sanitarium and Hospital, followed by a nursing school a year later. Joseph Smith III, moving to Independence in 1906, had proclaimed that the "gathering" should commence, and this was the Independence that the Saints found when they heeded the call.

Philosophically, the guiding principle behind the organization of the United Order of Enoch in Independence was to provide a means to care for the poor of the church through the temporal contributions of active church members and then re-distribute assets and aid according to the needs of the poor. Theoretically, this group stewardship concept was consistent with the previous Orders of Enoch in Kirtland, Ohio, and Lamoni, Iowa. The organization was another noble attempt to apply the gospel to the temporal aspects of the life of the church. In application, the intent of the order was to sell real estate to the Saints, during an era of the church when the gathering had begun and to use the profits to facilitate and manage the poor.

The month after incorporation of the order, a local church newspaper, *Zion's Ensign*, reported in June 1910 that "the United Order of Enoch has long been looked forward to by thousands, by many with fond and big anticipations, and now that it has been established, those who have long been

patiently waiting should become energetic, zealous supporters.”³ The new association took every opportunity to emphasize its charitable work for deserving Saints of the church. “The United Order of Enoch is a helping and benevolent association, organized for the benefit of the poor and needy, dispensing its charities by furnishing equal opportunities to the needy, upright, and industrious in a financial, educational, and social way, with those who are more fortunate, and the supplying stewardships and homes or inheritances to the worthy who may lack.”⁴ The by-laws and articles of incorporation for the United Order of Enoch did not outline specifically its methods to help the poor but rather emphasized the details of management, membership, objectives, and business affairs of the association. Although the order was most likely not in agreement with Missouri state law for benevolent associations, article nine of the by-laws went on to state, “This incorporation shall be in law capable of holding, purchasing and conveying any estate, real, personal or mixed, for its use in carrying out the work herein set forth and shall hold and enjoy in its corporate capacity, all the property, real, personal or mixed which said society may now have or hereafter may acquire.”⁵ Immediately after incorporation, the Order of Enoch put out a call for gifts, offerings, and donations that would enable it to secure land.

The church news column of the *Zion's Ensign* during 1910 and 1911 indicated that the Order of Enoch was a favored sermon topic among the church hierarchy. Presiding Bishop Edmund Kelley presented a sermon at the Stone Church congregation in October 1910. He used as his text Joseph Smith Jr.'s words regarding the care of the poor and establishment of the storehouse (RLDS Doctrine and Covenants Section 77), and the concept that there were no poor among the Lord's people (those people being called Zion) who held all things in common (Genesis 14:32–38 and Acts 4 The Holy Scriptures, Inspired Version). A few days after his sermon, Bishop Kelley sponsored a well-attended question-and-answer session about the Order of Enoch. Bishop Ellis Short in an August 1910 *Saints' Herald* article asked, “Are we to-day willing to be guided in a right and proper way, in the way the Lord directs? If so, let those that can spare money send it to those who have been set apart to receive it, that lands may be bought, and the way prepared so that those who desire may go upon them and establish

³ *Zion's Ensign* 21 (30 June 1910): 7.

⁴ *The United Order of Enoch Articles of Association and By-Laws*, pamphlet, Independence, Missouri, 11 May 1910, 1. Community of Christ Library Archives.

⁵ *The United Order of Enoch Articles of Association and By-Laws*, pamphlet, 8.

themselves.”⁶ Also in August 1910 in the *Zion's Ensign*, A. H. Parsons, a trustee of the Order of Enoch, wrote, “The cause of the Order of Enoch is one of the greatest blessings that has come to Latter Day Israel.”⁷ The leadership of the church found abundant scriptural justification in the cause of the new order.

Not until 1920 did the First Presidency officially designate Independence as the new headquarters for the church. Gathering to the Center Place had begun much earlier, however, at least in the hearts and minds of the Saints. Joseph Smith III had moved his family to Independence from Lamoni in 1906. The documents that Joseph Smith Jr. addressed to the church in Kirtland during 1831 (RLDS Doctrine and Covenants Sections 45 and 57) identified the New Jerusalem as Independence, the Center Place, for those righteous who will be gathered from all nations and will come to Zion singing. These words still rang in the ears of the faithful who longed to respond to the gathering. Edward Rannie, an Order of Enoch board member, wrote in a *Saints' Herald* article of October 1912 that “The revelations to the church make Independence and Jackson County the initial point for the building up of Zion, the extension to a larger area to come with the spiritual and numerical growth of the church. . . . We should all be interested in the order because it is part of God’s divine plan to accomplish the building up of Zion.”⁸

In the 1914 General Conference, the First Presidency and Quorum of Twelve issued a lengthy statement that identified Independence as a gathering center. They admonished the Saints to use economy, frugality, and good judgment in gathering and issued the need for a “people whose main desire is to glorify the name of God in the best and noblest service to their fellows.”⁹ The Order of Enoch was ideally positioned to facilitate gathering Saints. Too many Saints, however, wished to answer the call who were not financially able to support themselves, and the First Presidency warned that those Saints gathering would need to be well prepared. The Saints that would gather without adequate financial resources would have a negative impact on

⁶ Ellis Short, “What of the United Order of Enoch—Is It an Important, Necessary, and Needed Organization?” *The Saints' Herald* 57 (24 August 1910): 831.

⁷ *Zion's Ensign* 22 (10 August 1911): 7.

⁸ Edward Rannie, “The United Order of Enoch,” *The Saints' Herald* 59 (16 October 1912): 997, 999.

⁹ *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, volume 6 (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1970), 619.

the Order of Enoch if they expected monetary assistance. What the Order of Enoch wished for was Saints who could make financial investments and purchase real estate. From a survey of letters from out-of-town members, written to the order, the Saints had indeed accepted the role that the order would play in building up Independence as a gathering center. "With best wishes for the welfare of Zion" was a common sentiment expressed in letters of inquiry to the order.¹⁰ A man from Wisconsin commented, "We should be glad to feel that someone would notify us and sort of look after our small interests in Zion. It is for the sake of the church alone we care to hold property there."¹¹

The board officers of the United Order of Enoch during the years of 1910 to 1928 were represented under the Presiding Bishopric administrations of Edmund Kelley, Benjamin McGuire and Albert Carmichael, and the First Presidency, specifically Frederick Madison Smith. Other board members of the order were members of the Independence business community, many of whom were involved in real estate. Ellis Short was an officer for Jackson County Bank, Mark Siegfried was a lawyer active in real estate, Roderick May owned a coal and feed company, R. T. Cooper was in real estate, and B. J. Scott was chief of police for the city. Richard Bullard and George Harrington were English-born missionaries who served on the board. None of the management was performed on a full-time basis. During this period, there was never an RLDS mayor of Independence. However, the following persons served on the Independence council and were also United Order of Enoch board members: David Krah, Mark Siegfried, B. J. Scott, David H. Crick, and Lester Haas.

In early 1910, Ellis Short bought for \$30,000 an eighty-acre tract of land known as the Edgefield Addition.¹² Short had the land platted and in turn sold the addition to the United Order of Enoch for \$30,000, but retained six prime lots that he sold to Lyman Fike for \$800. The land was renamed the Summit Addition by the order. The location was excellent, about one mile south of the courthouse, and about three blocks south of the newly formed Southside RLDS Congregation. The northern edge met Alton Avenue that

¹⁰ Ella May Switzer to Richard Bullard, 23 July 1913. Order of Enoch Lot File. Community of Christ Archives.

¹¹ Ira D. Brown to Order of Enoch, 19 September 1914. Order of Enoch Lot File. Community of Christ Archives.

¹² Land Book no. 300, page 372. Jackson County Recorder Office, Independence, Missouri.

was then the southern boundary of the city limits of Independence. The addition bordered McCoy Street on the west and ran to the Missouri Pacific railroad tracks on the east. The land was considered one of the most beautiful locations in the city, "the land looked very pretty, green and smooth, with here and there a large shade tree. The view from the grounds is beautiful to look upon."¹³ The 19 January 1911 issue of *Zion's Ensign* carried the first advertisement for the sale of lots in the Summit Addition. The prices for the lots ranged on the average from \$5 to \$7 per frontal foot and up to \$10 per foot for larger lots. There were no utilities provided when the first lots were sold.

The order reserved the northeast corner of the Summit Addition for factories and manufacturing plants, although the only businesses that ever located there were a grocery store, a barber shop, and a beauty shop. Land was also reserved for a school and an old folk's home, but neither was ever built. The order reserved several lots on the highest elevation of the addition for a new RLDS mission. Originally named Enoch's Hill, a core of eight families quickly built a new building. Even though the Southside Congregation had a membership of over three hundred people, the Enoch Hill mission grew quickly and was organized into a branch by President Frederick Madison Smith in 1914. In 1919, a foundation was laid using stones from an old farmhouse on the Summit Addition property, and the Enoch Hill branch building was moved. The first families to buy lots on the Summit Addition lived in tents while building their house. The order paid for grading and oiling of streets, but electricity and sidewalks would come later. In 1914, the order spent several hundred dollars drilling a well for water without success and later provided a pipeline to carry city water to the Summit Addition.

In June 1921, the United Order of Enoch purchased a seventy-acre tract of land for \$40,000,¹⁴ which was approximately one mile east of the Summit Addition. The new tract was named the Gudgell Park Addition. The Gudgell name came from Charles Gudgell, the cattle breeder whose cattle farm was partially within the new Order of Enoch land. Streets still carry the names of various cattle breeds such as Hereford, Angus, Aberdeen, and Devon. The northern boundary of the Gudgell Park Addition was two blocks south of Alton Avenue, and the western boundary was Noland Street. Part of the

¹³ E. B. Burton, *The Saints' Herald* 61, (1 July 1914): 627.

¹⁴ Land Book no. 494, page 94. Jackson County Recorder Office, Independence, Missouri.

Gudgell Park Addition included the Gates Park Golf Club that had been closed in preparation for platting lots and the building of houses. This addition was located just a few blocks south of an established RLDS congregation (Walnut Park), a public school, and just west of the Independence city fairgrounds. Considerably more improvements were included in the Gudgell Park Addition such as electricity, water, sewer, and natural gas. Purchasing a lot from the order in either addition required a minimum \$10 down payment, and the buyer could name terms at 6 percent interest.

The United Order of Enoch took on not only the appearance of a real estate company, but also acted like a homeowners' association. The order confined sales of the lots to members of the RLDS Church, but those renting were not exclusively RLDS. Many out-of-town buyers and owners often expected the order to find them renters for lots and/or homes. There were continual problems with delinquent taxes and property payments, and some foreclosures resulted. The order later wanted to approve any outbuildings or garages and then restricted the minimum price of a new home. The order tried to resolve disputes among residents. There were disputes over fences and livestock grazing and pasturing. A 1915 letter from the order to the owner of a rented home complained about the tenants: "By telephone conversation with the Brighamite who is living in the little house belonging to Brother Roberts, I learn that he has no money and no prospect of getting any. Our people living in the neighborhood are anxious that the man and his family remove, but what to do with them is certainly a puzzle. The only thing I know of is to put the Juvenile Court officers on them. They are a sort of community pest, and it is best for the authorities to deal with a case of this kind."¹⁵ In an effort to control who should gather to Independence, the Presiding Bishop in 1921 developed a form titled "Certificate to the Bishop of Zion and her Stakes." This amounted to a character reference or a saintly standard that could be used in keeping the "undesirables out of Zion."¹⁶

Some of the restrictions incorporated in the property deeds placed a burden on the buyer's ability to secure a mortgage. A Kansas City loan association denied a loan for a lot in the Summit Addition based on a clause

¹⁵ Mark H. Siegfried to Joseph Roberts, 2 December 1915. Order of Enoch Lot File, Community of Christ Archives.

¹⁶ Benjamin R. McGuire to M. C. Fisher, 2 February 1921. Order of Enoch Lot File, Community of Christ Archives.

in the contract "that the premises herein described shall not be by the owner used for the purpose of the sale of intoxicating liquors or other improper or immoral purposes and that the owner shall not sell, lease or sublet said premises for any or either of the purposes named."¹⁷ The contract went to state that in the event of violation, possession of the property would revert to the Order of Enoch. The loan officer also reported that, "I see no reason for the reservation above named since the law simply takes care of these violations, and it seems unreasonable that the grantees in the deed should benefit from the unlawful acts of the grantees."¹⁸ The owners of a lot were also obligated to grant the right of first refusal to the Order of Enoch if they wished to sell. The order did not allow people to buy several lots at a time on speculation.

The restrictions in the Guggell Park Addition were even more stringent. These contract deeds stated that the owner of "the said premises or any part thereof shall not sell, convey, lease, nor rent to any person who is not of the white or Caucasian race."¹⁹ This restriction became void after January 1, 1942. The warranty deeds specified that the owner must build a home of at least a \$2,000 value. The order also retained the rights for natural gas, coal, minerals, and oils at a depth of 100 feet from the surface. If any restriction was violated, the contract called for the owner to pay \$1,000 to the Order of Enoch for each violation. This was a stiff penalty indeed, in view of the fact that some lots only sold for \$200 initially. There is no evidence that an owner legally tested this aspect of the contract.

On at least one occasion the Order of Enoch restrictions were interpreted as being unequal to the buyers. J. A. Morrison of Ontario wrote to the order explaining that his sister had bought a lot in the Summit Addition, paid her taxes, but not yet built on the lot. Morrison, like many Saints, had the desire to buy a lot and come to Zion, but felt that he (a locomotive engineer) could not make an impact since the Church did not own any railroads and there were already several "premium" men in Independence. Presiding Bishop Benjamin McGuire had visited in the home of Morrison in 1918. McGuire advised Morrison that it would not be a good

¹⁷ A. Hawkinson to Frank N. Garrison, 25 November 1924. Order of Enoch Lot File, Community of Christ Archives.

¹⁸ A. Hawkinson to Frank N. Garrison, 25 November 1924. Order of Enoch Lot File, Community of Christ Archives.

¹⁹ Land Book no. 431, page 47. Jackson County Recorder Office, Independence, Missouri.

investment to buy a lot and construct a home to rent out if he was not there personally to attend to the property. In April 1922, Morrison proceeded anyway (contrary to the bishop's advice) and made a down payment of \$50 on a lot in the Gudgell Park Addition. By October 1922, Morrison reversed his decision and wrote to R. T. Cooper asking the order to sell his lot because the law of equality could not be put into operation while there were "segregated areas in Zion." "If a certain number of people who have the money and can afford to do so, purchase lots at from \$500 upwards and according to the restrictions in the contract they cannot erect a house costing less than a certain amount (\$4,000), what about our Poorer Brethren who have not the money to do so. They will have to be satisfied with a lot at \$200 and a house at probably \$2,000. Not much equality about that if there is to be a district for the 400 class in Zion."²⁰ Morrison asked that his down payment and interest be credited to his tithing. R. T. Cooper wrote a check for \$63.45 to the Presiding Bishopric and asked them to credit the same to Morrison's tithing, and Cooper would send the receipt on to Morrison.

Another project of the United Order of Enoch was the purchase of a three-story house in 1910 that was located on River Road, just north of the First Independence (Stone Church) RLDS Congregation. This home was converted into a boarding house and provided for headquarter offices for the order. The Order of Enoch House was "modern in arrangement, with hot water heat, and electric lights. The rates are \$1.25 per day for transients, and \$5 and \$6 per week for regular boarders, with specially reduced rates for the traveling ministry and those sent there at the expense of the church."²¹ People were not sent away empty handed, even though they could not pay their way. The April 1913 house account recorded that Chief Three Fingers, Miss Lula Bearshield, and their traveling companions stayed at the Order of Enoch house while visiting Independence. Apparently unable to pay for their room and board, the order voted in a board meeting to pay \$8 of the \$11 if Bishop Kelley would pay the balance. The board minutes recorded that the motion was carried on behalf of the Lamanite brethren and sisters.²² The Order of Enoch house was managed by Amy and Charles Gurwell but

²⁰ J. A. Morrison to R. T. Cooper, 2 October 1922. Order of Enoch Lot File. Community of Christ Archives.

²¹ "The United Order of Enoch House," *The Saints' Herald* 59 (11 December 1912): 1195.

²² *Digest of the Development and History of the United Order of Enoch*, 4. Community of Christ Legal Services.

operated at a loss for several years. The board voted to close the boarding house in 1921 and rented out the property.



Order of Enoch house, Independence, Missouri, winter 1912.

Photo courtesy of Community of Christ Archives, D880.4

The 1909 General Conference authorized the formation of the United Order of Enoch in Independence, utilizing the words of Joseph Smith III that became Section 129 of the RLDS Doctrine and Covenants. Although the divine direction did not specifically name the Order of Enoch, it endorsed and reaffirmed the role of the Presiding Bishopric in their role of gathering, caring for, and disbursing money and property from the Saints. Presiding Bishop Edmund Kelley took this message to heart. His enthusiasm initially was overflowing in his support of securing funding for the United Order of Enoch. Bishop Kelley wrote frequently in the *Saints' Herald*, expecting the Saints to answer the call for support of the new order. "No institution can perform the work outlined for this without due capital as a basis for its work. . . . For the work of this order it should be a good basis

too; at least one half million dollars. . . . There are quite a few who could give to this one thousand dollars each. Many who could spare five hundred dollars. . . . Before the closing of the year 1910, we ought to hear from five thousand Saints touching this special work. Shall we?"²³ "The duty to help this movement is resting upon every Saint, and we should require no further appeal to get busy."²⁴ "To those who are more fortunate, can *you* send us from ten to one hundred dollars, monthly, for the next six months?"²⁵ However, donations lagged far behind the leadership's expectations: the order was continually handicapped by cash flow.

Donations to the order in the first year of business totaled \$6,132.90 that allowed the order to make a down payment on the tract of land in the Summit Addition. During the next five years donations to the order totaled \$27,355.51.²⁶ The order was not liquid, as very little cash came in. Most donations were in property. The board minutes reveal much time spent in considering proposed donations of property, either houses and lots and/or farms, many outside Independence and generally still carried a mortgage. Property in Independence was donated to the order with the understanding that the order would care for the donators in their old age.²⁷ Some members donated stock to the order, specifically from an Independence lumber company and a coal mining company. The order was so strapped for cash, that by 1913 the secretary of the order wrote a church member asking for a \$5,000 loan to be repaid over a five-year period.²⁸ The order was able to meet payments on land purchases only as lots were sold and payments collected.

The board of the United Order of Enoch was besieged with all types of business offers. The board created an Invention Committee to investigate the business potential of each offer. The committee evaluated offers to hold the patent rights for such items as a horse hoof trimmer, auto wheels, a self-cleaning rake, metal forging, baby carriage wheels, plows, a dish cleaner, a lid lifter, and hosiery.²⁹ The committee was attracted to the invention of an

²³ E. L. Kelley, "The Work of the United Order of Enoch," *The Saints' Herald* 57 (14 December 1910): 1207.

²⁴ R. Bullard, "Shake Off the Dust," *The Saints' Herald* 60 (12 February 1913): 159.

²⁵ "The United Order of Enoch," *The Saints' Herald* 59 (17 July 1912): 681.

²⁶ *General Conference Minutes*, 1911 through 1916. Community of Christ Library.

²⁷ *Digest of the Development and History of the United Order of Enoch*, 11, 13, 14.

²⁸ Mark H. Siegfried to Lyman Fike, 25 July 1913. Order of Enoch Lot File. Community of Christ Archives.

²⁹ *Digest of the Development and History of the United Order of Enoch*, 17.

elastic glue and even financed the manufacturing and sale of the glue. Most prospective businesses expected the order to exchange the ownership of patent rights and sales for capitalization to finance manufacturing. The board continually looked for opportunities to bring some business to the grounds of the Summit Addition that would provide employment for the Saints. But without adequate capital, few business enterprises were realized. The board, in their zeal, did not always make the best business decisions. Bishop Kelley requested the order make a loan to a local lumber company and later asked the order to purchase the building and grounds of the Central Lumber Company. A \$400 loan was made to the Clow Auto Plow Company that was never repaid. Apostle J. F. Curtis was approved to rent some of the Summit Addition to raise red clover, and he later rented out garden spaces. The board also considered many requests for financial assistance for those who could not meet mortgage payments on land that was not purchased from the order. One of the more interesting propositions came from a man in Stewartsville, Missouri, who offered the order one-third interest of a large street model outdoor fly trap that he had invented and received a patent in 1912. He also asked the order to assume an existing debt. The secretary of order wrote back suggesting that he offer one-half interest to the order, and make that his stewardship.³⁰ No other discussion ensued.

The minutes of the board meetings and the public and written statements of the leadership of the United Order of Enoch revealed a frustration over the lack of financial success. Although the order purported to be a charitable association whose interests were said to be centered on helping the poor and needy, the selling of land appeared paramount in reality. In the July 1914 *Saints' Herald*, Edward Rannie wrote, "So long as the Saints will seek to carry on their business through real estate firms and elders whom the church or the Lord has not appointed to do that special work, they will have financial loss and other troubles to annoy them."³¹ Rannie went on to write, "The high price of land in Jackson County is not a barrier to our people locating in that county. It is no higher than in other parts of the country where the population is as great. If the Gentiles can pay the prices, are Latter Day Saints less capable, less industrious, are they weaklings that they must have a miracle to take the place of industry and economy?"³² There was a degree of

³⁰ David H. Schmidt to E. L. Kelley, 11 September 1911. Order of Enoch Lot File. Community of Christ Archives.

³¹ Edward Rannie, *The Saints' Herald* 61 (22 July 1914): 699.

³² Edward Rannie, *The Saints' Herald* 61 (22 July 1914): 699.

turnover of ownership in the lots of Summit Addition. The anxiousness of the Saints to gather and buy lots in Independence sometimes exceeded their ability to pay. The financial condition in the country owing to World War I was an explanation cited by the order for some Saints' inability to pay their debt.³³ However, by 1927, all but a few of the 290 lots had been sold in the Summit Addition and about two-thirds of the 286 lots were sold in the Gudgell Park Addition. The 1930 *Independence City Directory* reported 95 houses in the Summit Addition and 92 houses in the Gudgell Park Addition.³⁴

In 1922, Bishops R. T. Cooper and Ellis Short purchased land, not as part of the United Order of Enoch but as an individual business venture, that lay approximately five blocks to the east of the Gudgell Park Addition.³⁵ The land bordered Rock's Flower Garden and Pollard's orchard and was earlier a part of the Gudgell cattle ranch. The addition named Cooper-Short, platted sixty-six lots that were bounded by Gudgell Street on the north, Pollard Street on the west, Drumm Avenue on the south, and Hands on the east. The lots were comparably priced with the Order of Enoch land, but there were no restrictions. This addition was considered far from the town of Independence and did not provide an accessible school, however lot owners could build a shanty if they desired. It was within this addition that the Gudgell Park Congregation, originally known as Group 41, was founded in 1925. This addition obviously competed with the Order of Enoch Gudgell Park Addition for those who wanted to build a less expensive house. By 1927, Bishop R. T. Cooper had also purchased land in the Eden Park Addition that was about six blocks east of the Walnut Park Congregation, which was on the corner of Alton Avenue and Pearl Street.³⁶ Once again, this was an individual business venture, not part of the United Order of Enoch. This land, composed of sixty-nine lots, was named Cooper's Addition and was bounded on the north by Hayward Street, on the west by Savage Street, on the south by Sea Street (Sempson), and on the east by Haden. Later, Eden Heights Congregation would be organized and located in Cooper's Addition.

³³ Mark H. Siegfried to G. H. Campbell, 15 August 1914. Order of Enoch Lot File. Community of Christ Archives.

³⁴ *Independence City Directory* (Kansas City, Missouri: Gate City Directory Co., 1930). Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, Missouri.

³⁵ *Atlas of Jackson County, Missouri*. (no city, no publisher, 1931). Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, Missouri.

³⁶ *Atlas of Jackson County, Missouri*. (no city, no publisher, 1931). Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, Missouri.

Joseph Smith III died in December 1914 and was succeeded by his son Frederick Madison Smith as president of the church. Section 132 of the RLDS Doctrine and Covenants released Edmund Kelley as presiding bishop, which affected the leadership of the United Order of Enoch. "Elder Benjamin R. McGuire became Presiding Bishop in 1916 and under his administration the order functioned somewhat less aggressively."³⁷ By 1918, criticism of the Order of Enoch was increasing. In 1919, the Order of Bishops took up the matter to review the work of the order. "It must be apparent to all that the Order is not functioning in a very wide or useful field, and something should be done to more clearly define its work from the standpoint of the revelations putting it not only in harmony with the Bishopric of the Church but putting it on such a practical basis as shall make it operative."³⁸ Clearly the Order of Bishops was not pleased and kept the matter in committee discussion for two years before rewriting the articles of the association. In reality, there were essentially few changes made and the order continued to function similarly to past operations. The order was criticized for part-time management, however the management was unpaid and frustrated over the perceived lack of success. Some local businessmen were questioning an association whose primary goal was to benefit the poor, but spent most its effort in selling real estate. And second, did such an association even have the authority to buy and sell real estate? By 1921, the United Order of Enoch had purchased \$70,000, had spent nearly \$20,000 in improvements, but given out less than \$3,000 in charity in eleven years of operation. The general church continued with the major responsibility for the care of the poor and needy in Independence. Undoubtedly there was much charitable work done that does not reflect in a financial statement and will never become a matter of record. The board minutes of the United Order of Enoch do reflect a serious concern and desire to secure financial support for the Saints. In reality however, the order functioned primarily as a real estate management company that endeavored to create exclusive Latter Day Saint neighborhoods for the gathering of Zion.

In 1909, the state of Iowa was the most populous for RLDS membership. In 1910, Missouri became the most populous state for RLDS members. Actual growth in membership from 1910 to 1920 varied by percentage from 2.1 percent to 6 percent each year. The following chart

³⁷ *History of RLDS Church* 6, 673.

³⁸ Order of Bishops Meeting Minutes, 56. Community of Christ Archives.

compares Independence population with total church membership and stake membership.

	1910	1920	1930
Independence population	9,859	11,686	18,000
RLDS total church membership	63,090	92,736	107,551
Lamoni Stake RLDS	1,879	3,416	2,117
Independence Stake RLDS	4,391	4,431	5,803
Kansas City Stake RLDS	— —	2,057	2,601
Holden Stake RLDS	— —	1,349	1,825
Far West RLDS	— —	2,527	2,414

Congregational membership figures were not consistently recorded at this time. However in Independence Stake in 1910, out of 4,391 members, 2,800 approximately were in two Independence congregations, First Independence (Stone Church) and Southside (Second Church). The balance of 1,500 members was made up of four Kansas City congregations and three missions in Independence. From 1920, Kansas City Stake included congregations that were located both in Missouri and Kansas. Holden Stake included congregations well east of Independence in towns such as Holden, Warrensburg, Atherton, and Sedalia. Far West Stake included congregations north of Independence in towns such as Cameron and St. Joseph. In 1910, approximately 10 percent of RLDS Church members lived in Lamoni or Independence Stakes. By 1930, approximately 12 percent of RLDS Church members lived in stakes concentrated in western Missouri. Although the church had gained some 44,000 members from 1910 to 1930, the shift in population of church membership was centered in Jackson County, specifically in Independence.

The Independence city directories during the years of the Order of Enoch report little change in denominations within the city, except for the RLDS congregations.

	1911	1914	1930
Baptist	3	5	7
Christian	1	1	3
Christian Science	1	1	1
Episcopal	-	1	1
Evangelical (German-Lutheran)	1	1	2
Hedrickite/Temple Lot	1	1	1
Holiness Church of God	-	-	1

LDS	1	1	1
Lutheran	1	1	-
Methodist Episcopal	6	7	4
Methodist Episcopal-Southern	1	1	2
Presbyterian	3	4	3
Roman Catholic	1	1	3
RLDS	4	6	10
-Church of Jesus Christ	-	-	1
-True Church of Jesus Christ	-	-	1
<u>Salvation Army</u>	-	-	<u>1</u>
Total	24	31	42

Typical of a southern town, Independence continued to report population and identify church denominational status by the terms "white" and "colored" in 1930. The population of Independence was listed at 18,000: 17,500 "white" and 500 "colored." There were five "colored" churches. Clearly the denominational growth in Independence was within the RLDS Church. The population of Independence had almost doubled from 1910 to 1930. During this time, the Independence population of RLDS Church members was 28 percent in 1910 and grew to 33 percent by 1930.

The Independence Stake was often referred to as the City of Zion. The following list reports the composition and growth of Independence Stake.

1910

congregation

1. First Independence (Stone Church)
2. Second Independence (Southside)
3. Central Church
4. Second Kansas City Church
5. Bennington Heights
6. Fourth Church
7. Mount Washington Mission

location

Electric and Bowen
 South and Delaware
 Kansas City; 9th and Lydia
 Kansas City; 23rd and Holly
 Kansas City; 13th/Bennington
 Kansas City; 43rd and Garfield
 western Independence

1920

congregation

1. Stone Church
2. Second Church
3. Englewood
4. Walnut Park

location

Lexington and River
 South Avenue
 Northern Boulevard
 East Alton Ave. and S. Pearl

5. Enoch Hill	South Osage
6. Liberty Church	Liberty Street
7. East Independence Mission	eastern Independence

1930

<u>congregation</u>	<u>location</u>
1. Stone Church	Lexington and River
2. Second Church	South Avenue and Delaware
3. Englewood Church	Northern Boulevard
4. Walnut Park	Pearl and Alton
5. Enoch Hill	South Osage
6. Liberty Street Church	North Liberty Street
7. Gudgell Park Church	Kings Highway, southeast
8. East Independence Church	Spring Branch Road
9. Mount Washington Church	Independence Avenue
10. Spring Branch Church	Spring Branch Road

The first seven congregations are within a four-mile radius of each other, quite close for a town of 18,000 people. Many of these congregations were about three-quarters of a mile from one another. These represented the core of the stake with nearly five thousand RLDS members.

In 1923, an attorney hired by a Kansas City mortgage company was reviewing an abstract of a lot previously purchased in Gudgell Park Addition. A question was posed over the legal right of a benevolent and educational association, the United Order of Enoch, to buy and sell land.³⁹ The concern had been raised before, but it was thoroughly and seriously considered in a December 1923 board meeting. Although the right to purchase and convey real estate was written into the original charter of the corporation (article nine), the board voted in April 1924 that the order was clearly outside its legal rights and voted to dispose of its real estate.⁴⁰ Perhaps some of the confusion developed when the United Order of Enoch was first organized by the church in 1909. In a letter and opinion by a St. Louis attorney, S. A. Burgess (who later became RLDS Church historian) to Bishop Edmund Kelley, Burgess claimed it would be legal for a religious corporation to own

³⁹ C. S. Gossett to Holmes Mortgage Company, 1 November 1923. Order of Enoch Lot File. Community of Christ Archives.

⁴⁰ Order of Enoch Board Minutes, 5 December 1923 and 7 April 1924. Community of Christ Archives.

and convey land and remain tax exempt.⁴¹ Certainly, the Order of Enoch board thought they were well within their legal limits until challenged. However, the order did not proceed at this time to dispose of its holdings, as the First Presidency desired an additional opinion in the matter.⁴²

Without communicating any additional opinions, President Smith expressed his opinion stating that "the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric should be represented on the Board of Directors of the Order of Enoch [and] that the other members of the said Board should be those who were willing to work in full harmony with the general authorities of the church."⁴³ President Smith also opposed any changes to the order, and it would not dispose of any real estate. No other board meetings were held until March 1928, but only four members were present. Finally, at a September 1928 board meeting of the Order of Enoch, the directors voted to approve the "transfer of the assets of the Order to the Presiding Bishop as trustee in trust for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in harmony with Article Ten of the Constitution of the Order."⁴⁴ Since then, no other meetings have been held.

On 23 June 1927, the Central Development Association was organized by the church for the purpose of "holding, purchasing, managing and liquidating of property."⁴⁵ The new association was an extension of the Presiding Bishopric that acted as a holding company that cared for the residential and business property of the church. On 1 July 1927, the CDA opened its books by recording and assuming the assets and liabilities of the United Order of Enoch. The net worth of the order was \$49,141.47, composed primarily of real estate. In May 1930, CDA was incorporated and began paying taxes in 1933. There is no record that the Order of Enoch ever paid taxes. The United Order of Enoch ceased to exist, although it has never been legally dissolved and remains a viable Missouri corporation, a benevolent and educational association.

The United Order of Enoch was not a financial success, there were no manufacturing plants, no large bank accounts, and relatively little help for the

⁴¹ S. A. Burgess to E. L. Kelley, 9 December 1909. Order of Enoch Lot File. Community of Christ Archives.

⁴² *Digest of the Development and History of the United Order of Enoch*, 26.

⁴³ *Digest of the Development and History of the United Order of Enoch*, 27.

⁴⁴ *Digest of the Development and History of the United Order of Enoch*, 28.

⁴⁵ Amos Allen, *Central Development Association Report*, 31 December 1935. Community of Christ Archives.

poor. However, the order provided a trusted means for out-of-town Saints to buy a building lot for a new house in Zion during the gathering process. The order facilitated the growth of new neighborhoods that concentrated membership that provided for the rapid development of new RLDS congregations. But the United Order of Enoch was successful in the hearts and minds of the Saints because it helped fan the flames of the desire to gather. The order was physical evidence that the dream of a center place could become reality. A 1910 letter from a woman in Michigan somewhat prophetically summarized the business of the order.

“Brother Kelley:

I have been interested in the establishing of the Order of Enoch since first notice of same, and today, as I took up the Herald and read the appeal for help, I felt that it meant me. I esteem it a privilege to be permitted to give to this cause, though the amount is small. I pray that the kind Father may accept of the same. I read and explained the article to my aged mother, 92, and she too, is eager to help, so each of us contribute \$25. I hope to hear that the tract of land is secured and that you are blessed in your labors.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ *Zion's Ensign* 21 (14 July 1910): 7.

Book Reviews

Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward. *Four Zinas: A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier.* Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000. 550 pages. \$34.95 ISBN 1560851414

REVIEWED BY BETH ANDERSON, WEST JORDAN, UTAH

A comfortable, welcoming read, Bradley and Woodward have succeeded in capturing the vitality and spirit of four women whose lives exemplify dedication, loyalty, and trust. Not only is the tapestry of their intertwined lives revealed, but also on a larger scale we “trace the changing views of feminine spirituality and the meaning of female religious leadership in early Mormon history” (xiv). While each of the Zinas displayed an unfailing devotion to their religion, their individuality was always foremost as that religion elicited informed, rather than blind obedience from these women.

Four Zinas is rich with personal experiences and musings found in the letters preserved in numerous library collections. The mother-daughter relationship is deeply validated throughout the four generations. The longing during separations is especially evident as the women maintained communication through what Zina Diantha called their “silent conversation” (12). Through these silent conversations we see Zina’s religiosity become inflamed with the burnings within her heart as she encounters a new faith in Mormonism, “a phenomenon not unlike a new birth” (45). Zina and her family entered the waters of baptism vowing to prove not only their faith, but also their strength of character as they suffered and rejoiced with the Saints in building the kingdom of God on the Earth. This dedication to faith was passed on to succeeding generations with Zina Presendia a main beneficiary. Daughter of Zina Diantha’s union with Brigham Young, Zina Presendia had been instilled with a desire to live the life of a Saint and she did so whether in the valley of the Salt Lake or the wilds of the Canadian frontier. This particular mother-daughter team had not only the vagaries of frontier life to cope with, but were both asked to make the supreme sacrifice of living the revealed order of plural marriage. While not denying the difficulties, each affirmed the blessings of participating in the “great and glorious” (161) purposes of the Lord.

Bradley and Woodward mark the loneliness suffered by these pioneer women as they struggled to raise their families in sometimes destitute

circumstances, but they also note the seasons of joy as the Zinas are privy to “the company of friends and a feast of the spirit” (175).

Zina Card Brown, Zina Presendia’s daughter, is the last Zina portrayed. While her life was very different in substance from that of her mother and grandmother, the same ideals of faith, family, and service are abundantly evidenced as she tamed her own frontiers.

Missing in the volume is a detailed genealogy of the women and their families. There is a brief summary in the introduction, but a more complete one would be appreciated. One distracting tendency is found in the latter part of the book as the narrative switches from a chronological to a topical theme, often abruptly. This becomes confusing and sometimes redundant as the authors jump back and forth between Zinas.

The authors of *Four Zinas* have provided a wonderful glimpse into the lives of a family of women who can be viewed as stalwart and strong. Bradley and Woodward richly deserved being awarded the Ella Larsen Turner Award for Best Biography at the 2001 Mormon History Association meeting.

Kathryn M. Daynes. *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001. 336 pages, bibliographical references, notes, index. \$34.95 ISBN 0252026810

REVIEWED BY M. GUY BISHOP, WOODS CROSS, UTAH

More Wives Than One tackles the ever-intriguing topic of plural marriage among the Latter-day Saints (LDS). The focus of Professor Daynes study is the Mormon inhabitants of Manti, Sanpete County, Utah, from the mid-nineteenth into the early twentieth century. Her work considers the religious, legal, and social history of Mormon polygamy as it was practiced in one Utah community.

Thoughts of plural marriage were discomfoting to many Latter-day Saints of this period, whether male or female. Polygamy, for some of the LDS women of Manti, Utah, as the author convincingly demonstrates, served as a vehicle to upward mobility. Many plural wives were young, “economically disadvantaged women” who found plurality a means of financial betterment (91). Because men who took plural wives were often among the wealthiest of Manti, entering polygamy helped shift the available economic resources from the financially well-off to those often young,

immigrant women, who were populating the region in ever-increasing numbers by the mid-nineteenth century. Although, as Daynes pointed out, "even though the men [legally] retained control of the resources," the plural wives were beneficiaries as well as they having access to their husband's wealth.

While focusing primarily on the legal and economic aspects of plural marriage at Manti, Daynes does not slight the religious bent driving the practice. The LDS concept of "sealing" the union of man and wife for eternity through the Church's priesthood authority is what made the LDS marital practice so unique. As the author correctly observed at the outset, "The Mormon marriage system rested on the distinctly Mormon doctrine of family perpetuation through the eternities." The result of such unions (often interchangeably referred to in LDS parlance as eternal marriage or celestial marriage) was the creation of a family unit believed to hold, for the faithful, the promise of everlasting kinship bonds.

In Utah, the LDS Church controlled divorce until 1899. As Daynes wrote, "Both civil courts and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints exercised jurisdiction over divorce" (142). Not all marriages in Manti proved successful, however Sanpete County Probate Court records of divorce cases demonstrate that often the involved couples simply "cannot live together in peace and happiness" and thus such unions "required a separation" (144).

Whether handled by the church or the state, a harmonious divorce was the preferred resolution of marital discord. For example, in February 1855, Azariah Smith and Camillia A. Smith reached such a dissolution of their marriage before a church court in Manti. The document, which they signed, stated that both parties "do hereby mutually Covenant, Promise and Agree to Dissolve [their marriage] and keep ourselves separate and apart from each other from this time forth" (152-153). Following the advice of his stake president, Smith gave his former wife a cow, "presumably as a divorce settlement."

With his view of eternal relationships, Brigham Young, as Church president, was most concerned about how such divorce affected the couples' afterlife. In the Latter-day Saint worldview, for a marriage to be in effect after death, the couple had to be sealed and remain faithful to the end. While the church permitted divorce, it did not really readily approve of this solution. Although the "church encouraged reconciliation between couples and discouraged divorce," Daynes wrote, "it did permit the dissolution of marriages on a variety of grounds" (159).

Using Manti, Utah, as a case study, Kathryn M. Daynes provides a commendable look at plural marriage through many eyes, notably those of the plural wives. Her use of the methodology of the social sciences to illuminate her argument highlights *More Wives Than One*. Anyone wishing to know more about Mormon polygamy would be well served by this book.

Philip Jenkins. *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 304 pages, bibliographical references, index. \$27.50 ISBN 0195127447 cloth. \$15.95 ISBN 0195145968 paper.

REVIEWED BY BRETT W. JAGGER, GRACELAND UNIVERSITY

In *Mystics and Messiahs*, Philip Jenkins casts the myriad of American cults and new religious traditions in an objective historical light. Confronting the accumulated popular "wisdom" of two centuries of anti-cult fervor, Jenkins seeks to create a comprehensive, historically relevant examination of new religious sects in American history. He scrutinizes the popular responses to these new sects and identifies patterns and common historical threads in this cause/effect relationship. The Latter-day Saint tradition figures prominently in Jenkins's study, and in many respects is his prototypical "cult" in its origins and development.

Jenkins examines the well-traveled path of American religions from cult to mainstream denomination. He provides vivid illustrations of the anti-Mormon backlash in the nineteenth century, such as the Mountain Meadows Massacre. For example, in *Roughing It*, Mark Twain called Utah "a luscious country for filling evening stories about assassinations of intractable Gentiles" (34). Jenkins contrasts this hatred to the current attitude: "Any writer today describing Mormons . . . as cultists would immediately be marked as an unreconstructed fundamentalist," arguing, "There comes a stage when even the deadliest enemies of a so-called cult have to grace it with the name of 'church'" (68-69).

Jenkins highlights the sensational, repetitive nature of anti-cult rhetoric in the supposedly impartial judicial system and the contemporary popular literature. He notes, "The polygamy question . . . led to one of the most sweeping episodes of religious persecution in American history . . . New federal measures fought polygamy with draconian policies that made serious inroads into traditional constitutional . . . protections, and that brought the

federal government deep into the business of enforcing religious orthodoxy" (37). The anti-Mormon popular literature of the time particularly illustrates Jenkins' assertion that sensational anti-cult accusations are repeated, often without justification, for every controversial new sect that appears on the scene. Jenkins cites the example of *Wife No Nineteen: A Complete Exposé of Mormonism*, written by "Brigham Young's Apostate Wife." In a later edition, titled *Life in Mormon Bondage*, the book promised "a complete exposé of its false prophets, murderous Danites, despotic rulers and hypnotized deluded subjects," which Jenkins calls "a fair epitome of the whole tradition of the anti-cult polemic" (36).

Oddly, a fault in Jenkins's analysis is that he swings too far toward the side of the cult in his treatment of alleged cultist atrocities. In discrediting the anti-cult hype in the media and popular society, he leaves a gaping hole in the understanding of new religious traditions. Perhaps he should have made his own inquiry into the alleged atrocities of cults to ascertain the crimes the cults *have* committed. However, given the triteness of the anti-cult polemic, Jenkins's one-sidedness is understandable, and he succeeds in giving an accurate and thorough accounting of the rise of new religious traditions in American history. *Mystics and Messiahs* is a must-read for the Latter-day Saint historian, because it places the Mormon movement in the context of cults and new religious traditions, a perspective that is easily neglected. By making a freshly objective investigation into these traditions, Jenkins adds considerably to the understanding of American religious history.

Danny L. Jorgensen and Joni Wilson, editors. *Religion and the Challenge of Modernity: The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the United States Today*. Binghamton, New York: Global Publications, 2001. 288 pages, footnotes, index. \$25.00. ISBN 1586841106

REVIEWED BY DAVID A. ALLRED, COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

Mormon studies, according to a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, is "an exceptionally passionate field, [one] in which faith wrestles

with scholarship, sometimes as violently as Jacob did with the angel.”* While *violent* may not apply to *Religion and the Challenge of Modernity*, the book does make readers wrestle with major issues concerning the state of the Reorganization. Consisting of nine chapters, this book takes up several fundamental controversies relating to the Reorganized Church (now Community of Christ), including the sect to denomination theory; the aftermath of Doctrine and Covenants Section 156; the effects of modernism and secularism; and, ultimately, the weighty issues of history, identity, memory, and faith.

In examining these issues, *Religion and the Challenge of Modernity*, more so than many books, creates a space for dialogue and debate. Early chapters by professor of religious studies Danny L. Jorgensen and sociologist James C. Cavendish establish a foundation for the debate by introducing the academic concepts of secularization and modernity. Furthermore, early in the book George N. Walton presents his statistical findings about declining activity in the Community of Christ over the past fifty years, statistics that inform all the subsequent chapters. It is in these later chapters where the meat of the dialogue occurs.

Although each of the book's contributors has a unique perspective, two ideological camps are evident: Jorgensen, historian Roger D. Launius, and philosopher Paul M. Edwards, and to some extent historian Edwards A. Warner argue ways that the Reorganized Church is in “crisis.” For example, Launius's gloomy outlook is representative of this camp's perspective: “It is not impossible to view the Reorganized Church of one hundred-plus years from now as an exceptionally small group of adherents linked mostly by kinship and revolving around the Independence Temple as their reason for being” (105). On the other hand, former member of the First Presidency Maurice L. Draper and especially current President W. Grant McMurray suggest that such dire observations are unfair and unproductive. McMurray counters that those who see the church as being in crisis “[fail] totally to see the powerful transformation at work just beneath the surface” (245). Even though this second camp may be outnumbered in the book, McMurray's direct response to the Launius, Edwards, and Jorgensen chapters is forceful and thought provoking.

* Scott McLemee, “Scholars of Mormonism Confront the History of What Some Call ‘The Next World Religion,’” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (22 March 2002): A14.

In spite of being an important book about the current state of the Reorganization, the book does have several problems. First, the cover and the index leave much to be desired. While this is a cosmetic error, other aspects of the book raise further questions about the arguments being made. For example, one has to wonder why Draper's chapter is placed after Jorgensen's and Launius's. Draper argued that the Community of Christ is merely going through the normal growing pains of a sect becoming a denomination. However in earlier chapters, this theory is shown to be simplistic and an example of shortsighted mismanagement. Because Draper's argument is placed where it is, and because he does not meaningfully enter the book's conversation, his argument reflects badly on his position. Draper's chapter should have not appeared in this book or should have been placed earlier, so he would appear as something more than a straw man. Also, McMurray counters arguments in part by bringing up biographical facts about those with whom he disagrees. It is up to the reader to decide if this tactic gives important contextual information or merely constitutes *ad hominem* attacks.

Still despite these problems, *Religion and the Challenge of Modernity* should be required reading for anyone seeking to understand the current position of the Community of Christ. It is important to note that many readers may already know the tenor of these arguments since many of the chapters quote extensively from the articles published in the pages of *Dialogue*, the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, and other sources. But even if some will have read these arguments elsewhere, the strength of this book lies in how it brings the different voices together to debate the issues. The results of this discussion may anger some, will likely raise additional questions for many, and will no doubt prompt counter arguments from the contributors. But this provocative book ensures a continuing discussion about where the Community of Christ is heading and where it should head in the twenty-first century.

Jan Shipp. *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 424 pages, bibliographical references, index. \$34.95 ISBN 0252025903

REVIEWED BY HENRY H. GOLDMAN, HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIFORNIA

Mormon and Latter-day Saint historiography has been an on-going subject for discussion among professional historians. It has taken a non-Mormon scholar to place things in their proper perspective.

This book is an autobiographical statement by Dr. Jan Shipp, recently retired professor of history at the University of Indiana–Purdue, and presents her personal view of the Latter-day Saint churches, including the non-Utah groups. Shipp is able to separate the forest from the proverbial trees in this highly readable essay on Mormonism.

Her keen sense of historical processes allows her to create an autobiographical statement that weaves together the historicity of the Latter-day Saint movement together with her own mainstream Methodist religious upbringing and her personal values. Jan Shipp describes herself as an “intimate outsider” in a culture that remains for her both familiar and strange.

While the book is, in fact, an autobiography, its real purpose lies in Shipp’s amazing abilities to write (and lecture) on the way that Mormons have created their history. She brings to bear such important, even necessary, topics like the unique relationship of, “What Being a People of God Means: Reflections on Method in the Scholarly Writings of Religious History.” Indeed, Professor Shipp treads on sensitive ground when she comments on the Laurel Thatcher Ulrich affair, which she described as “dangerous history.” She suggested that an unfortunate observation of Ulrich’s writings and teachings by certain members of the Mormon hierarchy that her (Ulrich’s) views ought not to be “blessed” by the LDS priesthood: they were afraid of the growing (1993) and “reemerging Mormon feminism.”

These subjects have been part of Mormon historiography for many years and are not likely to change, even given a new “freedom of expression” by female Mormon historians, some of whom have found it necessary to leave the church in order to maintain their own historical objectivity.

The book is well written, has a marvelous thesis, and provides the historian, both Latter-day Saint and non-Mormon, with an unusual base from which to respond to the role played by the Mormon churches in frontier history. Jan Shipp has demonstrated a point of view that is unlikely to be

expressed by Mormon colleagues: a viewpoint that is, first of all, intensely personal, and, finally, one that adds much to the understanding of the role played by the various Mormon sects in the history of the American frontier. The argument will continue. We, as historians, *must* continue the dialogue. Professor Shipps's book does just that.

John R. Sillito and Susan Staker, editors. *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002. 464 pages. \$21.95 ISBN 1560851546 paper.

REVIEWED BY NORMA ANNE HOLIK, INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

Mormon Mavericks is a repetitive but fascinating chronological, biographical recital of "person(s) who in various arenas operate[d] outside the [Mormon] mainstream." The identical base for the three women and ten men is that they began as typical Mormon stalwarts. Yet all independently were individuals whose personal ruminations in spirituality led them from hierarchical dictated theology and function to a search for truth instead of ritual acceptance. It led them from full compliance to personal "theological, financial, or intellectual" dissent. They all subscribed to John 8:32, "The truth shall make you free." This led to substantial life changes at home, occupation, school, and the ward brethren relationships.

Questioning began when the subjects recognized that leadership (mostly apostles) was fallible in teaching and practice. Preached infallibility was illusive in action but promulgated in organization. Sometimes the shift came from within the "inner circle." Essentially, beginning at Nauvoo, Illinois, there were spiritual and organizational innovations that clashed with the earlier format brought by Joseph Smith Jr. The changes irked the stalwarts and created schisms in community, family, and home.

These essays by various authors contain a plethora of personal detail for each maverick about family problems and spiritual struggles. Much space is given to exact dates, letters, meeting minutes, and publication quotes. These details are of historical relevance but push the volume into a complete historical context. The real importance of this volume should center on the thinking (plus action) of each person reviewed.

But the reader who covers one essay at a time will feel the mental and spiritual anguish of each individual portrayed. The various writings are

readable and well constructed. One must compliment the research and verification.

Each essay stands on its own. Several persons in the book are relatively unknown except to historians. Probably best known are John E. Page, William Smith, and King James Strang. More modern personalities included are Fawn Brodie, Thomas S. Ferguson, Samuel Taylor, and D. Michael Quinn.

There is a question as to what a close perusal of these essays will do to the “faith” of the Mormon readers. Mormon critics will add it to their ammunition against the Latter-day Saints. Within the church, there are those who accept the brethren in all phases of life. In the same membership there are those who exhibit a common tendency to question as the twelve “dissenters” presented in this book have done. So maybe this volume is itself a maverick among publications.

Overall this collection of life stories is a valuable library addition but not particularly inviting to casual readers. It may well be addressed in a spiritual mystery genre: not the “Who did it?” but the “Why did they?” The motives are more important than the personnel. A common thread of reasons and results of dissent is easily recognized.

Peter W. Williams. *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-First Century.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. 800 pages, bibliographical references, index. \$59.95 ISBN 0252026632 cloth. \$29.95 ISBN 0252066820 paper.

REVIEWED BY ERIC PAUL ROGERS, SARATOGA SPRINGS, UTAH

Williams's revised and expanded text is not limited to indigenous American religions—as I thought when I first read the title—but seeks to “provide basic information on a wide variety of groups and movements” (xi) that represent the broad tapestry of religion in America. With comprehensiveness an impossibility, Williams pursues the more realistic goal of inclusiveness.

America's Religions treats in fifty-five chapters the history and belief systems of a broad array of religious traditions. These are woven into a chronological framework of five parts: The Traditions; Early America: Europeans, Colonials, and Traditional Peoples before the Revolution; Religious Community Formation in the New Republic; The End of the

Frontier and the Rise of the City; and The Twentieth Century: Further Encounters with Modernity and Pluralism.

Wisely, the author provides a "Topical Guide to Chapters" to facilitate reference of particular movements. Mormonism has two chapters. Chapter 30, "New World Revelation: Joseph Smith and the Rise of the Mormons" (235–242), tells the story of Mormonism from its origins through 1846. Chapter 45, "Mormons and the 'Mainstream'" (389–398), examines the "belief, worship, structure, and . . . culture" of Mormonism. The bibliography roughly parallels the topical guide headings. Section X is "Mormonism and Other Indigenous Religious Groups."

Although Williams captures the broader story line of Mormon history, as well as basic beliefs and practices, factual inaccuracies and omissions, as well as puzzling interpretations leave one suspicious. Williams has the followers of Brigham Young entering the Salt Lake Valley in 1846 (241), Joseph Smith III assuming leadership of the Reorganization in 1859 (397), and John Taylor and Willard Richards shot to death at Carthage (240). The book is void of any reference to the Community of Christ. The author's repeated use of the term "first president" (393), perhaps an extrapolation from "First Presidency," belies Williams's familiarity with Mormonism. His explanation of pioneering Mormons irrigating the "salt flats of Utah" (241), and succession in the church being based upon age (393), left me chuckling. The author's conclusions that Mormon divorce rates are high (393); that the theology of Mormonism is "the product of each individual's reflections on revelation and experience" (394); that polygamy was introduced by Joseph Smith Jr. during the Kirtland period; and that D. Michael Quinn went into hiding because of the church's reaction to his book *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans* may cause concern to some readers.

In conclusion, Williams's writing style is engaging. His inclusive approach captures the interaction of individual religious groups in a broader social context. The organization of chapters and parts is both helpful and instructive. However, numerous errors and puzzling interpretations in the chapters on Mormonism, compounded by the failure to adequately reference the text, make Williams's treatment of the other religious traditions, with which I am less familiar, suspect. If the reader is interested in comprehensive treatment, they must go elsewhere. If, however, the reader is more interested in broad strokes than fine ones, Williams's book provides them.

Biloine Whiting Young. *Obscure Believers—The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler.* St. Paul, Minnesota: Pogo Press, 2002. 196 pages, twenty maps, twenty black-and-white illustrations, index, bibliography. \$16.95 ISBN 1-880654-27-X

REVIEWED BY JESSIE L. EMBRY, PROVO, UTAH

Biloine Whiting Young examines the experiences of the Cutlerites. Drawing on family sources and the research of religious studies sociologist Danny L. Jorgensen, Young paints a picture of what it was like to belong to a Latter-day Saint splinter group. She describes the group's movements, their successes and failures, and their reduction in size as some joined the Reorganization.

Young's strengths are the Whiting family sources because they provide human-interest stories. But that strength is also a weakness. Young needed to use other sources to determine if the Whitings' experiences were typical of other Cutlerites. Without more sources, the book is a history of the Whiting family and not the entire religious organization.

For me the best part of the book was the family stories, the little insights that the family felt. The stories of packing up and moving, establishing a new home, relating to other Cutlerites and their neighbors are all very vivid. I was often disappointed though because the stories were not finished. For example, the story of a house fire does not tell the final results.

Young relies too heavily on Danny L. Jorgensen's research. She quotes him extensively; few ideas seem to be uniquely hers. But Young lacks the historical and theoretical framework found in Jorgensen's writings. Members of the John Whitmer Historical Association—especially those who have connections to the Cutlerites—will enjoy reading the stories. However, they will learn more about what the Cutlerite movement means in Restoration and American religious history by reading Jorgensen's articles. His promised book on the subject will be the definitive study of the Cutlerites. Young's study simply whets the appetite for more information.