

One Hundred Years Since the Manifesto

CHANGED FACES: THE OFFICIAL LDS POSITION ON POLYGAMY, 1890-1990

By Martha S. Bradley

LEGRAND RICHARDS EPITOMIZED THE CONTEMPORARY Church's attitude toward polygamy in answer to the question, "What was the most significant development in the Church during your lifetime?" when he responded, "We have finally overcome the stigma of polygamy." In reviewing the one hundred years since the Manifesto in 1890 there is a conscious effort by Church leaders to remove the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from any association with polygamy.

September 26, 1990, marks the centennial of the Manifesto ending the practice of polygamy. Yet the doctrine of polygamy remains a part of our mythic historical past and a continuing principle of the gospel. It is a subject of persistent interest to those watching the Church from inside and out. During this century the Church's attitude has changed dramatically, from one of actively advocating the practice of polygamy to one in which polygamists are feared as a threat to the integrity of the Church. In their contempt for twentieth century polygamists, Utah Mormons have become typical of conservative middle America.

The changes in the Church's policy and attitude have been largely reactions, reflecting changed times rather than a change in doctrine. These adjustments also reflect a sort of "changing of the guard" in which a new generation of ecclesiastical leaders met the demands of the Manifesto by emphasizing the Church's American patriotism and loyalty to the laws and moral standards of American society. Through this transition, the Church entered the mainstream of conservative American society.

When Wilford Woodruff assumed leadership of the Latter-day Saints in 1890, the Church was in disarray. Most Church leaders were in prison or in exile. President John Taylor had died in hiding. The United States government had claimed the property of the Church and rejected five attempts at statehood.

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After years of resistance, in response to personal revelation, President Woodruff was willing to change.

Originally, the Manifesto sought to end both the teaching and the practice of plural marriage without specifying Church punishment for the disobedient. Successive Church presidents assumed Saints would feel obligated to obey the measure when they considered its revelatory source. The Manifesto also declared the intention of the Church to comply with the laws of the land.

Hence, the period of active civil disobedience sanctioned by John Taylor formally ended. The Manifesto created the first breach between the official Church body and the polygamist; by the mid-twentieth century that division would become both broad and deep.

Interestingly, the document raised almost as many questions as it answered. Many Saints stubbornly refused to accept it as a revelation from God. Others were confused by its vague and ambiguous instructions for the future. In the event, General Authority-sanctioned secret polygamous marriages continued to be performed 1890-1904, although in greatly reduced numbers.¹

In 1891, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles sent a petition to the president of the United States seeking amnesty for all violators of the federal anti-polygamy legislation. The petition, endorsed by a number of non-Mormons, including Utah territorial governor Arthur L. Thomas and Judge Charles S. Zane, was favorably received by President Benjamin Harrison. On 4 January 1893 he granted amnesty to all Saints who had been in compliance with the law since the Manifesto.

After the amnesty there followed a carefully qualified truce between the government and the Mormon church; it could not be called an era of good will. To marry polygamously or to cohabit with more than one woman continued to be a state crime, despite efforts by the Utah State Legislature in 1901 to

repeal the territorial cohabitation law which had been inadvertently codified into state statute.

The calm ended when polygamy again became the subject of heated debate during the Reed Smoot U.S. Senate confirmation hearings of 1904-1907. In response to the pressure generated by the publicity surrounding the hearings, and in an effort to re-emphasize the legitimacy of the revelations ending the practice, Church President Joseph F. Smith issued what is often called the "Second Manifesto" in April 1904.² This document denied allegations that any new polygamous marriages had been sanctioned by the Church, and declared that from that time forward all violators would be excommunicated. The force of the Second Manifesto rested on the coercive power of the threat of excommunication rather than the persuasive power of divine revelation. As polygamists themselves, Joseph F. Smith and other General Authorities felt particularly strong pressure to prove their willingness to enforce the prohibition of polygamy. Both President Smith and Apostle Francis M. Lyman were chided on the witness stand at the Smoot hearings for not being firm enough with offenders.

Although the official relationship between polygamy and the Latter-day Saints had been severed, polygamy was still a major concern of Church leaders. One indicator is the hardening of official policy in public addresses, including general conference talks by the First Presidency. The Church leaders slowly moved from advising against the practice to actively using excommunication. Their remarks shifted from preaching a faithful testimony of the principle (later without advocating its practice) to a secular detachment from the issue altogether, illustrating how far and how quickly the Church moved from its nineteenth century antecedents.

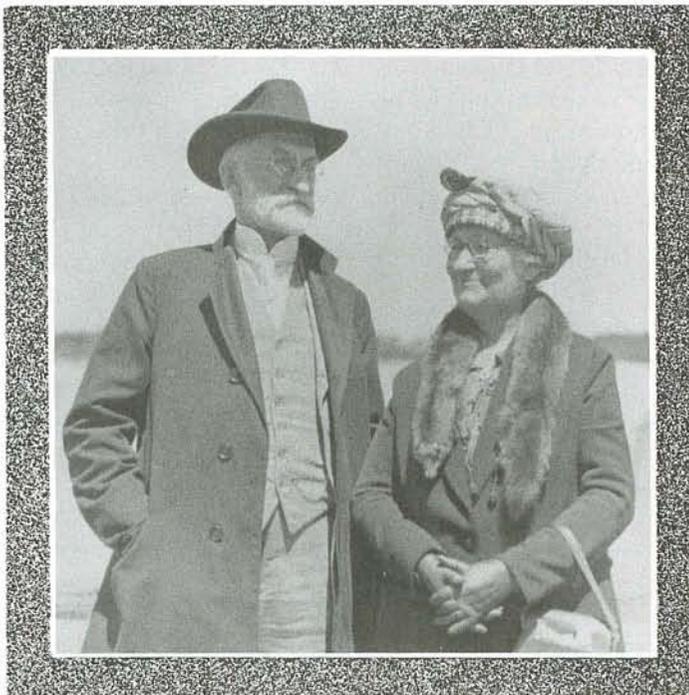
In a 1907 general conference, President Joseph F. Smith gave a lengthy reiteration of the patriotic posture of the Church, emphasizing the constitutional question of freedom of religion as the justification for polygamy rather than the traditional emphasis on the revelatory nature of the principle. Smith said:

What our people did in disregard of the law and the decisions of the Supreme Court affecting plural marriages was in the spirit of maintaining religious rights under constitutional guarantees, and not in any spirit of defiance or disloyalty to the government.³

According to him, the period of civil disobedience had ended when "every means of constitutional defense had been

exhausted."⁴ It was only then that "the Church abandoned the controversy and announced its intention to be obedient to the laws of the land."⁵ Citing the twelfth article of faith, he pledged loyalty to the American system. What about the revelation and loyalty to God before country? What about the fourteen years between the *Reynolds vs. the United States* U.S. Supreme Court ruling and the Manifesto? What about Woodruff's personal battle with the idea? Apparently, by 1904 the Church's perspective on polygamy had somehow altered, perhaps as a result of the pressure generated by the Smoot hearings. In any event shortly after the turn of the century the Church paraded a new aggressive patriotism before the nation.

The problem of polygamy, nevertheless, would not disappear. Twenty years after the Manifesto, some ecclesiastical leaders both in and out of the Church were still performing plural marriages without the official sanction of the president of the Church. Again President Smith felt it was necessary to clarify the Church's position on plural marriage, to warn of the consequences of disobedience, and to increase vigilance in enforcing the policy. A 5 October 1910 First Presidency letter directed stake presidents to actively search out those who were actually performing plural marriages and had so far evaded detection. This letter was primarily directed against those who were bringing others into the practice, although it also prescribed punishment for



those who only "advise" or "counsel." It was now very clear that continued adherence to the practice was no longer a matter of personal discretion; it had become a point of disloyalty to the Church and a failure to defer to the direction of the prophet. Disobedience was described as being "not only an individual transgression, but a dishonor to the Church as well."⁶

President Smith reminded Church leaders of those instructions again in 1911, and strengthened the directives by insisting that offenders be brought before Church courts. Subsequent operational instructions and policies were described as "precepts, regulations, and rules" rather than as doctrine or updated revelation. These letters of policy were precursors of the "Hand book of Instructions" which was first circulated in the 1910s.

IN a conference address in 1918, Charles W. Penrose, second counselor in the First Presidency, went beyond what had become the typical approach of using threats and making

declarations of good faith and tried to explain more fully the doctrine of plural marriage to a new generation who were less familiar with the principle. Before the Manifesto, the principle was of central importance to Church doctrine and solidarity and was taught with a single-minded passion. In the thirty years since, a new generation had grown up in the Church which had at best ambiguous feelings for both the social and sacred nature of the practice. President Penrose's discourse discussed both aspects. Divided into two main sections, it clearly delineated the issues that would have enduring significance in the Church's future attitude toward the doctrine.

Penrose portrayed Mormon marriage—celestial marriage, or the holy patriarchal order—as a privilege through which men and women were sealed together by the holy order of God. Hence, the doctrine of celestial marriage articulated by Joseph Smith, Jr., continued to be taught after the demise of plural marriage, despite the fact that the two were so closely linked. The purpose of celestial marriage was an abundant and faithful progeny: “They shall increase, worlds without end, in their prosperity, in knowledge, in wisdom, in understanding, in dominion, in glory. . . .”⁷

Celestial marriage, he explained, is detailed in Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants, and is therefore sanctioned as a commandment from the Lord. This scripture defines celestial marriage as marriage for “time and all eternity and a necessary prerequisite for the attainment of the highest degree of glory in the celestial world.”⁸

Penrose then referred to another portion of that revelation which mentioned “further orders” of the holy order of marriage that were under “special direction.” The power, authority, and keys to perform celestial marriages were located only in the hands of the president of the Church. “Read it carefully,” he said:

The keys of that power are given to one man at a time on the earth, and you will see sometime, if you cannot now, the wisdom of that law. He holds the key of that power, and when he turns it, as Brother Woodruff did, it closes the door.⁹

The “further order” of the patriarchal order that Penrose referred to was plural marriage. In the nineteenth century the concept of plural marriage and the concept of celestial marriage or the patriarchal order were inextricably linked. This was still true in 1918. The issue in dispute between the official Church leadership and those practicing polygamy independently was the location of the power or “keys” to perform such marriages. Penrose reemphasized this point.

I want to refer to this as clearly as possible, and I find it necessary to do it because of some recent occurrences—when men go around and whisper in the ears of the people that this thing is all right if you can keep it secret; keep it from the man that holds the keys—Think of it!¹⁰

He then reiterated the position of Church Presidents Lorenzo Snow and Joseph F. Smith, who both said that at that time there was no man who was authorized to perform plural marriages on the earth.

Obviously the purpose of Penrose's message was to combat the rumors about alternate priesthood authority and to ruin the credibility of those claiming authority to continue the practice. Recognizing the vulnerability of the new generation to these claims he said:

Do not believe these stories that men who are seeking to indulge their own lust are circulating among the people, but try to guard the purity of our innocent girls, many of whom have never heard of such things, and these things are whispered in their ears by some designing person who is rebel against the Church of Christ.¹¹

With Penrose's address the gulf between ploygamists and the Church dramatically widened.

IN 1921 Church President Heber J. Grant bluntly addressed the subject of priesthood authority, making it absolutely clear that the official Latter-day Saint position was that the “keys” remained in the person of the president of the Church. Later, in an impassioned 1925 ruling, President Grant claimed that the very integrity of the Church was being impugned. He found it necessary to repeat these straightforward and candid warnings on at least four other occasions during his administration in an attempt to make his attitude so “clear, definitive, and unequivocal as to leave no possible doubt.”¹²

In a 1931 talk, Heber J. Grant introduced a new approach that would become standard procedure after 1950: namely, sidestepping the subject of polygamy to avoid unnecessary publicity:

We have hesitated somewhat to make public statements or denials to charges and false assertions published in literature sent out by these enemies of the Church . . . , because we have felt that added publicity to their pernicious statements would be gratifying to them and probably useless in stemming their activity.

Another important reason for the change in the public dialogue on polygamy was the nature of the opposition. Beginning in the 1930s, the Church faced the more formidable power of *organized* fundamentalist polygamists who made alternative claims to the priesthood authority to perform plural marriages. From then on, any public discussion of polygamy by Church leaders was directed to the fundamentalists who were actively recruiting and circulating literature that criticized the Church leadership and encouraged members to ignore the Manifesto.

In 1933, because of renewed interest in the “corrupt, adulterous practices of the members of this secret, oathbound organization,” a definitive “Official Statement” from the First Presidency was drafted by second counselor J. Reuben Clark and published in the *Church News* section of the *Deseret News*.¹³ This assertion of Church policy gave a careful accounting of the history of the controversy which had raged since the 1890 Manifesto. It summarized legal action, doctrinal support of the principle, and the continued practice of polygamy outside of Mormonism—again stressing the legal contractual nature of the marriage union and the legal discontinuation of

the principle, rather than the fact that it had once been evidence of obedience to a commandment of God. With an erudite candor typical of President Clark, the document virtually eliminated the possibility of misrepresentation of the Church's policy.

The "Official Statement" also clarified the LDS doctrine of celestial marriage. The First Presidency made a careful distinction between celestial marriage and polygamous marriage saying: "Monogamous marriages for time and eternity, solemnized in our temples in accordance with the word of the Lord and the laws of the Church, are Celestial marriages."¹⁵ The logic that had been so carefully constructed to justify plural marriage was being just as carefully dismantled.

WE do not know the private deliberations and motives of Presidents Smith, Grant or Clark which led them to heighten their pursuit of offenders of the rule. But there are at least three factors which are of obvious importance.

First, Church leaders must have tired of the continued harassment by the government and media, with their continued base accusations and distrust of motives. They probably were embarrassed by their impotency in stopping the practice.

Second, they wanted to resolve the constant confrontation with the fundamentalists whose strident claim to priesthood authority directly challenged the position of the prophet who, according to official Church policy and doctrine, had sole possession of the "keys of the sealing."

Finally, these men were surely affected in more personal ways as relatives and friends continued on a path that seemed to lead them from the fold. The highly publicized Church court of Alpha Higgs, President Grant's personal friend and colleague and also the general secretary of the Church's Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association and assistant manager of *The Improvement Era*, must have particularly grieved and embarrassed Grant. The Church excommunicated J. Reuben Clark's eighty-year-old uncle, John W. Woolley, for performing plural marriages, a double-edged sword which must have both personally saddened Clark and caused him great public embarrassment in his career in the East.

Concern over internal dissension prompted one rather extraordinary gesture in the 1930s when the Church subjected selected members to a loyalty oath. Obviously, the First Presidency was willing to try anything to stop the practice of

polygamy. Local leaders required suspected fundamentalists to repeat the words:

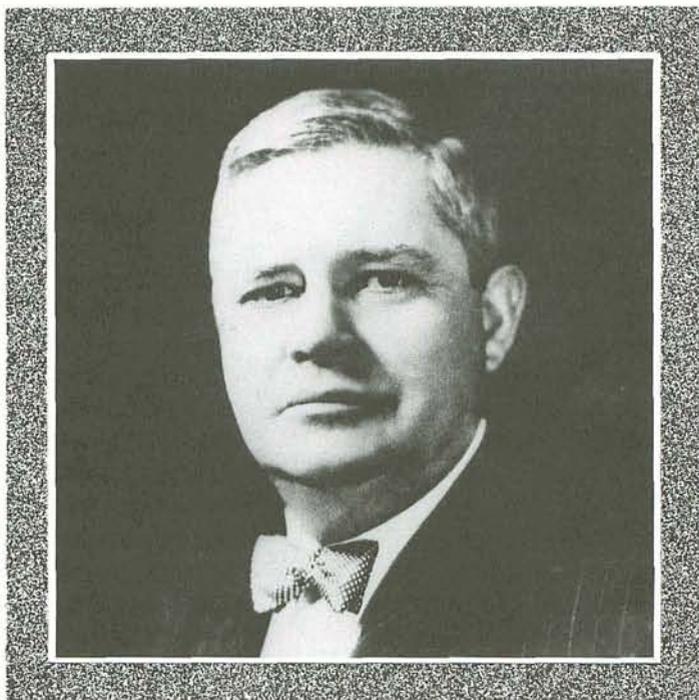
I solemnly declare and affirm that I, without any mental reservation whatever, support the Presidency and Apostles of the Church; that I repudiate any intimation that anyone of the Presidency or the Apostles of the Church is living a double life. . . . That I denounce the practice and advocacy of plural marriage . . . and that I myself am not living in such alleged marriage relationship.¹⁶

The concept for the loyalty oath originated in Southern Utah and Northern Arizona where clusters of polygamous Mormons had gathered to live. Zion Park Stake President Claude Hirshi

excommunicated twenty-one members of the Short Creek Branch for failing to sign a similar pledge. This series of excommunications led to the arrest and conviction of three polygamists, Price W. Johnson, Carling Spencer, and Sylvia Spencer, on charges of cohabitation. County Attorney Elmo Bollinger commented that "the officials of the regular (Mormon) Church were assisting to bring about the arrest and conviction of polygamists."¹⁷

Directions to local ecclesiastical leaders included in the *Handbook of Instructions* for dealing with polygamists have changed very little since 1935. Instructions have always called for direct and immediate action—plural marriages are

branded "adulterous relations" and are dealt with as such. In the 1934 *Handbook* particular attention was directed at those "teaching, encouraging, or entering into the practice" of plural marriage. If, after prompt and diligent investigation, evidence of violation was found, immediate excommunication from the Church resulted. The gentler disciplines of probation or disfellowshipment were disallowed for such cases. The excommunicated polygamist could be rebaptized only with special permission of the First Presidency. The new 1989 *General Handbook of Instructions* states that a disciplinary council (formerly Church court) is mandatory for "apostasy" by individuals who "continue to follow the teachings of apostate cults (such as those that advocate plural marriage) after being corrected by their bishops or higher authority. In such cases, excommunication may be necessary when repentance is not evident after counseling and encouragement." As in the past individuals excommunicated for "advocating or teaching the doctrines of apostate sects that practice plural marriage, or affiliating with such groups" must obtain First Presidency permission to be rebaptized.¹⁸



Suprisingly, there was never a temple recommend question specifically about polygamy. As early as 1946, however, questions about sustaining the General Authorities, and whether the applicant had any connection or sympathy with apostate groups, were intended to weed out fundamentalists. Whether they did in fact prevent polygamists from receiving recommends is debatable. Nevertheless the instructions to bishops were very clear: when a person was determined to be a believer in or practicing polygamy, he or she was to be uncategorically excommunicated and very definitely excluded from the Church's temples.

BY 1940 the group named the Fundamentalists presented the most united threat to the Church from a schismatic group. Formed in 1929, the group still called themselves Mormons. The Fundamentalists ordained four excommunicated Mormons as leaders: J. Leslie Broadbent, John Y. Barlow, Joseph W. Musser, and Charles F. Zitting. In the 1940s the group was actively recruiting new members through public meetings and through their publication, *Truth* magazine. Earlier, when the group had been restrained about proselyting their beliefs, the government and the Church ignored them. However, when they appeared to be growing and threatening the status quo, both the government and the Church took action to limit the organization.

In 1944 Federal and State law enforcement officers in Utah, Idaho, and Arizona arrested forty-six polygamists. As in the judicial crusade of the 1880s and 1890s the charges against the polygamists were severe. Aside from polygamous living itself, the accusations included Mann Act and Lindbergh Kidnapping Law violations, mailing obscene literature, conspiracy, and finally the old catchall, cohabitation, which was the most obvious charge to level against members of the cult. The cohabitation cases were grouped together for appeal.

Barlow vs. State et al. (1944) focused on the constitutional argument that cohabitation was a religious belief, and therefore protected by the freedom of religion clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Both the arguments and the proceedings had a familiar ring. They duplicated the polygamy trials of the 1880s, in which Mormon polygamists claimed protection under the U.S. Constitution. Also in the 1880s the government stretched the law in the effort to quash the practice. But this group of cases was different in a very important way. Not only did the state ostracize Barlow and his fellow defendants, but for the first time the polygamist faced prosecution without being able to claim the powerful sanction of the Mormon church. In fact, in an interesting twist of procedure, Mormon jurors seemed to pose a particular threat to the defendants in this case, and an effort was made to impeach them from service on the jury. The trial judge allowed Claude Barnes, the attorney for the defendants, to ask three questions about the juror's prior knowledge of the case:

1. That some of the defendants had been excommunicated from said church for advocating or practicing

- polygamy; 2. That no one is ever excommunicated without a trial at which evidence is produced, and the member charged with misconduct is given an opportunity to defend; and 3. That judgement of excommunication is based on a finding that the communicant has been guilty of "teaching" preaching or practicing polygamy.¹⁹

The defense counsel believed that the trial was over before it began because of the make-up of the jury, the Mormon church's support of the prosecution (as the polygamists perceived it), and what they called the "campaign against the group." Many of these accusations were false, or at best alarmist. There is, however, evidence that the Church did supply information to the prosecution and cooperated in the government's effort against the group. In a statement to the United Press which would later become part of the case file, Apostle Mark E. Peterson remarked:

The Church has actively assisted federal and state authorities in obtaining evidence against the cultists, and helping to prosecute them under the law. . . . Among the witnesses for the prosecution are men who have been appointed by the Church to search out the cultists, turning over such information as they gather to the prosecution for their use; these men have also been appointed by the Church to do all they can to fight the spread of polygamy.²⁰

At the time the Church was supplying information from its internal surveillance activities to the state attorney general it was publicly denying any part in the action. In these public statements the Church stressed that it had already dealt with the men in Church courts with the most severe punishment—excommunication. They also reasserted the importance of the separation of church and state.

Similar procedures were used during the famous 1953 raids on the fundamentalist community of Short Creek, Arizona. Again, state and federal officials conducted the raid. At the time the Church made a firm public statement that it had no involvement in the official raid, and that it had already dealt with the fundamentalists in Church courts. The implication was, of course, that there was no connection between the Church and the raid.

However, Arizona Governor Howard Pyle did keep Church leaders informed about every step of the planning and the execution of the raid. In daily phone calls to Elder Delbert Stapley, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Pyle shared details and information to ensure that the Church would not be offended by any of the steps taken. J. Reuben Clark and other Church leaders knew of the raid at least ten days in advance.²¹

THE policies presented in the 1940 edition of the *Handbook of Instructions* reflected the effort to deal expeditiously with the Fundamentalist threats. The less specific attack against the individual polygamists was strengthened by directing future

efforts against the source of their support and the center of power—those claiming to have continued authority to persist in the practice.

Polygamists posed a threat to the Church in three basic ways. The Church's first concern was the question of loyalty. In many ways the Church was like a large family bound by doctrine, ordinance, and custom. But fundamentalist polygamists were openly and stridently disclaiming both the Church and the prophet. The schism between fundamentalists and the LDS church was like a bitter and destructive divorce in which both parties felt betrayed and misunderstood.

A second concern of the LDS leaders was the numerical growth of the fundamentalist movement. Most new recruits to the group came from the ranks of the Church itself. As fundamentalists recruited Church members they increased in both strength and influence. This growth encouraged Church leaders to stress again the importance of keeping the members informed about the threats posed by polygamy so that "no one will be in ignorance of the falsity of the doctrines or of the illegality of the practices of this group, nor in doubt as to the spiritual falling away of its members and those who follow them, nor unaware of the Church's disciplinary measures which must be taken against them."²²

Finally, Church leaders wanted to insure that the polygamists could not partake of any of the rights and privileges appertaining to members, particularly entry into the temples, payment of tithes (with its subsequent blessings), participation in the activities of the priesthood quorums or auxiliary organizations of the Church, or any other ward, stake, or Church activities.²³ This measure served to socially and spiritually ostracize the polygamist from the official Church body. This rule sought to punish and to preserve the integrity of the sacred rites and ordinances for obedient members.

It is a curious phenomenon that, while the individual fundamentalists scorned the Church for its "unrighteous" denial of the principle, at the same time many continued to believe in the importance of LDS temple work and other Church programs—taking enormous risks and making tremendous sacrifices to secure recommends to enter the temples and to continue wearing the official temple garments. An uneasy connection persists, if at no more than an unconscious psychological level, between those who practice the principle and those who believe in the doctrine but not the practice.

STARTING in the 1950s, Elder Mark E. Peterson aggressively worked to eliminate the practice of plural marriage by searching out the individual believer and utilizing surveillance techniques similar to those used by private investigators. After searching for and identifying a suspected polygamist, Elder Peterson encouraged local leaders to watch their homes, to follow them to meetings or other gatherings, and to question them about their unexplainable behavior. This information would then be used in a Church court.

The most obvious and immediate result of this reactionary crusade was the excommunication of a large number of fundamentalist polygamists. An important residual result of this campaign was that it discouraged many members from having healthy dialogue on the subject of polygamy. At a time when only one-sided discussion of polygamy prevailed, when differing viewpoints were misread or seemed suspicious, the subject, in a very subtle but unmistakable way, became off limits for members.

For example, a 1976 letter from the president of the Quorum of the Twelve, Ezra Taft Benson, to his fellow General Authorities discussed how offenders were dealt with in a way that ultimately affected every member:

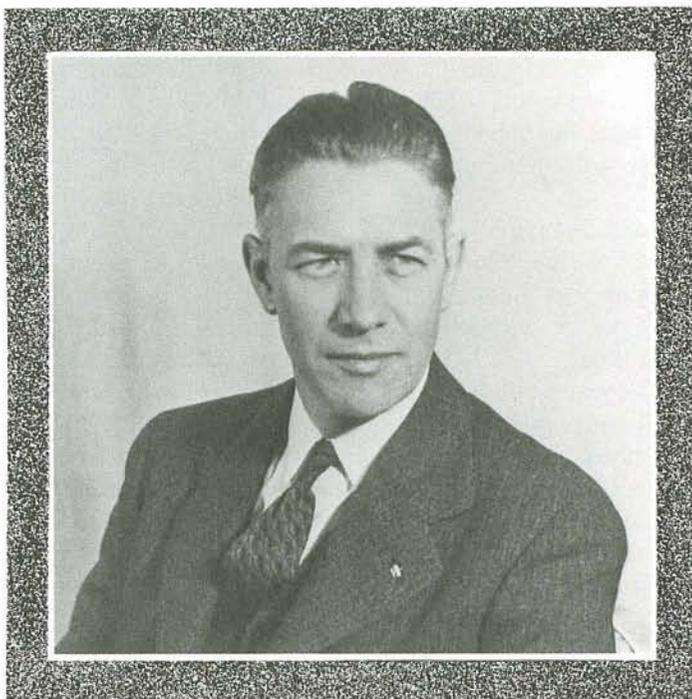
We have had called to our attention the recent case of a man excommunicated for polygamy who reported that he had been told by

his priesthood leaders that it made no difference whether he believed in polygamy and talked about it privately as long as he did not do so in Church meetings and classes.

We suggest that the General Authorities be instructed to counsel local authorities on this subject while attending stake conferences. A member is subject to Church discipline for advocating plural marriage whether it is done in private or in public.²⁴

There is a fine line between the advocacy of an idea and simply discussing its favorable aspects. For many Saints, any form of discussion about polygamy was simply too difficult to handle.

After 1950 Church leaders rarely mentioned the subject of plural marriage in general conference or in other public addresses to the Saints. When it was mentioned, as in a 1974 talk by Church President Spencer W. Kimball, another specialist in dealing with the fundamentalists, it was again to warn members not to associate with the various cults. Avoiding the



subject rather than dealing with the questions it presented was one way to prevent confusion among the members or difficulties with the doctrine.

TODAY, Saints no longer hear elaborations on the doctrine of a plurality of wives in conference addresses. Nor do they listen to amusing anecdotes about the intricacies of polygamist pioneer life. The polygamist Joseph Smith or Brigham Young is rarely acknowledged. It is as if the modern Church has been divorced from a large and important part of its historical past.

The official policy of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints toward the polygamist is essentially the same in 1990 as during the 1930s. Despite the confused and extended period of ambiguity that followed the manifesto in which many polygamous marriages were performed, since the 1930s the Church has consistently and determinedly moved in an undeviating course of separation from both the practice and the history of Mormon polygamy.

As early as 1935 the Mormon doctrine of plural marriage no longer fit into the missionary plan for the "good life." It was relegated to a position of relative obscurity as a hypothetical condition of the afterlife that should not be questioned, or necessarily understood, until another time.

Under the Priesthood Correlation Movement of the 1970s, the trend consolidated. Correlation uniformly limited polygamy in official Church literature, lesson manuals, pamphlets, and public discourse. This omission was not backed by any written or official directive. It was more a general unspoken yet pervasive assumption that difficult doctrinal or historical topics were not to be mentioned, including polygamy. One instance of purposeful removal of the subject of polygamy from official literature was the deletion of a group picture of proud jailed pioneer polygamists from the second edition of *My Kingdom Shall Roll Forth*. In contrast to the fiery defense of pioneer times, this quiet movement away from the topic has resulted in almost complete neglect.

As it is taught today, the ideal of celestial marriage centers on the coupling of two righteous spirits whose ultimate destiny (in terms of paradisaical glory) depends, in large part, on the success of that union. Books like *Marriage and Divorce* by Spencer W. Kimball make no mention of the "further order of the patriarchal order of marriage"—that is, the contingency of plural marriage in eternity (D&C 132). The concept of plural marriage is not part of the oral or written traditions of the modern day public Church. Except for descendants of pioneer polygamists with a sense of history, polygamy is as foreign to the contemporary Mormon as it might be to someone outside the Church. For some it is barely part of their mythic past.

Nevertheless, questions about plural marriage never totally disappear. They continue to be raised by investigators and other non-members. Polygamy is the one subject that universally precedes the Church's advertised public image. Despite this fact, in the last two decades important Church representatives like

mission presidents have usually received no written or formal direction about how to deal with questions investigators ask about the Church and polygamy.²⁵

Potentially combative confrontations with the outside world are sometimes addressed by the Church's Public Communications Department, which when pushed would briefly acknowledge that polygamy was once practiced but now is forbidden. Understandably, the public relations policy is to present an upbeat image of the contemporary Church and to avoid difficult subjects. During the 1970s, Charles Gibbs, a Public Communications representative, used a modified approach—the frontal attack. He addressed the issue straight on, answering questions by referring to the official ending of polygamy with the Manifesto, or by stating that no more than 10 percent of the Saints ever practiced plural marriage. By providing slightly more information than requested he seized control of the discussion. Few media personalities were sufficiently schooled in Mormonism to ask him difficult and probing questions about polygamy.²⁶

Although the official Church stopped talking about plural marriage in its meetings, manuals, and other publications in the 1950s, this does not mean that the individual member forgot it. Since the Church only resurrected polygamy as an issue to warn the Saints of the dangers of associating with members of the fundamentalist cults, where then do believing Saints find answers to their questions? For many members Elder Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* is the primary place. On the subject of plural marriage, Elder McConkie refers the reader to two definitive scriptural justifications for the practice: Isaiah 4 and Doctrine and Covenants 132. According to him, these two passages state that polygamy is accepted by the Lord when administered by those with the proper keys. The scriptures also describe polygamy as part of "the restitution of all things." Elder McConkie concludes by saying, "Obviously the holy practice will commence again after the Second Coming of the Son of Man and the ushering in of the millennium."²⁷

Hence, today's Saints are left with the same unanswered doctrinal questions as the Saints 100 years ago. The Manifesto suspended the practice of polygamy, but made no mention of the principle itself. Successive presidents of the Church struggled with this inconsistency either by trying to make the principle fit into Mormon theology or avoiding the topic altogether. However, they spent most of their energy punishing offenders and trying to halt the practice, a policy which divided the fundamentalists from official Church society and identified the Church as a mainstream group which, like most of the rest of middle America, scorned the practice. The Mormons moved from persecuted to persecutor. Ultimately, the Church's accommodation to the world—the reaching out for recognition—centered on shared Christian experiences, rather than on those practices which functioned as too severe of boundaries.

In the last decade polygamy was frequently in the news. Each time it made the headlines the Church pointed to its history of separation rather than shared tradition. Of course there was the notorious violence of the LeBaron clan. The trial of the

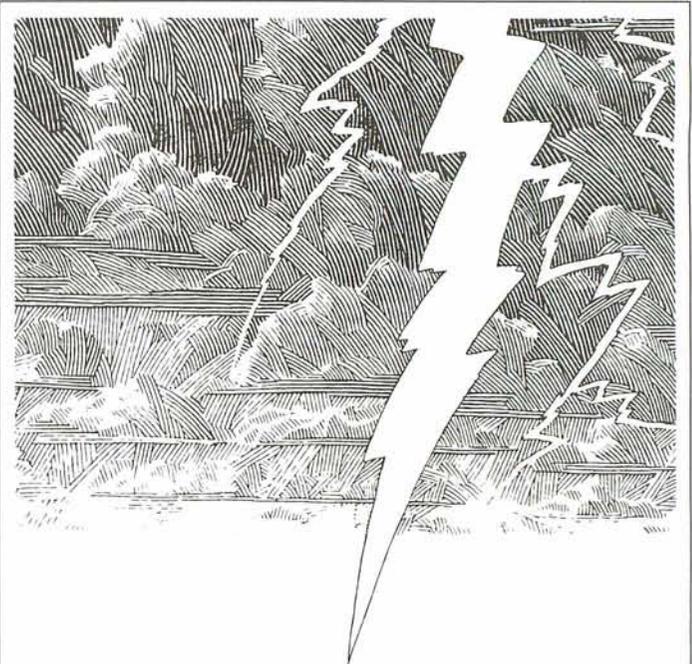
former Murray City, Utah, policeman and polygamist Royston Potter resurfaced the troubling questions of freedom of religion which polygamy raises. The bombing of the Kamas Stake Center by John Singer's son-in-law Adam Swapp eerily demonstrated the explosive tension that exists for these people so willing to sacrifice all for their beliefs. In reaction to these stories, each of which received national attention, the Church, as it had in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, quickly denied having any connection with polygamy explaining that it had already dealt with these men and women in private Church courts.

Polygamists continue to be unilaterally excommunicated and denied both entrance into temples and into fellowship with the body of Saints. Yet at face value these facts belie the incredible distance the two groups have moved in that fifty-year time period. The lines dividing the polygamist man from his parent church are both wide and deep, and probably unbridgeable. Yet, as the Church moves into the second century after the Manifesto, and as Utah fundamentalists become less of a concern for the growing international Church, one wonders if past is prologue. How will the Church confront the unavoidable existence of plural marriage in its doctrine? Will growing feminist values eventually repudiate the doctrine? How will the Church deal with polygamist converts in cultures where polygamy is a legal and accepted practice? (The RLDS church, which historically denied even Joseph Smith's revelations on plural marriage, baptizes African polygamists if they promise to take no new wives and teach monogamy to their children.²⁸) Although the challenge of the next century definitely ensures that Mormonism will continue to confront polygamy, still, given the current historical trend, it is likely that polygamy will become even more of a curious historical relic. ☐

NOTES

1. The work of Kenneth Cannon II and D. Michael Quinn on post-manifesto polygamy corrects many long held misconceptions about the period. Both men have shown that polygamous marriages continued to be performed both with and without the sanction of the General Authorities for about twenty years after the Manifesto. See Kenneth Cannon, II, "Beyond the Manifesto: Polygamous Cohabitation Among LDS General Authorities after 1890," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46 (Winter 1978): 24-36, and D. Michael Quinn, "LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890-1904," *Dialogue* 18 (Spring 1985):9-105.
2. *Journal History*, 6 April 1904, 6.
3. James R. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970): 151.
4. Clark, 4:151.
5. Clark, 4:151.
6. Clark, 4:218.
7. *Conference Reports*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Spring 1918, 16.
8. *Conference Reports*, 17.
9. *Conference Reports*, 17.
10. *Conference Reports*, 17.
11. *Conference Reports*, 19.
12. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5 (3 September 1925, 3 October 1926, 4 April 1931):194.
13. Clark, 5:293.
14. Clark, 5:329.
15. Clark, 5:327.
16. *Truth*, I(March 1936): 128.
17. *Truth*, I(October 1935): 135.
18. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *General Handbook of Instructions*, (Salt Lake City: LDS Corporation of the President, 1989), 10-3, 10-11.
19. *Musser vs. State et al.*, 110 Utah Reports 534.
20. *Truth*, 12(February 1947): 246.
21. D. Michael Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1983), 186.
22. *Handbook of Instructions* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1940) 139.

23. Lester Bush, "Excommunication." *Dialogue* 14:2 (Summer 1981).
24. Letter from Ezra Taft Benson addressed to all General Authorities, April 1976, in the personal possession of the author.
25. Interview with Ralph O. Bradley, May 1985.
26. Interview with Charles Gibb by Martha Bradley, September 1985.
27. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 578.
28. *Sunstone* 11(September 1987):5, 46.



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