

How a group of self-described “mainstream Mormons” took the teachings of the Church’s founding leaders literally and ended up embracing polygamy, rejecting black priesthood ordination, damning the rest of Mormonism, and creating its own church with the attendant challenges of hierarchy and authoritarianism.

THE MANTI MORMONS: THE RISE OF THE LATEST MORMON CHURCH

By Becky Johns

I FIRST MET JIM AND ELAINE HARMSTON IN November 1992. Jim had contacted the Mormon Alliance regarding the excommunication of himself, his wife, and several others in the Manti, Utah, area, and I had been sent to interview them.¹ When I first visited them in their home, the Harmstons seemed like many other typical Mormons I have known—of normal intelligence, friendly, not at all “kooky,” wild-eyed, or radical. They had been life-long members of the Church and had always paid a full tithing. Elaine had served in both Relief Society and Primary presidencies; Jim had served as a gospel doctrine teacher and in the high priests group leadership. They said they had regularly attended Church, read and studied their scriptures, held family home evening, and listened to and followed the teachings of Church leaders. They appeared to me to be typical, conservative Mormons who seemed genuinely puzzled and hurt over their excommunications. Within the following eighteen months, however, this couple would become the center of a storm of controversy and media publicity. Jim would declare himself a prophet, the two would enter into a polygamous marriage, and a new church would be born around them.

Clearly, the Harmstons, and others associated with them, are considered apostates by the mainstream LDS church. This is of little concern to the Harmstons now. At my last meeting with them, in June 1995, Jim declared all mainstream members and Church leaders to be apostate and his group to be the only “true” Latter-day Saints alive today. How did this transformation from obedient, faithful member to self-espoused prophet take place? Who are the “Manti Mormons?” How are mainstream members to view and understand these events in the context of Mormonism and their own religious lives? Why

has this story received so much media attention? What follows is my attempt to answer these questions from the point of view of an observer and interviewer. I am not a member of the Harmston group but maintain membership in the mainstream LDS church. I approached the Harmstons and other group members as a neutral, but interested, observer. I neither endorse their teachings and course of action nor condemn them; I want to understand them.

WHO ARE THE “MANTI MORMONS?”

How do they support themselves? What are their communities like?

I N the fall of 1992, news reports told of several dozen Sanpete County residents who were being excommunicated from the LDS church for, among other things, home-schooling their children, “excessive” food storage, and performance of temple rituals outside the temple. LDS members I spoke to were either appalled that such issues could warrant excommunication or they shook their heads in disbelief that so large a group of members could be so misguided. These news reports and surrounding rumors fueled speculation of a Branch-Davidian, Singer-Swapp-like group of radical fundamentalists or survivalists who, according to some rumors, were preparing to storm the Manti Temple and barricade themselves there until the second coming of Christ. In the midst of these news reports, I first went to Manti and began interviewing people associated with the Harmstons. I went with some anxiety, but mostly curiosity—and a stern warning from the chair of the Alliance’s case reports committee to “not be drawn into doctrinal debates and beware of emotional entanglements that you may not be prepared for.” This was good advice; once there, I found myself involved in deep doctrinal discussions, and, perhaps expectedly so, I was preached to and taught about fundamentalist Mormon ideas in an attempt to

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"convert" me to the "truth."

The Harmston group is one of several prospering Mormon Fundamentalist groups or schismatic sects in the Sanpete County area. Harmston boasts contact with several thousand interested persons, but regular group meeting and activity attenders number between 75 and 200. I met with group members in the Harmston home and later in their "store-front" meeting-house, formally interviewing fifteen persons and speaking informally to dozens more. Gradually an image of the so-called "Manti Mormons" began to take shape.

Demographics. There appear to be about the same number of males as females. Ages of adult participants run from twenty to seventy, and the average economic status appears to be medium- to low-income.

Participants' occupations include nursing, construction, accounting, financial advising, and homemaking. Many of the group's members migrated to Manti and have been unable to find employment in their own career fields since job opportunities there are limited and certain industries and businesses are not present at all.

Finances. Because the Harmstons spend their entire time teaching and preaching to others about their religious beliefs, I wondered how they supported themselves. I asked about tithes, church offerings, and publication sales. Jim said there was no official collection of tithes, although group adherents often help by giving money or goods to other group members in need; publications were sold at cost and generated no revenue. I asked Jim if he lived on a pension, savings, social security, or proceeds from investments. He said "no" to each question; he maintained that the Lord provided him with money for his needs, recounting the following incidents:

We go to the Lord . . . and the Lord tells me to spend 600 dollars. But I don't have it. So I procrastinate, you know . . . and [then] I open the mail and there's the money. That's how it works. I'm driving up the road, got less than twenty dollars in my wallet. And a voice says "you have \$300 in your wallet" and the spirit bears witness. Man, I pull that car over, I pop open my wallet, and I have less than twenty dollars, and it don't work like that, and I can hear [the] voices laughing. And this little thing says to me, "inside pocket," and I opened that up, and I pulled out three, folded-up \$100 bills. This is the way it works.

I got down one time to where we had less than, well, we had three cents, and my son came to us, and



Jim Harmston regularly communes with angels, has seen Joseph Smith, and is the current prophet of Manti's "True and Living Church."

"The LDS Church has gone whoring after Babylon and the vain things of the world, has built the kingdom of the devil, and apostatized from her earlier mission and charge."

he says, "you need to pay ten dollars more the next morning for [my] college AP course for high school." . . . I said, "I don't have it, John." He says, "They're going to drop me in the morning." And I go to the Lord. The next morning I get out of bed and look down, and I'm standing on a ten-dollar bill.

It appears that the group is at least somewhat communal in nature and shares its assets and income, to some extent, with each other. Occasionally, financial support comes from sympathizers who live and work elsewhere.

Politics. The people I interviewed are highly conservative, even radical. They are opposed to such ideas as the New World Order. They share political leanings similar to other Christian fundamentalist groups. One intriguing element of the Harmston group's political activity is its efforts to establish a "political Kingdom on earth" as outlined by Joseph Smith. They desire to accomplish this, in part, by seeking adoption into the Iroquois Indian Nation with the hopes of establishing a section of land that

would be a free and sovereign state. The implications of such a move, if accomplished, are far-reaching and certainly bear watching.

Community. I found Harmston and his followers to be a close-knit community. They home-school their children. Some have entered into polygamous marriages, and most seem willing to accept polygamous practice. They believe in providing for themselves and derive a good deal of satisfaction from relating to those who think and act as they do.

Like the Harmstons, almost all of the adherents I interviewed said they had been faithful, fully active, mainstream Latter-day Saints prior to their involvement with the group, with many holding leadership positions in their former wards and stakes. Some I interviewed, however, had become attracted to the Harmston group because of its Fundamentalist teachings and practice of polygamy. A number had been members of other polygamous groups for some time, others, all of their lives. It appeared that moving from one Fundamentalist community to another was rather common, and certainly there were those in Harmston's group who both came and went during my study.

Schisms. I did not always find that "all is well" in the Harmston group. The group has had a number of major schisms, the most significant occurring over the question of how to practice polygamy. Harmston's account of the schism

concerns questions about the practice of sleeping with more than one polygamous wife at a time, an action he calls a blasphemy and totally beyond the bounds of the will of the Lord regarding marital relations. According to individuals who left the group—or who say the group left them—over this issue, there never was any sleeping with two wives at one time in their homes. Rather, when the question was raised in a brethren's council meeting, there was concern expressed about the propriety of the group establishing acceptable behavior for *anyone's* bedroom. Strong advocates of independence and personal, direct revelation from God, some members felt the group leadership overstepped its authority in this case.

Authority does appear to be the difficult question for those who have left the Manti group. I have spoken to some ex-members who were attracted to the group because of its initial, leaderless style and its emphasis on personal relationships with God, unmediated by leaders. Later, when the group started to evolve into a hierarchical structure similar to the LDS church and Harmston declared himself prophet, some were concerned enough to leave the fold.

How did a few study group members with Fundamentalist ideas evolve into a new church with a self-proclaimed prophet? What happened to transform these people from faithful, active, mainstream LDS church members to a congregation of ostracized, excommunicated Fundamentalists?

THE TRANSFORMATION

How sincere belief in Mormon fundamentals can lead to expulsion.

IN *Kidnapped From That Land: The Government Raids on the Short Creek Polygamists*,² Martha Sonntag Bradley calls the idea of returning to the original, unadulterated teachings of Joseph Smith the "invisible church." She explains that Fundamentalists are tenaciously loyal to the concept of "original doctrine." According to Bradley, Fundamentalists feel that if a law or doctrine was pronounced or taught by Joseph Smith, then it remains an "eternal principle," and no succeeding prophet or Church leader has the authority to change these "eternal truths." Bradley argues that Mormons who hold tightly to this doctrine attempt to follow the "invisible" or "true" church but become increasingly disillusioned and isolated when, in their minds, the modern-day LDS church, whether because of its missionary imperative or its attempts to "Americanize" itself, appears to separate itself from the teachings of Joseph Smith.

Prior to the fall of 1992, some members of the LDS church in Manti and surrounding areas occasionally met together in study groups and informal gatherings to discuss their interpretations of the gospel. Some of these individuals already had Mormon Fundamentalist leanings; others had just been introduced to Fundamentalist teachings. Most of the group members I interviewed in 1992 were well-read in the LDS scriptures and Church history, especially the writings of Joseph Smith. Harmston says he had studied the gospel from four to six hours a day for more than forty years. Harmston, as well as other men and women, began to teach what they knew of the

"original, pure" doctrines of Joseph Smith in their study groups as well as to interested individuals. This teaching began as informal discussions, evolving into a two-day, organized seminar referred to as the Models.

Frustrated with the "dilution" of the "pure" doctrines taught by Joseph Smith, Harmston and his wife, Elaine, say they sought a closer relationship with God and answers to their questions about the modern-day practices of the LDS church. They decided to seek these answers at home, in a prayer circle, using the "true order of prayer," as taught in LDS temples. The following account of the Harmstons' experience was reported in the *Private Eye Weekly*:

... they donned their Mormon temple robes at home and created a makeshift altar from a pillow and piano bench topped by a white bed sheet. They knelt to utilize the "true order of prayer," a ritual said to facilitate otherworldly communication. . . . They say God gave them the same answer He gave Smith (in the grove when asking what church to join) only this time He said the current Mormon church was among the "wrong" churches and they should start their own.³

When I first visited with the Harmstons, they made no mention of starting their own church. In fact, Jim Harmston specifically denied that he had any intention of doing so, or that he had any special calling from God outside of teaching people what he knew was "true" doctrine. This point of view evolved over the next year and a half when, eventually, a new church was formed and Harmston became its first president and prophet.

During this relatively short period of time, word spread regarding the group meetings in Manti. Other established Fundamentalist groups took note and visited, news stories began to circulate, and reports of angelic visits and miracles spread.

As the teachings and activities of the Harmstons and others in the Manti area spread, Church officials became involved. A memorandum, ostensibly signed by Utah South Area President Malcolm S. Jeppson (the authorship is now in dispute), was allegedly circulated to local stake presidents. It enumerated specific activities to watch for, counsel about, and/or discipline for, including excessive food storage, home-schooling, the use of temple rituals outside of the temple, and excessive political activism (such as support of arch-conservative Bo Gritz).

Many of the group adherents, including the Harmstons, were called in and counseled by their bishops and stake presidents. When it became apparent that neither the Harmstons nor the other Fundamentalists were willing to cease certain activities (most specifically, home-based prayer circles) but continued to teach their beliefs, they were disciplined. Some were disfellowshipped; others were told to no longer associate with certain individuals. Many were excommunicated. From the experiences related to me and the excommunication letters available, the most frequent official reasons for excommunication appear to be: "refusal to obey the counsel of file leaders," "conduct contrary to the laws and order of the Church," "being

out of harmony with the Church," "continuing to associate with apostates when counseled to do otherwise," and, simply, "apostasy."

From the fall of 1992 through the summer of 1993, several dozen Sanpete County residents were excommunicated. Within a short time, those who had previously met together as a study group and continued to share similar beliefs began to associate more closely with one another. The excommunications and other Church disciplinary actions may have created an environment favorable for the real, "invisible church." Believers of the group's teachings began to clearly differentiate themselves from the mainstream LDS church and eventually turned away from it completely. When asked if he might ever return, Jim Harmston said:

The debate is over. [To the church:] Just go away and leave us alone. We'll take care of ourselves and our relationship to God. . . . If Gordon Hinckley walked in that door and got on his knees and begged me to come back to the Church, my response would be, "not if I have to give up one thing that the Lord has given me will I come back to that, because you have nothing to offer."

ORGANIZATION OF THE "TRUE AND LIVING CHURCH" *From a group of believing friends to a hierarchical organization.*

As more people joined the group, a more formal organization evolved. A "council of brethren" was formed, a group of approximately fifteen men who met on a regular basis and sought direct revelation from God through consensus regarding their religion. Sunday evening testimony and worship services, weekly gospel study classes, priesthood, and women's meetings were held regularly. The question of ordinances was solved, in part, by building an endowment house where re-baptisms and marriages were performed. The "original" doctrines regarding these ordinances were followed, wherever possible, and "new" revelation was continually received by the "council of brethren," the "sisters' organization," and individual members. As more families and individuals began to affiliate with the group, other organizations evolved, including a youth program and a home-school for members' children. Finally, on 3 May 1994, The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days (TLC) was officially organized when fifteen men, meeting in a secluded area on Beaver Mountain, petitioned God and received revelation. In



A typical polygamous family in Manti: Jeff Hanks, his wives Joanne and Amanda, and their children Derek, Heidi, and Kelly.

"The spirit bore witness to us in an incredible way that we needed to be in Manti. I sold my business, I sold my house, and in three weeks I was living in Manti."

the following July and August, a Women's Society was formed, a presiding bishop, Quorum of Twelve Apostles, First Presidency, and First Quorum of Seventy were "called by revelation," ordained, and set apart in rapid succession. Although he had long denied it, when I met with Harmston in June 1995, he admitted to me that he had been called by God to be the prophet and first president of the TLC.

On 16 August 1994, an "Apostolic Witness and Testament" was presented to the body of the church and "accepted by unanimous common consent." Here is the complete document:

In the beginning of this dispensation God through his servant Joseph Smith Jr. re-

stored the everlasting gospel with all the attendant principles, powers, gifts, keys and priesthood. He also established an organization to fulfill the temporal needs of his gathered people. The restoration was embraced by those that recognized the voice of Jesus Christ our master.

We testify that the fullness that Joseph Smith Jr. restored has been corrupted and perverted by every church and group that profess to have God's authority. Therefore God has now rejected them and withdrawn his priesthood authority from them.

We bear solemn witness that the heavens are open and Almighty God has set his hand again the second time to gather his elect, has called Apostles, bestowing power and authority upon them, and has established The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of The Last Days. All this being done to bring about the consummate work of the Father, to save His children from the final destruction and Desolation of Abomination which await the wicked.

We bear that responsibility and invite all seekers of truth and righteousness to come and partake of the living waters of the Savior and God of us all even Jesus Christ.

All praise, honor and glory be given to Adam our common Father and God, to Jesus Christ our Redeemer, King and Priest and to their beloved Joseph Smith Jr. who holds all the Keys of this Last Dispensation.

(signed by thirteen men, identified elsewhere as the TLC's First Presidency and Quorum of Twelve Apostles)

Since this document was presented, the TLC has been involved

in publishing a number of tracts and pamphlets about its beliefs. They have undertaken missionary work, continue to work on establishing a “political Kingdom on earth,” and continue to distance themselves from the mainstream LDS church.

WHY MANTI?

The gathering to a sacred place.

ONE question that frequently comes up when I tell others about the TLC is “Why Manti?” What is going on there that attracts the Fundamentalists? What’s so special about Manti?

To TLC members, Manti is a literal and metaphorical sacred place where the elect are being gathered to become the beginning place of Zion or temporary gathering place talked about in scripture. The need for sacred place is not new to followers of religion, especially Mormons, who have their “promised valleys” and “templed cities which stand as sacred places.” The TLC has contracted the vision of the appointed Zion to a small farming community in Sanpete County, Utah. The Manti Temple figures strongly in this sense of sacred place; TLC adherents believe it will be the only temple left standing in the “last days.”

The late, University of Chicago anthropologist Mircea Eliade has postulated that to understand religious people, we must understand how they relate to sacred place and sacred time: “For religious man, space is not homogenous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others. . . . There is then, a sacred space, and hence a strong, significant space.”⁴ Manti acts as a sacred place for TLC members. The city, valley, and surrounding areas, as well as the Manti Temple, act as the “center” or “axis mundi” Eliade describes as typical of a sacred place.

While most of the TLC members are newcomers to the Sanpete Valley, others feel they were led or gathered there prior to the organization of the group. Here is how one TLC adherent describes how and why he came to Manti some time ago:

One of our friend’s daughters was getting sealed in the Manti Temple, and we came to witness that. And as we came, the spirit bore witness to us in an incredible way that we needed to be in Manti. And, I mean, it was incredible. We went back home to Ogden. I sold my business, I sold my house, and in three weeks, I was living in Manti. That was thirteen, almost fourteen years ago. . . . I came here because the Lord called me to come here. He wanted me to come.

Regarding the gathering in Manti, Harmston says:

We do exactly what the early brethren said we ought to do. When Daniel Wells, Orson Pratt, Heber Kimball, Brigham Young, and others said, for example, “out of the hardened corps of people would come a people who would put special things to the forefront and for God.” Orson says “we shan’t get these people on the Wasatch Front to live this stuff. . . . the day will come when they will have to leave and go out in the mountains round about, start anew.” Well,

[at first] we never thought of that, we didn’t even know [about] it. And here God sends a bunch of people out into the Sanpete Valley—they just began to collect together. They begin to realize what’s going on. . . . These are the last days. . . . These people are gathered here by the Lord, and they know the Lord. I’m telling you . . . , you’re sitting in a room with some people that have seen Him and know for themselves. That’s what’s so different about all of this.

The TLC pamphlet, *The Gathering of the Elect*, claims manifest destiny as the reason for gathering in Manti:

We know by the Spirit that the Sanpete Valley in Utah has a manifest destiny in the work of the Lord, and we testify that great and marvelous events will yet transpire in this prophetic valley. The Lord’s covenant people will also need sacred ordinances performed preparatory to bringing in the Millennium. This valley will serve as a temporary refuge for the righteous while great destructions occur in all the land. That righteous remnant of the elect are already gathering to this place to fulfill the covenants they have made with God before they came to earth.⁵

Manti, then, is both a metaphorical and literal gathering place for TLC members to enact their vision of divine manifest destiny.

WHAT DO THEY BELIEVE?

They live the Law of Consecration, believe Joseph Smith is the Holy Ghost, and see blacks holding the priesthood as an abomination.

JOSEPH SMITH figures most predominantly in the writings of the TLC. He is called the “witness/testator,” literally the Holy Ghost. They believe he “reigns in the spirit world,” and will yet come back “in the flesh” to accomplish his work in this dispensation. Harmston and others in the group testify that they have had visions of Joseph Smith:

I was giving a blessing to a man one night. Right in the middle of the blessing a voice said, “I am here.” I’ve learned not to be shocked at that kind of thing. And so, in my mind, as I talked there, I simply started speaking to him. And the voice returns, “I am the Prophet Joseph Smith, and I’m here observing and approve of what you’re doing.” And, boy, I guess the witness of the spirit nearly dropped me on the floor. We’ve had those kinds of experiences regularly. And it’s only because the people are willing to listen and use the keys.

In the TLC pamphlet, *And Upon My House Shall It Begin*, a number of their fundamental beliefs are laid out, including:

1. Gathering—a literal collecting of “elect” saints;
2. Law of Celestial Plural Marriage—“to provide bodies for the spirits of the elect and in raising up a righteous posterity fit for the building of God’s Kingdom”;
3. Law of Consecration—“to prove our willingness to sacrifice all to the building of the Kingdom of God”;
4. Adam-God Doctrine;

5. Priesthood belongs solely to the House of Israel—"the seed of Cain will have to wait until all of Adam's posterity have come forward to receive their blessings through the end of the Millennium";
6. Original temple endowments—"Ordinances must be kept in the very way God has appointed and cannot be changed";
7. Personal revelation—"counsel from ecclesiastical leaders must be verified by personal revelation to each individual";
8. Preparation—both spiritual and temporal preparation for the last days;
9. Anti-government—"we cannot . . . support wicked government and inter-connected secret combinations";
10. Abortion—"is murder."

Much more than average Latter-day Saints, TLC members seem to experience the divine in their everyday lives. They see visions and have visionary dreams, hear voices, see angels and messengers; witness miracles, cast out Satan, and seem to expect these occurrences when they live their lives in accordance with their beliefs. A friend and associate of the group describes these experiences:

Put quite simply, they are receiving messengers. There have been angels who have appeared in response to being summoned. Some of these angels have bestowed blessings, others have provided further light and knowledge, and others, further direction from the Lord. There have been sentinels, dressed in full armor, who have protected various members as they have performed the callings they have received from the Lord. There have been concourses of angels seen and heard who were singing to the Lord as various of the Saints have done the Lord's bidding.⁶

Elaine Harmston described how she experienced a vision while she was performing a washing and anointing ordinance on a woman in labor:

It was incredible! The whole room was full of sisters [from beyond the veil]. This was a woman's ordinance, [it] had to do with creation, and there was no man there, but there were a lot of women. It was neat. The spirit was incredible, and it has been every time we've done it. Those sisters on the other side of the veil are rejoicing that there are finally some sisters that will stand up and begin to do what the early sisters started and were never able to finish.



Jim Davis and Burt Maistom lay the foundation for a basketball court. In the background sits the Endowment House, with part of it still under construction.

"The seed of Cain will have to wait until all of Adam's posterity . . . receive their blessings through the end of the Millennium"

Another member described an experience with angels in this way:

Our child was born two months premature. We witnessed her spirit leave her body. We witnessed her die, her spirit leave and [then] return to her body after being commanded by the priesthood, which I hold. We've witnessed miracles. We've seen them. There were angels present that morning when our daughter was born. I cannot deny these things.

A primary tenet of the TLC appears to be the expectation of direct, spiritual experience. From what they related to me, these experiences are sometimes surprising, sudden, and shocking, but always strongly felt. Many similar, powerful experiences were recounted to me.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LDS CHURCH

The LDS church will literally be destroyed; the elite TLC remnant will be gathered.

WITH a new church and a new theology, the TLC continues to distance itself from the LDS church and even attack it. Harmston's rhetoric itself has become, over time, sharpened and highly critical of the LDS church. When we met in June 1995, Harmston told me that he has been called by God to denounce the LDS church and to "proclaim it for what it is." From one of the recently published TLC pamphlets:

We, as Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, bear solemn witness that the LDS Church has gone whoring after Babylon and the vain things of the world, has built up the kingdom of the devil and apostatized from her earlier mission and charge. . . . Because of these rebellions and iniquities, she will be destroyed when the fierce and just judgment of God are poured out on the wicked of the earth. The only thing for true Saints to do is to forsake her and get out of her. The desolations soon to come will be a great vexation on those who have embraced [her] falsehoods and lies.⁷

The TLC sent a "Declaration to the Apostles of the LDS Church," dated 25 May 1995, in which, as commanded by the Lord, the "true" apostles of the TLC denounce the leaders of the LDS church:

You, who stand as the leaders of the LDS Church, are helping to bring on the demise and destruction of the

entire Church. We implore you to cease this dark course and repent in sackcloth and ashes, reestablish the doctrines and Celestial principles that will build up Zion and redeem the earth! However, we fear that Satan has such strong cords wrapped around you that you will not escape his grasp. It is much easier to declare to the people that "All is Well," and thus the devil has cheated your souls and leads you carefully down to hell.

... We testify that God's Priesthood authority has been lost to you who profess to guide the LDS Church. Rebellion against the Lord, changing ordinances and covenants, iniquity, and unrighteous dominion has caused the removal of this Priesthood. You now practice priestcraft and deceive over 9 million people into a false hope of salvation and exaltation, and are leading them to destruction.⁸

Harmston is very clear about his feelings toward the LDS church. At the Models last June, he said: "The LDS church has no sealing keys. They have nothing—less than nothing. They are a blasphemy before God—a stench in his nostrils." Several times Harmston has "prophesied" the literal destruction of the LDS church, including the Church Office Building in Salt Lake City. While not claiming that his group will be the author of any direct violence, Harmston declared in June 1995: "The LDS church in Salt Lake City will be completely destroyed. It will fall like a rock in one day. It will happen. God has rejected the Church."⁹ Harmston's condemnation is not limited to the LDS church: "These *are* the Last Days spoken of in all the scriptures, and the sword of justice hangs over this land of America. The blood of the prophets will be avenged on the Nation that shed their blood, even the United States, and upon the House that has rejected their teachings, doctrines, and principles."¹⁰

Harmston claims that a prophecy of Joseph Smith's is now being fulfilled in that "He [God] will seek another people," and that a portion, or remnant, of the original LDS church will be preserved. He calls these people the "heart's core," a people who will put spiritual things first, and who are willing to do God's will. According to Harmston, they will gather in the "mountains hereabout" and will commence anew the work of the Lord in saving the souls of humankind. He claims the TLC is that remnant and that the "elect" of the LDS church will gather with the TLC and be the only remaining faithful members when the final destruction of the earth comes.

This elite, or remnant, represents just a small fraction of the total membership of the LDS church, Harmston explains. He says that the LDS doctrine of the "gathering" was never meant to include everyone, it refers only to a gathering of the "elite." The missionary program of the LDS church is a satanic distortion of the doctrine of the gathering, Harmston claims, and when African Americans were given the priesthood in 1988 ("the darkest day in the history of the Church,"), it was proof-positive that the Church had apostatized. Harmston teaches that God does *not* love everyone equally. In fact, God is a segregationist. Specifically, Harmston believes that black persons are "cursed by God" and must prove their worth in their time

here on earth. He teaches that each person goes through "multiple mortal probationations" where this proving and testing goes on. Those who fail are reborn as blacks. Harmston predicts that LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley will return in his next probation as a black man because of his apostasy in this life. Harmston believes that there are a number of "true" saints and prophets who have had many mortalities and "proved" their worth. The direct descendants of these people (like Joseph Smith) are the elite who will someday be gods and goddesses and dwell in the celestial kingdom.

THE FUTURE OF THE TLC *Schism or unity?*

MANY questions about The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days remain. Will this group maintain itself independent of the larger Fundamentalist groups? Will its charismatic leader, Jim Harmston, be able to shepherd his fledgling church through its first shaky years of organization? Some early associates of the group have already become disenchanted with Harmston's leadership. Will sympathizers continue to journey to Manti and find it a safe and sacred place? Some law enforcement officials are concerned with the possibility of violence. Harmston and his group deny any harmful intent to anyone: quite the contrary, they say they have received death threats, and Harmston is convinced that LDS church leaders will or already have sought his death because of his teachings. Will the practice of polygamy in the group continue to help unify it, or will it divide and separate the community of believers? Already, members have left the main group over disagreements over the practice of plural marriage.

For now, the LDS church, the Sanpete Valley residents, and TLC members struggle to live peaceably and charitably with one another as each religious body and each individual finds their own ways to know God and live according to his precepts. ☐

NOTES

1. I serve on the case reports committee for the Mormon Alliance, which collects and publishes incidents of ecclesiastical abuse in the LDS church. For further information, see Paul J. Toscano, "Dealing with Spiritual Abuse: The Role of the Mormon Alliance," *Sunstone* 16:5 (July 1993), 32.
2. Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Kidnapped From That Land: The Government Raids on the Short Creek Polygamists*, (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1993), 39.
3. Carolyn Campbell, "Miracles in Manti?" *Private Eye Weekly*, 21 Sept. 1994, 9.
4. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957), 20.
5. *The Gathering of the Elect*, (Manti, Utah: The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days, n.d.), 7.
6. From Internet correspondence received by me. Copy in my file.
7. *Zion vs. Babylon*, (Manti, Utah: The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days, n.d.), 25–26.
8. "Declaration to the Apostles of the LDS Church," 25 May 1995, The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days, mimeographed copy in my possession, 1–2.
9. James Harmston. My notes from his "Models" discussions, 4 June 1995.
10. *And Upon My House Shall It Begin*, (Manti, Utah: The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days, n.d.), 12.
11. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 18.