

Fundamentalist Attitudes toward the Church: The Sermons of Leroy S. Johnson

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AT THE AGE OF NINETY-EIGHT, Leroy Sunderland Johnson died in Hildale, Utah, on 25 November 1986. Johnson presided over one of the oldest and largest fundamentalist Mormon groups, organizers of the United Effort Trust in Colorado City, Arizona, formerly known as Short Creek. Accepted as a prophet by his group of fundamentalist Mormons, Johnson's thirty-two years as senior member of the Council of the Priesthood was a time of stability, growth, financial success, and greater public acceptance. An obituary in the January 1987 *Sunstone* magazine called him "a dominant figure in post-manifesto polygamy for over half a century."

A number of fundamentalist groups have broken with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints over plural marriage and related issues. While the various groups most often sympathize with each other, their philosophies and leaders differ distinctly. Johnson's group has never adopted a name, identifying themselves as the fundamentalist arm of the Church. They emphatically reject the violence that has sometimes brought other groups into the public eye and shaped impressions

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of Mormon fundamentalism. Like most fundamentalists, Johnson's group tends to be reclusive, adopting styles and customs distinctly out of fashion. They model their religious organization after the nineteenth-century united order. Those followers I have encountered have always stressed their general goodwill toward the Church. They have many more agreements than disagreements with President Ezra Taft Benson and his predecessors.

Johnson's followers are *not* part of Allred's group of the Apostolic Brethren based in the Salt Lake Valley, the Davis County Kingstonites, the Singer-Swapp family, any of the Mexican-based LeBaron groups which have been involved in notorious killings, or Alex Joseph's Church of Christ in Solemn Assembly. Royston Potter, the former Murray, Utah, police officer who went to court to challenge anti-polygamy laws in the late 1970s was also not a member of Johnson's flock.

The Johnson group traces its priesthood authority from an 1886 vision they claim President John Taylor received while on the underground at the home of John W. Woolley in Centerville, Utah. During the intense prosecutions of polygamy in the 1880s, President Taylor and most other Church leaders went into hiding, moving from one refuge to another protected by bodyguards. In fact, John Taylor died on the underground in 1887, pursued by authorities until the end.

The Woolley home was a favorite stop for Taylor. He often met there with other Church leaders to conduct Church business. Fundamentalists believe Taylor had been considering a proposed statement suspending plural marriage. Jesus Christ and Joseph Smith are said to have appeared to him and instructed him not to give in. The following day, he told some of his party about the vision and set five of them apart to continue plural marriage no matter what the Church might do. The five were Woolley and his son Lorin C. Woolley, George Q. Cannon, Charles H. Wilkins, and Samuel Bateman (Van Wagoner 1986, 183-94).¹ The vision was never presented to the general Church membership for a sustaining vote and indeed, the Church denies its existence (Reimann 1974, 185-224; Anderson 1979; cf. Collier 1979, 145-46; "Four Hidden" (1948): 148-52).

¹ Most fundamentalist Mormon groups trace their priesthood authority to this visitation to Church President John Taylor. The Woolleys did not come forward with their accounts of these events until well into the twentieth century, after the deaths of Cannon and Bateman who, along with Wilkins, left no known account of the experience. The Woolleys maintained steadfastly that these events did happen and were the driving force behind early fundamentalism.

In 1904 President Joseph F. Smith issued the second manifesto in response to the Reed Smoot hearings, apparently closing the door on plural marriage for good (Clark 1971, 4:84-86). In 1912 and again in 1929 the Woolleys came forward, first privately, then publicly, with the "accounts" of the vision. After his excommunication from the Church in 1924, Lorin C. Woolley organized a seven-member priesthood council to continue to advance plural marriage under proper priesthood authority (Van Wagoner 1986, 190-93). After a 1933 "final manifesto" (Clark 1971, 5:315-30), the Church began excommunicating those who continued to support plural marriage. A more organized fundamentalist movement went public. Although families and small groups were spread over Mormon areas of the Rocky Mountain West, the movement increasingly centered on the little desert hamlet of Short Creek on the Utah-Arizona border. Today the Utah side of the community, where Johnson died, is called Hildale, and the Arizona side is Colorado City.

In the mid-1930s a group led by Eldon and Charles Kingston broke away from the Short Creek group. In the early 1950s, the main group divided to create the Allred and Johnson groups. Other splinter groups continue to break off today. The old Short Creek community remains one of the largest and most influential of the organized groups. Many students of Mormon polygamy believe the majority of modern polygamists are not affiliated with any group; some even retain membership in the Church while holding plural wives in secret (Baer 1988, 31-42; Flesher and Freedman 1983; Van Wagoner 1986, 190-222; Anderson 1979; Reimann 1974; Stumbo 1988).

Johnson first came to national public attention in 1953. A secret two-year investigation of his community by the state of Arizona came to a climax with a pre-dawn raid Sunday, 26 July 1953 by 102 law enforcement officers led by Attorney General Ross Jones, another one hundred invited newsmen, and an assortment of judges, social workers, nurses, and a National Guard field kitchen. Arizona governor Howard Pyle had declared the little fundamentalist community to be "an insurrection against the state." Arizona law officers brought 122 arrest warrants and seized 263 children whom the state deemed to be endangered by the fundamentalist environment. The state of Utah joined in by seizing more children and attempting to terminate the parental rights of fundamentalists in court. Eventually a plea bargain resulted in twenty-seven no contest pleas followed by probation, but family and community life in Short Creek was disrupted for years, and the community had to shoulder great financial burdens. To the Short Creek community, it was a traumatic and heart-rending experience.

Much of the national news media played the raid as a comic incident, but the raid was not always applauded. In two critical editorials, the *Arizona Republic*, Arizona's most influential newspaper, likened the raid both to "the hated police-state roundups of the old world" and a Keystone Cops farce (28 July, 1 August 1953). The Phoenix newspaper also commented on 1 August that "[the authorities] must also remember that the state has countenanced polygamy in Short Creek by taking no effective action against it for years."

The raid made headlines in nearly every major newspaper in the country. Johnson, then sixty-five, was identified as one of three leaders of the community. The others were Richard S. Jessop, fifty, and Carl Holm, thirty-six. It was Johnson who acted as the spokesman, calling the raid the "most cowardly act ever perpetrated in the United States," and the police "Storm Troopers masquerading in highway patrol uniforms" (*Deseret News* 27 July 1953, 1).

Johnson organized the community's defense during the raid, arranged bail for the defendants, found legal counsel, and raised funds to pay for it. The raid solidified his authority in Short Creek, leaving little doubt that he was leader after 1953.

From 1953 to 1986 Johnson led the Short Creek group and was a frequent speaker at fundamentalist religious gatherings in the western United States and Canada. His sermons were recorded by tape or shorthand with increasing regularity. Then in the mid-1980s the transcribed Johnson sermons were published as a seven-volume set along with a few sermons attributed to John Y. Barlow by the Twin Cities Courier Press of Hildale, Utah. The full set of the *L. S. Johnson Sermons* contains over three thousand pages of typed, double-spaced text, a sort of fundamentalist *Journal of Discourses*. As might be expected, much of the content deals with fundamentalism and the Church. The books are a rich source of fundamentalist history and beliefs as taught by Johnson and should not be overlooked by scholars.

THE WARREN JOHNSON FAMILY

Johnson's sermons frequently refer to his family, English immigrants who first settled in the East. Johnson recalled that his non-Mormon grandfather, Jeremiah Johnson, "was a polygamist. He had two wives and raised two families [twenty children] in the same home at the same time; but not under the direction of the Holy Priesthood, because he knew nothing about the Priesthood" (1983-84, 1:315). Johnson's father was named Warren. He graduated at twenty-five from "one of the eastern colleges," but because of poor health his doctors gave him only a few months to live and suggested that he might live longer in the more hos-

pitiable climate of California (1:315). So he left his home in Marston, Massachusetts, for the West. He got as far as Dubois, Idaho, "in a nice buggy" before ill health overtook him. He struggled on to Farmington, Utah, where a kind Mormon family named Smith took him in, nursed him back to health, and interested him in the LDS Church. After reading the Book of Mormon, he met Brigham Young in Salt Lake City, "and that was the first time he was absolutely convinced that Mormons did not have horns." He was converted "and entered into the law of plural marriage" (4:1226).

President Young, knowing this new convert was an educated man, "called him to go down into Nevada on the Muddy River and teach school for a colony of the Mormons down there" (4:1226). This settlement, the first of several missions for the older Johnson, was near the former St. Joseph and the present-day Overton, Nevada. Warren was later called by President Young as a missionary to the Navajo Indians in northern Arizona at Lee's Ferry. Johnson recalled that his father served there for twenty-two years until he was released by President Wilford Woodruff (3:864).

John D. Lee, the proprietor of Lee's Ferry, established the ferry in 1871 at Lonely Dell on the Colorado River and operated it until his arrest in 1874 on charges arising from the Mountain Meadows massacre. One of his wives, Emma Lee, operated the ferry until 1879 with the assistance of Warren Johnson. The two were recognized as capable and careful operators. In 1879 Emma Lee left with her family to settle across the river in Arizona. The Church later bought the ferry from her for one hundred cows contributed by the people of southern Utah and northern Arizona. The ferry continued operation until the Marble Canyon bridge was completed in 1929, much of the time under the management of the Warren Johnson family (Peterson 1973, 75-77; Brooks 1957, 292-95; McClintock 1985, 91-97).

After the Manifesto of 1890, Warren Johnson, concerned about his responsibility to his two wives and seventeen children, wrote Apostle and later President Joseph F. Smith. In a 15 December 1891 letter, Smith told him that God did not require men to put away their existing plural families. "What the Lord requires is that we shall not bring upon ourselves the destruction intended by our enemies, by persisting in a course in opposition to the law" (in Lyman 1986, 142). "My father was a man that had lived the law, but he refused to give up his plural families after the Manifesto" (5:254).

Johnson also recalled that his father broke his back and journeyed from Kanab to Salt Lake City "to be blessed under the hands of President Wilford Woodruff. When he came back, he had a

wheelchair—given to him by President Wilford Woodruff. He taught us children to honor and obey the leaders of the Priesthood. That was his great charge to his children, especially his sons—to honor and obey those who presided over them in Priesthood” (1:327).

In 1900 Johnson’s parents moved with Church colonists from southern Utah to Big Horn County, Wyoming. Warren Johnson was still in his wheelchair and made the difficult journey in the back of a wagon. Apparently, the family wanted to find more available land for its twenty children, especially the sons. Johnson’s mother was the only midwife in an area without a doctor. A year after the move, Warren Johnson died and was buried in the small town of Byron (2:557, 597-98; 3:798).

LEROY JOHNSON’S CHILDHOOD

Johnson was born 12 June 1887, probably at Lee’s Ferry, and was baptized at the usual age of eight, a few years after the 1890 Manifesto suspending plural marriage. Although he believed the Manifesto damaged the authority of the priesthood in the Church, he believed “my baptism took” (2:693). Like many pioneers of his generation, Johnson’s formal education was limited by the demanding life of the West. By age eleven, in 1898, he had gone as far as the sixth grade in Kanab, Utah. He was twenty-two before he could return to school and eventually completed the eighth grade. He was one of fourteen adults in the school; only two of them graduated from the eighth grade (6:108-9). He remembered his family had had four children die within one two-week period at Lee’s Ferry (4:1485). When his father died in 1901, Leroy was only fourteen (4:1227). At age seventeen he received a patriarchal blessing which he believed directed him toward his fundamentalist beliefs (2:632).

Johnson’s childhood memories in Big Horn County, Wyoming, include Apostle Abraham Owen Woodruff bearing his testimony “that except the people woke up and accepted the fulness of the gospel and lived it and applied it to their lives, they would not be able to obtain the blessings that the Lord had in store for them in the country” (5:254). Johnson said about Woodruff:

I was only a boy about thirteen years old when Abram O. Woodruff passed away. I heard him talking to my father. He [Woodruff] said “I hope the Lord will take me home before I do anything that will deprive me of my salvation.” This was in Wyoming. He went back to Salt Lake, was asked to go down and preside over the Mexican mission. He went down and established himself there. His wife took small pox and died. A week later, he died with small pox. So, the Lord takes us at our word. (3:881)

Woodruff had been ordained an apostle at age twenty-four in 1897 by his father, then Church President. He died in 1904 in El Paso, Texas, a week after his wife. An advocate of continued plural marriage, his death probably saved him from the Church discipline that came to Apostles John W. Taylor and Matthias Cowley after the second manifesto. Taylor was excommunicated, and Cowley was disfellowshipped in 1911 (Alexander 1986, 66; Jorgensen and Hardy 1980).

Leroy Johnson lived most of his life within the sphere of the devout Mormon community of St. George, about forty-five miles from present-day Colorado City. According to a recent study, more than two men in five in St. George in the 1870s and 1880s participated in plural marriages, the majority of married women were plural wives, and the majority of children grew up in plural families. Johnson's childhood experiences in a devout plural family in the 1890s were the norm, not the exception. Young people married early even by pioneer Mormon standards, usually by their late teens. For both men and women, status within the community and the Church was closely tied to participation in a plural marriage (Logue 1988, 44-71). It is not surprising that Johnson absorbed most of St. George's religious and cultural attitudes.

JOHNSON AS A CHURCH MEMBER

Leroy Johnson believed in continued plural marriage before he was even aware of the fundamentalist movement. "I tried for some years before I became acquainted with President Barlow or President John W. Woolley to get into the principle of plural marriage, because I had it in my heart" (3:1159). Woolley was the first acknowledged leader of the modern fundamentalist movement, having been excommunicated by the Church in March 1914 for "insubordination to the discipline of the government of the Church" for continuing to perform plural marriages as Salt Lake Stake Patriarch ("Excommunication" 1914). Johnson heard of the Woolleys and fundamentalism as early as 1924 (4:1433) or 1926 (5:241) and first met John W. Woolley in 1928, the year Woolley died. "I shook hands with him and heard his story on the 1886 revelation, and I believed it" (4:1504). Johnson recalled that he was very outspoken in his belief in "the Celestial Law" but "had not taken any action about it any further than to express my feelings." Johnson's stake president repeatedly scheduled interviews with him "regarding my worthiness of being maintained in the Church," but he recalled that the stake president kept missing them out of a fear of the confrontation (4:1268). This was probably in the mid-1930s.

In fundamentalism's early years stories were rife of continued plural marriage by the General Authorities of the Church (Quinn 1983, 183-85). In 1976 Johnson recalled a Kanab sermon preached by President Heber J. Grant in which he found subtle support for his fundamentalist leanings.

I had just listened to a conference report and heard President Grant speak from the stand, and I thought he condemned the law of plural marriage, the Celestial Law, pretty severely.² I had been laboring for some time to get the Spirit of the Gospel, and President Grant had scheduled a stopover in Kanab and was going to speak to the people. I went to the Lord and told him I was going to that meeting and for Him to cause that Brother Grant would give me the key as to whether plural marriage could be lived in this day or not. (4:1243)

He felt Grant did give him such a key. While Grant did not speak directly on the subject, Johnson came away satisfied. "Every once in a while he dropped a word to let me know that the true principles of the gospel were always discarded by the majority of the people" (4:1244).

Before his excommunication Johnson, his older brother Price, Isaac Carling, and their wives had driven to Salt Lake City to attend general conference. The women attended the meetings in the Tabernacle; but at Price Johnson's urging, the men met with another group in Cottonwood. At this meeting, Johnson first met Joseph Musser, John Y. Barlow, and other fundamentalist leaders. At first Johnson resisted the fundamentalists' ideas, but over the next few weeks as he discussed them with his brother, he became convinced they were true. Shortly thereafter Musser and Barlow visited Short Creek with their families, which further solidified Johnson's testimony. "It doesn't make any difference what men say, I know that President Barlow holds the key of the Priesthood," he told a friend (6:346).

THE SHORT CREEK EXCOMMUNICATIONS

About the time of Musser and Barlow's visit, President Grant gave his new counselor J. Reuben Clark, appointed in 1933, a mandate to end secret plural marriage in the Church. Clark, a relative of the

² Grant made formal public statements over a number of years denouncing continued plural marriage. He threatened excommunication and the full cooperation of the Church in criminal prosecutions of offenders. These statements came at the April 1921 general conference, a widely circulated letter of September 1925, the October 1926 and April 1931 general conferences, and the sixteen-page June 1933 "Final Manifesto" that was read aloud in every congregation of the Church (Clark 1971; Quinn 1983, 182-85; Alexander 1986, 60-73).

Woolleys,³ went at it with great energy. He employed a sort of ecclesiastical loyalty oath which required suspected fundamentalists to repudiate fundamentalist teachings and the suggestion that plural marriage continue in any form (Quinn 1983, 184-85).

Perhaps Musser and Barlow's Short Creek visit forced Johnson's Church leaders to act. He recalled his eventual excommunication as coming in 1935. "The high council came out to Short Creek in 1935 and called us on the carpet and told us our die was cast and that we were only to accept or reject their edict, there would be no argument." The presiding officer was President Claud Hirschi (6:342). At the time Short Creek was in the Zion Park Stake (now the Hurricane Utah Stake).

According to Johnson, the high council delivered its message, and a ward clerk then circulated "a little paper to sign," probably the loyalty oath. The fundamentalist periodical published the text of a sample oath in its March 1936 issue:

I, the undersigned member of the Millville Ward of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly declare and affirm that I, without any mental reservation whatsoever, support the Presidency and Apostles of the Church; that I repudiate any intimation that any one of the Presidency or Apostles of the Church is living a double life; that I repudiate those who are falsely accusing them, that I denounce the practice and advocacy of plural marriage as being out of harmony with the declared principles of the Church at the present time; and that I myself am not living in such alleged marriage relationship.

Johnson and his wife Josephine discussed it and decided not to sign. Only four or five members of the Short Creek congregation were willing to sign it. Most members of the ward, including the Johnsons, were notified of their excommunication a few days later.⁴ Johnson found his

³ Clark was himself the child of a plural family. His mother, Mary Woolley Clark, was a daughter of Edwin D. Woolley and plural wife Mary Wickersham. John W. Woolley was a brother of Mary Woolley Clark, making him J. Reuben Clark's uncle. Lorin C. Woolley was therefore Clark's cousin. Another of Clark's cousins, Janet Maria Woolley, would become a post-manifesto plural wife of excommunicated apostle John W. Taylor (Taylor 1974, 1-52; Quinn 1983, 181-83; Parkinson 1967, 196-99, 313-14, 334-35).

⁴ The Short Creek congregation was attached to the Rockville Ward of the Zion Park Stake. The Transcript of Ward Record for 1934 and 1935 shows twenty-two excommunications for polygamy-related matters. Johnson, who was a high priest at the time, was excommunicated along with his wife and fifteen others on 7 September 1935 for refusing to sign the loyalty oath. The excommunications of the twenty-two were for refusing to sign the oath, for preaching plural marriage, or for practicing it. Johnson's brother Price and a plural wife, Helen Hull, were among those excommunicated on 30 August 1934.

excommunication to be “a great load . . . lifted off my shoulders,” but his wife “felt like the earth had fallen out from under her.” For a while the couple met with and were courted by other Mormon dissenters, but eventually they chose the Woolley group (6:343).

Johnson referred to his excommunication as being “handled by the Church,” meaning that “I have no records in the Church today” (5:151). In 1970 he rejected the importance of his excommunication, saying, “They may have gone through the motions of excommunicating me, but how can they excommunicate a man for believing what Joseph Smith taught?” (1:233).

Sometime after the Short Creek excommunications, the Church sent an emissary, an Elder Crawford of Rockville, Utah, a returned missionary,

to come out to Short Creek and preach repentance to us. He was an ambitious young man, full of faith, as far as the Church was concerned. He was very definite in his explanation of what he was sent out to Short Creek for... He went on at great lengths to let us know that we had committed one of the greatest sins a people could commit in breaking away from the Church and claiming plural marriage to be a great saving principle. (1:342)

Apparently Barlow became Short Creek’s spiritual leader, and Musser returned to Salt Lake City where he edited the fundamentalist periodical *Truth*. Barlow, as senior member of the Priesthood Council, soon ordained Johnson as a member of the Council of the Priesthood and as his successor in the leadership of Short Creek (Baer 1988, 38). Barlow, who kept homes in Short Creek and Salt Lake City, died in 1949 at age seventy-four in Salt Lake City.

JOHNSON ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SHORT CREEK

Over the years, Short Creek (or Colorado City, as it was later known) became more than just a small town hidden in the “Arizona Strip” north of the Grand Canyon. Johnson’s sermons reflect its special religious significance for fundamentalists.

He taught that through inspiration three or four landowners offered the site “as a starting place for the gathering of the saints.” The site “was choice above all other spots of ground in the surrounding country. In fact, the statement was made that the time would come when one acre of this ground would produce more than ten acres of the best soil in Salt Lake Valley” (3:844). However, Joseph Musser had said that this richness would only be realized “when you are united” (4:1465).

Brigham Young had considered successful colonization of the St. George area and nearby Muddy River, Nevada, a high priority. Over a thousand families were called on missions in the 1860s and 1870s to settle in southwestern Utah, Johnson's parents among them. In 1864 Young built a home in St. George and began spending his winters there. The Church committed substantial resources to keeping the colonists afloat (Arrington 1958, 217-23; 1985, 295, 308-10; Logue 1988, 8-12).

According to Johnson, Brigham Young had visited the Short Creek area along with George Q. Cannon, his counselor in the First Presidency. Johnson claimed that in 1926 Young's buggy driver, an old man in Rockville named Gifford, related the following story to him. Young and Cannon were traveling by buggy from St. George to Kanab. The prophet ordered his driver to stop while he surveyed the land. "This will someday be the head and not the tail of the Church. This will be the granaries of the saints. This land will produce an abundance sufficient wheat [*sic*] to feed the people" (3:854-55).

JOHNSON ON THE MANIFESTO OF 1890

President Wilford Woodruff pledged through the Manifesto of 1890 to discontinue plural marriage and urged Church members to abide by federal laws which prohibited the practice. The Manifesto was widely opposed in the Church, and it was a generation before it was truly enforced (Quinn 1985, 9-105; 1983, 179-86; Alexander 1986, 60-73). Johnson and other fundamentalists see the Manifesto of 1890 as the event that divided the Church.

We all know that Wilford Woodruff signed a manifesto in order to make the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a part of the world, or in other words, in order to save our dignity with the world, he made a covenant with them that we could do away with the Celestial Law. (1:317)

In 1890 the Manifesto was signed by the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and not only did they sign away their privileges to the New and Everlasting Covenant, or the law of Plural Marriage, but they broke every other commandment that God has given. Why? Because God says: Break one of these commandments and you are guilty of the whole. (1:211-12)

As a result, Johnson taught, "This [Short Creek] is the only place, my brothers and sisters, upon the earth that you can hear the fullness of the everlasting gospel preached" (1:212). He described the Manifesto as a work of evil: "The evil powers tried to destroy that which God had set up, but before He allowed this condition to transpire, He provided an

escape for this revelation to be continued" (2:533). He saw the Manifesto as "one of the greatest stumbling blocks of all times," allowed by the Lord as "the great test" of the righteous (4:1357). The Church "tried to make peace with the enemy by signing away their rights to Holy Priesthood" (4:1339), and "the Lord caused a division to come upon the Latter-day Saints" (4:1535).

Johnson preached in a 1976 sermon:

"But," says the enemy of righteousness, "we live in a different age. What was good for the people in the days of the Prophet Joseph is not necessary in the lives of the people in the day in which we live." This is not so, my brothers and sisters, for God says: "My word is one eternal round, and what I say to one I say to all. My purposes never fail. And all who will not listen and put into their lives the Gospel of Jesus Christ will fall by the wayside." (4:1307)

Johnson also taught that the Manifesto did not prohibit continued plural marriage but left the choice up to individuals. "After Wilford Woodruff signed the manifesto, the Lord told him that it was now pleasing in His sight that men should use their own judgment regarding these principles. He also says in this book, the Doctrine and Covenants, that except a man obeys the laws that pertain to the blessings of Celestial Glory, he cannot obtain it. So, we are only trying to keep alive the principles of life and salvation" (1:234).

JOHNSON ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUSBANDS AND WIVES

Johnson said of his community's uncommon family structure, "I do not believe in polygamy, and I do not like the word. The Lord does not use it." His term and, he believed, the Lord's term, was "plural marriage" (3:1021).

In a 1974 sermon concerning peace in the home and among wives, Johnson taught that in the celestial kingdom "there are three heavens or degrees." He quoted J. Golden Kimball to the effect that it took more than plural wives to ensure an exalted station in the heavenly kingdom. Then he asked the men in his Colorado City congregation, "Are you training those wives so they will be in harmony with you and take you into the highest degree of the Celestial Glory and give eternal increase?" (3:807-9).

At another point while preaching on a similar theme, he quoted Brigham Young: "The Prophet Brigham Young said that the law of plurality would damn more than it would save. And this is true. Why? Because we treat lightly that ordinance. We do not know how to train

ourselves when we get them. We labor under a great delusion. Many of us think that when we have wives sealed to us that we have our calling and election made sure, and we need not go further, but this is not so" (2:422). If a properly sealed plural family lived obediently, on the morning of resurrection only the husbands could "bring . . . forth" their wives (2:747).

JOHNSON ON THE FUNDAMENTALISTS AND THE CHURCH

Johnson and his group never pretended to form a new church. Johnson always identified the Colorado City community as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1:14-18; 3:950; 4:1479) or "the Fundamentalist group of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (2:693).

Johnson and other fundamentalists distinguish between the priesthood and the "monogamist," "popular," or "corporate church." The Church, according to their view, is a legal creation to satisfy gentile expectations and is subordinate to the priesthood quorums. It is "a vehicle of the Priesthood, instead of the Priesthood being a vehicle of the Church" (1:173).

Describing his beliefs, Johnson said, "It is not in modern doctrines of the Church, but it is the original doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the fundamental principles. I was grateful when I heard that Mark E. Peterson [sic] branded us as 'FUNDAMENTALISTS'" (4:1491). He once called his group "the fundamentalists of the Fundamentalist division of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (4:1635).

Some people think because we speak of the everlasting Gospel and the law of Plural Marriage, that we have pulled away and left the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and that we have hung on to one principle of the Gospel, namely, plural marriage, and discard everything else. This is not true. For we believe that no man can receive the Celestial Law without first coming in at the door of Baptism for the remission of sins and keeping himself clean and pure from the sins of the generation in which we live. (1:210)

Yet he had observed in 1952, "We have separated ourselves from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as it now stands" (5:28).

As if to underscore this connection with the Church, in 1952 Johnson delivered a sermon on the Articles of Faith. After presenting all thirteen Articles of Faith, he said,

There is only one thing in which we differ from those who profess to be Latter-day Saints today, and that is in living of the higher principles of the Gospel

as they were revealed to the Prophet Joseph and given to him. Because they conflict with the laws of the land seemingly, they have been abandoned and laid on the shelf. And because we contend that they are as true today as they were the day they were given to Joseph Smith, we are condemned; and they say we are trying to establish something new and advance new ideas in the earth. (1:15-16)

In this context, Johnson somewhat indignantly charged that his followers were “a people who had been branded as apostates from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when they have only done that which the Lord has commanded” (1:212).

JOHNSON ON THE STANDARD WORKS

Johnson and his fundamentalist group embrace the scriptural standard works of the Mormon Church unreservedly as the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price (4:1503). “I hold in my hand the standard works of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” said Johnson in a 1977 sermon in Salt Lake City. “So every man, woman and child that believes in this book is under condemnation unless they live according to the teachings in it. There is nothing else for us to do, my brothers and sisters, in this day now, a hundred and fifty years since the Prophet Joseph brought this work into the world, but preach repentance to a generation of people who are unbelievers” (4:1420). Sermons delivered from the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants were the norm for Johnson, coupled with praise of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, and others. “We have been greatly blessed because we have this Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Mormon, and the Pearl of Great Price to refer to as the word of God to the generation in which we live” (4:1704).

JOHNSON ON THE JOURNAL OF DISCOURSES

Johnson and his followers believe with considerable pride that because of them the *Journal of Discourses*, a lengthy compilation of the sermons of nineteenth-century Church leaders, is available to twentieth-century Latter-day Saints.

He often told his followers that the orthodox Church “sent agents out around the country gathering up the *Journals of Discourses* [sic] and the *Millennial Star*” (1:136; 4:1690). He claimed these agents had visited those who owned copies and also bought them from retail and used book stores. Presumably this was to suppress previous teachings promoting plural marriage. He charged that the Church had “removed from the homes of the Latter-day Saints the testimonies of the early leaders of this Church. . . . They gathered up their literature and burned it, so

they could not get it" (5:345). Apparently at some point there was an effort by the Church to take the *Journal of Discourses* out of circulation (Taylor 1978, 233). Johnson recalled this happening "in about 1924-25" (4:1525).

Johnson recalled that in 1954 fundamentalists republished the set at a cost of \$55,000, and sold them through Deseret Book after an initial press run of five hundred were "scattered among the people and libraries" (1:61; 4:1490, 1525). Johnson claimed that "this incited the envy of the leaders of the Church. Why? Because the *Journals of Discourses* [sic] were being distributed among the people of the Church, and it wasn't by the consent of the Church" (1:228). He believed the Lord had inspired his servants to have the fundamentalists republish the set (3:1191) and considered it the greatest missionary accomplishment of the previous thirty years (1:298).

Johnson also reacted indignantly to what he saw as an attempt in 1930 by the Church to replace the Doctrine and Covenants with a volume by Apostle James E. Talmage called *Revelations of a More Enduring Value*. The replacement took out of the original collection "some two hundred sections and parts of sections." The effort was a failure, according to Johnson (1:317-18; 3:1209-10; 4:1660, 1681).⁵

JOHNSON ON TEMPLES

Johnson looked forward to the day when he and his followers would again enjoy the blessings of the temples although they did not believe that temples are essential for the exercise of priesthood authority in performing sealing ordinances. They believe their leadership had that authority in a direct line from John Taylor and that unions performed under proper priesthood authority are for time and eternity. Speaking of his people, Johnson said that "there is nothing in the world I would like to see more than to see them prepare themselves for the holy temple, that they might go there and receive their endowments" (2:675). He presumed all fundamentalists felt the same way. "There isn't anyone here but what would like to have access to the temples of our God and have their work done" (1:175). He seems never to have lost the respect for Mormon temple rites and his own temple marriage (6:360-61).

But Johnson disapproved of substantial changes he noted in LDS temple ceremonies early in the twentieth century—changes in both content and manner of presentation of temple ordinances, evident

⁵ The author has attempted to verify the publication of such a volume but as of this writing has been unable to do so.

when Johnson said he last visited a temple (see Buerger 1983, 10-44; 1987, 33-76).

When I see the great trend of the people today, the great cry of the Latter-day Saints is to go to the temples and be married for time and all eternity; but the ordinances of the temples have been changed in my days. They do not receive the same instructions today that were given to us when I went through the temple. I went through the temple first in 1914. The last time I was permitted to go through the temple was in 1928. In that short period of time, great changes had taken place. So, I know that the changes that have been made over the years are mockery in the sight of our Father; for He is not pleased with the Latter-day Saints, including a great number of the fundamentalist arm of the Latter-day Saints. (3:1091-92)

Referring to the Latter-day Saint community in general, Johnson said in 1973, that "since we have desecrated our covenants that were made in the holy temple, and we have changed the ordinances and broken the everlasting covenant, we have got to repent of these things" (2:675).

JOHNSON ON THE FULLNESS OF THE GOSPEL

Johnson was convinced that most members of the Church did not enjoy a fullness of the gospel. "The majority of those who bear the name of the Latter-day Saints have rejected the fullness of the everlasting gospel. Why have they rejected it? Because they have thought more of their own judgment than they did of the Prophets of God" (5:190). He applauded the missionary efforts of the orthodox Church, but he qualified that praise. "Even those who are being converted today to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do not believe in the fundamental principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as they were given to the Prophet Joseph Smith" (4:1704).

JOHNSON ON THE LINE OF PRIESTHOOD AUTHORITY

According to Johnson, at some point after the death of John W. Woolley in 1928, Woolley appeared in a vision to his son, Lorin C. Woolley, who was then head of the fundamentalists. The father instructed the son to call and set apart

to carry this work along . . . Joseph Leslie Broadbent, John Y. Barlow, Joseph Musser, Charles F. Zitting, LeGrand Woolley, and Louis Kelsch. . . . And before John Y. Barlow passed away, he called Leroy S. Johnson and J. Marion Hammon and had them set apart as Apostles of the Lord, Jesus Christ. He later called President Guy H. Musser and Rulon Jeffs⁶ and had them set apart. Later on he called Richard Jessop and Carl Holm, and Brother Alma Timpson. (4:1606-7)

Johnson would sometimes trace the fundamentalist line of priesthood authority for his followers. "The Gospel is true. Joseph Smith was

a Prophet of God. Brigham Young was his successor in the line of Priesthood. John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff, John W. Woolley, Lorin Woolley, Leslie Broadbent, John Y. Barlow, Joseph White Musser, Charles F. Zitting and the Council you see before you are also successors in the line of Priesthood" (3:1153).

JOHNSON ON THE RAIDS ON SHORT CREEK

Johnson's sermons contain repeated references to various "raids," especially the Arizona raid on Short Creek on 26 July 1953. He recalled "that great day when the army came in and took over the city of Short Creek. . . . They took the men out and put them in jail. They ravaged their homes, took their wives and children, loaded them on buses and took them away" (3:1081). He also remembered it as the day "we were carried away by the unbelievers" (2:693).

Johnson believed that the Lord:

had to know again how the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints felt toward the Celestial Law, so, this is what happened: soon after these people landed in Phoenix, Arizona, there was a quarterly conference held in Mesa, Arizona. President David O. McKay was in that conference and he made this statement, "I want the people to know that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is in full harmony with the actions of the state of Arizona in the Short Creek episode." What did it mean? Wait and see. It isn't over yet, and I doubt very much if the persecution of this people is over. (3:1082)

Arizona authorities concede they had kept the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints informed of their plans for the raid (Maloney 1953; Quinn 1983, 186), and the Church-owned *Deseret News* applauded the action on 27 July 1953 saying, "We hope the unfortunate activities at Short Creek will be cleaned up once and for all."

Johnson taught that the orthodox Church supported the 1953 raid financially. "They answered to the tune of \$50,000 to assist the state in carrying away the women and children of this people" (4:1391). At other times he said they provided \$100,000 in support and that the legal costs of the fundamentalists were \$50,000 (1:227). The Short Creek raid continued a policy of supporting prosecutions for plural marriage that dated back to President Heber J. Grant (Quinn 1986, 184-87; Clark 1971, 5:292-303).

Johnson also was convinced the Church was behind the 1944 raids:

⁶ Rulon Jeffs succeeded Johnson in 1986 (Bitton 1987).

Sometime along the line, President Grant made remarks that he would like to live to see all these polygamists behind bars. And he did. When the 1944 raid came along, they arrested Brother Musser and Brother Barlow and put them in jail along with Brother Zitting and others, Brother Kelsch. And do you know what happened? After the prison gates closed behind these men, President Grant passed away. So, he lived long enough to see them behind the bars. (4:1386)

Johnson felt his own children and others had been abused and taunted because of their modesty and beliefs while in Arizona state foster care (5:382-83), but he once suggested that supplies sent in by the state of Arizona to provide for families "while we laid in prison" might have been an indication of God's support and protection. He was proud that the fundamentalists came out of the ordeal with little or no long-term debt (3:1000.) He believed the Lord would always deliver his chosen people from the enemies; for him the outcome of the 1953 raid was proof of that. "We learned in the raid of 1953 that the Lord was willing to deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, simply because we were willing to do things that he asked us to do" (3:1026).

Johnson saw the raid and President McKay's statement as a turning point. "The key is turned and from now on we will win the battles of the saints," he recalled telling his wife (4:1391).

A Christmas day 1954 letter from Johnson to his religious community reflects the still fresh trauma of the 1953 raid:

Today we find ourselves threatened with the experience of being separated from our children and we feel like the Lord surely will not allow this to happen. . . . Let us as parents gather our families around us as much as circumstances will permit and . . . seek to get the spirit of God and keep it so that God will be pleased to grant unto us deliverance at this time. (1:132)

JOHNSON ON DAVID O. MCKAY

Johnson often commented on President David O. McKay. In 1960 he compared their respective priesthood authority: "President McKay has the same opportunity that I have, but he has rejected the saving principles of the gospel. . . . President McKay had the gospel given to him in a pure line from the Prophet Joseph Smith, and so did I" (5:151).

But when President McKay died in 1970, Johnson praised the man who had supported earlier prosecutions.

Today, nearly three million people are mourning the loss of a great leader. He took his place in the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and he filled it with honor before the people. I don't know of a man who has been loved by a greater number of people than has David O. McKay. It will be a great day of mourning and admiration given to his name, and I want this people to understand

that the priesthood join in with the rest of the world in mourning the passing of David O. McKay. (1:147)

Johnson also paid attention to the public comments of other Church leaders and sometimes announced his approval. For instance, in 1976 he applauded a Brigham Young University commencement address on improving morality within the Mormon community (3:1218).

In 1963 Johnson expressed some satisfaction that “offshoots” of fundamentalism had drawn attention away from his group.

We are glad for all these things because the fire is taken away from us. The Church now is about to fight some of these offshoots because they have carried the fight to the Church, and we have kept our mouths shut as far as the Church is concerned. . . . We might say a few things here that sound like we are fighting the Church teeth and toenails, but we have kept the commandments of the Lord in this. . . . If we have to stand and face the enemy, we will do it. But if the Lord has another offshoot from the Church to take the fire away from us while we do our work, that is all right, because we want to get our work done. (5:305-6).

JOHNSON ON CONTEMPORARY LIFE

Johnson was skeptical of much modern thought. He rejected evolutionary theory: “In my growing-up years, I ran across a book called the Darwin Theory. I only read a small part of it, but I read enough to tell me that if I read anymore I wouldn’t be Mormon” (3:949). He was suspicious of space exploration and saw it as an effort to discredit God (1:118-19). In a 1962 sermon, he worried aloud about the Cuban missile crisis and a son he had serving in the Marines at that time (5:277). He disapproved of the low morality of the Nixon administration (3:907). He frequently preached against long hair on men but said “the woman’s hair is her glory . . . and there are certain ordinances of the Priesthood that she will need beautiful hair in order to perform” (3:1189).

He thought little of modern fashion and was distressed that “the daughters of Zion would walk the streets of our great and glorious city of Salt Lake as harlots; and you will not be able to tell the face of a Saint from a Gentile” (5:14). He instructed parents never to allow their small children to run naked, but to clothe them, teach them modesty “and the sacredness of their bodies” (6:231). In 1974 he urged members who had television in their homes to “get rid of it” because of the harmful influences on their families (3:890). He disliked television crews who came to film exposés on the community (4:1616). He urged his follow-

ers to clean up dirty or unsightly homes and guard against accidents. "The spirit of God cannot come to a home that is ill-kept, while He blesses the occupants of it with health and strength" (5:311).

JOHNSON ON THE MISSION OF FUNDAMENTALISM

Johnson explained the religious mission of his community in a 1970 sermon in Salt Lake City.

The reason for us gathering people together and teaching them like we have been teaching them today is to try and bring up a people that Joseph Smith can use when he comes to set in order the House of God; for we believe that Joseph Smith is the One Mighty and Strong, who will come here clothed with power and the mantle of righteousness to set in order the House of God. He has to have men prepared for that great work. He has to have men who have not fought against the laws of the Celestial Kingdom; because God has said that Zion cannot be redeemed only upon principles of the Celestial Kingdom. (1:233)

In 1974 Johnson stated this purpose more simply, "These principles have got to be kept alive" (3:886).

Leroy Johnson, prophet of fundamentalists, and his followers may seem like a footnote in the total Mormon experience. They have not attracted much attention from scholars. However, a study of the Mormon fundamentalist movement provides remarkably illuminating insights on the experience of the Church and its accommodations to a modern society. The Johnson sermons contain a wealth of history for both nineteenth and twentieth-century Mormon historians.

Fundamentalism is essentially a protest movement against the religious and cultural accommodations the Church made as it searched for a way to survive under the often savage pressures of the gentile world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those accommodations began with the 1890 manifesto and gained speed during the long administration of President Grant. Fundamentalism strives to remain close to the Mormonism of the 1880s, which is seen as the golden age of the faith. By studying fundamentalist beliefs, we better understand those changes. Although plural marriage is the most obvious topic, shifts and changes can also be seen in temple ceremonies, religious communalism, the Word of Wisdom, and the strong hold of religious leaders over the last century's Mormons, a hold that is considerably diminished today.

With the organized criminal prosecutions of the fundamentalists ending in the late 1950s, the community now seems much more secure in its relationship with the outside world and more ready to tell its story to outsiders. The time is certainly ripe for scholars to listen.

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Photographs courtesy of the Leroy S. Johnson family.