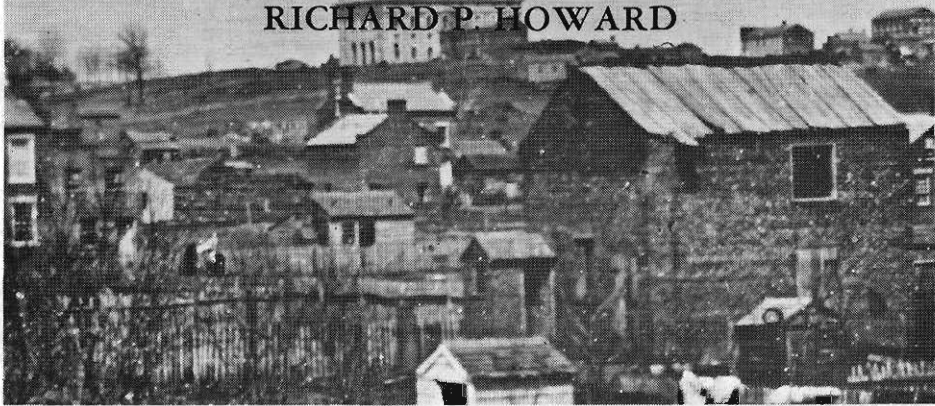


THE REORGANIZED CHURCH IN ILLINOIS, 1852-82: SEARCH FOR IDENTITY RICHARD P. HOWARD



The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (hereafter referred to as the RLDS Church) was headquartered in the State of Illinois until 1882. To a greater degree than that of any other descendant of the early Mormon movement, the history of the RLDS Church in that early period is the story of a people in search of their personal and corporate identity. The search for identity first occurred in terms of what might be called the "Mormon boundary" — that is, the RLDS Church tended to identify itself in terms of what it was *not*, by contrasting itself with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter referred to as the LDS Church). The RLDS Church also sought to define itself by constructing internal boundaries — boundaries of authority, of internal structure and of religious dogma and belief. Finally, identity was sought through the attempt to establish new and workable boundaries to the Kingdom of God on Earth.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RLDS CHURCH TO 1852

The large contingent of Saints who migrated to the Great Salt Lake Basin had, relatively speaking, little or no identity crisis. They had limitless land, isolation from the outside world for nearly a decade, and the creative and resourceful guidance of established leaders. These leaders were both able and disposed to exploit the potential of the Council of Fifty and to elicit the allegiance of the Saints for the trek westward and for the rigors of transforming the parched basin into fertile farmlands. Incalculable stores of energy and ingenuity were invested to rebuild in the Great Basin that which was so tragically aborted at Nauvoo. Eventually they carved out a Great Basin empire, in keeping with, and perhaps even surpassing, the fondest dreams of those who had planned Nauvoo.

Meanwhile, in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Pennsylvania, New York, Kentucky, Canada and Ohio, there were hundreds of faithful Saints in tiny, semi-isolated branches of the Church. These Saints were not economically able or ideologically inclined to migrate to the West but they earnestly sought continued outlet and expression for their faith. Many of these people united with one factional leader, then another, and still another in the search for a viable representation of what they understood to be the gospel of Jesus

Christ. They worked quietly on their farms and at their trades, remembering with nostalgia their part in ushering forth the Kingdom of God on Earth. Many had lived in Nauvoo, others had lived in Kirtland or in Jackson County, Missouri. They longed to participate again in what Klaus Hansen has called the "Quest for Empire."¹ They wondered if any of the proliferating sects springing from the wreckage of Nauvoo could offer such a possibility. They wondered also whether a zealous promulgation of the gospel might bring continued hostility and rebuff. The immediate events which led to the establishment of the RLDS Church took place in southern Wisconsin. Jason W. Briggs, a native of Beloit in Rock County, was converted to Mormonism in 1841. He organized the Newark Branch in Beloit, and after the death of Joseph Smith, associated himself with James J. Strang.² However, Briggs parted with Strang in 1850 in order to affiliate with the faction led by the deceased prophet's brother, William B. Smith. Briggs' attraction to Smith had initially rested upon the principle of lineal succession in the presidency. According to William Smith this principle provided that he was to lead the Church by virtue of his previous ordination as patriarch, and because he, as well as all of his brothers, had been blessed under the hands of the first patriarch of the Church, Joseph Smith, Sr. As the only remaining brother, William Smith laid claim to the prophetic office. Many responded to that claim initially, but when William espoused the practice of polygamy after the conference at Covington, Kentucky, in the spring of 1850 there was a considerable decrease in his following. In the summer of 1851 when Smith and some of his followers came from Illinois to visit Briggs, Briggs became disillusioned with Smith's position on polygamy. By the early fall of 1851 he had severed ties with Smith and had influenced most of his congregation to do likewise.

On November 18, 1851, on the prairie near Beloit, Briggs experienced what he called a vision and a revelation. The document resulting from that experience was written by Briggs very soon after the event, and was read by a number of his congregation. Significant excerpts follow:

. . . And because you have asked me in faith concerning William Smith, this is the answer of the Lord thy God concerning him. . . . William Smith [has] despised my law, and forfeited that which pertained to him as an Apostle and High Priest in my Church. And his spokesman, Joseph Wood, shall fall with him, for they are rejected of me. . . , for they have wholly forsaken my law, and given themselves to all manner of uncleanness, and prostituted my law and the keys of power entrusted to them, to the lusts of the flesh, and have run greedily in the way of adultery. . . . And in mine own due time will I call the seed of Joseph Smith, and will bring one

¹Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty* (East Lansing, 1967).

²Shortly after the death of Joseph Smith, Jr., Strang proclaimed himself to be the rightful successor to Smith and produced a letter, allegedly written by Smith, which designated him as the next prophet. Strang attracted many zealous and capable people to his cause. He located first at Voree, Wisconsin. In 1847 he migrated with some of his sect to Beaver Island, one of a group of twelve islands lying near the northern end of Lake Michigan.

forth, and he shall be mighty and strong, and he shall preside over the high priesthood of my Church; and then shall the quorums assemble, and the pure in heart shall gather, and Zion shall be re-inhabited. . . . And the Spirit said unto me, Write, write, write; — write the revelation and send it unto the Saints at Palestine [Illinois], and at Voree, and at Waukesha, and to all places where this doctrine is taught as my law; — and whomsoever will humble themselves before me, and ask of me, shall receive of my Spirit a testimony that these words are of me. Even so, Amen.³

Here, in what has sometimes been referred to as the first document of the "New Organization," the origin of its early means of identity is apparent. There is a rejection of leaders who endorse polygamy, which had been represented as the Celestial Law of the Lord, and a rejection of all leaders other than the one to be called forth from the seed of Joseph Smith, Jr. The principle of the gathering and the resettling of God's people back in Zion, which would be a matter of great importance and tension among the members of the RLDS Church, is also evident.

Some of Briggs' congregation questioned his right to receive revelation for the Church, but they acted upon the promise stated in the last sentence, and put the document to the test. As they became convinced of its authenticity the document was copied and circulated throughout the area.

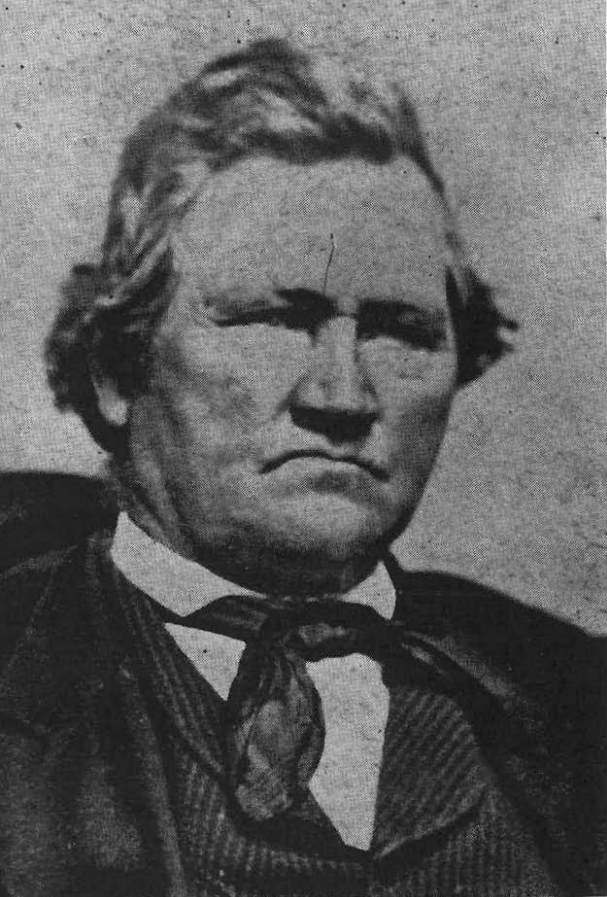
Early in 1852 a copy of Briggs's revelation reached Zenas H. Gurley in Lafayette County, Wisconsin.⁴ Gurley had been one of the presidents of the Quorum of Seventy in Nauvoo and in 1852 presided over the Yellow Stone Branch, which had associated itself with James Strang. Gurley's group was ripe for the reception of a communication like the one from Jason Briggs. Gurley had received what to him were unmistakable witnesses by the Holy Spirit that he and his followers ought to break with Strang. Recounting a visionary experience he had on a Sunday evening in the fall of 1851, Gurley wrote, "At this time Strang's Beaver Island operation appeared before me. It looked mean and contemptible beyond description. A voice — the Spirit of God — the Holy Ghost, then said to me, 'Can this [alluding to Strang's work] ever affect this great work?' I answered, 'No, Lord.' I felt ashamed to think that I had ever thought so. The voice then said, 'Rise up, cast off all that claim to be prophets, and go forth and preach the gospel, and say that God will raise up a prophet to complete his work.'"⁵

As Gurley shared these and other experiences with some of the members in the Yellow Stone Branch, they decided by consensus that the proper course to follow was to disassociate themselves from the leadership of Strang and from the influence of any of the other factional leaders claiming the prophetic mantle. Before receiving the Briggs communication, members of the Yellow Stone Branch had published the following statement in several

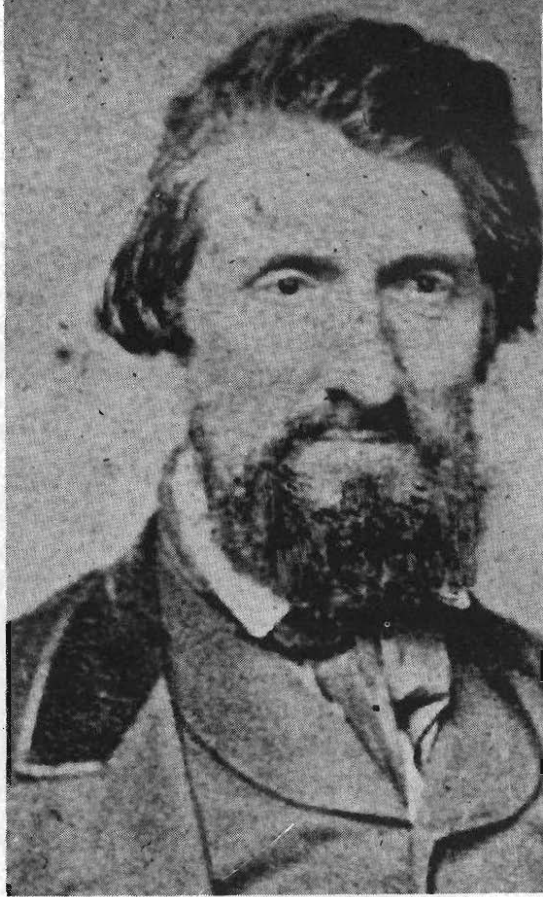
³Jason W. Briggs, "History of the Reorganization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," in *The Messenger*, II (November, 1875), p. 1.

⁴Zenas H. Gurley, "History of the New Organization of the Church," *The True Latter Day Saints' Herald*, I (January, 1860), 20-21. Hereafter cited as *Saints' Herald*.

⁵Heman C. Smith and Joseph Smith III, *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1900), Vol. III, 745.



Zenas H. Gurley, Sr., 1801-1871 — Member, Council of Twelve Apostles Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1853-1871.



Jason W. Briggs, 1821-1899 — President, Council of Twelve Apostles Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1853-1886.

newspapers in southern Wisconsin and in northern Illinois: "To whom it may concern: This is to certify that we the undersigned who are members of the Yellow Stone branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, do hereby protest against the practice of polygamy and other abominations that are practiced by James J. Strang and his so-called pretenders to the successorship or presidency of the church; among whom are the said James J. Strang, Brigham Young, William B. Smith, Colin Brewster, Alpheus Cutler, Lyman Wight, and others; and hold ourselves aloof from them, and do not wish to be held responsible for any of their evil teachings or practices."⁶

The writings of Gurley and of a number of his followers abound with references to the high degree of spiritual ecstasy which accompanied their public meetings and confirmed their determination to wait for the Lord to designate a new prophetic leader — who, they thought, would be a descendant of Joseph Smith, Jr.

By February, 1852, the Briggs revelation had been read by the Saints of Yellow Stone Branch, as well as the Waukesha, Palestine, Burlington and Voree branches where it was warmly acclaimed as authenticating their grow-

⁶Jason Briggs reports that a Brother David Powell visited the Yellow Stone Branch sometime after February 19, 1852. It was on this visit that the Briggs revelation of November 18, 1851, together with statements from several other branches repudiating James J. Strang's leadership were presented to Zenas Gurley and the members of the Yellow Stone Branch. See *The Messenger*, II (December, 1875), 6.

ing dissatisfaction with the various factional leaders. Consequently, a conference of delegates representing the newly-united branches was planned. Such a conference was held on June 12-13, 1852, at the Newark Branch, Beloit, Rock County, Wisconsin, to lay the foundation for a return to the first principles of the Restoration.

It seems apparent that the branches of the Church separating from both Strang and Smith in 1851-1852 had founded themselves in strong opposition to the various factions with which doctrinal and other differences had arisen. Certain boundaries had already begun to appear. The polygamy which was taught and practiced by James J. Strang and William B. Smith was particularly objectionable to the Wisconsin Saints. Also, the growing number of branches coming under the leadership of Briggs and Gurley after 1852 seemed unanimous in the view that lineal succession in presidency was of primary importance in any effort to continue the original structure of the church founded by Joseph Smith, Jr. Furthermore, they viewed lineal succession in presidency as limited to direct descendants of Joseph Smith.

THE MORMON BOUNDARY

At the initial conference of the new organization the following resolution was passed: "That this conference regard the pretensions of Brigham Young, James J. Strang, James Colin Brewster, William McLellin, William Smith and Joseph Wood's joint claim to the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints as an assumption of Power in violation of the Law of God and consequently we disclaim all connection and fellowship with them."⁷ Such an action clearly established the RLDS Church at its inception in an antagonistic position with regard to every other descendant of the original church. As if to further underscore that stance, it was also "Resolved that the successor of Joseph Smith, Jr., as the Presiding High Priest in the Melchisedek Priesthood must of necessity be the seed of Joseph Smith, Jr. in fulfillment of the law and the promises of God."⁸

After 1852 there were several official attempts by the fledgling organization to persuade Joseph Smith III (who was born in 1832 and who was the only surviving son of Joseph Smith, Jr.) to accept his place as prophet. The record shows that at first he was repulsed by the idea, but that he responded to repeated importunings. On April 6, 1860, at a conference held in Amboy, Lee County, Illinois, Joseph Smith III was accepted unanimously and ordained as "prophet, seer and revelator of the Church of Jesus Christ and the successor of his father."⁹

In his address of acceptance, President Smith carefully chronicled the events that led him to accept the prophetic role. With somewhat less restraint he expressed his feelings on the subject of Brigham Young and the

⁷Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, *Conference Minutes*, "Book A" (June 13, 1852), 3.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*, 60

Utah Church: "There is but one principle taught by the leaders of any faction of this people that I hold in utter abhorrence. That is a principle taught by Brigham Young and those believing in him. I have been told that my father taught such doctrines. I have never believed it and never can believe it. If such things were done then I believe they never were done by Divine authority. I believe my father was a good man, and a good man never could have promulgated such doctrines."¹⁰ While no mention of polygamy was made, it seems likely that polygamy was the principle alluded to.

Brigham Young made public the adoption of polygamy on August 5, 1852. The conference of the new organization in October, 1852, decided to publish 2,000 copies of the resolutions enacted at the previous conference. Copy for the resulting pamphlet was finished by January, 1853, but in reviewing it Zenas Gurley realized that nowhere in its twenty pages had polygamy been denounced. Accordingly, on the 6th of January the will of God was sought by Gurley and his congregation on the matter. As a result, Gurley was able to report the following in his historical narrative: "Polygamy is an abomination in the sight of the Lord God: it is not of me; I abhor it. I abhor it, as also the doctrines of the Nicolaitanes, and the men or set of men who practice it. I judge them not, I judge not those who practice it. Their works shall judge them at the last day. Be ye strong; ye shall contend against this doctrine; many will be led into it honestly for the devil will seek to establish it and roll it forth to deceive."¹¹ Significantly, three pages concerning polygamy were added to the initial copy and Brigham Young and his followers were linked with it for the first time.¹²

It may be valid to assume that with the public endorsement of polygamy by leaders of the largest single colony of Saints, and with the immediate negative public reaction thereto, the budding church had an identity crisis of far greater proportions than had previously been the case in its clash with James Strang and William Smith. Thus it was quite natural for the new organization of Briggs and Gurley, in the face of wide and intensifying public contumely directed against the Salt Lake City Saints for their views on marriage, to spare no effort to inform the world that the Reorganization had little in common with the Mormons of Utah Territory. So it was that during the period under review here and far beyond that in the twentieth century, the RLDS Church sought to erect a wall between the two churches. In so doing it was hoped that not only potential converts to the faith, but also people in government, would never associate the RLDS Church with other Mormon faiths which promulgated doctrines in violation of the laws of the original church, of the statutes of the land, and of the mores of Christian society.

At the urging of President Smith, who wished to establish "the legal point of distinction between ourselves [RLDS] and the followers of Brigham

¹⁰*Saints' Herald*, I (May, 1860), 103, quoting the Amboy, Illinois *Times*.

¹¹Gurley, "History of the Reorganization," *Saints' Herald*, I (March, 1860), 53.

¹²Jason W. Briggs, Zenas H. Gurley and J. Harrington, *A Word of Consolation to the Scattered Saints* (Janesville, Wisconsin, 1853), 21-23.

Young,"¹³ the delegates to the conference of April, 1870, approved a document entitled "Memorial to Congress." Its opening lines alluded to the evils in Utah Territory and followed with an attempt to set forth the position of the original church in matters of marriage and church-state relations. Article 15 of the memorial expressed regret that the RLDS Church was being forced to identify its faith "in contradistinction to that of other churches claiming the same name . . .," but that such a course was necessary due to the universal "tendency to confound the Reorganized Church with the polygamic factions that we deem it but just that we be placed aright upon the record, theologically, socially and morally, as well as politically" (*Saints' Herald*, XVII [June, 1870], 326).

The memorial then presented an "epitome of faith" based primarily upon Joseph Smith, Jr.'s statement of belief in the 1842 "Wentworth Letter,"¹⁴ but expanded it to include a strong affirmation of the monogamous view of marriage. In their closing appeal the memorialists petitioned that, "in the consideration of the questions of polygamy and disloyalty, as affecting a body calling themselves the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in the Territory of Utah, the crimes of polygamy and disloyalty may not be made to stain the mantle of the pure faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, by such official sanction and legislation of your honorable bodies as shall, in order to legalize the crimes of a few hundreds of polygamists in Utah, (many of whom we trust will yet abandon their folly), enstamp with infamy and disloyalty the faith of many thousands throughout the United States . . ." (*Saints' Herald*, XVII [June, 1870], 326).

As the severe scrutiny and judgment of the nation and the world was turned increasingly upon the Mormons of Utah in those early years the RLDS Church was caught in the cross currents. During this period, the RLDS Church categorized a number of "Utah Mormon" beliefs and practices as heretical, even those which were originally common to both churches. For example, early RLDS literature spoke of the Book of Abraham being divinely inspired,¹⁵ a position long since abandoned. The doctrine of a plurality of Gods, given considerable support by early RLDS writers, is now considered scripturally unfounded.¹⁶

Even a cursory perusal of the RLDS literature before 1882 discloses a sizeable array of materials identifying the RLDS Church in terms of the Mormon Boundary. Only in recent years has the RLDS Church begun to exploit the possibilities of a more creative and positive image.

BOUNDARIES OF AUTHORITY, INTERNAL STRUCTURE, AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

In 1831 sections forty-three and sixty-four of the *Doctrine and Covenants* had unmistakably established Joseph Smith as the ultimate authority in

¹³RLDS Church "Conference Minutes" for April 6, 1870, *Saints' Herald*, XVII (April 1870), 245.

¹⁴*Times and Seasons*, III (March, 1842), 706-710.

¹⁵Editorial, "The Early Revelations," *Saints' Herald*, I (March, 1860), 63.

¹⁶Editorial, "A Plurality of Gods," *Saints' Herald*, I (December, 1860), 280-283.

spiritual matters in the Church. With his assassination in 1844 there was a proliferation of claimants to that authority. Thus it was quite natural that in the early, uncertain years the Reorganization would move very carefully to cement its internal structure, its sources of authority and its religious beliefs.

The first leaders of the Reorganization were conservative in their approach to authority. They wished to avoid the appearance of grasping for the status which by common consent should go to the seed of Joseph Smith, Jr. Therefore at the conference of April, 1853, three men were chosen who proceeded to select seven men to be ordained into the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Zenas H. Gurley, Henry H. Deam, Jason W. Briggs, Daniel B. Rasey, John Cunningham, George White and Reuben Newkirk were selected.¹⁷ Of these seven men two were released from the Quorum within eighteen months and two others were quite inactive. Eight more apostles were selected by committees before 1866. With the death of one apostle in 1866, the excommunication of another for apostacy in 1868, the release of two others for inactivity¹⁸ and the resignation of another because he did not feel a sense of divine calling as an apostle (*Saints' Herald*, XVII [April, 1870], 248), it was apparent to Joseph Smith III that another method for choosing apostles should be considered in order to insure the stability and identity of the Church at large.

The change of policy in the selection of apostles is an apt illustration of the manner in which the leadership authority of Joseph Smith III grew between 1860 and 1873. In October, 1860, he suggested that the Quorum of Twelve should be filled (*Saints' Herald*, I [October, 1860], 236). This would have called for the ordination of four men. The conference immediately passed a resolution calling for the selection of three men, and at the following April conference, the minutes of the October, 1860, conference were changed so that President Smith's suggestion read, "The Quorum of the Twelve should be filled, as far as practicable" (*Saints' Herald*, II [May, 1861], 67). By contrast, in 1873, seven men were called to the Council of the Twelve by means of a document delivered by President Smith which was accepted as divine.

As to the matter of religious belief, the new organization faced the problem of doctrinal differences within the Church. At the April, 1854, conference, held at Zarahemla, Lafayette County, Wisconsin, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was authorized "to try to examine all revelations and manifestations, that have or may come through any member of this church, male or female and that such revelation or manifestations, after having been examined by this Council, and declared to be the word of God, may be taught as such until the next General Conference shall reject or receive it as the law and if any member of the church assumes to teach as law or doctrine any

¹⁷Conference Minutes, "Book A" (April 8, 1853), 9.

¹⁸On April 8, 1864, the General Conference acted to "withdraw the hand of fellowship from Apostle George White until he reports, with the proviso that if he is dead this resolution is inoperative." See "Conference Minutes," *Saints' Herald*, V (April, 1864), 125.

revelation or manifestation before being presented to this Council shall be considered a transgressor of the Law and proceeded against as such."¹⁰

One of the notable characteristics of the RLDS Church has been its democratic spirit, by which no man's ideas are exempt from critical scrutiny of the corporate body. While the conference of 1854 was willing to let the Apostles arbitrate in matters of doctrine, the conference of 1855 might reverse their decisions. The problem of final authority in matters of religious belief continued to vex the church through the period under review, and of course, beyond. There always has remained a certain tension between, on the one hand, those wanting definitive statements of religious dogma from church leadership to guide them in their stewardship of life and, on the other hand, those maintaining firmly their right of conscience to question every statement claiming any degree of religious authority, from whatever source. Such a tension is not thought to be detrimental at all, but rather a sign of growth potential and an opportunity for a more enlightened dialogue among the membership.

Such an opportunity emerged in the years 1877-1880 when the President of the Council of the Twelve, Jason Briggs, was not sustained in office by the narrow margin of one vote. With such flexibility, positive identity as a corporate body was difficult and the RLDS Church moved to clarify some of its fundamental positions regarding the nature of inspiration, revelation and scripture.

Jason Briggs was one of many who questioned the plenary base of scripture. The more traditional and conservative elements in the Church saw the dangers inherent in such a position and sought to avoid unnecessary speculation. One outcome of the struggle for internal boundaries in the area of doctrine was that Briggs left the Church. Another result was the temporary clarification of the issues and easing of the tensions by the adoption of General Conference Resolution 222, which was adopted on September 29, 1879. While this document acknowledged the futility of making belief in all of the scriptures the test of fellowship, it observed also that those functioning as ministers of the gospel bore a fundamental responsibility to avoid disturbing the faith of people by preaching and teaching in direct opposition to basic principles of salvation contained in the scriptures.

It is unrealistic to represent the RLDS Church as having achieved a high degree of identity by 1882 in terms of authority, internal structure and religious belief, since the Church is still dynamic in all these areas today. But by 1882 important strides had been made toward stabilizing and institutionalizing procedures and principles. For an organization which germinated in 1852 in a real leadership vacuum, it was imperative that such institutionalization take place in order for the organization to continue.

A NEW BOUNDARY FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH

If ever a people had a heritage which identified them with the tangible expression of Christian relationships in daily life, it is the people of the Res-

¹⁰Conference Minutes, "Book A" (April 8, 1854), 15.

toration. Under the leadership of Joseph Smith a small group had hoped to build a city on a hill, a light to the world, and an ensign to the nations of the earth. But they found that however divine their commandments, these commandments were implemented by human beings acting in keeping with the best light they possessed. The RLDS Church, therefore, worked toward a more realistic conception of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

The rather extensive degree to which the RLDS Church developed the idea that the Nauvoo experiment was rejected by God impresses one with the notion that RLDS leaders saw and remembered so much about Nauvoo that failed to stimulate their Christian impulses that they were somewhat fearful of the idea of the gathering of a large body of Saints together again. The Church had tried to build the Kingdom of God in social experiments at Kirtland, Independence, Far West, and Nauvoo. Each time of building was followed rather quickly by a time of fleeing, until after a generation those not involved in further migrations to distant points faced the practical alternatives available to them where they had remained.

Leaders of the new organization in 1852 saw the necessity of using great restraint and wisdom in pursuing the lofty goals of the gathering. Note the instructions given to the scattered Saints in 1852: "Resolved that in the opinion of this conference there is no stake to which the Saints on this continent are commanded to gather at the present time. That the Saints in all the lands are commanded to gather to this land preparatory to the re-establishment of the church in Zion. . . . And, it is the duty of the Saints, to turn their hearts and their faces towards Zion, and supplicate the Lord God for such deliverance."²⁰

This instruction displayed at once the uncertainty and the longing of the leaders of the new organization for the full and immediate gathering to Zion in Missouri. Now the stage was set for the Reorganization's early attempts to work out the timing and degree and the direction for such a gathering.

Nearly every issue of the *Saints' Herald* (an RLDS periodical) between 1860 and 1882 contained an article or editorial or letter touching this central theme of the gathering to the Kingdom of God on Earth. Some wanted no part in further gathering efforts. Others were aware of the grave dangers of gathering without adjusting the concept of the Kingdom of God to the feelings and requirements of the citizens who lived in the regions where the Kingdom of God was to be built.

On the other hand staunch believers in the promises of God in modern revelation reasoned that if in 1833 God had told the Church to buy land in Jackson County, then that commandment was still valid in 1870 (all real or supposed historical conditioning factors completely aside) (RLDS *D&C* 98:9f, g; LDS *D&C* 101:70-71). They also noted the divine promise that the truly faithful settlers evicted from Jackson County in 1833 would return with their children to their inheritances (RLDS *D&C*, 98:4g; LDS *D&C*, 101:18).

²⁰Conference Minutes, "Book A" (June 13, 1852), 3.

By 1870 time was running out and the Saints who took the promise literally were intent on doing everything possible to secure its early fulfillment.

These divergent views had their expression in the shifting locations of Church members from 1870 to 1890, as demonstrated by the following chart. The figures tend to reveal a trend toward colonization at points closer to Missouri — especially at Lamoni, Iowa, which was 125 miles north of Independence, Missouri.

MEMBERSHIP TRENDS IN THE RLDS CHURCH, 1870-1890, SHOWING INCREASE AND RATE OF INCREASE FOR ILLINOIS, IOWA AND MISSOURI, IN RELATION TO TOTAL MEMBERSHIP.

	(1) Illinois	(2) Iowa	(3) Missouri	(4) Three-State Total	(5) Total Church Membership
1870	1,036 (15.0)*	1,870 (27.1)	600 (8.7)	3,506 (50.8)	6,900
1875	1,437 (14.5) (38.7)**	2,190 (22.1) (17.1)	900 (9.1) (50.0)	4,527 (45.7) (29.1)	9,900 (43.5)
1880	1,708 (14.0) (18.8)	3,101 (25.5) (41.6)	1,662 (13.7) (84.7)	6,471 (53.2) (42.9)	12,171 (22.9)
1890	1,909 (8.0) (11.8)	5,283 (22.0) (70.4)	3,080 (12.9) (85.3)	10,272 (42.9) (58.7)	23,951 (96.8)

*To the right of each membership total in columns 1-4 is a figure showing the percentage of the total membership represented by that total in each block.

**Underneath each membership total for the years 1875, 1880 and 1890 is a percentage figure showing the rate of increase of that total over the total in the block immediately above. (Source: Summary of branch reports to the General Conferences of 1870, 1875, 1880 and 1890 and recorded in the respective Conference Minutes. Figures do not represent a complete census but rather the totals of all branches reporting to the General Church Recorder. The number of branches not reporting is indeterminable on the basis of present sources. Many of the original Church membership records were destroyed by fire in 1907.)

As illustrated by the chart, the rate of membership growth and also the proportion of membership to the total Church population dropped sharply in Illinois between 1875 and 1890. In both Iowa and Missouri the rate of membership growth increased rather steadily, although it failed to keep pace at some points with the rate of membership growth of the Church generally. The Illinois membership of the RLDS Church increased 84.3 percent in the period from 1870 to 1890, or at an average annual rate of 4.2 percent. The combined Iowa-Missouri membership grew at an annual rate of 9.1 percent for the same period. The membership increase for the Church at large was 17,051, an average annual rate of 12.4 percent.

The creation of the "First United Order of Enoch" at the General Conference of September, 1870, was tangible evidence of great interest in the colonization principle. This agency purchased and began to improve over 3,000 acres of land at Lamoni, Iowa, and had accumulated \$44,000 of additional capital assets by November, 1872 (*Saints' Herald*, XIX [Nov., 1872], 659-660).

It thus becomes apparent that while influential elements in the RLDS Church sought to colonize closer to Missouri from 1870 to 1890, the Church

at large grew at a significantly higher rate during the two decades. This growth took place in the many scattered branches and missions, from Utah Territory to New England and from Canada to Florida. While many gathered to Lamoni, Iowa, and Independence, Missouri, many more accepted the gospel and chose to live by its demands where they were.

In this way the hope of the Kingdom of God on Earth was not forsaken, but seen in a new light. Gradually the idea of Zion as the "pure in heart" came to have increasing validity. By 1882 the RLDS Church was beginning to see that it could identify its divine mission of the Kingdom of God on earth with the life of its people in their Christian stewardship no matter where they lived. At the same time the dream of the gathering was kept alive by the persistent faith of devoted people possessed by the Christian communitarian ideal of the early Restoration. As Lamoni, Iowa, grew in numbers and in economic base, many of the key RLDS leaders migrated from Illinois to that new community.

When Joseph Smith III and his family left Plano, Illinois, on October 7, 1881, to join the growing body of Saints at Lamoni, the "Illinois era" of the RLDS Church came to an end.

One way to observe the degree of adjustment from the early colonization philosophy would be to look at the current thrust of Zionism thought in the RLDS Church. Note the following: "Zion is seen as the corporate life of the faithful in communities wherever they may be. As part of the illuminating ministry of Joseph Smith, a center place was established in which there should be the beginnings of a society. . . . The place of beginning is not destined to be the exclusive witness of God's glory in the Kingdom of God. Zion is the underlying imperative wherever men are found and the call of Christ is experienced."²¹

RLDS leaders have perceived that the essential nature of the Kingdom of God on Earth (Zion) is one and the same with the life of God in Christ among men. The thrust of Zionism endeavor today benefits from mistakes of our ancestors who equipped their Kingdom with an army of brightly uniformed officers and enlisted men bearing arms. The RLDS Church sees the utter waste of human potential in a venture which fails to have at its very core and in all its primary relationships the incarnational ministry of the Holy Spirit, reaching in every direction to bless human life with the redemptive fruit of that spirit.

It would be interesting to trace the shift in community emphasis from one where each member cares for the other to one where all in the community care for the world so that the identity of that community is in terms of its relationship to the world. The import of such a change in identity lies in a document addressed to the RLDS Church by Joseph Smith III in 1909, when he was seventy-six years old. He claimed divine inspiration on the matters treated therein, and he asked the delegates at the conference to

²¹The First Presidency, RLDS Church, "1967 Annual Report," *Saints' Herald*, CXV (March, 1968), 17.

judge it in that light. In part, this is what they read about the Kingdom of God:

It is well to understand that the term *regions round about* must mean more than a small area of country round about the central spot, and that the necessity of the great majority of the church in gathering together can only be provided by settling carefully together as many in one region as may be practicable and profitable and in accordance with the feelings of the people under the laws existing in the places where such settlements are to be made. The great variety of callings, avocations, and professions will present difficulties precluding the practicability of all settling and living in near proximity to each other. [Therefore those responsible] should provide for other organizations or associations than those simply pastoral or agricultural . . . [thus the Saints] cannot withdraw themselves so completely from a qualified dependence upon their Gentile neighbors surrounding them as to be entirely free from intercommunion with them. . . . (RLDS D&C 128: 5-6, 8.)

By 1909, urbanization was becoming a part of our national life. The industrial revolution was having its full impact upon Western civilization. Mobility of population, together with the supremacy of civil law in society were widely acknowledged aspects of most communities in the United States. Perceiving these things clearly, Joseph Smith III delivered instructions to the Church which turned its Zionite concepts "inside-out." The idea of a single, pastoral-agricultural, isolated community of Saints living in close proximity to one another on a specified plot of land was altered to the idea of multiple gathering centers, diversified in organization and having a much closer relation to society at large. In the new concept, people would live the imperatives of the gospel but would be primarily sensitive to the feelings and needs and laws of the larger society.

After 1882 the RLDS Church continued its search for institutional identity. It still sought to clarify its distinctive position with regard to the Mormon Boundary, as in the well-known "Temple Lot Suit" of 1894. It still needed to establish workable and acceptable lines of authority, internal structure and religious belief. And finally, the RLDS Church came back to "Zion," to make its headquarters there, and to address itself to the complex issue of the implementation of Zionite ideals and relationships in the twentieth century.