

## THE COMING OF THE MANIFESTO

Kenneth W. Godfrey

*An investigation of the factors which brought about the Manifesto which in turn officially terminated the practice of, if not the belief in, plural marriage helps to illuminate at least one process by which revelation comes. Political and social pressure was brought to bear upon Church leaders, financial sanctions seemed on the verge of destroying the Kingdom of God, and men sustained as prophets, seers and revelators reasoned, sometimes even argued, and sought the Lord in prayer for an answer to their difficulties. That God responded by confirming the rightness of what they had already concluded becomes apparent from the writings of Apostle Abraham H. Cannon, whose diaries bring additional insight to bear upon some very difficult problems. These diaries prompt and perhaps justify another article that has to do with the most publicized of all Mormon practices, plural marriage. Kenneth W. Godfrey is Director of L.D.S. Institutes and Seminaries for Arizona and New Mexico. He lives in Tempe, Arizona, with his wife and family, and holds the Ph.D. in History from Brigham Young University.*

Our story probably begins as early as 1831. The place is not Utah but New York, yet the setting is somewhat the same because a Mormon prophet was involved in initiating plural marriage, just as one was responsible for its cessation. Another common factor was communication with God, first from man to God and then from God to man. Though the questions were different they were at least the same in that plural marriage was the subject of both prayers.

According to President Joseph F. Smith, W. W. Phelps and Orson Pratt, Joseph Smith seriously considered plural marriage as a part of the restitu-

tion of all things as early as 1831.<sup>1</sup> In fact there is some evidence to support the contention that he might have taken his first plural wife later that same year. Yet largely because he was somewhat reluctant to teach such a doctrine to his "Puritan" followers, polygamy was probably not practiced by a significant number of Saints before they settled in Nauvoo. In that city a number of the Prophet's more devout followers actually married more than one woman.<sup>2</sup>

Andrew Jenson, one of the most revered of the Latter-day Saint historians, officially acknowledged that Joseph Smith had taken twenty-seven wives before his death.<sup>3</sup> Fawn Brodie lists forty-eight women allegedly sealed to the Prophet and at least one other writer believes he can document over sixty plural wives taken by the Mormon leader while he was alive.<sup>4</sup> That Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, John D. Lee and many others had entered into plural relationships before the Saints left Nauvoo is a fact attested to by scholars of Mormon history. Still the first public acknowledgment that Mormons not only believed in but practiced plural marriage did not come until after the Saints had migrated west, the year being 1852.

One of the Quorum of the Twelve who had only reluctantly entered plural marriage himself when first asked by the Prophet, was selected by Brigham Young to preach the first public discourse upon this subject. The "Gauge of Philosophy," Orson Pratt, declared that plural marriage was a part of the restitution of all things, was sanctioned by the Bible and was indeed a commandment from God to His latter-day Saints. He would later have a debate with the renowned Reverend Doctor J. P. Newman, arguing that the Bible did indeed sanction plural marriage. Following this public announcement by Apostle Pratt, plural marriages were entered into with a kind of haphazard spirit depending, as shown by the historian Stanley Ivins, upon how vigorously the federal government was, at that moment, trying to stamp out the practice.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>William W. Phelps to Brigham Young, August 12, 1861, Unclassified Letter File, LDS Church Historian's Library, hereafter referred to as ULF. An article also appeared in the *Warsaw Signal*, April 25, 1844, which talked about the early beginnings of plural marriage.

<sup>2</sup>For documentation of this statement see Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Causes of Mormon, Non-Mormon Conflict in Hancock County, Illinois 1839-1846," Ph.D. Dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1967, pp. 90-111.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew Jenson, *The Historical Record*, Vol. VI, May 1887, copy in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church Historian's Library. Keith W. Perkins, a student of Mormon history, in his master's thesis quotes a letter from Wilford Woodruff to Andrew Jenson in which President Woodruff says, "We do not think it is a wise step to give these names to the world at the present time in the manner in which you have done in this 'Historical Record.' Advantage may be taken of their publication and in some instances, to the injury, perhaps, of families or relatives of those whose names are mentioned." Wilford Woodruff to Andrew Jenson, August 6, 1887, Wilford Woodruff's Letter Books, LDS Church Historian's Office, found in Keith W. Perkins, "A Study of the Contributions of Andrew Jenson to the Writing and Preservation of LDS Church History," Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University, May 1971, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup>Stanley P. Hirshson, *The Lion of the Lord* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), pp. 184-223.

<sup>5</sup>Stanley Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 35 (Fall, 1967), 309-321.

For the next ten years Mormons defended, preached and practiced plural marriage without official governmental interference. There was no law proscribing such activities in the territories of the United States. Then, following another Utah petition for statehood in 1862, Congress passed what became known as the "anti-bigamy" act which made the practice of plural marriage against the law. This forced Latter-day Saints to re-examine their relationship to the law of the land. Such scriptures as "for this purpose [that no man should be in bondage one to another] have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood," and "now, verily I say unto you concerning the laws of the land, it is my will that my people should observe to do all things whatsoever I command them," must have been thoroughly studied by thoughtful leaders. Yet there seems to have been no thought given at this time to abandoning plural marriage. At least one scripture declared that any law of man which might be different than constitutional law "cometh of evil" (*D&C* 101:78-80; 98:4-5) and the Latter-day Saints were almost unanimous in their belief that the anti-bigamy law was a law of man. Furthermore, an official declaration that the Saints had voted to accept as binding upon themselves read that only governments and laws which preserved life, *free exercise of conscience* and private property should be obeyed (*D&C* 134: 2, emphasis added).

Possessing a very strong belief kindled by their leaders that the laws of God have to be obeyed even if they conflict with the laws of men, Latter-day Saints were prepared to go to prison if necessary in defense of their convictions. But first they were desirous of testing the constitutionality of the anti-bigamy law. Proceedings began with Elder George Reynolds as the defendant.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after the death of Brigham Young the United States Supreme Court finally handed down its decision in which the anti-bigamy law of 1862 was declared to be constitutional.<sup>7</sup>

This action put the Saints in a very difficult position because of their belief in the sanctity of the Constitution and the declaration of their scriptures that the law of the land should be obeyed. The Supreme Court had declared the law of the land to be contrary to the Mormon matrimonial system. Thus each Latter-day Saint was in effect forced to decide whether one part of the Constitution, namely the first amendment guaranteeing religious freedom, was superior to a decree of the Supreme Court regarding an act of Congress. His dilemma was further increased in intensity because some of his scriptures plainly stated that in obeying the law of man and/or the Constitution he obeyed God (*D&C* 58:21). For example, the Apostle Paul instructed the saints of his day to render obeisance to the "powers that be" because they were ordained of God (Romans 13:1).

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<sup>6</sup>B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus, Christ of Latter-day Saints*, V (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), p. 19.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1966), p. 576.

The Mormon's concept of continuous revelation came to their rescue as did their conviction that a prophet led the church to which they belonged. Almost immediately, speaking on this relevant subject, the President of the Twelve Apostles, John Taylor, declared in the Tabernacle:

Do we propose to govern or interfere or rebel against the government of the United States? No, we do not. That is not in the program. Has God given us a law? Yes! Have they made a law to punish us for obeying His law? Yes. All right we will get along and do the best we can, but we won't forsake our God and all those who are willing to abide by the law of God signify it by raising the right hand.<sup>8</sup>

The vote was unanimous as Mormons declared their allegiance to God. With increased governmental pressure attempting to force obedience, President Taylor became even more clear regarding the moral obligation of Latter-day Saints. Again in the Tabernacle he declared, "Polygamy is with us a matter of revelation, also a natural law which rules the lives of millions on this globe. One sure thing is that we will not surrender polygamy" (*DNW*, 12 Nov. 1880). Though they were to imprison or shoot almost all Mormons, he further stated, "there will always be somebody left to carry on the work" (*DNW*, 25 Feb. 1885). Then again on February 1, 1885, he very forcefully proclaimed that he wanted to obey the laws of the nation but that no man had a right to control his or any other Latter-day Saint's conscience, and his conscience told him to obey God. He further declared that no honorable man would disobey, and that he would die if necessary in defense of the truth (Stout, pp. 229-230). However, President Taylor admonished the Saints to refrain from coming out in open rebellion against the "powers that be." Rather they were advised to do right, fear God and observe His laws, but with no "bloodshed, no rendering evil for evil" (*DNW*, 25 Feb. 1885).

Yet in spite of such bold talk in public there was uneasiness on the part of many Mormons in continuing to live in opposition to declared constitutional law. Some members of the Church would not enter plural relationships because of government sanctions against them. And even Saints like President Taylor and Bishop F. A. Brown, who declared, "If the conscience of the American people is outraged at my conduct by obeying what my conscience prompts me to be my duty to my God . . . they are welcome to it" (*Deseret News*, 15 July 1885), seemed to believe very sincerely that the anti-polygamous law, in spite of the court ruling, was a violation of the First Amendment and was consequently invalid. Many Mormons apparently believed the Lord would intervene on their behalf and that those who opposed them would soon be overthrown.<sup>9</sup>

By 1886 it was becoming more obvious that something would have to be done regarding either the law or plural marriage, or both, or the Saints

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<sup>8</sup>As quoted in the *Deseret News Weekly*, May 12, 1880, p. 227 (hereafter referred to as *DNW*). Also quoted in Wayne Stout, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Wayne Stout, 1967), p. 127 (hereafter referred to as Stout).

<sup>9</sup>Gustive O. Larson, "Utah and the Civil War," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 33 (Winter, 1965), 55.

would have to leave the United States. In spite of many "anti-government" speeches both before and after the Civil War, most Mormons were loyal and held strong positive feelings toward the Nation. Yet colonies were begun in Mexico and Canada, where there were no official rules against plural marriage.

The alleged revelation given to John Taylor on September 27, 1886, provides further evidence that there was a growing concern regarding Church teachings which made it necessary for the Saints to disregard the laws of the land. Outside pressure was causing President Taylor considerable anxiety as he contemplated the fate of his people. So great was his concern that he made the subject again a matter of prayer. In response to his petition the Lord told him, "All commandments that I give must be obeyed . . . unless they are revoked by me or by my authority." The Lord then reiterated for the benefit of President Taylor that He had revealed the New and Everlasting Covenant and had spoken in great plainness to the Saints regarding this covenant. In the last part of this revelation the Lord, through President Taylor, said, "I have not revoked this law, nor will I, for it is everlasting, and those who will enter into my glory must obey the conditions thereof . . ."<sup>10</sup>

President Taylor was thus assured that for the present at least it was the Lord's will that the Saints continue to oppose human law and that they contract and live in plural marriage relationships. So strong was his and other Church leaders' convictions regarding plural marriage at this time that George Q. Cannon, President Taylor's first counselor, would later say, "We believed that it was right to carry this principle out; and if we had been sentenced to be killed, I suppose some would have felt that it was right for us to submit to that rather than yield the principle" (*DNW*, 21 Nov. 1891).

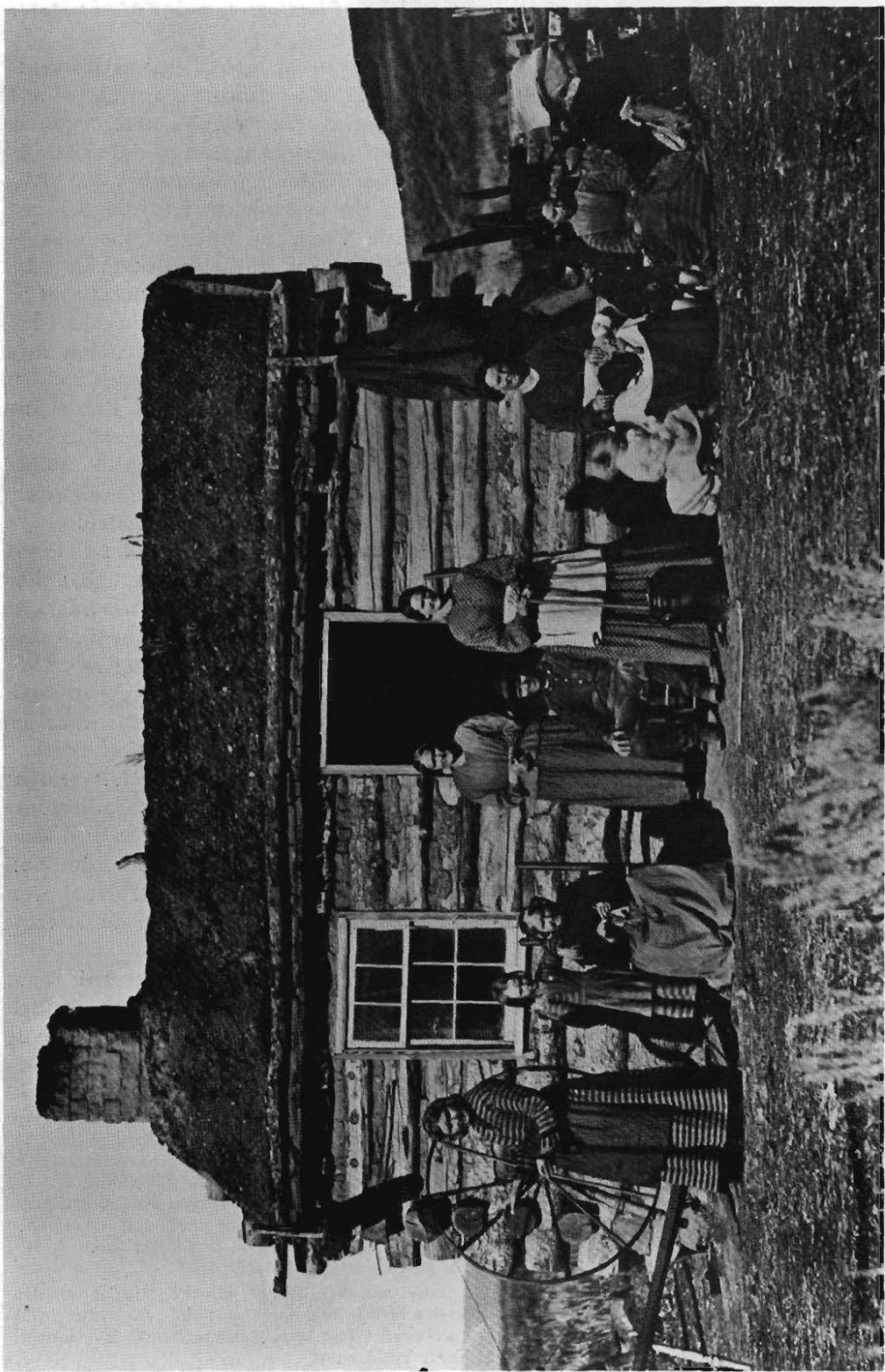
By July 26, 1887, President John Taylor was dead. In the last year of his life, while still on the "underground,"<sup>11</sup> he married at least six additional wives in a further attempt to keep the law of God. Wilford Woodruff soon took his place as prophet, seer and revelator for the Church. The Edmunds-Tucker Act became law, the Church was disincorporated, the Perpetual Emigration Fund was confiscated, and further sanctions adopted in an attempt to squelch plural marriage.

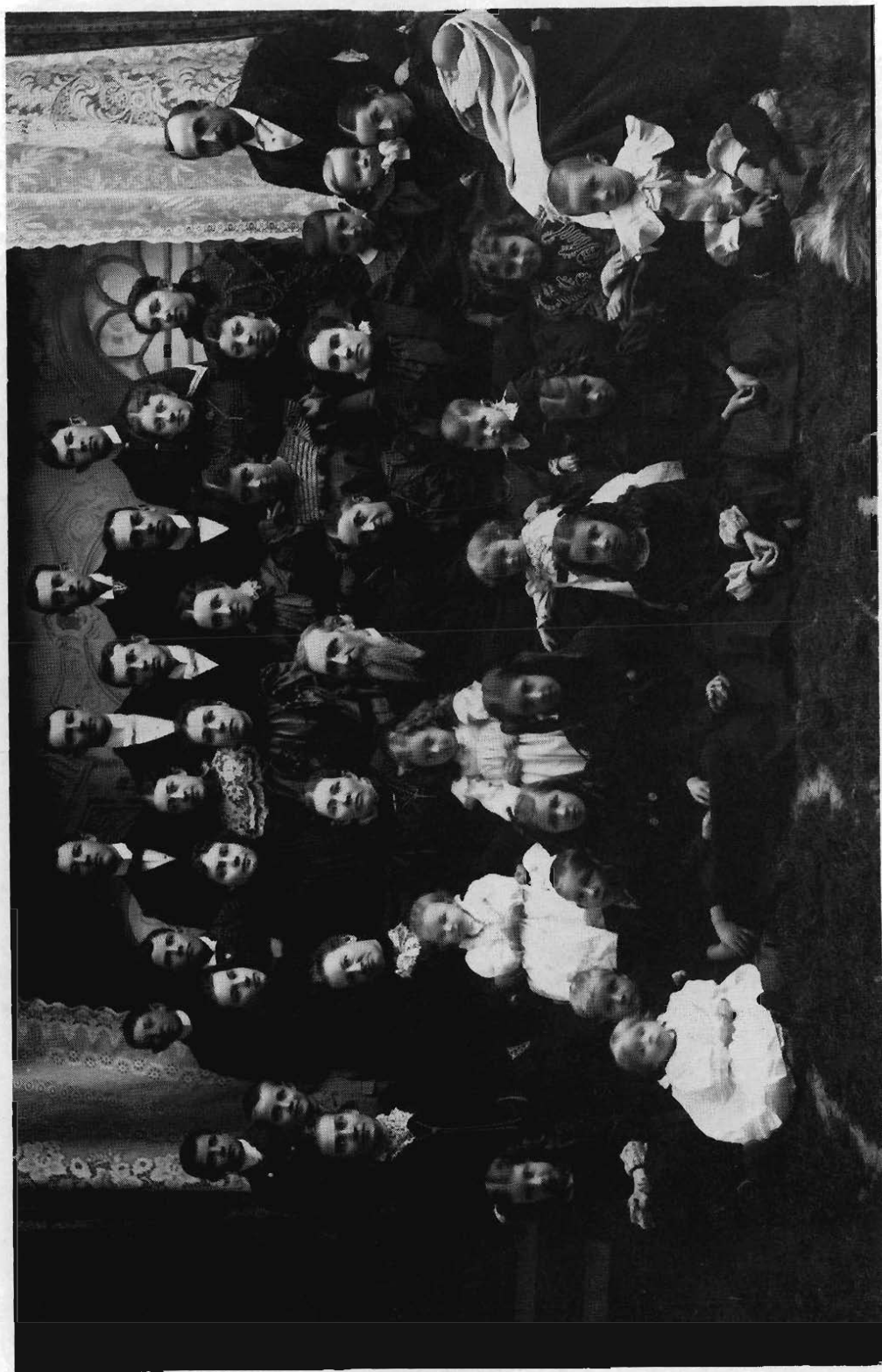
Though a polygamist himself, Wilford Woodruff was concerned about the worsening situation. Discussions within the hierarchy of the Church regarding plural marriage were frequent as Church leaders pondered not only

<sup>10</sup>Dean C. Jessee, "A Comparative Study and Evaluation of the Latter-day Saint and the Fundamentalist Views Pertaining to the Practice of Plural Marriage," Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1959, p. 101. The family of John Taylor claims that the revelation referred to above was found in the prophet-leader's papers and the original given to the Church historian. Since that time it has not been available to the public and the Church Historian allegedly has declared that it is not in the Church Historian's Library. However Dean Jessee concluded in his study that it is highly probable that such a revelation does exist. The alleged revelation published in full in the Jessee thesis was taken from a publication of the so-called Fundamentalists called *Truth* (July 1949), 41-49.

<sup>11</sup>When governmental opposition to plural marriage became so strong that it was dangerous for Church leaders practicing plural marriage to appear in public they often, traveling under assumed names, went into seclusion. The term "underground" is frequently used by historians to describe such measures to avoid arrest.







*Two contrasting views of polygamy. Above, a man and his five (or six) wives, supposedly near Farmington, Utah, 1888. Below, the wives and children of President Joseph F. Smith.*

their own fate but also the fate of the Church. Joseph F. Smith, President Woodruff's first counselor, was still in hiding using assumed names, and George Q. Cannon was free only because he had served a prison term in defense of his beliefs.<sup>12</sup> His mind "considerably exercised in regard to the prospect of the people being taxed under the liberal rule to such an extent as to ruin them," Wilford Woodruff gave the matter even more thought and prayer.

Then the Idaho test oath became law,<sup>13</sup> and was declared constitutional by a hostile Supreme Court. In writing about a Mormon's conviction under the Idaho law the editor of the *Deseret News Weekly* declared:

The appellant violated no law. He did not practice bigamy or polygamy, nor did he advise anyone else to do so. It does not appear that he even believed in these practices and certainly he repudiated them by his oath. He simply belonged to the Mormon Church and claimed his right to worship in that Church. This act undertakes to say that he shall not do this without forfeiting his franchise, one of the most sacred rights of citizenship.<sup>14</sup>

Because of such stringent laws which sought to circumscribe the Saints, President Woodruff, as early as 1889, secretly ceased giving permission for plural marriages to be solemnized. That he held the keys and had the right to do so was not seriously disputed by members of the Mormon faith.<sup>15</sup>

By January of 1890, in the words of the editor of the *Deseret News*,

As the lines have been drawn tighter in Utah the Church has quietly sent out its colonies into Arizona and New Mexico. These colonies have carried with them the dogmas and practices of the Church, and put them into force as soon as they are strong enough. (DNW, 4 Jan. 1890)

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<sup>12</sup>A large number of old Mormon families have a picture of one of their relatives in prison garb in company with George Q. Cannon. Most of these pictures have become cherished family relics.

<sup>13</sup>Idaho adopted a law which in essence made it impossible for a Mormon to vote in an election; a similar law was proposed for the Utah Territory. See Gustive O. Larson, *Outline History of Utah and the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1958), p. 214.

<sup>14</sup>DNW, 11 Jan. 1890. The name of the editor is not given nor attached to the article.

<sup>15</sup>An interesting entry is found in the diary of L. John Nuttall, dated November 24, 1889. Nuttall writes: "The President W. W. told me that he had made the subject a matter of prayer . . . [and] he asked me to copy [the] revelation which he had received. I did so. Having heard Bro. J. W. Young[']s reasoning I felt very much worked up in my feelings. For I did not feel that as a Church we could assume the position in regard to Celestial Marriage which he seemed to desire. [W]hen Pres. Woodruff commenced talking to me this evening I felt he had become converted and actually trembled[,] for I knew such had not been Pres. Woodruff's feelings before. [B]ut as I wrote at his dictation I felt better all the time and when completed I felt as light and joyous as it is possible to feel, for I was satisfied that President Woodruff received the word of the Lord."

Because of Dean C. Jessee's fine study it is now possible to report that the only revelation recorded and preserved dated November 24, 1889 says nothing directly about plural marriage. The one revelation given to President Woodruff on that date is in the handwriting of Nuttall and is reproduced in full in Jessee, pp. 172-173. Perhaps of greater significance is Nuttall's attitude and feelings which seem to indicate that J. W. Young, at least, was arguing for the cessation of plural marriage; this points out that such discussions must have been occurring in the leading councils of the Church. Unfortunately the Abraham



By the spring of 1890 the leaders of the Church had launched a three-pronged approach in an effort to save the Church from what they considered to be "evil and designing governmental officials." First, they had officially refused to sanction or perform any additional plural marriages; second, colonists were sent to Arizona, New Mexico, Old Mexico and Canada to establish a stronghold where possible future plural marriages could be performed; and third, in accordance with the wishes of the chief leaders of both political parties, but more particularly the Republican Party, an attempt was being made to balance the party system in Utah.<sup>16</sup>

By June, in a further attempt to quell political fears, President Woodruff declared that no plural marriages would be permitted to occur "even in Mexico unless the contracting parties or at least the female has resolved to remain in that country."<sup>17</sup>

Latter-day Saints believe that revelation can come in open vision, by means of divine declarations, and various other ways, including "the still, small voice." But Mormons have never held that such "dramatic" means of receiving communication from on high exhaust the divine possibilities. Frequently they have adopted a pragmatic approach, believing that if a chosen course works and good results accompany it then it must be approved by God.<sup>18</sup> It would seem that Wilford Woodruff, in his initiated policy, was indeed being pragmatic and such a course was beginning to bear "good fruit." It could be argued effectively that he had also embarked upon a course and was now seeking divine confirmation. George Q. Cannon reported that in the beginning "the spirit . . . at no time . . . seemed to indicate what should be done (A.H.C. "Diary," 10 Apr. 1890). Such a declaration by the eloquent Cannon would suggest that the Lord was allowing the Brethren to struggle and grow as they worked toward an acceptable solution to their problem.

As pressure from the United States government continued in some quarters, at least a few of the Saints argued that if plural marriages had in fact been discontinued in secret that a public declaration of such a policy should indeed be given so that the effects could be fully utilized. Though the pressure mounted no such declaration from President Woodruff came until the fall of 1890.

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H. Cannon diaries have nothing significant under the date November 24, 1889. J. W. Young at this time was having serious marital problems with one of his wives and the whole matter may relate to this rather than plural marriage.

<sup>16</sup>See J. D. Williams, "Separation of Church and State in Mormon Theory and Practice," *Dialogue* (Summer, 1966), 30-54, and Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Prophets in Politics," unpublished paper, Brigham Young University, 1966.

<sup>17</sup>Abraham H. Cannon, "Diary," 10 Apr. 1890, copy in possession of the author. Hereafter referred to as A.H.C. "Diary."

<sup>18</sup>The welfare program of the Church or the Home Evening Program might be cited as examples of this kind of approach to revelation. See William E. Berrett, "Revelation," an address given to seminary and institute instructors meeting at Brigham Young University (June 27, 1956), also quoted in James B. Allen and Richard O. Cowan, *Mormonism in the Twentieth Century* (Provo, Utah: Extension Publications), pp. 91-92. See also Joseph F. Smith, *Home Evening With Suggestive Exercises and Explanations* (Salt Lake City: Granite Stake of Zion, 1909), copy in possession of the author.

Repeatedly, if we may believe President Woodruff and George Q. Cannon, the Mormon Prophet prayed about plural marriage and "besought God . . . to show him what to do" (A.H.C. "Diary," 6 Oct. 1890). Then on September 24, 1890, "the spirit came upon him," and in response to that spirit the Mormon leader wrote a news release, now called the Manifesto.<sup>19</sup> The Spirit had confirmed that it was right to prohibit the further contracting, publically at least, of plural marriages. Left unresolved was what to do with existing polygamist families. (See A.H.C. "Diary," 19 Oct. 1891.) Thus the Lord had only answered the immediate question and had left the Saints to resolve the other problems that resulted from such an answer.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Wilford Woodruff left Salt Lake City for California on September 3, 1890 and did not return until September 21st. He makes no reference to the Manifesto during his California trip. The first hint is his reference to a meeting on an "important subject," on September 24, 1890. This information was supplied by Dean Jessee of the Church Historian's Office.

<sup>20</sup>It has frequently been asserted by the so-called Fundamentalists, that the Manifesto was not a revelation at all. In support of this view Thomas J. Rosser tells the following story. "On Monday morning, the 25th [May 1908], our conference priesthood meeting was held, which lasted four hours and a half. After the preliminary exercises, President Charles W. Penrose asked if any of the brethren had any questions on their minds, and if so, to present them now before he delivered his message to us.

Up went my hand.

'Alright,' he said.

'President Penrose,' I said, 'I have heard much discussion on the principle of Plural Marriage, some saying that it is withdrawn from the earth and that the Manifesto was a revelation from God. Dear President, what about this case?' Then I related to him the testimony of the Sister, which is written above, and then I asked him, 'Why should she receive this testimony if God has withdrawn that principle from the earth, and the Manifesto is a true revelation from God?'

President Penrose then rose to his feet, scratched the side of his head with his right hand for a moment or so, then stretched out his right hand toward us and said: 'Brethren, I will answer that question, if you will keep it under your hats. I, Charles W. Penrose, wrote the Manifesto with the assistance of Frank J. Cannon and John White. It's no revelation from God, for I wrote it. Wilford Woodruff signed it to beat the Devil at his own game.' See Thomas J. Rosser to Mr. Robert C. Newson, August 4, 1956. Copy in possession of the author.

In a letter to the author, Dean C. Jessee, a member of the Church Historian's staff, wrote: "Your reference to a meeting in Treararchy, Wales at which Charles W. Penrose allegedly stated that he wrote the Manifesto, and the reference to the Wolfe testimony in the Smoot proceedings where he claims that John Henry Smith told him that the Manifesto was a trick to beat the devil at his own game are both frequently used quotations of the Fundamentalists.

"In checking the matter, the Church has no minutes of a meeting in Treararchy, Wales on May 25, 1908. Neither do we have a journal of Charles W. Penrose. Aside from statements in Fundamentalist literature I have been unable to find any reference to this meeting in Wales, or anything that would verify the Wolfe testimony in the Smoot investigation.

"To my knowledge there is no written revelation upon which the Manifesto was based."

Dean C. Jessee [signed]

(Dean C. Jessee to Kenneth W. Godfrey, April 5, 1968, copy in possession of the author.)

Wilford Woodruff himself recorded in his diary on September 25, 1890, "I have arrived at a point in the history of my life as the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints where I am under the necessity of acting for the temporal salvation of the Church. The United States government has taken a stand and passed laws to destroy the Latter-day Saints on the subject of polygamy, or patriarchal order of marriage[.]

37TH CONGRESS,  
2D Session.

## H. R. 391.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

JUNE 17, 1862.

Ordered to be printed.

### AN ACT

To punish and prevent the practice of polygamy in the Territories of the United States and other places, and disapproving and annulling certain acts of the legislative assembly of the Territory of Utah.

In the October 1890 general conference of the Church the news release was read, approved unanimously according to the record, and defended (*Deseret News*, 7 Oct. 1890). Scripture was called to reinforce the Mormon leader's action and a very thoughtful, carefully worded defense by George Q. Cannon persuaded some reluctant Saints to follow their sustained leader.

More than a year later President Wilford Woodruff, in a public address given in Logan, Utah declared that the Lord had shown him in vision and by revelation what would have taken place if he had not stopped plural marriage:

Had we not stopped it, you would have no use for Brother Merrill, for Brother Edlefsen, for Brother Roskelley, for Brother Leishman, or for any of the men in this temple at Logan; for all ordinances would be stopped throughout Israel, and many men would be made prisoners. This trouble would have come upon the whole church, and we should have been compelled to stop the practice.<sup>21</sup>

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and after praying to the Lord and feeling inspired, I have issued the following proclamation which is sustained by my counselors and the twelve apostles."

The diary of Marriner W. Merrill states that the Manifesto was read and approved by all the brethren, September 24, 1890, before it was released to the press. Melvin Clarence Merrill (ed.), *Marriner Wood Merrill and His Family* (n.p., 1937), p. 127. In defending his issuance of the Manifesto, President Woodruff boldly declared, "I say to Israel, the Lord will never permit me nor any other man who stands as the President of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the program. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so he will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty" (Wilford Woodruff, General Conference, October 6, 1890).

<sup>21</sup>G. Homer Durham, ed. *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc. 1969), p. 215.

The Mormon leader went on to explain that work for the dead, which is such a vital part of Mormonism, would have been brought to a halt and then he vigorously affirmed that the Spirit of the Lord was very much with him and that the Church was still being led by God.

The foregoing represents how the leaders of the Church were defending the Manifesto, but what were the Mormon leaders saying in private? With the recent acquisition of the Abraham H. Cannon diaries it is now possible to accurately report what was taking place in meetings of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Back as early as December 1889 Cannon had reported in his diary that great pressure was being applied to the leaders of the Church to make "concessions to the courts in regard to its principles." Neither of the President's counselors, he reported, would advise him "as to the course he should pursue." After laying the matter again before the Lord, Wilford Woodruff reported that he had been told not to "yield one particle of that which he had revealed and established" (A.H.C. "Diary," 19 Dec. 1889). A feeling of peace, Cannon said, pervaded the room as the Mormon Prophet spoke (A.H.C. "Diary," 30 Sept. 1890). Little else is said about the difficulties besetting the Saints by Cannon until September 30, 1890, six days following the press release previously mentioned. In the meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve held that Tuesday, the issuance of the press release was freely discussed by those present. That discussion is reported in detail in Cannon's diary under the date of September 30, 1890:

Lorenzo Snow, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, said,

The Lord will not permit any faithful Saint to lose blessings through the acts of the wicked or because of circumstances over which the individual has no control. . . . A faithful man, though he may have wayward wives and children, will doubtless have the power hereafter given to him to bring them up to a plane of happiness and exaltation, even though he may have no influence with them here . . . the very important law concerning baptism is at times suspended as in the case of married women whose husbands are opposed to the gospel, or minors whose parents object to the baptism of their children. I can see great good and no inconsistency in this matter.

Next Apostle Franklin D. Richards said,

In the issuance of this Manifesto I see good and those who possess the spirit of revelation will understand and appreciate it . . . When President Woodruff prepared his Manifesto it was without the aid or suggestions of his counselors. He took a clerk and went to a room alone where under the spirit of inspiration he dictated the declaration he desired to make and their [sic] was only one slight change made therein when it was read to counselors Cannon and Smith. Therefore I feel it is from the Almighty.

John W. Taylor, who fifteen years later would be excommunicated from the Church because of his private disregard for the Manifesto, then spoke,

When I first heard of this Manifesto I felt to say Damn it, but on further thought I felt it was not right to be so impulsive. I do not yet feel quite right about it. My father when President of the Church sought to find a way to evade the conflict between the Saints and government on the question of plural marriage but the Lord said it was an eternal and unchangeable law and must stand. President Woodruff lately received an encouraging revelation in regard to this principle, and now I ask myself, 'Is the Lord a child that he thus changes?' Yet I feel the Lord giveth and the Lord can also take it away.

Moses Thatcher, who just six years later would be dropped from the Quorum of the Twelve because of his refusal to sign the political manifesto,<sup>22</sup> remarked,

In 1885 Pres. Taylor made a public statement in the tabernacle that he had taken a course to place himself outside the reach of the law and many persons then felt and do feel that he was seeking to avoid the issue, just as many now feel concerning Pres. Woodruff's declaration. Yet I feel that both of these brethren acted exactly right. The law of God is not abrogated, but in order to try the nation which has long called us traitors of the practice of this principle, the cause of offence is removed, so that the law makers and people may be left without just excuse in their prosecution of the Saints...

Francis Lyman was the concluding speaker that day and is quoted as having said,

I endorse the Manifesto, and feel it will do good. I design to live with and have children by my wives, using the wisdom which God gave me to avoid being captured by the officers of the law.

The meeting then adjourned until ten o'clock the following morning, October 1, 1890. Prayer was offered by Quorum President Lorenzo Snow, and then John H. Smith said,

I cannot feel to say that the Manifesto is quite right or wrong. It may be that the people are unworthy of the principle and hence the Lord has withdrawn it. I cannot consent to cease living with my wives unless I am imprisoned.

Heber J. Grant stated,

I approve of the Manifesto and feel that it is merely a public announcement of the course which we had already in our private councils decided to adopt and this being the case I do not know why we should not receive any possible benefits which may arise from a public declaration. Yet I believe greater trouble will follow the

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<sup>22</sup>The political manifesto was published and discussed in an article by President Wilford Woodruff in *DNW*, 19 Oct. 1895.



prominent Elders in the Church through the adoption of this policy. If this plan had been accepted in the beginning of this crusade the nation would not have been tried as it has been and would not be worthy of condemnation such as it now merits, hence I feel this has come at a proper time.

Antho H. Lund, who was the concluding speaker, said, "Sickness prevented my being here yesterday to my sorrow. I feel that the Manifesto will result in good — I gave my approval to what has been done.

That apostles also struggle to understand when decisions are made, is evidenced by the statements quoted above. Not one declared that God had spoken to him and said the Manifesto was of divine origin. All attempted to understand the revelation penned by their President's clerk by use of their reason, and they were at this time at least struggling with themselves and Deity for confirmation. That such confirmation was slow in coming is attested to by the fact that two members of the quorum were forced to resign, fifteen years later, for their refusal to abandon plural marriage.

### CONCLUSIONS

In the coming of the Manifesto we have seen the struggles of men as they attempted to encounter Deity and learn His will. We have witnessed a Prophet of God, as external pressure was applied, reason, pray and try in various ways to save those Saints who followed him from sorrow, suffering and anguish. Willing to defy the laws of the land only after they had been slowly tested through the courts and then quietly submitting to the decrees of those courts as they marched to prison, the Saints proudly witnessed that they would obey God rather than man. Theirs was not a wild, passionate, violent rejection of law but rather, for the most part, a peaceful determination to worship God in the way they believed to be proper.

Then, as pressure became even more severe, as it became clear that other doctrines of the Church, including work for the dead, would suffer a serious setback unless something was done, a faithful, devoted president of the Church, with some counsel, decided upon a three-pronged plan to win governmental favor; he then struggled with himself and with Deity to know whether such a plan was approved or not. When divine confirmation came a public declaration was penned and the world heard, but for many months did not fully believe, that the Mormon Church had abandoned plural marriage.

The Lord, George Q. Cannon argued, basing his argument upon scripture, would reward the Saints for the desires of their heart and no condemnation would result, because environmental pressure forced them to abandon the practice of plural marriage. The Lord will at times change true doctrines and practices if his covenant people are subjected over long periods of time to external pressure. But it should be noted that the Saints did not officially abandon plural marriage until the Lord had spoken, as a further indication that they obeyed God rather than decreed congressional law, which

their Prophet deemed to be evil. Not willing to condone violent demonstrations against unjust laws, they quietly, legally at first, refused to submit until a revelation from God told them they could do so with divine favor.

It is not strange that some Mormons never would abandon plural marriage given the Latter-day Saint concept that each man has the right to confirm divine decrees of the prophet, seer, and revelator. Some Mormons, including two members of the Quorum of the Twelve, apparently either did not receive or were unable to recognize divine confirmation and hence continued to engage in plural relationships. Other Saints either received confirmation or were glad to follow the counsel of their prophet-president without going to the Lord in prayer.

Coming largely in response to specific needs, revelation from God is truly a happening. There can be no greater experience whether it be the grand, expansive dramatic vision of an apocalypse or the sublime calm and peace that comes as the mind of God communicates with the mind of man. That such experiences come after struggle, thought, frequent hours of prayer, is humbly attested to by those Latter-day Saints, including the author, who are convinced that Wilford Woodruff and his successors are indeed prophets of God.



*A polygamist group portrait taken at the Utah State Penitentiary, Sugar House, during the late 1880's. George Q. Cannon is seated in the center, holding a bouquet of flowers.*