



In defense of
JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH
1876-1972

With respect, Dialogue presents the following collection of tributes and recollections of President Joseph Fielding Smith. The span of President Smith's life dramatizes the growth and development of the Church during the past one hundred years. When he was born the Church was still a Great Basin Kingdom presided over by Brigham Young; when he died it had become in the full sense of the word an international Church. From the time he became an Apostle at the turn of the century to his death, Church membership increased more than tenfold.

When Joseph Fielding Smith became President of the Church, some may have felt that a man of his age and orientation might be incapable of the vision and guidance which the Church needed in these times. What has happened under his brief administration is dramatic evidence of his inspired leadership. As Eugene England remarked in the Spring, 1971 issue of Dialogue, "The Prophet has brought an era marked by a marvelous new tolerance and breadth in his own sermons on one hand, and on the other an exciting new spirit of venturesomeness in actions of the Church: appointment of young men of spiritual and intellectual power and cultural breadth . . . to head the Church schools; new professionalism and courage in the reorganized Church publications . . . ; new confidence and sophistication in our mission as a universal Church . . . ; bold moves in development of the Church's social services. . . ." Time may well show that in his short tenure as President and Prophet, Joseph Fielding Smith initiated one of the most progressive periods in Church history.

As a public man, Joseph Fielding Smith often was seen as stern and austere. That he was also kind and gentle is less well known. In the following pages Hoyt Brewster, Jr., a grandson of the Prophet, points out in a touching reminiscence, that those who knew Joseph Fielding Smith well knew that he was a man of love; two associates, G. Homer Durham and Henry Eyring, attest to his kindness and tolerance; Denise St. Sauveur, a recent convert to the Church, tells of her experience in discovering the Prophet; and Mary Bradford and Richard Cracroft write personal impressions of their brief encounters with him. Finally, Leonard Arrington, newly-appointed Church Historian, gives an estimate of President Smith's fifty-year tenure as Historian of the Church.