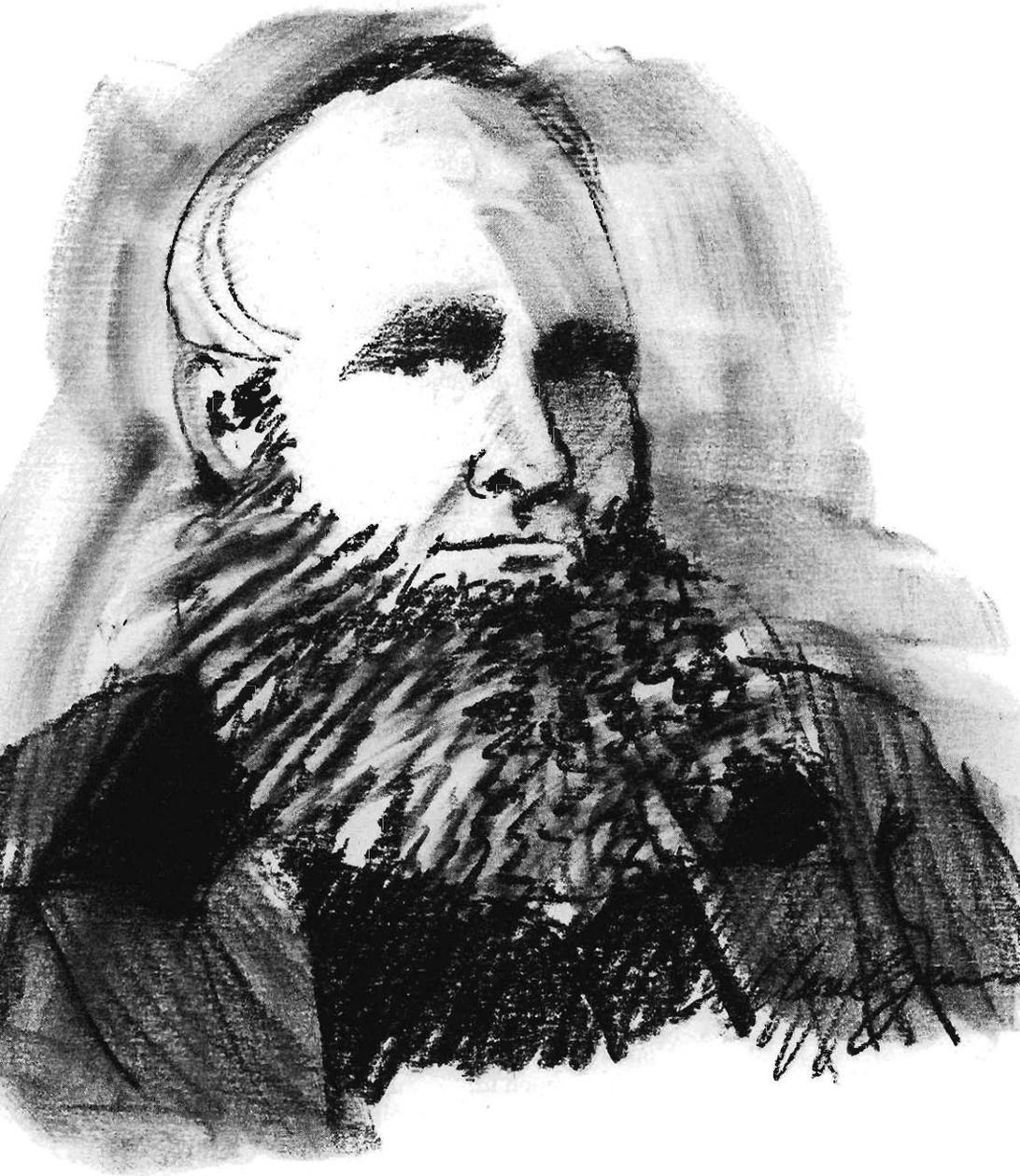


Loretta L. Hefner

From Apostle to Apostate: The Personal Struggle of Amasa Mason Lyman



The principles of the gospel are perfect," President Brigham Young admonished his audience early in the summer of 1867, "but are the Apostles who teach it perfect?" Even though he provided an answer ("No, they are not"), the question was rhetorical. He had just reminded his listeners that doctrinal deviations were not limited to the apostles of old. Even among the present Quorum, observed Young, was one apostle who does "not believe in the existence of a personage called God"; a second "who believes that infants have the spirits of some who have formerly lived on the earth, and that this is their resurrection"; and ("This is not all") "another one . . . who, I understand, for fifteen years, has been preaching on the sly . . . that the Savior was nothing more than a good man, and that his death had nothing to do with your salvation or mine."¹

The first apostolic "heresies," Orson Pratt's, have been recounted elsewhere.² The second apostle, Orson Hyde, was associated with several rejected doctrinal innovations during his career including his 1844–45 notion that blacks were "neutrals" in the War in Heaven and that everyone had a personal "guardian angel."³ Hyde's ideas on the "baby resurrection," as it was termed, were put forth about 1850, a year in which he recalled "President Young told me . . . my views on the baby resurrection was not true, that I might believe what I pleased if I would not preach false doctrine." Subsequently "Hyde renounced the doctrine and made it all right with the Quorum."⁴ The third unorthodox apostle and the only one whose views led to his excommunication, was Amasa Mason Lyman, devout member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for over thirty-five years, and an active participant in some of the Church's most dramatic and harrowing episodes.

The eighteen-year-old Lyman was introduced to Mormonism and baptized by twenty-year-old Orson Pratt in 1832. He left his family in New Hampshire, joined the Saints in Ohio, and almost immediately set out with Pratt on the first of sixteen missions he would ultimately serve. During one of these missions in 1834, he joined Zion's Camp, was stricken by ague and fever, and though still shaky, immediately resumed his missionary work. Like many others who served in Zion's Camp, Lyman was called late in 1834 to the First Council of the Seventy.

An early sign of Lyman's exceptional commitment was his courage and resourcefulness in antagonistic Missouri. On several occasions he disguised him-

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¹ Discourse, Salt Lake City, 23 June 1867, reported in the *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool 1854–82), 12:66, hereafter cited as JD, by volume and page numbers.

² Gary James Bergera, "The Orson Pratt-Brigham Young Controversies: Conflict within the Quorums, 1853 to 1868," *DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT* 13 (Summer 1980): 7–49.

³ Joseph Smith Hyde, *Orson Hyde* (Salt Lake City, 1933), p. 6; Zina D. Huntington Young Diary, 13 Nov. 1844, Historical Department Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereafter LDS Church Archives.

⁴ Wilford Woodruff Journal, 10 Sept. and 4 Sept. 1867, LDS Church Archives.

self to gather information about the citizens' plans to force the Mormons out of the state. Then, in November 1838, Joseph Smith, Lyman, and several others were arrested, convicted, and sentenced to death by a military tribunal for their alleged crimes against the State of Missouri. Later the sentences were commuted to jail terms.

Lyman rejoined the Saints in Illinois in 1842 and was called to be an apostle, filling a vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve created by the excommunication of his friend and first contact with Mormonism, Orson Pratt. When Pratt resolved his conflicts with Joseph Smith and was reinstated to the Quorum, Lyman was appointed a counselor to the First Presidency. A year after the death of Joseph Smith, Lyman was again called into the Quorum of the Twelve.

During the Saints' move west, Lyman helped the Mississippi group migrate and was one of three apostles asked to raise funds for the trek among the eastern Saints. By this time, Lyman, like other leading Mormons, had accepted the practice of celestial marriage. In Utah he settled his eight wives and their children in several communities — Farmington, Salt Lake City, Fillmore, Beaver, and Parowan.

In 1851, Lyman and fellow apostle Charles C. Rich directed the Church colonization of the San Bernardino area and lost thousands of dollars by personally refinancing the settlement's mortgages. From 1860–63 Lyman again joined Rich to preside over the European mission.

The intellectual antecedents of the ideas which finally culminated in Lyman's excommunication in 1870 are not completely clear. His impressive record of Church service clearly attests to a deep personal commitment to Mormonism. Yet remnants of his Universalist heritage occasionally showed. Even as leader of the Church colony in San Bernardino in the early 1850s, Lyman associated with local spiritualists and at least twice experimented with seances. By 1852, Lyman, like many other Americans, was reading the works of spiritualism's most prolific and prominent writer, Andrew Jackson Davis, in particular, *The Harmonial Philosophy*, *The Principles of Nature*, *Her Divine Revelations*, and *A Voice to Mankind*, and *The Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse: Being an Explanation of Modern Mysteries*. As European mission president in 1860–63, he was immersed in what later historians have termed "the golden age of liberal theology," which was primarily the result of a social and scientific upheaval which seriously challenged traditional religions in the later half of the nineteenth century. Dramatic scientific discoveries and a concurrent shift in religious and moral attitudes led to skepticism toward biblical concepts of history and creation.

In America, liberal theology found its most fertile ground among New England protestant churches. Unitarians and Universalists made the most significant contributions to the liberal movement, but it also took root among Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Northern Baptist congregations. Although these denominations still preached essential Christianity, liberal theolo-

gians led their churches away from so-called myth, error, and intellectual bondage into the broader world of science, philosophy, and scholarship.⁵

That Lyman might be receptive to such a movement was apparent to some from the outset of his European mission. In 1860, an unknown reporter for the *Millennial Star* praised the new mission president's first sermon as:

delightful and satisfying. The aim of the speaker was to give to "Mormonism" that massive, universal, and liberal character which properly belongs to it. . . . I could not help but wish for the speaker during his mission here, many opportunities of addressing large congregations of the liberal and advanced minds of England . . . [thereby] establishing in the public minds a more just and higher appreciation of "Mormonism."

And there are those who believe the period has come [from which the Latter-day Saint Church will draw] some of its most liberal and advanced minds.⁶

Whatever his starting point, by early 1862 Lyman was immersed in some of the liberal theology then in vogue. In a March 1862 sermon delivered in Dundee, Scotland, he asserted that man, coming from a perfect spirit father, was innately good and could redeem himself by correcting his own mortal errors. There was thus simply no need for a savior. The historical figure, Jesus, whom most worshipped as the Christ, was in reality only a moral reformer, teacher, and exemplar of great love.⁷

Although this startling sermon was published in the *Millennial Star*, it did not come immediately to the attention of Brigham Young. In the interim, Lyman resumed his duties in Utah. In 1863, not long after his return from England, President Young heard that Lyman had given a sermon in Beaver, Utah, denying the divinity of Christ and the efficacy of the atonement. While touring Mormon settlements in southern Utah soon thereafter, Young preaching at Parowan, not far from Beaver, turned to Lyman, who was seated behind him on the dais, and asked the fifty-two-year-old apostle if he had ever preached such a sermon. Lyman replied that he had never thought of preaching that doctrine.

Young, relieved, continued his sermon on the importance of the atonement of Jesus. After discussing the necessity of man's efforts to achieve salvation, he said to the congregation, "If I were to stop here, you would say that I had preached the same doctrine that Amasa [had], but I will extend it further and say what he would have said had he finished his discourse." President Young said a savior had to exist to account for justice and mercy — man could not do this for himself. Young then turned to Lyman and asked if this were not what he had intended to preach. Lyman responded that it was. Young, the visiting

⁵ Loretta L. Hefner, "Amasa Mason Lyman, The Spiritualist," *Journal of Mormon History* 6 (1979): 75–87; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 763–84.

⁶ *LDS Millennial Star* 22 (18 Aug. 1860): 524.

⁷ Amasa Mason Lyman, "Nature of the Mission of Jesus," 16 March 1862, *LDS Millennial Star* 24 (5 April 1862): 209–17.

members of the Quorum, and the congregation were fully satisfied, and nothing more was said.⁸

While the Church leadership may have missed the extent of Lyman's intellectual-universalist outlook during the next few years, he attracted unusual attention in 1866 when the *American Phrenological Journal*, a liberal national organ, wrote at some length about Lyman, its first featured Mormon, whom they characterized as "the Mormon Theodore Parker":

[Amasa Lyman] is full of transcendental thoughts. . . . He could stand in a church in fellowship with Carlyle or Emerson, and they could not charge him with not being universal enough. He believes in the "divinity of the world," perhaps more than in the divinity of the mission of any man, and even Christ himself is only the embodiment of the world's divine mission. . . . Amasa thinks that the universe of truth is God, and man approximates to Deity as fast as he takes in universal truth. Amasa Lyman is an apostle of universal truth, rather than an apostle of any one Church organization. . . . Church organizations, apostleships, doctrines, forms, and ordinances are only the shell; the kernal of truth is within. . . . He is perhaps much too heterodox an Apostle, but the Mormon Church, which has taken in all sects and all people of all nations, seems to have gathered into it all classes of minds.⁹

Just the year before, ironically, Lyman had joined the Quorum in signing a public statement of censure against his old mentor, Orson Pratt.¹⁰ One of the points in dispute was Pratt's "unorthodox" view of God which did not differ markedly from that attributed to Lyman above.

Already sensitized by Pratt's ongoing disagreement on several points of doctrine, as well as the previously alleged heresies of Lyman and Hyde, the First Presidency issued an 1865 statement prohibiting the publication of "any doctrines, as the doctrine of the Church . . . without first submitting [the text] for examination and approval to the First Presidency and the Twelve." Young amplified in a December 1866 statement that "if some doctrines be preached and published as the doctrines of the Church and not contradicted by us it would not be long before there would be schisms."¹¹ It was of more than passing interest, therefore, when just a few days later, in January 1867, Young and some associates came across a copy of Lyman's 1862 Dundee sermon. Eight passages were found to be doctrinally offensive, and a meeting of the First Presidency and complete Quorum of the Twelve was convened.¹²

⁸ The only narrative of the events leading up to the disfellowship is unfinished, written circa 1867-68, on newsprint in pencil. The document is thought to be in the handwriting of Robert Lang Campbell, chief clerk in the office of the Church Historian, 1854-72. Amasa Mason Lyman Collection, LDS Church Archives; hereafter cited as the Campbell narrative. The collection will be cited as AML Collection.

⁹ "The Mormons' History of Their Leading Men," *American Phrenological Journal* 44 (1866): 150.

¹⁰ *Deseret News*, 23 Aug. 1865.

¹¹ James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Publishers, 1965-75), 2:239; Wilford Woodruff, Journal, 26 Dec. 1866, LDS Church Archives.

¹² Campbell narrative.

At the gathering in the president's office on 21 January 1867, Lyman was given a copy of the sermon and told "that it contained doctrines which were opposed to God's word, and which his brethren who held the apostleship condemned as false." Lyman responded that he found nothing in the sermon to be false or heretical, as he understood the doctrine.¹³ He told the group that the Dundee address represented his views on the mission of Jesus but that he would not impose his views on them and would gladly listen if they had a different opinion. His associates, surprised and saddened by the realization that Lyman had lied to them about the Beaver sermon, lectured him sternly, and cited scripture in an attempt to correct his ideas.

Wilford Woodruff spoke first of all, the Quorum followed, and they spoke in very strong terms. Wilford Woodruff said that he felt shocked at the idea that one of the Twelve should go so far into the darkness as to deny the blood of Christ and say that it was not necessary for the salvation of men and teach this as true doctrine. . . . "And I can tell Brother Lyman that that doctrine will send him to perdition, if he continues it, and so it will any man, and furthermore, such a doctrine would send this Church and Kingdom to pieces like an earthquake. There never was and never will be a saint on earth that believes in that doctrine, it is the worst heresy man can preach."¹⁴

After hearing similar reprimands from others Lyman begged them to stop and, weeping, asked forgiveness. He said he wanted to be found in good standing in the Church and that he would sign any confession necessary. The men left Lyman to confer with President Young who concluded that Lyman should "make [his confession] as public as he had his false doctrine."¹⁵

The following day the Twelve gathered again in the president's office to listen to Lyman's confession, no copy of which now survives. They found it unacceptable. President Young sharply told Lyman that if he did not produce a satisfactory document, one would be written for him. The president added, "If it had happened in Joseph's day, he would have cut [you] off [from] the church, and it was a question whether the Lord would justify us in retaining [you] in the church or not."¹⁶

The next day, Lyman returned with a satisfactory retraction which was published in the *Deseret News*:¹⁷

To the Latter-day Saints Throughout
All the World

Great Salt Lake City
January 23, 1867

I have sinned a grievous sin in teaching a doctrine which makes the death of Jesus Christ of no force, thus sapping the foundation of the Christian religion. The above mentioned doctrine is found in a discourse which I preached on the "Nature of the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Wilford Woodruff, *Journal*, 21 Jan. 1867.

¹⁵ Manuscript History of the Church, 21 Jan. 1867, LDS Church Archives.

¹⁶ Ibid., 22 Jan. 1867.

¹⁷ *Deseret News*, 30 Jan. 1867.

Mission of Jesus," on the 16th of March, 1862, in Dundee, Scotland, and which was published in the *Millennial Star*, No. 14, Volume 24. The above preaching was done without submitting it to, or seeking the counsel of, those who bear the Priesthood with whom I am associated. In this I committed a great wrong, for which I most humbly crave and ask their forgiveness, as I do also of all the Saints who have heard my teaching on this subject. I will further say that it is my wish and desire that this confession of my errors shall also apply to all of my teachings of a similar kind among the people, and that the confession should be as widely circulated as my teachings have been. I do most honestly and firmly believe in the Sacrifice and Atonement made by Jesus Christ in opening up the way of salvation to mankind, and that without his death we would all have been lost. Everything that I have said that would deny this great truth is false, and has a tendency to destroy, in the minds of the people, the value of the plan of redemption.

(signed) Amasa M. Lyman

Four days later in Provo, Utah, Lyman "spoke on the subject of the Atonement of Jesus Christ." This time his doctrine was orthodox. "He wished it distinctly understood that he believed in it, [and] gave a lengthy eulogy on the life, ministry, and sacrifice of our Savior. He had done for us that which we could not do for ourselves viz open the prison, mark out the way, and invite us to follow. He [Lyman] reasoned to the effect that we could not have salvation without the Atonement of Jesus no more than we could have light without the sun."¹⁸

The sermon came as good news to the other Church leaders. Lyman was apparently convinced of his errors, had confessed them, and appeared ready to continue his ministry. However, during visits to smaller Utah communities outside Salt Lake City in the next few weeks, Lyman repudiated his confession and criticized the treatment he had received from his colleagues. While preaching a sermon in Fillmore, he "suggested that some would ask why he made [the confession] if his doctrines were true, and he said, 'I did it to save being thrown over the fence to the dogs.'" On another occasion, the apostle asked a man whether he would lie or be cut off from the Church, then he answered his own question: Lyman knew what *he* would do.¹⁹

Before long these remarks were reported to President Young. At the end of March 1867, another complaint from Beaver arrived where Lyman had preached a full discourse on the irrelevance of Christ's atonement. He had read David's protest against abuses inflicted upon him by his enemies (Psalm 35), then told an anecdote: "The countryman said that all men would lie if pinched hard enough; the merchant queried how hard an honest man would have to be pinched to make him tell a lie, to which the countryman made answer, 'Why pinch him until he lies.'"²⁰ Lyman then plunged into a sermon similar to the

¹⁸ Minute Book of Utah Stake, 27 Jan. 1867, LDS Church Archives.

¹⁹ Francis Marion Lyman, Journal, Aug. 1867, LDS Church Archives. Also cited in the Campbell narrative. Date of sermon in Fillmore not given.

²⁰ Report of investigation, Brigham Young, John Taylor, George A. Smith, Wilford Woodruff, and George Q. Cannon to the Quorum of the Twelve, 6 May 1867, AML Collection.

Dundee address, adding that he was not sorry for what he had taught but regretted that he was not understood.

When President Young received word of the sermon, he promptly called a meeting of the Twelve. The clerk reported that after "a recapitulation of the evidence and circumstances of the case and upon due consultation, it was moved, seconded, and carried unanimously that Amasa M. Lyman be cut off from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and his priesthood be taken from him, and he remain as a lay member of the church."²¹

On April 29 and 30, President Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, and George Q. Cannon, visited Fillmore "to take such action in the case as they might deem necessary." Lyman candidly admitted his behavior. Rather than dropping Lyman from the Quorum, the five General Authorities forbade Lyman to engage in any preaching and told him to "especially be silent respecting those erroneous and false doctrines which have been condemned by the First Presidency and the Twelve."²²

Unfortunately, details of Lyman's reaction to the message and counsel of the General Authorities are not known.²³ He apparently took the instructions calmly, had no violent outbreaks of emotion, and did not attempt to placate his colleagues.

It is not clear why Lyman, who for years had obviously been motivated by a desire to keep his good standing in the Church, suddenly valued more a public proclamation of his concept of the Atonement. Perhaps he yearned to be understood. It appears that Lyman grew weary of his inner conflict and felt it was easier to admit his doubts about Jesus and the Atonement than to argue with his brethren.

Brigham Young and his colleagues among the General Authorities left no room for uncertainty among Church members about their views. Returning to Salt Lake City, they stopped at several communities and preached specifically and by name against the false doctrines Elder Lyman had spread. Joseph Fish, a resident of Parowan, Utah, recorded: "The speakers spoke quite pointedly on the subject of the atonement of the Savior. They sustained the notion in strong terms and spoke against Amasa Lyman's preaching on the subject."²⁴

On returning to Salt Lake City the following week, the four members of Twelve submitted a report to the Quorum:²⁵

[The investigation] substantially confirmed the evidence which came before us, and more particularly by Elder Lyman's own explanations and statements in regard to his teachings on that occasion. . . .

²¹ Campbell narrative.

²² Wilford Woodruff, Journal, 30 April 1867; Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency to Amasa Mason Lyman, 30 April 1867, AML Collection.

²³ While there are forty-three journals and extensive correspondence in the AML Collection, documentation for this period is scanty.

²⁴ Joseph Fish, Journal, 9 May 1867, Mormon Settlements in Arizona Collection, Special Collections, Western Americana, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁵ Report of investigation, 6 May 1867, AML Collection.

Having fully satisfied ourselves upon these points, we have become convinced that, duty to our God, to the Truth, to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the members thereof, to the holy calling which we have received, and to every consideration which can have weight with Saints of God, demands at our hands that Amasa M. Lyman be deprived of his priesthood. Therefore, we the undersigned members of the Quorum of the Twelve, feel to withdraw our fellowship from him, and to cut him off from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

[signed]
 John Taylor
 Wilford Woodruff
 George A. Smith
 George Q. Cannon

While this action was slow in coming, it was nonetheless decisive. Removing an apostle from the Quorum of the Twelve, denying him his privileges to officiate in priesthood ordinances, and censoring him from preaching were harsh measures indeed. Yet the hierarchy must have retained some feeling of optimism toward Lyman's rehabilitation, because he was only disfellowshipped, not excommunicated, which would have totally divorced him from the Church. Furthermore, they attributed Lyman's heresies to his "vague imaginations and theories," and their prescribed cure was equally simple: "Become more practical and conversant with the actual affairs of life."²⁶

Lyman obeyed their counsel, even though the advice was unappealing to him. In some ways, his family welcomed the decision. One of his eight wives had written of him in 1863, "Brother Lyman seemed to feel uncomfortable in his mind [and] he left his family mostly to their fate or to get along as best they could, although he was with them."²⁷ After the disfellowshippment, Amasa tried to give more time to his family and their needs. He reduced his travels drastically, and he worked daily in his orchards, in his sawmill, and on building or repairing homes for his wives. His journal entries changed from "spent the day reading" to "spent the day at the sawmill." While he remained in Fillmore with his wives, the only academic exercise he records is that he worked with his children, teaching them the basic skills of reading, grammar, and spelling.²⁸

Nineteen months after the disfellowshippment, he began attending Church services regularly, not missing a Sunday meeting for months. His son, Francis Marion Lyman, attended that first meeting with Amasa and recorded the remarks which the bishop of the Fillmore Ward allowed Amasa to make.

I can truly say my brethren and sisters it gives me pleasure to meet you once again; I do not arise as a minister to teach you, but by invitation from my brethren, and to speak of my feelings. The value of the Gospel to me is increasing every day. I have proved that it is true and good, and I am pleased and satisfied with it, and I am determined to live in this work and my chief desire is to keep my connection with it unbroken. I have no other hope but in this work and never have had. Many have

²⁶ Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency to AML, 30 April 1867, AML Collection.

²⁷ Eliza Partridge Lyman, Journal, July 1863, LDS Church Archives.

²⁸ Amasa Mason [Lyman], Journals, almost daily references throughout 1868-69, AML Collection.

wondered what bro Lyman's course [would] be. My feelings are and have been to stay with this people. The great reason why I stay is because I had rather stay than go away, an action for which I have no reason as there is no one living whom I have injured.

The Gospel provides me all the blessings I enjoy, I love it because it is pure and holy for this reason I expect to live with you and when my wearied mortality shall find its rest in the grave it shall be with the Latter-day Saints. My business now is to watch bro Lyman. I can only pray that you will listen to the instructions you may receive from the Servants of God. Brethren and sisters I thank you and Bp [Thomas] Callister for this privilege of expressing a few of my feelings.

May the Lord bless you all and the Saints and me in particular, that I may live to merit his blessings in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.²⁹

The General Authorities began visiting him again, another positive indication of Lyman's progress. Once President Young, impressed with Lyman's faithfulness, issued him a ticket to attend the local School of the Prophets.³⁰ This was certainly a token of good faith indicating that Lyman was on the way to full membership and a restoration of his priesthood.

Everything was going relatively well: business enterprises, family harmony, and his own Church activity. Then on 4 August 1869, Lyman made a seemingly harmless entry in his journal: "Today Brother William Godbe and wife came to town. . . . I spent the day with Brother Godbe."³¹ While it was not unusual for old friends to call on Lyman, this friend's brewing conflicts with the Mormon Church make these few lines noteworthy. Godbe, a British convert to Mormonism, had been friends with Lyman since their days together in the European mission. Godbe came to Salt Lake City in 1851 and soon established himself as a prominent figure. A literate man with considerable intellectual skills, he was a successful businessman, and by the late 1860s, had become one of the richest men in the Territory.

By 1869, Godbe's loyalties had shifted noticeably and his reputation as a "stalwart" member of the Mormon community and a close friend to Brigham Young soon changed to that of an antagonist of both Young and the Church at large. He became involved with Edward Tullidge and Elias Lacy Thomas Harrison, both also friends of Lyman from his days in England. Tullidge and Harrison were conspicuously discontented with the Church, and in 1864 edited the five-issue *Peep-O-Day*, a magazine of cultural and scholarly topics, openly critical of the Church in its tone. Later, they would both work on publications such as *The Mormon Tribune*, *Utah Magazine*, and the *Salt Lake Tribune*, each of which also attacked the Church's political, economic, and religious policies.³² Furthermore, beginning in 1869 Godbe and Harrison openly sup-

²⁹ Francis Marion Lyman, *Journal*, 1 Nov. 1868.

³⁰ Parowan Stake School of the Prophets Minute Book, 1869, LDS Church Archives; Amasa Mason Lyman, *Journal*, 25 April 1869.

³¹ Amasa Mason Lyman, *Journal*, 4 Aug. 1869.

³² Ronald W. Walker, "The Commencement of the Godbeite Protest: Another View," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 42 (Summer 1974): 224-28.

ported spiritualism, by then a popular, semi-religious movement in America numbering between one and two million adherents.

Lyman does not report any conversations with Godbe but five days later notes that he sent Godbe a letter. It was the beginning of a relationship that would last until Lyman's death. They corresponded frequently. Lyman began traveling to Salt Lake City to meet with Godbe and his associates. Before long, Lyman was neglecting the practical agrarian life and was again absorbed in philosophy, which had always interested him.

For nine months, Lyman maintained close contact with the Godbeites. Then on 8 May 1870, he called on President Young and his close friend, Apostle Charles C. Rich. That same evening he told William Clayton, his son-in-law, and Francis Marion Lyman, his eldest son, that he was going to resume preaching "in connection with the New Movement." Both knew that this decision would lead to an open confrontation with the Mormon hierarchy and Lyman's eventual excommunication, and the decision gave them, Lyman recorded in his journal, "much pain."³³

Nevertheless, he began immediately, preached daily, and associated constantly with the members of the New Movement. Universal truth, salvation without atonement, and man's redemption through knowledge were the subjects of his sermons. He openly participated in spiritualism and seances.³⁴ Rumor circulated in Salt Lake City that Lyman would become president of the New Movement, or the Church of Zion, as it was officially called in 1870. William Clayton wrote Francis Marion Lyman, "Dr. [Ira Taggart] makes no secret of saying that your father is the man to take the lead of the apostate clique; that he is ready and expected to be the head of the apostate church."³⁵ Clayton was not the only one to make this report. Brigham Young wrote wryly to Albert Carrington, a future apostle then serving as European Mission President: "The church of the 'great unappreciated' has, I am informed, at last found a head. After various vain attempts, and several journeys of many thousands of miles in diverse directions, the coming man has at length been developed, as I am told by several of the brethren that Amasa M. Lyman has consented to take the presidency of the 'new movement.'"³⁶ Shortly thereafter, another of Lyman's sons, Lorenzo Snow Lyman, wrote of the same rumors in his home town of Fillmore.³⁷

Word of Lyman's renewed activism spread through Salt Lake City rapidly. On 10 May 1870, while Lyman was at the home of Joseph Silver, three representatives from the Salt Lake Stake high council, in whose boundaries Lyman

³³ Amasa Mason Lyman, Journal, 8 May 1870; Francis Marion Lyman, Journal, May 1870.

³⁴ Amasa Mason Lyman, Journals, see almost daily references for 1870-73.

³⁵ William Clayton to Francis Marion Lyman, 16 Dec. 1869, William Clayton Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California, microfilm at LDS Church Archives.

³⁶ Brigham Young to Albert Carrington, 11 May 1870, in *LDS Millennial Star* 32 (14 June 1870): 378-79.

³⁷ Lorenzo Snow Lyman to Amasa Mason Lyman, 15 May 1870, AML Collection.

was temporarily residing, came to investigate. Joseph L. Barfoot, Emanuel M. Murphy, and William Thorne reported that Lyman “made a long statement of his views and feelings, he [said that he] had smothered [his] abilities to do good for 3 years and he now intended to take a cause to preach the truth as he understood it, independent of the authority ‘he had been formerly identified with.’” Did he support the First Presidency of the Quorum of the Twelve? No. Did he belong to the New Movement? He evaded the question. The trio warned him that the consequence of not supporting the General Authorities was excommunication, but he retorted: “It was not for him to express any opinions on that matter,” that the High Council should do its duty and “if [they] did it in righteousness he would have no evil feelings to [them].” What were his views on the divinity of Jesus and the efficacy of the atonement? The same as they were years ago, and that “til some one could give him better information they would remain unchanged.”³⁸ The visit ended, the three took their findings to the Salt Lake Stake high council, and the council excommunicated him on 12 May 1870 and published its decision in the *Deseret News* the following day.³⁹

Lyman seemed pleased. He wrote to his first wife, Maria Louisa Tanner Lyman, “My health is good and my spirits never beter One week ago today it was announced that I was cut off from the Church for apostacy.”⁴⁰ Lyman had reentered the ministry and public life. He had been a preacher since age eighteen, the orator of the Church during his apostleship. Now he was finally meeting an urgent need: to preach the liberal doctrines that had been stifled for three years. He did it with the zeal and authority befitting “a prophet of the Godbeites.” He preached spiritualism to groups several times a week, traveled through central and southern Utah and northern Arizona, established seance circles and generally propagated spiritualism and the New Movement philosophy.

The members of his family who shared the Mormon belief in the eternal nature of the family were griefstricken, particularly six of Lyman’s seven living wives. Eliza Maria Partridge, Caroline Ely Partridge, and Lydia Partridge, all daughters of Edward Partridge, the first bishop in the Church, had long complained about Amasa’s lack of support for them and their children and felt “he did not enjoy the proper spirit an apostle should.”⁴¹ They divorced him after his disfellowshipment.⁴² Dionita Walker, Paulina Eliza Phelps, and Priscilla

³⁸ Report of Joseph L. Barfoot, Emanuel M. Murphy, and William Thorne to the Salt Lake Stake high council, 12 May 1870, AML Collection. It is not clear why the Salt Lake Stake high council was the ecclesiastical body to investigate Lyman or who suggested that they act on the matter. Lyman was on an extended visit to Salt Lake City, but his home was in Fillmore. However, after Lyman had publicly espoused the New Movement banner, the Mormon hierarchy presumably felt the need to act quickly.

³⁹ Amasa Mason Lyman, Journal, 12 May 1870. *Deseret News*, 13 May 1870.

⁴⁰ Amasa Mason Lyman to Maria Louisa Tanner Lyman, 20 May 1870, AML Collection.

⁴¹ Eliza Partridge, Journal, July 1863.

⁴² Eliza Partridge was sealed to Joseph Smith before she married Lyman, but her two sisters were sealed to Lyman. After the disfellowshipment, all three divorced him and the

Turley seemed to feel some alienation immediately after the excommunication and continued to be active in the Church, but continued their relationship with him.

Only Maria Louisa Tanner, Amasa's first wife, remained loyal to him and at times served as a medium for his seances. She wrote him immediately after his excommunication: "I am glad you feel free to preach the gospel my prayer is that you may have the spirit of the Lord to dwell with you and to teach you truth and righteousness for persecution is not at an end. my Marriage vows I hold sacred as also the covenants I have made at the waters edge. . . ." ⁴³ On the back of the letter, assuring him of her devotion, she put in large writing, "DOUBT me not."

Amasa's apostasy caused deep divisions among his children as well. Francis Marion Lyman, Amasa's eldest son, to whom his father once said, "Remember my son, that not only yours alone, but the hope and interest of your father's house, hang upon your conduct in the future," ⁴⁴ was wounded as well as indignant over his father's decision to embrace and preach the New Movement:

I was broken hearted and speechless, but when I could sufficiently recover my presence of mind I remonstrated with him with my eyes full of tears and all to no purpose. My heart was too sore for argument and I parted with him thus, and took Rhoda [his wife] upstairs at George Crismons, where we wept together for hours. Father's death would have been a pleasure compared with what we suffered at this terrible announcement.⁴⁵

On the other hand, at least four of Lyman's children supported him. Louisa Maria Lyman, his oldest daughter and sister of Francis Marion, felt such sympathy that it caused a divorce in her marriage to William Clayton.⁴⁶ Lorenzo Snow Lyman, son of Amasa and Dionita Walker, was a vocal supporter, corresponding extensively with his father until his death. He and two sisters, Agnes Hila and Love Josephine, daughters of Maria Louisa Tanner, wrote to Bishop Thomas Callister, the presiding bishop of Fillmore, asking that their names be removed from the records of the Church. All three remained close to their father, Lorenzo defending him when community members were critical. They, along with his wife, Maria Louisa, developed skills as spiritualist mediums and conducted seances for their father.

In the end, Lyman's excommunication seems to have been more negative for his family and the Mormon community than for him. He was pleased to be

two sisters were sealed to Joseph Smith. Harriet Jane Lyman Lovell, a child of Amasa and Caroline Ely Partridge, whose mother decided to leave Amasa after his estrangement from the Church, remembers that Amasa "pleaded with [Caroline] and walked the floor all night trying to persuade her to stay with him, but she was firm and lived as a widow from that time on." Albert R. Lyman, *Amasa Mason Lyman, Trailblazer and Pioneer from the Atlantic to the Pacific* (Delta, Utah: Melvin A. Lyman, M.D., 1957), p. 279.

⁴³ Maria Louisa Tanner Lyman to Amasa Mason Lyman, 15 May 1867, AML Collection.

⁴⁴ Francis Marion Lyman, Journal, 1853.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 May 1870.

⁴⁶ Maria Louisa Lyman Clayton to Amasa Mason Lyman, 15 July 1870, AML Collection.

free, content to spend the remaining years of his life discussing his concept of truth, knowledge, and the reforming light of Jesus. Because Lyman felt that his concept of salvation was broader than that of any sect, he was not bitter toward the Church but tolerated what he felt was narrowness and egocentricity. The formal excommunication relieved him of a cumbersome annoyance. Lyman actively preached his liberal theology until the demise of the New Movement three years later in 1873. The movement's dissolution came about as a result of its loose organizational structure and the failure to convert a sufficient number of new members. Four years later, still staunch in his beliefs, "Mormonism's Theodore Parker" died of natural causes, at the age of sixty-three.

The intense redirection of Lyman's conviction baffled the Mormon community. The only explanation to many was that the once-faithful apostle was "diseased of the mind." Over the next century, folklore would invent explanations: a skull fracture from the kick of a horse, false doctrine taught by Dr. Ira Burns, a gentile-heretic, when he was in a state of delirium.⁴⁷

In 1909, partly persuaded by assertions of mental illness, President Joseph F. Smith consented to a full posthumous restoration of all ordinances and blessings. As recently as 1954, Joseph Fielding Smith, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and Church Historian, explained to two members of the Lyman family that "Amasa M. Lyman, while serving as an Apostle, was stricken with an unexplainable blight of unsteadiness that caused him to waiver into setting forth doctrine foreign to the true precepts of the Gospel."⁴⁸

Brigham Young's three renegade apostles thus chose not only different heresies but also different methods of resolving the problems. Believing that "my opinion is not worth as much to me as my fellowship in the Church,"⁴⁹ Orson Hyde acquiesced to the authority of his Church president: "I thought

⁴⁷ Francis Marion Lyman made several scathing remarks about Dr. Ira Burns and his relationship with his father in his journals and letters.

⁴⁸ Asael Lyman and George E. Lyman to George E. Lyman, 24 May 1954, discussing an interview with Joseph Fielding Smith, April 1953, in the Church Administration Building in Salt Lake City, Utah. Letter published in Albert R. Lyman's *Amasa Mason Lyman*, pp. 283-84.

Whether Lyman can be termed mentally ill in the clinical sense cannot be determined because no description of any unusual behavior is available. Each society, of course, determines what is normal. To the Mormon Church — to some extent to the entire country — spiritualism was not only abnormal but also synonymous with mental instability. In the School of the Prophets in Parowan, one member suggested that by "trifling with mediums we trifle with our spirits [and that] is what fills our insane houses." Parowan Stake School of the Prophets Minute Book, 19 June 1872, LDS Church Archives.

In California, *The Banner of Progress*, a spiritualistic periodical published in 1867, wrote: "The *Times* of last Thursday morning actually gave an account of the insanity of a young lady of the city from excitement in regard to a piece of music, which she was learning to play. How surprising it must be to the editors of that paper, that a person has become insane from some other cause than a belief in spiritualism." *The Banner of Progress*, 23 March 1867, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California.

⁴⁹ "Minutes of a Meeting of the Presidency & Twelve Presidents of Seventies and Others Assembled in President Young's Council Room," Wilford Woodruff, Journal, 27 Jan. 1860, as quoted in "The Orson Pratt-Brigham Young Controversies," p. 19.

when the prophet pronounced upon favorite doctrines, it was for us to repudiate ours, and sustain his. . . ."⁵⁰

Orson Pratt, while conceding both publicly and privately that one should not oppose a doctrine espoused by the president, reserved the right to retain his personal belief that Young's doctrine was in error, resisting considerable efforts by his brethren to comply.

At the far end of the spectrum was Amasa Lyman. While initially he appears to have been more deceptive with his colleagues than Hyde or Pratt, in the end Lyman carried the defense of his prerogatives further. Ultimately, he declined to acquiesce publicly or privately to the received views of Church leadership and submitted to complete separation.

The contrast between Lyman and Pratt is particularly interesting. Pratt ultimately believed in the prophetic authority vested in the president of the Church and in the role of the institutional Church in securing mankind's salvation. On the other hand, Lyman contended that the individual saved himself through moral progression, independent of any president, prophet, or Christ. Pratt's position compelled him to defer to his colleagues and president. Lyman's cosmology dictated just the opposite.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.