

The Higher Powers: Fred M. Smith and the Peyote Ceremonies

Shelby M. Barnes

FREDERICK MADISON SMITH (1874-1946) WAS THIRD president and prophet of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Son of Joseph III and grandson of Joseph the Martyr, Fred M., as he was generally known, came to lead the Reorganization in 1915. Smith was a highly educated man interested in the relationship between science and religion. His interest led him to experiment with the religious significance of the hallucinogenic drug peyote. By his own admission, he widely used the drug in searching for what he would identify as "the higher powers of man."¹

As a participant in peyote religious ceremonies, Fred M. Smith celebrated with his American Indian colleagues in their search for ecstasy. Though Smith seldom discussed his views with the wider church membership, his participation and its resulting knowledge were an important part of his open-minded, far-sighted attitude about the mysteries of human ecstasy as an essential element in religion.

Ecstasy, as Smith defined it, is "calling into action the higher powers of man" or, as he sometimes described it, "the state of being beside one's

1. *Saints Herald*, 19 Aug. 1914, 784; *Saints Herald*, 26 Nov. 1919, 1151-53; *Saints Herald*, 24 Dec. 1919, 1243; Addie Spaulding Stowell, *The Red Man's Hope* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1963), 173; Virgil Thomson, *Virgil Thomson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 42; *The Arimat*, 1 Nov. 1919, 2-3, Alice M. Edwards Papers, Restoration History Manuscript Collection, Smith Library, Lamoni, Iowa. Frederick M. Smith received his B.A. from Graceland College, his M.A. from the University of Kansas, and his Ph.D. from Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts.

self."² Like many people of his time, Fred M. was not clear about what constituted a religion among the American Indians. Persons unfamiliar with Native American culture often looked for some sort of organized religion and, noting the lack of it, assumed Indians had no religion. However, Smith acknowledged that religious experience occurred among the Indians and saw the peyote ceremony as a way for the Indians to reach ecstasy. Such experience could, and did, occur despite the lack of recognized—by which Fred M. meant organized—religion.

Smith quite naturally felt the call to "return" the American Indian to the Christian faith and supported the Reorganization's missionary work among the descendants of the Book of Mormon people. But he also believed that the ecstasy experienced in the peyote ceremony had much to offer the Reorganization. He was concerned about the narrow road the church was following and sought ways to help the institution grow and expand to encompass an enlarged world view. He thus encouraged sympathy for, and an informed understanding of, American Indian ceremonies. He urged the church to look forward with him into the future. And, in limited and controlled measures, he urged others to experiment with him in the search for ecstasy via the peyote celebrations.³

As Fred M. began his academic studies, he became increasingly interested in the mystery of what, at the time, was called "mind expansion." He related this human ability to expand the mind with the LDS view of contemporary revelation. At the time he began his studies at the University of Kansas in 1909, two members of the Reorganization, Phillip Cook and Chief Three Fingers of the Cheyenne Nation, talked with Smith about peyote and its use in religious ceremonies. It interested Smith who, completing his studies in Kansas, was anticipating enrollment at Clark University in Massachusetts for a doctorate.

Smith had talked with those in charge at the university about a two-year program of study in the field of sociology. But after arriving in 1914, and expressing his interest in the expansive power of the human mind, Fred M. was persuaded to do a psychological study of a primitive people, understanding this study would assist him in the field of religion. Prominent American psychologist G. Stanley Hall agreed to be his advisor and direct him in a study of the Native American Indian peyote cults.

2. Frederick M. Smith, *The Higher Powers of Man* (Lamoni, IA: Herald House, 1918), 59. This work, taken primarily from his dissertation, is a key to understanding Frederick M. Smith's views on the topic of expanded understandings. The book, continually available through the RLDS publishing house, Herald Publishing Company, is not well known among members of the Reorganization, and I would be surprised if it had been read by other than a few scholars. Also see Theodore Ribot, "Ecstasy," *Open Court*, 5 Dec. 1889, as reported in Smith, *Higher Powers*.

3. Frederick Madison Smith, "Preparation," *Saints Herald*, 19 Aug. 1914, 783-85.

During this time Smith, who was already assuming more and more of the duties of the presidency of the church, minored in philosophy and in economics. He felt these might be of practical value in the work which he faced.⁴

G. Stanley Hall, professor of psychology at Johns Hopkins University and founder of *The American Journal of Psychology*, was a pioneer in the field of scientific psychology. Hall, who together with William James, Alfred Adler, and Sigmund Freud, would help to establish psychology as an academically trained professional discipline, assumed the presidency of Clark University in 1889.⁵ He sought to make the university a research rather than teaching institution. By 1898 Clark had graduated thirty of the fifty-four Ph.D.s granted in the United States that year.⁶

Many of Hall's ideas appealed to Fred M. and were adopted into his dissertation. But it was from William James that Smith took his concepts of expanded mental ability. From James's article, "The Energies of Men," Smith took the idea that erethism, the extreme stimulation of the mind, was as effective as any physical "second breath or wind." Few persons experienced the effect of this intoxication, however, because they were content to live below their maximum energy.⁷

Most people are aware of the "second wind" which often becomes available as a reservoir of energy brought on by the physical stimulation of extreme effort. Smith, much like James and Hall, became interested in the stimulation of the mind which could release mental energies, a sort of "second thought" to be used for even further understanding.

Clearly, it was not the idea of intoxication which interested Smith. In fact he gave the impression of being opposed to alcoholic beverages. In a sermon in Independence, Missouri, in 1914 he encouraged the Saints to vote for a dry town, explicitly stating the church's views.⁸ Again in July 1938 a *Saints Herald* article identified his belief that sale of such "poisons" was causing great social damage.⁹

4. Paul M. Edwards, *The Chief: An Administrative Biography of Fred M. Smith* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1988), 100. Edwards does not pursue the topic of peyote in this administrative biography. Larry Hunt, in his biography, deals with it in volume one.

5. Larry E. Hunt, *F. M. Smith: Saint as Reformer. Volume 1* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1982), 68. See also William James, "The Energies of Men," *Philosophical Review* 16 (1907): 1-20; G. Stanley Hall, "Anger," *American Journal of Psychology* 10; G. Stanley Hall, Introduction to Smith, *Higher Powers*, 9-13; Smith, *Higher Powers*, 29.

6. Hunt, 72-73; Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall, Psychologist as Prophet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

7. Smith, *Higher Powers*, 15.

8. Frederick Madison Smith, "Preparation," *Saints Herald*, 19 Aug. 1914, 785.

9. Frederick M. Smith, "Better Not to Drink," *Saints Herald*, 30 July 1938, 963. See also Paul Shupe, "Indulging in Temperance: Prohibition and Political Activism in the RLDS Church," *Journal of Mormon History* 10 (1983): 21.

Medical drugs, however, were different. In an article in the *Herald* of 1943 Smith discussed the need for medicine which, in coordination with a physician's instruction, promoted healing. This may have been an important view to express, for there was an attitude among some Saints that one needed only to rely on faith and prayer to be healed. Smith related the growing progress of the art of healing and the "wider and deeper knowledge of the human body and its function."¹⁰

The intoxication of the mind about which Fred M. spoke could be described in several ways: a state of excitement, a revival of emotions, a change from outer to inner control, a feeling of an expanded self, and enlarged powers.¹¹ Smith named this mystical experience "ecstasy."

Ecstasy, as so defined, plays an important role in human affairs, particularly in the area of religious experience. When a state of ecstasy occurs, the great force it creates demands attention and must "either be entirely expended" or "transformed into a work of art, of the pen, the chisel, or pencil."¹² The result of Fred M.'s study was compiled in a dissertation which was accepted by Hall, and the degree of doctor of philosophy was conferred on Smith by Clark University in 1916. By this time Smith has assumed the presidency of the Reorganization.

Much of what was in this dissertation depended on Smith's own varied experience. During his younger years he had worked in agronomy, blacksmithing, metallurgy, installed heating systems, repaired automobiles, set up a telephone system, and was increasingly familiar with sophisticated photographic equipment. His personal interests led him to explore economic systems, industrial efficiency, and the conservation of energy. All of these impacted his approach to the study, for in them all he had identified the limitations imposed by humans on their own mental growth. And, on some occasions, he had expended both physical and mental "second wind."

In a different fashion Smith's experiences with his father during the final years of Joseph III's life, and the anticipation of the burden of prophetic office, also played an important role in his study and conclusions. In a significant way Fred M. was seeking answers for his own powerful questions.

Understandably, given Fred M.'s calling, he was vitally concerned with the possibility of a man revealing the mind of God. And, if so, how?

10. Frederick M. Smith, "Our Attitude Towards Medicine," *Saints Herald*, 23 Jan. 1943, 100.

11. Colin Wilson, a contemporary British philosopher, considers the expanded self in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and calls the person effected the "outsider" and the cause of the effect the "X" factor. For a discussion, see Howard F. Dossor, ed., *Colin Wilson: The Bicameral Critic* (Salem, NH: Salem House, 1985), 5-7.

12. Smith, *Higher Powers*, 69.

The expectations of his office concerned him, for he questioned his own ability to give revelation to the Reorganization. And, unlike most other presidents of the Reorganization, in presenting his inspired documents to the church he did so in a more detached manner: "I am permitted to say to the church by way of instruction, through inspiration received" (RLDS D&C 133:1).

From his studies he was convinced that every human being had the potential to expand the limits of his or her mind. To what degree this could be done, and how best to do it, were questions which remained for him to address. It was a personal quest for Smith, but it was also a quest which was conducted within the larger community of the church. He was concerned about how he might encourage others to expand their minds beyond the limits they knew, to stretch, to grow, to further experience ecstasy.

Fred M. investigated alcoholic intoxication as a part of his dissertation and came to the conclusion that this sort of intoxication, which might also be seen as an ecstatic state, has the opposite effect than the one for which he searched. In alcoholic intoxication the higher mental powers were depressed and the lower mental powers were exaggerated. And, like many non-drinkers, Smith failed to distinguish clearly between drinking and being drunk.¹³ Thus Smith concluded that alcohol, even in moderation, was the antithesis to the ecstasy he sought and did not help people reach the full power of their mind.

In a lengthy portion of his dissertation, Fred M. relates and supports William James's assertion "that it is possible to reach higher levels of energy than are usually reached by individuals."¹⁴ James wanted to know how people could direct educational activity in such a way that they might reach their maximum mental potential.

Smith saw a relationship between James's concept of "revelation without religion" and Hall's work on mental efficiency. Hall contended that much of the loss of human potential results from the inefficient use of human power. Hall, like some rationalist philosophers before him, had determined that where the human mind becomes interested, where it is "lost" in a dominant idea or in deep devotion to a cause, there appears to be an almost unlimited reservoir of mental energy to call upon.

But persons are not simple machines where lost motion is taken up or where speed can be increased easily. Fred M.'s experiences and research led him to consider that chemical ecstasy might play a role in initiating, as well as in reaching, the heights of power and insight which he sought

13. Much has been made recently about the relationship between writing ability and the freedom produced by alcoholic indulgence. The thesis, as old as authors, was contrary to Smith's view.

14. Smith, *Higher Powers*, 22.

in mind expansion.

The ecstatic state Fred M. had in mind was reached in the Native American sunset-to-sunrise ceremony which commenced with the chewing of peyote buds. Fred describes peyote as a button from the top part of a small cactus grown in Texas and Mexico. While often confused with mescal, the Mexican liquor, Fred M. clarifies the difference,¹⁵ expressing his belief in the physical, spiritual, and mentally therapeutic effects of the peyote plant.

We know that Fred M. experimented with peyote as early as 1913. At that time he encouraged longtime church missionary Hubert Case, a man with experience among the American Indians, to join him in the experiment. "I say, Hubert, the only way we will know is to eat some of it and note the effects . . . I suggest we try it."¹⁶

Apparently, Fred and his wife, the former Ruth Cobb, joined in partaking peyote sometime in 1918 while vacationing in the southwest. He related the event, pointing out that "we both went through the peyote ceremonies which lasted from sundown to sunup."¹⁷ The next year he entered the ceremonial tepees at least four times to participate in the ritual consumption of peyote.¹⁸ Before and during the ceremonies he was asked to address those gathered and to discuss with them the Book of Mormon and the similarities of the God they worshipped.

Smith was apparently well accepted by the Indians for his willingness to worship in their environment. At a ceremony, shared with the Omaha Indians, one participant reportedly said: "The peyote boys all like Fred Smith. He is not opposed to the peyote. He is a reasonable man."¹⁹ He was given several items after one ceremony as tokens of sincere friendship. These included a sacred eagle feather fan, a dollar, a gourd rattle, and a pair of moccasins from the chief.²⁰

Fred M. made no attempt to hide his interest from the members of the church. As early as 1914 he spoke about the peyote ceremonies while preaching at the Stone Church, the headquarters congregation of the Reorganization. In this talk he discussed the effects of the drug peyote and the relationship between the Indian ceremonies and more traditional religious service. He did not, in this particular presentation, relate being a

15. *Ibid.*, 106. Smith appears to use the words peyote and mescal interchangeably. *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 2d ed.: "'Mescal' mescaline, any of several cacti related to, or resembling mescal: mescaline of genus *Lophophora*, C, H17, NO3." The mescal cactus produces the peyote button.

16. Stowell, 173.

17. Frederick Madison Smith, "A Trip Among the Omaha Indians," *Saints Herald*, 26 Nov. 1919, 1151.

18. *Ibid.*, 1151-54.

19. Mrs. Edgar Butts, "An Experience with Peyote," *Saints Herald*, 19 May 1920, 480.

20. Smith, "A Trip Among the Indians of Oklahoma," 1245.

participant in a peyote ceremony but acknowledged knowing about it.²¹

However, by 1919 Smith publicly related an experience he had several years earlier in which he had gone "through the peyote ceremonies which lasted from sundown to sunup."²² In this same article he explains how he was asked to pray and speak to a group of Omaha Indians near Decatur, Iowa, about the gospel in their "lodge." He also spoke of meeting later with a group at Walthill where he had "gladly accepted" the invitation to participate in a peyote ceremony. This meeting lasted through the night, and Fred describe it as a religious experience and with a "strong appeal to the Indian heart."²³

That December Smith wrote in the *Saints Herald* about a trip he had taken to Oklahoma to visit the Cheyenne Indians. There he attended a ceremony and explained his experience in some detail. "Each worshiper is expected to roll a cigarette and solemnly smoke at least four puffs. After each has smoked, the first of the peyote is eaten. Each person is handed two or more (depending on the quantity on hand) of the herbs, and these are solemnly eaten . . . After the first general eating of peyote, the number consumed is left to individual inclination, the user securing by request from the chief the number desired."²⁴

Believing that the peyote experience first released then enhanced the human mind toward creative expansion, he understandably encouraged others to use the drug. One such example concerned Virgil Thomson. Thomson, who was to become a famous composer and longtime music critic at the *New York Times*, was a college friend of Smith's oldest daughter, Alice. The young composer became a good friend of the family, and Fred M. was interested in the power of the peyote to release the creative talents which Thomson displayed. The composer related that "the drug had been given me by Dr. Smith" who wanted Thomson to report back on what effects he had experienced.²⁵

Hubert Case, RLDS Indian missionary who Fred urged to join him, said that on Smith's encouragement he and Smith gathered the peyote and tried it together.²⁶ E. E. Long, an RLDS missionary from southern Ohio, stated that "we [several RLDS men] desired to join them [Omaha Indians] in their piote [sic] meeting . . . all drank of a concoction made of boiling piote [sic]."²⁷ Fred M.'s daughter, Alice, was sent peyote buttons

21. Frederick Madison Smith, "Preparation," *Saints Herald*, 19 Aug. 1914, 784.

22. Smith, "A Trip Among the Omaha Indians," 1152.

23. *Ibid.*, 1153.

24. Frederick Madison Smith, "A Trip Among the Indians of Oklahoma," *Saints Herald*, 24 Dec. 1919, 1244.

25. Thomson, 41-42.

26. Stowell, 173.

27. E. E. Long, "Eleven Hours in a Piote [sic] Tent," *The Arimat*, 1 Nov. 1919, 2.

by her father with instructions on how to use them.²⁸ She later reported they were bitter and caused no noticeable effect.

While RLDS church views about such things as liquor and drugs were not as well defined in the early 1920s, Fred M. did seem to demonstrate a more liberal attitude than many church members. He encouraged this religious practice because he believed that it was a way in which people could catalyze the ecstatic state.²⁹ But after the initial publication of several letters and articles mentioning Indians and peyote ceremonies, as well as Smith's participation in them, little or nothing more on the topic is recorded in church periodicals.

There is some evidence that Fred M. used his official position, as well as his own personal knowledge and experience, to defend the peyote ceremony against federal intrusion. He understood the use of peyote by his own experience and promised to lobby against federal legislation to limit the use of peyote. Hubert Case and Fred M. both indicate they journeyed to Washington, D.C., in regards to legislation pending about peyote and its uses in religious ceremonies. Smith may have also been accompanied by William Madison, RLDS member, secretary of the National Society of American Indians, and chief of the Chippewas.³⁰

Fred M. connected the "higher powers of man" with the essence of Jesus Christ, and in the conclusion to his dissertation, he pondered the secret energy of Jesus Christ. Was Jesus totally human and impelled by unusual motivation or stimulation? How was Christ able to make his human equipment produce its maximum energy? Fred M. defined his concept of ecstasy using Mark 3:11 to describe Christ as being "beside himself." This is the state of ecstasy Smith identified as calling the higher powers into his being.³¹ Though he published his dissertation in 1918, it is doubtful many church members read it or, if they did, took it seriously. Smith certainly believed, for the American Indian anyway, that the use of peyote in religion produces an ecstatic state and gives new direction to life. We can only assume he wanted to make this available, in some fashion, to his own people.

Fred M. was determined to educate the church. "He believed that education was one of the means whereby his church could 'retool' through developing that corps of 'bright young men' who would look forward with him into the future. And he himself continued to read and search for

28. Frederick Madison Smith to Alice Myrmyda Edwards, Alice M. Edwards Papers.

29. Gomer T. Griffiths, "The Indian Work," *Zion's Ensign*, 23 July 1920, 558.

30. Hunt, 66-100. Gomer T. Griffiths, who in 1920 was president of the RLDS Quorum of Twelve, commented that he did not agree with Madison that the church should wait until the "embargo [against peyote] is lifted by the Government before we prosecute missionary work among them" ("A Chippewa Chieftain," *Autumn Leaves*, Nov. 1926, 468-69).

31. Smith, *Higher Powers*, 178-83.

ways to integrate faith with intellect, knowledge with service."³²

How did the RLDS church respond to President Smith's use and acceptance of peyote? Letters to the *Saints Herald* suggest that members thought the ongoing missionary work with Indians was of highest importance. But there is little evidence that members were either disturbed or encouraged by Smith's investigations. We can only speculate what might have been the outcome if Smith had pursued this quest. Unfortunately, Fred M.'s time and talents were soon turned from his interest in the peyote religion, and for that matter in the "higher powers of man," for he quickly became embroiled in the struggle over presidential power. This fight, referred to as Supreme Directional Control,³³ plus the massive depression which hit the United States and the emergence of a world war, redirected his time and energy in other directions.

32. Hunt, 102.

33. Supreme Directional Control is the term identifying Fred M.'s 1919-25 struggle over who controls the RLDS church. He believed that the power ultimately emerged from the president/prophet. This view was eventually affirmed by an RLDS world conference.