

The Remnant Church: An RLDS Schismatic Group Finds a Prophet of Joseph's Seed

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AT THE APRIL 1970 WORLD CONFERENCE of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS)¹ in Independence, Missouri, one of the delegates, A. H. ("Bud") Edwards, rose to offer a substitute to a motion on the floor which called for the First Presidency to appoint women to Church committees more in proportion to their numbers in the Church. Edwards's substitute went further than the main motion and called for an end to "discrimination on the basis of sex in the life of the Church," clearly suggesting that women should be ordained.²

As Edwards read his substitute motion, a loud, collective gasp resounded through the conference chamber, foreshadowing the negative re-

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1. The RLDS Church formally changed its name to "Community of Christ" on April 6, 2001.

2. 1970 *World Conference Bulletin*, 329; "A Transcript of the Business Sessions: The 1970 World Conference," 404-8. These official documents and others in the same series are all available in the Community of Christ Library-Archives,

action that would come fourteen years later when Church President Wallace B. Smith endorsed women's ordination in a statement to the 1984 World Conference that the delegates accepted as a revelation from God. "The uproar from the conference was a shock and a little frightening," recalls Edwards, thirty-two years later.³ The 1984 revelation became Section 156 of the RLDS Doctrine and Covenants.⁴ But the 1970 substitute motion suffered an instant death, as the delegates laid the matter on the table indefinitely.⁵

When the 1984 conference approved Section 156, which also indicated that the soon-to-be-built temple in Independence would be dedicated to the pursuit of peace,⁶ it became clear that the largest "schism"—separation from the unity of the Church—in the history of the RLDS Church was in the making.⁷ In the six years following the approval of Section 156, at least one-fourth of the active RLDS members terminated their involvement in the Church. Many of these people formed separate splinter groups in their local areas.⁸ Others simply grew tired of the

Independence. See also Richard P. Howard, *The Church Through the Years*, 2 vols. (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1993), 2:396–97.

3. Bud Edwards, email to Bill Russell, March 15, 2002.

4. 1984 *World Conference Bulletin*, 308–9; "Doctrine and Covenants 156," *Saints' Herald* 131, no. 9 (May 1, 1984): 3; "A Transcript of the Legislative Sessions: The 1984 World Conference," 113–54.

5. 1970 *World Conference Bulletin*, 329.

6. D&C 156:5a. Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural citations are from the Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1990). In addition to citations to section and verse, the Community of Christ tradition designates parts of verses with alphabet letters.

7. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., edited by E. A. Livingston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1462, defines schism as: "formal and willful separation from the unity of the Church."

8. William D. Russell, "Defenders of the Faith: Varieties of RLDS Dissent," *Sunstone* 14, no. 3 (June 1990): 14–19; and "The Fundamentalist Schism, 1958–Present," in *"Let Contention Cease": The Dynamics of Dissent in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, edited by Roger D. Launius and W. B. "Pat" Spillman (Independence, Mo.: Graceland/Park Press, 1991), 125–51, and the following essays in the same volume: Larry Conrad, "Dissent Among Dis-

bickering and stopped attending church.⁹ The only comparable division in the Church had occurred in the 1920s during the early years of the presidency of Frederick Madison Smith, the grandson of Joseph Smith, Jr. The issue then was the centralization of power in the office of the President of the Church, which came to be called "Supreme Directional Control."¹⁰ This paper will examine the most recent and most successful attempt, so far, to organize a new general Church, with a prophet, apostle, and other high Church officials.

The debate over women's ordination had been simmering in the Church since the early 1970s. The feminist movement had made some RLDS people aware of how patriarchal culture limited women's opportunities to use their talents in ways that would benefit themselves as well as the Church and the larger society. The first published, sustained argument for greater recognition of women's giftedness in the RLDS Church, including advocacy of ordination, appeared in a short-lived quarterly journal published by liberals on the faculty at the RLDS Church's Graceland College, beginning in 1970. *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action* published only eleven issues in three years, before ceasing publication

senters: Theological Dimensions of Dissent in the Reorganization," 199-239; W. B. ("Pat") Spillman, "Dissent and the Future of the Church," 259-92, and Roger D. Launius, "Guarding Prerogatives: Autonomy and Dissent in the Development of the Nineteenth-Century Reorganized Church," 17-58. See also Paul M. Edwards, *Our Legacy of Faith* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1991), 282; Howard, *The Church Through the Years*, 2:409-32; Roger D. Launius, "The Reorganized Church, the Decade of Decision, and the Abilene Paradox," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31 (Spring 1998): 47-65.

9. For a somber look at the decline in active membership in recent years, see George N. Walton, "Sect to Denomination: Counting the Progress of the RLDS Reformation," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 18 (1998): 38-62.

10. On the Supreme Directional Control controversy, the most thorough study is that of Larry E. Hunt, *F. M. Smith: Saint as Reformer* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House; 1982), 233-345. See also Kenneth R. Mulliken, "The Supreme Directional Control Controversy: Theocracy Versus Democracy in the Reorganized Church, 1915-1925," in *Let Contention Cease*, 91-124; Paul M. Edwards, *The Chief: An Administrative Biography of Fred M. Smith* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1988), chap. 9; Howard, *The Church Through the Years*, 2:227-42.

in 1973 for financial reasons. In a December 1970 editorial, the nine-member Editorial Committee advocated ordination for women.¹¹ The most articulate spokesperson on behalf of feminist causes in *Courage* was co-editor Carolyn Raiser. Others who advocated the cause included Chris Piatt, Marge Troeh, and Barbara Higdon.

Theological tension had been simmering in the Church since the early 1960s; but during that decade, the ordination of women had not yet surfaced as a significant issue. The feminist movement was not highly visible in American society until the end of the 1960s. The issues debated in the Church during the 1960s revolved around the nature and interpretation of scripture and of the Church's sacred story. Some people in the Church—usually called “liberals”—challenged the traditional interpretations on a variety of issues. At the beginning of the decade, challenges to orthodoxy were coming from some professors at Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa, and from the three departments at Church headquarters in Independence: Religious Education, directed by Clifford P. Buck; History, directed by Charles A. Davies; and Herald Publishing House, directed by Roger Yarrington.¹² Those who challenged traditional RLDS orthodoxy might be called “New School” thinkers. Various terms like “fundamentalist,” “conservative,” and “traditionalist” have been applied to

11. See the following articles and editorials in *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action*: Editorial Committee, “Sex Roles in a Changing World,” 1, no. 2 (December 1970): 81–84; Carolyn Raiser, “All Animals Are Equal: But Some Animals Are More Equal Than Others,” 2, no. 3 (Spring 1972): 413–20; The Editors, “Interview with Marge Troeh,” 3, nos. 2–3 (Winter/Spring 1973): 71–80; Barbara Higdon and Larry Moffett, “Women’s Lib in Print,” 3, nos. 2–3 (Winter/Spring 1973): 109–13. See also Howard, *The Church Through the Years*, 2:381–408. I edited *Courage* throughout its short three-year life. The other members of the editorial committee were Barbara Higdon, Paul Edwards, Roger Yarrington, Clifford Buck, Joe Pearson, Roy Muir, Lorne White, and Judy Schneebeck. Carolyn Raiser soon joined the editorial committee and became co-editor.

12. Church Statistician James E. Lancaster Jr. was closely associated with Church Historian Charles Davies and the men in the Religious Education Department of Religious Education. He published what may have been the most controversial article in the *Saints Herald* during that period: “By the Gift and Power of God: The Method of Translation of the Book of Mormon,” *Saints’ Herald* 109, no. 22 (November 15, 1962): 798–802, 806, 817; reprinted with some revisions as “The Method of Translation of the Book of Mormon,” *John Whitmer Historical*

those who opposed the New School thinking that eventually led to the schism of 1984. I will refer to the traditionalists as advocates of the "Old School" way of thinking. They favored returning the Church to the traditions that were slipping away as the leadership embraced more and more of the New School ideas.

The ordination of women was merely the last straw for many Old School Saints who had been concerned about the Church's deemphasis of many beliefs that had been central tenets of the RLDS faith for more than a century. It was clear by the end of the 1960s that some highly placed Church leaders no longer regarded the Book of Mormon as history and did not believe that the RLDS pattern of Church organization and doctrines constituted a restoration of the forms and beliefs that Jesus had established during his mortal ministry. Some no longer believed in the interpretation of Christian history regarding apostasy and restoration that had long been taught in the Church nor, indeed, believed that the RLDS Church was "the true Church of Jesus Christ."

While Old School Saints were shocked and angered over approval of Doctrine and Covenants 156, many held out hope that the World Conference of 1986 might rescind Section 156 and correct the error which they felt had been made by the prophet, Wallace B. Smith, and the delegates at the World Conference of 1984. Therefore, after the 1984 World Conference, a "wait and see" attitude was common among traditionalists, and only a very few local RLDS splinter groups emerged between the biennial conferences of 1984 and 1986.¹³ But when a resolution to rescind Section 156 came to the floor at the 1986 World Conference, President Smith ruled the motion out of order, reading a long statement to explain his reasoning. Essentially, his position was that, since only the prophet can bring a purported revelation to the World Conference for consideration, only

Association Journal 3 (1983): 51-61, and as "The Translation of the Book of Mormon," in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, edited by Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 97-112.

13. One of the few that started during the inter-conference period was Center Branch in Independence, led by Rudy Leutzinger, who subsequently was expelled from the Church. Only about a dozen fundamentalist splinter groups' leaders were expelled—which is the RLDS equivalent of LDS excommunication. Several hundred men were "silenced"—removed from the priesthood.

the prophet can bring a motion to rescind a revelation.¹⁴ A leader of the Old School faction among the delegates appealed the chair's decision. Eighty-eight percent of the voting delegates (2,265 to 323) supported Smith's ruling.¹⁵

Interestingly enough, some of the New School revisionists who strongly supported Section 156 were disappointed with President Smith's ruling. Clearly the 88 percent support for his ruling demonstrated that an overwhelming percentage of the delegates supported Section 156 and were prepared to vote against the motion to rescind it. But the ruling prevented a vote on the *merits* of the motion to rescind. As Church Historian Richard Howard expressed it, the chair's ruling "closed off the possibilities of jurisdictions, quorums, or even the World Conference initiating measures that seek in any way to modify the modern Church canon." Howard characterized it as a "radical shift in canonization principle and procedure."¹⁶ Others have noted that President Smith's ruling means that the only person who can correct a mistaken revelation is the very person who made the mistake in the first place.

As a result of this failure to rescind Section 156, many Old School Saints decided it was time to begin forming separate groups. In the nineteen years since the World Conference of 1986, Old School Saints have organized more than 200 local splinter groups, the vast majority in the United States, and most of them in the Midwest. Several types of schismatic groups have emerged, and the divisions can be seen as natural, possibly even predictable ones. Most of the local groups are independent of any higher authority at the present time.

Ten years before the 1984 conference, Richard Price, an employee of Bendix Corporation in Kansas City, living in Independence, Mis-

14. 1986 *World Conference Bulletin*, 288-89.

15. *Ibid.*, 289. The Nebraska District has also sent a resolution to the 1986 World Conference calling for the removal of Section 156. 1986 *World Conference Bulletin*, 233. The World Conference acted only on the Central Missouri Stake resolution, published in the 1986 *World Conference Bulletin*, 230-31.

16. Howard, *The Church Through the Years*, 2:53. Recently, Howard has called for the creation of a "Task Force on the Canon," composed of a learned and diverse group of scholars, who would make recommendations to the Church, thus opening the canonization process. Richard P. Howard, "A Proposal for a Task Force on the Canon," *Theology Colloquy*, Graceland University, February 2, 2002. Photocopy in my possession.

souri, had published *Saints at the Crossroads*, warning the RLDS people of what he regarded as “liberal heresies” being espoused by Church officials at headquarters.¹⁷ *Saints at the Crossroads* might appropriately be seen as a 250-page critique of “position papers” authored by staff in the Department of Religious Education as they developed new curriculum materials for Church school classes. Their papers were not intended for distribution outside their curriculum committee, but Old School Saints surreptitiously secured copies and circulated them widely. The Old School Saints were shocked at the contents of the papers, which expressed liberal positions on many issues of history and theology. Price’s book achieved a wide readership, with 12,000 copies having been sold or given away by 2001.¹⁸ Price’s book and an earlier newspaper, *Zion’s Warning* (1970–76), published by Barney Fuller and Glen Stout, were the first two extensive, widely circulated published warnings issued by Old School thinkers trying to alert the Saints about the New School “heresies” being introduced by Church leaders. Their warnings were for the most part accurate. The Church and its leaders have embraced many of those New School ideas in the three decades since Fuller and Price issued their warnings.

During the period of uncertainty between the conferences of 1984 and 1986, Price offered a very effective strategy for the Old School Saints, at least in the short run. It recognized the turmoil experienced by Old School Saints who were torn between their commitment to the restored gospel in general and of the RLDS Church in particular and their resistance to the new ideas. That strategy, published in a book, *Action Time*, and a pamphlet, *The Restoration Branches Movement*,¹⁹ proposed that whenever and wherever the local RLDS congregation is controlled by “the liberals” (which typically meant that the congregation’s leaders supported the World Church leadership or had ordained women), then the faithful Saints should withdraw from participation and establish an “Independ-

17. Richard Price, *The Saints at the Crossroads* (Independence, Mo.: Price Publishing, 1974).

18. Richard Price, “Saints at the Crossroads,” *Vision*, Issue 37 (June 2001): 14; Richard Price, Letter to Bill Russell, November 6, 2001.

19. Richard Price, *Action Time: The Problem of Fundamentalism Versus Liberalism in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and Suggestions for Coping with That Problem* (Independence, Mo.: Price Publishing, 1985) and *The Restoration Branches Movement* (Independence, Mo.: Price Publishing, 1986), both written with the assistance of Larry Harlacher.

ent Restoration Branch” controlled by local elders who were ordained by proper authority and who adhered to the traditional RLDS doctrines. Price advised the Old School Saints not to resign from the RLDS Church, but to await the opportunity to help return the RLDS Church to its traditional doctrines and practices. Over the years, Price has remained optimistic that this will eventually happen.²⁰

By “Independent,” Price meant branches independent of control

20. Price, “The Restorationists Will Regain Control of the RLDS Church,” *Vision* 7 (September 1991): 18, cites as evidence the growth of the Restoration Branches and the decline in membership and vitality of the institutional (RLDS) church. He believes that, if the restorationists will remain in independent branches, the time will come when the Lord “cleanses the RLDS Church (Doctrine and Covenants 105:9-10) and replaces those New Agers with righteous servants.” Price’s son David noted that the name “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints” was given by revelation at Far West on April 26, 1838, and recorded in the *Elders’ Journal*, August 1838, 52, and in Joseph Smith III and Heman Hale Smith, *History of the [Reorganized] Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1805-1890*, 4 vols.; continued by F. Henry Edwards as *The History of the [Reorganized] Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Vols. 5-8 (Independence, Mo.: Herald House, 1970): 2:151. David Price stressed that Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith had declared that the 1838 revelation “settles definitely the name of the church.” David M. Price, “What’s in a Name?” *Vision*, Issue 11 (November 1992): 5-6. The Prices apparently feel that, since God gave the name by revelation, he will not allow the name to be desecrated for long. However, the Utah church carries the same name given in the 1838 revelation, without a qualifier such as “Reorganized,” or “Restoration,” or “World,” or “Remnant,” as has been added by some recent factions. But Price would reply that Joseph Smith III was told by revelation to “join the Reorganized Church” (*Saints’ Herald*, October 24, 1936, 1, 330), “which indicates that the Lord approved of that addition.” Richard Price, “The Name of the Church Was Given by Revelation,” *Vision*, Issue 12 (March 1993): 10. Community of Christ Historian Mark A. Scherer, “‘Called by a New Name’: Mission, Identity, and the Reorganized Church,” *Journal of Mormon History* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 45, notes that this 1838 revelation at Far West became Section 115 of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants but was never canonized by the RLDS Church. Perhaps Scherer was suggesting that it was all right to change the name of the church since the traditional name is not in the RLDS Doctrine and Covenants. Scherer also suggested that the “Church of Jesus Christ” part of the name would have likely pleased the Missouri Saints while “Latter Day Saints” would have pleased the Kirtland Saints “because it acknowledged their strong dispensationalism.”

from the RLDS hierarchy and their appointees. "Restoration" meant that the independent branches would preach the original gospel restored in 1830. "Branch" meant they would establish only a local branch (congregation) and not create a general Church organization—that is, they would not organize beyond the local level. Each branch would do what a local branch does: conduct worship services and Sunday School classes, elect its own officers, and conduct other business, such as calling and ordaining priesthood members who are "local" rather than "general Church" in nature. Such local officers are deacons, teachers, priests, and elders, but not seventies or any of the various types of high priests who are regarded as "general Church officers."

He based his ideas to a great extent on the historical precedent of the 1850s when the Saints in various locations in Wisconsin and Illinois kept what might appropriately be called "the Kirtland gospel" alive until a new prophet, Joseph Smith III, was called and accepted the office. "The Kirtland gospel" seems an appropriate term because those who joined the "New Organization" (later the Reorganization and now the Community of Christ) ultimately rejected all of the innovations associated with the Nauvoo period in the history of the Saints. The RLDS Church through the years sought to retain a faith that is roughly approximate to the faith held by the Saints at the end of the Kirtland period in 1838. Old School Saints today often contend that they seek to return to the original faith of 1830, failing to notice that many important RLDS doctrines and practices were introduced in Kirtland during the 1831–38 period and were therefore not part of the original faith held by the Saints in 1830. But because of their strong emphasis upon restoring the New Testament Church and restoring the faith of the early Latter Day Saints, the term "restorationists" has been commonly used by the Old School Saints.

A majority of the local schismatic congregations established by Old School Saints followed Richard Price's strategy. Outsiders have often thought of Price as the leader of the Restoration Branch Movement, because his publications on the subject were early, frequent, widely circulated, and certainly influential. But he has never been the pastor of a Restoration Branch or held any formal leadership position in the Restoration Branch Movement. He has been strongly criticized both by people who have remained in the RLDS Church and by a variety of Restoration Branch members. RLDS Church Historian Richard P. Howard characterizes *Saints at the Crossroads* as a "bitterly angry book" whose style "sacrificed

truth and accuracy to the rage of its author." W. B. ("Pat") Spillman terms Price a "self-appointed strategist of the fundamentalist cause" whose "view is no doubt extreme, and stated more for its propaganda effect than for serious analysis."²¹ At the same time, some Old School Saints have criticized Price for his sometimes harsh tone in criticizing others. Some see him as too negative and attacking. Others challenge his belief that ultimately the Old School Saints will be able to restore the true gospel under the traditional name, "The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints." His views constitute a stricter interpretation of the scriptures and Church traditions than most restorationists have.

Given Price's strict, literalistic interpretation of the RLDS heritage, people on all sides should be able to understand the harsh tone in some of his writings. Price's "Independent Restoration Branch" strategy seems to have been an effective policy, certainly in the short run.²² And he has consistently articulated that strategy in the pages of a magazine he has published since 1989, *Vision*.²³

One effect of the "Independent Restoration Branch" strategy was that men who held the Melchisedec Priesthood could exercise leadership in local branches where they could preach, teach, pray, and testify in the Old School manner, and sing the old familiar hymns without any hindrance from World Church apostles, regional administrators, stake presi-

21. Howard, *The Church Through the Years*, 2:31 note; Spillman "Dissent and the Future of the Church," 263-64. While Howard discusses the schism over the ordination of women in his two-volume history, published in 1992-93, Paul M. Edwards, in his official one-volume history, *Our Legacy of Faith: A Brief History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1991), does not mention that the conflict over women's ordination led to schism nor does he include Section 156 in his chronology of important events in Church history. The only entry for that year was Barbara Higdon's inauguration as president of Graceland College.

22. On Richard Price's career in the Church, see William D. Russell, "Richard Price: Leading Publicist of the Reorganized Church's Schismatics," in *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History*, edited by Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 319-42.

23. *Vision* is published by Price Publishing Company, 915 E. 23rd Street, Independence, MO 64055, which is also the site of the Restoration Bookstore. *Vision* is a very useful source for news about the Restoration Branches and for the publisher's critique of other restorationist factions and of the RLDS Church.

dents, or other career Church appointees hired and evaluated by the RLDS hierarchy in Independence. These World Church appointees were the very men who had been guiding the Church down the dark path that led toward acceptance of the New School ideas that were so troublesome to the Saints of the Old School. Church officials had pressured reluctant congregations into using the "new curriculum" materials in the 1970s and the new hymnbook of 1981. They could block priesthood calls initiated by local fundamentalists and initiate calls for New School thinkers and others who supported the new World Church policies. And they could often control who got elected or appointed to stake or district offices and who preached the sermons and taught the important classes in local congregations.

In the long run, the difficulty for the independent branches will be the need to eventually create a general Church structure in conformity with the requirements of the RLDS Doctrine and Covenants. A major obstacle will be achieving agreement on the identity of who God has called to be the true Prophet, Seer, and Revelator for the Church, divinely commissioned to set the Church in order in the aftermath of the "liberal heresies." Unfortunately, it appears to be difficult for a large group of men to achieve consensus regarding the thoughts of God.

In the long run, difficulties might arise because of the lack of ordained men in the higher offices of the Church. In the short run, the Restoration Branches have had the benefit of the ministry from men ordained to the higher offices (e.g., seventies, high priests, patriarchs, and bishops) by RLDS authorities before they affiliated with the Independent Restoration Branches. Obviously these men will all grow old and die. The numbers of active seventies and patriarchs are both in single digits at this point. So the Old School schismatics will eventually need to create a general Church structure and ordain new seventies, high priests, patriarchs, bishops, and of course, twelve apostles and a prophet. If not, they will forever remain local independent branches.

For many of the Old School Saints, the prophet must be a descendant of Joseph Smith Jr., as has every RLDS prophet until 1996, when the prophet who gave the Church Section 156 called a non-Smith to be his successor. To remain independent restoration branches forever would leave the restoration branches in the position of being, in effect, Southern Baptists with two extra books of scripture to defend.

Richard Price has cautioned the traditionalists not to "run before

the Lord," that is, not to proceed with organizing beyond the local branch level without genuine revelation calling the Saints to do so. Here again, he uses the 1844-60 model, when the "true Church" remained alive in, for example, the Beloit and Yellowstone branches in Wisconsin and Illinois. Independent of the "Brighamite heresy," these branches awaited a son of Joseph the Martyr to lead them. Price says that those who moved too quickly to fill the higher quorums during that period were rejected by God, their revelations were false, and they taught false doctrines which led to further apostasy.²⁴ He correctly recognized, early on, that men would inevitably step forward who had either seen themselves as God's prophet to save the Restoration or who would claim divine light revealing that some personal friend or relative had been called to that task. It is probably inevitable that various claims to the prophetic mantle would be brought forward in this climate, where Old School Saints thought that Wallace B. Smith was not now nor never had been truly a prophet.

Keenly aware of this strong probability, Richard Price in the August 1999 issue of his *Vision* magazine, identified twelve contemporary groups or individuals who had "run before the Lord" by organizing beyond the local level or proclaiming themselves the prophet without authentic revelation to proceed. The groups he identified were led by: (1) Stanley King, (2) Barney Fuller, (3) Eugene Walton, (4) Bud Ormsbee, (5) Lee Abramson, (6) John Cato, (7) Robert Murdock, (8) Bob Baker, (9) Norman Page, (10) Bill Whenham and Glen Hendrix, (11) Doyle Launius and Jack Ferguson, and (12) David Bowerman and Lee Killpack.²⁵ He could also have included groups led by Ron Livingston and Jeff Lundgren.²⁶

But many Old School Saints think Richard Price is too cautious, even naive, to continue hoping that the RLDS Church (now the Community of Christ) will someday come to its senses and reaffirm the traditional

24. Richard Price, "Running before the Lord," *Vision*, Issue 2 (Fall 1989): 12.

25. Richard Price, "High Priests' Group Organizes Twelfth Restoration Church," *Vision*, Issue 32 (August 1999): 8-10.

26. Ron Livingston, who no longer claims his given name, is the prophet and high priest for a group of about fifty people who claim to be Essenes (a pre-Christian Israelite sect) who live on more than two hundred acres of land between Lamoni and Davis City, Iowa. Jeffrey Don Lundgren was the prophet and seer of a group of twenty-nine people in Kirtland, Ohio, until April 1989 when he murdered a family of five, who were part of his group. Lundgren is currently con-

gospel.²⁷ Inevitably, as the years pass, the number of these optimists has declined. Since the early days after the schism of 1984, Old School Saints have been divided between those who, like Richard Price, do not want Old School Saints to resign from the RLDS Church and are therefore “nonseparatists,” and those who do withdraw and are “separatists.” The separatists do not believe that the RLDS Church will one day reaffirm the Old School beliefs, so there is no reason to hope that the Church will ever turn from its present apostasy. Like seventeenth-century Puritans in England, some believed the Church of England could not be reformed and therefore became “separatists.” Others believed that there was still hope for the Church of England and were therefore “nonseparatists.”

In the RLDS schism, the division between the optimists (nonseparatists) and the pessimists (separatists) was probably inevitable. However, the optimism of the nonseparatists has gradually gotten more and more difficult to maintain as the RLDS Church continues to move further away from past traditions. The revelation on women in 1984 began the formal schism.²⁸ But gradually it became clear that, by calling in the same revelation for the Independence Temple to be dedicated to the pursuit of peace, Wallace B. Smith was calling for an important new direction in the Church’s mission.

Then in 1994 the Church changed its policy on the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper from closed to open communion, which was a big issue for the Old School Saints. The next year Wallace B. Smith announced his recommendation that W. Grant McMurray be ordained his successor. Finally, at the 2000 World Conference the delegates voted to change the name of the Church to the “Community of Christ.” While McMurray was president at that time, the idea goes back to a suggestion made by Wallace B. Smith at a leadership retreat in Colorado in 1994. These five changes, initiated by Wallace B. Smith, have created a gulf so wide be-

lined to death row in the state prison at Mansfield, Ohio. Only three members of Lundgren’s group retain any allegiance or contact with their former scriptural mentor.

27. On the recent RLDS name change, see Scherer, “Called by a New Name.”

28. Two self-proclaimed prophets arose prior to 1984—Stan King in Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada, and Eugene Walton in Independence. Both movements were short-lived.

tween the RLDS Church and its Old School schismatics that it appears impossible to close. James Rogers, a restorationist who has chosen the separatist camp, reflected on this debate: "There is a sense of hurt and frustration in the struggling Restoration Branches today. Some are hoping that the Lord will turn the institutional [RLDS] Church around and correct the breaches. To this we must ask, 'Did God turn Brigham Young around, and those who followed him?'"²⁹

It was probably predictable that some Old School Saints believed that the elders should take the lead in restoring the wayward Church, while others thought the seventies or high priests should perform that task. Understandably, elders tended to believe that the elders should lead, while at least some of the seventies and high priests looked to their particular quorums. The elders could cite a historical precedent: the early conferences of the Church up into the Kirtland period were elders' conferences.

At present, the separatist group that seems to be posing the most serious challenge to the unity of the Old School schismatics is the recent movement by certain high priests, initially led by David W. Bowerman and V. Lee Killpack, to reestablish the original church under the name, "The Remnant Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints." This movement, however, follows an earlier serious effort by Old School seventies to build a new general church structure. Most of them had affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, led by A. Lee Abramson. These Seventies noted support in the Doctrine and Covenants for the idea that, if the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles are in apostasy, it is the duty of the Seventies to set the Church in order, if the Seventies are unanimous. The Seventies cited Doctrine and Covenants 104:11f-j; 122:9a, 10a, and 124:4 in support of their position.

The effort to get a unanimous quorum of Seventies, however, failed; and on October 1, 1989, a meeting of only five Seventies convened. All five agreed that the Church needed to be "set in order," which, they affirmed, meant they were "unanimous."³⁰ The result was the formal organization of the "Restoration Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" in 1991. This group numbered about a thousand by the end of its first

29. James Rogers, "The Name of the Church," *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 2 (February 1, 2000): 17-18.

30. R. Ben Madison, "The History of the Restoration Church of Jesus

year. Two years later in 1993, Marcus Juby became its prophet, seer, and revelator. By 2002, its membership had dwindled to about two hundred members, due to endless internal schisms. The future looks dim for the Restoration Church.³¹

After the restorationist Seventies failed to accomplish their mission of setting the RLDS Church "in order," some of the Old School high priests felt that scripture and historical precedent suggested that they take the lead temporarily in guiding the Church. One of these high priests, Roger Gault, from Blue Springs, Missouri, noted that according to the 1852 "Word of Consolation," the original statement of what became the Reorganized Church, the highest authority always presides. Therefore in the absence of the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve, the high priests preside.³² Other scriptures and the historical record offered what they considered corroborating evidence. Three documents authored by Church prophets seem particularly important.

The first is Doctrine and Covenants 122:10a, presented by Joseph Smith III in 1894. "Should the Church fall into disorder, or any portion of it, it is the duty of the several quorums of the Church, or any one of them to take measures to correct such disorder; through the advice and direction of the Presidency, the Twelve, or the Seventy, or a council of high priests, in case of emergency."³³

The second is Joseph Smith III's March 4, 1912, "Letter of Instruction," naming his son, Frederick Madison Smith, as his successor. Although the conference accepted this letter and sustained Frederick M. as the next Church president, Joseph III's biographer, Roger D. Launius,

Christ of Latter Day Saints," 104, unpublished book manuscript, photocopy in my possession, used by permission. Madison was Church Historian for this group.

31. R. Ben Madison, interviewed by William D. Russell, April 8, 2002, Independence. The Restoration Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is headquartered at the former Alton School, 801 W. 23rd Street, Independence, MO 64055. Its official publication has been *Restoration Advocate*, copies of which are in the Library-Archives, Community of Christ Temple, Independence.

32. Roger Gault, "Scriptural and Historical Evidence of Church Reorganization," *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 3 (May 1, 2000): 12.

33. Quoted in Lee Killpack, "By What Authority a Council of High Priests?" *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 2 (February 1, 2000): 14.

notes significantly that Joseph III's Quorum of Twelve resolved that "we do not commit ourselves to the terminology nor all the conclusions contained in the 'Letter of Instruction'" and the General Conference did not endorse it and has never endorsed it as the official policy of the church with regard to succession in the office of President of the Church.³⁴

This precedent became important in November 2004 when Grant McMurray resigned as Church president, citing personal reasons and declining to name a successor. The Quorum of the Twelve took on the task of heading the "process of discernment" by which the Lord's choice for McMurray's successor would be revealed. In consultation with the other headquarters quorums, including the still-functioning First Presidency, they called for the entire Church to engage in this discernment process. The Council of Twelve announced in a letter dated March 4, 2005, signed by all of the Twelve except its president, Stephen M. Veazey, that "God graced our efforts and gave to each of us a testimony that Stephen M. Veazey is called to lead the church as prophet-president."³⁵ This recommendation would be proposed at a specially called World Conference, June 2–5, 2005. Veazey's selection was sustained by that conference.

A third key document was President Israel A. Smith's statement at general conference in 1952, the centennial year of the creation of the "New Organization," which became the "Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints." Roger Gault cites Israel as saying: "The testimony of all concerned was that it was not a new organization; that was not necessary. For the original body has perpetual existence in and through its faithful adherence . . . for the name of the church had no legal significance whatsoever—The whole controversy was in the domain of doctrine and tenets."³⁶

These high priests concluded that, given the apostasy of the First Presidency and the Twelve, and given the Seventies' inability to act in unanimity, then they should exercise leadership. Gault quoted Joseph Smith

34. Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 349–50. The "Letter of Instruction" was published in the *Saints' Herald* 59 (March 13, 1912): 241–48, and in *History of the Reorganized Church*, 6:560–75.

35. "Official," *Herald*, April 2005, 6.

36. Israel A. Smith, "The Return: Conference Address of the President," *Saints' Herald: Conference Daily Edition*, Monday, March 31, 1952, 36.

III: "If the Melchisedec priesthood is present in any of its offices, the right to organize or to reorganize, the power to establish, to build up and to confirm the Church is there; and if directed by command of God, to perform all the work necessary."³⁷ In the view of Gault and Killpack, the current situation constitutes a clear emergency. The Remnant Church leaders push further than Richard Price in using the 1844–60 period as precedent because they believe that God has established a pattern (Heb. 8:5; D&C 52, 91) which he follows, thereby allowing Saints to be able to discern what to do in difficult times.³⁸ In Hebrews 8:5, God admonished Moses to "make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount." In Doctrine and Covenants 52:4b, Joseph Smith announced a revelation in June 1831: "I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations." Two years later, in Section 91:1a, referring to creating the Kirtland Stake, Joseph wrote, "Behold, it must be done according to the pattern which I have given you." Therefore, concludes Lee Killpack, "the scriptural record is clear that the Lord provides a pattern in all things."³⁹

Killpack believes that the RLDS Church has ignored the pattern and that doing so has had dire consequences for the Church: "The evidence of rejected patterns and the law of lineage [in the office of President of the Church] established by the Law Giver himself as well as the pollution of the ordinances occurring in the RLDS Church indicate that the

37. Joseph Smith III, *RLDS Church History*, 5:538, quoted by Roger Gault, "Scriptural and Historical Evidence of Church Reorganization," *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 3 (May 1, 2000): 9.

38. The Conference of Restoration Elders, a group of several hundred elders who still adhere to the Independent Restoration Branch strategy, included in its organization a "Pattern Committee." However, not all restorationists believe that the Lord always uses a single set structure. For example, William ("Vim") Horn, chairman of the Conference of Restoration Elders, 1998–2002, recently stated: "It is hard to say a singular event is 'the pattern,'" but "over time there have been different structural forms. There is the New Testament structure, the Book of Mormon structure, the 1830 structure, and the 1850s structure." He was guest speaker at the adult Sunday School class, Lamoni Community of Christ, Lamoni, Iowa, March 3, 2002; notes in my possession.

39. Lee Killpack, "'Succession in Presidency:' Presented to the Center Place Prayer and Study Group," *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 1 (October 1, 1999): 9.

Church as represented by that institution is in apostasy.”⁴⁰ Breaking with the lineage tradition for the Church president, which occurred in 1996 when W. Grant McMurray succeeded Wallace B. Smith, was evidence of abandonment of the Lord’s pattern. Open communion admitted to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper persons who had not made a baptismal covenant in the Reorganized Church, seen as pollution of the ordinances. Ordaining women was another. Not only was the sacrament of priesthood ordination polluted by the ordination of unauthorized persons (i.e., women); but women’s ordination corrupted all other sacraments, since women who administered the sacraments corrupted those sacraments because they lacked authority. Also, the male elders who called them lack God’s authority for their action, as the Old School Saints see it. Killpack stated the essence of what many Old School Saints have said: “The power and authority of a presidency is diminished and eventually decimated by a continual and willful departure from the law.”⁴¹

Many Old School Saints have echoed the statement of Joseph Smith III who said: “The Church is the faithful remnant, the body remaining true to the doctrine of the Church.” Between the disorganization of the Church in 1844 and the Reorganization under Joseph III, the Church was “the remnant scattered abroad, who remained true to the principles first given as to the gospel of Christ; and with any body of such remnant.”⁴² These high priests also drew on another of Joseph Smith III’s statements for assurance that they are the legitimate Church: “The body has perpetual existence in and through those people who still adhere faithfully to the original tenets and doctrines.”⁴³ Smith’s definition of “the Church” is conservative because it implies that the true Church should not undergo change or evolution in doctrine. This is consistent with the concept of the true Church as the restoration of the New Testament Church. But it appears to be in conflict with another central tenet of Latter Day Saintism, which holds that humankind needs continued revelation as a source of further light and truth. The existence of contin-

40. *Ibid.*, 8.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Roger Gault, “Scriptural and Historical Evidences of Church Reorganization,” *The Hastening Times*, 1, no. 3 (May 1, 2000): 10.

43. *Ibid.*, 9.

ued revelation implies that current concepts are fallible and that, therefore, change is needed to move closer to the fullness of the gospel.

The two key high priests who took the lead in creating the Remnant Church were David W. Bowerman and V. Lee Killpack. Bowerman retired from RLDS World Church appointment in 1991 after thirty-two years, twenty-four of which he served as president in four stakes—Omaha-Council Bluffs, Kansas City, Tulsa, and Blue Valley (Independence, Missouri area).⁴⁴ Lee Killpack retired in 1999 as a science teacher at Tri-Center Community Schools in Neola, Iowa, and moved to the Independence area. Bowerman made a presentation to the Restoration Branch pastors in Independence (the “Pastors in Zion”) on June 2, 1992, suggesting that a conference of restorationist elders be called for April 1993. James Daugherty, historian for the Conference of Restoration Elders, reports that on July 18, 1992, approximately two hundred elders met in Independence and approved Bowerman’s plan.

The first Conference of Restoration Elders (CRE) convened in Independence, April 5–9, 1993, attended by 406 Melchisedec and 23 Aaronic priesthood men, along with 99 nonpriesthood members. They affirmed belief in the three standard books of scripture, the “Epitome of Faith” (the RLDS version of The Articles of Faith), and various pre-1984 RLDS General Conference resolutions on membership, priesthood, the sacraments, and tithing. It tabled proposals involving marriage, divorce, and remarriage, probably because the Church’s resolutions on these sensitive subjects, adopted in the 1960s before the dramatic rise in divorce rates in America, are too conservative even for Old School Saints, some of whom have been divorced themselves.⁴⁵

At that first conference in 1993, Bowerman was chosen as chairman of the CRE. The elders elected a Coordinating Council and other committees. The conference also began publishing a magazine, *Tidings of Zion*. Sixty-nine issues had appeared by the end of 2004. While Bowerman was leading the organization, the conference approved for publication various

44. David W. Bowerman, interviewed by William D. Russell, November 28, 2001, Independence.

45. The Church’s resolutions on divorce began in the nineteenth century. Until 1962, the only legitimate grounds for divorce were acts of adultery (World Church Resolution 1034 [1962], replaced by World Church Resolution 1182 [1984]).

documents of “inspired counsel” that had been presented through J. J. Basse, David Bowerman, Warren Chelline, Vernon F. Darling, Conrad R. Faulk, C. Houston Hobart, and Robert R. Murie Sr., and published in *Tidings of Zion*.⁴⁶ The content of these “counsel” messages tended to point in the direction that Bowerman was advocating. Thus, it is no surprise that, as of this writing, all of these men have affiliated with the Remnant Church except Vernon Darling.

David Bowerman was concerned that the autonomous local branches were too independent of each other, with each of the local Restoration Branches going its own way. Bowerman looked at the two hundred plus local splinter groups that had proliferated between 1984 and 1993 and concluded that, without guidance, these groups might diverge too sharply to be unified again.⁴⁷ He hoped that guidance could come from the Conference of Restoration Elders that he had created in 1993. He also believed that Church law and tradition supported the leadership of the high priests, given the apostasy of the higher quorums. But over the next five years, 1993–98, resistance to Bowerman and his associates increased. Finally, at the annual Conference of these Restoration Elders held in April 1998, those who opposed the direction Bowerman seemed to be going elected William (“Vim”) Horn as chairman of the conference. Horn served in this capacity for four years, until April 2002, when Seventy Richard Neill—possibly Bowerman’s strongest opponent within the organization—became its chair. In April 2005, Paul Gage replaced Neill.

A major point of contention between the two factions in the Conference of Restoration Elders had been over evangelism in distant parts of the world. It came to a head between the 1997 and the 1998 conferences. Bowerman was concerned because various members of the CRE’s Evangelism Council had created independent organizations for missionary work in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. He and others felt that foreign missions should not be operating outside the authority of the conference. But Neill noted that the Center Place Missionary Council, which created such agencies as the African Restoration Ministries, pre-

46. “Inspired Counsel,” *Tidings of Zion*, no. 22 (January–February 1997): 9–14. *Tidings of Zion’s* address is P.O. Box 4085, Independence 64057.

47. David Bowerman thinks this figure is high. Bowerman, interviewed, November 28, 2001, Independence. In contrast, I regard it as a conservative estimate.

dates the establishment of the Conference of Restoration Elders in 1993.⁴⁸ Bowerman supporters, a majority in the Coordinating Council, voted by a 7-4 majority to dismiss Richard Neill from their council. They also dismissed several members of the Evangelism Council, which also included Neill. The men of the Evangelism Council have undertaken missions to Nigeria, Kenya, the Congo, Nepal, Honduras, Australia, Germany, and Great Britain.⁴⁹ Neill, expelled in 1997 from two leadership roles in the CRE, became its chair in 2002.

This situation captures the two decades of tension between Old School Saints who would have their congregations remain autonomous as Independent Restoration Branches and those who want some centralized leadership. In 1994 Richard Neill published a pamphlet expressing regret that so much criticism has gone on within the Restoration Branches. In 1996, Jack Basse, a prominent high priest from Sperry, Oklahoma, gave a prophetic message at the end of that year's meeting of the Conference of Restoration Elders: "I, the Lord, . . . have not been well pleased with this Conference. . . . I have heard the murmurings and the backbiting in your discussions, both privately and in your meetings."⁵⁰ Tom Beil from Blue Springs, Missouri (now deceased), worried that "two hundred independent Restoration branches are becoming similar to the Baptist congregations. Each branch is independent and autonomous, with unique rules, incorporation papers, and/or bylaws."⁵¹ Lane Harold, from Lees Summit, Missouri, lamented, "The Lord's Latter Day Church is not to be permanently expressed as a collection of fiercely independent congregations existing in a very tentative alliance, and which association is subject to cancellation any time our feelings become hurt. We get no scriptural encouragement from our Lord when we allow ourselves to grow resentful of any outside influence, even from neighboring brothers and sis-

48. Richard Neill, interviewed by William D. Russell, November 27, 2001; see also William ("Vim") Horn, "What Are You Being Asked to Accept?" *Tidings of Zion*, no. 38 (September-October 1999): 5.

49. *Ibid.*

50. "Admonition and Counsel to the 1996 Conference: Message through High Priest Jack Basse," *Tidings of Zion*, no. 20 (September-October 1996): 1.

51. Tom Beil, "Are We Becoming 200 Different Churches?" *Tidings of Zion*, no. 17 (March-April 1996): 1.

ters.”⁵² Roger Gault of the Remnant Church deplored the fact that the many independent branches “are mostly separate entities unto themselves” and suggested that they all need to “pray for one another, instead of preying on one another.”⁵³ Lane Harold commented early in 2000: “Much valuable time has been lost in endless debate and acrimony since 1993.”⁵⁴

There is a natural tendency to assume that God is displeased with such debates, since the Saints are admonished in all three RLDS standard books to be “of one heart and one mind.”⁵⁵ Lane Harold wrote that the anger and impatience of the Lord is not limited to those who have continued to support the RLDS Church, but extends also to those who formed independent congregations and then grew comfortable when much more work was needed to rectify the problems.⁵⁶ It is understandable that people would be disturbed about such contention because the issues for them are extremely important. If God is unchangeable and wants the Saints to be of one heart and one mind, and if He has established a pattern of true doctrine and organization and that pattern is the New Testament Church, then deviation from it is a serious matter. But since Old School Saints

52. Lane Harold, “Scouting Out the Kingdom As We Leave the Nineties,” *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 2 (February 1, 2000): 30.

53. Roger C. Gault, “The Role and Duty of the High Priest,” *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 2 (February 1, 2000): 4, 7.

54. Lane W. Harold, “When All Else Fails—Read the Directions,” *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 2 (February 1, 2000): 12. Basse, Beil, Harold, and Gault all joined the Remnant Church when it was created in September 2000.

55. The RLDS Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 1:36, admonishes: “Arise from the dust, my sons, and be men, and be determined in one mind, and in one heart united in all things, that ye may not come down into captivity; that ye may not be cursed with a sore cursing.” Both RLDS Doctrine and Covenants 36:2h and Genesis 7:23 of the Inspired Version include this statement: “And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness.” RLDS Doctrine and Covenants 45:12 also contains this advice: “With one heart and with one mind, gather up your riches that ye may purchase an inheritance which shall hereafter be appointed unto you, and it shall be called the New Jerusalem, a land of peace, a city of refuge, a place of safety for the saints of the most high God.” These passages are all from the Joseph Smith Jr. contribution to the Latter Day Saint canon of scripture, not in standard versions of the Bible.

56. Harold, “When All Else Fails,” 29.

sometimes differ about exactly what “the pattern’s” essential elements are, internal disagreements should not be a surprise.

Most of the local schismatic groups have remained independent branches, with complete local autonomy, even though the RLDS Church has always been a hierarchical church with considerable authority vested in its general officers at headquarters. (This is even truer of the much larger LDS Church headquartered in Salt Lake City, thanks in large part to the revelations of Joseph Smith Jr. in the Doctrine and Covenants which assert considerable centralized authority.) The centralized hierarchical authority in the Latter Day Saint churches is somewhat similar to the centralized authority of churches which are “episcopal” in their form of government. The opposite is the “congregational” form of church government which preserves local autonomy. In the United States, the Baptists are the best example of the congregational form. For the RLDS, “Church law,” found primarily in the Doctrine and Covenants, views this centralized hierarchical authority as being part of “the pattern” required by God. In light of the hierarchical nature of the “true Church,” as RLDS members have traditionally viewed it, one might wonder why many of the Restoration Branches have become protective of their autonomy as local branches.

David Bowerman thinks that the misuse of authority in the past by the RLDS leadership caused the people in the Restoration Branches to be too cautious about vesting authority beyond the local level.⁵⁷ Certainly, the caution of men like Richard Price and many others is understandable. Price has often warned against creating another hierarchy. “I have opposed doing so because I believe that only God can call leaders to the high Church offices. I believe He has not yet done so, but I believe He will in His own due time.”⁵⁸

But if God calls a prophet to lead the schismatic members, will the Old School Saints recognize him? In the five years that Bowerman led the Conference of Restoration Elders, he advocated going forward with some organizing beyond the local branch level, even though no prophet existed as yet. But he was not able to get the conference as a body to agree to it. However, one project he began, early on, did later have an important role

57. David W. Bowerman, “The Hastening Time,” *Tidings of Zion*, no. 26 (September–October 1997): 1.

58. Richard Price, Letter to Bill Russell, April 5, 2002.

in the creation of what became the Remnant Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

In 1994 Bowerman began to encourage "Prayer and Study Groups" across the United States, led by Old School elders. The only serious group that developed was in the "Center Place"—in and around Independence—when nine men began holding monthly meetings of six hours' length. The original group included Bowerman, Conrad Faulk, Roger Gault, James Rogers, Ron Turner, Jake Simmons, Vernon Darling, Jack Basse, and the late C. Houston Hobart.⁵⁹ The group expanded until eventually about forty Melchisedec Priesthood men were meeting twice a month. Some men developed papers on a variety of topics and discussed them with the group. Of considerable importance is the fact that Frederick N. Larsen, a grandson of Frederick M. Smith and great-grandson of Joseph Smith III, took an active part in the meetings, beginning in 1996.⁶⁰

At a meeting of the prayer and study group held in May 1999, a document entitled "A Proclamation and Invitation to the Faithful" was presented for discussion.⁶¹ Its writers realized that a study group has no formal authority in the Church, a fact that critics were quick to point out: "There is no provision in the law for a study group to function in the administrative affairs of the Church," wrote one dissenter. "A study group has no authority to conduct legislation."⁶² Recognizing this point, supporters of the proclamation called a meeting of restorationist high priests for July 17, 1999, to consider this document. Lee Killpack invited all known restorationist high priests to this gathering, using as his data base the mailing list of high priests in the Conference of Restoration Elders as

59. All but Turner and Darling joined the Remnant Church when it was organized in September 2000. David W. Bowerman, interviewed, November 28, 2001, Independence.

60. David W. Bowerman and V. Lee Killpack, interviewed by William D. Russell, September 17, 2001, Independence.

61. "A Proclamation and Invitation to the Faithful," *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 1 (October 1999): 2-4, with the names of 123 signers of the Proclamation on p. 5.

62. Dale Crown, "By What Authority?" *Tidings of Zion*, no. 38 (September-October 1999): 9. This issue of the *Tidings* contains rebuttals to the Proclamation written by William ("Vim") Horn, James Daugherty, John Henderson, Paul Gage, and Milo M. Farnham, in addition to Crown's.

well as that of an earlier group known as "The High Priests' Assembly," begun by Dr. Milo Farnham.

Twenty-four high priests attended the meeting.⁶³ They believed that the restorationist high priests were "the appropriate administrative" body to take whatever action they believed to be consistent with the "law and covenants" of the Church.⁶⁴ They chose V. Lee Killpack to chair their temporary council. He had earlier been elected chair of the high priests group within the Conference of Restorationist Elders. According to Bowerman and Killpack, when the vote was taken on the "Proclamation and Invitation to the Faithful," only one high priest voted against it.⁶⁵ Killpack chose Roger Gault and Jim Rogers as his two counselors. Then the three selected nine other high priests to complete a "Council of High Priests." They were Jack Basse, David Bowerman, Albert Burdick, Carl VunCannon, Lane Harold, Dale Miller, Joe Ben Stone, Harold Tims, and Melvin Zahner.⁶⁶ Critics like Richard Price immediately charged that Bowerman's people were setting up a new church, seeing these men as likely its apostles and leading officers.

In language much like that of Joseph Smith III when he accepted the presidency of the Church on April 6, 1860, the writers of the proclamation declared that they felt "compelled by a Higher Power" in preparing it.⁶⁷ The proclamation asserted that none of those men who so far had claimed succession and authority had divine sanction, meaning the self-proclaimed prophets discussed above, and the churches that resulted from their work. The proclamation further asserted that the Conference of Restoration Elders had strayed from its founding purposes. It resolved to stand firmly behind the statement of faith that the Conference of Res-

63. V. Lee Killpack, interviewed by William D. Russell, November 28, 2001, Independence.

64. Roger Gault, "The Center Place Prayer and Study Group," *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 1 (October 1, 1999): 17.

65. David Bowerman and Lee Killpack, interviewed by William D. Russell, November 29, 2001.

66. The names of the Council of High Priests are listed in a sidebar, *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 2 (February 1, 2000): 16.

67. Joseph Smith III said on that occasion: "I have come in obedience to a power not my own, and I shall be dictated by the power that sent me." Quoted in Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, 117.

toration Elders had approved in its first conference in 1993,⁶⁸ on succession, reorganization, and the role of the Melchisedec Priesthood. The proclamation urged “recognition of the lawful role of faithful High Priests to select a *temporary* council to provide interim leadership for guiding and renewing the Church” (emphasis in original). And the “Proclamation and Invitation to the Faithful” acknowledged various “inspired messages” that had been published in the *Tidings of Zion*, the magazine of the Conference of Restoration Elders.⁶⁹

Once the high priests group had approved the proclamation, they decided to call a Melchisedec Assembly, which was held on October 30, 1999, at the Blue Springs, Missouri, Restoration Branch, to see if the elders approved the proclamation and the procedures advocated. At this meeting, the elders voted to accept the proclamation and the Council of High Priests and its leaders. They also authorized the calling of a conference to be held in April 2000.⁷⁰ The General Conference held in Independence on April 8–9, 2000, voted “nearly unanimously” to continue the original church of 1830 under the name “Remnant Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.”⁷¹

When Bowerman had been defeated as chairman of the Conference of Restoration Elders in 1998, he and his supporters lost control of that organization’s bi-monthly magazine, *Tidings of Zion*, and created their own magazine, *The Hastening Times*. Its first issue appeared in October 1999. In this magazine, the proclamation’s supporters continued expressing their need for some centralized leadership under the direction of the high

68. “Statement of Faith,” *Tidings of Zion*, no. 16 (January-February 1996): 15–19.

69. “A Proclamation to the Faithful,” *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 1 (October 1999): 3, 2.

70. V. Lee Killpack, interviewed by William D. Russell, November 28, 2001; “Report of the Council of High Priests,” *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 1 (October 1999): 6.

71. “General Conference,” *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 3 (May 1, 2000): 3. The Remnant Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is headquartered across the street from the Community of Christ Temple in the former William Chrisman High School, 700 W. Lexington Avenue, Independence, MO 64050.

priests. The "Proclamation and Invitation to the Faithful" was published as the lead article in that first issue, followed by a list of 123 signers.⁷²

In the Latter Day Saint tradition, evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit has normally been seen as an important sign of God's favor for a Church or any religious group. This is especially true for Old School Saints. Marylyn Gosling of Kansas City, Missouri, was frightened when she first read the proclamation. "Oh, dear, something else to divide us even more," she wrote in the *Hastening Times*. But she visited the conferences of both groups and reported finding the Spirit lacking at the Conference of Restoration Elders, in contrast to the abundance of the Spirit she felt at the Remnant Church's conference.⁷³

Remnant Church member Warren Chelline has written that the test of veracity lies in these three areas: scriptural support, historical precedent, and spiritual verification.⁷⁴ Chelline and the others of the Remnant Church believe it has satisfied all three tests. Clearly the Remnant people found scriptural support and historical precedent for their position. But they also believed that they need revelation from God directing them to proceed with the process of restoring a legitimate general Church structure. That occurred when High Priest Lee Killpack presented a revelation that he had received on March 23, 2000, two weeks before the April conference. This revelation instructed the elders to proceed with organizing the Church at the higher levels by appointing a committee of three patriarchs, the late C. Houston Hobart, E. D. ("Dan") Gough, and Conrad R. Faulk. After fasting and praying for guidance, these three would then name seven apostles. The revelation also called for a conference to be held on September 23, 2000, to deliberate on whether to approve the calling of the seven men recommended by the three patriarchs. The revelation concluded: "Be faithful little flock, and

72. "A Proclamation and Invitation to the Faithful," *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 1 (October 1999): 2-4, with the names of 123 signers of the Proclamation on p. 5. One of the 123 was Paul Edwards, a retired dentist, of Independence, not to be confused with Paul Madison Edwards, a grandson of RLDS President Frederick M. Smith, and longtime president of the RLDS Church's Temple School. He and Frederick Niels Larsen, discussed below, are first cousins.

73. Marylyn Gosling, "Testimony of Marylyn Gosling," *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 4 (August 1, 2000): 29-30.

74. Warren H. Chelline, "A Great and Marvelous Work," *The Tidings of Zion*, Issue 29 (March-April 1998): 14.

in My time I will send you one mighty and strong, again, to be your President, Prophet, Seer, and Revelator.”⁷⁵ The conference held in April approved the revelation, authorized the three patriarchs to recommend seven apostles, and called for the conference to be held in September.

More than 500 people registered for that conference. The three patriarchs reported that the seven men called to be apostles were: Gary L. Argotsinger, David W. Bowerman, P. James Buchman, Steve R. Church, V. Lee Killpack, Robert E. Ostrander, and James L. Rogers. The conference approved their calls, and they were ordained.⁷⁶ The seven apostles chose Bowerman as president and Killpack as secretary of the Quorum of Apostles. The apostles have since divided the United States and Canada into seven regions, with each apostle taking charge of the work in one particular region.⁷⁷

A second conference was held a year later on September 21–23, 2001, at William Chrisman High School at Noland Road and Highway 24 in Independence.⁷⁸ It was attended by 138 priesthood from several states. At that time, there were only 205 priesthood members in the Remnant Church.⁷⁹ The evening preaching services and the Sunday morning service were open to nonpriesthood and attended by several hundred people. At the sessions exclusively for priesthood holders, the conference

75. V. Lee Killpack, “Inspired Message—General Conference—April 8–9, 2000,” *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 3 (May 1, 2000): 4.

76. “Report of Fall General Conference,” *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 5 (November 1, 2000): 3.

77. In choosing seven, they were perhaps following the historical precedent of the Reorganized Church, which, in its early stages, also by conference decided to ordain seven apostles and gradually build up the numbers. Seven apostles were ordained on April 8, 1853. The number had grown to nine by the time Joseph Smith III was ordained as Church president on April 6, 1860, and was finally completed to twelve on October 6, 1860. For a list of general Church officers, see Edwards, *Our Legacy of Faith*, 313–25.

78. “Priesthood Conferences” (announcement), *The Hastening Times*, 2, no. 3 (August 1, 2001): 8.

79. Bowerman interview, November 28, 2001.

gave tentative approve for the budget for 2002 of over a quarter of a million dollars.⁸⁰

Since the Remnant Church has placed a lot of faith in the idea that God has established a pattern for organizing the true Church, it would follow that the person chosen by God would be a direct descendent of Joseph Smith Jr. This dream was fulfilled when Frederick Niels Larsen, a great-grandson of Joseph Smith III, stepped forward with an affirmation of his conviction that God has called him to be president of the high priesthood and of the Church. Larsen was born January 15, 1932, the son of Ed Larsen and Lois Smith Larsen, the daughter of Frederick M. Smith, the second president of the RLDS Church. This grandfather, for whom Frederick Larsen was named and whom he resembles, blessed him and later confirmed him a member of the RLDS Church. He was ordained a priest in 1956 by his great-uncle, RLDS President Israel A. Smith, and an elder in 1960 by another great-uncle, the recently ordained RLDS President W. Wallace Smith. In 2001 he was ordained a high priest by David Bowerman, under the auspices of the Remnant Church.

He had stopped attending his RLDS congregation in Independence after Section 156 in 1984 and did not affiliate with any of the restorationist schismatic groups until 1996 when he was invited to attend Bowerman's Prayer and Study Group. He was one of the twelve men who met in Carthage, Missouri, and drafted the "Proclamation and Invitation." He testifies that on two occasions in November of 2000 "the Lord revealed to me very clearly that the mantle of leadership would fall on my shoulders." When he awoke on March 5, 2001, "the voice of clear inspiration" came to him, further confirming his call. So on February 27, 2002 Larsen wrote a letter to the members of the Remnant Church. In it he said: "It is my intention to present to the Quorums and the General Conference in April an Inspired Document responding to a call to the Presidency of the High Priesthood and of the Church of Jesus Christ."⁸¹ The April 5-7, 2002, General Conference approved Larsen's document, which became Section R-145 of the Doctrine and Covenants of the Rem-

80. V. Lee Killpack, email to Bill Russell, September 24, 2001.

81. Frederick N. Larsen, "Letter to the Membership of The Remnant CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST of Latter Day Saints," *The Hastening Times* 3, no. 2 (May 2, 2002): 4.

nant Church.⁸² The revelation called David W. Bowerman to be Larsen's counselor in the First Presidency. Since then, Larsen has submitted four more revelations, the most recent, R-149, was approved at the April 2002 General Conference. Wayne Bartrow of Blue Springs is the third member of the First Presidency. The conference also approved other officers, including members of the Standing High Council.⁸³

As President of the Church, Frederick M. Smith had been very interested in the teachings of his great-grandfather, Joseph Smith Jr., on Zion and those of his grandfather, Frederick Madison Smith. Fred Larsen shares his grandfather's enthusiasm for the Zionite ideal and told the *Salt Lake Tribune* how he sees his role: "to prepare this people for what might come spiritually and physically. We do believe in the literal gathering of Zion. This is the center place, the promised land. This will be the starting point for spreading the gospel," and Independence is where "the Lord will return."⁸⁴

At the time Fred Larsen assumed the prophetic office, he was seventy years old. His great-grandfather had been twenty-seven when he assumed the presidency in 1860. At the time of the 2002 General Conference, there were nearly a thousand members and seventeen branches had been organized: five in Missouri (Carthage, Ava, and three in the Independence area); and four in Oklahoma (Blackgum, Muskogee, Sperry, and Texoma). The others were in Delta, Colorado; Missouri Valley, Iowa; Lake Elsinore, California; Marlin, Texas; Magic Valley, Idaho; Floyd's Knob, Indiana;

82. The Remnant Church, along with many of the leaders and members of the independent restoration branches, reject the revelations of W. Wallace Smith (1958-78), Wallace B. Smith (1978-96), and W. Grant McMurray (1996-2004). Therefore they accept only Sections 1-144 of the RLDS Doctrine and Covenants.

83. See the post-conference issue of *The Hastening Times* 3, no. 2 (May 1, 2002): 4-19. The eleven high priests who form the Standing High Council are Albert V. Burdick, Ralph W. Damon, Samuel R. Dyer Jr., James E. Gates, Paul R. Gress, James L. Ross, Richard T. Scott, Gregory A. Turner, David R. Van Fleet, Frederick L. Williams, and Melvin Zahner.

84. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Joseph Smith Descendant at Helm of LDS Remnant Church," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 20, 2002, C-2. Larsen also stated in this interview that he is the "one mighty and strong" foretold in latter day scripture.

Jackson, Mississippi; and Toronto, Ontario, Canada.⁸⁵ Recently two branches have been organized in Bella Vista, Arkansas, and Garden City, Michigan. As of March 31, 2005, the Church had 1,244 members.⁸⁶

It is common among Restoration Branch and Remnant Church members to assert that they did not leave the RLDS Church. Rather, "The RLDS Church has left us," as Conrad Faulk wrote in the *Tidings of Zion*.⁸⁷ Therefore, the Saints of the Remnant Church take the official position that they did not start a *new* Church. Remnant Church Historian Raymond Clough says the Remnant Church is a *renewed* Church "reborn with all the spiritual truth of the primitive gospel and hope of salvation that was returned to earth in 1830." By the same token, Clough asserts, the Reorganized Church of 1860 was not a new Church but merely the re-birth of the restoration of 1830.⁸⁸ Marjorie F. Spease writes that, when the RLDS Church came into being, it "was simply a setting in order of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—the original church exactly as it had been restored in 1830."⁸⁹ Old School Saints typically hold that the test of truth is to be found in holding to the New Testament doctrines and practices that were restored by Joseph Smith in 1830.

It appears that about half of the active restorationist high priests in the Independence area have affiliated with the Remnant Church, although a much smaller percentage of the elders and other restorationists joined. Clearly its greatest appeal so far has been to high priests. Paul Gage of Independence, a high priest who did not join the Remnant Church, contends that they represented less than 35 percent of the restorationist high priests. "By this action it would seem that they have separated themselves from the quorum of high priests, which for the past seven or eight

85. V. Lee Killpack, interviewed by William D. Russell, September 24, 2001.

86. Wayne A. Bartrow, telephone-interviewed by William D. Russell, April 11, 2005. Bartrow is a member of the Remnant Church's First Presidency.

87. Conrad Faulk, "Our Dilemma," *Tidings of Zion*, no. 28 (January-February 1998): 1.

88. Raymond Clough, "Why a Remnant Church of Jesus Christ?" *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 4 (August 1, 2000): 21.

89. See also Marjorie F. Spease, "A Pattern from History," *The Hastening Times* 1, no. 2 (February 1, 2000): 23.

years has worked with and through the CRE.”⁹⁰ Even if Gage’s estimate is accurate, however, it seems that the Remnant Church has made a good beginning.

The Remnant Church attracted a significant number of well-known Church leaders from the ranks of elders and high priests in the Independence area. By way of contrast, the Restoration Church, launched in 1991 and led by the Prophet Marcus Juby, attracted very few leaders from the headquarters area. Rather, their leaders were widely scattered geographically. Also, Fred Larsen does not appear to be a person who alienates those who work closely with him, as did Marcus Juby. Time will tell if their numbers will grow and ultimately win a majority of the restorationists to their cause.

During the last four decades of the nineteenth century, the RLDS Church became by far the largest Mormon splinter church for at least two reasons: First, the son of the founding prophet became their leader, and Mormons have always valued lineage. Second, Joseph Smith III was an effective leader—a “pragmatic prophet,” as Roger Launius characterized him in the subtitle to his biography of the Church president.

Frederick N. Larsen is a direct descendent of Joseph Smith, Jr., but through his mother, Lois Larsen, who was not in the priesthood. That is not satisfactory for some fundamentalists, while others accept the idea. If Larsen proves to be an effective leader, the Remnant Church may well become the historical parallel to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which became the largest Latter Day Saint splinter group after Joseph Smith III became its president in 1860. Just as the RLDS Church rejected the Nauvoo innovations of Joseph Smith Jr. and hearkened back to the brand of Mormonism preached in the Kirtland era, so the Remnant Church and other restorationists reject the innovations introduced during the W. Wallace and Wallace B. Smith period (1958–96) and hearken back to the faith articulated during the presidency of Israel A. Smith (1946–58) and before.

90. Paul Gage, “Why I Cannot Accept the ‘Proclamation,’” *Tidings of Zion*, no. 38 (September–October 1999): 10.