The Death and Resurrection of the RLDS Zion: A Case Study in "Failed Prophecy," 1930–70[1]

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On Resurrection Sunday, April 1930, Bishop J. A. Koehler of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints attended a priesthood prayer meeting at the Stone Church RLDS congregation in Independence, Missouri.[2] After a week of solemn and joyful conference services remembering the past century of the denomination's history, men from across the world sat seeking the Lord's further direction before Easter services. Koehler rose to his feet and dramatically declared a vision he had been given. "I saw Jesus," proclaimed Koehler. "Not Jesus the man, but Jesus the Way, the Truth, and the Life, crucified on a cross of gold."[3] Using language from Social Gospel Christianity, Koehler continued that he had seen Jesus "lying in a tomb of acquisitive institutions," bound by grave cloths of "exploitive customs," and sealed in a tomb by "the stone of ignorance and selfishness" under a new imperial authority—capitalistic "private interest." In his dream, dejected Saints wept for their dead Lord. It seemed that greed and capitalism had won the day.

Yet out of grief and despair, Koehler envisioned a "great commotion" that woke the dead Lord from the grave. Representing the "Angel of God," RLDS priesthood members rolled the rock away from the entrance to the tomb. As Jesus came forth from the tomb, Koehler saw not a physical body, but an incarnational Lord—a Social Gospel Lord—found in the "institutions of mutual helpfulness, and clothed with Divine understanding."[4] Through these institutions, Koehler believed that he saw the resurrection of Christ. Koehler's incarnational Lord became "the word made flesh in the city of Zion," meaning RLDS cooperative organizations and

education. According to Koehler, Zion—the RLDS model community that embodied Christ—would become an ensign to the world; the "eyes of the nations" would be fixed upon the Saints' community. Triumphantly, Koehler proclaimed that the embodiment of Christ in Zion provided the rest of the world with true, authentic life. "He is risen!" declared the nations, "And because He lives, WE TOO shall live!"[5]

In his Easter morning vision, Bishop Koehler embodied his faith movement's contradictions and hopes in modernity. Reorganized Latter Day Saints were in the process of modernizing their denomination, moving slowly toward a "sect to denomination" transformation.[6] Church leaders like Bishop Koehler freely drew on Social Gospel theologians and progressive social thought in articulating the quite sectarian vision for the kingdom of God that RLDS members believed would be built as a physical community in Jackson County, Missouri.[7] As the culmination of several years of planning by Church members and hierarchy like Bishop Koehler, specially chosen RLDS "stewards" established a small community at Atherton, Missouri, in an effort to bring forth this kingdom on earth.[8] As Koehler's vision indicated, early twentieth-century RLDS members equated their actions with God's actions. Without their effort, God's kingdom could not be established on earth. Confident of their ability to perfect their bodies and live in perfect harmony, RLDS members espoused an optimistic community praxis that they believed could resurrect humanity itself. They could not foresee the emotional, financial, and physical losses that they would endure during the Great Depression. For some, such losses would lead to a broader, spiritualized reinterpretation of Zion while others would emphasize the apocalyptic aspects of the kingdom over its socialistic economic vision. In a real sense, the RLDS community faced the problem of "when prophecy fails" during the crisis of modernity itself—a crisis that had long-term consequences on the movement.

In the past fifty years, sociologists of religion have explored how individual religious groups respond to failed prophecy. In a now-foundational 1956 study, *When Prophecy Fails,* Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schacter argued that groups often emerge from failed prophecy more committed to their beliefs than before, strengthened by the process of negotiating "cognitive dissonance," a term they originated.[9] Festinger, Riecken, and Schacter also claimed that groups would evangelize after failed prophecy, rather than disintegrate. In 1985, J. Gordon

Melton challenged some of Festinger, Riecken, and Schacter's conclusions but significantly nuanced their framework. He demonstrated that groups often spiritualize a failed prophecy and/or reaffirm the faith's basic beliefs and commitments in the wake of failed prediction. In addition, Melton cogently proclaimed that, while outsiders may classify a group solely on the basis of a single predictive event, most millennialist groups are "set within a complex system of beliefs and interpersonal relationships" of which the "failed prophecy" is only one element.[10] In this way, groups with a more complex cosmology generally emerge even stronger from a failed-prophecy episode since the failure "provides a test for the system and for the personal ties previously built within the group." In sum, "times of testing tend to strengthen, not destroy a group."[11] Melton concludes that failed prophecy may in fact reinforce group cohesion, but for different reasons than those Festinger, Riecken, and Schacter asserted.

Despite Melton's astute observation that adaptation to failed prophecy springs out of a much broader context than a single isolated aspect of a group's life, most scholars of this issue have failed to give historical context an important place in their theoretical musings.[12] The result is decontextualized sociological models with assumed applicability regardless of whether the failed-prophecy event happened in the nineteenth century, the late twentieth century, or even the first century.[13] In an attempt to generalize their theories for widest applicability, most authors have failed to observe how the larger culture of nineteenth- or twentieth-century America (where most studies are situated) has helped to generate plausibility structures for expecting prophetic fulfillment. Additionally, scholars have not addressed how larger cultural movements directly impacted the way individuals have adapted to failed prophecy. In other words, sociologists of religion have largely failed to historicize their own models, giving them an "otherworldly" status much like the "failed prophecies" that such sociological theories describe. In this article, I analyze how RLDS people responded to "failed prophecy" in both the localized context of their specific faith and in the general context of America during modernity.

While present-day observers may see the Saints' community-building dreams as hopelessly utopian and naive, such beliefs were anything but strange for the 1930s. Individuals of varied persuasions experimented in communal living and massive collectivized programs throughout the decade. In Canada, ordinary Catholics experimented with the Antigonish movement.[14] Radical Catholic (and ex-communist) Dorothy Day

founded the communally based Catholic Worker movement.[15] Eastern European Jewish immigrants founded the Sunrise Colony near Saginaw, Michigan, while urban New Jersey Jewish garment workers started the Jersey Homesteads, a "triple cooperative community" that combined "agricultural, industrial, and retail cooperatives" in one community.[16] Jersey Homesteads was one of ninety-nine "New Deal New Towns" that collectively received $109 million of federal assistance from various New Deal agencies.[17] Even the arch-critic of utopian ventures, Reinhold Niebuhr, served on the board of directors of a several-thousand-acre interracial farming cooperative in the Deep South.[18] On the international stage, Soviet premier Josef Stalin pushed for massive collectivized farms as the world watched the progress through propagandistic newsreel footage.[19] RLDS members stood with these disparate others in their dreams of building collectivized communities that would solve world problems and usher in a reign of peace.

The RLDS vision for collectivized utopian communities found expression in the symbol of Zion, which members equated with the kingdom of God on earth. Early twentieth-century RLDS beliefs about Zion were a syncretic amalgamation of nineteenth-century Latter Day Saint millenarian thought, Protestant Social Gospel ideals, and "Muscular Christianity."[20] Always more open to Protestant theology than their LDS cousins, early twentieth-century RLDS leaders liberally borrowed from thinkers as diverse as the Social Gospel theologian Walter Rauschenbusch,[21] pragmatist philosopher John Dewey,[22]radical theologian Harry Ward,[23] sociologist and theologian Charles Elwood,[24] the progressive, ecumenical Anglican bishop and future Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple,[25] and the eminent American psychologist and advocate of "Muscular Christianity," G. Stanley Hall.[26] To build Zion, RLDS leaders urged their people to become acquainted with such diverse, challenging thinkers.

Paradoxically, RLDS leaders and laity juxtaposed the use of such liberal leaders with the rather conservative sectarian conviction that the then-100,000-member RLDS Church was "the one true Church" and the true heir of Joseph Smith Jr.'s restoration movement. Like their nineteenth-century ancestors, many members felt millennial urgency to build the kingdom on earth through cooperative colonies.[27] Similarly, Reorganized Latter Day Saints taught a doctrine of "gathering" to build up this kingdom. Following Joseph Smith Jr.'s revelations from the 1830s, they

believed that the New Jerusalem was to have literal physical place in Independence. In accordance with Smith's nineteenth-century revelations, the RLDS hierarchy relocated Church headquarters to Independence in 1920. Joseph Smith Jr.'s radical egalitarianism also found a place in the RLDS kingdom. In Zion, "every man who has need may be amply supplied and receive according to his wants," revealed the first Mormon Prophet (D&C 42:9b; LDS D&C 42:33). The early twentieth-century RLDS Prophet Frederick Madison Smith liked to sum up the thought of his grandfather, Joseph Smith Jr., with the phrase, "from every man according to his capacity; to every man according to his needs." Of course, he borrowed this felicitous phrase directly from Karl Marx.[28]

While Joseph Smith, John Dewey, and Karl Marx might seem like strange bedfellows to outsiders, RLDS leaders saw no contradiction in their religious syncretism. "The glory of God is intelligence," Joseph Smith Jr. had declared in a "thus saith the Lord" revelation—and RLDS members believed it, albeit with new, modern minds (D&C 90:6a; LDS 93:36). Historian Mario S. De Pillis argues that this Mormon scriptural passage—"the glory of God is intelligence"—meant "primarily education in millennial doctrine and personal holiness" to early Mormons. Yet "as the Saints accommodated to the secular world, *intelligence* came to mean the cultivation of the mind."[29] Early twentieth-century Reorganized Latter Day Saints wholeheartedly pursued such cultivation. Like their LDS cousins, RLDS members pursued paths toward establishing higher educational institutions and advanced degrees from America's best institutions.[30]

"One's knowledge of Zion," wrote Prophet F. M. Smith, "would be enhanced by knowing as much as possible of the humanities in scientific study: anthropology, to know man as a biological individual; ethnology, to know him as one of a group; psychology, to know his mental traits; sociology, to know the fruitage of social instincts. All this should widen the scope of his knowledge of the Zionic goals."[31] He took his own counsel to heart, earning an M.A. in sociology in 1911 and a Ph.D. in psychology in 1916.[32] Early twentieth-century RLDS members longed for learning and a chance to practice "applied Christianity" advocated by both prophets and liberal Protestant Social Gospel leaders. Armed with a strangely sectarian and proto-ecumenical ideology, RLDS members embraced their perceived duty and destiny to establish communities of cooperation that would usher in the kingdom of God.

By 1929, RLDS members had established a number of "stewardship associations" whose ends were to establish cooperative communities.[33] In tandem with this movement, Church leaders authorized a complicated application process through which members could apply to be part of the envisioned stewardship communities. Church leaders hoped to find the best qualified members to populate these "Zionic" communities—qualified in every sense from their spiritual fitness to their educational levels and their physical capacities for work. In less than a year, more than a thousand members applied. On the pages of their application forms, would-be stewards explained their ardent desire to live within the communities that could possibly initiate the kingdom of God. Church authorities, including Prophet F. M. Smith, carefully screened the applications. In at least one instance, Smith intervened to the point of carrying on an extended correspondence with one applicant's pastor over the potential steward's attempts to abandon tobacco. Clearly, Church authorities felt that such an intense level of scrutiny for would-be stewards could aid the success of the envisioned communities. As Church publications broadcast the call for stewards to gather to these envisioned Zionic communities, members felt a heightened sense of urgency.[34] Such urgency generated by leaders and laity alike helped inflate expectations beyond what could be realized later.

Still, four such communal entities were formed between 1926 and 1931: in Atherton, Missouri; Onset, Massachusetts;[35] Detroit, Michigan;[36] and Taney County, Missouri.[37] Atherton, the oldest, was the culmination of several years of planning by RLDS officials and laity. In 1926, RLDS Church leaders had bought almost 2,500 acres of land in the Atherton flood plain along the Missouri River, northeast of Independence.[38] By 1930, as many as nineteen families occupied small houses in the start-up community. They built a church, farmed, and began a poultry hatchery which, for a time, brought in a profit for the community that was equally divided among all stewards.

Unfortunately for the stewards who occupied the small start-up communities, larger national and denominational disasters swamped the experiments.[39] In early 1931, the RLDS hierarchy realized that the Church faced a serious financial crisis. With the construction of its Auditorium, a gigantic copper-domed headquarters conference center in Independence, the RLDS Church had accumulated a debt of $1,876,000.[40] To preserve the Church's financial solvency, leaders had to take drastic mea-

sures. In desperation, F. M. Smith visited the struggling stewardship community at Atherton and informed the stewards of a planned mortgage of the Church-owned land to help in a Church-wide financial retrenchment program. "Well, President Smith, do you know what this means to this project?" asked a steward. "Well, hum, it means the game is up. Well, we're sorry, but the church is in a tight spot and we just have to do it," was the answer.[41] By this point, Atherton stewards had already become seriously divided over issues of leadership and control in the community. With Smith's announcement of the land's mortgage, the formal stewardship community broke apart. Several stewards remained on the Atherton land and, as individuals, rented from the Church while the RLDS Presiding Bishopric sold several cooperative enterprises and parcels of land to outside buyers, some of whom were not RLDS members.[42]

Despite their hopes of building a religious utopia in the 1930s, RLDS members found themselves in mixed company, as utopian socialists, classical liberals who had invested in the stock market, European communists, and fascists all saw their idealistic projects crumble in the 1930s and 1940s.[43] Predictably, RLDS members cited many reasons for the failure. "The land was never free from debt," Bishop Koehler told an interviewer.[44] "There had been unwise use of spiritual gifts in the past," asserted Atherton Pastor Amos E. Allen, who explained that D. R. Hughes, one of the stewards, had been told in prophecy that he would become a bishop. As a result, Allen believed, Hughes had difficulty cooperating with Church authorities.[45] Frank E. Ford, one of the stewards, felt that the community had failed due to lack of prophetic insight by those who called the stewards to their tasks. According to another steward, O. C. Hughes, "The causes of the discontinuance were all of a spiritual and intangible nature and . . . none of them were due to financial difficulties."[46]

In contrast, other stewards felt that the community had relied too much on divine intervention. Steward Roy Young stated that "the same attitude was taken by some of these men that was taken in connection with other farm problems, being superficially that they should pray over their problems and that the Lord would rebuke the disease from their flocks the same as he would rebuke the disease from people on administration, and that the Lord would lead them in various endeavors."[47] As Young and the other stewards found by hard experience, dead chickens did not receive immediate resurrection. Young concluded that the Atherton com-

munity had been "too narrow, too selfish, too clannish, and not inclined to look upon the entire needs of the community."[48] It is not difficult to sense disillusionment, even bitterness, on the part of these stewards as their community project ended.

As noted before, Festinger, Riecken, and Schacter and subsequent scholars of failed prophecy predict that when a prophecy fails, "the individual will frequently emerge, not only unshaken but even more convinced of the truth of his beliefs than ever before."[49] While Atherton stewards were shaken by their failed experience, each found ways to reaffirm his faith in the "cause of Zion." "Brother Edgerton said that he was not discouraged with the attempt to build stewardships," noted Earl Higdon, bishop of Far West Stake, in a report compiled for RLDS leaders in 1940. "He hoped that the time would come when the general church would study and present a program which it could sanction."[50] Higdon also reported that steward Roy Young "ha[d] not lost faith in the stewardship idea and believes that some day men and women of the church shall have arrived at the point of broadmindedness and tolerance when they can work together in the establishment of a stewardship community."[51] Despite the disappointment of former stewards, to a man they felt that the stewardship system could succeed in the future. They took the position that Atherton had been a learning experience for the Church upon which others could build.

Given the context of their time, the stewards at Atherton acted in rational, even culturally understandable ways, motivated by hopes shared by others in the larger society. In the period after the community's failure, members unanimously reaffirmed their faith in the RLDS Church or at least in its ideals. Despite personal bitterness at individual Church leaders, all stewards reaffirmed their commitment to the "gospel plan of stewardships." Members of the RLDS Church in general were very disappointed by the failure of the Atherton community, but their faith was also connected to a broader "habitus" of spiritual geography. Zionic beliefs were interwoven through a complicated cosmology rooted in Old and New Testament symbols and reinterpreted by modern RLDS revelations pronounced by Church prophets from Joseph Smith Jr. to their present prophet. While the future coming of Zion provided many with a reason for being, RLDS members also tied in social services, a deep sense of calling, interpersonal bonds, sacred communal rituals, and evangelism as part of their purposes as a people.

In the years that followed the dissolution of the Atherton experiment, RLDS leaders continued to preach the doctrine of Zion, but they never again risked Church tithes on new communities. Instead, individual members attempted grassroots Zionic experiments that ranged from small-loan organizations to cooperative grocery stores and a small community where members lived together but did not produce anything.[52] Zion gained middle-class respectability just as those who proclaimed its message entered the ranks of middle-class Americans. In a sense, Zion became less a utopia of production than a utopia built around consumption, mirroring a larger shift in Western perceptions of perfected future communities in the second half of the twentieth century.[53]

By the 1960s, RLDS members who sought Zion had to contend with a new geographical feature in their Church—the clear emergence of a deepening chasm between fundamentalist and modernist factions. While fundamentalist/modernist debates simmered below the surface of ecclesiastical conflicts in the 1920s, RLDS members held these two worldviews in tension. Yet by the late 1960s, individuals in the RLDS Church had begun to identify themselves as liberals or fundamentalists. Elsewhere, I have argued that this fundamentalist/liberal split was due in part to the difficult American transformation from what sociologist Robert Wuthnow calls "dwelling" spirituality to "seeker" spirituality.[54] This move was due in part to the larger societal reorganizations in the United States following World War II that caused Americans to "negotiate and live with confusion." In addition, he argues, people of other faiths were "forced to interact with each other, band together . . . to compromise, and to bargain with other religious groups to get what they want[ed]."[55] RLDS members, not immune to their environment, were caught in these larger cultural dynamics that helped to generate two different ways of being in their Church. Yet on the localized level, the RLDS collective reckoning with "failed prophecy" also helped generate the fundamentalist-liberal chasm.

While the first generation of RLDS hierarchy never repudiated its commitment to a combined sectarian and Progressive model for Zion, the second generation of RLDS Progressives dropped the sectarian trappings of Zion for an ecumenical model of the kingdom drawn from modernist theology that affirmed "broad responsibility over society" instead of over one centralized geographical area.[56] Zion in this new conceptualization was to be a leaven in the world rather than a lighthouse.[57] Several prominent RLDS leaders now even openly admitted that the goal of building a

utopian city was impossible for humans to achieve.[58] To compensate for this bold admission, Progressives emphasized a realized eschatology that affirmed that Zion was "already" and still "not yet"—a process rather than a goal.[59] Still, Church progressives emphasized the need to make Zion present through social justice advocacy and "participatory human development projects" in all the world.[60] Progressives, then, spiritualized the millennialist Zion while still affirming a commitment to concrete social justice issues attached to the Social Gospel Zion.[61]

In contrast, fundamentalists reinterpreted Zion in a way that denied the need for any reinterpretation. Church members simply needed to follow God's eternal word and the kingdom would come, so they claimed. After the collapse of the Atherton community effort by 1931, many former stewards became resentful of hierarchical control by educated "experts" like J. A. Koehler and Frederick Madison Smith. This resentment presaged a revolt against ecclesiastical "experts" by the next generation of Atherton residents who had grown up at Atherton and who heard much rhetoric about their role as the forthcoming seed of the kingdom. Perhaps predictably in the age of Cold War containment (the 1950s to the early 1970s), the children of Atherton stewards lost much of their parents' Christian socialism but retained their fundamentalist eschatological hopes for the future—which, for some, included the fiery destruction of America in the last days as Zion emerged from the ashes.[62] Some of these children who stayed in Atherton eventually revolted against attempts by the RLDS hierarchy to force their stake[63] to ordain women in the 1980s, sued for the ownership of the Atherton church built by the stewards, and won ownership of the building.[64] At the time of this essay's publication, the Atherton Restoration Branch is an independent congregation of more than 300 members who are affiliated with the quasi-fundamentalist Restoration Branches movement drawn from dissident RLDS members.[65] These fundamentalists, then, adapted to failed prophecy by reaffirming their basic faith commitments even while they waged war with their liberal counterparts over the geography of the body of Zion.

In sum, the failure to build Zion in the 1930s was not simply an issue worked out by one generation of believers but a problem that individuals confronted across generational lines. Additionally, RLDS members struggled with this problem within the context of complex changes in American society across forty years. RLDS members confronted new spiritual languages, new cultural chasms, and new conceptions of the "good

society." For each rising generation, part of Zion died; yet, RLDS faithful resurrected the corpse in divergent reinterpretations of their collective failed prophecy that, in turn, preserved the integrity of their spiritual cosmos in a changing world.

As contemporary members of the Community of Christ (the former RLDS Church) and Restorationists gathered on Resurrection Sunday, 2007, they did so with very similar ceremonies, but with greatly divergent meanings. Men and women in the Community of Christ served the communion to all baptized Christians in their midst, regardless of denomination, while male Restorationists, like those at Atherton, served the Lord's Supper only to members baptized by male, non-liberal RLDS/Restorationist priesthood. The disparity in these approaches was more than a simple difference in theology. Instead, these ceremonies manifested disparate embodiments of the RLDS Zion found in the memory of two once-related communities. Bishop Koehler's predictive vision of a dead and resurrected Jesus remained partly present in both churches as they embraced differing eschatological hopes for a coming future.

Notes

1. Portions of this text are revised and expanded from my thesis, "The Body of Zion: Community, Human Bodies, and Eschatological Futures among the Reorganized Latter Day Saints, 1908–1934" (M.A. thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2004). I would like to thank the following individuals who read earlier versions of this essay: Gary Ebersole and Andrew Bergerson, both from the Department of History, the University of Missouri-Kansas City; Ralph Keen of the Department of Religious Studies, the University of Iowa; Roger D. Launius of the National Air and Space Museum; Mary Sawyer, the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Iowa State University, and *Dialogue*'s anonymous reviewers.

2. In April 2001, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints officially became the Community of Christ. Unless otherwise noted, this essay retains the historic nomenclature. Koehler was the bishop of Holden Stake, a largely rural stake near Independence that included the Atherton stewardship community described in the text. In the early twentieth-century RLDS Church, bishops served as stake stewardship officers; pastors (or presiding elders) were in charge of congregations, and specially set-apart high priests served as stake presidents.

3. J. A. Koehler, "I Saw Jesus," photocopy, Joseph Luff Collection in Karl Anderson's personal library, Independence. My thanks to Anderson for

making this resource available. Koehler's "cross of gold" reference appropriated William Jennings Bryan's famous phrase; however, Koehler apparently referred to a cross of greed that crucified humanity rather than the gold standard.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929). For historical overviews of the RLDS Church, see Richard P. Howard, *The Church through the Years,* Vol. 1, *RLDS Beginnings to 1860* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1993) and *The Church through the Years,* Vol. 2, *The Reorganization Comes of Age, 1860–1992* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1993); and Paul M. Edwards, *Our Legacy of Faith: A Brief History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1991).

7. Perhaps the best example of this tendency in RLDS thought is J. A. Koehler, *Problems of Industrial Zion* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1927), with a foreword by RLDS Prophet Frederick Madison Smith. Historian Larry Hunt, *F. M. Smith: Saint as Reformer* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1982), 387, attempts to classify Smith as part of political "mugwumpery" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or as "part of the more conservative, traditional side of the larger, many-faceted movement known as progressivism." While Hunt's work is invaluable and his definition has a certain methodological utility, he largely ignores the broader context of the Social Gospel movement and the RLDS appropriation of Social Gospel theology. Since Hunt's study appeared in 1982, historians of the Social Gospel movement have demonstrated that the movement's adherents ranged along the spectrum of beliefs from the far left to the far right. For instance, Ralph Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 6, argues that the Social Gospel movement itself was less a radical movement than "an extension of the antebellum home missions and social reform movements." Luker further asserts that the Social Gospel movement was a largely socially conservative movement reacting to disruptive social changes in American communities. Frederick Madison Smith, then, stood within the mainstream of these somewhat conservative Christian reformers. In addition, while Hunt sees the RLDS movement as out of step with American culture, the Social Gospel movement continued well into the 1940s. See Paul T.

Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth: Anglo-American Social Christianity, 1880–1940* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

8. In the commemorative *Centennial Yearbook* sold at the 1930 RLDS General Conference, RLDS editors placed a two-page article with glossy photographs of the Atherton community in the very center of the book. *Centennial Yearbook and Conference Souvenir* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1930), 50–51. A member from the Atherton congregation reported that a group of three hundred Saints attending this conference visited the Atherton community on a single day. "Atherton," *Saints' Herald* 77 (May 21, 1930): 570.

9. Leon Festinger, Stanley Schacter, and Henry Riecken, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).

10. J. Gordon Melton, "Spiritualization and Reaffirmation: What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails," in *Expecting Armageddon: Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy,* edited by Jon R. Stone (New York: Routledge, 2000), 147.

11. Ibid.

12. Stone's anthology brings together some of the best work on "failed prophecy" in the last fifty years. With the exception of Melton and Lawrence Foster (whose essay on Millerites and Shakers addresses theory only indirectly), most authors in Stone's collection approach the question of failed prophecy as an all-encompassing question that can be removed from historical context. For a concise overview of recent work on failed prophecy, see Lorne L. Dawson, "When Prophecy Fails and Faith Persists: A Theoretical Overview," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 3, no. 1 (1999): 60–82. Despite the helpful summary of previous studies, Dawson reframes Festinger by referring to "dissonance management" but not to particular historical contexts. A further sociological refinement of Dawson's theory is Douglas E. Cowan, "Confronting the Failed Failure: Y2K and Evangelical Eschatology in Light of the Passed Millennium," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 7, no. 2 (2003): 71–85. In an essay that appeared at the same time as Dawson's study, Chris Bader, "When Prophecy Passes Unnoticed: New Perspectives on Failed Prophecy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38, no. 1 (1999): 119–31, repeats the sociological tendency toward decontextualism by attempting to fit the question of failed prophecy into ahistorical rational choice theory.

13. For application of Festinger's theory to early Christianity, see John Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 37–49. Bader, "When Proph-

ecy Passes Unnoticed," 121, 123–24, draws material from mid-nineteenth-century Morrisites and late twentieth-century groups like Heaven's Gate and the Baha'is Under the Provisions of the Covenant (BUPC).

14. Scott MacAulay, "The Smokestack Leaned toward Capitalism: An Examination of the Middle Way Program of the Antigonish Movement," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2002): 43. In the late 1920s, the Antigonish Movement emerged in maritime Canada as "a program of populist adult education and co-operative development." The Extension Department of the Catholic St. Francis Xavier University served as the "intellectual and organizational center of the movement in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Movement activists saw themselves as a middle way between capitalism and socialism. Ibid.

15. The classic account of this movement is Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1982). Individual Catholic Worker communities are constituted by a small "family" (people not necessarily related by blood) of clergy, nuns, and/or laity. They covenant to serve those on the margins of society through social justice activism and houses of hospitality. For a recent study on the evolution of the Catholic Worker family, see Dan McKanan, "Inventing the Catholic Worker Family," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 76, no. 1 (March 2007): 84–113.

16. Francis Shor, "The Utopian Project in a Communal Experiment of the 1930s: The Sunrise Colony in Historical and Comparative Perspective," *Communal Societies* 7 (1987): 82–94; Sora H. Friedman, "No Place like Home: The Settling of Jersey Homesteads, New Jersey," *Communal Societies* 19 (1999): 24. Sunrise's Jewish colonists communally farmed 10,000 acres from 1933 to 1936. Members ate meals in communal dining halls, established a collective home for their children, and governed themselves by a democratic general assembly.

17. Friedman, "The Settling of Jersey Homesteads," 27; Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1959).

18. Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 176. Niebuhr served on the board of the "Delta Cooperative" located in Hillhouse, Mississippi.

19. Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. chap. 9.

20. Howlett, "The Body of Zion," chap. 1.

21. C. E. Wright, "The Problem of the Ages," *Saints' Herald* 67, no. 35 (September 1, 1920): 845.

22. Koehler, *Problems of Industrial Zion.*

23. In a class at the 1944 RLDS General Conference, Bishop Koehler suggested that students read some of Ward's works. See "The Mission of the Church in the Crisis of Civilization," "Koehler, J. A. file," Biographical Folder Collection, Community of Christ Archives.

24. Wright, "Problem of the Ages," 845, and Charles Ellwood, Letter to Frederick Madison Smith, as quoted in *Zion's Ensign* 29 (August 8, 1918): 14.

25. In a private conversation with me, Community of Christ Theologian-in-Residence Anthony Chvala-Smith stated that William Temple's theology in the 1930s greatly influenced both the young RLDS Apostle F. Henry Edwards and the soon-to-be apostle Arthur Oakman. According to Chvala-Smith, Oakman drew portions of his sermons straight from Temple's works, sometimes word for word, not always with citations. Ironically, Oakman and Edwards are still beloved by conservative RLDS members even though both men drew some of their most eloquent theology from the writings of the liberal Archbishop of Canterbury.

26. Hall served as Frederick Madison Smith's dissertation advisor at Clark University and wrote the introduction to Smith's dissertation: Frederick M. Smith, *The Higher Power of Man* (Lamoni, Ia.: Herald Publishing House, 1918), 9–13.

27. In December 1930, an elderly RLDS man wrote to the First Presidency that he was "convinced that the warning given by the Seer [Joseph Smith Jr.]" was "nigh at hand." Paraphrasing Joseph Smith's 1831 revelation, the man stated "that the time will come when he who will not take up his sword to fight his neighbor" must flee to Zion for safety (D&C 45:13a; LDS 45:68). The writer balanced his apocalyptic doom with a paradoxical hope "to see saints organized into cooperative colonies. I believe that if I was authorized," continued the man, that "I would find many of our people who would be glad to become one of such a group stewardship." "V-X: Stewardship Applications," P75–4, f44, Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence.

28. F. M. Smith, "Zion and Stewardships," *Saints' Herald* 75, no. 10 (March 7, 1928): 276. Hunt, *F. M. Smith,* 135, contended that Smith "unwittingly appropriated a Marxian aphorism he found on the cover of *Cosmopolitan.*" However, cultural geographer Richard A. Waugh, "Sacred Space and the Persistence of Identity: The Evolution and Meaning of an American Religious Utopia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1995), 229, commented: "It seems incredible that Smith could study socialism at the University of Kansas in the course of getting his master's degree and earn a Ph.D.

in psychology at Clark University without recognizing the origin of this famous summary of Marxist thought."

29. Mario S. De Pillis, "Christ Comes to Jackson County: The Mormon City of Zion and Its Consequences," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 23 (2003): 42.

30. In 1895, RLDS members established Graceland University at Lamoni, Iowa. Both Prophet Frederick Madison Smith and his counselor Floyd McDowell received Ph.D.s from Clark University where they studied with G. Stanley Hall, America's best-known psychologist of the early twentieth century. Future RLDS Presiding Patriarch Roy Cheville attended seminary at the University of Chicago Divinity School from which he received his Ph.D. Bishop J. A. Koehler, a crucial leader in the RLDS stewardship movement, was awarded both his B.A. and bachelor of divinity from Temple University. Edwards, *History of the Church* 7:709–11; Paul M. Edwards, *The Hilltop Where: An Informal History of Graceland College* (Lamoni, Ia: Venture Foundation, 1972); "Introducing J. August Koehler," *Saints' Herald* 98, no. 5 (January 29, 1951): 119.

31. Frederick M. Smith, "Some Things a Member of the Priesthood Should Know," *The Priesthood Journal* 9, no. 3 (1943): 6.

32. Paul M. Edwards, *The Chief: An Administrative Biography of Fred M. Smith* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1988), 93, 114.

33. Late nineteenth-century Reorganized Saints experimented in a renewed "Order of Enoch" loosely based on the 1830s Mormon organization of the same name. While this corporation was not legally connected to the RLDS Church, it provided late nineteenth-century members with an avenue by which they could realize "Zion-building" endeavors. The most important accomplishment of the RLDS Order of Enoch was the 1870s establishment of Lamoni, Iowa, as an RLDS community and gathering place. Joseph Smith III saw the Lamoni community as a halting step toward a future, more perfectly realized community of Zion that would some day exist in Independence. Consequently, the Order of Enoch did not renew its charter in 1890. By then, Joseph Smith III and many of the Saints had turned their attention to a future move to Independence. See Roger D. Launius, "The Mormon Quest for a Perfect Society at Lamoni, Iowa, 1870–1890," *The Annals of Iowa* 47, no. 4 (1984): 325–42. In 1909, members resurrected the RLDS Order of Enoch. Rather than build communities, this organization provided "a trusted means for out-of-town Saints to buy a building lot for a new house in Zion [Independence] during the [early twentieth-century] gathering process." The Order of Enoch was incorporated into the "Central Development Authority" (CDA) on July 1, 1927. By then, RLDS members had focused their commu-

nity-building efforts into newly formed stewardship associations. See Gregory Smith, "The United Order of Enoch in Independence," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 22 (2002): 116–17.

34. David J. Howlett, "'The Making of a Steward': Zion, Ecclesiastical Power, and RLDS Bodies, 1923–31," *Journal of Mormon History* 32, no. 2 (2006): 25–27, 29–31, 34–37.

35. In Onset, Massachusetts, members of an RLDS stewardship association bought land to be used for summer camping and Church "reunion" experiences. During the rest of the year, several families lived on the land as a small community. "Southern New England Reunion," *Saints' Herald* 76 (August 21, 1929): 1024–25.

36. Stewards at Detroit, Michigan, formed an association and served as a type of financial board of directors for the RLDS Detroit Stake throughout the 1930s. While they directed the construction of a new church, they never formed a community.

37. In Taney County, Missouri, the RLDS Church brought a family of Oregon sheep ranchers to develop a ranch that could provide employment for other RLDS members. "A Church into Sheep Business to Give Members Employment," *Independence Examiner,* July 5, 1929, in "Newspaper Clippings, 1924–1931," microfilm reel #923, Community of Christ Archives.

38. Ronald E. Romig and John Siebert, "J. A. Koehler and the Stewardship Movement at Atherton," *Saints' Heritage: The Journal of the Restoration Trails Foundation* 1 (1988): 46–47.

39. See my "'The Making of a Steward,'" 36–37. Ironically, while the Great Depression ended RLDS communal experiments, the economic catastrophe encouraged other groups to actively pursue communal solutions to world problems. See Donald W. Whisenhunt, "Utopias, Communalism, and the Great Depression," Communal Societies 3 (1983): 102.

40. Hunt, *F. M. Smith* 2:368.

41. J. A. Koehler, "Seminar on Zion," 1957, Independence, typescript of address, in "Koehler, J. A., File," Biographical Folder Collection, Community of Christ Archives.

42. Hunt, *F. M. Smith,* 1:197.

43. For an example of a communist experience of "failed prophecy," see Arthur Koestler, "The God that Failed," in John W. Boyer and Julius Kirshner, eds., *Twentieth-Century Europe,* Vol. 9 of *Readings in Western Civilization,* edited by John Boyer and Jan Goldstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 352–67.

44. Earl T. Higdon, "The History of the Atherton Stewardship Experi-

ment," photocopy (Independence, Mo.: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1940), 52.

45. Ibid., 54–55.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., 70.

48. Ibid., 71.

49. Festinger, *When Prophecy Fails,* 3.

50. Higdon, "History of the Atherton Stewardship," 73.

51. Ibid., 71.

52. For a survey of these efforts by 1979, see Sandra Colyer, "Zionic/Stewardship Endeavors: Prepared for the Zionic Community Commission, Thomas Noffsinger, Commissioner," Private Report, 1979–80, Community of Christ Archives. The most significant of these efforts is Harvest Hills, a Community of Christ/RLDS intentional community on the outskirts of Independence. Begun in 1972, Harvest Hills continues to function, although members do not jointly engage in cooperative occupational enterprises. For a brief history of Harvest Hills, see James A. Christianson, *Zion in Our Time* (Independence, Mo.: Center for Zionic Studies, 1980).

53. Hieko Stoff discusses this shift in Western utopic concepts in his "Utopian Thinking between Producerism and Consumerism: What Distinguishes the New Deal from the *Volksgemeinschaft*?," in *Visions of the Future in Germany and America,* edited by Norbert Finzsch and Hermann Wellenreuther (New York: Berg, 2001), 446.

54. David J. Howlett, "Remembering Polygamy: The RLDS Church and American Spiritual Transformations in the Late Twentieth Century," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 24 (2004): 149–72.

55. Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 198.

56. Paul A. Wellington, ed., *Readings on the Concepts of Zion* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1973), 33.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., 31, 35, 121.

59. Ibid., 30–35, 114–23, 132.

60. Outreach International, the RLDS Church's humanitarian charity, developed a "participatory human development" program in the 1970s. In this program, people in developing areas (who were not necessarily RLDS members) would participate in an outreach-funded project, such as building a school or digging a well for clean water. Thus, people in developing areas maintained a measure of "ownership" over their projects. Apostle Charles Neff, an important revisionist of the RLDS Zion, helped found Outreach In-

ternational. Matthew Bolton, *Apostle of the Poor: The Life and Works of Missionary and Humanitarian Charles D. Neff* (Independence, Mo.: John Whitmer Books, 2005), 111–14.

61. For further examples, see Andrew Bolton, "'Blessed Are . . . ': Developing a Christ-Centered Theology of Peace, Justice, and Sustainable Environment," *Saints' Herald* 145 (October 1998): 412–13; Anthony Chvala-Smith, "The Spirit, the Book, and the City: Retrieving the Distinctive Voice of the Restoration," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 19 (1999): 26–27; Stephen M. Veazey, "2005 World Conference Sermon: 'Share the Peace of Jesus Christ,'" April 2005, www.cofchrist.org/docs/wc2005/Veazey-sermon.asp (accessed March 21, 2007).

62. Such an apocalyptic prediction keeps faith with earlier generations of Reorganized Latter Day Saints who also believed that America would be "cleansed" in the last days while Zion came into being. For instance, at the same conference in which Bishop Koehler predicted that a Social Gospel Lord would be resurrected through Zion, R. E. Burgess uttered an inspired poem that read in part as follows:

> I have spoken through my prophets
> Telling of the days to come
> When my judgments will be poured out
> Without measure; fail shall none
> Pestilence and also famine
> Wind and rain my wrath shall show
> Lightning and the awful thunder
> Spread destruction here below.
> I've set for you a task, my people
> Before you stands an open door
> Enter ye the task to accomplish
> Zion beckons; haste ye more.

In this conceptualization, Zion acts as an ark, saving Saints from the coming destruction. See Alvin Knisley, *Infallible Proofs* (1930; rpt., Independence, Mo.: Price Publishing Company, 1988), 181–82. Knisley's work collects dreams from RLDS members, some of which, like the one quoted above, were printed in the *Saints' Herald.* Significantly, many Restorationists still use Knisley's book as a source for spiritual insight into the future.

63. Like LDS stakes, RLDS stakes were diocese-like administrative units made up of multiple congregations; but since April 2002, the Community of Christ has been organized into "mission centers" which approximate and

consolidate older stake divisions. Members of the Restoration Branch movement have not organized any official geographical administrative units beyond one organization for pastors around Independence, a decentralized Conference of Restoration Elders which has no powers of enforcing its legislation, and a Joint Conference of Restoration Branches whose scope and authority are just emerging at this time.

64. The internecine conflict between fundamentalist RLDS and the liberal RLDS hierarchy has been documented in a pamphlet published by fundamentalist RLDS elder Richard Price in *Blue Valley Packet* (Independence, Mo.: Price Publishing Company, n.d. [1998]). In it, Price reproduces local newspaper articles, letters from the RLDS hierarchy, and his own polemical commentary. Price distributes this pamphlet free at his Independence bookstore. RLDS Church historian Richard Howard provides a different perspective on this conflict in *The Church through the Years,* 2:409–32.

65. Much of the information for this paragraph is taken from my personal observations as both a scholar and a participant who grew up in this movement. Additionally, I have many friends who attend the Atherton Restoration Branch. While I classify "Restorationists" as dissident RLDS members for heuristic purposes in this essay, several Restorationists whom I know deeply resent the appellation. Like many groups involved in religious schisms, Restorationists see themselves as bearers of the true tradition, not as dissidents.