

Polygamy, Mormonism, and Me

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Note: This article is part of a series, Avenues to Faith, guest-edited by Todd Compton. The series looks at how historians, creative writers, administrators, educators, and scriptural scholars have dealt with some of the classic problems in Mormon history. The series assumes that a careful examination of these issues is necessary to develop a holistic, inclusive faith.

When I was a young Latter-day Saint, polygamy entered my consciousness about the time I became a teenager. References to it were not uncommon by family members and in Sunday School classes. It seems to me there was less sensitivity surrounding discussion of polygamy in church meetings then than now. Men reflected on the practice, often humorously. Women, nettled by such remarks, often expressed displeasure with the prospect of plurality under any circumstance. The comment most often heard was that, though once permitted, Mormon polygamy had been discontinued by the Church's president. Guided by inspiration, he had directed that such marriages no longer be performed. It was also occasionally said that the reason for its discontinuance was that too many had fallen short of living the principle in righteousness. Plural marriage in this life was thus brought to an end by the Manifesto of 1890. It may recommence in the millennium, we were told, but there, as in heaven where it is sure to be the domestic order of the gods, our minds will be so enlightened that all misgivings, and especially female discomfort with the arrangement, will fade away. This was the general course that I and others followed in discussions on the subject, both in church and, after I married, at home with Kamillia.

A more extensive encounter with the topic occurred in the process of preparing my doctoral dissertation on the Mormon colonies in Mexico. Examination of materials relating to the relocation of large numbers of Mormons south of the border beginning in the mid-1880s revealed that, rather than a search for new lands—the reason publicly given for the migration—it was escape from prosecution for unlawful cohabitation that actually prompted most to go there. I became aware that the thousands of Latter-day Saints living in northern Mexico constituted the greatest concentration of pluralists anywhere in Mormon society at the time. More than this, it became obvious from my research that plural marriages continued to be performed in Mexico after the Manifesto of 1890. Records left by Anthony W. Ivins, stake president in the colonies and later an apostle and member of the First Presidency, showed that he performed many of these post-Manifesto marriages with the quiet approval of and instructions from high Church leaders in Salt Lake City.

This discovery did not, at the time, startle my conscience or threaten my religious convictions. For reasons I cannot fully explain, I ignored the dissonance brought by contradictions between what was publicly stated and what secretly took place. I accepted statements by Mormon authorities that plural marriages after the Manifesto had not been approved and were the work of rebels out of harmony with Church leaders. Consequently, Church-approved post-Manifesto polygamy received virtually no attention in my finished dissertation. The contradiction lingered, however, and would later be joined to other questions concerning the reliability of Mormonism's official historical claims.

After receiving an appointment to teach the history and philosophy of education at Brigham Young University, I completed the dissertation and devoted myself to responsibilities associated with work and raising a young family. Kamillia and I had always been conservative in our views, both of us were active in the Church, and we both wanted to acquire a deeper confirmation of Mormonism's divinity. I imagine the questions we addressed in our private conversations were much the same as those raised by other thoughtful Latter-day Saint couples when discussing religion. Our searching was accompanied by prayer, fasting, scripture reading, and full activity in the Church—all that was prescribed as the pathway to a "testimony." As time passed, however, and when nothing of a convincing nature occurred to allay our doubts, confidence that Mormonism offered us a sure road to either heaven or absolute truth wavered.

During these same years, as commonly happens with scholars after completing their doctoral programs, I continued my research on the colonies in Mexico with a view to eventually publishing my findings. This research involved regular visits to the Church Archives in Salt Lake City, where I learned, first, that there were numerous documents I could not see and second, that whatever notes I took on documents I *was* permitted to view must be examined by A. William Lund, then assistant Church historian. It was always a harrowing half hour or so at the end of each research day when Lund read the 3x5 cards on which I wrote my notes—especially when, finding some of which he disapproved, he would crumple them and throw them into the waste can in his office.

Another occurrence of the early 1960s involved making the acquaintance of Nelle Spilsbury Hatch. She was a prominent resident in the colonies, had written a history of Colonia Juarez, and was visiting a relative in Provo, Utah, when we were introduced. She kindly consented to answer questions about the colonies, permitting Kamillia and me to spend an afternoon with her during which we discussed everything from polygamy to economics in Mormon-Mexican colonial life. I particularly remember the sense of abandonment that she said the colonists felt when President Wilford Woodruff issued his 1890 Manifesto. Our discussion was pleasant and led to a collaborative project some years later. Near the same time, Kamillia and I also interviewed Heber Farr, an older Provo resident who, having married a plural spouse in 1904, was at the time, perhaps, the only polygamist yet living in the United States whose post-Manifesto marriage had been approved by Church authorities. The memories and comments of these two individuals gave human faces to numbers of people whose names I knew only from diaries and other documents.

Another approach I undertook to my subject was to send questionnaires to Mormons living in the colonies. Some residing there had survived the exodus imposed on them by the Mexican Revolution, had returned to Mexico and, I hoped, could tell me things that would otherwise die with them. Some of the questions I asked related to polygamous practices before the exodus but were respectfully phrased and constituted only a portion of the information I sought. It was with surprise that I was one day summoned to a meeting with one of the university's administrative officers, Anthony Bentley. Born in the colonies but living in Provo, Utah, he had somehow learned of my questionnaires and insisted that I explain the reason for them.

Angrily, he interrogated me both about my purpose in sending such inquiries and my intentions regarding the use of any information obtained from them. With a raised voice, he repeatedly demanded to know where I would publish my findings. Taken aback by his hostile manner, I could only say what was true: that questionnaires were commonly employed by scholars in many fields; that my intent was an innocent search for historical information; and that, while I did not yet know where I would publish any writing I might do on the subject, I had assumed that I would eventually submit it to some historical journal. Bentley was especially provoked because I could not be specific about where the information I sought would appear in print. He seemed suspicious of my intentions generally and found none of my answers satisfactory. He told me that, before resuming work on the colonies I should clear future research with him.

About the same time, Antone K. Romney, dean of the College of Education, also asked me to explain what my research was about. This was a more amicable experience than the interview with Bentley. The dean displayed greater understanding about how research is conducted and published, seemed sympathetic with what I was trying to do, and said he would discuss my work and need for more historical information with his brother, Marion G. Romney, who was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. Their family also had roots in the Mexican colonies, both Antone and Marion having been born in Colonia Juarez.

It was perhaps three months or so before a response came. Again Dean Romney invited me to his office and read to me a memorandum sent to him not from his brother but from Hugh B. Brown, a member of the First Presidency. It indicated that I should not pursue my research, at least so far as it involved Mormon polygamy. When I asked Dean Romney for a copy of the memo, he said he could not give me one. I vividly remember some of the language, however. There was no rancor in it, but it instructed Romney to tell me that it was best not to examine subjects that had brought "trouble" to the Church in its past. I was disturbed by the message, not only because of the curb it placed on my work but by the view that things possibly embarrassing to the Church were not appropriate for scholarly investigation. It seemed entirely at odds with what I thought a university should be about. I was also affected by the fact that it came from one in the First Presidency whom I and many others believed possessed a broad and intellectually friendly outlook.

These events occurred at the same time Kamillia and I were privately equivocating over the truth claims of Mormonism. It is important that I acknowledge Kamillia's interested participation in all that occupied me in those years. While discussions on the subject occurred nearly daily, we shared our inner turmoil with no one, not even our children. I was fortunate to have a companion whose misgivings were identical to my own and who confronted the implications of our questions so bravely and honestly. I must also add that our decision to leave Brigham Young University—and subsequently the Church itself—did not hinge singly on issues associated with my research. These were but part of a complex of considerations that brought us to that momentous life step.

While there were several ingredients in the decision, the primary concern remained a want of spiritual certainty that the Church was true, an increasing awareness of instances where the historical record contradicted what we had been taught, and a growing realization that the world was filled with admirable, heroic people entirely outside the Mormon frame. Discouragement with the university's approach to scholarship, particularly as it related to my own work, was but one of several matters qualifying my religious faith. Taken altogether, it seemed dishonest on my part, as I told the president of the university when explaining my resignation in the spring of 1966, to continue as an employee paid from the tithing receipts of believing members.

Something more needs to be said regarding my break with Mormonism. After formally submitting my resignation from BYU, owing probably to brief discussions with colleagues and administrators about my reasons in the matter, several faculty and friends paid visits, hoping to dissuade me. I particularly remember Hugh Nibley, a former teacher from whom I had taken many courses, and one whom I had long held in high regard. He did not "bear his testimony" or engage me on philosophical or historical grounds. His chief plea was simply that I should not be "inveigled by the ways of the world." What affected me most was his interest and concern. I was even more touched when Dean Romney asked whether Kamillia and I would visit with one of the General Authorities concerning our doubts if he could arrange it. Of course, we consented.

An appointment was made for us to meet with Apostle Howard W. Hunter in the Church Administration Building in Salt Lake City. After we were ushered in by a secretary, Apostle Hunter graciously greeted us. The first few minutes were confused because, for some reason, he as-

sumed we were grieving for a dead child and seeking spiritual solace for the loss. After explaining the correct reasons for our presence, our growing doubts and misgivings regarding the Church, he expressed understanding and responded with kindness. He remarked on the many advantages offered by the Church, especially for those with families. He told us that he could not imagine how life would be for him without “the gospel.” When I asked if he had direct, personal confirmation that the Church was true, such as a communication from heaven, he said, “No.” But, he went on, he knew others who told him they had had such a witness, and he relied on their claims, believing that they would not deceive him. While Kamillia and I left the interview no more convinced than before, we have always remembered the thoughtful manner and compassion the apostle displayed toward us.

I should also add that Kamillia and I, neither at that time nor since, harbored any bitterness toward Mormonism. It was responsible for much that we considered best in our lives. We yet have enormous regard for the toil, sacrifice, and achievements of our pioneer ancestors. Even after becoming nonmembers, we stood by our children when all chose to be baptized in the Church. And we were happy to support our son when he was called to fill a mission abroad. We occasionally attended church, especially when our children were participating in some way. It was only that we could not *personally* subscribe to contentions that Mormonism alone possesses all religious truth, that its theology is divinely dictated from heaven, and that, if there is a life beyond the grave, as between individuals of equal ethical merit, those who are Mormon will be given a greater reward than those who are not. In the years following my resignation from Brigham Young University and our decision formally to leave the Church, we have consistently sought to respect the religious choices made by our children. And in none of my historical writing about the Church have I ever intended to criticize or embarrass it.

After accepting an appointment at California State University, Fullerton, I sought for a time to redirect my research into areas apart from Mormon history, fields in which I had studied and that had long held interest for me. While this resulted in publications on non-Mormon topics, I found I could not entirely abandon historical interest in my Latter-day Saint ancestors. Moreover, with the appointment of Leonard Arrington as Church historian a spirit of openness and honesty regarding investigation of the Mormon past largely replaced the paranoia I encountered in the

1960s. I was given a grant to work at the Church's Historical Department Archives for several weeks in the mid-1970s. Access to materials I had never seen before was permitted, and I was able to add considerable information to what I already possessed on the polygamous, Mormon colonies in Mexico. Near this same time, I met and became acquainted with Victor W. Jorgensen, an engineer from Utah, who was intensely interested in post-Manifesto polygamy. He had already gathered data on the post-Manifesto marriages of certain Mormon apostles. It would be unfair of me not to acknowledge the large contribution he subsequently made to publications resulting from our work together.

Another important event occurred when, in the early 1970s, I and my colleague, Professor Gary Shumway, along with a few students spent several days in the Mexican colonies. Gary gathered numerous interviews on tape, all of which are a part of the impressive collection he developed as founder and director of the California State University Center for Oral and Public History. These and other records gathered by Gary have proven of great assistance to me over the years. During our visit to the colonies, I renewed my acquaintance with Nelle Hatch. Though aged and severely impaired in both sight and hearing, she remained mentally alert and implored me to bring to completion a project she had long ago commenced and since passed on to another Mormon colonist from Mexico, Hal Bentley, then employed at the University of Utah. The project involved writing biographical sketches of important personalities dating from the founding years of the colonies' history. She had gathered several notebooks of memoirs, letters, and other materials to be used in the volume. Bentley, struggling with an illness, was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task and was unable to do anything with it.

Fearing that her long-envisioned tribute to old friends, the pioneer founders of the Mexican settlements, would be forgotten, Nelle pleaded that I do what I could to obtain the materials and finish the volume by 1985, the centennial date for the founding of the colonies. I promised her I would do so. I succeeded in acquiring possession of all Nelle's materials bearing on the project, incorporated findings of my own, and with the assistance of Gary Shumway and Nelle's daughters—Ernestine Hatch and Madelyn Hatch Knudsen, the book was privately published by Gary Shumway and made available for sale during the centennial celebration of the colonies in 1985. Titled *Stalwarts South of the Border*, it is a rich compilation of biographical and autobiographical reminiscences relating to the

Mormon pioneers of Mexico, many of whom were polygamous.¹ Nelle Hatch remains for me an especially dear personality, forever connected in my mind with those sturdy figures who, with so little, built a thriving Mormon commonwealth in the deserts of northern Mexico.

It was also during the early 1980s that I met Guy C. Wilson Jr., the son of polygamous parentage in the Mexican colonies who was then living in Pasadena, California. After reading an article of mine, Guy contacted me, wishing to share some of his memories. I soon realized that, though in his eighties, he had unusually strong powers of recollection. I arranged to interview him, making tape-recordings of his reminiscences. Goodly portions of his youth were spent both in the colonies and in Utah. His father, Guy Carlton Wilson Sr., was a prominent citizen in the colonies and presided over the Juarez Stake Academy, one of the premier elementary and secondary schools in all northern Mexico. He was also a polygamist. In addition to Melissa Stevens, a plural wife and Guy Jr.'s mother, Guy Sr. married Anna Lowrie Ivins, a daughter of Anthony W. Ivins, president of Juarez Stake. Young Guy thus grew up within the colonies' most elite circle and was extensively acquainted with polygamy as it was practiced and approved by Mormons in the early twentieth century.

Guy was primarily interested in memorializing his father. But in the process of telling about him, Guy brought other individuals and events into his narrative. He remembered the names of many who took plural wives after the Manifesto, some in Mexico and others in the United States. So many women who married in polygamy after 1890 were sent to Mexico to bear their children and thereby be less conspicuous north of the border, he said, that Mexican colonists referred to their settlements as "lambing grounds." He told how George Q. Cannon, counselor in the First Presidency, strongly urged entry into "the Principle" and helped implement its continuation. He related touching accounts of the hardships imposed on families who, relocating to the United States after the Mexican Revolution, were asked to geographically disperse their plural families so as to spare Mormonism (by then officially monogamous) any embarrassment owing to its former attachment to the Principle. These and many other memories were published by the California State University Oral History Program in 1988 as, *Memories of a Venerable Father and Other Reminiscences*.

Guy took great pride in his Mormon heritage but was relaxed in his personal attitudes toward Latter-day Saint teachings. Following our re-

ording sessions in the mornings, he generally took me to the Valley Hunt Club in Pasadena for lunch. After ordering cocktails, Guy always raised his glass and said: "Come Carmon, let's drink to the Church!" Then followed two hours of further recollections, some adding to stories recorded in the morning, others new, but most told in language so salty that he wanted it confined to our luncheon table.

I should now return to the work that Victor W. Jorgensen and I first undertook in the late 1970s and early '80s. The first printed investigation into approved, late plural marriages on which we collaborated was an article in an issue of the *Utah Historical Quarterly* for 1980 dealing with the cases of Apostles Matthias F. Cowley and John W. Taylor.² That article not only showed the extent to which these two authorities engaged in plurality after 1890 but, more importantly, demonstrated that their expulsion from the Quorum of Twelve in 1905 was an event orchestrated for the purpose of appeasing national criticism of the Church. We explained how the two agreed to resign owing to pressures brought by Senator-Apostle Reed Smoot whose seat in the United States Senate was challenged on the grounds that the Church still engaged in new plural marriages. The article also revealed that there were other apostles, apart from Cowley and Taylor, who entered plural marriages after 1890. The publication was well received and was awarded the Dale Morgan Prize as the best article to appear in the *Quarterly* that year.

The success of this project encouraged us to commence work on a book-length treatment of the matter. Then Michael Quinn, who had an interest in the same subject, published a long article on it in *Dialogue* in 1985.³ His findings reinforced ours and provided additions to our growing list of post-1890 plural unions. His account also contained helpful insights into how such marriages were approved. Pressing ahead with our work, Vic, who lived in Utah, regularly sent me extensive transcripts identifying and discussing approved plural marriages after the Manifesto. I then added my own findings and other observations, slowly working all into a book-length manuscript. The result was *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage*, published by the University of Illinois Press in 1992, more than a decade after our first foray into the topic in the *Utah Historical Quarterly*. Despite his extensive work in searching out those who married after the Manifesto, for personal reasons Vic decided that he did not wish to be formally identified with the book. Thus, the volume bears my name alone. Like our article, this work received overwhelmingly favor-

able reviews and was given the best book award for that year by the Mormon Historical Association.

It is always interesting how one's views change as work in a subject area progresses. At the outset, the extensive number of new, Church-approved, post-Manifesto plural marriages was what most surprised me. And it is still astonishing to realize that, between 1890 and 1910, at least two hundred and perhaps as many as three hundred such marriages took place. Church statements, when rumor and question arose, that such marriages were few, that Church authorities did not approve them, and that those that did occur were the "sporadic" work of "mavericks," fell hollow before the sheer quantity of plural unions that research now shows were approved and contracted. But gradually, something else emerged, something more significant even than the magnitude of their numbers. This was the identity of many of those who undertook such marriages. The majority were individuals who could be counted among the most faithful of Church members: former missionaries, bishops, members of bishoprics, stake presidents, members of stake presidencies, and other individuals similarly distinguished and favored in the Mormon community. At least seven apostles took plural wives after the Manifesto.⁴

Again, it was not just that numerous apostles entered the Principle after 1890, but that members of the First Presidency approved and assisted them in such unions as well. George Q. Cannon in the mid-1880s was remembered to declare that his attachment to the revelation on plurality was so strong that he felt "like taking every son of mine & placing his hand on my thigh causing him to swear he will obey it."⁵ After the Manifesto, Cannon remained more active perhaps than anyone else in assisting with its continuance. He not only encouraged individuals, including members of his own family, to take plural wives but sent recommends to Anthony W. Ivins in Mexico indicating that the bearers of such messages were approved and that Ivins might proceed to solemnize their plural unions.⁶ President Joseph F. Smith was also a strong believer in polygamy and gave permission to numerous individuals after the Manifesto to enter the practice—both in and outside of the United States.⁷ While documentation for such marriages is in most instances compelling, it is less so for President Wilford Woodruff, who issued the Manifesto. While I am persuaded that Woodruff entered a marital arrangement of some kind on his own with Madame Lydia Mountford in 1897, the available evidence for

this is inferential only.⁸ And other capable historians have disagreed with me.⁹

This realization, that it was the Church's elite who were mostly involved in post-Manifesto polygamy, highlighted another issue, one that nagged the investigation from its beginning. This was the problem of the Church's use of mistruth when publicly discussing polygamy, both early and late. Even a superficial examination of Mormon plurality, from the period of its practice in the 1840s to the throes of its cessation in the first two decades of the twentieth century, confronts one with numerous instances of false denial by Church leaders. This led to my writing a rather lengthy essay, titled "Lying for the Lord," that was added as an appendix to *Solemn Covenant*. Since the publication of the book, that phrase has sometimes been repeated as a criticism of the Church for instances of dissembling on a variety of questions. My intent in that essay was not, however, to indict the Church in any general way but simply to explore its use of prevarication when attempting to keep the approved practice of polygamy secret.

While it is true that Church leaders used purposeful falsehood to cloak Mormon polygamous practice at almost every stage of its history, my essay on the subject argued that we must be careful with our conclusions concerning it. Honesty and dishonesty are not easily reduced to the binary, ethical judgments we commonly make. Most importantly—and what I fear is too often missed despite my repeated attention to the issue in the book—is that plural marriage was so important as a tenet that resorts such as lying, though regretted, were thought necessary as a way to preserve it. In all of life, and with all people, lesser truths must sometimes yield to more important ones. While policies of deceit seldom escape detection and, once indulged, are susceptible to being employed elsewhere, their use here speaks most emphatically to the high regard in which plural marriage was held during those years.

And this, the crucial significance given the practice by the nineteenth-century Church, was justified by other contentions, some of which have been quite forgotten. One of these was the support polygamy gave to patriarchal government in the home. The importance of patriarchal authority, and its linkage with plural marriage, was affirmed in the first public defense of the practice printed on Joseph Smith's press in Nauvoo, Illinois: Udney Hay Jacob's *The Peace Maker* (1842). During the decades of its approval, plurality was often referred to as "patriarchal marriage." The sig-

nificance of restoring the polygamous, Abrahamic household, with a strong male figure at its center, was repeatedly emphasized in nineteenth-century Mormon sermons and writings. Attention to patriarchal government in the home was so pervasive that I sometimes wondered if polygamy was but an auxiliary device, a brace recruited to assure the more important function of male rule. This thinking led to my article on the subject in the *Journal of Mormon History*.¹⁰ Unfortunately, when printed, the typesetting program ran footnotes into the text, making it difficult for readers to follow the development of the article's themes. I was not given an opportunity to correct mistakes made by the printer before it appeared in the completed issue of the journal. Because the patriarchal-polygamous alliance was so important in nineteenth-century Mormon thinking about home life, I have sometimes thought I should revise the article, add further reflections, and publish it again.

Biological advantages were also said to follow plurality when practiced as taught by Mormon leaders. If sexual relations were employed only for reproductive purposes, men and women were told they would enjoy greater health, greater strength, and greater longevity, goals that were allegedly more easily accomplished in polygamy than in monogamy. Some saw the practice as a way by which the longevity of the ancients would be restored. As I combed through Mormon diaries, sermons, and public prints during the years of my research, I encountered this argument so frequently that I wondered why it had not received greater mention by historians. Dan Erickson, a friend and graduate student, joined me in summarizing these arguments in an article in the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* in 2001.¹¹ Along with its eugenic promises, superior social gifts were ascribed to polygamy, along with the claim of providing greater happiness than could be found in the monogamous home. Another assertion was that women might escape the curse of Eve by submitting to the requirements of plural family life. Such contentions make it easier to understand why the Saints went to such lengths, including the use of mistruth, to keep the Principle alive after the Manifesto.

All these aspects of plural marriage, and more, were brought together in *Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy, Its Origin, Practice, and Demise* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2007). I had always been interested in writing a book that would be published by the Arthur H. Clark Company. When I was a graduate student at Brigham Young University in the late 1950s, Dr. LeRoy Hafen, one of my profes-

sors and a much-published authority, praised the Clark Company for the quality of materials used in its books and the historical service provided through its splendid volumes on western Americana. The Arthur H. Clark Company, as every historian of the American West knows, continues to enjoy a reputation as one of the premier publishing houses in the field. When I learned that Clark was planning a new series, *KINGDOM IN THE WEST: THE MORMONS AND THE AMERICAN FRONTIER*, I contacted Robert A. Clark and expressed interest in doing a book for him on Mormon polygamy. Bob put me in touch with Will Bagley, the series general editor. After I sent him a prospectus, Will invited me to be a contributor to the *KINGDOM IN THE WEST* project. Over the lengthy period of time necessary to complete the book, I suspect Will often wondered whether he had erred in that decision. Not only were ten years required to finish the volume, but my early drafts, submitted to reassure Will and Bob that progress *was* occurring, were so filled with footnotes and documents that they must have despaired at the behemoth in preparation.

Books in the series, as Will envisioned them, were to consist primarily of original sources illustrating development of Mormonism's nineteenth-century "Kingdom in the West." Inasmuch as I had been collecting notes and documents on Mormon polygamy for more than thirty years, I first needed to organize the book into conceptual categories, that is chapters and subchapters. This was followed by much sifting and winnowing, then grafting the selected materials into their appropriate sections. Because polygamy is so rich a subject, with so many interconnecting implications, I considered it necessary to use several early writings to illustrate each theme. When my own commentaries on these documents were added, along with lengthy footnotes, the book ballooned beyond what either Will or Bob found acceptable. Then followed a series of drafts, each thriftier than its predecessor. As part of the slenderizing process, including many excellent recommendations by Will and Bob, the work greatly benefited from the helpful critiques of Ben Bennion, Todd Compton, and Michael Homer. In addition to stylistic and factual corrections, all identified places where surgery on the volume could be done.

The book was finally published in the spring of 2007. It contains most of what I have found and thought concerning polygamy in the course of several decades of research: original inspirations for the practice; arguments for plurality presented both to Church members and to the world at large; commentary by those living "the Principle" on their experi-

ence with it; the long, cruel, anti-polygamy crusade by the federal government; Mormonism's final surrender of the practice; and its return to monogamy as the preferred form of domestic life. Looking back now that I have completed the volume, perhaps the most significant feature to emerge in my mind is the enormous importance given the doctrine by nineteenth-century Mormon advocates. But equally dramatic, after equivocating for twenty or so years following the Manifesto, is the emphatic manner displayed by the Church in moving away from the Principle. All who acquaint themselves with sermons and writings of nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints repeatedly encounter the centrality given plural marriage as an ideal both for this life and the one hereafter. And no less conspicuous is the subsequent abandonment, made obvious by a glaring absence in official histories and sermons, of the Church's attention to it today.

But Mormon polygamy, I now realize, has implications beyond a narrow concern with nineteenth-century Mormon domestic life. Anthropologists indicate that the marriage of one man to several women yet remains the most *preferred* (if not actually entered into) form of marriage in world societies—a claim made by nineteenth-century Mormons when justifying the practice. This is why, in *Doing the Works of Abraham*, I made occasional comparisons between the Latter-day Saint practice of plurality and that of others such as Muslims and certain African societies. Mormonism's own involvement with polygamy may have been one of the larger, if not the largest, formal departure from traditional monogamous marriage in Euro-American family structure in centuries.

Latter-day Saint efforts to secure the legality of their plural marriage system also led to many encounters with the government in court. The most famous of these, *Reynolds v. U.S.* (1879), laid down principles of American constitutional law yet followed and cited in cases involving the First Amendment's freedom of religion clause. To examine such contests, one in which the advocates of polygamy almost always lost, necessarily leads to a consideration of legal and constitutional issues, an area no historian of Mormon polygamous experience can ignore. Apart from legal defenses, I am also struck with the sheer quantity of formal apologetics produced in behalf of the Principle. Mormon writings and sermons defending plurality are encountered at every turn during the years when the Church approved the practice. While I have done no counting nor made a serious survey, I suspect formal Mormon justifications supporting plu-

rality may constitute one of the larger bodies of such argument in world literature.¹² These are but a few of the ancillary lines of inquiry that flow from the study of Mormon plural marriage.

In concluding, it is important to repeat that my work on polygamy should not be seen as connected in any large way with my decision to leave Mormonism. Except that I was frustrated by university policies regarding my early research, it was not the major reason leading Kamillia and me to ask that our names be removed from the Church's membership rolls. Moreover, it needs to be said that those administering the Church's historical archives in recent years have been most generous in making their collections available to me. Neither have I as a historian ever condemned Mormonism or judged it negatively because of plurality. Rather, exposure to Mormon polygamy, with all that it demanded from practitioners, has only deepened my respect for the men and women who lived it. They were, as Nelle Hatch put it to me decades ago, "big people."

I have often thought about the fact that there are many historians, numbers of whom are better scholars than am I, who yet believe in the divinity of the Church. Though looking at the same historical phenomena, they seem simply to appropriate them differently than do I. I have wondered at times if it comes down to personality or psychological proclivity on the part of the observer. I can only say in all honesty that there is nothing in the evidence with which I am acquainted that grants Mormonism, either in the past or at present, a greater radiance than one finds in many institutions and individuals. It is always painful when, as occasionally occurs, someone accuses me of writing "against the Church" or, as when a caller from Utah told how his stake president warned him to trust nothing Carmon Hardy writes inasmuch as he is "an apostate." Such comments have been few, however, and almost without exception I am treated kindly by Mormon historians and Latter-day Saints—especially those who actually read what I write.¹³ In every instance, when treating Mormon subjects, I do my best to describe them as accurately and fairly as possible, placing all under the same lamp I would if recounting a military exploit of the American Civil War or the policies of a medieval Catholic pope.

This said, it is also true that my interest in the study of Mormon polygamy is partly owing to the fact that it is my heritage—what Eugene Campbell, a former chair of BYU's History Department, in a conversation with me about the difficulties of religious belief, called "the folkway of our fathers." Not only was I raised in the Church, a descendant of

George A. Smith and his polygamous wife Hannah Maria Libby, but I am proud that my Mormon forebears walked across the continent, broke their plows subduing the salt-crusted plain, fought the crickets, and raised up cities in the dry valleys of the Rocky Mountains. If I now disagree with some of their precepts, I yet hope to emulate their courage in setting a different course, in honoring my own deepest convictions.

More than anything, however, as one infatuated with the limitless range of our species' possibilities, I see Mormonism as constituting an extraordinarily brave and rich religious instance. If, for me, it remains a mortal invention, it still partakes of the evanescence I find to surround the human adventure generally. Though no longer a formal Latter-day Saint, I expect the drama and allurements of its historical journey, including its complicated dance with polygamy, to long bind my fascination.

Notes

1. Nelle Spilsbury Hatch and B. Carmon Hardy, comps. and eds., *Stalwarts South of the Border* (Anaheim, Calif.: privately printed, 1985).

2. Victor Jorgensen and B. Carmon Hardy, "The Taylor-Cowley Affair and the Watershed of Mormon History," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 4–36.

3. D. Michael Quinn, "LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890–1904," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 9–105.

4. All of Chapter 6 in *Solemn Covenant* is devoted to providing evidence for and identifying plural marriages by Mormon apostles in those years. The ratio of distinguished Latter-day Saints to those less prominent who took plural wives after the Manifesto is given at the end of Appendix 2 in *Solemn Covenant*.

5. Thomas Memmott, Quotation Book, 101–3; Archives, Family and Church History Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

6. Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 171.

7. *Ibid.*, 310–35.

8. *Ibid.*, 227–32.

9. See, for example, Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 326–29.

10. B. Carmon Hardy, "Lords of Creation: Polygamy, the Abrahamic

Household, and Mormon Patriarchy," *Journal of Mormon History* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 119–52.

11. B. Carmon Hardy and Dan Erickson, "'Regeneration—Now and Evermore!': Mormon Polygamy and the Physical Rehabilitation of Humankind," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 10, no 1 (January 2001): 40–61.

12. I am, of course, not talking about memoirs or reminiscences, imagined and factual, that describe men and women's experiences in plural, sexual relationships. Rather I refer to purposeful defenses of formal, religiously approved polygamous marriage, adducing its advantages and urging its adoption.

13. And, I must add, though my dominant historical interest remains with those many-wived, patriarchal stalwarts of the old Church, I have found today's polygamist dissenters not only welcoming but as gentle and sincere a people on the whole as their nineteenth-century predecessors.