

## REVIEWS

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### Legacy of a Lesser-Known Apostle

Edward Leo Lyman. *Amasa Mason Lyman, Mormon Apostle and Apostate: A Study in Dedication*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009. 646 pp.; photographs, notes, bibliography, appendices, index. Cloth: \$39.95; ISBN 13: 978-0-874809-4-04

*Reviewed by Blair Dee Hodges*

Amasa Mason Lyman (pronounced “AM-uh-see,” according to phonetically spelled family documents) made many important contributions to the early Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Until now, however, the apostle-turned-apostate has remained a peripheral figure in much of Mormon historical literature. This new biography aims to provide a definitive treatment of Amasa’s life. The slightly dry, chronological narrative weaves through aspects of Church history from its inception through the 1870s, describing early Mormon missionary efforts, the development of priesthood offices and Church administration, Zion’s Camp, the Missouri persecutions, the development of the Nauvoo Temple endowment, the pioneer exodus, western colonization, the aftermath of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and dissent in the Church’s highest quorums. B. H. Roberts considered Amasa, in his prime, as “doubtless the most persuasive and forceful speaker in the church” (230).<sup>1</sup> The biography’s author, Edward Leo Lyman, a direct descendant, believes Amasa’s contributions to building the kingdom had “more influence than has usually been recognized” by contemporary members and historians of the LDS Church (74). Amasa’s legacy includes three apostolic descendants: Francis M. Lyman, his grandson, Richard R. Lyman, and his great-great-grandson, James E. Faust. Amasa’s legacy also includes the results of a life dedicated to the pursuit of truth and goodness. By chronicling Amasa’s valuable Church service and honorable life, Lyman intends to “redress a century and a half of diminished attention” (297). His “objective and complete treatment” makes no “pretense of seeking to veil” his admiration for Amasa (xvi).

To rehabilitate Amasa’s impressive life and contributions, Lyman needs a strong explanation to account for his ancestor’s

departure from the Church to which he selflessly devoted so many years of his life. He finds the reason largely in the person of Brigham Young, Joseph Smith's successor as prophet-president. Lyman believes Young made use of Amasa's oratorical talents but apparently never fully trusted him, suspecting him as a potential rival for influence among Church members. Lyman believes Young's personal pettiness and hunger for control played a critical role in Amasa's ultimate alienation from the Church. "In a very real sense," Amasa had to break ranks with the apostles "because he could no longer tolerate what he considered the misled dominance of the church membership by Brigham Young" (xii).

At times the biography reads like a morality play in which the wise, compassionate, and free-thinking Amasa confronts the cold, power-hungry Young whose "regime" (a term first used on p. xii and repeated often) is controlling, hyper-critical, and close-minded. Lyman employs a host of negative adjectives that color Young's actions negatively while Amasa receives the benefit of the doubt: "Amasa's collegial style of leadership was in marked contrast to the sometimes arbitrary and unilateral decisions of President Brigham Young" (213). According to Lyman, the apostle's "fully reciprocated" antagonism toward Young "looms as the primary factor leading to his ecclesiastical demise" (xi). Young's dislike for Amasa may have "stemmed from the church leader's resentments—or perhaps jealousies—over his fellow apostle's earlier relationship with Joseph Smith" (xi).

To Lyman, Amasa's growing popularity as a speaker and community-builder in San Bernardino fueled Young's ire. The apparent success of that community "may have loomed as an embarrassing contrast to some aspects of Brigham Young's Utah regime" (244). Further, Lyman argues, the two men diverged on their general understanding of the religion restored by Joseph Smith: "Lyman had embraced that expansiveness [of eternal progression] as Smith's ardent disciple and rejected what he saw as Brigham Young's mistaken attempt to focus on hierarchy, obedience, and practical concerns" (488).

Lyman fails to fully flesh out the "Joseph Smith" to whom both men looked for direction. Absent is the kingdom-building Joseph, who displayed characteristics closer to Young's—directing the construction of a hotel, mustering local militiamen, founding banking

institutions, and planning cities.<sup>2</sup> Amasa evidently missed the collapse of the temporal into the spiritual that pervaded the thought of Joseph Smith—something Brigham Young found so attractive and motivating. “When I saw Joseph Smith,” Young explained, “he took heaven, figuratively speaking, and brought it down to earth; and he took the earth and brought it up, and opened up, in plainness and simplicity, the things of God; and that is the beauty of his mission.”<sup>3</sup>

Lyman fails to recognize that many of Joseph Smith’s teachings and the structure of the Church he organized strongly impacted Young’s vision of the Church’s direction. Lyman does not provide a good summary of what Young was trying to accomplish or how Young understood his role as prophet/president. In other words, Young is an incomplete foil. At one point Lyman goes as far as uncritically implicating Young in unspecified deaths of Church dissidents: “Virtually no one had ever stood so firmly against Brigham’s version of Mormon doctrine and practices and survived,” Lyman cryptically writes (411).<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps Lyman’s largest complaint against Young involves his dissatisfaction over San Bernardino, California. Lyman notes that even before writing his biography he had “asserted that Young’s aloofness during the preparation period [of settling San Bernardino] calls into question his reputation as ‘the great colonizer.’ There has been no reason presented since then to alter that conclusion” (190). Lyman believes the “large size of the group” Amasa led to California resulted in Young’s lasting resentment, even though “no record exists that the church leader had ever specified or even suggested a maximum size” (190). On the contrary, Young’s journal, which Lyman does not quote, notes that he had envisioned a group of about twenty colonists: “Elders Amasa M. Lyman and C. C. Rich, with some twenty others, having received my approbation in going to Southern California, were instructed by letter to select a site for a city or station.”<sup>5</sup>

Lyman also sees Young’s decision to call back the Mormon settlers at the beginning of the Utah War as “a destructive policy that resulted in killing what might have been the Mormon Church’s most flourishing regional center outside of Utah” (244). But Lyman’s focus on San Bernardino excludes the rest of Young’s stewardship. Young was presiding over thousands of scattered

Saints in Europe as well as Mormon outposts in Iowa and Nebraska. Missionaries were serving throughout the United States, India, Australia, and the Sandwich Islands. Converts were emigrating over land and sea. San Bernardino was one settlement among many, and Young was keenly concerned for Mormon safety. He did not arbitrarily command the San Bernardino Saints to return. There is a pleading tone in his letter: "We feel to write you confidentially to make your arrangements as fast as possible to gather up to these Vallies for we feel that you are or soon will be in danger. . . . Let all the faithful therefore take warning and be preparing suitable teams wagons &c necessary to transport themselves and families to a place of safety."<sup>6</sup> San Bernardino was not singled out, although that is the impression Lyman's narrative gives.

A further point of disagreement between Young and Amasa was the heavy mortgage attached to San Bernardino, the reasons for which Lyman explicates. True, Young had specifically instructed Amasa and his fellow apostle Charles C. Rich to avoid "the bondage of debt" should they find a suitable site for a Mormon colony in California (194), but Young seems not to have appreciated the fact that free land was simply not available in southern California as it had been in the Salt Lake Valley.

Lyman correctly notes that "lesser Latter-day Saint leaders often deserved much more credit for the success of many of the Mormon colonies" than "the great colonizer" (244). Why stop at the "leaders"? More credit is due to the individual Saints who lived and worked alongside those leaders. Focusing exclusively on Young's interactions with San Bernardino does not adequately represent the scope of all the projects Young was overseeing and their mixed success. Leonard Arrington discussed problematic decisions Young made about Church-sponsored or -encouraged industries.<sup>7</sup> Comparing Amasa's best efforts in San Bernardino with Young's retrospectively worst does a disservice to both men.

The same point could also be made where their temperaments are concerned. Young could be petty or mean at times, short and brash, hyperbolic and insensitive. But he could also be compassionate, quietly kind, and highly concerned with (and sensitive to) the needs of those he felt called by God to oversee. These qualities are missing from Lyman's narrative. Mormon historians

have noted the tendency to fall into “interpretive extremes of Young as saint and Young as devil.”<sup>8</sup> Painting a portrait of Young as the inverse of previous hagiography is an ineffective corrective.

Lyman’s narrative provides good insights about early Mormon family life, including the dynamics of plural marriage. Amasa’s concern and affection for his eight wives and thirty-eight children are apparent in his personal correspondence quoted throughout the book. These relationships were strained by the financial and emotional difficulties of living “the principle” and by the apostle’s constant missions which took him away from his family for long stretches. Amasa’s letters contain beautifully poetic (only occasionally over-the-top) prose describing his labors, apologies for absences, and constant urging for family unity. In 1855, he compared his wives and children to “flowers whose blushing beauties are the budding prospects of future happiness and glory.” If granted a vision of their future eternal activities, he would feel “a satisfaction equaled only by that of the assurance that I am doing that which is requisite to the promotion of our mutual interests.” He recognized that his prolonged absences made it difficult for his children to know him but hoped that “by the attention of the mother and of the fond recollections impressed upon their infant minds they may learn of things they have not seen and respect him whom they have not seen” (229). A useful appendix traces the maze of Lyman familial relationships (495–501), though it is easy to become confused as wives and children increase and settle in different locations. Perhaps a visual family tree would have been helpful.

Lyman’s examination of Amasa’s involvement with the Council of Fifty is hampered by the unavailability of its recorded minutes. Nevertheless, Lyman uses the available sources to describe Amasa’s prominence in the group’s early activities. On August 20, 1842, Brigham Young and two other apostles, acting under Joseph Smith’s direction, ordained Amasa to the apostleship to replace Orson Pratt, who was struggling with the practice of plural marriage. One day later, “Joseph Smith recorded that Orson Pratt had experienced a change of heart” (65). By the next January, Pratt was officially restored to his position in the quorum in a meeting to which Amasa was not invited (66). Smith reasoned that the three apostles had authority to ordain Amasa to the apostleship but not to make him an actual member of the Twelve.

Smith suggested that Amasa be made a member of the First Presidency but “Lyman was never publicly sustained to that position” despite several conference opportunities to do so (67).

In October 1842, Joseph ordained Lyman as second counselor in the First Presidency of the newly formed Quorum of the Anointed (75). This confusing shift from the Quorum of the Twelve to the presidency of the Council of Fifty demonstrates the flexible nature and nebulous responsibilities of these early priesthood offices. Amasa played a significant role in preparing for and officiating in the Nauvoo Temple endowments (107). Lyman skillfully navigates that sensitive topic and avoids disclosing sacred or confidential information (99–103). At the same time he adds enough detail to demonstrate the temple’s “crucial place in Mormon theology” (92) and give readers a sense of what the early endowments meant to the Saints.

After Smith’s death, Amasa vouched for the authority of the Quorum of the Twelve during the succession crisis, an important gesture that helped Brigham Young and the quorum gain more adherents than other splinter groups (83–88). Lyman continued to take part in the Council of Fifty after the Saints had moved west and was present during the first “constitutional convention” and other political activities prior to the Territorial establishment of Utah (160–61).

Lyman argues that Amasa’s loyalty to Joseph Smith was a prominent feature of both his faith in the Church and, interestingly enough, of his involvement in spiritualism beginning in the mid-to-late 1850s. Spiritualism had recently grown to prominence beginning in the Burned-Over District of New York (392). Amasa held several hundred séances before his death, including many before his excommunication (460). In one early séance Amasa believed that Hyrum Smith instructed him to “heed the communication if it was good and reject it if not” (206). In 1870 Amasa believed he had received “some words purporting to have come from Joseph Smith” (443). Regrettably, Lyman does not describe in detail how an actual séance was conducted.

Lyman acknowledges that “if such a thing as an official attitude existed about spiritualism at church headquarters, it was definitely negative” (207). Spirit rapping and other such phenomena were denounced by Heber C. Kimball, Jedediah M. Grant, and

Orson Hyde in the 1852–54 period during which Amasa apparently became interested in spiritualism.<sup>9</sup> Lyman sees Amasa’s “encounters with spiritualism” as “consistent with his lifelong search for new truths” (207) and hypothesizes that it stemmed from Joseph Smith’s encouragement to “receive truth, let it come from whence it may” (208). However, there is good reason to believe that Amasa misunderstood Smith, if in fact he even considered what Joseph Smith might have thought of such things. As early as 1842, Joseph Smith revealed signs for detecting false spirits (D&C 129).<sup>10</sup> Amasa had received his endowment from Joseph Smith before the completion of the Nauvoo Temple and delivered a temple preparation-like sermon to the Saints in May 1842 regarding “certain signs and words” that would soon be revealed to them (102). Lyman concludes that Amasa “would have been aware of collegial suspicion about spiritualism and would naturally have refrained from announcing his current investigations” (207). Amasa’s foray into spiritualism moved him further from the main current of thought among the apostles.

Another serious divergence was Amasa’s developing views on the Atonement. In 1862, he delivered a sermon in Dundee, Scotland, in which he depicted Jesus as humankind’s great teacher and exemplar. “But was it decreed then,” Amasa reasoned, “that Jesus should die to save men who were thus pure and holy? No it did not form any part of the purpose of God that He should die. He was ordained to be a Savior through preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God” (328). Much of the sermon would fit comfortably within Mormon thought—then and now. But as Lyman explains: “To [Amasa], Christ’s primary mission was to emancipate the soul from ignorance and outline how individuals could abandon sin and apply gospel principles. . . . Where he went too far was in explicitly discounting the need for Christ’s blood” (397).<sup>11</sup>

It is unclear why the sermon did not catch the immediate attention of Brigham Young or the other apostles, but apparently it did not. Sometime between 1863 and 1867, Amasa preached to a congregation in Beaver that “the shedding of the blood of Jesus was not [a] necessary part of the plan of salvation” (349). This description is from George Q. Cannon’s notes of April 1867, reporting on one of Amasa’s earlier, undated sermons. Brigham Young and sev-

eral other apostles traveled to Parowan where Young delivered a sermon on the Atonement, presumably to correct Amasa's views. When he finished, he turned to Amasa, who was seated with the other authorities on the stand, and "asked him if this was not what he believed and intended to teach. Bro. Lyman replied that it was" (349). The matter was dropped, but either Amasa had not been entirely truthful or perhaps, as Lyman argues, "he may not yet have recognized how vastly his views on the matter had actually diverged from commonly held orthodoxy, including Young's" (349).

Lyman contextualizes the seriousness of Amasa's doctrinal deviance by pointing to other apostles who had also preached doctrines Brigham found heretical—for instance, Orson Pratt's views on the nature of God or Orson Hyde's ideas regarding "baby resurrection" (371, 386–88). They had "submitted" to Young by publishing "categorical retractions and apologies" for their speculations (387). Because these apostles were not dropped from the quorum, Lyman posits that Young "appears to have harbored a longer-term grudge" for Amasa because of his "refusal to render the expected deferential homage" to the president (387). In fact, in 1865 the First Presidency had restricted leaders from publishing anything as official doctrine "without first submitting [the text] for examination and approval of the First Presidency and the Twelve" (371).

Regardless, Amasa delivered other atonement-themed sermons in southern Utah. Reports of his views on the Atonement warranted further investigation, including the Dundee sermon (372). On December 26, 1866, Wilford Woodruff recorded a quorum discussion in his journal in which Young said it was "grievous to me to have the apostles teach false doctrin [sic]. Now if the Twelve will sit down quietly & not contradict such doctrin are they justified? No they are not" (372). Amasa was apparently absent, although the existing records do not clarify either way.

The Twelve questioned Amasa on January 21, 1867, and he "admitted teaching that the blood of Christ was not absolutely necessary for human salvation" (373). He published a statement in the *Deseret News* recanting his views (374) but apparently chafed under the restriction and recanted his recantation. According to a member of his stake presidency in Fillmore where the Lyman family had lived since 1863, Amasa had told a congregation in April



1867 that “the Blood of Jesus Christ was no more efficacious for the remission of sins than the blood of a bullock” (377). Amasa’s bishop, Philo T. Farnsworth, wrote to Young reporting Amasa’s “defiant demeanor” in reportedly denouncing his accusers of being “narrow brained, ignorant, miserable objects” who weren’t smart enough to understand his doctrines (377–78). On May 6, 1867, Amasa was “disfellowshipped, forbidden to exercise his priesthood in performing any church ordinances, and most expressly forbidden to preach; but he was still a member of the church” (382).

In November 1868 Amasa began attending Mormon services in Fillmore again and appeared to be moving back toward full Church membership. By April 1869 Brigham Young “personally provided him with a ticket (or recommend) to attend the Fillmore School of the Prophets” (409). But Amasa soon began meeting with William S. Godbe, a prosperous merchant from England who, with a small group of other influential Saints, opposed “Brigham Young’s economic and religious policies” in favor of “laissez-faire individualism” (410–11). Amasa eventually united with the Godbeite movement, becoming a highly visible promulgator of their views.<sup>12</sup> Lyman depicts Amasa “as an intellectual forerunner and perhaps exemplar for the Godbeite revolt.” As a result, Amasa was excommunicated for apostasy on May 12, 1870, by the Salt Lake Stake high council (429).

The Godbeite movement faded away and so, in a way, did Amasa. Lyman traces Amasa’s sporadic church attendance, continuing interest in spiritualism and seances, and declining health—including the possibility that Amasa had battled depression for several years, a hypothesis he finds unconvincing (357–58). Amasa apparently did not reconsider his stand, caricaturing Mormon preaching as the “idle twaddle of the propagandists of a creedal faith” that epitomized the “blindness of the dupes of religious fanaticism” (483). He was never rebaptized and requested to be buried in a black suit instead of white temple clothing.

The efforts of several relatives to get Amasa’s membership and blessings restored posthumously comprise a touching conclusion to the book. Apostle Francis Marion Lyman repeatedly made such requests (493). In 1908 Amasa’s daughter Martha told Francis that Amasa had appeared to her in a dream and asked her to

appeal for his reinstatement. According to Martha, Amasa was “weary and tired of his black clothes and . . . did so want to be with his family, his wives and his children whom he loved and longed for” (494). Following the funeral of Amasa’s wife Caroline in May 1908, Francis related Martha’s dream to President Joseph F. Smith who responded, “Well Marion, it looks like your father has suffered long enough. We will see what can be done for him” (494). On January 12, 1909, Amasa’s son Francis was baptized in his father’s behalf in the Salt Lake Temple. President Joseph F. Smith, who had replaced Amasa in the Quorum of the Twelve in 1867, performed the confirmation to restore all former priesthood ordinances and marriage sealings (494).

Lyman’s book is likely to remain the most complete source on Amasa for years to come. It sheds substantial light on Amasa’s contributions, sacrifices, and interesting life. Lyman wants readers to know that Amasa was one of the most important Mormons of the early days of the Church and has spent an impressive amount of time, energy, and research to that end. The book might have been more powerful with a more skillfully crafted narrative or if Lyman had allowed Amasa’s deeds to make the case without repeated reminders that Amasa has been overlooked in historical studies. After all, Amasa’s best self appeared reluctant to proclaim his own accomplishments. Regardless of the interpretive disagreements I have with the book, Lyman includes enough material to engage anyone interested in studying the early development of the Church through the experiences of Amasa Mason Lyman, an enigmatic and fascinating apostle. Amasa’s struggles illustrate the interplay among religious individuality, community, and authority, moving from devotion, to defection, to apostasy—and ultimately, restoration.

#### Notes

1. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1930), 5:83.
2. Robert B. Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), vi, went as far as asserting that Joseph Smith’s “Kingdom on the Mississippi” set the pattern for Brigham Young’s “Great Basin kingdom.” Joseph Smith was less of a prophet and more of a “man of affairs.” As a “planner, promoter, architect, entrepre-

neur, executive, politician, [and] filibuster,” Smith set the precedent for the direction of the Church in Utah. Flanders shines light on an aspect of Joseph Smith that remains unexplored in Lyman’s book but which could provide a corrective to Amasa’s admiration for the Prophet.

3. Brigham Young, October 7, 1857, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool and London: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 5:332.

4. Lyman footnotes David Bigler, *Forgotten Kingdom: The Mormon Theocracy in the American West, 1847–1896* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998), 208–17, which Lyman says describes “a substantial group of dissenters in Utah, the Morrisites, who did not all survive” (587 note 171). It is difficult to refute such innuendo but the reference makes an irresponsible and inaccurate assessment of the Morrisite schism that turned violent in 1862.

5. Quoted without a citation in Eugene E. Campbell, *Establishing Zion: The Mormon Church in the American West, 1847–1869* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 82. B. H. Roberts quotes this journal in *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1930; rpt. Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1965 printing), 3:349, which cites “History of Brigham Young,” Ms., March 23, 1851, 13–14.

6. Brigham Young, Letter to William Crosby and William I. Cox, August 4, 1857, Brigham Young Papers, quoted in Ardis E. Parshall’s “Sealing the Borders: The Mormon Return to Utah at the Beginning of the Utah War,” paper for the Mormon History Association, Sacramento, California, May 24, 2008. Parshall quotes other Young letters that express similar concerns.

7. Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints 1830–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 129: “Brigham Young and his appointed lay leaders were outstanding colonizers, and there can be no doubt that they were dedicated to the Kingdom, but the more the specialists depended on them for leadership, the more the specialized industries were apt to suffer from inexpert direction. . . . It is quite possible that the sugar, iron, and lead enterprises, and perhaps others, would have been more successful if knowledgeable private interests had been allowed a freer hand in the day-to-day direction, and a stronger voice in the making of basic decisions.”

8. Ronald W. Walker, David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen, *Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 126. They overview biographies of Brigham Young on pp. 124–26.

9. Heber C. Kimball, July 11, 1852, *Journal of Discourses* 1:34–37; Jedediah M. Grant, February 19, 1854, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:10–16; Orson Hyde, “Discourse . . . October 8th, 1854,” *Deseret News*, November

9, 1854, 2. Lyman lists other examples of negative views of spiritualism including *Deseret News* editorials (207).

10. For the context, see Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 21.

11. Lyman's discussion of the Atonement in LDS thought (chap. 8 and an appendix, pp. 505–7) is cautious and reasonable. Nevertheless, a full historical exploration of LDS Christology is still needed.

12. An excellent treatment is Ronald W. Walker, *Wayward Saints: The Godbeites and Brigham Young* (1998; rpt., Provo, Utah: *BYU Studies*/Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009).

## Loving Truthfully

Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth). July 7, 2009. (Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2009). [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html) (accessed November 1, 2009).

*Reviewed by Jeremiah John*

*Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI's third encyclical letter, is a striking beginning for his papal contribution to Catholic social teaching. In a sense, the encyclical confirms one piece of conventional wisdom about his papacy—that it is a work of consolidating the monumental legacy of John Paul II and, less directly, the ecclesiastical and theological developments of the whole post-Vatican II period. References to the teaching of Paul VI and John Paul II appear throughout *Caritas in Veritate*, and the letter should result in a renewed interest in their social encyclicals. But *Caritas in Veritate* also puts Benedict's powerful and unique stamp on Catholic social thought. The letter draws together the varied strands of the past four decades of papal thought on the problems of the modern world and applies their core principles to contemporary issues. But it also grounds those principles in fundamental concepts of the Christian religion: charity and truth. Like no other authoritative, modern Catholic document of which I am aware,