

your own future, which, though constrained and disciplined by universal law, is nonetheless determined by your willingness to persevere in the pursuit of your heart's desire. Though you may be confronted with seemingly insurmountable difficulties, frustrations, and harassments, and though you may at times feel that the Lord has abandoned you, you can have peace in your heart, for your suffering is for but a small moment, and if you endure it well how great will be your joy.

You graduates here today are perhaps unique in all the world because of the philosophy you have that is not shared by others of your generation. Because of your knowledge of your nature and your vision of the greatness of your possibilities, you will influence the course of human history in far greater proportion than your numbers would suggest. You are the light of the world. The torch is yours, bear it well.

Foolsmate

Gordon C. Thomasson

the time has come
the walrus said
to speak of many things
. . . of cabbages and kings

Some Mormon Theologians hold that Joseph Smith had a plan for world government and that he believed that, as President of the Church and Prophet, he was the only legitimate and rightful ruler of this world. To this end, they maintain, Joseph Smith had himself crowned "king on earth" and then set about to organize a political Kingdom of God on earth. Gordon C. Thomasson offers comfort for those who are shocked to learn that there actually are reports from Nauvoo that Joseph Smith was anointed "king." Thomasson takes issue with Klaus Hansen (DIALOGUE, 6 [Spring 1971], 73-76) who feels that James Strang's "dreams of empire" were an outgrowth of similar desires in Joseph Smith. Thomasson suggests that the temple ordinances provide the factual basis for the stories about Joseph Smith's supposed earthly kingship and a point from which to begin to understand the Mormon concept of the Kingdom of God.

Klaus J. Hansen's review of Doyle L. Fitzpatrick's *The King Strang Story: A Vindication of James J. Strang, the Beaver Island King* in the Spring 1971 *Dialogue* is the latest manifestation of a currently popular scholarly perspective on Mormonism which is most easily recognized by its emphasis on "the political kingdom of God." The works of Hansen, Hyrum Andrus, and others illustrate this view. Seldom have so many individuals from so many isolated and otherwise antagonistic "camps" of Mormon scholarship shown such agreement in their interpretation of our tradition. The last decade has seen a number of highly influential studies which depend on assumptions about the existence of a political kingdom of God.

Since Hansen began his review with a note on the place of amateurs in scholarship I would seek to justify my entering the debate by recalling Hugh Nibley's oft-cited example of how illiterate Bedouin boys could explain the function of Qumran artifacts which had stumped the professional archaeologists. Everyone can play the game. Nevertheless, by the time an entire

“school” of historical interpretation has evolved and gained acceptance it takes a certain degree of foolhardiness to suggest there is a flaw in its foundation, or to point out that the “emperor” has no clothes on after all.

Without seeking to defend Fitzpatrick, I must reject the parallel offered by Hansen between James J. Strang and Joseph Smith which he presents in criticism of Fitzpatrick’s work. Hansen’s suggestion that it is impossible “to understand Mormonism” without considering James J. Strang’s regal pretensions is questionable.¹ I would suggest, to the contrary, that it is impossible to accept current theories about the “political kingdom of God,” without first making some rather questionable *interpretations* of certain “facts.”

It is a fact that in Nauvoo rumors were spread that Joseph Smith had been “annointed” or “crowned” a “king.” Coincidentally, it was also well-known that Joseph Smith was the Mayor, Lieutenant-General of a Militia of 5,000 men, an announced candidate for the Presidency of the United States, and Prophet and President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. All that together makes quite a juicy set of “facts” which can easily be employed in constructing a rather confused and fantastic picture of events in Nauvoo. The whole business has been carried to incredible extremes. The scholars, who accept in a wholly uncritical manner and at face value the rumors about Joseph Smith having himself crowned “king on earth,” are victims of the same misperception of facts as was James Strang. Strang, as is well-known, did actually have himself crowned king on Beaver Island. Likewise, many of the Saints formed their expectations about the role of the Church on the basis of rumors and misunderstandings of doctrines (as some political cultists still do today), and now a current generation of scholars holds that the “annointing” of Joseph Smith as “king” is the key to understanding Mormonism, for that event they say, was part of the inauguration of a “political kingdom of God”!

It would be naive to assert that the Saints have not engaged in politics. Events such as those in Nauvoo, Joseph’s candidacy for President, and the State of Deseret can be explained, however, as more or less necessary attempts at political self-defense and survival. The Saints learned painful political lessons in Missouri. Much of the subsequent political behavior of the leaders of the Church can be explained by the same categories that are applicable to other American political minority group behavior; it is not necessary to have recourse to an hypothetical political kingdom of God to understand Church involvement in politics.²

¹Hansen asserts “that it is as impossible to understand Strang without the larger Mormon context as it is to understand Mormonism as a whole without Strang.” After discussing Strang’s “dreams of empire,” he concludes that “surely, these were the same kind of dreams that motivated, to some degree, the prophet Joseph Smith.” Then Hansen adds, “Historians who take Smith seriously need not feel compelled to hide his ambition and his dreams of power.” It is Hansen’s assumption that Joseph had worldly political ambitions and dreams of power that is open to question, however, and not whether such dreams, if they actually existed, should be discussed. A posture of candor is no substitute for real evidence.

²The role and scope of the Council of Fifty has been exaggerated by certain writers in much the same way as it was originally by those not privy to the higher councils. This could be from blurring all distinctions between those statements that referred to the Church/Gospel Kingdom and those which reflected the constitutional aspirations of a politically oppressed minority. Why would non-Mormon American citizens be willing to participate in a council which supposedly had as its goal the imposition of a king on a constitutional republic? Could it be that the non-Mormons knew better than to believe such a tale?

There is ample evidence in the public and private remarks of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young that their kingdom was not of this world, however interested they might have been in the political events of their time or however effective they may have been in governing worldly affairs. There is also evidence of their commitment to American constitutional ideals and the traditional republican processes. To impute to them motives and designs of worldly kingship without direct evidence borders on a crude psychologizing of history. The statements which deal with Joseph's "kingship" have one thing in common — they all constitute hearsay. Do they have some factual basis and explanation?

Nauvoo Saints, including James J. Strang, heard rumors about Joseph Smith being anointed king and they read into these rumors what they wanted to hear — relief from oppressive political conditions. Likewise, many of the First Century Saints accepted and followed Jesus because they expected Him to fill *their* longings for a political Messiah who would deliver them from Roman bondage. Jesus is the King of Kings, but His Kingdom is not of this world. Similarly, many Saints seized on the rumors of Joseph's "kingship" for signs of a political deliverance from and vengeance for gentile political persecution. In both cases the Saints' expectations were dashed because they were derived from vain hopes rather than the Lord's plan. Those who would assert that plans existed for an actual worldly political kingdom of God have yet to show that such plans were more than the hopes and misunderstandings of oppressed Saints rather than the actual intent of the leaders of the Church.³

What then of Joseph's "kingship"? Did it have any relationship to his bid for the Presidency of the United States? Certainly he hoped for one nation, indivisible and under God — but did he plan to be the earthly King? It is easy to unintentionally demean or to consciously debunk Joseph's prophetic message by pigeonholing him as a megalomaniac, but is it valid to do so? The key problem with all theories regarding a political kingdom of God is precisely the word "king" in the kingdom. To what sort of "kingship" was Joseph anointed? The answer is to be found in Mormon temples. Any "endowed" Mormon, if he reflects for a moment on what he was washed and anointed to *become*, and how he was promised in covenants that the day might come when such ordinances would cease to be conditional, will understand clearly the nature of Joseph's kingship. And it should also be obvious where Nauvoo's rumor mills got their materials. Joseph received the oft-whispered "Second Anointing" (often mis-named and misunderstood as a "second endowment"), but the fact that his "calling and election" (washing

³See Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed: A Study of Modern Messianic Cults* (New York: Mentor Books, 1965). While this work provides valuable insights into the relationship between anti-colonial nationalism and messianic religions, it is seriously flawed by uncritical reliance on the work of one J. Mooney (see pp. 68 ff.) regarding Mormon involvement with the Ghost Dance Cult of the North American Indians. Since Lanternari makes frequent reference to this case as a model for understanding other cases, it is crucial to his work and deserves attention. Mooney's work is similar to J. P. Dunn's recently reprinted book *Massacres of the Mountains: A History of the Indian Wars of the Far West* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1886, and New York: Capricorn Books, 1969). While Mooney has Mormons dancing with the Ghost Dancers, Dunn has them instigating virtually every Indian war from 1850 to 1880, and both of these works give the appearance of serious scholarship.

and anointing) were made “sure,” while making him a “king” indeed, and insuring that he would retain his kingship and his kingdom, *in no way* implies that his kingdom was to be in any manner of this world. I am arguing that those who assert the existence of a political *kingdom* of God have entirely overlooked or at least deeply misunderstood the role of the temple and its ordinances. As I have previously tried to point out,⁴ scholars would do well to pay more attention to the place of the temple in Mormonism. It is ironic that of the many students of Mormonism, besides Hugh Nibley, only Robert Flanders, a Reorganite, has recognized that “The physical as well as the symbolic heart of Smith’s restoration was the Temple of the New Jerusalem,” and that Joseph “seemed to grasp the profound significance that the ancient temple had for Jewish culture — the unique role that it played in the Jewish concept of a divine history. In the temple, the dualism between time and space disappeared; sacred time and sacred space became one.”⁵ Scholars would do well to regain that perspective. Nevertheless it should be remembered that most of the Saints in Nauvoo had not received their endowments during Joseph’s lifetime. They only had some hints of what they might obtain. The promised endowment, however, was a prime motivation to them to finish the temple. It generated, just as it does among the uninitiated today, speculations, misunderstandings and gossip. Certain of these speculations and rumors from Nauvoo have now been romanticized and distorted to the point that a number of scholars do not even question that Joseph aspired to world dominion. Joseph Smith was no more nor less “king on earth” than any Saint who has been endowed in the temple. The factual basis of the rumors about Joseph Smith being “king” in a “political *kingdom*” should be quite obvious. Joseph Smith was anointed to be a king, but not to head an earthly political kingdom. While Joseph’s kingship is central to a correct understanding of Mormonism, it was “King James’ ” *misunderstanding* of the kingship to which the Saints are anointed that is the key to what transpired on Beaver Island, and it is also the key to understanding the basic flaw in theories regarding the existence of a political kingdom of God.

⁴“Thoughts on Mormon Neoorthodoxy,” *Dialogue*, 5 (Winter, 1970), 123-126.

⁵“To Transform History: Early Mormon Culture and the Concept of Time and Space,” *Church History*, 40 (March, 1971), 116.