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The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Goal of Zion

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THE REORGANIZED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS

AND

THE GOAL OF ZION

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION

Scattered throughout most of the United States and parts of Canada, as well as in a number of foreign countries, but with its main strength in the Middle West, is a religious group known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The name of this church body is commonly shortened to the "R.L.D.S. Church." While the Church's General Conference has called this abbreviation "undignified" for use in Church correspondence,¹ it is still the popular name. For the sake of brevity we shall use this shortened name in this paper. The members of the church designate themselves as "Saints," and this term will be used in this paper accordingly.

This group has its center of activity and its world headquarters in Independence, Missouri, a fast-growing suburb of Kansas City. It shares a common founder and origin with the Utah Mormons, who have their headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah, and number well over a million members. Despite this common origin, however, there are great differences between the two groups as they are today, and have been for over a century. The two groups are not on friendly terms, and there is no particular hope of their ever joining together into one church body.²

¹"Official Minutes of General Conference Business Session, Saturday, April 14, 1956," The Saints' Herald, Conference Daily Edition, April 15, 1956, pp. 114-16. Hereafter this periodical will be referred to as SH, CDE.

²Elbert A. Smith, Differences That Persist (Independence: Herald House, 1954), p. 6.

The purpose of this paper is not primarily to compare the two groups, but to give special consideration to the smaller Independence group. But this study will attempt to point up more clearly the fact that they are different, and may perhaps encourage further research in the field of the study of the founder, Joseph Smith, Jr., his work, his writings, and his various followers.

The Church claims as its founder Joseph Smith, Jr., commonly known simply as Joseph Smith and also called Joseph the Seer, Joseph the Prophet, Joseph the Martyr, and the Prophet of Palmyra. The Reorganization itself began in 1852 under provisional leadership. It became more solid and sure and began to make greater progress when Joseph Smith III, the son of the Prophet, became president in 1860. He is also known as "Young Joseph" or "Young Joe." No descendants of Joseph the Prophet have joined the fellowship of the Utah Mormon group,³ a fact which adds weight to the claim of the Independence group to be the true successors of the church established by Joseph Smith, Jr.

The R.L.D.S. Church is a growing church, but it is not growing particularly fast in comparison with other churches. In the two-year period from January 1, 1954, until December 31, 1955, the number of known baptized members in the United States and Canada grew from 128,931 to 133,749. The number outside these two countries grew during this period from 9,313 to 9,566. In addition, the Church listed, at the end of 1955, 16,681 members under categories of "Unknown" and "Suspense."⁴

³Ibid., p. 3. This is a consistent claim of the R.L.D.S. Church.

⁴Merle P. Guthrie, "Report of the Department of Statistics," SH, CDE, April 8, 1956, pp. 21-25.

To understand their true size more correctly, we must remember that these figures are only for baptized members, and this church does not practice infant baptism. In fact, it will not baptize children under the age of eight years. The average age at baptism is about fourteen or fifteen. During the years 1950-1954, 12,861 people under the age of fifteen years were baptized, while the number of people over fifteen who were baptized was 10,801.⁵

The group has been taking a more conventional place among church bodies, so that today it is regarded as a "respectable" church body. Its members and leaders are not averse to using modern methods and fixtures in their work and on their property. The entrance and foyer of their headquarters building in Independence, the Auditorium, has recently been remodeled and has a very dignified and impressive appearance. In the Auditorium are the huge General Conference room, which seats about 6,000,⁶ and a number of other fine facilities. In particular the Council Chamber and the small Museum and Art Gallery have been very beautifully finished in modern style. Other facilities include a large dining hall, recreation areas, a music rehearsal room, and the Church's research library. There are plans for further improvements in this building.⁷

There are other features which enable this Church to take a respected position among the religious scene of today. The leaders

⁵Loc. cit.

⁶The Auditorium, tract (Independence: Herald House, c.1956), p. 4.

⁷Much of this information is the result of a tour of the building and conversation with the guide by the writer.

today have had a better education than their predecessors. Indeed, the area of education is not neglected, for the Church owns and operates Graceland College in Lemoni, Iowa, a junior college with a four-year course in religion, and with plans for becoming a four-year college. Six hundred sixty-eight students were enrolled in the school in 1956.⁸ The church also operates several homes for the aged, the Herald House, a publishing house and bookstore in Independence, and the Independence Hospital and Sanitarium. All these institutions have taken a regular place in the communities where they are located.

The leaders of the Church seem to be quite tolerant, and while they consider theirs to be the only true church, pre-millennial membership is evidently not necessary to salvation; that is, others besides their members will be saved. Though some of the members are rather zealous in personal proselytizing, and give the definite impression that unless one is a member, he is lost, the writer has received only the kindest, most tolerant and helpful treatment from leaders of the Church.

Charles Shook, who was diligent in writing to disprove common claims of the Utah Mormons and the R.L.D.S. Church, as well as specific claims of the R.L.D.S. group, has this to say:

To the fact that the members of the Reorganized Church are usually good and law-abiding citizens, I cheerfully bear witness. They will compare favorably with the members of other churches, but they are no better. . . . What has been written is in respect to the evil designs and practices of the original leaders, and does not apply to the rank and file to-day. No one, who has studied the history of the Mormon movement, will for one moment believe that there is any more connection between the Josephite and Brighamite Churches than there is between the Presbyterian and the Roman

⁸Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., "Report of the Board of Trustees of Graceland College," SH, CDE, April 8, 1956, pp. 11-15.

Catholic. The former have fought their polygamic brethren with a zeal that would be commendable if it were consistent.⁹

The writer finds himself in general sympathy with Mr. Shook's statement. They have always opposed polygamy. Whatever one believes concerning the origin of the ideals and objectives of the R.L.D.S. Church, and the validity of their claims, he will find that they believe sincerely in their teachings, and that in general their example of a life of civic righteousness is very good.

In their public teachings and writings, these people, as their name indicates, make a great deal of Jesus Christ. They use much terminology concerning Jesus that is common in the Christian Church. They give Him such traditional titles as "Son of God," "The Only-Begotten," "Redeemer," and other such names. They ascribe to Him great and wonderful works and attributes. They make Him part of the Godhead with the Father. However, they seem unwilling to say that He is true God, but rather ascribe statements which He said according to His State of Humiliation to His essential nature, to show that He is a little less than God.¹⁰ In this day and age, though, unwillingness to declare that Jesus was and is true God, just as the Father is, does not mark a religious group as being very unusual. They use the regular terminology of faith, repentance, atonement, obedience, and the like.

In this paper we shall consider both the doctrine and history of this church body, for, as they themselves assert, their history and

⁹Charles A. Shook, The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1914), p. iv.

¹⁰Charles R. Field, We Believe in Jesus Christ (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), pp. 1-4, 12-14, 28-30.

doctrine are closely interwoven.¹¹ A more particular examination of their doctrines will appear later in the paper, for while they lay stress on the importance of doctrine,¹² the main basis of the Church and the goal which it is serving can be stated relatively simply. They have never been too concerned with a large body of doctrinal formulations, and the establishment of the Church did not come about as the result of particular doctrinal considerations or examinations. They claim to have a "Restored" Church, and they are working to establish "Zion." The purpose of this paper is not to disparage the R.L.D.S. Church or its members, nor is it intended to draw them from their faith. It is primarily an attempt to show in some detail how their ideals arose, what their claims are, and how their adherence to their faith has formed and shaped their church and its history. The first chapter is concerned with general observations about the Church, particularly in its relation to society, including religious society. The second chapter will consider the doctrine of the Restoration, which sets it off in particular from other churches and the goal of Zion toward which its members are professedly striving. Successive chapters will then discuss the founder of the church, the sacred writings, and the story of this "Restored" Church as it has endeavored to achieve its goal of Zion.

¹¹This Is Our Church (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), p. 8.

¹²E.g., the R.L.D.S. Church in 1952 sponsored the publication of a pamphlet entitled, "Doctrine Is Essential," written by Garland Tickemeyer, and published by the Herald House.

CHAPTER II

TWO DISTINCTIVE DOCTRINES: RESTORATION AND ZION

The second chapter will present two doctrines of great importance. The first of these is the doctrine of the Restoration, a principal doctrine that affects the past, present, and future of the church. The second doctrine is the concept of Zion, which is the goal of the Church, and the purpose for which the Restoration took place. Although it is the writer's intention to approach his topic from a historical view as much as possible, the history of the founding of the Church and the origin of these claims is so involved and so very unusual that it seems best to begin with a consideration of these two doctrines.

The Restoration Doctrine of the R.L.D.S. Church is of great importance because of the unique features it involves and because it basically determines the view which this church has of other churches. Since it is a restored Church, it is obviously the only true Church, according to their belief, even though membership in it this side of the millennium is not absolutely essential to salvation in eternity. They lay a great stress on being the true New Testament Church, as founded by Jesus Christ,¹ and regard it as necessary to have the same gifts and offices as the New Testament speaks about. Other religious groups make a similar assertion, but the basis of the claims of these groups is a return to the New Testament, as they understand it, a matter of being

¹L. Wayne Updike, Checking the Church of Your Choice (Independence: Herald House, 1956), p. 6. This is a consistent teaching of the R.L.D.S. Church.

true to the Scriptures. They claim that they have studied and interpreted the Scriptures correctly, which others have not done. However, the basis of the claim of the R.L.D.S. Church does not rest first of all on a claim to be in perfect accord with the Scriptures, although they do claim to be in such accord. We must remember, though, that the Scriptures were subjected to revision by Joseph Smith, Jr., which he claimed to have performed by divine inspiration. The real basis of their claim that they are surely and always the true Church is their teaching that the Lord restored the church through Joseph Smith, the Prophet, by means of angelic ministry. This, they say, was accomplished by personal appearance and immediate revelation and command.²

To be a Restoration, there must first be an apostasy from the truth. The R.L.D.S. Church declares that such was the case, that from the Dark Ages until the Restoration the church was in apostasy, that the true church did not exist.³ The church uses passages from the Scriptures that refer to false teachers and defections to affirm a complete apostasy. Such passages are Matt. 24:9-12; Acts 20:28-30; II Thess. 2:3-7; II Tim. 3:1-5; and II Peter 2:1-3.⁴ Then the argument from history is used, that such an apostasy did occur. The apostasy was

²This Is Our Church (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), pp. 3-4. This teaching too is found throughout the writings of the R.L.D.S. Church and will be treated in the next two chapters.

³Theona Stevens, "Words of Light," The Gospel Quarterly Series, Vol. 54, No. 1, (Independence: Herald House, 1945), p. 37.

⁴John W. Rushton, "The Apostasy and the Restoration" (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), pp. 1-4.

"complete," they say.⁵ Even the Reformation was not able to restore the truth or the true church, for the Protestant churches had their origin in the Roman Catholic Church. The apostasy was spread by all the churches which broke away from the Roman Church.⁶ Religious leaders such as John Wesley, Roger Williams, and Alexander Campbell are quoted as evidence that a special divine intervention and new revelation were necessary in order that the true Church might again exist on the earth.⁷ This took place, they say, through Joseph Smith, Jr.

Nor do they lack Bible passages which they apply to their Prophet and his work. Rev. 14:6-7 is said to apply to the great work of Restoration.⁸ The "marvelous work" of Isaiah 29:14 is said to refer specifically to the work that would be done through Joseph Smith, Jr.⁹ They view Joseph Smith and his work very specifically as the fulfillment of these and other passages of Scripture.

One of the most significant implications of the Restoration teaching is the doctrine of continued revelation. They believe that God still speaks to individuals today, and that through His Prophet, the president of the Church, He gives revelations for the Church.¹⁰ However, these

⁵Ibid., pp. 6-8.

⁶Ibid., pp. 16-17.

⁷Elbert A. Smith, The Great Restoration (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), p. 5.

⁸Rushton, op. cit., p. 18.

⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁰Chris B. Hartshorn, Reorganized Latter Day Saint Distinctives (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), pp. 13-14.

must be ratified by the General Conference before they are considered divine revelations.¹¹

The second doctrine to be considered is the doctrine of Zion. Zion is central in the thought of the R.L.D.S. Church and its members. Zion is a hope, but it is more than a hope. It is the goal of the Saints which they are striving to establish. It is not simply something which will be given to them, even though the second coming of Christ to usher in the millennium is connected with it.¹² It is something which they expect to establish by their work.

Zion is also called the "kingdom of God on earth," and the "New Jerusalem." It is true that the Saints are concerned with the growth of the individual toward perfection, the rule of Christ in the heart of man, and that they also look forward to an eternal life of bliss for the children of God. The growth of the individual in spirituality is essential for the establishment of Zion. But the particular Zion they are endeavoring to bring about is an earthly kingdom. As support for the belief that there will someday be an earthly kingdom known as God's kingdom, they point to the second and third petitions of the Lord's Prayer, Matt. 6:33, Matt. 3:1-2; Matt. 4:17, and other Scripture passages,¹³ which are often used in traditional Christianity, but not to contend for a concept of Zion such as the R.L.D.S. Church holds.

¹¹Infra, pp. 74-75.

¹²Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (Independence: Herald House, 1943), p. 151.

¹³Roger Yarrington, "What Is Zion?" (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), pp. 1-3.

They claim that the Bible gives general indications of a Zion to be established, and that modern-day revelation as found in the Doctrines and Covenants gives the blueprint.

The idea of Zion is professed to be an old one, with various near approaches in the past to a Zion state. "Enoch's city" is held to be a perfect example of Zion, and other approaches to a Zion state were achieved by Jews in and around Jerusalem who accepted Christ's ministry, a group of people on the American continent in early times, and perhaps by other peoples. Only Enoch's city actually kept all of God's commandments, and Enoch and his city shall return to meet the righteous in Zion, the New Jerusalem, according to the teachings of the church.¹⁴

The principle of "gathering" is essential to the establishment of Zion. A specific place for gathering is designated, namely, Independence, Missouri, and the regions round about. To this point the members of the Church are eventually to come in order to establish fully the ideal community. The process is gradual and not hasty, but eventually all the members are expected to move to that area. Here the Saints intend someday to build a temple, where Christ will come and rule.¹⁵

The Saints, the members of the Church, do not regard their projected Zion as a political government. They feel that the founding and development of the United States was part of God's plan for establishing Zion. "The political possibility of Zion is owed to the United States,"

¹⁴Thelona D. Stevens, Book of Mormon Studies (Independence: Herald House, 1955).

¹⁵Charles R. Hield, We Believe In Jesus Christ (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), p. 19.

they believe.¹⁶

A simple statement as to how all this is to come to pass is, "His kingdom will result when his gospel is applied to group living."¹⁷ The movement toward Zion is a social movement. When Zion has been established, the people will be of one heart and one mind, and dwell in righteousness, and there will be no poor among them. One of their writers says:

When we think and talk about Zion these days, we are actually talking about the care for the needy, the juvenile, the young, and the aged. We are talking about the need for social workers, sociologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists.¹⁸

In accord with these principles, stewardship is an important principle in the life of the R.L.D.S. Church.

When the ideal community of Zion has been established, then Christ is to come the second time to begin his millennial reign. Then the first resurrection will take place, the resurrection of the righteous, the honorable people. The righteous people, that is, the especially righteous, will reign with Christ during this period. They will work with Christ for the conversion of the billions of people who have not had the opportunity to hear of Christ and his laws. The wicked will not be raised at the first resurrection, but shall be retained in the prison house or hell all during the millennium. After the thousand years are over, Satan will be loosed, he will do battle against Christ and his

¹⁶Gyarrington, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁸G. Leslie DeLapp, The World Needs Zion (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), pp. 31-32.

Saints, but will be defeated. At the final judgment he and all the sons of perdition will be placed in a position of no glory. Most people will be placed in some degree of glory, according to their works, and death and hell will be done away with. Zion is preparatory to all this.¹⁹

What the Saints are doing in seeking to establish Zion is externally quite similar to what any Christian is doing who sincerely tries to serve the Lord. But the R.L.D.S. member is doing it with the thought that he is establishing the kingdom of God in a particular geographical area, that he is engaged in a unique project of the R.L.D.S. Church, and that he will eventually have a place of special honor in the millennium and in eternity as a result of his faithfulness.

¹⁹Hield, op. cit., pp. 19-27.

CHAPTER III

JOSEPH SMITH, JR., THE PROPHET OF ZION, AND THE SACRED BOOKS

No Man Knows My History is the title of a book by Fawn M. Brodie concerning the life of Joseph Smith, Jr., the Prophet. When one undertakes the study of this widely-known person, he finds such different views and reports that he will likely conclude that the title of Mrs. Brodie's book is quite accurate. Whatever the truth is, it is a fascinating, fantastic story. His followers make of him a true and great prophet, the Prophet of the Latter Day. Many volumes of reports and affidavits have been written to disprove his claims and portray him as a great fraud and deceiver, a seeker of his own glory. Perhaps in his violent death he was a victim of his own power of scheming and cunning, his ability to dominate and lead people, but nevertheless he did apparently die as a martyr to the faith which he taught. His life certainly was one of activity, and he did have some remarkable gifts and abilities.

A study of Joseph Smith and judgment concerning him is essential as far as the substance and truth of the religion of the R.L.D.S. Church is concerned. Everything depends on his claims and is based on his teachings. He is the one through whom the sacred books came to the people. To the Saints he is the special person foretold in the Scriptures, through whom the Lord has restored His Church in order that it may establish Zion in preparation for the latter-day glory.

However, a study of the history of the Church does not demand a determining of the exact truth concerning the life of the Prophet. Even what is false concerning historical events is of importance as long as it is believed by someone. A study of the life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet and of what others think of him is important, even though such a study may not lead us to detailed conclusions and clear refutations, and may leave many questions unanswered.

Joseph Smith, Jr., was born on December 23, 1805, at Sharon, Vermont. The family moved to Palmyra, New York, in 1815.¹ Whether the family was honorable and respectable, or dishonorable and undesirable, there is general agreement that they were rather poor. Joseph, Jr., was the fourth child and third son² in a family of ten children.³ According to his followers, the family, while not highly educated, achieved an average level of education. Both parents had been schoolteachers in Vermont at one time or another.⁴ Religious revivals which were very common during the time of Joseph's boyhood were a significant part of his environment, and the boy supposedly was concerned with joining a church. But he wanted to be sure he joined the right church. Heeding the words of James 1:5, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God,"

¹Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (Independence: Herald House, 1943), p. 522.

²Ibid., p. 35.

³Charles A. Shook, The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1914), p. 1. Hereafter this title will be referred to as TOMP.

⁴Davis, op. cit., p. 35.

Joseph is said to have gone to a grove to pray to God for guidance.⁵ There two personages appeared to him, God the Father, and Jesus Christ, His Son. Joseph did not recall whether both individuals spoke or not,⁶ although most writers of the church today say both did. But he did recall that the Father said concerning Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, hear him." These words, especially the words "Hear him," stand forth as a professed keynote of the R.L.D.S. Church today, epitomizing their stress on obedience as a means of becoming and being a member of Christ's Church.

Joseph also reported that the Father instructed him not to join any of the existing churches, for they were all wrong, and their creeds were an abomination. If he would wait and be patient, he would receive revelations and instructions for founding a new church which would be the true church. Thus did Joseph receive an answer to his prayers.⁷ This took place in the spring of 1820, when Joseph was little more than fourteen years old.

Joseph continued in this hope for a faith for the next few years. Then on September 21, 1823, he reports, he was kneeling in prayer in his room, and an angel appeared to him. This angel was Moroni, who was the son of Mormon, and was the last faithful member of the Nephites, a group of people who lived in America long before the time of

⁵Ibid., p. 28, and in numerous writings of the church.

⁶Board of Publication, The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Independence: Herald House, 1952), I, 11.

⁷Davis, op. cit., p. 30, and consistently in the writings of the church.

Columbus.⁸ Christ had appeared to them after his life in Palestine, taught them, and appointed twelve apostles among them. The people had lived in a high state of civilization, but many fell away from the faith, and those who were faithful were at last destroyed in a great battle. This angel told Joseph of "golden plates" on which the record of ancient peoples in America was written. Again, if Joseph would be patient and have faith, he would be given these plates and the ability to translate them. There were several visits to Joseph by the angel.⁹

At last Joseph was allowed to take the plates from their storage place in the sacred hill of Cumorah. With the plates he also found the Urim and Thummim, which in this case were a pair of spectacles with very special lenses. These glasses would enable him to translate the writing on the plates, which was in the "Reformed Egyptian" language, into English.¹⁰ He did not show these plates to his family. He only let them feel them under wrap. But they believed his story, and trusted that he would do great things.¹¹ Using these glasses, and with various men serving as scribes, Joseph Smith translated these plates. Oliver Cowdery was the scribe the greatest length of time.¹² This writing is the Book of Mormon.

⁸M. T. Lamb, The Mormons and Their Bible (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1903), p. 32.

⁹Davis, op. cit., pp. 30-34.

¹⁰Lamb, op. cit., p. 32.

¹¹Davis, op. cit., p. 31.

¹²Charles A. Shook, The True Origin of the Book of Mormon (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1914), p. 39. Hereafter this title will be referred to as TORM.

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were ordained to the Aaronic priesthood on May 15, 1829. John the Baptist himself appeared to them, and commanded them to baptize and ordain each other.¹³ On April 6, 1830, Smith, Cowdery and four other men organized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. They spoke of great gifts of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon them at this time.¹⁴

During the years immediately preceding the founding of the Church, Joseph Smith claimed to have received a number of divine revelations. Some of these are contained in the Doctrine and Covenants, with revelations received later. These revelations dealt mainly with the translation of the Book of Mormon, and the great work that was about to be done in establishing the Church.

The preceding paragraphs have reflected the beliefs and views of Joseph Smith's followers. There are other views of the character and life of Joseph Smith. An examination of the times in which he lived is necessary for understanding the man and the movement he began.

Joseph was born, and lived his early years, at the time when a great religious awakening was having its effect upon the people of the United States. The Saints themselves concede that this to some extent prepared the way for the Restoration through Joseph Smith.¹⁵ During these years revivals were common, and various mysterious physical manifestations, such as the "jerks," occurred in connection with these revival meetings.

¹³Davis, op. cit., pp. 68-70.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 15-25.

It was a time when people looked for and expected strange and mysterious happenings.¹⁶ It was a time, too, of considerable competition among the churches, so that very likely many were concerned as to what was the true church, if there was really a true church. This had been one of the concerns which Joseph had professed concerning his boyhood days.

Another feature of the spiritual thinking of the time was the idea of "spiritual wifism." The essential feature of this belief is that men and women are mated in heaven as spirits. Since there was no way of communicating this mating before birth to those on earth, men and women were free to find their mates here. When an individual, by some sort of inspiration, was able to detect his spiritual mate, he should be free to join with that mate. Sometimes this new conjunction of the sexes was purely platonic in nature, but sometimes it was just a step toward living together in more mundane relations.¹⁷ No doubt later Mormon polygamy arose from the seed of this doctrine. If Joseph Smith practised it, as there is much evidence that he did, his practise of it too developed from this idea, and actually was the beginning of Mormon polygamy.¹⁸

The books that have been written and affidavits that have been sworn, giving an unfavorable view of Joseph's early life and of his family, are numerous and severe. The family is characterized as

¹⁶George B. Arbaugh, Revelation In Mormonism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), pp. 1-2.

¹⁷Kimball Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1954), p. 88.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 89.

ignorant, bigoted, superstitious, dishonest, and lazy. Joseph Smith's father, Joseph Smith, Sr., was known to be intensely superstitious. He spent a large part of his time in "witching" for lost treasure with a mineral rod.¹⁹

One of the sharpest criticisms of the family has been leveled by Mrs. Horace Eaton, who was a resident of Palmyra for thirty-two years. She made the following evaluation of the Prophet and his mother:

As far as Mormonism was connected with its reputed founder, Joseph Smith, . . . it had its origin in the brain and heart of an ignorant, deceitful mother. Joe Smith's mother moved in the lowest walks of life, but she had a kind of mental power, which her son shared. With them both the imagination was the commanding faculty. It was vain but vivid. To it was subsidized reason, conscience, truth. Both mother and son were noted for a habit of extravagant assertion. They would look a listener full in the eye, and, without confusion or blanching, would fluently improvise startling statements and exciting stories, the warp and woof of which were alike sheer falsehood. Was an inconsistency alluded to, nothing daunted, a subterfuge was always at hand. As one old man, who knew them well, said to me, "You can't face them down. They'd lie and stick to it." . . . The mother of the high-priest of Mormonism was superstitious to the last degree. The very air she breathed was inhabited by "familiar spirits that peeped and wizards that muttered." She turned many a penny by tracing in the lines of the open palm the fortunes of the inquirer. All ominous signs were heeded. . . . Even in the old Green Mountain State, . . . Mrs. Smith's mind was made up that one of her sons should be a prophet. The weak father agreed with her that Joseph was the "gemus" of their nine children. So it was established that Joseph should be the prophet. To such an extent did the mother impress this idea upon the boy, that all the instincts of childhood were restrained. He rarely smiled or laughed. "His looks and thoughts were always downward bent." He never indulged in the demonstrations of fun, since they would not be in keeping with the profound dignity of his allotted vocation. His mother inspired and aided him in every scheme of duplicity and cunning. All acquainted with the facts agree in saying that the evil spirit of Mormonism dwelt first in Joe Smith's mother.²⁰

¹⁹Shook, TOMP, p. 18.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 19-20.

Joseph, later the Prophet, was one of a set known as "money-diggers." He had a "peep-stone," which had been discovered in the digging of a well. He would put it in his hat and claim that in it he could see places to dig for money.²¹

Joseph was not in good graces with his father-in-law, Isaac Hale, of Harmony, Pennsylvania. When Joseph asked the hand of his daughter in marriage, Mr. Hale refused. Therefore Smith and Emma eloped, and were married on January 18, 1827. Peter Ingersoll, who accompanied Joseph and Emma when they returned to the Hale home to get Emma's belongings, reports that Hale said he would rather follow Emma to the grave than see her married to Smith. He accused Smith of deceiving people by claiming to use his peep-stone for finding money. Joseph at that time admitted his deceptions, and promised to mend his ways,²² but it seems that he soon forgot that promise, probably owing in part to the pressure of his family.²³ Hale too has sworn to a statement to the effect that Joseph Smith was a low type of character and a deceiver.²⁴

In 1833 fifty-one citizens of Palmyra, New York, signed the following statement concerning the character of the Smiths:

We, the undersigned, have been acquainted with the Smith family, for a number of years, while they resided near this place, and we have no hesitation in saying, that we consider them destitute of that moral character, which ought to entitle them to the confidence of any community. They were particularly famous for visionary projects, spent much of their time in digging for money which they

²¹Ibid., p. 22.

²²Shook, TOBM, p. 20.

²³Ibid., p. 21.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 31-33.

pretended was hid in the earth; and to this day, large excavations may be seen in the earth, not far from their residence, where they used to spend their time in digging for hidden treasures. Joseph Smith, Senior, and his son Joseph, were in particular considered entirely destitute of moral character, and addicted to vicious habits.²⁵

Concerning the finding of the plates from which the Book of Mormon was taken, Peter Ingersoll has made the following statement in an affidavit sworn in 1833, about an event that took place in 1827:

One day he came and greeted me, with a joyful countenance. Upon asking the cause of his unusual happiness, he replied in the following language: "As I was passing, yesterday, across the woods, after a heavy shower of rain, I found, in a hollow, some beautiful white sand, that had been washed up by the water. I took off my frock, and tied up several quarts of it and then went home. On my entering the house, I found the family at the table, eating dinner. They were all anxious to know the contents of my frock. At that moment, I happened to think of what I had heard about a history found in Canada, called the golden Bible; so I very gravely told them it was the golden Bible. To my surprise, they were credulous enough to believe what I said. Accordingly I told them that I had received a commandment to let no one see it; for, says I, no man can see it with the naked eye and live. However, I offered to take out the book and show it to them, but they refused to see it, and left the room. "Now," said Joe, "I have got the d----d fools fixed, and will carry out the fun." Notwithstanding, he told me he had no such book, and believed there never was any such book, yet, he told me that he actually went to Willard Chase, to get him to make a chest, in which he might deposit his golden Bible. But, as Chase would not do it, he made a box himself, of clapboards, and put it into a pillow-case, and allowed people only to lift it, and feel of it through the case.²⁶

There are many more statements and affidavits concerning the character and life of Joseph the Prophet and his family. The books by Charles Shook referred to in this paper contain many of these.

Another view of the Prophet is that he had some kind of mental illness. Kimball Young presents the possibility that he was what Young

²⁵Shook, TOMP, p. 24.

²⁶Shook, TOEM, p. 21.

calls a "parapath," which he defines as one who cannot always tell fact from fantasy. As a youth, Joseph was known as a great spinner of tall yarns. Young suggests that it is likely that with the telling and retelling of these stories, Joseph himself began to believe they were true. Then when he found others accepting them as facts, he was all the more inclined to believe them himself.²⁷

The writer of this paper will admit the possibility of some mental disorder on the part of Joseph Smith. However, whatever the involvement of Joseph Smith may have been in producing and dictating the Book of Mormon, the writer feels that this involvement constitutes too great a matter to have been carried out by someone who simply could not distinguish fact from fantasy. It is likely that in those times in which Joseph Smith grew up, when religion was so closely connected with superstition, and when religious manifestations brought a person distinction and power, the genius of Joseph Smith combined with his and his family's lust for power and distinction, and with the spirit of the times, in such a way as to produce a cunning and duplicity of almost unbelievable depth. Joseph may honestly not have had a very clear distinction between right and wrong. His great ability, his power of influencing people, his lack of conscience, and ability to carry out long-range plans of fraud, suggest the type of personality known as psychopathic, but it is better not to try to make a conclusive analysis. Some mental illnesses do not diminish, but rather increase, a person's strength and activity, even activity that seems normal.

²⁷Young, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

The R.L.D.S. Church claims three sacred books which are said to be primarily the work of Joseph Smith. These three books are the Inspired Version or Inspired Translation of the Holy Scriptures, the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, usually referred to as Doctrine and Covenants.

The Book of Mormon was the first book produced by Joseph Smith. Joseph claimed that it was a record of early American peoples, who came to this continent from the land of Palestine. It is the new witness for Christ, a sacred record written from and for the Western world. It adds to the witness of the Bible, and makes a number of things clearer than the Scriptures do.²⁸ In form it is divided into books as the Bible is. It is a story of several groups of people that left Palestine and came to America.²⁹

The first of these groups that left Palestine was under the direction of Jared, just after the confusion of tongues at Babel. The date usually given is 2200 B.C. With them they brought the sacred records of the children of God. On the American continent they grew and prospered, and developed an advanced civilization. But at last these people, the Jaredites, split into two groups, and annihilated themselves in war.

About the time this war was taking place, around 600 B.C., another group left Jerusalem, made up of two families. These families

²⁸A consistent claim of the R.L.D.S. Church, e.g., James S. Menzies, A Second Witness for Jesus Christ (Independence: Herald House, n.d.).

²⁹The summary given in this paper is adapted primarily from Lamb, op. cit., pp. 29-32. Other summaries may be found in Shook, TOBM, pp. 9-13, and Thelona D. Stevens, Book of Mormon Studies (Independence: Herald House, 1955), pp. 9-14.

intermarried, but soon split into two rival nations, the Nephites and the Lamanites. About nine years after this group came over, a third group left Jerusalem, under the leadership of a son of King Zedekiah. After about four hundred years, the Nephites discovered them, and they became one people, bearing the name Nephites. The Nephites eventually occupied most of North America, while the Lamanites covered the South American continent. The Lamanites were cursed by God with a "skin of blackness" at the very beginning of their separate existence. They were a wild, ferocious, ignorant people, the ancestors of the present Indian races. The Nephites were God's favorites, establishing Christian churches, furnishing great prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and enjoying all the blessings and privileges of the New Testament dispensation before the time of the New Testament.

After Jesus' resurrection, he appeared to his people on the American continent, remaining forty days, preaching, doing miracles, ordaining twelve apostles, and otherwise establishing the faith of the people. According to the Saints, these are the people Jesus referred to when he said, "Other sheep I have," as recorded in John 10:16. A few years later the whole American population is reported converted, the Lamanites and Nephites are enrolled in Christian churches. Two hundred years of peace, purity, and religious culture then followed. But by and by apostasy again occurs. The apostates take the old name of Lamanites and are hostile toward religion and religious people. These Lamanites grow, opposing the Nephites, and at last war and bloodshed again fill the land. In the year 384 A.D. the Lamanites succeeded in destroying the Nephites and all that was left of the religious element.

A prophet named Mormon was commander-in-chief of the Nephite forces. Before the final war ended, he gathered all the records of the people, which were the result of inspiration of God, abridged them, and engraved this record on golden plates. These he turned over to his son Moroni, a commander of one division of the Nephite army. He finished the record, and hid the plates in the sacred hill Cumorah, near Palmyra, New York. Moroni had been the only Nephite survivor who did not go over to the Lamanites. The plates remained in Cumorah for fourteen hundred years, until Moroni returned in the form of an angel, appearing to Joseph Smith. He gave Smith directions for finding the plates. With the plates Joseph also found the Urim and Thummim, the special spectacles for translating the records. When Joseph would wear them and look at the plates, the English words would appear beneath the Reformed Egyptian words. He would then dictate the translation to his scribe. The translation was finished in 1830, and Martin Harris financed the publishing of five thousand copies of the book.³⁰

This book contains a number of passages referring to Zion and the building of it. In I Nephi 3:187 are the words: "And blessed are they that shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and power of the Holy Ghost." II Nephi 11:109 says, "But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money, they shall perish." Other references to Zion are in II Nephi 5:31,33; 11:106,108,118; 12:30, and in the Book of Nephi 9:86.

Joseph Smith had two sets of witnesses for the plates of the Book

³⁰Shook, TOBM, p. 8.

of Mormon. The first group consisted of three men, the second group, of eight men. The members of the first group were Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer, who had made a special request to be allowed to be the official witnesses of the plates.³¹ An angel supposedly showed them the plates, while Joseph himself showed the plates to the group of eight.³² The separate testimonies of the two groups serve as prefaces to the Book of Mormon. Before many years all three men of the first group had severed relations with the church founded by Joseph Smith.³³ Of the second group, three of the men were members of the Smith family, and four of the Whitmer family. John Page was the eighth witness.

In 1828 Martin Harris obtained from Smith a specimen of the Reformed Egyptian in which the Book of Mormon was supposed to have been written and took it to Professor Charles Anthon in New York City. Harris later maintained that Anthon had said the letters were genuine and that the translation was correct. Professor Anthon, however, emphatically denied ever making such a statement and declared that "the paper contained anything else but Egyptian hieroglyphics."³⁴

The most commonly-accepted belief among non-Mormons or "Gentiles" concerning the origin of the Book of Mormon centers around a romance written by a retired clergyman named Solomon Spaulding. The name of

³¹David, op. cit., p. 61.

³²Ibid., pp. 62-63.

³³Ibid., p. 63.

³⁴Henry C. Sheldon, A Fourfold Test of Mormonism (Cincinnati: The Abingdon Press, 1918), pp. 21-23.

this romance was "Manuscript Found," and it was never published. There are no copies of this novel in existence now. The R.L.D.S. Church at one time came into possession of another writing of Spaulding, entitled "Manuscript Story," which they have claimed is the story that others claim was the basis of the Book of Mormon. They point out that there is no particular similarity between the two. Indeed, there is not; however, there is a great deal of evidence that this is not the same story as the one upon which the Book of Mormon is held to be based.³⁵

The exact details of the development of "Manuscript Found" into the Book of Mormon are not known, nor are they significant for this study. About 1813 Spaulding had sent his manuscript to the printing office of a Mr. Patterson in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, hoping to get it published, so that he could pay his debts. Patterson did not publish it right away. About 1816 Sidney Rigdon, a good friend of Patterson's partner, came across the manuscript while lounging around the printing office. He either took it, or read it carefully and remembered much of the contents. Probably he took it. As Spaulding had written the story, he read it to many friends and acquaintances. When these people later read and heard the Book of Mormon, they testified that there were many similarities between the two books and that the outline of history contained in the two is the same.³⁶

Just how Rigdon and Smith got together is not clear, but it is quite clear that they did get together a number of years before Rigdon's

³⁵Shook, TOEM, pp. 65-77.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 79-82, 102. Testimonies and development of the story constitute a large part of Shook's book.

professed conversion to the Church in 1830. Probably Ridgon heard of Smith as a rising "fortune-teller and money-digger" and decided that Smith was the man he needed for the purposes he had in mind. Together they concocted the whole plan of the Book of Mormon and the kind of church they should found upon it. The idea was originally Ridgon's, but he had a definite need for a person such as Joseph Smith in carrying out his schemes.³⁷

The changes that were made in "Manuscript Found" and the material that was added to produce the Book of Mormon were completely or at least mostly the work of Ridgon. Smith may have made some contribution. There are many reflections of teachings of the Disciples of Christ, a church founded by Alexander Campbell; Ridgon was a minister of this church at this time.³⁸ A fruitful source of material was the King James Version of the Holy Bible. Numerous passages and also longer sections of the Book of Mormon are verbatim duplications of passages from the King James Version. Other passages are very similar to passages in the Bible, and probably were derived from them.³⁹

The Book of Mormon has been characterized as wordy, repetitious, and of a generally low literary quality. Other facts of significance are its reference to modern developments and knowledge of science, use of modern words, and reference in accounts written before the time of Christ to things which He said as having already been said by Him. The

³⁷Lamb, op. cit., p. 74; Arbaugh, op. cit., pp. 28-32.

³⁸Arbaugh, op. cit., pp. 10-13.

³⁹Ibid., p. 21; Sheldon, op. cit., pp. 54, 62; Lamb, op. cit., pp. 106ff.

things done and spoken in America make the New Testament seem rather anti-climactic. Revival scenes and terminology of the time of publication also appear frequently in the Book of Mormon.⁴⁰

The Book of Mormon is of vital importance as a foundation of the R.L.D.S. Church. The followers of Joseph Smith look upon it as a necessary evidence of the genuineness of the Restoration. If it and the claims concerning it are false, then Joseph Smith as a Prophet of the Restoration, and any church claiming to be his followers, are false.⁴¹ This book also brings forth the concept of a building of Zion here on earth. The book presents the doctrine of continued revelation, thus setting things up for Joseph Smith to be the Prophet of the latter day, of the Lord's "restored" Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.⁴²

Despite the fact that the Prophet never claimed actually to have worked with the original text in the true sense of translation and that there is no original text available for further study, nevertheless later leaders of the R.L.D.S. Church have made changes in the interest of improving the subject-matter of this book which they claim is divinely inspired.⁴³

The Book of Doctrine and Covenants is the next book to consider.

⁴⁰Lamb, op. cit., pp. 99-106.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 37-38.

⁴²The Book of Jacob 1:3; 3:11. This is one of the books of the Book of Mormon.

⁴³An explanation of these corrections forms the preface to the Book of Mormon printed in 1944 by the Herald House.

This book claims to be a record of revelations given primarily to Joseph the Prophet, but also to some of the other early leaders, and then to the true successors of the Prophet, namely, the presidents of the R.L.D.S. Church. The most recent of these at this writing was received in 1954 by President Israel A. Smith. Some of the revelations allegedly received by the Prophet were received before the founding of the Church; most came in the first few years following the founding. Very often revelations are conveniently received shortly before the General Conferences, so that the Conferences can decide whether the revelation is genuine.⁴⁴ Some of the revelations concern doctrine, but most of them give directions for guiding the affairs of the church, especially the appointment of leaders. Some of the earliest revelations gave directions concerning the translation of the Book of Mormon. The book contains specific directions for the establishment of Zion, even indicating where it is to be built. There are several differences between this book and the Utah Mormon version of it, particularly the omission of Section 132 of the Utah book, the revelation on celestial marriage.

One other literary work of Joseph the Prophet is of primary importance to the R.L.D.S. Church. This is the Inspired Version or Inspired Translation of the Holy Scriptures. The claim of the Saints is that there have been various errors and omissions in translating the Scriptures. Only divine revelation could restore the Bible as it really was.⁴⁵ Joseph Smith was the man to do this, with some help from

⁴⁴This is a general admission of the Saints, which can be checked according to dates given in the Doctrine and Covenants.

⁴⁵A. B. Phillips, Three Bibles Compared (Independence: Herald House, 1944), pp. 3-11.

Sidney Rigdon. He began this work in 1830 and completed it in 1833. Large parts of the Bible are unchanged or changed only slightly. But Joseph, or Rigdon, made additions and some significant changes. He expanded the twenty-ninth chapter of Isaiah and the fiftieth chapter of Genesis, in order to insert a forecast of his prophetic calling and the unearthing of the Book of Mormon.⁴⁶ Other significant additions are in the early chapters of Genesis, where, for example, the sixth chapter declares that even Adam knew the name of Jesus Christ and received baptism. God authorized this translation in a revelation given to Joseph Smith in June, 1830, which was primarily a vision of an appearance of God to Moses, making Moses His servant to write his part of the Bible. This revelation appears as Section twenty-two in the Doctrine and Covenants, and as a preface to the Inspired Version.

This chapter has presented various factors of the origin of the R.L.D.S. Church and their doctrines of today. The person and claims of Joseph Smith, and the three books for which he is primarily responsible, so they believe, are very vital for the Saints of yesterday and today. The Saints believe in these things and guide their faith and life accordingly, as individuals and as a church.

⁴⁶Sheldon, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHURCH FROM ITS FOUNDING TO THE DEATH OF THE PROPHET (1830-1844)

Joseph Smith and several of his associates had been preaching their doctrines while he was producing the Book of Mormon. Then on April 6, 1830, Joseph and Oliver Cowdery, with four other young men, met and formed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. To the Saints of today, that date is very important, because it means that after many centuries of apostasy, a true Church again existed on the earth.¹

The Church did not gain a large group of followers at the very outset. After eight months in December, 1830, the Church numbered seventy members.² Except for a few low-type individuals the people in the immediate area where Joseph lived had no respect for his claims.³

Then Joseph declared a revelation to the effect that the Church should move westward. In 1831 the Saints of this original Church moved to Kirtland, Ohio, and established headquarters there.⁴ Sidney Rigdon

¹John W. Rushton, The Apostasy and the Restoration (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), p. 28, and consistently in the writings of the church.

²Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (Independence: Herald House, 1943), p. 99.

³Charles A. Shook, The True Origin of the Book of Mormon (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1914), p. 17. Hereafter this title will be referred to as TOEM.

⁴Doctrine and Covenants 38:7. Hereafter this book will be referred to as DC.

soon joined the Church, professing to be converted. With him he brought a number of followers. Converts from Mentor, Ohio, moved to Kirtland, and the church grew quite rapidly, as one of the early revelations of Joseph had said it would.⁵ This was a time when many people were concerned about religion, when unusual and mysterious happenings were believed and even looked for, and many people looked for visionary elements in religion. Perhaps there was also a concern, as Joseph had professed, as to which church was true, and perhaps a serious and sincere desire to be sure of the truth for truth's sake. A church that made such claims as this Church made through its Prophet would naturally attract some people, particularly during times such as those during which it originated. Not to be overlooked is the appeal to the ego which is present in a church of this type. The claim of belonging to the only true church, restored to the earth by special action of the Lord, naturally would appeal to some.⁶ Then, too, the Church received immediate opposition, and persecution frequently leads people both inside and outside the group to believe that the persecuted group is in the right.

The Church from the very beginning sent out missionaries. Missionaries had preceded the settling at Kirtland. In 1831 missionaries were sent to the area of Independence, in Jackson County, Missouri. One whole branch, the Colesville branch, moved to Jackson County and settled in Kaw township, west of Independence.⁷

⁵F. Henry Edwards, A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants (Independence: Herald House, 1946), p. 159.

⁶M. T. Lamb, The Mormons and Their Bible (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1903), pp. 15-22.

⁷Davis, op. cit., pp. 112-16.

The Church did not know from the beginning where it would endeavor to establish Zion. In September, 1830, Oliver Cowdery had prayed to the Lord, seeking such information, but the Lord is said to have told him very clearly, "It is not revealed, and no man knoweth where the city shall be built, but it shall be given hereafter."⁸

On March 7, 1831, the Saints received instruction that the gathering in Kirtland was preliminary to establishing Zion. The mission to the west was another step toward Zion, and the Saints were now to gather up their riches, in order to be able to purchase the land for Zion.⁹ At the June Conference in Kirtland, the elders of the Church were directed to assemble in Missouri. They would then be shown where the City of Zion was to be. The elders went to Missouri and began to arrive in Jackson County in the latter part of July.¹⁰ No explanation is given as to why they went to a county on the western border of the state, when they had come from the East, and had only been instructed to come into the state. At this time Sections fifty-seven through sixty of the Doctrine and Covenants were given, by revelation of God. Section 57:1, given in July, 1831, imparted the following information to the Saints:

Hearken, O ye elders of my church saith the Lord your God, who have assembled yourselves together, according to my commandments, in this land which is the land of Missouri, which is the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the saints: wherefore this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion. And thus saith the Lord your God, If you will receive wisdom here is wisdom. Behold, the place which is now called Independence, is the center place, and the spot for the temple is

⁸DC 27:3.

⁹DC 45:12.

¹⁰Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

lying westward upon a lot which is not far from the courthouse; wherefore it is wisdom that the land should be purchased by the saints; and also every tract lying westward, even unto the line running directly between Jew and Gentile. And also every tract bordering by the prairies, inasmuch as my disciples are enabled to buy lands. Behold this is wisdom, that they may obtain it for an everlasting inheritance.

On August 3, 1831, Joseph Smith dedicated the land for the temple, even though the Church did not yet own the land. On December 19 of that year, Bishop Partridge purchased sixty-three acres of land including the lot for the temple, known simply as the "Temple Lot," from J. H. Fluornoy and his wife. The purchase price was one hundred thirty dollars. This lot is not presently owned by the R.L.D.S. Church. As a result of some legal technicalities it is now in the possession of a small group known as the Hedrickites, followers of one of the men who claimed leadership after the death of the Prophet.¹¹ The present lack of ownership of the Temple Lot does not seem to be a cause of concern to the Church.

Section 57 also contained instructions for gathering at Zion. Sidney Gilbert and Bishop Partridge were to be the main leaders in procuring land and organizing the community of Saints. By July, 1833, nearly two thousand acres of land in Independence and west of Independence were in the possession of the Saints. They had established a storehouse, by which they were to provide for the poor and for times of need. William Phelps received the divine appointment to be printer for the Church, and to make a profit for the good of the Saints. He became publisher of The Evening and The Morning Star, the first

¹¹Davis, op. cit., p. 527; Edwards, op. cit., pp. 190-92.

periodical of the Church, which appeared in June, 1832.¹² The whole region of the country around Independence was to be bought as soon as time would permit.¹³

One of the difficulties that the Prophet faced was the tendency of the people to inquire of God for direct guidance concerning trivial things. This exhausted Joseph, cheapened the idea of revelation, and weakened the self-reliance of the Saints. He therefore proclaimed the revelation: "It is not meet that I should command thee in all things."¹⁴ A later leader of the Church pointed out the timeliness of this revelation, and also observes in this connection that:

The Saints need to remember that no man is justified in asking for divine guidance until he has made full use of the intelligence which God already has given him.¹⁵

This incident provides some insight into the thinking and practices of the Saints involving revelation.

Another warning issued by the Prophet as a revelation was that the elders of the Church should not be in a hurry to get to Independence, for the time would not come for many years to receive their inheritance in this land. Joseph Smith III, the son of the Prophet, later pointed out that the troubles that soon afterwards beset the Saints were the result of disobedience to this command.¹⁶

¹²Edwards, op. cit., pp. 185, 194.

¹³DC 58:11.

¹⁴DC 58:6.

¹⁵Edwards, op. cit., p. 197.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 198.

The first conference in the land of Zion, the fifth of the Church, was held on August 4, 1831. The seat of the Presidency of the Church was to remain in Kirtland, which was more accessible. Money was to be gathered there and elsewhere for the purchase of Zion.¹⁷

During the following months missionaries of the Church went about preaching, and the Church grew steadily. Canada, New York, and New England were particular areas where missionaries worked. Joseph Smith, Sr., was made patriarch, or father to the whole church on December 18, 1833.¹⁸

Old neighbors of the Smiths in Palmyra were not concerned when the Saints moved and began work in the west. They felt certain that only a very, very few people would ever accept Smith's teachings and claims of being the Prophet. However, when they heard that Joseph was gaining a considerable following, many of them began to record affidavits concerning the character and activities of the Prophet and his family, with the hope that people might be warned by them. E. D. Howe published a number of these in his book Mormonism Unveiled of 1834.¹⁹

Happenings which brought both joy and sorrow occurred in 1833 and the years following. In Kirtland the cornerstone of the new temple was laid in 1833, and the temple was dedicated in 1836.²⁰ This temple still stands and is the property of the R.L.D.S. Church. But at the time of

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 201-02.

¹⁸Davis, op. cit., pp. 168-73.

¹⁹Shook, TOEM, pp. 17-18.

²⁰Davis, op. cit., pp. 202-04.

the cornerstone-laying in Kirtland, the Saints in Zion were in great distress.

Persecution on the part of their neighbors brought the Saints in Independence much suffering, driving them from Jackson County, and eventually from the state of Missouri. The Saints were Easterners, and their dress and speech were different from that of their neighbors. These were wild times, and certainly in such times people who were different in their ways, who professed a pious life, and who regarded themselves as the one and only true church would arouse the scorn and the anger of their frontier neighbors. Such diverse people could hardly live together in peace and unity. The Saints were the subjects of ostracism, but it only strengthened their conviction of their own superiority. Arrogance and group egotism were apparent among them, a common occurrence among those who feel they are a "chosen" people. They had gained great strength and numbers, and had acquired large amounts of land, which then belonged to the government, and was subject to pre-emption. These things would be enough to arouse hostility from their neighbors. But this wasn't everything. The Saints were not slave-holders. Though they tried to maintain a neutral position on the matter, there was no such thing as complete neutrality. Some pronouncements came out against it, and this attitude on the part of the Saints, who formed such a large part of the population, seemed a real threat to their neighbors.²¹

So it was that on July 20, 1833, the neighbors of the Saints drew up a petition asking or demanding that the Saints leave Jackson County.

²¹Ibid., pp. 155-57.

This was followed by mob violence. On July 23 the Saints signed a treaty, agreeing that half of them would leave before January 1, 1834, and the other half by April first of that year. However, new violence broke out in October of 1833, and early in November most of the Saints crossed the Missouri River northward into Clay County. They hoped that soon the difficulties might be ironed out and they might return, but this hope failed to be fulfilled. Still the dream and goal of Zion lived strongly in the hearts and souls of those who had suffered so because of their faith.²²

For some time the Saints lived in Clay County and neighboring areas, hoping in vain that the difficulties in Jackson County might be ironed out. The arrangement for living in Clay County was intended to be only temporary. When it appeared that a return to Jackson County seemed out of the question in the near future, the local and state authorities made provisions by law, enabling the Saints to settle in Caldwell County. They began settling in this area in 1836. They established the town of Far West as their county seat and chief center. Converts from the East came and settled in this area also, so that the Mormon settlements spread beyond this county. During this time, however, there was internal strife, and the three major witnesses to the Book of Mormon, as well as other prominent leaders, severed their relations with the Church. None of the three witnesses officially repudiated his testimony to the Book of Mormon,²³ but none of them ever rejoined the

²²Ibid., pp. 157-67.

²³Ibid., pp. 235-41.

Church, and Oliver Cowdery later joined a Methodist Church.²⁴ In 1838, the Prophet denounced Martin Harris as "given loose to all kinds of abominations, lying, cheating, swindling, with all kinds of debauchery."²⁵

The going was not always smooth for Joseph. During these years there were other people who claimed to receive revelations from God. Joseph Smith accordingly brought forth other revelations, which pointed out that commandments were to be received only through him, and that he had the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Joseph met resistance and opposition from his people, mainly because of his high-handed methods. Already in the summer of 1831 it appeared that he would be ousted from his position. In 1833 trouble was brewing. In 1834 he was brought to trial, vindicated, and retained his position with difficulty. About 1837 an attempt was made to put David Whitmer in Joseph's place, but this, too, failed.²⁶ Finally a revelation came forth from the Lord commanding the apostles, "Rebel not against my servant Joseph."²⁷ In all the bitter controversy and apostasy that went on Joseph managed to retain his position. His revelations were of course his main weapon.

The early and middle 1830's were important years for organizing a more complete and complex government for the Church. On February 17, 1834, the Standing High Council was organized.²⁸ In accordance with

²⁴Shook, TOEM, p. 60.

²⁵Ibid., p. 48.

²⁶George B. Arbaugh, Revelation In Mormonism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), pp. 61-65.

²⁷DC 105:6.

²⁸Davis, op. cit., p. 188.

revelation received before the founding of the Church, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was appointed and organized on February 14, 1835. These Twelve arranged to take their first mission trip through the eastern states. On March 28 they met for their final assembly, and the minutes of the meeting contained the following:

The time when we are about to separate is near; and when we shall meet again, God only knows; we therefore feel to ask of him whom we have acknowledged to be our Prophet and Seer, that he inquire of God for us, and obtain a revelation (if consistent), that we may look upon it when we are separated, that our hearts may be comforted. . . . We have unitedly asked God our Heavenly Father to grant unto us through his Seer, a revelation of his mind and will concerning our duty the coming season, even a great revelation, that will enlarge our hearts, comfort us in adversity, and brighten our hopes amidst the power of darkness.²⁹

President Smith complied with the request, inquired of the Lord, and as a result the revelation known as Section 104 of the Doctrine and Covenants came into being. This section gives detailed instruction concerning the various offices of the Church, and the duties of each official. This complicated organization of officialdom claims sources in both the Old and New Testaments, particularly in sections added to early chapters of Genesis in the Inspired Translation. The government thus established was very hierarchical. The people were taught that they must accept the leaders, since they were appointed by God Himself.

In 1834-35 the Book of Doctrine and Covenants was produced, as an arranging of the doctrine and principles of government for the Church. Revelations that had been claimed comprised the main part of it. There is considerable evidence that many changes were made from the form in which various revelations originally appeared. This book superseded

²⁹Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

the Book of Commandments, and became one of the standard books of the Church.³⁰

In 1836 the Kirtland Temple had been dedicated, with services lasting eight hours. The Saints reported that intense religious feeling and manifestations characterized the services.³¹ In 1837 Smith told Heber C. Kimball that the Lord had told him that Kimball should go to England to do mission work. Kimball went, thus beginning the first mission work of the Church in a foreign country. Soon converts were coming over to join the Saints in America. In 1840 the first number of the Millennial Star appeared in England.³² Mission work also was proceeding in America, with particular efforts made in New York City. Claims of marvelous healing were an important part of this mission.³³ All this work and preaching was ultimately for the purpose of establishing Zion in Independence, and with the assurance that sometime it would so come to pass.

But trouble was again brewing for the Saints in Missouri. The Mormons in Daviess County had sufficient power to swing the election in 1838. One candidate feared them and made efforts to prevent the Mormons from voting. His actions triggered further action against the Mormons, and soon mob persecution again came upon them. The violence suffered by the Mormons was enormous. Governor Boggs issued orders to exterminate

³⁰Davis, op. cit., pp. 199-201; Arbaugh, op. cit., pp. 89-94.

³¹Davis, op. cit., pp. 204-06.

³²Ibid., pp. 219-29.

³³Ibid., pp. 230-32.

the Mormons or drive them from the state. Accordingly General Clark compelled them to promise to leave the state of Missouri by May 1, 1839. Joseph Smith was imprisoned in Liberty, in Clay County, where he appointed and blessed his son, Joseph III, as his successor. The Saints seemed farther than ever from their goal of Zion. Nevertheless, missionaries were at work in every part of the United States, and newly-converted Saints were coming into Missouri even when they came only to be driven out with the earlier settlers.³⁴

The next center and gathering place for the Mormons was Nauvoo, Illinois. When the Saints fled from Missouri in the winter of 1838-39, they first found refuge in Quincy, Illinois.³⁵ When Joseph Smith got to Illinois, he chose a malaria-ridden lowland around the deserted village of Commerce as the new home for his people. He obtained a charter from the state of Illinois for his town, renaming it Nauvoo, which means "beautiful place." The Saints set themselves to the task of building up a beautiful city, in keeping with the name they had chosen. They drained the swampland, and dug deep wells instead of using surface water, and the malaria became a much less serious problem than before. Saints streamed in from everywhere, particularly converts from England. The city became the largest in Illinois, passing the twenty thousand population mark before the troubles arose which forced the Saints to leave their Illinois home.³⁶ Estimates of the world membership by 1844,

³⁴Ibid., pp. 241-54.

³⁵Ibid., p. 256.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 270, 316-7.

when these difficulties occurred, range from forty thousand to two hundred thousand.³⁷

In Nauvoo Joseph Smith became a powerful figure, becoming mayor of the city, Lieutenant-General of the Nauvoo Legion, and candidate for president of the United States on an independent ticket in 1844. Sidney Rigdon was his running mate. He lived in the Mansion House, which also provided hotel facilities for visitors to the city.³⁸

In 1839 the first issue of a new periodical, Times and Seasons, appeared. Ebenezer Robinson directed the printing interests of the Church. Two thousand new copies of the Book of Mormon were printed and placed in the hands of the people.³⁹

The Saints built their temple in Nauvoo, with the men giving of their time to work on it. It was the center of interest and served as a source of inspiration to the whole population. It was visible for miles up and down the Mississippi River. Fire destroyed this temple in 1848.⁴⁰

The Church continued its missionary activity. Frivolity among the young people caused some concern among the leaders. But the young people received the admonition given them, and in January, 1843, they formed "The Young Gentlemen and Young Ladies' Relief Society."⁴¹ In

³⁷Charles A. Shook, The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1914), p. 3. Hereafter this book will be referred to as TOMP. The R.L.D.S. Church consistently claims that the membership at this time was around two hundred thousand.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 275, 281, 296.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 264-69.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 273.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 269.

1843 the Saints also sent missionaries to the South Sea Islands. The missionaries were still abroad when the death of the Prophet and the scattering of the Saints occurred.⁴²

What went on in the last months at Nauvoo is in some respects a deep mystery. The Independence Saints of today speak of enemies in the camp who withdrew and defamed the Prophet and the Saints. Dr. John C. Bennett is a principal character who withdrew and wrote reports of iniquity on the part of the Prophet and his people, particularly the other leaders.⁴³

There were others who were opposed to the Prophet. Some of these had been cut off from the Church on various charges of "unchristianlike conduct." Charges of crime and immoral conduct were tossed back and forth quite freely, also at the Prophet.⁴⁴ The party in opposition to Joseph set up a printing press to publish a newspaper called the Nauvoo Expositor. Only one issue appeared. On June 10, 1844, the city council declared the Expositor a nuisance and ordered the mayor, who was Joseph Smith, to have the establishment and paper removed immediately, in whatever way he saw fit. An order to Marshal John P. Green accomplished this very quickly and effectively.⁴⁵

The greatest problem, and one concerning which there is much, sometimes heated, difference of opinion, is the connection of Joseph the Prophet with polygamy. The Saints of Independence today deny that

⁴²Ibid., pp. 286-92.

⁴³TOMP, pp. 52-65.

⁴⁴Davis, op. cit., p. 298.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 298-99.

Joseph ever taught or practised it.⁴⁶ They maintain that the polygamous practices of the Utah Mormons during the nineteenth century originated with Brigham Young. In 1852 Young declared the doctrine publicly, but claimed that it was based on a revelation of Joseph Smith in 1843. This revelation is Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants of the Utah Mormons, and it is not included in the present versions of the R.L.D.S. Church.

Despite the claims of the Saints of today, there is much evidence that the doctrine of spiritual wifism that prevailed during the early life of Joseph Smith developed into the teaching of polygamy by the Prophet. No doubt it was not taught to the general Mormon public as a doctrine, and Joseph's practise of it was not open. Joseph was a cunning man, and by his force of personality and his ingenuity he could keep down the reports and rumors of his immoral activities for a considerable length of time. Charles Shook is convinced that the whole fraud of the Book of Mormon and the Mormon Church had two underlying motives; namely, to make money and to gratify lust,⁴⁷ and there is other evidence that polygamy was in the minds of the leaders even before the Church was founded.⁴⁸ Even Joseph Smith III, son of the Prophet, and president of the R.L.D.S. Church from 1860 until 1914, at one time admitted the possibility that his father considered the possibility of

⁴⁶E.g., The R.L.D.S. Church has prepared a tract, Joseph Smith Was Not A Polygamist, written by Leonard J. Lea, and published by the Herald House.

⁴⁷Shook, TOEM, p. 126.

⁴⁸Shook, TOMP, pp. 14, 39-45.

the correctness of a doctrine of spiritual marriage, and that from this the doctrine and practise of polygamy developed.⁴⁹ A loophole in the strong language of the Book of Mormon against polygamy in Jacob 2:33-8 is left by the word "otherwise" in verse 39. The Prophet himself held that no man should have more than one wife, unless the Lord directed otherwise,⁵⁰ and of course it was possible for the Lord so to direct. The Saints today stress the fact that polygamy is wrong, even if it should be true that Joseph Smith practised it.⁵¹ In the early days of the Reorganization some Saints said that Joseph had taught the doctrine, but repented of it before he died.⁵² It may be that Dr. John C. Bennett and others suggested that he introduce such a doctrine of polygamy as a revelation, and as a "principle of exaltation," so that his and their desires might be fulfilled under a respectable guise.⁵³ Then Joseph saw what doom was coming because of it, and tried, though unsuccessfully, to get rid of it.

The numerous charges brought against the Prophet, the cutting off from the Church of people who opposed him, and the destruction of the Neuvoo Expositor built up a tremendously inflamed public opinion. When a warrant was sworn out against Joseph and practically the whole city council in connection with the destruction of the newspaper, Joseph fled

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 11-13.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 180.

⁵¹Elbert A. Smith, Differences That Persist (Independence: Herald House, 1954), p. 18, provides an example.

⁵²Shook, TOMP, pp. 150, 159-160.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 78, 113-14, 131-32.

with others across the Mississippi River into Iowa. He did this in spite of the fact that he had a writ of habeas corpus. But he returned and surrendered himself to the authorities, and was held in the jail at Carthage. But as soon as the troops were discharged from guarding the jail where Joseph and his brother Hyrum were being held, an armed mob broke in and murdered the two brothers.⁵⁴

Thus on June 27, 1844, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints lost their Prophet, and seemed farther from achieving their goal of establishing Zion in Independence, Missouri, than they ever were. Had Joseph lived, he might have been revealed as a fraud, and the Church might have dissolved.⁵⁵ But now their leader was their chief martyr, dying at the hands of a lawless mob. The many persecutions that the Saints had already endured, and this climax of the death of their Prophet confirmed the Saints ever more strongly in the conviction that their Church was true, their cause was just, and their goal of Zion would someday be achieved.

⁵⁴Davis, op. cit., pp. 299-306.

⁵⁵Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 126; Shook, TOMP, pp. 5-6.

CHAPTER V

FROM NAUVOO TO JOSEPH SMITH III (1844-1860)

The death of the Prophet left the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints without a designated leader. This did not mean there was no one who wanted to be the leader, or who would not advance a claim to the position of leadership. Although most of the Saints probably were sincere in their desire to maintain the church and to go on to their goal of Zion, a number of men seemed much more concerned with advancing themselves to the top position in the church. Some of them claimed to have received revelations designating themselves as the true successor to Joseph Smith, as well as other revelations. One even produced another sacred book, as Joseph had brought forth the Book of Mormon, and produced plates to back up his contention.

Sidney Rigdon came forth immediately to put forth his claim. Though he and the late Prophet had not been on friendly terms and he was not residing at Nauvoo at the time of the martyrdom, he hastened to that city. He claimed a revelation to the effect that he was to be the leader. For the immediate future the Saints were to scatter, with Pittsburgh as their center. He was soon cut off from the church, but gained a few followers and established his own "Church of Christ" in Pennsylvania.¹

James J. Strang was another who claimed divine revelation. He

¹George B. Arbaugh, Revelation in Mormonism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), pp. 133-35.

said that when the Prophet was shot, an angel came and anointed him to be Joseph's successor. He even produced some plates which were supposedly some ancient records, like the Book of Mormon. Other revelations came to him too. At one time his followers were the second largest faction of the followers of the Mormon Prophet. He established a group at Voree near Burlington, Wisconsin. His later stronghold was on Big Beaver Island, in Lake Michigan, where he ruled over nearly 3,000 people. He had himself crowned king, but he was shot and killed in 1856. The group he headed continued to function and look for a leader for some time. A few of his adherents have persisted down to the present time, but there has never been a successful attempt to revive the movement.²

The largest group that formed after the Prophet's death accepted the leadership of the Twelve, the quorum of the apostles. Brigham Young was president of the Twelve, so he was naturally the leader in the church in fact, although it was not immediately made official. At first Young held that it was not necessary for Joseph to have a successor in the full sense of Prophet. Joseph had given them the new religion, and now the apostles had the task of building the church on the foundation Joseph had laid. Prophecy had ceased with the Prophet's death, but the apostles had the authority to rule, according to Young. However, when others claimed that they had received revelations, Young also claimed the power to receive them. He only proclaimed one official revelation. He did claim to receive inspiration. Very likely it was the desire of the Mormon people for a prophet that caused him to make any claims of

²Ibid., pp. 146-58; Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (Independence: Herald House, 1943), pp. 321-22.

being a prophet. His chief concern was to be the ruler of the church. He claimed that Joseph, before his death, had received a revelation that declared that Zion was to be somewhere in the West. Accordingly, in 1846-1847 he led his followers out to Utah.³ They have grown rapidly, and retained the name "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints." They are often referred to as the "Utah Mormon Church" or the "Brighamite Church." In the minds of most people, this church is the continuation of the church founded by the Prophet.

Others who made claim to leadership and gathered little bands of followers around them were William Bickerton, Alpheus Cutler, George Hinkle, James Brewster, James Emmett, Gladden Bishop, Charles Thompson, Austin Cowles, David Whitmer, and Lyman Wight. William Smith, the Prophet's brother, met failures in attempting to start a church of his own.⁴

From the very time of the Prophet's death there were some who believed that it was God's will that he be succeeded by his son. At the time of the martyrdom, his oldest son, Joseph III, was only eleven years old, so there was no prospect of his asserting any leadership for some time. Still, some wondered, some hoped, some believed that he was to be the true successor to his father. It is said that they did not talk about it much, lest other claimants to the leadership should become concerned, and do away with the boy.⁵ Lyman Wight in his work expected

³Arbaugh, op. cit., pp. 172-78.

⁴Ibid., pp. 136-37.

⁵Ibid., p. 135; Davis, op. cit., p. 323.

Joseph III, sometimes called "Young Joseph," to assume eventually the position his father had held.⁶ William Smith felt that either his own son or Young Joseph would someday be the true leader of the true church.⁷

In the branch of Saints at Beloit, Wisconsin, was an elder named Jason W. Briggs. He had joined the church in 1841. The Beloit branch renounced the group led by Brigham Young as being in apostasy, in 1845 or 1846, and had begun to fellowship with the followers of James J. Strang. But Briggs again became convinced that he was following a false leader. He and most of the Beloit branch then left this faction, and became associated with William Smith's organization, with the understanding that Smith claimed the right to lead only as guardian for Young Joseph.⁸

In October, 1851, Briggs attended a conference held by William Smith and others, and became very dissatisfied with their claims. He at that time felt that none of the professed followers of the Prophet were true. He reports that in his perplexity he decided to do what the Prophet had done--ask the Lord for guidance. So on November 18, 1851, he says, he went out to pray on the prairie about three miles northwest of Beloit. In answer to his prayer he reports the following revelation:

Therefore, let the elders whom I have ordained by the hand of my servant Joseph, or by the hand of those ordained by him, resist not this authority, nor faint in the discharge of duty, which is to preach my gospel as revealed in the record of the Jews, and the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants; and cry repentance and remission of sins through obedience to the gospel,

⁶Davis, op. cit., pp. 345-46.

⁷Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 137.

⁸Davis, op. cit., pp. 350-52.

and I will sustain them, and give them my Spirit; and in mine own due time will I call upon the seed of Joseph Smith, and will bring one forth, and he shall be mighty and strong, and he shall preside over the high priesthood of my church; and then shall the quorums assemble, and the pure in heart shall gather, and Zion shall be reinhabited, as I said unto my servant Joseph Smith; after many days shall all these things be accomplished, saith the Spirit. . . . And the Spirit said unto me, Write, write, write; write the revelation and send it unto the Saints at Palestine, and at Voree, and at Waukesha, and to all places where this doctrine is taught as my law; and whosoever will humble themselves before me, and ask of me, shall receive of my Spirit a testimony that these words are of me. Even so. Amen.⁹

Briggs made this revelation known in the church, and soon the Saints at Beloit withdrew from the fellowship of William Smith. They sent the revelation to the branches mentioned, and to others. At this time they did not make contact with Young Joseph.¹⁰

About this same time another elder of the Saints had become dissatisfied with all the factions. Zenas H. Gurley had joined the church in 1838. He became dissatisfied with the claims of Brigham Young, and became a zealous worker and missionary in Strang's movement. But when Strang came out in favor of polygamy, Gurley, along with converts he had made at Yellowstone, Wisconsin, disavowed him. They too followed the advice of James 1:5 in the fashion of their late Prophet, and asked God for wisdom. Gurley reports that in the fall of 1851 he was sitting in his chair at the house of David Wildermuth, one of his converts at Yellowstone, when a vision of Strang's Beaver Island operation appeared to him, seeming to be a very disgusting thing. The voice of the Holy Spirit also spoke to him, telling him to cast off all who claimed to be

⁹Ibid., p. 352.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 352-54.

prophets, commanding him to preach the gospel, and promising that God would raise up a prophet to complete his work.¹¹

A short time afterward, Brother David Powell came from Beloit, which was about fifty miles away, with the revelation that Briggs had produced. Then at a meeting of the Saints at Yellowstone in the home of one of the members, there were religious manifestations, including speaking in tongues.¹² In answer to prayer, the Holy Spirit is said to have declared,

The successor of Joseph Smith is Joseph Smith, the son of Joseph Smith, the prophet. It is his right by lineage, saith the Lord, your God.¹³

Following this meeting, Elder Gurley wrote Jason Briggs, stating simply, "We have received evidence of your revelation."¹⁴

The experiences and contacts of Briggs and Gurley led to a conference at Beloit, Wisconsin, on June 12, 1852. The purpose of the meeting was to organize this group that was trusting in the Lord to send the seed of the Prophet to lead the church. In other words, they came together to reorganize the true church. The conference lasted two days, and made the following resolutions:

Resolved, that the conference regard the pretensions of Brigham Young, James J. Strang, James Colin Brewster, and William Smith and Joseph Wood's joint claim to the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints as an assumption of power, in violation of the law of God, and consequently we disclaim all connection and fellowship with them.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 355-56.

¹² Ibid., pp. 361-62.

¹³ Ibid., p. 362.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 362.

Resolved, that the successor of Joseph Smith, junior, as the Presiding High Priest in the Melchisedec Priesthood, must of necessity be the seed of Joseph Smith, junior, in fulfillment of the law and promises of God.

Resolved, that as the office of First President of the church grows out of the authority of the Presiding High Priest, in the High Priesthood, no person can legally lay claim to the office of First President of the church without a previous ordination, to the Presidency of the High Priesthood.

Resolved, that we recognize the validity of all legal ordinations in this church, and will fellowship all such as have been ordained while acting within the purview of such authority.

Resolved, that we believe that the Church of Christ, organized on the 6th day of April, A.D., 1830, exists as on that day wherever six or more Saints are organized according to the pattern in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Resolved, that the whole law of the Church of Jesus Christ is contained in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Book of Doctrine and Covenants.

Resolved, that, in the opinion of this conference, there is no stake to which the Saints on this continent are commanded to gather at the present time, but that the Saints on all other lands are commanded to gather to this land, preparatory to the re-establishment of the church in Zion, when the scattered Saints on this land will also be commanded to gather and return to Zion, and to their inheritances, in fulfillment of the promises of God; and it is the duty of the Saints to turn their hearts and their faces towards Zion and supplicate the Lord for such deliverance.

Resolved, that we will to the extent of our ability and means communicate to all the scattered Saints the sentiments contained in the foregoing resolutions.

Resolved, that this conference believes it is the duty of the elders of the church, who have been legally ordained to cry repentance and remission of sins to this generation, through obedience to the gospel as revealed in the record of the Jews, the Book of Mormon, and Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and not to faint in the discharge of duty.¹⁵

These resolutions indicate the fundamental beliefs, views, and purposes of the newly organized church, and indicate what the program

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 363-64.

of these Saints was to be. The arrangement was of course intended to be only provisional, to last until such time as the Lord would enable them to organize further. Particularly it was intended to take care of things until such a time as Young Joseph would come to them, in accord with the promises of God. Immediately missionaries went out to perform the work that had been decided upon. A pamphlet entitled "A Word of Consolation," based on these resolutions, was ordered to be written for the use of the missionaries.¹⁶

A great problem faced the new organization, the question of polygamy. These Saints abhorred the doctrine of polygamy, and knew they would soon be meeting the problem in their work. So they desired the word of the Lord on two questions: first, is polygamy of God?, and second, was any addition necessary to the pamphlet, "A Word of Consolation," before it could be published? At a meeting on January 9, 1853, they received a revelation which condemned polygamy and ordered three pages to be added to the pamphlet, in order that it might be made more "plain." These Saints were to contend against polygamy.¹⁷

Although these questions were now answered, the Spirit raised another problem for them. At the General Conference in October, 1852, the group had "Resolved, that the highest authority among the priesthood represents the legitimate President as a presiding authority."¹⁸ They felt that this was as far as they could go in organizing at this time.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 364.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 366.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 365.

However, shortly after the communication on polygamy and the pamphlet was given, the Spirit indicated that they must organize. At first the leaders set this down as a mistake.¹⁹

A few weeks later the Saints were concerned about the validity of the priesthood some of them held, since this ordination had been performed by William Smith. So they again petitioned the Lord for guidance. They reported that the Lord told them the ordinations were not valid, and that He commanded them again to organize. They felt themselves in deep trouble over the matter.²⁰

At the next meeting, held on March 20, 1853, they petitioned, "Will the Lord please tell us how to organize."²¹ After a while H. H. Deam came forth with the following word from the Lord:

Verily thus saith the Lord, as I said unto my servant Moses, "See thou do all things according to the pattern," so I say unto you. Behold the pattern is before you. It is my will that you respect authority in my church, therefore let the greatest among you preside at your Conference. Let three men be appointed by the Conference to select seven men from among you, who shall compose the majority of the Twelve Apostles for it is my will that that quorum should not be filled up at present. Let the President of the Conference, assisted by ten others, ordain them. The senior of them shall stand as the representative. Let them select twelve men from among you and ordain them to compose my High Council. Behold ye understand the order of the Bishopric, the Seventies, the Elders, the Priests, Teachers, and Deacons. Therefore organize according to the pattern. Behold, I will be with you unto the end, even so. Amen.²²

The next Conference was scheduled for April 6, 1853, the anniversary

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 366-67.

²⁰Ibid., p. 367.

²¹Ibid., p. 368.

²²Ibid., p. 368.

of Joseph Smith's founding of the church. The Saints met together on April 5, in order to seek instruction for organization. They did not get the desired instruction on April 5, so they tried again on April 6. They were then instructed to organize according to what was written. Disregarding the revelation of March 20, they assumed that this referred to their sacred books. When they attempted to carry this out, bitter differences of opinion arose, and it seemed for a while that the work would collapse. However, at a prayer meeting on the evening of April 7, some kind of spirit moved Deam to bring forth his revelation of March 20 as a basis of organization. The Spirit moved a number of the brethren to affirm that this was indeed a revelation of God, and thus the problem of organization was solved. The Saints explain the difficulties by saying that the Lord told them He had withheld His Spirit from the elders to show them that they did not have sufficient wisdom of themselves to organize.²³

On April 8, the reorganization work proceeded as follows:

At the opening of the session, the revelation of March 20 was presented to the conference, and accepted as such by unanimous voice after which the following persons were chosen as the three to select the seven to be ordained into the Quorum of Twelve Apostles: Cyrus Newkirk, Ethan Griffith, and William Cline, who selected the following seven persons, who were accepted by the conference, and ordained according to the instruction previously given: Zenas H. Gurley, senior, Jason W. Briggs, Henry H. Deam, Reuben Newkirk, John Cunningham, George White, and Daniel B. Rasey. The ordinations took place in the afternoon session in the following order: Henry H. Deam was first ordained by Jason W. Briggs, assisted by Zenas H. Gurley and Reuben Newkirk, then Henry H. Deam, assisted by Zenas Gurley and Reuben Newkirk, ordained Jason W. Briggs; then Jason W. Briggs, assisted by Henry H. Deam and Reuben Newkirk, ordained Zenas H. Gurley; and then Jason W. Briggs, assisted by Henry H. Deam

²³Ibid., pp. 368-70.

and Zenas H. Gurley, ordained the other four of the seven chosen.²⁴

On that day also, Jason W. Briggs was made president of the Quorum of the Twelve. Twenty seventies were chosen and ordained, and the Twelve were told in prophecy: "I give unto you the care of my flock on earth; take the oversight of them, as you shall give an account unto me in the day of judgment."²⁵

This is the story that the R.L.D.S. Church of today gives concerning the formation of their church, the reorganization of the church as restored through Joseph Smith, Jr., the Prophet. Thus the Saints of this body contend that their church is the "legal successor" of the Prophet's church. Apparently there never was any official deviation from the eventual goal of establishing Zion in the area of Independence, Missouri, although the question of an immediate gathering place bothered some.²⁶

In 1836 Jason Briggs left the church he had been so instrumental in organizing.²⁷ The son of Zenas Gurley, Zenas Gurley, Jr., also left this body about the same time.²⁸

The years 1853 to 1860 produced no events of great significance. They were important, however, for the church became better established, overcame obstacles and difficulties, and won many adherents from among

²⁴Ibid., pp. 370-71.

²⁵Ibid., p. 371.

²⁶Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 197.

²⁷Ibid., p. 196.

²⁸Davis, op. cit., p. 496.

Mormons in Illinois, Iowa, and isolated spots.²⁹ General Conferences took place biennially.³⁰ William Marks was one of the more important leaders to come into the fold during this time, joining as a result of persuasion and seeming manifestations of divine power and revelation. The whole period, from the very beginning of the reorganizing movement, was characterized by claims of great and mighty religious manifestations, such as speaking in tongues, appearance of angels, and the like.

As the months and years went by, there was no sign from Young Joseph that he intended to affiliate with the Reorganized Church or become its leader. The Saints decided it was about time they did something to convince him to assume the task they wished him to fulfill. In 1856, as the fifth anniversary of the church was approaching, two men were chosen to take a letter to Young Joseph. The two men chosen were Samuel Gurley, eldest son of Zenas, and Edmund Briggs, Jason's young brother. The letter was written by Jason Briggs. It told of the experiences of the church, and urged Young Joseph to come to them as leader. They found him living on a farm near Nauvoo with his new bride. Joseph did not receive them kindly at first. But he became more mild, and explained that he had had no sign from the Lord that he should do as they wished, and he would not act without such direct evidence. Gurley returned to Zarahella, the branch at Argyle, Wisconsin, where they had come from. Briggs preached and did farm work in the Nauvoo area. He had resolved not to return until Young Joseph came to the church,³¹ but Joseph

²⁹Arbaugh, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

³⁰Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 380-85.

reports that he "returned at his leisure."³²

This period also saw negotiations of the church leaders with Granville Hedrick of the Crow Creek branch. However, he did not see fit to join the Reorganized Church, but led in the formation of another "Church of Christ," known as the "Hedrickites." This group, which had lived primarily in the area of Peoria, Illinois, moved to Independence, Missouri, in 1867, and bought the lot which had been dedicated for the building of the temple.³³ They still own the "Temple Lot" today and are known as the "Church of Christ (Temple Lot)."

Although the Saints of today deny it, it seems that the general belief and official stand of the leaders of the Reorganized Church during the early years was that the Prophet had fallen into sin, that he had taught and practised polygamy, but that he had repented of it before he died.³⁴ The revelation he thought had come from God, he found actually to have been from the devil, and he had ordered it burned.³⁵ One authority states that Brigg's revelation included Joseph's sin, and says that the revelation of Joseph's sin and of the raising of one of his sons "to set in order the house of God" was the accepted authorization of the reorganization.³⁶ In January, 1860, the first issue of

³²Board of Publication, The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Independence: Herald House, 1952), III, 263.

³³Davis, op. cit., pp. 386-90.

³⁴Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 196.

³⁵Charles A. Shook, The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1914), p. 153.

³⁶Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 196.

The True Letter Day Saints' Herald appeared, being published in Cincinnati, with Isaac Sheen as editor. In this first issue, members of the church quoted Paul and Ezekiel as prophesying the Prophet's punishment for leading the church into sin and disorganization. However, in later years the church has denied Joseph's guilt and nearly all copies of this Herald have been destroyed.³⁷

During the 1850's Young Joseph gave thought to his future life and work, giving consideration to the possibility of a connection with his father's work, possibly as leader of the Reorganized Church. He also studied a little law during this time. In later writings he claims several visions, particularly in 1856, which indicated that he might be called to lead the church. He too trusted in the promise of God as given in James 1:5. People were also suggesting that he go to Utah and oust Brigham Young, taking over the leadership of the Utah Church. In answer to the question, "Why not go to Utah?" Young Joe claims to have received the answer from God in a vision, "Because the light in which you stand is greater than theirs."³⁸ This occurred only a few weeks before Elders Gurley and Briggs visited him. It may be that the main reason for Joseph's refusal to follow their wishes at that time was the dictatorial attitude with which Briggs presented the matter to him,³⁹ rather than a lack of a direct sign or evidence.

It appears that nothing of great significance happened from that

³⁷Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 196.

³⁸Davis, op. cit., pp. 399-402.

³⁹Board of Publication, op. cit., p. 262.

time until the fall of 1859. Young Joseph claims that the problems he had were gradually being settled during that time, and in the fall of 1859, the only question he had left was where his future life and labor should lie. Joseph's own answer is as follows:

This was determined by a similar manifestation to others that I had received to this effect: "The Saints reorganizing at Zarahemla and other places, is the only organized portion accepted by me. I have given them my Spirit, and will continue to do so while they remain humble and faithful."⁴⁰

During the winter he resolved to get in touch with the brethren of the Reorganized Church. The next chapter will treat his affiliation with the church and its history under his leadership.

⁴⁰Davis, op. cit., p. 403.

CHAPTER VI

MOVING TOWARD ZION--JOSEPH SMITH III AND THE CHURCH

Joseph Smith III was the leader of the R.L.D.S. Church from 1860 until his death in 1914. These years are of the utmost significance for the church. During this time the group progressed from being a group of less than five hundred scattered Saints¹ with many problems and worries, to a body of sixty thousand members,² with many of the Saints, including the President, living in Independence, Missouri, the site of Zion.

On April 6, 1860, Young Joseph Smith and his mother, who had remarried and was then Emma Smith Bidamon,³ attended the conference of the Saints at Amboy, Illinois. The morning sessions were devoted to organization and preaching. Then at 1:30 in the afternoon, Joseph came forward, and Zenas Gurley, Sr., spoke to the Conference, saying, "I present to you, my brethren, Joseph Smith."⁴ Then Joseph made his

¹Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (Independence: Herald House, 1943), p. 455.

²Charles A. Shook, The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1914), p. 8. This book was published in the year of Joseph Smith III's death, and gives this figure for the membership of the church in that year.

³Joseph Smith III and the Restoration, the memoirs of Joseph Smith III, which appeared serially in The Saints' Herald, 1934-1937, and were edited by Mary Anderson, his daughter, and condensed by Bertha Hulmes, his granddaughter. (Independence: Herald House, 1952), pp. 93-96. Hereafter this book will be referred to as JSR.

⁴Davis, op. cit., p. 404.

speech, relating his feelings and experiences, and indicating what they could expect of him if they made him their leader. He insisted that he had come in obedience to a power not his own, and that he had not come for motives of personal gain. He concluded his speech with the promise, "If the same Spirit which prompts my coming, prompts also my reception, I am with you."⁵

Isaac Sheen moved that Brother Joseph Smith be received as Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, and successor to his father. This of course was approved unanimously. Joseph and his mother were then received into fellowship with the church. Young Joe was then ordained President of the High Priesthood, and Elder Gurley said, "Brother Joseph, I present this church to you in the name of Jesus Christ."⁶

This was the big event of the Conference, but other organizing also took place. The Standing High Council was reorganized with twelve high priests, Isaac Sheen was ordained president of the high priests' quorum, and five of seven presidents of seventy were selected. Israel L. Rogers was ordained Bishop of the church. Quorums of elders, priests, teachers, and deacons, were organized, their officers ordained, and missions assigned.⁷

The major development of this conference naturally attracted some public attention. Though there were some threats against Joseph, and misgivings about the wisdom and safety of his remaining in the Nauvoo

⁵Ibid., p. 406.

⁶Ibid., p. 407.

⁷Ibid., p. 407.

area, there was apparently no violence. One newspaper editor hoped that a new era of Mormonism had dawned, an era which would greatly improve the name of the people. Joseph preached in the Nauvoo area without being disturbed. A few Saints came back to the city and made homes there. Two of Joseph's brothers, David and Alexander also united with the church.⁸

The work of regathering scattered Saints, at least uniting them with the church, went on steadily after Joseph became head of the church. Everywhere people who had been members of the original church united with the Reorganized Church. By 1868 the number of members had grown to more than ten thousand.⁹ In July, 1861, Joseph issued his first epistle, in order to facilitate further the work of gathering. He reviewed the circumstances of his acceptance of his prophetic calling, and urged,

In the name of bleeding Zion, I call upon all those who have been wandering in and by forbidden paths, and have been led astray by wicked and designing men, to turn from their scenes of wickedness and sins of convenience--to turn from their servitude to Satan, in all his seductive devices; from vice in every phase, and from the labor of sin, the wages whereof are ever death--unto their true and delightful allegiance, to the principles of the gospel of peace . . . to turn and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon. . . .

And in the name of the Lord of hosts, I call upon all the inhabitants of the earth to repent, believe, and be baptized.¹⁰

He calls himself at this time "President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints."¹¹ Various names were used in the early

⁸Ibid., pp. 408-11.

⁹Ibid., p. 455.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 420.

¹¹Ibid., p. 420.

years--God did not command any one name. The word "Reorganized" came into wider use as the years went by, no doubt in order to make the distinction from the Utah Church clear. Today the Saints of the R.L.D.S. Church are very insistent on the use of the "R."

The R.L.D.S. Church continued to carry out its mission work. In 1862 three men were sent on a mission to England. The English mission became a successful project.¹² In 1863 two men were sent to the West, especially Utah, Nevada, and California. They met with difficulties, and conflicts with Brigham Young's followers, but they found followers, and a considerable number returned to the Middle West.¹³ These were the two major missions undertaken during the time of the Civil War.

When the Civil War broke out, the Saints claimed that the original Prophet had prophesied it.¹⁴

The Saints took an early interest in Sunday School work. In 1864 they organized a Sunday School in St. Louis. In 1865 the Sunday School movement was endorsed by the First Presidency and the Twelve. They urged that every branch have such a school.¹⁵

The Saints were often very anxious to gather, that is, to assemble in Zion, or some place preparatory to Zion. But Joseph urged them to proceed slowly, and impressed upon them that while building the city of

¹²Ibid., pp. 421-31.

¹³Ibid., pp. 432-36.

¹⁴George B. Arbaugh, Revelation in Mormonism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), p. 128; Davis, op. cit., pp. 147, 418.

¹⁵Davis, op. cit., pp. 513, 525-26.

Zion was important, the building of the people to live there was more important than all else.¹⁶

In January, 1866, Joseph Smith moved his family to Plano, Illinois. The Herald had been moved there from Cincinnati in 1863, and in 1865 Joseph had become its editor.¹⁷ The headquarters of the church remained in Plano until 1881, when they were moved to Leamoni, Iowa.

The early years at Plano were in some respects formative years. Tithing had been an unsettled question. In 1867 the church adopted the interpretation that the law requires one-tenth of the property and one-tenth of the annual increase, which is still followed.¹⁸ Many make offerings in addition to this, or tithe their entire income.

Very early in his leadership Joseph outlined in detail the manner of serving communion, administering to the sick, and other rites and ceremonies of the church. His directions were followed, and made for unity in the church.¹⁹

Printing and literature also were a concern of the church. In 1867 the Inspired Translation of the Scriptures by Joseph Smith the Prophet was published. In 1869 the church secured a new steam power press. In the same year a children's paper, Zion's Hope appeared.²⁰

From the very early years at Plano, the church leaders looked

¹⁶Ibid., p. 448; F. Henry Edwards, A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants (Independence: Herald House, 1946), pp. 434-35.

¹⁷Davis, op. cit., p. 411.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 453.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 454.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 452-53, 455.

forward to a gathering nearer to Independence, preparatory to the gathering there.²¹

Missionaries went to Switzerland, Germany, the South Sea Islands, Australia, and Scandinavia. Because many converts emigrate to the United States,²² there are proportionately few Saints living in the foreign mission fields, compared with the converts made there. Missionaries have been active in Canada also, and have won many converts there.²³

In 1880 the R.L.D.S. Church gained official possession of the Kirtland Temple by legal action. The significance of this was that the church was legally recognized as the true successor of the original church.²⁴

The problem of gathering could never be avoided, by the very nature of the religion and its goal of Zion. The many converts who were coming to the United States, and needed homes, further complicated the problem.²⁵ The Order of Enoch, approved at a General Conference in 1870, was organized to consider the problem, and in 1875 a "removal committee" was formed, which made trips of investigation into various parts of the country.²⁶ The Order of Enoch bought about 3,250 acres of land in

²¹Ibid., p. 489.

²²Ibid., p. 482.

²³Ibid., pp. 483-87.

²⁴Elbert A. Smith, Differences That Persist (Independence: Herald House, 1954), pp. 44-45.

²⁵Davis, op. cit., pp. 488-89.

²⁶Ibid., p. 489.

Decatur County, Iowa, which borders on the state of Missouri.²⁷ The removal committee approved this site, known in early years as "The Colony," and named it Lamoni.²⁸ In 1879 a plan for the town was laid out. In October, 1881, Joseph Smith moved to Lamoni. The Herald also was moved there in the same month, and Lamoni became for all practical purposes the headquarters of the church.²⁹ It was a big step toward the gathering in Zion.

Even before the move to Lamoni, Saints were starting to trickle back to the Independence area. The first family returned in 1867.³⁰ Though some threatened them, the community as such did not oppose them. For some time after 1870, meetings were held in the courthouse. A branch was formed in 1873.³¹ In 1877 Joseph Smith paid a visit to the Saints living in the area.³² In 1878 a district was formed, though there were only thirty-five members. When the first church was dedicated in 1884, there were 350 members. In April, 1882, the General Conference of the church was held in Independence.³³ In 1888 the large "Stone Church," just north of the Temple Lot, was dedicated. This

²⁷Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 198.

²⁸Davis, op. cit., p. 490.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 493-94.

³⁰Ibid., p. 500.

³¹Ibid., p. 500.

³²Ibid., p. 499.

³³Ibid., p. 501.

church still houses the central congregation of the R.L.D.S. Church.³⁴

The early years of the Lamoni period were characterized by ordinary activity and intense missionary work. In 1890 a missionary was sent to the Hawaiian Islands to present the claims of the church and instill the goal of Zion in the hearts of the people there.³⁵ Mrs. Davis presents detailed accounts of this and other foreign mission work of the church in her book, The Story of the Church.

Organizations within the church, similar to the general Protestant pattern, appeared in the early 1890's. In 1891 the General Sunday School Association was organized by direction of the General Conference. In 1893, Zion's Religio Literary Society for young people was organized by a committee of the General Conference. About 1893 also the general organization of the Daughters of Zion, the church's women's organization, took place.³⁶

In 1894 the "Temple Lot Suit" occurred. The church did not get the lot, but it was legally recognized as the true successor of the original church of Joseph Smith, the Prophet. It was therefore a victory for the church, similar to the Kirtland Temple suit.³⁷

Two important institutions were built by the R.L.D.S. Church near the turn of the century. In 1897 Graceland College was dedicated at Lamoni, classes having started in 1895. Frederick M. Smith, the eldest

³⁴Ibid., p. 501.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 503-04.

³⁶Ibid., p. 513.

³⁷Smith, op. cit., p. 45.

son of Joseph III, was the first graduate.³⁸

In 1906 the church claimed a special command of the Lord to build a hospital in Independence. This they did, opening the building formally on December 16, 1909.³⁹

Other institutions opened by the Saints were a children's home in Lamoni (1907), and homes for the aged in Lamoni, Independence, and Kirtland.⁴⁰

A special revelation authorized the organization of stakes, gathering places for the Saints, at Independence and Lamoni in 1901. This caused great happiness among the Saints.⁴¹

Joseph Smith III had the misfortune of losing two wives by death. The first bore him five children, of whom three daughters survived her.⁴² His second wife bore him nine children, four of whom died at a young age. Of those who survived, Frederick M. Smith was born in 1874. He inherited the right of the first-born and became president in 1915, as revealed in 1906. Israel A. Smith, the president of the church at the present time, was born in 1876.⁴³ This second wife also died, and Joseph took a third. On January 12, 1898, he married Ada Clark, who bore him three sons. The second of these was William Wallace,

³⁸ Davis, op. cit., p. 510.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 510-11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 511-12.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 509.

⁴² JSR, pp. 118-22.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 125.

a Counselor in the First Presidency at the present time. The last son was born when Joseph was seventy years old.⁴⁴ The Saints of today regard this sequence of events as a special arrangement of the Lord to keep the leadership of the church in the hands of Joseph's family for a longer period of time.

In August, 1906, Joseph and his family moved to Independence,⁴⁵ where he died on December 10, 1914.⁴⁶ During his lifetime he had gained respect and honor from his countrymen for both himself and his church.

The Kansas City Journal paid him the following tribute:

He was the Prophet, but first of all he was the Christian gentleman and the good citizen. As such he lived; as such he died; and as such he will be remembered by all outside the household of his faith. His followers themselves can have no legacy of remembrance more honorable than this appraisal of the people among whom he lived and labored so many years.

Kindly, cheerful, loyal to his own creed, tolerant of those of others, standing for modesty, simplicity, good citizenship, embodying in his private and public life all the virtues which adorn a character worthy of emulation--such is the revelation which Joseph Smith leaves to the world, as the real interpretation of an ecclesiastical message translated into terms of human character.⁴⁷

This chapter has not dealt much with revelation and church organization and administration after 1860. The two are very closely connected. Joseph III produced some revelations which dealt mainly with appointments of officials in the church, and other administrative matters. The qualifications and work of the various leaders also

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 133-36.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 136.

⁴⁶Davis, op. cit., p. 515.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 516.

received treatment in revelation.⁴⁸ The revelation of 1873 confirmed in the minds of the Saints the opinion they already held, that members of the Quorum of Twelve should not be chosen except by direct revelation. The Lord desired at times that the quorums not be filled.⁴⁹

The duties of the leaders of the church remained about the same as in the time of the original church, according to Section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Revelations contained in Sections 120, 125, and 129 clarified some of the duties and functions and were intended to eliminate conflicts.

In presenting revelations, Joseph frequently refers to putting himself in condition to receive them, particularly by prayer. He states this as an introduction to the various revelations. The preparation sometimes included fasting also, for they fasted before their spring General Conferences, and that was when Joseph sought most of his revelations. Concerning the means and process of receiving his first revelation in 1861, on the subject of tithing, Joseph states:

While pondering over the matter after an earnest engagement in such prayer, I became aware of a power being exercised over me such as I had never before experienced. That which is embodied in the revelation mentioned was vividly impressed upon my consciousness and was presented in words to the church, as stated, . . . By this voice of the Spirit, or Word of the Lord, the burden of presenting and executing the law of tithing was, for the time being, placed upon the Quorum of Twelve.⁵⁰

When receiving revelations, he is always "in the Spirit." When the church had problems, he would, either according to his own judgment or

⁴⁸Arbaugh, op. cit., pp. 198-99.

⁴⁹Doctrine and Covenants 117:2; 119:1, 122:4.

⁵⁰JSR, pp. 602-03.

by direction of the Conference, seek the will of the Lord in the matter by direct revelation.⁵¹ But of course the revelations have to be accepted by the church in General Conference to be recognized.⁵²

It is not the purpose of the writer to analyze in detail the claims of any of the prophets of the R.L.D.S. Church to receive divine revelation. Whether Joseph III consciously faked the revelations, and if so, what his true motives were, the writer does not intend to discuss. Certainly it appears that Joseph III never used this power he claimed in order to become a dictator or wealthy man. Perhaps the power of suggestion was so strong that he worked himself into a state in which he really thought he received revelation. Perhaps he just did not want to let the people down. An interesting problem appears in the revelation of 1897, Section 124:3, where the Spirit of the Lord tells the leaders that He may be contradicted by the "spirit of revelation and wisdom," and if so, they should follow the latter. Whatever the case may have been, many people accepted his revelations as genuine, and the church directed its affairs according to the detailed plans Joseph brought forth as revelations. The problem of revelation is suggested for possible further research.

This chapter has presented the story of the R.L.D.S. Church in its quest for Zion under the leadership of Joseph Smith III. The next chapter will treat the story of the church since Joseph III.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 600-14.

⁵²Ibid., p. 613; Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 96; Doctrine and Covenants 120:1; 121:6; 123:29; 126:13.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHURCH SINCE JOSEPH SMITH III

Since the death of Joseph Smith III, the R.L.D.S. Church has been ruled by two of his sons. After the death of Joseph III on December 10, 1914, his eldest son, Frederick Madison Smith, became President of the church. That means he became also Prophet, Seer, and Revelator. He took office in 1915 and lived until 1946. In that year his brother, Israel Alexander Smith became President. Israel A. Smith is President at this time. Frederick Smith had no sons.

The church has continued its steady growth during this period. At the time of the death of Joseph III it probably numbered about sixty thousand members. It has more than doubled in size; it now numbers between 130,000 and 140,000 known members in the United States and Canada and about 10,000 members in foreign countries.¹

Frederick M. Smith knew well ahead of time that he would someday be President.² In 1902 he was called to be president by a revelation of his father.³ A revelation in 1906 made this clearer, for misunderstanding had arisen concerning the previous announcement.⁴ From 1909

¹Supra, p. 2.

²Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (Independence: Herald House, 1943), p. 516.

³Doctrine and Covenants 126:8. Hereafter this book will be referred to as DC.

⁴DC 127:8.

on Fred Smith took over a large part of his aged father's work of presiding over the church. Joseph III instructed his son concerning the work of leading the church before he died.⁵

Fred Smith was an educated man. He received his doctor's degree from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1915.⁶ He had studied at the University of Iowa for two years, and then constituted the first graduating class of Graceland College in 1908,⁷ before Graceland became officially a junior college. He studied at the University of Missouri, and then at the University of Kansas, where he received his M.A. degree in 1911. A fellowship then took him to Clark University, where he received his Ph. D.⁸ His aspirations to higher education led one elder to declare from the pulpit that Fred Smith was leading the church to hell.⁹

Young Fred had been deeply interested in sociology, and this was one of his major concerns in his studies. Whatever his faith may have been in the religion of his father and grandfather, he found that it had a social ideal which gave it validity and purpose. He applied what he had learned from sociology to the affairs of the church.¹⁰

"Frederick hoped to be able to present . . . an interpretation of his

⁵Davis, op. cit., p. 515.

⁶Ibid., p. 515; George B. Arbaugh, Revelation In Mormonism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), p. 201.

⁷Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 200.

⁸Ibid., pp. 200-01.

⁹Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 200.

grandfather's doctrines of Christianity and sociology which would be capable of being put into actual practice."¹¹ He was beginning to do this before his father's death. When he became complete head of the church, he began to work zealously for the Zionite ideal.

The revelations produced by Frederick Smith for the church number only seven, and are extremely subjective.¹² He does not speak of them as "revelations," but claims only "inspiration." In his final addition to the Doctrine and Covenants, he says he acted "under such inspirational impulsions as were given me at the moment."¹³ God never speaks in these messages. They reveal no doctrine, but deal only with appointments to offices.¹⁴ Thus Smith claims inspirational guidance for building up Zion, and little or nothing more. His messages all come to him around Conference time, following meditation and prayer, as the introductions to the revelations indicate.

The concept of Zion was not always the same to everyone. The concept of Zion as a cooperative social order implied the need of a great deal of money to bring it to pass. The majority of people still considered Zion a place of refuge, preparatory to the return of Christ. The thoughts of many were expressed in the verse:

¹¹Ruth L. Smith, Concerning the Prophet Frederick Madison Smith (rev. ed., 1924, p. 152, quoted in Arbaugh, op. cit., pp. 200-01.

¹²Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 201.

¹³DC 138.

¹⁴Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 201.

In the hour of tribulation
 In the hour of deep despair,
 You will find the hand of Satan
 If you're scattered everywhere.¹⁵

About 1923-1924 the financial burden began to cause protests, and the controversy that resulted shook the church. The protests were met by strict insistence on submission to the first presidency. The leaders sought a centralization of power, including bringing control of finances under the power of the president, contrary to the law of the church recognizing the supremacy of the bishops in financial matters. At a meeting held on April 16, 1924, organized irregularly to put the bishops at a disadvantage, those present tried to legislate against the bishops. A document was presented, and adopted after much argument, which said that supreme directional control must rest in the Presidency. Thus "Supreme Directional Control" became an unpleasant expression to many Saints. The bishops objected, and at the next conference the Zionite ideal was denounced as a bold program of popery and exploitation. Nevertheless, the provisions of the document were finally accepted.¹⁶ Frederick Smith then deposed the bishops, being directed "through the voice of inspiration."¹⁷ About two thousand people left the church after this action.¹⁸ Along with the inspiration deposing the bishops, and in other official inspired messages, Frederick Smith in the name of

¹⁵Saints' Herald, October 23, 1929, quoted in Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 203.

¹⁶Arbaugh, op. cit., pp. 203-04.

¹⁷DC 135:1.

¹⁸Arbaugh, op. cit., p. 204.

the Lord warned the people to avoid contention and to strive for unity. The messages contained frequent references to Zion and the work of establishing it, for which unity was necessary.

The movement back to Independence, the "goodly land," was a gradual one. The establishment of headquarters there was a gradual process. In 1906, Joseph Smith III moved there. In 1920 it was officially declared to be the headquarters of the church.¹⁹ The gradual growth of the number of Saints has been characteristic of the whole movement. Despite difficulties, most of the people have believed in and hoped for, the establishment of Zion in Independence. Missionary work was carried on regularly during this period also, and contributed to the growth of the church, as well as to the number of Saints in the Independence area.

As growth continued, other steps of development and organization became necessary and were made possible. In April, 1916, the Independence Stake was divided into Independence, Kansas City, and Holden stakes. In May, 1917, the Far West Stake was organized.²⁰ In 1920 the Independence Stake was organized as the "City of Zion" and was put under the direct supervision of the Presidency, Presiding Bishopric, and Standing High Council.²¹

On May 24, 1921, the Saints' Herald was issued from Independence

¹⁹Davis, op. cit., p. 528.

²⁰Ibid., p. 528.

²¹Ibid., p. 509.

for the first time.²² During this period the Herald House, the publishing house of the church, was established. The Herald House also operates a retail book store. This organization prints and publishes all the literature of the church, and handles a variety of materials purchased from other publishing companies, including Concordia Publishing House.

In 1923 the church purchased the Campus, in Independence, which consisted of twenty acres of land and a large home. It was obtained for the use of the Saints in recreation, education, and worship. Sunday evening services are held on the Campus during the summer.²³

It seems that there was no specific divine direction claimed for the erection of the Auditorium, at least not at the time it was begun. Nevertheless, on February 2, 1926, excavation was begun for the erection of this building, just south of the Temple Lot. In 1927 the April Conference was held in the lower part of the building, and in October, 1928, the Conference took place in the upper assembly chamber of the Auditorium.²⁴ The Auditorium is now considered the world headquarters of the church.

In 1932 the church began its "Pay the Debt" program. Ten years later the debt was paid, and the church established a new policy of reserves, indicating a certain stability and soundness of administration in the church. In 1942 also the new Sanitarium was ready for use,

²²Ibid., p. 528.

²³Ibid., p. 528.

²⁴Ibid., p. 528.

having been completed with the help of government funds.²⁵

In 1946 Fred M. Smith died, and his brother, Israel A. Smith succeeded him. The writer has found no record of any claim of divine revelation ordering this. However, it is the right of the president to name his successor. A revelation is not necessary.²⁶ The writer has knowledge of five messages from the Lord brought to the church by this prophet.²⁷ These again deal mainly with appointment of officials in the church, encourage the people in their Zionic hopes, and several times commend the people for their unity and tolerance. These messages also were all received at Conference time. The spiritual condition of the people still is of utmost importance in establishing Zion, for "Zionic conditions are no further away nor any closer than the spiritual condition of my people justifies."²⁸

In 1950 the church purchased a building in Independence for use as a Social Service Center. The money came from the oblation fund of the General Church. The Kansas City Stake operates a subsidiary center.²⁹

Numerous details could be given concerning the history of the R.L.D.S. Church, to illustrate the activity of the Saints in their

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶A. B. Phillips, Letter Day Saints and What They Believe (Independence: Herald House, n.d.) p. 13; DC 43:2.

²⁷DC 139 given April 9, 1946; 140, April 7, 1947; 141, October 2, 1948; 142, April 2, 1950. Another revelation is reported in 1954. The writer does not know any revelations claimed between 1950 and 1954.

²⁸DC 140:5.

²⁹This Is Our Church (Independence: Herald House, n.d.) p. 14.

attempts to win followers and establish Zion. The hope and goal of Zion has remained strong in the church and its leaders. In theory at least, all activity of the Saints is designed to contribute to the establishment of Zionic conditions. And shortcomings in the Saints are hindrances to the establishment of these ideal conditions.

In literature which the church distributes today, the writer has found no mention of the charismatic gifts being in use today, and the earlier prominence of claims of such gifts does not receive much stress in present-day popular writings. While this certainly does not mean they have disregarded this phase of church principles, it does indicate a change in attitude toward their importance. It seems that in practice those signs were claimed only for establishing the church, particularly in establishing the Reorganization, and declined as the church grew stronger.³⁰ This is particularly noteworthy in view of their stress on having things just as they were in the New Testament times. The main claims of the church to being the true and only true church still go back to the events of 1820-1830.

The membership of the church in Independence, the City of Zion, has fallen far short of keeping up with the growth of the population.

³⁰Arbaugh, *op. cit.*, p. 61. His observation concerns Mormonism in general. In recent literature of the R.L.D.S. Church, L. Wayne Urdike, in Checking the Church of Your Choice (Independence: Herald House, 1956), p. 6, urges the church-seeker to find a church with all the same spiritual gifts that were present in the New Testament times, not just some of them. A. B. Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 18, refers to the restoration of spiritual gifts, but refers to the restoration in the past, with no reference to more recent occurrences of the gifts. Albert A. Smith in The Great Restoration (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), p. 12, enumerates "ancient gifts and blessings" which the church claims as "wisdom, knowledge, healing, and prophecy," neglecting glossalalia, or speaking in tongues.

One of their writers stated in 1943 that Independence was a city of about 18,000, and the church claimed a membership of 7,053.³¹ In 1957 the church claimed 10,638 members in the Independence area,³² which constitutes a considerable growth in members. However, in that time the population of Independence has approximately tripled, standing somewhere over the 50,000 mark. The writer has no indication that this causes any anxious concern for the church leaders, however. They believe God has promised that Zion will be established in Independence, and their faith rests on that promise.³³

The final chapter will present a summary of the church's history, and endeavor also to summarize the present position of the church in its beliefs and practices and its effect on the world.

³¹Davis, op. cit., p. 519.

³²Sue Gentry, "Area Churches Near Peak In Equipment And Staffs," The Independence Examiner, February 18, 1957, p. 6, col. 4.

³³G. Leslie DeLapp, The World Needs Zion (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), pp. 36-38; DC 42:10c; 45:14; 64:8.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHURCH TODAY

The R.L.D.S. Church today is the product of the process of history that has been presented in the previous chapters of this study. It is an unusual church body--it is difficult to put it into a category. Dr. F. E. Mayer, in his book Religious Bodies of America, classifies all Latter Day Saints under "Millennial Bodies," which they surely are.¹ Then too they have similarities with the Holiness and Pentecostal bodies, with their stress on New Testament church organization and charismatic gifts. But their doctrine of the Restoration, and their goal of building up a specific geographical community as Zion mark them as a distinctive church body. The Utah Mormons, with whom the R.L.D.S. Church has a common origin, share such a goal of Zion, but have it located in Utah. The stress on gathering the Saints into specific localities, eventually into one locality, rather than having them witness where they are and build up the kingdom of God there, marks them as very distinctive on a very practical level. Gathering is made essential to salvation.² They appear to have no serious concern for building the kingdom of God anywhere else. That is at best of only secondary importance, despite their assuming of the task of "evangelizing

¹F. E. Mayer, Religious Bodies of America (Revised edition; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), pp. 449-58.

²G. Leslie DeLapp, The World Needs Zion (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), p. 25.

the world."

The ecclesiology of the R.L.D.S. Church does not extend beyond the denomination itself. One of their writers has made their attitude very explicit by saying, "Some . . . have urged that the Church of Christ is composed of individuals scattered in the various churches. Obviously this is a fallacy."³ To them the entire church was in apostasy until the great Restoration in Joseph Smith. Theirs is the true church, all other churches are false, and displeasing to God. But of course this loses some of its significance in view of the basis of salvation they teach, and their millennialistic doctrine. The major significance of belonging to the true church besides simply doing what is right, or having the distinction of belonging to the true church, is the position of special honor that will belong to the members during the millennium.⁴

In operation the Saints are proselytizers. In practice, everybody is fair game for their workers; the writer knows this from experience. Practically all of their converts are from other church bodies. Thus many people in the church have been influenced by other religious factors besides those present in the R.L.D.S. Church. Generally it is people who are already rather religious by nature that join this church.⁵

Church government and church officials represent a mixture of Old

³John W. Rushton, The Apostasy and the Restoration (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), p. 13.

⁴Charles R. Field, We Believe in Jesus Christ (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), pp. 20-22.

⁵Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (Independence: Herald House, 1943), p. 280; M. T. Lamb, The Mormons and Their Bible (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1903), pp. 10-13.

and New Testament principles, interpreted in the church's own way. The priesthoods are rooted in the Old Testament, while other officers find their precedent in the New Testament writings. The organization is complex, there are many officials and types of officials.⁶ Very few of the ministers and other workers in the church are paid. Missionary work and care of the churches goes on with unpaid workers who provide their living from their own funds.⁷

The doctrine of Christ held by the church is unusual, too, as might be expected. Millennialistic teaching will naturally change the doctrine of Christ. The Saints do not seem to be concerned with a doctrinal formulation concerning Christ, but their views can be seen from practical expressions concerning him and his work. He is called the true Son of God, part of the Godhead, but is not made equal with the Father. Statements which Christ made according to his state of humiliation are taken to apply to his whole eternal existence and nature. The Saints speak of an "atonement" performed by Christ, but its relation to salvation is stated thus:

We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all men may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

We believe that these laws and ordinances are: (1st) Faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ; (2nd) Repentance; (3rd) Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; (4th) Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.⁸

⁶Doctrine and Covenants 104; F. Henry Edwards, A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants (Independence: Herald House, 1946), pp. 336-48; supra, p. 74.

⁷Davis, op. cit., p. 454.

⁸Statement of Belief (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), p. 2, statements 3, 4.

To these principles are often added the Resurrection of the dead, and Eternal judgment. The six "Gospel Principles" are taken from Hebrews 6:1-2.

It appears that faith is another good work, a matter perhaps of humility and obedience, agreeing to what the Lord says. It seems further that according to their theology, Christ died to make it possible for man to earn his salvation.⁹ Their theology does add the statement, "His blood atoneth for those who have ignorantly sinned,"¹⁰ but the full implications of this are not presently clear to the writer.

In speaking of Christ, the Saints declare that he was active in the beginning of the world, that he has constantly been very active in caring for his church, even during Old Testament times, that he appeared in his spiritual body to the brother of Jared in 2200 B.C. Christ is particularly the head of the church; he is directing the building of Zion, pleading for loyalty and faithfulness to his program. He will be the Lord of the millennium, and will have an important part in the final judgment.¹¹

The doctrine of Christ held by the R.L.D.S. Church has some resemblance to Arianism, but has involvements that go far beyond this early heresy.

The Holy Spirit is very important to the Saints. He aids in

⁹Elbert A. Smith, What Did Jesus Preach? (Independence: Herald House, n.d.), pp. 14-16; Elbert A. Smith, Differences That Persist (Independence: Herald House, 1954), p. 63.

¹⁰Hield, op. cit., p. 30.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 7-31.

revelation, and his gifts are earnestly sought after. The possession of his gifts is necessary to be a true Christian believer. Yet he is apparently not regarded as true God. The church is not truly Trinitarian, despite the fact that "The Testimony of Three Witnesses" in the preface to the Book of Mormon ends with the words, "The honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen." This is the only statement the writer has found, in which any reference is made to divinity on the part of the Holy Spirit.

In discussion of a concept of the Godhead, Chris Hartshorn, a leader and writer in the R.L.D.S. Church illustrates the uncertain position of the church on the Godhead by stating:

The church has not taken any official action to define its concept of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. No one is, therefore, able to state dogmatically that this view, or some other view, represents the church.¹²

While little children cannot receive baptism because they are not old enough to understand it, they may receive the patriarchal blessing, even though they do not comprehend what is going on.¹³ The purpose of the patriarchal blessing, offered to adults and children alike, is "to give an authoritative, priestly blessing, invoked by a spiritual father representing God and the church."¹⁴ The blessings are given by the patriarchs, also called evangelists.

Despite the various strange doctrines, practises, and attitudes to

¹²L. W. Spitz, "The Reorganized Church Versus Utah Mormons," under "Letters," The Lutheran Witness, LXXV (July 3, 1956), 250.

¹³Elbert A. Smith, Approach to the Patriarchal Blessing (Independence: Herald House, 1940), p. 2.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 2.

which the church adheres, it has nevertheless been able to assume a respected position in Independence and other communities where it is represented. Reference has already been made to institutions operated by the church in Independence and other communities.

The Saints are scattered very widely. There are seven organized stakes, which means simply that areas designated and organized as such have a greater concentration of the Saints. The seven stakes are: Independence (Center Stake of Zion), Kansas City, Holden, Far West, Lamoni, Detroit, and Los Angeles. Four of these are in Missouri, and one borders Missouri. Districts are organized where the concentration of Saints is weaker. In 1955 there were seventy-six districts in the United States and Canada. Foreign missions are carried on in the British Isles, Australia, Germany, Holland, the Society Islands, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and the Isle of Pines.¹⁵

Many questions are left unanswered in this study of the R.L.D.S. Church. Any period of the history of the church might furnish an opportunity for further study and research. Doctrinal considerations also offer abundant opportunities, particularly in their interpretation of the Bible. A psychological study of Joseph Smith or of Mormonism would be a possible undertaking. Revelation in the church could be studied under a psychological topic, or as a topic itself. A comparative study of this group and the Utah Mormons could also occupy the time and effort of the enterprising research scholar.

¹⁵Merle P. Guthrie, "Report of the Department of Statistics," The Saints' Herald, Conference Daily Edition, April 8, 1956, pp. 21-25.

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