

The DISCERNER

“HEREBY KNOW WE THE SPIRIT OF
TRUTH AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR”

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QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL THE DISCERNER

by Dr. Wm. A. BeVier

As most of you know, the primary ministry of the Religion Analysis Service is to provide good literature refuting the cults and other aberrations of Christianity from a Biblical perspective. This includes each issue of *The Discerner*.

The reading of good books has long been a part of an enlightened church. The Apostle Paul, enduring what was probably his last imprisonment before his martyrdom, writing for Timothy to come to Rome stated: "When you come, bring with you . . . the books, but especially the parchments" (II Tim. 4:13). To the end of his earthly life, Paul was reading. We can do no better, assuming the books have good content.

I personally read a number of books a year (confessingly, not all I should). Sometimes I'm reading two or three different books at a time, not necessarily all on cults. But as I converse with other people, I find this is not a common practice today.

Many people have difficulty reading in our day; many try to avoid reading out loud, even from the Bible, in public. Some have claimed they don't read from the Bible because "the King James is too

hard to read." However, the several "modern" translations and versions available have not significantly increased reading of the Bible.

A number of religious publishers and writers are producing a large number of books each year, but most seem to be more for entertainment than to be informative.

We see the results of this deficiency in reading ability and its accompanying lack of interest in reading in today's college students. There are some students who don't even purchase or read the textbooks assigned in their courses. Sometimes the excuses for not doing this are: "The books are too hard to read," or "The books are boring," which many of us take really to be equivalent to the first statement.

College textbook manufacturers are aware of this problem and during the past decade college textbooks have become smaller in size and in the number of pages, and more photographs and other visuals have been added.

Professional educators have a variety of opinions why this situation exists. But many attribute it to the influence of television on

awareness today of the situation, realizes the attention span of American people is steadily becoming shorter. The 30-second TV commercial is about the limit for some people. It is difficult for such individuals to read a book.

Anyone who reads to any extent realizes reading can be, and is, work. As a teacher I do distinguish between "reading" and "studying." The latter requires much more effort. In fact, the word translated "study" (II Tim. 2:15, KJV) comes from the Greek word spoudezo (to exert one's self, endeavor, give diligence, Thayer). God requires this of us as those who must give an account to Him, but many Christians don't seem to realize it. God has given us a written revelation (Gk. graphia, the Scriptures). He could, and at times has, used other means. But for now His primary revelation is in the written Word. A complete study of this Word would eliminate most, if not all, of the cults.

There are a couple of other items I want to share with you.

Some time ago two members of our Board of Reference were called home to be with the Lord: Dr. John G. Mitchell and Rev. R. F. McInay. The purpose of our Board of Reference is to have noteworthy and trusted Christian leaders who are familiar with R.A.S. and are willing

to commend the ministry. A careful and prayerful search was conducted for men to add to our Board of Reference. It is my privilege to announce to you that the two new members of the Board are Dr. Norman L. Geisler of Charlotte, NC, and Dr. David Hunt of Bend, OR. Both of these men are well-known to students of the cults.

In a previous issue of *The Discerner* I reported some of the background on Yahweh Ben Yahweh, the self-proclaimed Son of God, and his group, The People for Truth (Temple of Love). Current news reports are that he and 15 of his followers are now on trial in Florida for conspiracy in 14 murders, two attempted murders, arson, and other crimes. At last report, the trial was still ongoing.

One other item in conclusion. At the last meeting of our Board of Directors, we received a report on our financial situation. We have a special need for contributions at this time. The literature we distribute pays for itself, but not for our other expenses, such as building rent, utilities, printing, and the modest salary we attempt to pay our Office Manager. All of these expenses need to be paid from gifts to R.A.S. Please consider sending a gift to the office. We appreciate those who faithfully and regularly contribute to the ministry.



A new and important book, fresh from the publisher and printer: *Jehova Witnesses and The Hour of Darkness* by Derik Barefoot. 156+ pages with 20 illustrations and fully documented. Reveals the occult influence and subversion and subliminal messages in the *Watchtower* publications. \$9.95

RLDS: MORMON, MAINLINE OR WORLD RELIGION?

Carol Eskridge

(All bold print in quotes are from the author)

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) is the second largest branch of the Mormon movement begun by Joseph Smith, Jr., in 1830. While the Reorganized Saints do not wish to be called "Mormon," they hold to definite Mormon doctrines and thinking, and continue to separate their doctrinal and revelatory beliefs from those of Christendom. Joseph Smith recognized the difference between Mormonism and Christianity and made a clear statement to that effect in April 1834 in the church monthly journal, "Evening and Morning Star."

It is very difficult for us to communicate to the churches [Christian] all that God has revealed to us, in consequence of tradition [Christian Biblical sufficiency] for we are differently situated from any other people that ever existed upon this earth, consequently those former revelations cannot be suited to our conditions.

When Joseph Smith claimed to supernaturally translate the golden plates given him by an angel, he said they were both authentic history and scripture. The narrative tells the story of Israelites who settled the shores of ancient America. Although the Book of Mormon quotes a vast amount of King James Scripture, it states that the Bible has been corrupted: *thou seest that after the book [Bible] hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book (p. 36). Thou fool, that shall say, a bible, we have got a bible, . . . ye need not*

suppose that it contains all my words (p. 156).

Joseph found the Bible insufficient enough to alter 54 of its 66 books, and he completely removed the Song of Solomon. Joseph's revision was not published until 1867 when his son published the Inspired Version for the RLDS. Without undermining the authority of the Bible, Joseph Smith, and his descendants, could not have made their "revelations" church law by canonizing them.

Biblically knowledgeable persons never would have accepted the Mormon distinctives of Prophet-President, Priesthoods, extra-biblical revelations, pre-existence, Zion, temples, High Priests, baptism for the dead, spiritual encounters with the dead, salvation after death, eternal progression, submission of financial statements to a bishop, and the belief that Joseph and his descendants have a better gospel.

Again, with no solid Biblical base of authority, Mormonism could easily pick up passing trends and incorporate them into their belief system. Thus came the idea that Mormonism is a religion built on shifting sands. Converts to all branches of Mormonism were encouraged to "pray about" anything they wanted to believe, rather than take Jesus' admonition to "search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

The book of Mormon contains a promise that if you will ask God, He will give you a testimony that the book is true. Mormonism was founded on feelings and "spiritual experiences" so that an experience is automatically thought to be from

God. However, answers to the needs of the early Latter Day Saint church were directed through Joseph's channeling them in the first person language of God, and Joseph was to be the only speaker for God to the church: *I say unto thee, no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in the church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jr., for he receiveth them even as Moses; (Doctrine & Covenants 27:2. The D&C is a compilation of revelations from the Smith prophets).*

One of Joseph's unique revelations was his story of Enoch. On eight extra pages in the RLDS Inspired Version of the Bible, Enoch preached and built a city, *and the Lord called his people, Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind; and there were no poor among them . . . and Lo! Zion in the process of time was taken up into heaven (Gen. 7 "Inspired Version").* According to Joseph, God promised Enoch He would establish another righteous people in the latter days. He would "gather" them and build the latter day Zion—this became the goal of every Latter Day Saint.

Joseph sent a colony to Jackson County, Missouri, where Zion would be centered. However, due to many difficult circumstances, and to the unique beliefs and practices of the Saints, Zion did not prove to be a safe haven for Mormons. They were driven out of Independence and Jackson County. In the meantime, Joseph and most of his heirarchy still lived in Kirtland, Ohio, where they were building the first Mormon temple to be completed. But, trouble was brewing there also.

The state of Missouri, weary of Mormon vexations, had set aside land for the Saints to settle. Church leaders chose Far West, Missouri in Caldwell County as their headquarters. With the dedication of ground for a temple they aimed for

another Zion community. Joseph fled from Kirtland to avoid being mobbed, and joined the Saints in Far West in January of 1838: *Gentile fears of Mormon domination in northwestern Missouri grew as the number of Saints increased. By the fall of 1838 there were over 3,000 Mormons living at Far West, giving the Church political control of Caldwell County. The county clerk, two judges, thirteen magistrates, and all the militia officers were Mormons (F. Mark McKiernan, "Far West, 1838-1839," in The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History, Coronado Press, 1973, p. 124).*

Hostilities mushroomed as rumors and accusations raged between Mormons and Missourians. During these hard times, the "gathering" principle kept bringing new arrivals, stoking the fear developing in Missouri as Mormonism took on militancy. A secret band of "Danites" put fear in both Missourian and Mormon; nothing was done to cross these violent defenders of Joseph Smith until the Missouri-Mormon War of 1838 erupted, ending their threat to the citizens of Missouri. When the war was over, Joseph Smith, and other Mormon leaders, were charged with treason, murder, arson, and robbery.

The Saints were driven from the state, but Joseph languished in jail at Liberty, Missouri. In the spring of 1839 he was allowed to escape and slipped away to Illinois to join the Saints waiting for him there: *They were instructed by their leaders to "gather" to the various sites where the Church was currently building its communities—in turn to Kirtland, Ohio, Independence and Far West, Missouri, and Nauvoo, Illinois. In all these places, the Gentile neighbors were eventually excited to uneasiness, then to hostility toward the sect . . . But Mormonism, the Gentiles*

observed, was more than the unorthodox doctrine of ardent believers. It was a burgeoning centralized, corporate sect committed to action upon its beliefs—and those beliefs entailed the reordering of society and the conversion of the world (Robert Bruce Flanders, Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi, University of Illinois Press, 1965, p. 3).

Each time Joseph's enthusiastic prophecies or predictions failed, he lost a certain amount of his church people. Some would continue to believe what he first taught, clinging tightly to what they believed had been given to a true prophet before he fell into new doctrine. Others threw up their hands in disgust and just quit believing anything, while some found reality in the Jesus of the Bible and blended into the Christian community.

Joseph next purchased property on an Illinois bend of the Mississippi River and built the city of Nauvoo. The state was kind to the Saints, giving them a generous city charter and leaving the Mormons pretty well to their own way of doing things at first. "Gathering" caused Nauvoo to grow until she became the largest city in Illinois. But Joseph hadn't learned his lesson in Far West and was soon playing one end of politics against another.

With the blessing of the state, Joseph developed the second largest armed force in America, the Nauvoo Legion. Regular parades of military might did little to endear Latter Day Saints to neighbors—who, by 1843, were hearing rumors that Joseph had given a revelation teaching polygamy. Most of his leading men were already practicing "the principle."

In Restoration History: the Middle Period 1840-1900, an RLDS Temple School manual, we find statements on page 23 about the

importance of the Nauvoo temple: *Few public buildings were erected in Nauvoo, churches included because of the enormous investment being made in the temple [Joseph never built a church] . . . It was the tribute costly beyond measure . . . But more than this, the temple was a building to link heaven and earth in some mystical-literal manner that was peculiarly Mormon.*

Joseph was never far from trouble. It came from all directions, bringing the constant fear he would be taken back to Missouri. Then there was the anger of the Christian community who had heard Joseph poking fun of most of their beliefs. There was the anger of non-members (called gentiles) who watched with foreboding as a large white temple was built on a hill overlooking the city. Rumors about masonic type rites occurring in the temple were circulating, and Joseph's teachings of a plurality of gods marred his image even more. Neighbors watched with disdain as Latter Day Saints "baptized for their dead" in the river. They knew a font for such rites was being installed in the basement of the rising temple.

In 1844 Mormonism was getting a sense of the power she could have in setting up a utopian Zion. Five thousand British Mormon immigrants had settled with the Saints, and others were gathering daily. Joseph Smith was Prophet, Seer and Revelator to the Church, Mayor of the city, Trustee for all church real estate, Lieutenant General of the Nauvoo Legion, and Judge. Joseph had become despotic. Because of Nauvoo's special city charter, he had come to think of Nauvoo as a state within a state, and himself as sovereign of his domain.

William Law, one of the members of the three-man presidency of Latter Day Saintism, used every means possible to warn

Joseph of the impending danger. In frustration and desperation, Law published a newspaper, the Nauvoo Expositor that publicly exposed Joseph's polygamy and other doctrinal aberrations, his real estate and political ploys, and his misuse of the city charter. Joseph's solution to the problems was to destroy Law's press. This caused his downfall. To deny freedom of the press was more than his enemies would tolerate.

Despite Joseph's declaration that he would be triumphant over all his enemies, Joseph and his brother, Hyrum, were arrested. The Governor was unable to protect the Smith's from the anger of a mob set on destroying them. They were shot to death while confined in the Carthage, Illinois jail on June 27, 1844.

The Saints scattered after Joseph's death. Various men rose to claim the prophet's office. Brigham Young led the largest group to Utah, while others led small groups that generally became polygamous. In outlying areas there were Saints who rejected the polygamy revelation. One man among them was Jason Briggs. He decided to teach the "restored gospel" the way he believed it had been originally: *On November 18, 1851, after he prayed . . . Briggs, penned the following instructions: ". . . saith the Lord . . . concerning the church . . . I have not cast off my people; neither have I changed in regard to Zion . . . preach my gospel as revealed in the . . . Book of Mormon, and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants . . . and in mine own due time [I] will call upon the seed of Joseph Smith . . . he shall preside over the high priesthood of my church, and then . . . the pure in heart shall gather, and Zion shall be reinhabited . . . whomsoever will . . . ask of me, shall receive of my spirit a testimony that these words are of me" (W. B. "Pat" Spillman, The hastening Time,*

Herald House, Indep., MO 1988, Vol. 3, pp 6, 7).

In 1860 Joseph Smith III came to these waiting Saints at Amboy, Illinois stating: *I have received [spiritual] manifestations pointing to the position which I am about to assume . . . There is but one principle taught . . . that I hold in utter abhorrence, that is a principle taught by Brigham Young . . . I have been told that my father taught such doctrines . . . I believe my father was a good man, and a good man never could have promulgated such doctrines. (History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Herald House [HH], MO, 1952, pp 247, 248).*

Thus was the RLDS Church begun on the basis of revelations by Briggs and Smith with a preset hatred toward polygamy, and a desire to uplift Joseph Smith's "seed" as leaders of the Church. They alone were to have the power to speak to the Church for God.

Young Joseph identified the doctrines that led to the destruction of the city, but he was never able to see his father's full part in the downfall of Nauvoo. He remembered only the father who loved him; who took great pride in his young son. *[Nauvoo] was the closest approximation the church had to the ideals of Zion carried in scripture and doctrine. The political power and secular authority also served Smith [III] as reminders of the ultimate goal of the church: the merging of church and state into a benevolent theocratic-democracy (Roger D. Launius, Joseph Smith III and the Creation of the Reorganized Church. HH, MO, 1990, p. 40). Smith set his mind to erase the excesses of Nauvoo from the minds of his followers: he rejected the concepts of plural marriage, secret temple rituals, plurality of gods,*

blood atonement (Launius, p. 111).

As "Mormon" became a byword to the Christian community, the RLDS church found itself constantly having to explain they were not **those** other Mormons. And since "Mormon" became deeply entrenched with the Utah group, the RLDS began saying, and eventually believing, "we are not Mormons." This did not change the fact that the RLDS were and are Mormon in their distinctives, theology, scripture, and mind-set. They continued to scorn the Christian view of salvation, and laughed at the idea of hell. They carried on with the baptismal regeneration idea and taught that children had reached the age of accountability on their eighth birthday. They taught the Jesus of the Book of Mormon not the Christian Jesus of the Bible who is God incarnate. Most viewed those who believed in biblical inerrancy as somewhat ignorant and deluded. They continued publishing the story of Joseph Smith, Jr.'s first vision in which God and Jesus were two separate look-alike beings who said all Christian churches were an abomination to God. They taught that each of us are incarnate pre-existent beings, thus minimizing the miraculous incarnation of Jesus Christ and His eternal existence. Joseph's binding priesthood offices remained with the RLDS, who have a pyramidal priesthood with a pope-like prophet at the head. Their priesthood includes (among others) the office of "High Priest," once more minimizing Jesus and the holy office which only He can occupy for a Christian. They held on tightly to a literal "Zion" built by men who would act as "leaven" in society as they teach principles learned from the "center place." (Now from the Temple School.)

Yet, to make sure the RLDS did not take on the most extreme Latter Day Saint dogmas, the leaders of the

church never published Joseph Jr.'s biography—no books with his sermons, no books with his writings—only those sayings of his that are quoted and edited appear before RLDS eyes. Robert Bruce Flanders says of him: *Smith's papers, correspondence, Journals, and collections of Church documents [revelations?] fill six large Volumes (Flanders, p. 4).* Few RLDS know that.

Joseph Smith III's dilemma was making his church appeal to scattered Mormons while making it acceptable to the Christian community. The RLDS began a treadmill path of being all things to all people, and catering their revelations to the convenience of the moment, or the passing trends of the times: *[The RLDS] held to the priesthood offices that most Saints knew, was not without the spiritual gifts that all the groups experienced, and promised the communal salvation of "Zion" (Blair, McKiernan, Edwards, p. 210). Out of the mainstream, fishing mainly in the Mormon net, the earliest RLDS missionaries sought to reclaim the old-time Saints to the fold. But they also (and increasingly) fished in the nets of so-called mainline religions . . . They would deliberately seek to be identified with mainline American religion, while at the same time trying to be known as the true Mormon religion (Richard P. Howard, "A Reorganized Perspective," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, Vol. 24, No. 4, Winter 1991, pp. 81, 82).*

But what principles were they to use? Were they to be based on the Bible? At a General Conference in 1878 this resolve was passed . . . *this . . . body . . . does hereby authoritatively endorse the Holy Scriptures [IV] . . . the Book of Mormon, the revelations of god contained in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and all other*

revelations which have been or shall be revealed through God's appointed prophet . . . accepted by the church **as the standard of authority** (*Compilation of General Conference Resolutions 1852-1910, Iowa, 1911*). General Conference Resolution 215 still applies today.

Smith had difficulty unifying the diverse elements being pulled into the Reorganization from the scattered Mormons. He couldn't get a consensus on anything: *Speaking for God . . . Smith finally completely centralized the appointive power in his office with the declaration of a revelation . . . this document established Smith as the supreme power in the church . . . Smith found it necessary to curb the democratic excesses that he found rampant in the General Conference (Roger Launius, Restoration Studies II, Mo., 1983, pp. 106-107)*. This was to become typical of RLDS revelations of convenience.

As the years wore on, and the acceptance of RLDS neighbors was earned, Joseph Smith III said that the "great principle, the gathering" would become necessary as the difference between the gospel which the RLDS preached became more apparent next to the gospel of "saving grace." However, he was most careful in initiating any such move. Before his death, Joseph was to see the gathering begin anew in Independence, Missouri. Church headquarters were moved there while his son, Frederick Madison Smith, was presiding over the RLDS church in 1920.

Frederick was the first prophet to have a higher education. He incorporated the philosophies of his day into his dream of Zion: *With prophetic vision in early youth, he saw the glittering towers of Zion, and they never ceased to beckon him on (Stone Church Bulletin, 3, 24, 1946)*. He took his belief in the improvement of society through

church programs into the field where he began secular RLDS businesses in the name of Zionic projects.

Smith was organized, intelligent and quick. He expected the same from his church. His father had been patient, arriving at his goals through persuasion and revelation, but Frederick was different when he stressed: *All should consecrate of their talents, abilities, and substance for the prosecution of the great work intrusted to us (D&C 132:3—speaking for God)*.

His followers were belligerent in demanding that the Prophet be accountable to the church. Joseph III had established a way to get around this by simply having a revelation for what he felt the current need was—knowing it would be rare for the Saints to vote against a "word from God." Frederick soon found this was the only way, but made the mistake of phrasing his General Church Resolution as "supreme directional control." The words were offensive to the Saints. Given time he was able to impose control, but lost a third of his followers in the process. Many new factions formed out of the RLDS at this point.

In 1946 the prophetic mantle was passed on to Frederick's brother, Israel Smith. His years of leadership brought unity, even though he continued stressing the need for more work, more diligence, more devotion and more obedience. But, if he was a task master, he was a gentle one! He was like a thread weaving through the hurts of his people and drawing them back together. Perhaps Israel did his job too well. In his twelve years as Prophet, unity was restored. Israel was so angelic that the people forgot the treatment they had received under other Smith's. They forgot they were a dissident group of Mormons prone to break into fragments.

Israel's half brother, W. Wallace Smith, became the next Prophet-President in 1958. One of his early revelations said, in the first person language of god . . . *take full advantage of the willingness of my people to follow the leadership which I have provided and to which my people have given their consent.* **This principle is at the heart of the gospel which I restored through my servant Joseph and which is preserved in the reorganization of my people (D&C 146:2).** It took years of Wallace's leadership for the trusting RLDS people to realize the presidency had taken too much advantage. The shifting sands of Latter Day Saintism had undulated with the passing trends once again, but they were in for more changes than they were willing to accept.

During the decade of the 60's, the church picked up the trends of the times, incorporating them into the D&C as the word of God. W. Wallace pronounced his right as prophet to reinterpret "principles" given by earlier "prophets." In D&C 147 he says: **the demands of a growing church require that these principles shall be evaluated and subjected to further interpretation. This requisite has always been present.**

Joseph had taken the issues of his day and made these changing trends cardinal points in his church. By not using the time-tested teachings of the Bible for guidance the RLDS fell into a sort-of-situation-ethics-revelation-from-the-prophet-mentality, passing it from father to son.

As divisions again sprang leaks in RLDS unity, W. Wallace gave the first modern revelation regarding the building of an RLDS temple in Independence: *The time has come for a start to be made toward building my temple in the Center Place (D&C*

149:6). And in D&C section 150 in accordance with the themes of the sixties and the Vietnam war: *The lives of many are being sacrificed unnecessarily to the gods of war, greed, and avarice. The land is being desecrated by the thoughtless waste of vital resources. You must obey my commandments and be in the forefront of those who would mediate this needless destruction while there is yet day. Continue your study toward defining the purpose and selecting a place for erecting a temple in my name for the teaching of my priesthood (150:7, 8).* **And two years later:** *You who are my disciples must be found continuing in the forefront of those organizations and movements which are recognizing the worth of persons (D&C 151:9).*

Since these revelations, the RLDS have prided themselves in being in the forefront of women's organizations for equal rights, peace movement coalitions, councils of churches, hunger movements, etc. All of these works will be centered in the new Temple and, according to RLDS doctrine, will act as a "leavening" agent in society to help in establishing Zion procedures throughout the world.

When Wallace B. Smith, son of W. Wallace, was ordained Prophet in 1978, he continued his father's third world, one world, philosophies. In keeping with current rationality, and in being in the forefront, Wallace had a revelation in 1984 calling for the ordination of women to the priesthood, and the building of the temple to be "dedicated to the pursuit of peace." The delegates at World Conference voted to approve this revelation in haste and have been repenting at leisure ever since. One congregation after another has left the RLDS organization.

Not only has Wallace B. Smith been able to exercise supreme directional control, but he has

managed to rig the conference to the point that issues he doesn't care to discuss are simply dismissed as "out of order." He has succeeded in silencing many of his priesthood members, thus causing the rest to either leave or cower in silent submission.

All through this demanding period Smith has been preaching about the peace, love and reconciliation to be engendered through temple ministries. Babel-like, the RLDS are seeking to make a name for themselves as did Joseph. Smith claims his spiral temple: **"gives an impression of seeking to link that which is earthbound with a creator who is beyond our reach"** (Saints Herald, October 1988). The temple spiral reaches the height of 340 feet.

As in his great grandfather Joseph's day, the results of Smith's lack of concern for the rights and feelings of his people have been disastrous for the group. Several thousand people have left the main body of the church, and have established "Restoration Churches." Rather than turning to Jesus, these restorationists are creating branches that teach Joseph's fundamental doctrines as taught by Joseph Smith III. Most have maintained their RLDS membership, but do not support the hierarchical church led by Smith.

When Smith pushed through his revelation on the ordination of women, his words were canonized the same week they were set before the conference. He then claimed absolute authority for himself: **No other person or group is designated to declare for the church's consideration what does or does not constitute the Divine mind** (Conference Bulletin, 1986).

An insightful Methodist preacher has penned these words:

Instant canonization trivializes the genre of scripture, separates the [RLDS] church from the wider Christian community, fosters anti-democratic trends in polity, and concentrates ecclesiastical power in the hands of a few . . . the RLDS practice [implies] the insufficiency of the Bible (Larry W. Conrad, "Scripture in the Reorganization: Exegesis, Authority, and the 'prophetic mantle'" Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer 1991, p. 77).

After RLDS leaders had shunned devoted members, whose only sin was believing what they had been taught, one RLDS writer dared to claim that the RLDS were more than just Christians . . . *the church is wider than any one sect or denomination, broader than even the Christian faith. Indeed, it encompasses every member of the whole human family who, on whatever terms, senses his or her dependence on God . . . [the RLDS are] beginning to emerge from recent stresses to a new threshold of involvement with the world . . . Recent prophetic instruction has challenged the church . . . to bring the ministry of love and compassion to human need wherever that need exists. Finally, the current temple project has the potential of challenging the RLDS church . . . to make a lasting mark on the pursuit of peace and reconciliation, at every level of human experience, from personal to global . . . already RLDS churches, in dozens of local and regional jurisdictions are finding new ways to unite with other churches and agencies to increase the presence of God's love in the world (Howard, p. 79).* Does the matter of uniting RLDS representatives with Christian church councils mean they believe in the Bible, or the same Christian doctrine? President Smith, in an

interview, has said: *God is in this work! . . . the current success of some of the fundamentalist churches and the television evangelists may provide instructive lessons for us . . . their success illustrates the fact that many people are looking for easy answers. When the evangelist says all the answers to today's problems are in the Bible and the answers are thus and so that is an attractive message to some people. We accept the universal Christ of the Book of Mormon . . . This gives us an additional image beyond the Christ of the New Testament . . . because of our additional scriptures and insights, we have more to work with and perhaps more to do* (Saints Herald, July 1985, p. 7, 10).

The RLDS Church Historian expressed a rather typical RLDS view of Christianity when he said: *The religious picture is one of an amorphous mass of sometimes contending, largely indifferent, and yet frequently cooperating denominations and sectarian establishments. Each seems intent on furthering its own aims, identity, and sphere of influence. Each is preoccupied with maintaining itself as an institution* (Howard, p. 81).

By infiltrating Christian society, the RLDS Church has caused many to believe they are trying to become "mainline Christian," and that they no longer believe in the Book of Mormon and their past Doctrine and Covenant revelations, but this simply is not so. President Smith, in remarking about the new RLDS Book of Mormon study series, states: *Our scriptures are so valuable to us that we can never exhaust the potential for further study and deepened faith because of them . . . As I have read and re-read the Book of Mormon, I have discovered timeless truths which are the essence of scripture. That has validated the Book of Mormon for me . . . I have*

found my life changed by the truths and understandings contained in it . . . It is important for us to study the three standard books of scripture (Saints Herald, Aug. 1987, Editorial). And in the World Conference Bulletin 1986: *Whenever members of the First Presidency are asked to bear their testimony about our three standard books of scripture, we are always pleased to have the opportunity to affirm our faith and support for the Word of God which is contained in these divinely inspired books.*

A temple brochure states: *Building the Temple and its supporting facilities is a project . . . which has the potential for uniting the church in common purpose in a way which has not been possible for many years.* To try and unify their church, and to try to attract new people, the RLDS are building a Temple that is costing them nearly 80 million dollars. Temple ministries are to be accented along with the global peace movement, the global hunger movement, and the global ecological movement—at a cost in broken hearts and families that far outweighs its construction costs. Thousands who have freely given lives of service to this Church have been silenced, their churches have been padlocked, and their rights have been disdained and ignored by the RLDS hierarchy. Hundreds of small groups have formed dissident RLDS off shoots.

The saddest toll in the ongoing emphasis on human socialistic works, is that thousands have not received the life-changing ministry of Jesus Christ because they have not been taught to look to Him for salvation, and changing lives. "Born again" phrases are scoffed at. Bible ways and methods have been devalued in RLDS literature to the point that those RLDS who do bother to read the Bible generally do so with a pre-set thinking that

blinds them from Biblical understanding. Christians who use plain, easily understood Scripture in the presence of an RLDS are often told, "that's just your interpretation,"—a perfect result of being told Scripture must be constantly reinterpreted and added to for our day.

The RLDS church tends to place its president and contemporary thinking above the Biblical witness and the Christian tradition. This tendency began when Joseph Smith, Jr. interpreted his vision to condemn all existing churches . . . Had Joseph Smith, Jr. held a high view of the Bible, he would not have so radically revised Genesis, Isaiah, or the prologue to John. It is surely no coincidence that persons most offended by Mormonism are persons with a high, even fundamentalist, view of scripture (Conrad, p. 75).

Perhaps the idea the RLDS are now promoting, that their church and their priesthood act as the incarnation of Christ in the world, best reveals their lack of understanding Christianity. However, the RLDS believe by implementing their current stand on poverty, pacifism, and ecological purity they are Zion builders, and are acting as "leaven" in society, leading towards the building of God's kingdom. The RLDS Basic Beliefs Committee has said: *Zion . . . promotes the expression of God's reconciling love in the world, thus bringing forth the divine life in human society. The church is called to gather her covenant people into signal communities where they live out the will of God in the total life of society* (**Exploring the Faith, Herald House, 1970, p. 172**).

It is easy for the RLDS to speak of love in such terms. It is easy for the Saints to demonstrate this love

to those who do not disagree with them or to those who do not challenge them to think deeply about what they are doing.

President Smith could best live out these kindnesses by publishing an honest church history for his people. He would do well to publish Joseph Smith's papers and letters. But he could do his best by directing his people's loyalty away from the church and putting it where it belongs—in the person of Jesus Christ—not in a building or a program or a church. This, and this only, will make Wallace's church a part of Jesus Christ's church which the gates of hell cannot prevail against.

President Smith and his people will find happiness and growth in a church that does not need to be periodically "restored." When RLDS lives are given to Jesus and not to a church, Christ will bring true reconciliation and enduring peace through all circumstances in life. The RLDS will then belong to the true "body of Christ" and will at long last find the true meaning of "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). They will find joy in the true work of the Lord.

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

"If ye continue in MY WORD, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32).

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the EVERLASTING COVENANT, make you perfect in every good work TO DO HIS WILL, WORKING IN YOU THAT WHICH IS WELL-PLEASING IN HIS SIGHT, THROUGH JESUS

**CHRIST; TO WHOM BE GLORY
FOR EVER AND EVER. AMEN"**
(Hebrews 13:20, 21).

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SIGNIFICANT TRENDS DURING OUR PRESENT GENERATION

by Prof. John E. Dahlin

So far as my knowledge extends, there were no distinct trends during the earlier centuries. Life was simple, and traditions were ongoing from one century into the next one without any distinct change. This has changed when we give consideration to that which has taken place in the present century. Let me illustrate this: in this period of time we have witnessed a complete breakaway from the past. This has taken place in a number of areas.

First, we see this taking place in the creation of the World Council of Churches. No such massive union had ever taken place during nearly two thousand years of church history or since the first century, when Christ launched His Church (Mt. 16:18). The world situation was that during World War II which ended in 1945, at least 25 million people had died in the most terrible war in human history. Starvation faced tens of millions of people, especially in Europe. Communism was a serious threat to Europe and the Middle East.

Most church leaders of that time had majored in the social gospel, and it was understandable that the principal church leaders felt responsible for some action that would bring help to a troubled world. Since religion was anchored in the social gospel approach, it was logical that some world-wide arrangement be made at this juncture of history.

There had been one antecedent event, namely, the formation of the Federal Council of Churches in 1906. It was no church union. It might be called a league of churches, which would need cooperation and help with the formation of a definite church union. At the meeting which created the World Council of Churches there were 169 denominational representatives. Most of these leaders were associated with the liberal wing of Christianity. I checked the roster of the names of the leaders of these many churches. I didn't find a single Fundamentalist listed. It is much easier for Liberals to promote a major church union than it would be if a considerable number of Bible-believing leaders were also present. It would create theological controversy, and it would prevent a major church union.

I was present as an unofficial observer at the second World Council meeting held at Evanston, Illinois, where I was the pastor of a church. I wanted to be present myself to see what would happen when the two principal questions were up for discussion and disposition. They were: should the personal return of Jesus Christ be proclaimed by this great union of churches? And, is there a future place of distinction for the Jewish nation here on earth in God's kingdom? Both of these subjects were voted down by a decisive majority of the delegates. It

was stated officially that the two questions were taken spiritually and not literally. A small minority was present when the decision was reached on the subjects mentioned. They insisted that these doctrines should be proclaimed and not spiritualized as proposed. I thought at that time that the minority was at the wrong meeting. I believed that these two doctrines should be taken literally, for this is the way they are stated in God's Word. It is very difficult to achieve church union when there are men present who have strong convictions on Bible doctrine. I was happy to be there and see how a church union was achieved by the World Council of Churches.

THE INNER CONFLICT WITHIN THE REALM OF CHRISTIANITY

We have discussed the takeover by the Liberals when they established the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches. It did not end the inner struggle among a large number of people who continued to exercise much spiritual influence among a large number of American churches. They did not sit on the sidelines but moved ahead aggressively. We see this clearly in the establishment of the national Association of Evangelicals. While still being in the minority, this organization became the voice of the Evangelicals nationally considered. It also had annual national conventions. It demanded, furthermore, a proportional representation when the government established its policy of supervision over the radio and television systems. The Liberals had sought domination exclusively over these vital public systems. In addition, the Conservatives demanded proper representation in the selection of chaplains for all the branches of our armed forces. This demonstrated that the Liberals could not control the national policy of Christianity in America. The large minority would continue to speak for millions of people in the country.

This was no small achievement by the Conservative wing of Christianity in America. Within the same period of our history, large conservative elements separated from many of the large religious denominations and organized independent denominations and functioned separately across the United States. These separatistic bodies also organized new colleges and seminaries, which represented the Conservative position in Christian education.

Other groups became completely independent in establishing new denominations and no longer bearing the denominational names. These became altogether independent and had a full independent ministry. Much of the missionary enterprise also became non-denominational. Nationally known Fundamentalists had their programs over the radio and television networks.

In our summary, you, as the readers of this article, will realize that the Liberal forces have not taken over a total control of religion in America. This large scale breakaway of the Conservatives from the Liberals has been a great spiritual blessing to our country. The conservative wing of the Southern Baptist denomination has the official control of the largest denomination in the country. This situation may change, and two major Baptist denominations may emerge. As of now both sides are almost even numerically.

I might mention, also, that other more separatistic denominations have carried out a very effective ministry throughout America since 1950 when the broad cleavage took place nationally.

Denominationally considered, this then gives a broad overview of major events in Christendom which have taken place since the early part of this century.



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