

MORMON HISTORY:¹

By Denver C. Snuffer, Jr. ©2015

I want to thank Tony Gilbert for the opportunity to get together in his home to give this talk. Tony and I were talking at my office a few days ago and I mentioned there was a subject I wanted to address in a talk, and he suggested to do it in his home with this group. I was glad to have that opportunity. I wish all Mormons (Latter-Day Saints and otherwise), were like Tony Gilbert. He is a man of religious convictions, but has a broad and tolerant mind. He is reflective, contemplative and, like Joseph Smith, is willing to consider truth wherever it may be found.² If all men were like Tony Gilbert, we would have a lot fewer arguments between those who believe in the restoration. He has the right kind of religious attitude to establish peace.

I want to address the topic of Mormon History. To help understand the topic I will redefine some terms that will be used in this paper. Redefining the terms will help clarify the concepts I want to address. First, this paper will not cover the writings of anti- Mormons as part of Mormon history. Everything we have from the anti-Mormons fits into a different category than the topic discussed in this paper.

As to the anti-Mormons, going back to the very beginning the first book length anti-Mormon work on history was compiled by Philastus Hurlbut. He gathered affidavits from those who lived near the Smith Family, and others who encountered the Smiths, in an attempt to discredit Joseph Smith. Hurlbut's affidavits were gathered together by E.B. Howe and published in the early anti-Mormon book (*Mormonism Unveiled*). Then there was Ezra Booth who wrote a series of nine letters that were published in the Ohio Star newspaper and also included in *Mormonism Unveiled*. Booth was a disaffected member of the church. He was one of those who in June of 1831 was among the first 23 who got ordained to the high priesthood in Kirtland³ and then he turned on Joseph and he wrote a series of nine letters that were blasting him.

It does not appear that Ezra Booth intended to lie. In his letters He thought he understood the truth and the truth was bad enough to condemn Joseph. He apparently believed that if he just said what he saw, heard, thought and understood that it would be enough to condemn Joseph Smith. The problem is that his attitude was viral. That predisposition to interpret Joseph in a negative light colors all the anti-Mormon writers.

The early anti-Mormons include Alexander Campbell whose pamphlet *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon With an Examination of its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of its Pretences to Divine Authority*, was published in 1832. John C. Bennett published his *A History of the Saints*, shortly following his excommunication.

Later, and even current, anti-Mormon material has been produced by Fawn Brodie (*No Man Knows My History*), Grant Palmer (*An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*), Ed Decker, Mark Hoffman, Steve Benson, Jon Krakauer (*Under the Banner of Heaven*), and many others.

Anti-Mormon history also is derived from fiction. People assume novels written by Zane Grey or Arthur Conan Doyle portray the history of Mormonism accurately.

¹ This is based on a talk given in Bountiful, Utah, on November 22, 2015. The content has been edited and modified to make it more readable. Additional source materials have been added.

² See, Letter from Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, Mar. 22, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri, published in *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 1840.

³ The minutes of the conference can be found in *JS Papers, Documents Vol. 1*, pp. 324-327. Joseph ordained 5, Lyman Wight ordained 18.

To understand Mormon history, and in particular Joseph Smith, it requires us to let the people directly involved provide their own interpretation. We must permit Joseph Smith the right to define what he meant. If we impose an interpretation upon Joseph Smith we can distort the history. We must be careful not to stand back at arm's length and judge him by concluding: "I impute this to you..." Or, "I take what you're doing to mean this..." Or, since I know what was happened, therefore, "I want to color what you have to say by this..." Joseph may not agree with any of the meanings we want to assign, assume or impute.

To be accurate it requires us to say, "None of my attitude and none of my disposition means one iota. Joseph: tell us what you mean. Joseph: explain yourself. Joseph: account for your sayings. Joseph, what do you mean by that?" We must let him explain himself. If he does not explain, then we must put his words out for others to consider and allow for several possible interpretations. But interpretations are only that: a guess based on what we think. Joseph may not at all agree with our conclusions. We must be realistic about that.

It is not fair or accurate to stand back and based on a hostile or faultfinding heart to claim, "Joseph, you said *this* here, and you said *that* there, and those two are irreconcilable. Therefore Joseph you are a liar!" Instead we must recognize that it is only fair to allow him the right to have his own meaning and intent: "Joseph, you said this here, and you said that there. What do you mean by these two statements?" We must let him explain it. He may have a constant and consistent theme in his own heart, and we must allow him to explain that to us. If all a critic chooses to do with Joseph Smith is to throw rocks, it is possible to multiply and magnify what seem to be contradictions. Everyone can be assaulted with apparently legitimate criticism with an approach such as, "on Tuesday you said the sun was shining! But then on Wednesday, you said it was raining. It cannot be both sunshine and rain! Therefore you're a liar." The anti-Mormon critic often uses that approach. Ignoring the context, ignoring the difference between a sunny Tuesday and an overcast Wednesday lets the unfair conclusion seem to be correct.

That is the problem with a great deal of the anti-Mormon stuff. Therefore if you are going to consider anti-Mormon source material as part of Mormon history, you must recognize what they provide has been colored, interpreted and the assumption they make is that Joseph was a fraud. You must take into account their coloring, bias and underlying conclusion and allow for that as you read their material. It can be done. Some of their material is valuable. But the context must be considered.

This paper will not consider those sources. We will instead consider the work written by people who believe in the restoration, people whose religion is Mormonism. Even though these individuals may hold radically different viewpoints, their religion is "Mormonism." They accept the *Book of Mormon* as true, or at least truthful. They may not regard it as authentic history, but they believe it has religious significance and meaning. They likewise accept Joseph Smith as a prophet. They may not altogether rank him with Moses or Peter, but would rank him at least as important as Martin Luther or John Knox. I may disagree with them on many points, but we are still all Mormons. Inside this "Mormon" universe there remains enormous conflict and tremendous disagreement about Mormon history. It is because there is a great range of viewpoints about Mormonism that there is a tumult of opinion, strife and contention among "Mormons."

To begin to understand I will define the term "apologists" as those people who have written the orthodox story claimed as the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. That includes, most notably, B.H. Roberts. B.H. Roberts was involved in the final work of publishing the *Documentary History of the Church*. That history is attributed to Joseph Smith using many documents, letters, journals and talk transcripts to relate Mormon history. It was compiled by many contributors. It is seven volumes and was originally published with footnotes provided by B.H. Roberts beginning in 1902.

Roberts is also responsible for writing the serialized *Comprehensive History of the Church*, a six volume interpretation of Mormon history. It was composed by Roberts as a series of magazine articles published between 1909 and 1915 in the *Americana* magazine. Later these articles were gathered and published in the six volumes of the *Comprehensive History*.

B.H. Roberts is primarily responsible for framing the apologetic history. There are others who added, but he is foremost in establishing the framework.

When I was baptized into the LDS Church, I was given a book written by William Berrett. It was a single volume titled *The Restored Church*. It was one a glossy paged book with color photos and retold the faithful, orthodox interpretation of LDS history. It was used at the time of my baptism in 1973 in the Seminary and Institute programs. I checked and you can still find it on Amazon if you're looking for a copy. I read it, then B.H. Robert's *Comprehensive History* and then the *Documentary History of the Church* in the first year or so following baptism.

Others in the category of "apologists" are Joseph Fielding Smith whose *Essentials in Church History* is likewise "orthodox." George Q. Cannon wrote *The Life of Joseph Smith*. I will not list them all, but it includes Wilford Woodruff, Orson F. Whitney, John A. Widtsoe, and even Glen Leonard and Thomas Alexander. Organizations also support the apologetic view of the LDS church and includes FARMS and FAIR. As part of FAIR the *Mormon Interpreter* defends the apologist's view of Mormon history. They get irritated when the traditions are examined and lash out to justify the traditions of the institutional LDS church.

Like the anti-Mormons, there are writers of fiction who reinforce the apologist's view. The most notable example is Gerald Lund's 9 volume *Work and the Glory* series. After selling more than a million books he was made an LDS General Authority.

I am defining these defenders of the orthodox LDS tradition as "apologists." They want Mormon history to vindicate not just the restoration, but also to support the claims of the LDS church.

I'm going to define another group of people as "anti-apologists." These people are very friendly to Mormonism, but do not accept the same view advocated by the apologists. They believe in Mormonism, but do not believe the apologists have explained Mormon history accurately.

These anti-apologists include Richard Bushman (*Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism, Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction, Rough Stone Rolling*, etc.), D. Michael Quinn (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View, Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power, Mormon Hierarchy, Extensions of Power*, etc.), Juanita Brooks (*Mountain Meadows Massacre*), Gregory Prince (*David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism*), Mark Staker (*Hearken O Ye People*) and Terryl Givens (*By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion, When Souls Had Wings*, etc.) and many others. I define the anti-apologists to include those people who are advocates of Mormonism but who think the apologists are not complete. These writers are not trying to pick a fight with or undermine the LDS church. But they think true history requires more to be disclosed, or corrected, or explained.

The anti-Apologists have motives. Some of them, for example Richard Bushman, the Columbia University Gouverneur Morris History Chair, had the need and the intellectual ability to defend Mormonism to historical critics. He concluded that Mormons could do a better job and be more fair in telling our history. He attempts to write a more full disclosure of history that conflicts with accounts told by the apologists.

In the history told by D. Michael Quinn we encounter one of the most important Mormon historians. He is a writer who has unearthed and exposed tremendous additional original history sources. Michael Quinn still defines himself as a Mormon. He is no longer a member of the LDS church, but when interviewed and asked about his religion, he self-defines as a Mormon.

Reading his works in some cases I believe that Quinn's motivation was to deal with history that hurt his sensibilities. I think after he learned some things he felt bad about it. I think he felt

cheated or robbed and he lashed out in writing history to say, “Yes, but...” He has been venting on the LDS church, but not by writing falsely. He wants to confront the truth, even when it will involve a painful retelling.

It is important to recognize that following D. Michael Quinn’s groundbreaking work, almost all Mormon history grapples with Quinn’s material. Both apologists and anti-apologists use Quinn in their writing. He has provided a great deal of the source material now used in composing current Mormon history. Quinn was a history professor at Brigham Young University, and worked in the LDS History Library. He was given access to diaries and journals. He made copies of original source material that would otherwise not be available for publication. He has donated material to Yale University Library to make it available for others to use in their research. Some of the material at the Yale University Library has now been copied and published in limited editions. We owe Quinn thanks for making some otherwise hidden material available for study today.

Like the anti-Mormons and the apologists, the anti-apologists do not provide us with history. They provide an interpretation or viewpoint. They often conflict with one another.

A new library of recently published historical material is now available to help in understanding Mormon history. Newly available historical documents have made the early history composed by the apologists increasingly less credible. Sources for Mormon history not previously available are now important for our study. If the apologists have given to you everything you know about Mormon history then the likelihood is that you are poorly informed or misinformed.

The *Joseph Smith Papers* have been recently coming into print. They supersede the earlier *Documentary History of the Church*. They are now essential. But they are not the only newly available material required to understand Mormon history. The second LDS leader, Brigham Young, is now far more exposed to view because of the 2010 five-volume *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young*. This collection totals 3,260 pages of material with 4,400 entries. Many of the entries are material not previously available. If you are trying to understand Brigham Young and you only consider what was written about him before 2010, you will only learn from a tiny fraction of what is now available. His own words expose him to view in a way biographies cannot ever achieve.

Only 350 copies of the *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* were printed. They are hard to locate now, and the price has escalated. But they are important for anyone who is interested in studying Brigham Young.

Another important historical source is the 10 volume set of *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, published in 1983. It has been out of print for 30 years, but remains invaluable to Mormon history. The Wilford Woodruff journals is one of the primary sources for Mormon history.

The *Times and Seasons* was put into a 7 volume set in 2008. This Nauvoo newspaper covered events from November 1839 to February 1846. It is an important source for recording events at that place during that time.

There are many other sources now available. These included *The William Clayton Journals*, the *Far West High Council Minutes*, the *Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, *Diaries of J. Reuben Clark*, *The Diaries of Heber J. Grant*, *In the President’s Office: Diaries of L. John Nuttall 1879-1892*, the diaries of David O. McKay were donated to the University of Utah Library and a book based on them (*David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism*) is still in print, *The Mormon Church on Trial: Transcripts of the Reed Smoot Hearings*, *Candid Insights of A Mormon Apostle: The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon 1889-1895*, and the diaries of William McLellin to mention only a few of the recent historic sources now available to study.

In my own study I have approached Mormon history like it mattered. I believe the religion has come about through a revelation by Jesus Christ to Joseph Smith. I believe Joseph Smith was given work to do by God, and therefore it is important to study it as if my own salvation is affected by that revelation. As I studied the work of all the apologists I learned a great deal that persuaded

me. But eventually I ran out of their works. So I turned attention to the work of the anti-apologists. These sources added additional insights that were also persuasive. But while studying the anti-apologists two things occurred to me: First, the apologists had composed Mormon history that is incomplete and in some instances very unfair. Second, they caused suspicion that they were probably also equally incomplete and unfair in telling Mormon history. In some cases the anti-apologists were more clearly pursuing an agenda because they were stinging from realizing they had been fed incorrect history. They thought they'd been misled. They wanted the truth. If the Mormon religion matters, then the truth of that religion matters all the more.

After nearly forty years of study of Mormon history the advocates for interpreting history as an apology for the LDS church, and the anti-apologists who wanted to point out other interpretations together made me realize this topic cannot be left to others. They all have an agenda. The history should not be turned into propaganda to support an institution. Nor should it be used as a tool to embarrass or hinder an institution. History is important in its own right, separate from who wins and who loses in getting to the truth.

Because I cared about it, I wanted to try and get to the truth. One of the fascinating things about Mormon historians is they all tell the history like there has been a plot line. They all assume there is a story to the events and they spin data into their version of the story.

Let me illustrate it with two separate accounts of returning to my home in Sandy from here in Bountiful:

The first account: I left this house, and headed triumphantly westward to the Interstate. With angels accompanying me I turned south on Interstate 15 and, inspired by God, I traveled the Interstate until arriving at 106th South. Then I went eastward toward the rising sun, towards Jerusalem, yea in the direction the Lord Himself shall one day return, until arriving safely and happily at my destination.

Then the second account: When I left I intended to go north, to Brigham City, but the orange barrels prohibited a turn to the north. Swearing at my misfortune of living in a state where idiots provided traffic control during highway construction projects, I took a southern route intending to eventually exit and return headed northward. But misfortune and blocked exits forced me to travel all the way south to 106th South in Sandy, Utah. When I exited there I immediately encountered car trouble and a flat tire. In desperation I found a repair place on 106th South where I had to abandon my car for days. Happily a family took pity on me and allowed me to stay in the east of Sandy, where I remain to this day.

The apologists use a model like the first account. They believe it promotes faith in the restoration. But faith cannot be based on a lie.⁴ Even the anti-apologists largely model the first account, modifying it only somewhat to change details or add missing parts. In contrast, the source material of the history; the diaries, journals, letters and newspapers written as the events took place, all tell the second account.

The people who lived Mormon history had no clue where they were headed. More often than not they intended to arrive at a very different destination than the one to which they moved. They lived their lives much like we live ours. They had hopes, desires, ambitions and goals. But their hopes faded and were changed, their desires were unfulfilled, their ambitions were foiled and their goals unattained and so new goals were adopted. Events overtook them. Many of them died perplexed, frustrated and fearful that God had abandoned them.

The diaries and journals, including the diary of the secretary to the First Presidency, the minutes of meetings in the 1880s to 1893 record the struggle behind the scenes to gain statehood for Utah. The leaders grappled with the opposition of a hostile congress, and the proceedings in the

⁴ See D&C 93:24; Lecture Third ¶5.

federal court system targeting the church's practice of plural marriage. Despite the "histories" of those events, the diaries and minutes tell of how the leaders planned, schemed, conspired to lie, and released false statements including the Manifesto hoping to get things to turn out differently. They bribed newspapers, and paid members of Congress to obtain favors. They hoped to trick the nation into allowing Utah to become a state so that on the other side of statehood they could continue to practice polygamy. They knew family law was a matter of state, not federal law. So if they could just obtain statehood they could go ahead with their barbaric practice.⁵ But the federal government suspected the LDS leaders were lying about their real intentions, and so they demanded that the constitution of the State of Utah prohibit polygamy. Statehood required the permanent abandonment of polygamy, not just a public relations campaign designed to make it seem to be abandoned. The Manifesto was a sham when first released. Now it is regarded as an authentic, even scriptural statement of truth.

The greatness of Mormon history consists in large part from the enduring faith of the founders and pioneers. They believed in God. They believed their lives should be sacrificed to advance the cause of true religion. The believers have been far more authentic than the LDS leaders. Following the death of Joseph Smith there has been a great gulf between retail Mormonism and its corporate managers. Many of the believers sacrificed everything to obey the new revelation. The common Mormon has belonged to an institution that has been managed by wealthy men. LDS leaders and their families have become enriched by the tithes of the believers. But it is the faithful believers who have preserved the faith sufficiently intact that, if we are willing to live it, we can now recover it.

The bottom line question is: how should Mormon history be framed? How do we sort through the events to get a true framework to interpret the history of Mormonism? The best and truest framework should come from God. We need to ignore what men hoped for, what men wanted, or retelling events to support men's ambition. Truth must focus on God's agenda. God must tell us the framework. The question is, what was God up to? Did God have a plan and if so, where might that plan be found.

As it turns out, not only is the *Book of Mormon* filled with commentary⁶ about what would happen at the time the *Book of Mormon* was published, but in addition we have been given prophecies through Joseph Smith in the Doctrine and Covenants. Christ prophesied the latter-day gentiles would reject the fullness.⁷ Joseph prophesied gentile success would result in them remaining in Nauvoo and God protecting them.⁸ But gentile failure would result in them being cursed, driven out of Nauvoo, and suffering.⁹ We have been given an entire library of material telling us what God says He would do if the gentiles were faithful, but if not, God would choose others and accomplish His work in His own way. No matter how much men may have wished for it to turn out otherwise, no matter how much we may want a different story, the question must focus on God's work. True history involves only what God has been doing in these last days.

God's work is not going to be as pleasant, flattering, or self-confident as the apologists' stories. Taking the scriptures as the guide, it turned out that what has happened in the restoration fits squarely into the framework God foretold. That new version of events is just as faith promoting as the apologists' account. But it has a completely different look and feel.

⁵ Polygamy was opposed by the newly founded Republican Party, whose first platform condemned it as "one of the twin relics of barbarism." The other was slavery.

⁶ See, e.g., 2 Ne. 27-33.

⁷ 3 Ne. 16:10.

⁸ D&C 124:44-45.

⁹ D&C 124:47-48.

Both the apologists and anti-apologists agree with the anti-Mormons about Joseph Smith. All of them claim Joseph Smith was a liar and deceiver. It is universal. But the contemporary records do not require that conclusion. Quite the contrary, the contemporary records vindicate Joseph as a truthful, honest and moral man. One of the things that frustrates me the most are the many accounts from those who claim to be faithful, believing Latter-Day Saints, who accept Joseph Smith as the prophet of the restoration, but require Joseph Smith to be dishonest and immoral. They claim Joseph Smith said one thing in public and another thing in private. Because they believe that a prophet of God can do that and can get away with that, it has created a malignancy on the LDS version of Mormonism. Even today the leaders of the LDS church believe God allows them to practice deceit because their version of Joseph Smith imposes that on him.

In April of 1838, the high council at Far West held a trial in which Oliver Cowdery was excommunicated. A church court held April 12, 1838 by the Far West High Council brought nine charges against Oliver Cowdery, the Assistant President to the Church and one of the Three Witnesses to the *Book of Mormon*. Those charges included: “For seeking to destroy the character of President Joseph Smith Junior by falsely insinuating that he was guilty of adultery etc.” After taking evidence, the High Council ultimately excommunicated Oliver Cowdery and cleared Joseph of the charge. The minutes of the High Council said they dealt with “the girl business,” meaning Oliver’s allegations against Joseph. Joseph was exonerated.¹⁰ Joseph Smith testified in that court. He was examined on the issue. Oliver Cowdery was questioned about the allegations in the church court and Oliver Cowdery backed off of those charges during the trial.¹¹ One of the reasons why Oliver Cowdery was excommunicated from the church was because it was found that he lied about the prophet Joseph Smith.

It was in April when a series of crises was underway, and a lot of the church leaders were losing their fidelity to Joseph and their allegiance to the church. There were a number of excommunications including the Three Witness to the *Book of Mormon*, members of the Quorum of the Twelve and the church historian. The church historian was John Whitmer, brother of David Whitmer, who was one of the Eight Witness to the *Book of Mormon*. David, of course, was one of the Three Witnesses to the *Book of Mormon*. John Witmer had been given the commission to write the history of the church and maintained it since 1831. Following his excommunication and he took the church’s history with him. Because of these events, Joseph Smith began the process of rewriting a replacement history of the church.

The history of the church written in 1838 was written by Joseph Smith to make up what had been stolen from the church by its historian John Whitmer. Read these words in the context of 1838 and what had been going on including the trial and excommunication of Oliver Cowdery.

Owing to the many reports which have been put in circulation by evil-disposed and designing persons, in relation to the rise and progress of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, all of which have been designed by the authors thereof

¹⁰ (See Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983), 162-163.)

¹¹ “[Cowdery] seemed to insinuate that Joseph Smith jr was guilty of adultery, but when the question was put if he (Joseph) had ever acknowledged to him that he was guilty of such a thing; when he answered No.” David W. Patten testified of a conversation between Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith in which “J. Smith asked him if he had ever confessed to him that he was guilty of adultery, when after a considerable winking &c. he said No. Joseph then asked him if he ever told him that he confessed to any body, when he answered No.” *Id.*, pp. 167-168.

to militate against its character as a Church and its progress in the world—I have been induced to write this history

Joseph was not writing the replacement history in response to the events of his childhood in 1820. This was not about his First Vision and the reaction at the time he first related it to others. He wrote to defend the church in 1838 against members of the church's own leadership ranks. Church leaders who left the church and would subsequently testify the next year against him in legal proceedings. He was tried in 1839 for treason in Richmond, Missouri. His life was threatened. The court could sentence him to be executed. In that perilous moment former church leaders testified against him.

When you read the Joseph Smith History, remember the events of 1838. Oliver Cowdery lost his membership because he had, among other things, accused Joseph of sexual immortality. Joseph wrote his words a few months later. That is why he included this statement concerning his own sins: “*In making this confession, no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins. A disposition to commit such was never in my nature.*” (JS-H 1:28.) Joseph Smith may have fallen into “many foolish errors” but after the accusation that he was an adulterer, he declared he never had the nature or disposition to commit a great or malignant sin. The heart of Joseph was innocent.

Oliver characterized Joseph of being involved in “a dirty, nasty, filthy affair” in a letter to his brother, Warren Cowdery. Fanny Alger was the first woman with whom Joseph Smith reportedly had immoral relations. But the contemporaneous record stops short of supporting the accusation. There are really only two primary sources for the suggestion Joseph Smith was sexually involved with Fanny Alger.

There are really only two sources, both of which were written years after the fact, relating to Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger. From these two sources an almost universal conclusion has been reached that Emma Smith caught Joseph having sex with Fanny Alger in a barn. But the sources do not say that. The source material refers to Emma Smith witnessing “the transaction.” The “transaction” was Levi Hancock performing a wedding ceremony in the barn. Joseph Smith told Levi the words to use and Levi performed the ceremony by repeating the words. Emma was at the door listening, or witnessing “the transaction” in the barn.¹²

¹² For a complete discussion see Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy, Vol. 1: History*, Greg Kofford Books, (Salt Lake City, 2013), pp. 93-126. No contemporaneous accounts of the marriage exist. Nineteen documents exist, the first written years later in 1838. Fifteen of the nineteen accounts were written thirty-seven or more years later when justifying the practice of polygamy was critical to resolving legal issues for the LDS Church. The “transaction in the barn” was a marriage performed by Levi Hancock, which Emma discovered while underway. Later, a third-party identified as “Miss Hill” told William McLellin about a conversation she had with Emma Smith. Purportedly Emma said to “Miss Hill” who then said to William McLellin, who in turn wrote a letter to Joseph Smith III that Emma “went to the barn and saw him and Fanny in the barn together alone. She looked through a crack and saw the transaction!!! She told me this story was verily true.” (*Id.* p. 96.) The account in this letter is contradicted by another account from William McLellin given three years later to anti-Mormon journalist J.H. Beadle, who reported McLellin “informed me of the spot where the first well authenticated case of polygamy took place, in which Joseph Smith was ‘sealed’ to *the hired girl*. The ‘sealing’ took place *in a barn* on the new mow, and was witnessed by Mrs. Smith through a crack in the door.” (*Id.* p. 97, italics in original.) Mosiah Hancock, whose father Levi Hancock performed the sealing in the barn, is the best source explaining the “transaction” which Emma witnessed. In all the accounts, however, there is second- and third-hand evidence, because everyone involved deliberately concealed what happened. Therefore, Joseph Smith's History written in the months following the Far West High Council court constitutes one of the best explanations of how Joseph viewed his behavior.

This “transaction” has been embellished by speculation, first by anti-Mormon critics, and as of late, by Mormon historians who interpret earlier events through the lens of later LDS Church history.¹³ The largest body of evidence about plural wives was not gathered until decades later, during the legal challenges to LDS polygamy. These affidavits were long after the fact and for a purpose other than dispassionately understanding Joseph Smith’s conduct and teaching. There has been a good deal of libido-driven license taken by those who would like a less virtuous prophet than the one we had in Joseph Smith. We want to parade around his supposed weaknesses so we can excuse our real weaknesses. Joseph said it himself: “*No one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins. A disposition to commit such was never in my nature.*” Those who claim otherwise are looking for a license Joseph did not grant himself. He likely wrote this remark into his 1838 history shortly after the High Council court, to reaffirm he never had the disposition to commit malignant sins. Taking Joseph’s statement about himself at face value, he never committed sexual transgressions.¹⁴

The problem with the anti-apologists and with the apologists is their willing acceptance of later events (open practice of polygamy) as an accurate reflection of Joseph’s conduct. Since Joseph condemned polygamy, and excommunicated people for practicing it, both apologists and anti-apologists make Joseph Smith a liar. They require him to be a liar because otherwise later LDS leaders have misrepresented him. But it is possible later LDS leaders DID misrepresent him. It is possible the statements Joseph made and the steps he took to eliminate polygamy were a part of what he believed.

While confined in the Liberty Jail, the Lord said to Joseph,

The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name, and fools shall have thee in derision, and hell shall rage against thee; While the pure in heart, and the wise, and the noble, and the virtuous, shall seek counsel, and authority, and blessings from under thy hand. And thy people shall never be turned against thee by the testimony of traitors.

This has a bearing on Mormon history. What if “the testimony of traitors” included not merely those in 1838, but also those who would later betray Joseph’s innocent character? What if later LDS leaders would impute to Joseph “great and malignant sins” to cover their own wickedness? What if today it is only a handful who are “pure in heart, and wise, and noble, and virtuous” and who refuse to be turned against Joseph’s character by traitors? What if this dichotomy continues still?

About 60 days before his death Joseph said to the residents of Nauvoo (who would inherit his legacy and be trusted to write his history) the following:

You don't know me; you never knew my heart. No man knows my history. I cannot tell it: I shall never undertake it. I don't blame any one for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I would not have believed it myself. I never did harm any man since I was born in the world.

The people who did not and do not believe in Joseph’s virtue inherited the restoration from him. They are the authors of apologist history. But their history reveals what was and is in their own

¹³ Once the practice was publicly taught and defended under Brigham Young, LDS historians have interpreted a good deal about Joseph by relying on Brigham Young and other defenders of plural marriage. In fairness, Joseph should be isolated from this subsequent development when trying to understand what Joseph said and did.

¹⁴ Joseph fathered eight children with Emma Smith. Fanny Alger later married Solomon Custer in 1838 and bore nine children. Though both were fertile their supposed union produced no offspring, and therefore there is no biological proof of any sexual relationship between Joseph and Fanny, nor for Joseph and any other woman than Emma, for that matter.

hearts, not in Joseph's. I include in the anti-apologists Brian Hales. He is a believing polygamist,¹⁵ although so far as I know he does not actually practice polygamy—he nevertheless believes it to be an essential part of Christ's gospel. Hales was of the view that the LDS church has never done an adequate job of reconstructing Joseph Smith's polygamy. So he offers another retelling of history to support the conclusion that Joseph Smith was sexually involved with multiple women and, without any evidence to prove it, offers his theory of pregnancies resulting from Joseph's involvement with women other than Emma. Conveniently all of the suspected offspring died, except one, whose DNA does not prove Joseph was the father.

Joseph Smith advocated for an persuaded the Nauvoo City Council to adopt an ordinance on May 14, 1842 punishing adultery with six months imprisonment: “[F]or every Act of Adultery, or Fornication, which can be proved, the Parties shall be imprisoned Six Months, and fined, each, in the Sum of five hundred to fifty thousand Dollars[.]”¹⁶ Three days after the ordinance passed John Bennett resigned as Mayor of Nauvoo under accusations of adultery and fornication. When he resigned he publicly testified, “I publicly avow that any one who has said that I have stated that General Joseph Smith has given me authority to hold illicit intercourse with women is a Liar in the face of God. Those who have said it are damned Liars: they are infernal Liars. He never (either) in public or private gave men any such authority or license, & any who states it is a scoundrel & a Liar.”¹⁷ Joseph Smith confronted John C. Bennett in front of the City Council and asked, “Will you please state definitely whether you know any thing against my character either in public or private?” To which Bennett responded, “I do not; in all my intercourse with Gen. Smith, in public and in private, he has been entirely virtuous.”¹⁸

Bennett later changed his story and claimed the opposite. He began a campaign to attribute all of his misconduct with women to Joseph Smith.

On May 21, 1842 another respected community and church leader, Chancy L. Higbee was accused of “unchaste and un-virtuous conduct with the widow [Sarah] Miller and others.” The proof before the High Council was that Higbee “had seduced several women and at different times had been guilty of unchaste and unvirtuous conduct with them and taught the doctrine that it was right to have free intercourse with women if it was kept secret &c and also taught that Joseph Smith autherised him to practise these things &c”¹⁹ But Chancy L. Higby had signed an affidavit four days earlier swearing under oath that “he never knew said Smith to countenance any improper conduct whatever, either in public or private, and that [Smith] never did teach [Higbee} in private or public that an illicit intercourse with females was under any circumstances justifiable.”²⁰ In the months that followed over twenty cases were brought before the Nauvoo High Council condemning adultery, spiritual wivery, and fornication. Joseph Smith was the moving force behind bringing many of the charges, and testified in many cases against the accused. Four women signed affidavits describing his predatory sexual activities.

Just four examples to illustrate the cases and parties involved follow:

May 25, 1842, Mrs. Catherine Warren, who admitted adultery with John Bennett and provided the names of several other men also involved in the Nauvoo bed-hopping inspired by

¹⁵ By that I mean he believes polygamy is an eternal principle, and will be practiced in the Celestial Kingdom in the afterlife. He believes in polygamy so completely that he has given many years of diligent study to defending it, publishing a three-volume series on *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*.

¹⁶ *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, John S. Dinger, ed., Signature Books, (Salt Lake, 2011), pp. 80-81.

¹⁷ *Id.*, p. 84. The testimony was also printed in the *Times & Seasons* Vol. 3, p. 841, July 1, 1842.

¹⁸ *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3, p. 841.

¹⁹ *Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, pp. 414-415.

²⁰ *Id.*, p. 415, footnote 37.

Bennett and his compatriots.²¹ In her case before the High Council she learned “that the heads of the church did not believe of [the] practice [of] such things, she was willing to confess her sins and did repent before God for what she had done and desired earnestly that the Council would forgive her and covenanted that she would hence forth do so no more.”²² The names she provided were Darwin Chase, Lyman O. Littlefield, Joel S. Miles and George W. Thatcher. Additionally, John Bennett informed her he was also having sexual relations with Mrs. Shindle and with two Miss Nymans.

May 27, 1842: Charges were then brought for both immoral behavior and teaching false doctrine against Lyman O. Littlefield, Darwin Chase and Joel S. Miles.²³

May 28, 1842: Charges were brought against Justis Morse for unchaste and unvirtuous conduct.²⁴

September 3, 1842: Charge against Gustavius Hills for illicit intercourse with a woman named Mary Clift. He was charged also with teaching Mary Clift “that the heads of the Church practiced such conduct & that the time would come when men would have more wives than one &c.”²⁵

Numerous other courts were held, all designed to identify who was involved in adultery in Nauvoo, and to make it clear to all involved that the heads of the church did not teach or condone such conduct. During the same time period Joseph Smith publicly preached against adultery and plural wives.

The single document tying Joseph Smith to plural marriage is the revelation recorded on July 12, 1843—what is now D&C Section 132. The original of that document does not exist. The content of Section 132 is a document in the handwriting of Joseph Kingsbury, who was not a clerk for Joseph Smith and is a curious source for the document. The contemporaneous description given of the document in June 1844 describes it in these terms: “[Hyrum] referred to the revelation [he] read to the [Nauvoo Stake] High council—that it was in answer to a question concerning things which transpired in former days & had no reference to the present time.”²⁶ Because of internal inconsistencies it appears Section 132 has been altered.

In Mormon history you can go from issue to issue, question after question, and the apologists’ story, and the anti-apologists’ additions all make leaps, draw inferences and smooth out conflicting information to tell their versions of the events. But none of them attempt to conform the story to prophecy. None of them accept plain language of the *Book of Mormon* and condemning prophecies of Joseph Smith as the framework for retelling our history.

I believe it requires us to back to the First Vision and the visitation by the angel Moroni to begin to understand the work God assigned Joseph. Then from that starting point the only question to answer is: What did God accomplish through Joseph?

What God accomplished by Joseph can and should be answered without considering what others did after his death. As soon as economic and social privileges are involved in propping up LDS leaders, the story is fashioned for other interests. It becomes a tool to benefit insiders. But their stories are not necessarily true, accurate or complete.

We should not care about what happened after Joseph died when we are searching to discover what God accomplished through Joseph. Even well-intentioned people should not add to

²¹ *Id.*, p. 416-417.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*, pp. 418-419.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*, pp. 424-426.

²⁶ *Id.*, p. 241.

or detract from God's work. If you ignore events after June 27, 1844 the picture of Joseph Smith is very different than what you've been told. The historic picture of Smith takes a very different look and feel as soon as the affidavits collected for the lawsuit over property in the 1860s are added to the record. Even before then, a very different picture of Joseph Smith emerges as soon as the Mormon reformation got underway in the mid-1850s. And even before then, a very different picture emerges after 1852 when the apparently altered text of DC 132 is first made public and the practice of plural wives as taught by Brigham Young is attributed to Joseph Smith.

Mormonism is true. But it is possible for people to believe in Mormonism who have a whole bundle of ideas in their head that I do not share with them. The difference between the views I have of Mormonism and the views of others comes from the study, effort, review and source materials studied. Thoughtful Mormons can disagree on our history. But that does not make one more and another less Mormon.

The restoration began through Joseph Smith, but it did not conclude with him. If it is to continue, one of the absolutely essential requirements will be to understand what God accomplished through Joseph Smith. Comfortable traditions will not reveal that to us. Hard study, honest and careful research is required. We must have the humility to acknowledge failures and the meekness to accept God's chastening. We must recognize God has condemned us and will continue to keep us under condemnation until we repent and remember the new covenant offered in the Book of Mormon and through Joseph's revelations.²⁷

The work to uncover the story of God's work in the restoration is still undone. That version of Mormon history is still incomplete. I have been working as diligently as I can in every spare minute I have but there is still a monumental pile of material yet to be reviewed. I work full-time as a lawyer for a living. I don't have the luxury of researching and writing Mormon history as a profession. I can only do it as a hobby and a labor of love. Historic source materials are expensive to acquire and require months to review. Writing Mormon history against the apologists and anti-apologists is not a money-making endeavor. Nor does it make friends. But the labor is worthwhile and in coming generations Mormon history will follow the trail I am on. That search is worthwhile. It is important. We need to face the past without the agendas of the apologists, anti-apologists and anti-Mormons.

Mormon history raises troubling questions for those who believe. It is not easy to find contradictions, errors and lies. We all want to respect the pioneers. They sacrificed a great deal to follow and preserve the faith as they understood it. It is not necessary to devalue their sincerity, honor or commitment to the restoration. If they had not paid the tremendous personal price required of them, we would not today have the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, *Pearl of Great Price* or historical material to guide our search. They bequeathed to us great blessings through their sacrifices. But we must not stop our effort merely because the early saints made some missteps. If we can uncover errors, we should abandon them. They did not complete the restoration, build the New Jerusalem, or establish Zion. If we confine what we do to what they did we will not see the New Jerusalem or Zion either.

When you discover problems with the restoration, be thankful. It is through that process errors can be overcome. If we cannot find a problem then we cannot address it. But do not let it discourage you. There ARE answers. There are solutions to the problems. Corrections can only come from first recognizing the problem. When I address a problem it is not to condemn others, but to help elevate us. A true friend will help you see your errors, and will not encourage you to continue in your errors. I am a true friend to all Mormons.

²⁷ See D&C 84:54-57.

There remains a great work to be done. I have to stay focused on the things that are important. Things left incomplete in Joseph's day have been promised to be finished at some point. We may yet see the restoration take on a power and a glory that it hardly attained to at the beginning. But the easiest way to hijack that is to spend all of our time refuting arguments about our history. I have given up any ambition of either refuting Mormon critics or refuting my own critics. The only thing I'm interested in doing is advancing the work that God had Joseph begin. If I defend myself against critics it would quickly become a full time job. Historians can go back and take everything that I have written and fill in any gaps. I will let others defend everything I've written. I'm going to keep pressing on to new ground to construct what the restoration is intended to accomplish.

I would encourage every one of you to take seriously the restoration of the gospel. I would encourage every one of you to realize Joseph Smith was exactly what he said he was and probably a whole lot more than he was ever willing to disclose.

When Joseph first presented the endowment in the red brick store, there were not three angels named "Peter, James and John." He had two unnamed angels. Two visitors, two witnesses from Christ. Brigham Young changed it to three and identified them as Peter, James and John. This was done in order to reinforce the primacy of the Quorum of the Twelve as the leadership of the Church.

Joseph Smith constructed a ritual to enact the walk back to God's presence as he experienced it. The rites disclose there will be sentinels along the way who will expect us to demonstrate by our conduct that we are in possession of certain true standards. We move forward by our sacrifice and obedience to God and eventually arrive at the point where we converse with the Lord through the veil. Once we have proved true and faithful in all things, we are permitted to enter into the presence of the Lord.

The LDS ceremony has been tinkered with. It has been altered many times, but the theme of the ceremony has remained constant. Joseph Smith lived the journey depicted in the ceremony. He accomplished that walk back into the presence of the Lord. He conversed with the Lord through the veil and then entered into His presence. He encountered messengers and opponents along the way. In a letter composed in September 1842 (while in exile), he related where the ceremony came:

And again, what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfilment of the prophets—the book to be revealed. A voice of the Lord in the wilderness of Fayette, Seneca county, declaring the three witnesses to bear record of the book! The voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light! The voice of Peter, James, and John in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna river, declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom, and of the dispensation of the fulness of times! And again, the voice of God in the chamber of old Father Whitmer, in Fayette, Seneca county, and at sundry times, and in divers places through all the travels and tribulations of this Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints! And the voice of Michael, the archangel; the voice of Gabriel, and of Raphael, and of divers angels, from Michael or Adam down to the present time, all declaring their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood; giving line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little; giving us consolation by holding forth that which is to come, confirming our hope! (D&C 128:19-21.)

Joseph lived these events. Then he embodied them in a ritual to be housed in the temple. The ritual allows every participant to receive an account of the same kind Joseph lived. It is a path guided by

angelic ministrants. They challenge you and obligate you to live a higher standard. Then they return again and again to impose yet another, higher standard still. At last you are purified sufficiently to embrace the Lord through the veil.

Upon embracing Him through veil, you receive through Him not a name, but a seven-fold blessing that stretches from time into eternity. Any of you who have been through the temple will realize that what goes on there is very other-worldly, very foreign, very strange, very unusual. We don't typically see that level of ritual in what is typically an informal Mormon religion. But in the temple it is quite formal. The ritual retells the path all have walked who returned to God's presence while here, on this side of the veil.

Do you really believe that God would trust into the hands of a wicked man, a liar and a deceiver, the restoration of the gospel for the salvation of everyone that would live in the world thereafter? It is astonishing we have to defend the character of Joseph Smith to Mormons. But given the latest essays that have been published by the LDS church, I find that the ridiculous is necessary.

Joseph Smith was a good man. Joseph Smith was a far better man than most of you think he was. He was true and faithful to everything entrusted by God into his care. His greatest mistakes happened when he trusted others. He relied on men who lied to him. Close associates misled him. That engaged in misconduct behind his back. Time and time again, the people who betrayed Joseph, as soon as they were found out, blamed Joseph for what they were doing.

From Sampson Avarad in the courtroom testimony given in Richmond, Missouri to John Bennett, William Law and Chauncey Higby, men attributed to Joseph Smith what they, and not he, had done.

Brigham Young got a testimony of plural wives while he was a missionary in England.²⁸ Lorenzo Snow also claimed to have received a testimony that it was true while in England on a mission.²⁹ Once Joseph was dead, if leaders knew it was true and people would accept more readily from Joseph rather than as something new from them, it would have been tempting to lay it onto Joseph. Like so many others did before, what if the church's leaders palmed onto Joseph what they wanted rather than what he taught?

Be very careful with the historians and their claims. Trust the people that lived it, but only when they recorded events at the time they happened. After years pass their stories become far less reliable, and in many cases far less honest. Trust the scriptures.

Unfortunately, one of the people who was in an ideal position to contribute a lot, William Clayton, had a double set of books. And we don't know which set was right and which set was altered and how reliable he was. The LDS church has not released all of his journals. When you are reading William Clayton's journals, you must consider the fact that Joseph was dead a lot longer than he was alive as William Clayton worked for the hierarchy. He was loyal to Brigham Young and those that inherited the church following Joseph.

I haven't said for many years that "the church is true." But I have said and I say again: The gospel is true. The restoration is true. Joseph is what he claimed to be, and probably a lot more.

If you stumble into questions in LDS church history that raise some doubts in your mind about the restoration itself, trust me. If you'll just study the matter out and take the time to look into it, you are going to find an answer and very often those answers are quite glorious. Glorious beyond anything that you can imagine. If anything, Joseph Smith understated what he did. That list found in DC Sec. 128 doesn't reveal what "divers angels from Adam or Michael down to the

²⁸ See *The Messenger*, Vol. 1, p. 29.

²⁹ *Deseret Semi-weekly News*, June 6, 1899.

present” revealed or conferred on Joseph. In testifying to us Joseph Smith left out more than he included about his experiences with God and angels.

Let me end by bearing testimony to you that Joseph had a work to do and he did it. It was an introduction for something far more glorious that God is still going to do. It will include the establishment of Zion. It’s going to happen.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.