QUESTION TIME

VOLUME 2

A collection of often-asked questions and answers from the Saints' Herald

Well indexed for ready use

Reorganized CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST of Latter Day Saints

HERALD HOUSE

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The legend concerning Adam grew out of some remarks attributed to Joseph Smith, Jr. The Utah church has made much of this. The Reorganization has not taken the legend seriously, whatever the basis of the remarks attributed to Joseph Smith. The name is mentioned in Doctrine and Covenants but only representative of a condition rather than an American location.

We have many things in North America, and an ancient history much deeper than many know, but I doubt if the Garden of Eden can be placed on this continent. This strains any interpretation of the facts.

Rigdon was correctly quoted in his speech with reference to the word "extermination." This may have been in Governor Boggs's mind when he issued his infamous "Extermination Order." In the light of history Rigdon's remark was unfortunate and undoubtedly inflammatory. Judging by pictures available, the characterization of Rigdon was not too accurate in my opinion. He had more dignity than appeared in the film. Probably the purpose was to convey the idea of his not being the prime figure in the church. The main thing to keep in mind is that the film was intended to show the courage of General Doniphan. In doing this the producer dealt kindly with the Latter Day Saint pioneers and this was well done even if unusual.

160. Manuscript History by John Whitmer

**QUESTION**

Is there in existence a manuscript history by John Whitmer? I have been told that John Whitmer's history printed in the "Journal of History" (RLDS) is not a faithful copy. Would you state the facts?

**ANSWER**

Yes, there is a manuscript copy of a writing by John Whitmer. It is in the possession of the Reorganized Church. It came to us with other material (the Book of Mormon manuscript and some original transcripts of early revelations to the church) from the family of David Whitmer in 1903. It consists of ninety-six pages of lined foolscap written in ink.

Concerning the second part of your question, it is important to state that nineteen chapters out of twenty-two were printed in the Journal of History, 1908, edited by Heman C. Smith, church historian at the time. It is unfortunate that the publication of this work did not contain an explanatory note as to why chapters 20-22 were not printed. The facts are as follows: John Whitmer was appointed by revelation in March, 1831, to be church historian and served the church until he was disfellowshipped in 1838. He served with distinction in several fields of ministry, including membership on the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants committee, as editor of the Messenger and Advocate, and as assistant president of a Missouri High Council, as well as commencing to write church history.

When leaving the church, he took with him the writings he had made. On page eighty-five of the manuscript he states, "Therefore I close the history of the Church of Latter Day Saints," and then after a few lines of request that his faults may be forgiven, pens three final words, "Farewell, March 1838." It is obvious that this was intended to be the conclusion, and the editor of the Journal of History so interpreted it and finished the printing there.

The supplementary chapters (20, 21, 22) were written in different ink and include items of which John Whitmer was not a witness. In commenting on some of the problems of Nauvoo (he did not reside there) he says, "According to the best information I could get," etc. This approach, coupled with the fact that the last three chapters were an afterthought and were written much later than his official connection as historian, raises the question of their accuracy.

It may be said that the accuracy of any dating could be doubtful. The manuscript appears to have been prepared after 1835, as reference is made to page numbers in the 1835 edition of Doctrine and Covenants. It contains statements in parentheses, such as (insert revelation here). This would indicate a preparation for printing from notes or diary after 1835 but before 1838. The last three chapters were very probably much later than this.

At least when the supplementary chapters were written, Whitmer was suffering (rightly or wrongly) from a sense of injustice.

161. Oliver Cowdery

**QUESTION**

Did Oliver Cowdery join the Mormon church shortly before he died?

**ANSWER**

In a letter published in the Millennium Star of January 1, 1849, George A. Smith states that Oliver Cowdery visited Council Bluffs with his family and was invited to address a gathering of the Saints
considered weak in that his very action would indicate that he did not hold the authority of the church of primary importance.

The rites of the church by which authority one marries are basic in the intent of the contract. One marrying according to Mohammedan rites, for instance, would be able to marry polygously; and for one marrying according to Jewish rites certain other concepts are assumed.

Marrying by other authority also exposed people to the danger of the aberrations of many sects at the time Section 132 was documented. As we have just said, that the concept of the minister performing the ceremony and the conditions attached thereto put meaning of a specific nature into the covenant. For instance, those sects not holding the ideals of monogamous marriage could not perform marriages involving this concept. Other groups were experimenting with so-called spiritual wifery and “free love,” and so forth. There is evidence in my personal research that members of some of these sects moved into early church communities and therefore confused the popular image of the church. This was a probable reason for Section 132 being affirmed as our standard in Kirtland in 1835.

To be married “in the church” was some assurance that the right principles were being recognized. A careful reading of the paragraphs which follow in the section under review makes the terms and conditions of the marriage covenant clear.

The question of the inadvisability of marrying nonmembers rests upon other premises than this section provides and the factors involved in making decisions to marry those not of the faith need careful consideration. It may be that the Latter Day Saint partner feels such strength of faith that he or she will be able to bring the realization of the true church to the other partner. I personally would not class one so marrying as weak in the faith, but after many years as a minister I would strongly counsel that one examine his motivations and reasoning as objectively as possible because of the hazards of unequal yoking in marriage.

To make this emphasis upon what I feel is the primary point in paragraph 1—that is, authority—in no way does violence to the caution required in nonmember partnerships. If the other view is taken it simply implies weakness and is not illegal or prohibited.

My recommendation of this section was made because of my observations that those who had married nonmembers often did so after much deep concern and a decision that they could bear strong witness to the partner. Many of these have proved that they were far from weak in the faith. This did not seem to harmonize with the traditional interpretation—and so my modified opinion.

231. For Time and Eternity

QUESTION

Does our church believe in marriage for time and eternity as it is taught by the Utah church?

ANSWER

The Reorganized Church does not believe in marriage “for time and eternity.” We believe in marriage for time. This is a lifetime contract only and is binding as long as both parties live. Should one partner die or the marriage be dissolved for just cause as set out in the rules endorsed by World Conference of the church, one is free to remarry. This contract also remains in force during life only.

The Utah practice is to seal men and women in marriage for eternity. This philosophy and practice has led to many aberrations, including polygamy, in the Utah Mormon church. The Reorganization early repudiated these doctrines as false, and they have no part in our belief.

No Scripture gives any indication of the Mormon doctrine of marriage for eternity. Our church rejects the Utah claim that Joseph Smith ever presented a revelation to the church proclaiming the Utah doctrine of marriage. This is why we brind Section 132 of the Utah Doctrine and Covenants (on the eternity of the marriage covenant and polygamy) spurious.

We say again, we do not believe in marriage for eternity.

232. Doctrine and Covenants Revelation

QUESTION

Is Doctrine and Covenants, Section 132, a revelation?

ANSWER

This section is not a revelation as a reading of the introductory paragraph will show. The word was used rather loosely in the answer, as the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants are often referred to as the revelations." This section is a statement on marriage read and adopted at a General Assembly, August 17, 1835.

While on the subject of the basic policy I would observe that this article coming so early in the definition of beliefs of the early church makes our position very clear as to the Christian standard of monogamy being fundamental. The document was an advanced one for its time.
233. Qualifying Churches

QUESTION
Do all religious organizations have to meet certain specifications to qualify as functioning churches according to the laws of the land (United States of America)? If so, how could a church with unorthodox views on marriage be recognized as such?

ANSWER
One of the basic freedoms sought and obtained by the founding fathers of the United States of America was the right to worship according to one’s own desires and conscience and therefore to be free not to worship in a certain way also.

I would be surprised to learn of any law, either federal or state, that would prevent people from functioning as a church regardless of their beliefs. A person may believe what he wishes, or he may choose not to believe. He may organize with those of sufficiently similar ideas and thus belong to an association or church.

Individual states have certain regulations which govern the activities of church ministers in performing marriages, but this is because marriage involves an established unit of society at large.

Probably you are confused with such procedures as incorporation which has a legal status with certain advantages in the method of holding property and in acting corporately in other ways. A group does not have to become incorporated to function as a religious body. Such incorporations as have been effected are purely for convenience of doing business and not with regard to belief.

The RLDS Church is incorporated in Australia and New Zealand, Canada, and in the states of Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. Incidentally, Graceland College and the Independence Sanitarium and Hospital are also incorporated (see Rules and Resolutions, pages 194-226). There is no restriction on an association provided it does not plan subversion.

Naturally any subversion would receive the attention of the government. Even the Communist society has not been declared illegal, although certain requirements to register as such have been made on its members by the federal government. I understand this has been more honored in the breech than the observance. In the light of the foregoing what a church believes about marriage is not significant at this point. However, the law of the land makes the practice of polygamy illegal, and any such bigamous actions as this implies are subject thereto. Action has been taken from time to time in Utah and Arizona. It is the overt act with which the law is mainly concerned. The RLDS movement is not involved in this question.

234. Accusation of Polygamy before 1835

QUESTION
Upon what grounds was the accusation that the church believed in polygamy made before 1835? The document on marriage, Doctrine and Covenants 111, is the cause of my inquiry.

ANSWER
Doctrine and Covenants 111:4b states:

"Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife, and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again."

I have never heard of any specific accusation concerning any particular case of this nature in the period preceding the first publication of the statement on marriage. It is a fact, however, that there were many social experiments in the first part of the nineteenth century, and a great number of them centered in the northeastern area of the United States. A number of these communal societies included experiments in love and marriage relationships, ranging from celibacy on the one hand to polygamy on the other. Because of this, any community organization was likely to be interpreted at times as being involved in these aberrations, and the fact that as early as 1830 the church became concerned with the establishment of a Zion community would place it in question. A number of people living in a society which was sponsored by Sidney Rigdon and known as "the family" (prior to
his baptism into the early Restoration) also joined the church and this may have prompted the statement with which we are concerned.

It is known, too, that Orson Hyde preached during a missionary tour to a number of families which, his diary states, believed in a doctrine of spiritual wifery. They were called Cochrantes. He observed that it was in his opinion a family relationship more accurately termed polygamy. He did not use the word, but his comments indicate that this was what it was. We have no record of any Cochrantes joining the church but any contact with these people could have led to the charge. The early leaders, therefore, felt the necessity to disclaim the doctrine, and it is fortunate that they stated the church's position as early as they did.

A book which discusses the social experiments of the time may be available in city libraries. It is entitled Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850, by David Ludlum, published by the Vermont Historical Society. A more comprehensive text is The Communist Societies of the United States by Charles Nordhoff, published by Hilary House Publishers, New York.

235. Joseph Smith and Document on Polygamy

QUESTION

Did Joseph the Martyr ever receive a document on spiritual wifery or polygamy? If so, what happened to it?

ANSWER

The answer is "No." I give this answer after many years of close examination of the statements of those who claim to the contrary, and more recently several years as church historian have given me opportunity for more thorough perusal of the so-called evidence which has resulted in confirming the results of previous studies.

There is no need for a true follower of the Restoration movement to be reluctant to view the facts. Novelists have found the erroneous claim more suitable to their purposes than the truth and so perpetuate the myth of Joseph Smith as a polygamist, but evidence of a credible nature is completely lacking.

No authentic document pronouncing these doctrines has ever been produced from the pen of Joseph Smith or copied from his dictation and bearing his signature. All the statements of Joseph Smith published in his lifetime speak against these doctrines. The only two claims concerning documents which seem to require refuting bear no evidence that Joseph Smith was responsible for the doctrine of polygamy being taught or practiced.

The most famous is the document presented by Brigham Young in 1852 to his church in Utah. This has received the consideration of competent judicial minds and has not been accepted as authentic. Actually the document was not in the handwriting of Joseph Smith and was not signed by him. Witnesses called to establish it as genuine have differed and made statements as to length and source, and other aspects, which conflict with fact. It is amazing how pseudo-historians use documents in their writings and accept statements as valid which would not be admitted in a court as evidence. This Utah document is one of the greatest untruths of the last century.

The other document not so generally known but of sufficient importance to require consideration was a notarized statement by Austin Cowles in the Nauvoo Expositor of June 7, 1844. This paper had only a single issue. The Municipal Council of Nauvoo ordered the Expositor press destroyed because of libelous statements in that newspaper, therefore there were no subsequent issues. It was this action of the Municipal Council which precipitated unlawful mob action resulting in the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum Smith at Carthage, Illinois.

In the Expositor Austin Cowles claimed that he heard a document read by the prophet's brother Hyrum in a Nauvoo High Council meeting. He quoted what he said he remembered hearing. No doubt Cowles heard some kind of document read, but his testimony was admittedly from having heard something read and his memory thereof. The document has never been presented to the world by the Utah church. If Cowles' statement was accurate Brigham Young failed to use it to establish authenticity for his 1852 presentation. The only reason I can see for his not using Cowles as a witness is that two weeks later in the Nauvoo Neighbor (June 19, 1844) Joseph Smith denied the correctness of the statement made by Cowles. This, of course, contradicts Young's claims concerning Joseph Smith's being the author of Young's presentation in 1852.

In his statement to the Nauvoo City Council Joseph Smith explained his position concerning the Cowles allegation and concerning a discussion on marriage. This was reported as follows:

"Mayor said he had never preached the revelation in private as he had in public—had not taught it to the apostles of the church in private, which statement many present confirmed, that on inquiring concerning the passage in the resurrection concerning "they neither marry nor are given in marriage," etc. [Matthew 22:29, 30] he received for answer, men in this life must marry in view of eternity, otherwise they must remain as angels, or"
be single in heaven, which was the amount of the revelation referred to, and the Mayor spoke at considerable length in explanation of the principle. . . ."

It is reported in the same column:

"Councilor H. Smith proceeded to show the falsity of Austin Cowles in the Expositor in relation to the revelation referred to, that it was in reference to former days, and not the present time as related by Cowles."

It is reported of Joseph Smith on the same occasion:

". . . they make a criminality for a man to have a wife on earth, while he has one in heaven, according to the keys of the Holy Priesthood—and he then read a statement of William Law's from the Expositor where the truth of God was transformed into a lie concerning this thing."—Nauvoo Neighbor, June 9, 1844.

Certainly no document was ever presented to the church that would make spiritual wifery, celestial marriage, or polygamy a teaching of the original church. That certain people were engaged in teaching the doctrines of spiritual wifery and polygamy in Nauvoo is a matter of historical fact. It is also on record that Joseph Smith said it was "an accursed doctrine" and asked the president of Nauvoo Stake, William Marks, to take official action to deal with those teaching or practicing this heresy. (See True Latter Day Saints' Herald, Vol. 1, p. 22.)

Most important is the fact that any document expounding the doctrine of polygamy would be contrary to accepted scripture. (See Book of Mormon, Jacob 2:28-32; Doctrine and Covenants of Reorganized Church, Section 131; Doctrine and Covenants, 1835 edition, Section 101.) The principle of monogamous marriage is still found in all editions of the Book of Mormon and was retained in the Doctrine and Covenants of the Utah church until 1876 when the original section on marriage was removed and replaced by the unauthorized document of 1852. (See Doctrine and Covenants of Utah church, Section 132.) All Reorganized Church editions have continued to carry the original statement as in 1835.

Joseph Smith III, son of the martyr, spent a long life in research to get the facts on the allegations which endeavored to connect his father with polygamy. This involved visits to Utah and personal interviews with alleged plural wives and with those reported to have evidence. He stated that as the years passed, his confidence in his father's innocence increased.

236. Revelation on Polygamy

QUESTION

In reading Orson Pratt's introduction of the so-called revelation on polygamy in Utah in 1852, I do not find that he stated that it came through Joseph Smith. Nor did Brigham Young appear to say so at that time. Where is the reference that states that they did?

ANSWER

It is a fact that both Orson Pratt and Young did so state giving Joseph Smith as the one who received it.

In the introductory address of Orson Pratt to which you refer we find the following words:

"This was the word of the Lord to His servant Joseph the Prophet himself."


Reprint from Deseret News Extra of September 14, 1852.

At the 3:00 P.M. meeting the same day (August 29, 1852), Brigham Young said:

"You heard Brother Pratt state, this morning, that a Revelation would be read this afternoon, which was given previous to Joseph's death. It contains a doctrine, a small portion of the world is opposed to; but I can deliver a prophecy upon it. Though that doctrine has not been practiced by the Elders, this people have believed in it for years."


Reprint from Deseret News Extra of September 14, 1852.

On the page following this statement is found: "Elder Thomas Bullock then read the following. . . ." Then is printed the false document that is now Section 132 in the Doctrine and Covenants of the Utah church.

Later, in 1862, Young reiterated this slanderous statement about Joseph Smith, Jr. In an address reported by G. D. Watt and published in the Utah Journal of Discourses, Volume 9, page 322, he said:

"Why do we believe in and practice polygamy? Because the Lord introduced it to His servants in a revelation given to Joseph Smith, and the Lord's servants have always practiced it."

These statements are mostly generalized affirmations and not docu-
mentary proofs. These assertions have not been backed by evidence acceptable in a court of justice. Considering all the gush that have been trained on Joseph Smith in an endeavor to hit the target of his sponsorship of this practice, none have scored a hit. If there were any real evidence, one hundred and twenty-five years of vigorous research should have brought it to light. The verdict on the evidence is "not guilty."

237. Statements of William Marks

QUESTION

William Marks seems to have written several letters which are interpreted by those opposed to the Reorganization to implicate Joseph Smith in polygamy. I refer to statements in the "True Latter Day Saints' Herald" and in "The Return." These are repeatedly used to argue that a prominent leader of the early Reorganization knew this to be a fact, but we do not care to admit complicity. Please explain.

ANSWER

You are right in saying that certain statements concerning the situation in Nauvoo as to Joseph Smith and polygamy just before the martyrdom were made by William Marks in the 1860's and later. The wording varies slightly from one statement to another. From these comments it is often inferred that he was saying he believed Joseph was implicated. It is not correct to assume that Marks ever made statements intended to admit this. There is record of Marks being asked what he meant, and fortunately he had the opportunity to explain further. This is raised so often in letters and conversation that I will here quote at some length from an article by a man whose word we can accept. I quote from Saints' Herald, Volume 50, pages 364, 364, April 22, 1903. Edmund C. Briggs stated therein that he asked William Marks certain questions and gives the following account:

"Did you, when you had that conversation with Brother Joseph, think he had been in any way mixed up in polygamy, or had favored it?" He replied, "No. I had more confidence in him at that time than I ever had in all my life before, and was satisfied that he was pure from that gross crime. I had been troubled over the condition of the church for some time, and been fearful that Joseph did not bring the pressure against some men in the church that he should have done. You see from John C. Bennett's time there had been so many rumors going the rounds, I was fearful that there might be something in the stories afloat that might implicate Joseph. But Joseph was so free and positive in his denunciation of polygamy in every form, that I took courage; and I could see Joseph was in earnest and felt just as I did about it."

I then said, 'Brother Marks, did you ever see the revelation on polygamy before it was published in 1852 by Mr. Pratt?' Marks emphatically replied, 'No, never.' You were president of the stake at Nauvoo, and if Joseph had such a revelation, would you not have been privileged, according to custom, to have seen it, or heard of it?' He replied, 'Yes, without a doubt. There was no such revelation in existence during Joseph's life. . . . Brigham Young would have showed it to me when I opposed his measures. But he never pretended to any such thing to me, that there was such a revelation on the subject from Joseph.'"

William Marks, it is said, indicated that Joseph Smith "had been deceived." E. C. Briggs gives Marks's explanation of this reference in these words, "But I thought he [Joseph] had been deceived in some of the men and elders of the church, and had too much confidence in some of them." This later comment by Marks himself disposes of any contention that Joseph Smith confessed to being deceived in receiving a revelation of the nature of which he has been accused. I hope this is helpful in settling the question as to William Marks's alleged implication of the prophet in this unchristian doctrine. That there was a document on marriage in existence in Nauvoo is indicated by statements of Joseph and Hyrum Smith in the Nauvoo Press of the time. This, however, does not admit of the contention that a revelation favoring polygamy was ever given. The statements of these men prove the prophet's opposition to this doctrine of plurality of wives. Joseph called the accusation a lie.

238. Word of Consolation and Polygamy

QUESTION

Does the Word of Consolation written by John Taylor, Willard Richards, and W. W. Phelps and published in "Times and Seasons" (Volume 5, Number 12), condone polygamy?

ANSWER

There is a communication over the signature of W. W. Phelps, W. Richards, and John Taylor in Times and Seasons, Volume 5, Number 247