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Fundamentalist Mormon Attitudes Toward The Church As
Reflected In The Sermons Of The Late LeRoy S. Johnson

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On 25 November 1986 LeRoy Sunderland Johnson died in Hildale, Utah, at age 98. A leader and prophet to fundamentalist Mormons, Johnson’s 32 years as senior member of the Council of the Priesthood was a time of stability, growth, financial success, and greater public acceptance. An obituary in *Sunstone* magazine called him "a dominant figure in post-manifesto polygamy for over half a century."

There are a number of fundamentalist groups who have broken in some respect from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints over plural marriage and related issues. Johnson presided over what is probably the oldest and largest group which organized the United Effort Trust in the Colorado City, Arizona, area, formerly known as Short Creek. While the various groups are more or less sympathetic with each other, they are also distinctly different with dissimilar philosophies and leadership.

Johnson’s group has never adopted a name different from the Church, other than to call themselves the fundamentalist arm of it. They attempt a religious organization modeled after the nineteenth century United Order. They emphatically reject the violence that has sometimes brought other groups into the public eye and shaped public impressions of what fundamentalism is all about. Like most fundamentalists, Johnson’s group tends to be reclusive, adopting styles and customs distinctly out of fashion. Those followers whom the author has encountered, admittedly limited in number, have always stressed their general good will toward the Church and the fact that they have many more agreements than disagreements with President Ezra Taft Benson and his predecessors.
Johnson's followers are not part of the Salt Lake Valley based Alldred Church of the Apostolic Brethren, the Davis County Kingstonites, the recently violent Singer-Swapp group, any of the Mexican based LeBaron groups involved in other killings, or Alex Joseph's Church of Christ in Solemn Assembly. Royce Potter, the former Murray, Utah, police officer who went to court to challenge anti-polygamy laws in the late 1970s, was not a member of Johnson's flock.

The Johnson group trace their direct line of priesthood authority from an 1886 vision President John Taylor is said to have experienced while on the underground at the home of John W. Woolley in Centerville, Utah. During the intense persecution of Mormons in the 1880s Taylor and most other Church leaders went into hiding, moving from one safe haven to another in the company of bodyguards. They often met with other Church leaders to conduct the business of the faith while keeping out of sight. The Woolley home was a favorite stop for Taylor. He would continue to be pursued by authorities until he died on the underground in 1887. (Arrington 1986, 109-114; Firmage and Mangrum, 210-260; Parkinson, 198-199.)

On this occasion Taylor had been considering a proposed statement to suspend plural marriage in response to federal pressure. Jesus Christ and Joseph Smith, Jr., are said to have appeared to him and instructed him for most of the night not to give in. The following day he told some of his party about the vision and set five of them apart to continue plural marriage without regard to what the Church might do. The five were Woolley and his teenage son, Lorin C. Woolley, George Q. Cannon, Charles H. Wilkins and Samuel Bateman. The vision was not
recorded in the usual LDS Church manner. (Reimann 185-224; Anderson; Collier 145-146; Truth 148-152.)

Early in the twentieth century Church President Joseph F. Smith issued the 1904 "second manifesto", apparently closing the door on plural marriage for good. In 1912 and again in 1929 fundamentalists came forward with the Woolley accounts of the vision and organized a seven member priesthood council to advance all of the doctrines set out in the 1886 vision, including plural marriage. After a 1933 "final manifesto" the Church began large numbers of excommunications of the advocates of continued plural marriage and a more organized fundamentalist movement increasingly went public. While they existed in small numbers over the old Mormon Rocky Mountain West, their center increasingly became the little desert hamlet of Short Creek on the Utah-Arizona border. Today the Utah side of the community is Hildale, where Johnson died, and the Arizona side is Colorado City.

In the mid 1930s Eldon and Charles Kingston broke a group away from the fundamentalist body. In the early 1950s the main fundamentalist group divided between the Allred and the Johnson factions and other divisions continue today. The old Short Creek community remains the largest and most influential of the organized groups. Many experts believe the majority of modern polygamists are not affiliated with any group and some still are members of the Church while holding plural wives in secret. (Baer 31-42; Flesher and Freedman; Van Wagoner 190-222; Anderson; Reimann; Stumbo.)

Johnson’s first appearance in the national consciousness came with the raid of Short Creek on 26 July 1953. Much of the
national news media played the raid as a comic incident, but to the Short Creek community it was a traumatic and heartrending experience. Arizona Governor Howard Pyle had declared the little fundamentalist community to be "an insurrection against the state." A secret two year investigation came to a climax with a pre-dawn Sunday raid by 102 law enforcement officers led by Arizona Attorney General Ross Jones, another 100 invited newsmen, and an assortment of judges, social workers, nurses, and a national guard field kitchen. They brought 122 arrest warrants and seized 263 children whom the state deemed to be endangered by the fundamentalist environment. The state of Utah joined in with attempts to seize 80 children and going to court to terminate the parental rights of fundamentalists. Eventually a plea bargain resulted in 26 no contest pleas followed by probation, but Short Creek experienced great financial burdens and a disruption of family and community life for years.

The raid made headlines in nearly every major newspaper in the country. Johnson, then 65, was identified as one of three leaders of the community. The others were Richard S. Jessop, 50, and Carol Holm, 36. It was Johnson who acted as the spokesman, calling the raid the "most cowardly act ever perpetrated in the United States," and the police "storm troopers masquerading in highway patrol uniforms." (The Arizona Republic; The Salt Lake Tribune; Deseret News; New York Times; Chicago Daily Tribune; Time; and Newsweek.)

The raid was not always applauded. Two Arizona Republic editorials likened it to "the hated police-state roundups of the old world" and a Keystone Kops farce. The Phoenix newspaper, Arizona's most influential, said "But they must also remember that the state has countenanced polygamy in Short Creek by
taking no effective action against it for years.” (Arizona Republic.)

During his tenure as a fundamentalist leader Johnson was a frequent speaker at religious gatherings in the western United States and Canada. With increasing regularity his sermons were recorded by tape or shorthand. In the mid-1980s the sermons were transcribed and published in a seven volume set as the L. S. Johnson Sermons. The publisher was the Twin Cities Courier Press of Hildale, Utah. The full set contains over 3,000 pages of typed, double spaced and bound material, a sort of fundamentalist Journal of Discourses. The first volume contains a few sermons attributed to John Y. Barlow. They are a rich source of fundamentalist history and beliefs as taught by Johnson and should not be overlooked by scholars. As might be expected, much of the content deals with fundamentalism and the Church.

The Warren Johnson Family

The collected sermons are full of the history of Johnson’s family. They were English, first settling in the East. He recalled that his non-Mormon grandfather “was a polygamist.” “He had two wives and raised two families in the same home at the same time; but not under the direction of the Holy Priesthood, because he knew nothing about the Priesthood.” Johnson’s father was named Warren. He was an educated man who graduated at 25 from “one of the eastern colleges.” Because of poor health his doctors only gave him a few months to live after graduation, time that might be prolonged in the more hospitable climate of California. So he left his home in Marston, Massachusetts, for the West. He got as far as Dubois, Idaho,
before his poor health overtook him. He struggled on to Farmington, Utah, where he was taken in and nursed back to health by a kind Mormon family named Smith who first interested him in the LDS Church. After meeting Brigham Young in Salt Lake City he was converted "and entered into the law of plural marriage..." (1:315-317; iv:1223-29.)

President Young, knowing this new convert was an educated man, "called him to go down into Nevada on the Muddy River and teach school for a colony of the Mormons down there." This was near the former St. Joseph and the present day Overton, Nevada. It was the first of several missions for the older Johnson. He was later called by Young on a mission to northern Arizona at Lee's Ferry and as a missionary to the Navajo Indians. Johnson recalled that his father served there for twenty-two years until being released by President Wilford Woodruff. (iii: 864; iv:1226.)

Lee's Ferry was established in 1871 at Lonely Dell on the Colorado River. John D. Lee operated it until his arrest in 1874 on charges arising out of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. One of his wives, Emma Lee, operated the ferry until 1879 with the assistance of Warren Johnson. The two were recognized as capable and careful operators. In 1879 Emma Lee departed across the river with her family to settle in Arizona. Warren Johnson later bought the ferry from her on behalf of the Church. The price was 100 cows which were contributed by the people of southern Utah and northern Arizona. The ferry continued operation until the Marble Canyon bridge was completed in 1929, much of the time under the management of the Warren Johnson family. (Peterson, 75-77; Brooks, 292-295; McClintock, 91-97.)
With the 1890 manifesto Warren Johnson, who had two wives and seventeen children at the time, became anxious as to what his responsibility was toward his plural families. He wrote Church Apostle and later President Joseph F. Smith. In a 15 December 1891 letter Smith told him that God did not require the putting away of existing plural families. "What the Lord requires is that we shall not bring upon ourselves the destruction intended by our enemies, by persisting in a course in opposition to the law." (Lyman, 142.) He refused to give up his plural families after the manifesto. (v:254.)

Johnson recalled that his father broke his back and journeyed from Kanab to Salt Lake City "to be blessed under the hands of President Wilford Woodruff. When he came back, he had a wheelchair -- given to him by President Wilford Woodruff. He taught us children to honor and obey the leaders of the Priesthood. That was his great charge to his children, especially his sons -- to honor and obey those who presided over them in Priesthood." (i:327.)

In 1900 Johnson’s parents moved from southern Utah to Big Horn County, Wyoming, with more Church colonists. Warren Johnson was still in his wheelchair and made the difficult journey traveling in the back of a wagon. Apparantly the family’s motivation was to find more open country in which their twenty children, especially the sons, could establish themselves. In Wyoming Johnson’s mother was an important figure as the only midwife in an area without a doctor. It was here that Warren Johnson died and was buried in the small town of Byron. (ii:557,597-598; iii:798.)
LeRoy Johnson's Childhood

Johnson was born on 12 June 1887 and baptized at age eight, the usual time for Mormons. This was a few years after the 1890 manifesto suspending plural marriage, an event he believed damaged the authority of the priesthood in the Church, but he believed "my baptism took." (ii:693.) Like many pioneers of his generation, Johnson's formal education was limited by the demanding life of the West. By age eleven, in 1898, he had risen to the sixth grade in Kanab, Utah. He was twenty-two before he could return to school and then made it to the eighth grade. He was one of fourteen adults in the school and of only two who completed it. (vi:108-9.) He remembered his parents having four children die within one two week period at Lee's Ferry. (iv:1485.) His father died in 1901 when he was only fourteen. (iv:1227.) Like most young members of the Church, he received a Patriarchal Blessing at age 17 which he believed directed him toward his fundamentalist beliefs. (ii:632.)

Johnson's childhood memories include Apostle Abraham Owen Woodruff. He remembered the Apostle bearing his testimony "that except the people woke up and accepted the fulness of the gospel and lived it and applied it to their lives, they would not be able to obtain the blessings that the Lord had in store for them in the country." (v:254.) This was in Big Horn County, Wyoming.

"I was only a boy about thirteen years old when Abram (sic) O. Woodruff passed away. I heard him talking to my father. He (Woodruff) said 'I hope the Lord will take me home before I do anything that will deprive me of my salvation.' This was in Wyoming. He
went back to Salt Lake, was asked to go down and
preside over the Mexican mission. He went down and
established himself there. His wife took small pox
and died. A week later, he died with small pox. So,
the Lord takes us at our word." (iii:881.)

Woodruff had been ordained an Apostle in 1897 by this then
Church President father at age 24. He died in 1904 in El Paso,
Texas. His wife died the week before. As an advocate of
continued plural marriage, his death probably saved him from the
Church discipline that came to Apostles John W. Taylor and
Matthias Cowley some months after the second manifesto. Taylor
was excommunicated and Cowley was disfellowshipped in 1911.
(Alexander, 66; Jorgensen and Hardy.)

Having lived most of his life within the sphere of
influence of the extremely devout Mormon community of St.
George, located about 45 miles from present day Colorado City,
it is not surprising that he would absorb most of its religious
and cultural attitudes. One recent study found that in the
1870s and 1880s upwards of two men in five in St. George
participated in plural marriages, that the majority of married
women were plural wives and that the majority of children grew
up in plural families. Johnson’s childhood experiences in a
devout plural family in the 1890s were the norm, not the
exception. Young people married early even by pioneer Mormon
standards, usually by their late teens. For both men and women,
status within the community and the Church was closely tied to
participation in a plural marriage. (Logue 44-71.)
Johnson as a Member of the Church

LeRoy Johnson’s sermons discussed his early membership in the Church. He apparently believed in continued plural marriage before he was even aware of the fundamentalist movement. "I tried for some years before I became acquainted with President Barlow or President John W. Woolley to get into the principle of plural marriage, because I had it in my heart." (iii:1159.) He heard of the Woolleys and fundamentalism as early as 1924 (iv:1433) or 1926 (v:241) and first met John W. Woolley in 1928, the year Woolley died. "I shook hands with him and heard his story on the 1886 revelation, and I believed it." (iv:1504, v:241.) Woolley was the first acknowledged leader of the modern fundamentalist movement, having been excommunicated by the Church in March 1914 for "insubordination to the discipline of the government of the Church" with his beliefs on plural marriage. (Salt Lake Tribune.) Johnson recalled that he was very outspoken in his belief in "the Celestial Law", but "I had not taken any action about it any further than to express my feelings." His Stake President repeatedly scheduled interviews with him "regarding my worthiness of being maintained in the Church," but he recalled that the Stake President kept missing them out of a fear of the confrontation. (iv:1268.) This would probably be in the mid 1930s.

In 1976 Johnson recalled a Kanab sermon of President Grant’s in which he found subtle support for his fundamentalist leanings. "I had just listened to a conference report and heard President Grant speak from the stand, and I thought he condemned the law of plural marriage, the Celestial Law, pretty severely." (Grant made formal public statements opposing continued plural
marriage at the April 1921 general conference of the Church, in September 1925, at the October 1926 general conference, at the April 1931 general conference, and in the 16-page June 1933 "final manifesto" widely circulated in the Church.) "I had been laboring for some time to get the Spirit of the Gospel, and President Grant had scheduled a stopover in Kanab and was going to speak to the people. I went to the Lord and told him I was going to that meeting and for Him to cause that Brother Grant would give me the key as to whether plural marriage could be lived in this day or not." He felt Grant did give him such a key. While Grant did not speak directly on the subject, Johnson came away satisfied. "Every once in a while he dropped a word to let me know that the true principles of the gospel were always discarded by the majority of the people." (iv:1243-44.)

In its early years fundamentalism was rife with stories of continued support for plural marriage by the general authorities of the Church. (Quinn 1983, 183-185.)

Before his excommunication Johnson, his older brother Price Johnson, Isaac Carling, and their wives had driven to Salt Lake City to attend General Conference. The women attended the meetings in the Tabernacle, but the men met with another group in Cottonwood at Price's urging. It was here that Johnson first met Joseph Musser, John Y. Barlow, and other fundamentalist leaders. Price Johnson would also become a strong believer in Mormon fundamentalism. In December 1935 he would be one of the first two men convicted of unlawful cohabitation, receiving an eighteen month sentence to the Arizona State Prison at Florence. (vi:343-44; The Literary Digest.)
At first Johnson resisted the fundamentalists' ideas, but over the next few weeks as he discussed them with his brother he became convinced of the truth of what they taught. Shortly thereafter Musser and Barlow visited Short Creek with their families, further solidifying Johnson's testimony. "It doesn't make any difference what men say, I know that President Barlow holds the key of the Priesthood," he told a friend about that time. (vi:344-346.)

Johnson and the Short Creek Excommunications

At about this time President Grant had given his new counselor J. Reubin Clark a mandate to end secret modern plural marriage in the Church. Clark, a relative of the Woolleys, went at it with great energy. One of his approaches was a sort of ecclesiastical loyalty oath which required suspected fundamentalists to "solemnly declare and affirm that I, without any mental reservation whatever, support the Presidency and Apostles of the Church; that I repudiate any intimation that any one of the Presidency or Apostles of the Church is living a double life...that I denounce the practice and advocacy of plural marriage...and that I myself am not living in such alleged marriage relationship." (Quinn 1983, 184-185.)

Perhaps the Short Creek visit by Musser and Barlow forced some action by Johnson's Church leaders. He recalled his eventual excommunication as coming in either 1934 (iv:1306) and 1935. "The high council came out to Short Creek in 1935 and called us on the carpet and told us our die was cast and that we were only to accept or reject their edict, there would be no argument." The presiding officer was Zion Park Stake President
Claud Hirsch. (vi:342.) At the time Short Creek was in the Zion Park stake, now the Hurricane Utah stake.

The high council delivered its message and a ward clerk then circulated "a little paper to sign." This was probably the loyalty oath. Johnson and his wife Josephine discussed it and decided not to sign. Only four or five members of the Short Creek congregation would sign it. The Johnsons were among eighteen members of the ward notified of their excommunication a few days later. Johnson found his excommunication to be "a great load...lifted off my shoulders," but for his wife it "felt like the earth had fallen out from under her." For a while the couple met with and were courted by other Mormon dissenters, but none satisfied them. The Woolley group would be their choice. (vi:343.)

He would refer to his excommunication as being "handled by the Church," meaning that "I have no records in the Church today." (v:151.) In 1970 he rejected the importance of his excommunication saying, "They may have gone through the motions of excommunicating me, but how can they excommunicate a man for believing what Joseph Smith taught?" (i:233.)

Sometime after the Short Creek excommunications the Church sent an emissary. An Elder Crawford of Rockville, Utah, a returned missionary, "was called on a home mission to come out to Short Creek and preach repentance to us. He was an ambitious young man, full of faith, as far as the Church was concerned. He was very definite in his explanation of what he was sent out to Short Creek for... He went on at great lengths to let us know that we had committed one of the greatest sins a people could
commit in breaking away from the Church and claiming plural marriage to be a great saving principle." Johnson left no doubt that he thought the missionary was sincere, but the Short Creek group was unmoved. (i:342.)

Apparently Barlow remained to live in Short Creek and became its spiritual leader while Musser returned to Salt Lake City. Barlow, as senior member of the Priesthood Council, soon ordained Johnson as a member of the Council the Priesthood and as his successor in the leadership of Short Creek. (Baer, 38.) Barlow, who kept homes in Short Creek and Salt Lake City, died in 1949 in Salt Lake City at age 74.

Significance of Short Creek

Over the years, Short Creek came to have a special religious significance for fundamentalists. It was more than a small town hidden away in that part of the state north of the Grand Canyon, the "Arizona Strip." Johnson's sermons reflect a special feeling.

Through inspiration, he taught, three or four landowners offered the present site of Colorado City "as a starting place for the gathering of the saints." The site "was choice above all other spots of ground in the surrounding country. In fact, the statement was made that the time would come when one acre of this ground would produce more than ten acres of the best soil in Salt Lake Valley." But according to council member Joseph Musser, this richness would only be realized "when you are united." (iii:844; iv:1465.)

He also taught that Brigham Young had visited the area along with George Q. Cannon, a counselor in his presidency. They were traveling by buggy from St. George to Kanab. The
Prophet ordered his driver to stop while he surveyed the land. "This will someday be the head and not the tail of the Church. This will be the granaries of the saints. This land will produce an abundance sufficient wheat (sic) to feed the people," Young said. Johnson explained that the story was related to him in 1926 by Young’s buggy driver, an old man in Rockville named Gifford. (iii:854-855.)

Young considered successful colonization of the St. George area and near-by Muddy River, Nevada, a high priority. Over a thousand families were called on missions in the 1860s and 1870s to settle in southwestern Utah, Johnson’s parents among them. In 1864 Young built a home in St. George and began spending his winters there. Substantial northern Utah resources were committed by the Church to keeping the colonists afloat. (Arrington 1985, 295, 308-310; Arrington 1958, 217-223; Logue, 8-12.)

The 1890 Manifesto

Johnson and the fundamentalists see the 1890 manifesto as the event that divided the Church. At that time President Woodruff pledged to discontinue Mormon plural marriage and urged Church members to abide by federal law which prohibited the practice. The manifesto was widely opposed in the Church and it was a generation before it was truly enforced. (Quinn 1985, 9-105; Quinn 1983, 179-186; Alexander, 60-73.)

"We all know that Wilford Woodruff signed a manifesto in order to make the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a part of the world," Johnson taught, "or in other words, in order to save our dignity with the world, he made a covenant with them that we could do away with the Celestial Law." (i:317.)
"In 1890 the Manifesto was signed by the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and not only did they sign away their privileges to the New and Everlasting Covenant, or the law of Plural Marriage, but they broke every other commandment that God has given. Why? Because God says: Break one of these commandments and you are guilty of the whole."

As a result, "This is the only place, my brothers and sisters, upon the earth that you can hear the fullness of the everlasting gospel preached." (i:211-212.)

The manifesto was described as a work of evil. "...the evil powers tried to destroy that which God had set up, but before He allowed this condition to transpire, He provided an escape for this revelation to be continued." (ii:533.) He saw the presence of the manifesto as "one of the greatest stumbling blocks of all times," allowed by the Lord as a test of the righteous. (iv:1357.) It was "the great test" when "they tried to make peace with the enemy by signing away their rights to Holy Priesthood." (iv:1339.) It was a time "when the Lord caused a division to come upon the Latter-day Saints."
(iv:1535.)

In a 1976 sermon Johnson preached:

"'But,' says the enemy of righteousness, 'we live in a different age. What was good for the people in the days of the Prophet Joseph is not necessary in the lives of the people in the day in which we live.'

This is not so, my brothers and sisters, for God says: 'My word is one eternal round, and what I say to one I
say to all. My purposes never fail. And all who will not listen and put into their lives the Gospel of Jesus Christ will fall by the wayside.'" ( . )

Johnson also taught that the manifesto did not prohibit continued plural marriage, but left the choice up to individuals. "After Wilford Woodruff signed the manifesto, the Lord told him that it was now pleasing in His sight that men should use their own judgement regarding these principles. He also says in this book, the Doctrine and Covenants, that except a man obeys the laws that pertain to the blessings of Celestial Glory, he cannot obtain it. So, we are only trying to keep alive the principles of life and salvation." (i:234; vi:189.)

Relationships with Wives

In 1974 Johnson taught that in the Celestial Kingdom "there are three heavens or degrees." He quoted J. Golden Kimball to the effect that it took more than plural wives to insure an exalted station in that heavenly kingdom. "...are you training those wives so they will be in harmony with you and take you into the highest degree of the Celestial Glory and give eternal increase?" he asked his Colorado City congregation. Much of this particular sermon concerned peace in the home among wives. (iii:807-809.)

At another point he quoted Brigham Young while preaching on a similar theme. "The Prophet Brigham Young said that the law of plurality would damn more than it would save. And this is true. Why? Because we treat lightly that ordinance. We do not know how to train ourselves when we get them. We labor under a great delusion. Many of us think that when we have wives sealed to us that we have our calling and election made sure, and we
need not go further, but this is not so." (ii:422.) If a plural family, properly sealed, lived obediently, on the morning of resurrection only the husbands could "bring ... forth" their wives. (ii:747.)

Johnson said of his community's uncommon family structure, "I do not believe in polygamy, and I do not like the word. The Lord does not use it." His term and, he believed, the Lord's term, was "plural marriage." (iii:1021.)

The Fundamentalists and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

Fundamentalists draw a distinction between the priesthood and the "monogamist", "popular" or "corporate church", as they often call the Church. The latter is a legal creation to satisfy gentile expectations and is subordinate to the priesthood quorums, according to their view. "...the Church was a vehicle of the Priesthood, instead of the Priesthood being a vehicle of the Church." (i:173.)

Johnson and his group never pretended to be forming a new church or to be different from the mother Church. He always identified the Colorado City community as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (i:14-18; iii:950; iv:1479) or "the Fundamentalist group of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." (ii:693.)

Describing his beliefs, Johnson said "It is not in modern doctrines of the Church, but it is the original doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the fundamental principles. I was grateful when I heard that Mark E. Peterson branded us as 'FUNDAMENTALISTS'." (iv:1491.) He once called his group "the fundamentalists of the Fundamentalist division of
the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." (iv:1635.)

"Some people think because we speak of the everlasting Gospel and the law of Plural Marriage, that we have pulled away and left the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and that we have hung on to one principle of the Gospel, namely, plural marriage, and discard everything else. This is not true. For we believe that no man can receive the Celestial Law without first coming in at the door of Baptism for the remission of sins and keeping himself clean and pure from the sins of the generation in which we live." (i:210.)

Yet he would observe in 1952 "We have separated ourselves from the world; we have separated ourselves from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as it now stands." (v:28.)

As if to underscore this community with the Church, in 1952 Johnson delivered a sermon from the Articles of Faith. This summary of beliefs was drafted by Joseph Smith, Jr., and is still used by Mormon missionaries in their contacts with potential converts. After presenting each Article of Faith, he said "There is only one thing in which we differ from those who profess to be Latter-day Saints today, and that is in living of the higher principles of the Gospel as they were revealed to the Prophet Joseph and given to him. Because they conflict with the laws of the land seemingly, they have been abandoned and laid on the shelf. And because we contend that they are as true today as they were the day they were given to Joseph Smith, we are condemned; and they say we are trying to establish something new and advance new ideas in the earth." (i:15-16.)
In this context, Johnson somewhat indignantly recognized his followers were "a people who had been branded as apostates from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when they have only done that which the Lord has commanded." (i:212.)

**Johnson on the Scriptures**

The Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price constitute the scriptural standard works of the Mormon Church. Johnson and the fundamentalists embrace them unreservedly as "our Church work." (iv:1503.)

"I hold in my hand the standard works of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," he said in a 1977 sermon in Salt Lake City. "So every man, women and child that believes in this book is under condemnation unless they live according to the teachings in it. There is nothing else for us to do, my brothers and sisters, in this day now, a hundred and fifty years since the Prophet Joseph brought this work into the world, but preach repentance to a generation of people who are unbelievers." (iv:1420.) Sermons delivered from the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants were the norm from Johnson, as was praise of past Mormon leaders Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, and others. "We have been greatly blessed because we have this Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Mormon, and the Pearl of Great Price to refer to as the word of God to the generation in which we live." (iv:1704.)

**The Journal of Discourses**

Johnson and his followers believe with considerable pride that they are responsible for making the Journal of Discourses, a lengthy compilation of the sermons of nineteenth century Church leaders, available to twentieth century Mormons.
He often told his followers that the orthodox Church "sent agents out around the country gathering up the Journals of Discourses (sic) and the Millenial Star," a nineteenth century newspaper published in Great Britain and at one time edited by John Taylor. They visited individuals who owned copies and bought them from retail and used book stores. He saw this as the Church having "removed from the homes of the Latter-day Saints the testimonies of the early leaders of the Church . . . they gathered up their literature and burned it, so they could not get it." (i:136; v:345.) This was "in about 1924-25." (i:136; iv:1525, 1690.) Presumably this was to suppress previous teachings in favor of plural marriage. Johnson recalled that in 1954 at a cost of $55,000 the fundamentalists republished the set and sold them through the Deseret Book Company after an initial press run of 500 which was "scattered among the people and libraries." (i:61; iv:1490, 1525.) "This incited the envy of the leaders of the Church. Why? Because the Journals of Discourses (sic) were being distributed among the people of the Church, and it wasn’t by the consent of the Church." (i:228.) He attributed this effort on the fundamentalists part to the Lord’s inspiration of his servants. (iii:1191.) He called the republication the greatest missionary accomplishment of the previous thirty years. (i:298.)

Apparently at some point there was an effort by the Church to take the Journal of Discourses out of circulation and Johnson’s recollections are essentially correct. (Taylor, 233.)

Johnson reacted indignantly to what he saw as an attempt in 1930 by the orthodox Church to replace the Doctrine and Covenants with a volume by Apostle James E. Talmage called
Revelations of a More Enduring Value. The replacement took out of the original collection "some two hundred sections and parts of sections." The effort was a failure, according to Johnson. (i:317-318; iii:1209-1210; iv:1660, 1681.)

Johnson on the Temples

Fundamentalists believe that Celestial Marriage is not only plural marriage but that unions performed under proper priesthood authority are for time and eternity. Temples are not essential for the exercise of this priesthood authority, which they believe their leadership has in a direct line from President Taylor.

But Johnson looked forward to the day when he and his followers would again enjoy the blessings of the temples. Speaking of the fundamentalists he said "there is nothing in the world I would like to see more than to see them prepare themselves for the holy temple, that they might go there and receive their endowments." (ii:675.) He presumed all fundamentalists felt the same way. "There isn't anyone here but what would like to have access to the temples of our God and have their work done." (i:175.) He apparently never lost the respect for Mormon temple marriages he learned through his own temple marriage. (vi:360-361.)

Johnson disapproved of substantial changes undertaken in LDS temple ceremonies early in the twentieth century.

"When I see the great trend of the people today, the great cry of the Latter-day Saints is to go to the temples and be married for time and all eternity; but the ordinances of the temples have been changed in my days. They do not receive the same instructions today
that were given to us when I went through the temple. I went through the temple first in 1914. The last time I was permitted to go through the temple was in 1928. In that short period of time, great changes had taken place. So, I know that the changes that have been made over the years are mockery in the sight of our Father; for He is not pleased with the Latter-day Saints, including a great number of the fundamentalist arm of the Latter-day Saints." (iii:1091-1092.)

Referring to the LDS community in general, Johnson said in 1973 "And since we have desecrated our covenants that were made in the holy temple, and we have changed the ordinances and broken the everlasting covenant, we have got to repent of these things." (ii:675.) There were changes in both the content and manner of presentation of LDS temple ordinances beginning to take place during the time when Johnson said he last visited an temple. (Buerger 1983, 10-44; Buerger 1987, 33-76.)

The Fullness of the Gospel

Johnson was clear in his belief that most members of the Church did not enjoy a fullness of the Gospel. "The majority of those who bear the name of the Latter-day Saints have rejected the fullness of the everlasting gospel. Why have they rejected it? Because they have thought more of their own judgement than they did of the Prophets of God." (v:190.) He applauded the missionary efforts of the orthodox Church, but he qualified that praise. "Even those who are being converted today to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints do not believe in the fundamental principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as they were given to the Prophet Joseph Smith." (iv:1704.)
Line of Priesthood Authority

He would sometimes trace the fundamentalist line of Priesthood authority for his followers. "The Gospel is true. Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God. Brigham Young was his successor in the line of Priesthood. John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff, John W. Woolley, Lorin Woolley, Leslie Broadbent, John Y. Barlow, Joseph White Musser, Charles F. Zitting and the Council you see before you are also successors in the line of Priesthood." (iii:1153.)

According to Johnson, at some point after the death of John Woolley in 1928 he appeared in a vision to his son, Lorin Woolley, who was then head of the fundamentalists. The father instructed the son to call and set apart several individuals:

"to carry this work along . . . Joseph Leslie Broadbent, John Y. Barlow, Joseph Musser, Charles F. Zitting, LeGrand Woolley, and Louis Kelsch were among that body. And before John Y. Barlow passed away, he called LeRoy S. Johnson and J. Marion Hammon and had them set apart as Apostles of the Lord, Jesus Christ. He later called President Guy H. Musser and Rulon Jeffs and had them set apart. Later on he called Richard Jessop and Carl Holm, and Brother Alma Timpson." (iv:1606-1607.)

Jeffs succeeded Johnson in 1986. (Bitton.)

The Raids on Short Creek

His sermons contain repeated references to various "Raids", as criminal prosecutions have been called in Mormonism since the 1880s, especially the Arizona raid on Short Creek on 26 July 1953. He would recall "that great day when the army came in and
took over the city of Short Creek ... they took the men out and put them in jail. They ravaged their homes, took their wives and children, loaded them on buses and took them away." (iii:1081.) He also remembered it as the day "we were carried away by the unbelievers." (ii:693.)

Johnson believed that the Lord:

"... had to know again how the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints felt toward the Celestial Law, so, this is what happened: soon after these people landed in Phoenix, Arizona, there was a quarterly conference held in Mesa, Arizona. President David O. McKay was in that conference and he made this statement, 'I want the people to know that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is in full harmony with the actions of the state of Arizona in the Short Creek episode.' What did it mean? Wait and see. It isn't over yet, and I doubt very much if the persecution of this people is over." (iii:1082; v:348.)

He taught that the orthodox Church supported the 1953 raid financially. "They answered to the tune of $50,000 to assist the state in carrying away the women and children of this people." (iv:1391, 1444.) At other times he said they provided $100,000 in support and that the legal costs of the fundamentalists were $50,000. (i:227.)

Arizona authorities concede they had kept the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints informed as to their plans for the raid (Collier's) and the Church owned Deseret News of Salt Lake City applauded the action saying "We
hope the unfortunate activities at Short Creek will be cleaned up once and for all." This continued a policy of support for such prosecutions dating back to the administration of President Grant. (Quinn 1986, 184-187.)

Johnson felt his own children and others had been abused and taunted because of their modesty and beliefs while in Arizona state foster care. (v:382-383.)

Johnson once suggested that supplies sent in by the state to provide for families "while we laid in prison" might have been an indication of God's support and protection. He was proud of the fact that they came out of the ordeal with little or no long term debt. (iii:1000.) He believed the Lord would always deliver His chosen people from the enemies and he saw the outcome of the 1953 raid as proof of that. "We learned in the raid of 1953 that the Lord was willing to deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, simply because we were willing to do things that he asked us to do." (iii:1026.)

Johnson saw the raid and Mckay's statement as a turning point. "The key is turned and from now on we will win the battles of the saints," he recalled telling his wife. (iv:1391.)

A Christmas Day 1954 letter from Johnson to his religious community reflects the trauma of the 1953 raid which was still being felt at that point. He wrote:

"Today we find ourselves threatened with the experience of being separated from our children and we feel like the Lord surely will not allow this to happen . . . Let us as parents gather our families around us as much as circumstances will permit and ...
seek to get the spirit of God and keep it so that God will be pleased to grant unto us deliverance at this time." (i:132.)

He also saw the Church as being behind the 1944 raids:

"Sometime along the line, President Grant made remarks that he would like to live to see all these polygamists behind bars. And he did. When the 1944 raid came along, they arrested Brother Musser and Brother Barlow and put them in jail along with Brother Zitting and others, Brother Kelsch. And do you know what happened? After the prison gates closed behind these men, President Grant passed away. So, he lived long enough to see them behind the bars." (iv:1386.)

**Johnson on President David O. McKay**

Johnson often commented on President McKay of the Church. In 1960 he discussed their respective priesthood authority.

"President McKay has the same opportunity that I have, but he has rejected the saving principles of the gospel ... President McKay had the gospel given to him in a pure line from the Prophet Joseph Smith, and so did I." (v:151.)

With the 1970 death of McKay, Johnson would praise the man who had been supportive of earlier prosecutions.

"Today, nearly three million people are mourning the loss of a great leader. He took his place in the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and he filled it with honor before the people. I don’t know of a man who has been loved by a greater number of people than had David O. McKay. It will be a great day of mourning and admiration given to his
name, and I want this people to understand that the priesthood join in with the rest of the world in mourning the passing of David O. McKay."

(i:147.) Johnson also paid attention to the public comments of other Church leaders and sometimes announced his approval, for instance he applauded a Brigham Young University commencement address on improving morality within the Mormon community. (iii:1218.)

In 1963 Johnson expressed some satisfaction that "the offshoots" of fundamentalism had taken some of the heat off his group:

"...we are glad for all these things because the fire is taken away from us. The Church now is about to fight some of these offshoots because they have carried the fight to the Church, and we have kept our mouths shut as far as the Church is concerned...We might say a few things here that sound like we are fighting the Church teeth and toenails, but we have kept the commandments of the Lord in this...If we have to stand and face the enemy, we will do it. But if the Lord has another offshoot from the Church to take the fire away from us while we do our work, that is all right, because we want to get our work done."

(v:305-306.) Johnson was skeptical of much modern thought. He rejected evolutionary theory. "In my growing-up years, I ran across a book called the Darwin Theory. I only read a small part of it, but I read enough to tell me that if I read anymore I wouldn't be Mormon." (iii:949.) He was suspicious of space exploration
and saw it as an effort to discredit God. (i:118-119.) He disapproved of the low morality of the Nixon administration. (iii:907.) He frequently preached against long hair on men, but said "the woman's hair is her glory...and there are certain ordinances of the Priesthood that she will need beautiful hair in order to perform." (iii:1188-1189.) He thought little of modern fashion and was distressed that "the daughters of Zion would walk the streets of our great and glorious city of Salt Lake as harlots; and you will not be able to tell the face of a saint from a gentile." (v:14.) He instructed parents never to allow their small children to run naked, but to cloth them, teach them modesty, "and the sacredness of their bodies." (vi:231.) In 1974 he urged members who had a television in their homes to "get rid of it" because of the harmful influences it would introduce to their families. (iii:890.) He had a special dislike for visiting television crews trying to publicize the community. (iv:1616.) He urged his followers to clean up dirty or unsightly homes and guard against accidents. "The spirit of God cannot come to a home that is ill-kept, while he blesses the occupants of it with health and strength." (v:311.) In a 1962 sermon he worried aloud about the Cuban missile crisis and a son he had serving in the marines at that time. (v:277.)

The Mission of Fundamentalism

Johnson explained the religious mission of his community in a 1970 sermon in Salt Lake City.

"The reason for us gathering people together and teaching them like we have been teaching them today is to try and bring up a people that Joseph Smith can use
when he comes to set in order the House of God; for we believe that Joseph Smith is the One Mighty and Strong, who will come here clothed with power and the mantle of righteousness to set in order the House of God. He has to have men prepared for that great work. He has to have men who have not fought against the laws of the Celestial Kingdom; because God has said that Zion cannot be redeemed only upon principles of the Celestial Kingdom." (i:233.)

In 1974 Johnson stated this purpose more simply, "These principles have got to be kept alive." (iii:886.)

Today the Prophet LeRoy Johnson and his followers may seem like a footnote in the total Mormon experience and they have not gained much attention from scholars. That is a mistake. The Johnson Sermons contain a wealth of history for both nineteenth and twentieth century Mormon historians. A study of the Mormon fundamentalist movement is remarkably illuminating in the insights it provides on the experience of the Church and its accommodations to a modern society.

Fundamentalism is essentially a protest movement against the religious and cultural accommodations of the Church as it searched for a way to survive under the often savage pressures applied by the gentile world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The study of fundamentalist belief and thought provides remarkably illuminating insights on the experience of the Church and those accommodations which began with the 1890 manifesto and gained speed during the long administration of President Grant. Fundamentalism strives for a closeness to 1880's Mormonism, which they see as the golden age
of the faith, and can be used to better understand the changes. Plural marriage is the most obvious topic, but they can be seen also in temple ceremonies, attempts to live religious communalism, modern development of the Word of Wisdom, and the strong hold of religious leaders over the last century's Mormons but which is considerably diminished today.

With the end of the criminal prosecutions of the fundamentalists in the late 1950s, the community seems much more secure in their relationship with the outside world and more ready to tell their story. The time is certainly ripe for scholars to listen.
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