

# Re-placing Memory: Latter-day Saint Use of Historical Monuments and Narrative in the Early Twentieth Century

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In the winter of 1905, leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (L.D.S. or the “Mormons”)<sup>1</sup> departed Utah on two, seemingly disparate, missions to the east coast. One contingent went to defend their church at Senate hearings in Washington, D.C.; the other, to Vermont to dedicate a monument to church founder Joseph Smith. These forays into national politics and religious memory re-fashioned Latter-day Saint identity, as well as public perception of Mormonism, for the remainder of the twentieth century. They also illuminate one of the quotidian mysteries of religion: how it adapts to the demands of time yet maintains its sense of mediating the eternal. It is axiomatic that religious communities are not exempt from the human condition; they must adapt to their temporal circumstances or die. What is not as often recognized is that churches bring a particular burden to this task because they offer their believers the hope of transcending time.

Indeed, it is doubtful that religious identity can survive the awareness of certain kinds of change. This is more true of some religious communities than others, especially those characterized as “sectarian,” or set apart from their culture. Formed in response to a sense of immediate divine call, which aggrandizes the expectation of imperviousness to time, and yet originating in a literate era, which inevitably documented their changes over time, the Latter-day Saints are among those communities most susceptible to feeling the conflict between time and eternity, history and faith. And at no time had the Latter-day Saints felt the conflict more keenly than the winter of 1905. After many years of resistance, the church was about to cease practicing their doctrine of plural marriage, or polygamy as their antagonists called it, and, as a consequence, subordinate their divine law to the antipolygamist law of the land. This was a change of enormous magnitude for the Latter-day Saints, and the particular mission of church

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leaders traveling east in the winter of 1905 was to negotiate the change without destroying the very church they were trying to save by abandoning plural marriage. Thus, one set of travelers was charged with convincing the state that the church had changed enough; the other, with convincing the faithful that it had not changed at all.

The Washington-bound group of travelers was led by Reed Smoot, L.D.S. apostle and new U.S. senator for the State of Utah.<sup>2</sup> His election the previous year had catalyzed a nationwide protest and U.S. Senate hearing on charges that the Saints were still practicing polygamy, notwithstanding promises to the contrary which had enabled Utah's statehood ten years earlier. Polygamy, like Smoot himself, however, represented a deeper problem to the protestors. Through plural marriage, the nineteenth-century L.D.S. church had earned a reputation for theocratic despotism and civil anarchy. It was widely believed that Mormons obeyed their god and priestly leadership at the expense of the nation and its elected lawmakers. A trial on these charges had been fifty years in the making, which may explain its length and intensity. Today, what's left of citizen petitions against Smoot fill eleven feet of shelf space, the largest such collection in the national archives. During the hearing, spectators lined the halls of the U.S. Capitol, waiting for limited seats in the committee room, and filled the galleries to observe floor debates. For those who could not see for themselves, journalists and cartoonists depicted each day's admission and outrage. Ultimately, the four-year Senate investigation created a 3,500-page record of testimony by one hundred witnesses on every peculiarity of Mormonism: its polygamous family structure, ritual worship practices, "secret oaths," open canon, economic communalism, and theocratic politics.<sup>3</sup> Smoot's journey, however, and his trial before the Senate provide only the context for this essay, not its subject.

In the middle of public uproar and senatorial demands that the L.D.S. church change its ways, a second group of Utahns embarked on a pilgrimage that would include the dedication of a monument to church founder and revelator of its doctrine of plural marriage, Joseph Smith. At the head of the delegation to Vermont was the founder's nephew and namesake, contemporary church president Joseph F. Smith. Only three days earlier, President Smith had given Smoot permission to inform his senatorial colleagues that two of the church's apostles would be dismissed for their practice of plural marriage. This was the first disciplinary measure ever taken by the church in obedience to federal antipolygamy law and signaled the end of more than a half century of open hostility between the church and its

host nation.<sup>4</sup> However stabilizing this action was for the church's external relations, it had the potential to be exceedingly destabilizing internally. The faithful believed that plural marriage was a divine commandment given through their martyred prophet, Joseph Smith, and had themselves sacrificed much to live the principle. Thus, solving the church's problem with the nation required Smith to remove his people's faith in plural marriage without undermining their confidence in other revelations, as well as revelators, namely, Joseph Smith and himself as successor. How he managed to do that is the main subject of this essay.<sup>5</sup>

In sum, I argue that the dedication trip to Vermont was both a means and a symbol of Joseph F. Smith's creating a new future out of the Mormon past. The first section lays the groundwork for this argument by showing the ways in which plural marriage had become central to the Latter-day Saints' belief system, including their understanding of Joseph Smith as a prophet. Section two describes the Vermont dedication ceremony and the meaning given to Smith's birth marker as it marked also the meaning of Mormonism through claims to (1) restored church order, (2) divine authority, and (3) continuing revelation. Section three argues that these three claims, inscribed on the Vermont monument, were given particular force by L.D.S. Progressive-Era uses of the autobiographical narrative of Joseph Smith's early life. Specifically, the narrative of Joseph's original theophany or "First Vision," as it is denominated within the church, achieved during this period the primacy once accorded plural marriage, allowing the Latter-day Saints to forget, as a practical matter, the once-definitive marriage practice.<sup>6</sup> The fourth section of this essay uses theories of narrative and myths of origin to show how the "First Vision" narrative allowed the Latter-day Saints to jettison plural marriage without destroying their identity, much less their confidence in Joseph Smith as church founder.

Jan Shipps argues that the L.D.S. church's successful transition to modernity required an increased emphasis on individual boundary maintenance. Nothing in this essay is meant to contradict her conclusion. Rather, it offers a definition of the "somehow" in her observation, "Somehow the responsibility for boundary maintenance had to be shifted from the corporate body to the individuals in that body, and that shift had to be legitimized in such a way that it would gain general acceptance."<sup>7</sup> In addition, however, this essay attempts to show how, despite the apparent shift to stronger individual boundaries, the Latter-day Saints have maintained also their unusually strong corporate identity throughout the twentieth century. Thus, the fifth and final section returns to Joseph F. Smith and his fellow travelers

to show that their return trip to Utah both effected and symbolized the changes the L.D.S. church had to make in order to negotiate its corporate survival within its host culture. The dedication party's decisions about where to go and not go, what to say and not say, on their way home reveals the subtleties of what was to be remembered and what forgotten about nineteenth-century Mormonism by the twentieth-century L.D.S. church. More obvious to the church's project of collective memory was its reconstruction of historical sites and schedule of historical commemorations. These, too, are discussed, but it is important that the details of what follows not obfuscate the general explanatory power of the story itself. Ultimately, this essay argues that the L.D.S. church's Progressive-Era efforts to change and remain the same illuminate a task common to all communities that seek the divine in time and successfully hold to that pursuit over time. Nevertheless, before this particular story can be used to illuminate some general principles of religious resourcefulness, the Latter-day Saints' particular crisis of faith must be defined.

### **The Mormon Problem**

From their earliest beginnings, Latter-day Saints tested America's constitutional commitment to free exercise of religion. The governor of Missouri considered the Mormons such a problem that he issued an extermination order against them in 1838 and drove them from the state with his militia. State officials in Illinois took actions that precipitated the murder of church founder Joseph Smith in 1844 and the expulsion of his followers by local mobs. In 1857, the federal government dispatched its army to the Rocky Mountains to subdue the Mormons. The so-called Utah War caused much trauma and expense, but little change. Brigham Young was deposed as Utah's official governor, but the Mormons continued to build their kingdom of God in the West, while North and South fought a real war. Between 1862 and 1896, the nation turned to the instrumentalities of law to change the Mormons: jailing polygamists, revoking franchise, denying citizenship, disinheriting children, confiscating property, and disincorporating their church. The church's promise, in 1890, to abandon polygamy made possible Utah's admission to the union of states in 1896. But a few years later, to the nation's chagrin, the Smoot hearing demonstrated that church economic, political, and familial orders, including polygamy, remained in place. Thus, by December 1905, when Senator Smoot and President Smith left Salt Lake City on their respective missions, the nation was, once again, trying to solve that complex of differences that had become known simply as the "Mormon Problem."<sup>8</sup>

Proposed remedies included not only removing Smoot from office but also amending the constitution to deny public office to those who espoused polygamy. Convinced that the draconian laws of the late nineteenth century were about to be called into service again, church leaders had to convince the nation that, this time, the Latter-day Saints really would change. Words would not suffice. Therefore, the contingent heading for Washington, D.C., carried with it the news about the dismissal of apostles John W. Taylor and Matthais Cowley, two of the church's most powerful and popular leaders. The disciplining of Taylor and Cowley in response to Senate pressure would be the first punitive action ever taken by the church against its members for the practice of polygamy, notwithstanding fifty years of federal antipolygamy law.<sup>9</sup>

By striking down two of their own, the church leaders eventually satisfied the Senate. More immediately, however, this dramatic action made it clear to the rank-and-file Saints that the church was abandoning its commitment to plural marriage and, therefore, immediate attention had to be given to shoring up the faith of those who had staked so much on the principle. While Joseph F. Smith's ultimate goal in sending Smoot to the Senate was to "make us [the church] assume our real position and standing in the midst of the earth,"<sup>10</sup> Smith first had to ensure that the changes precipitated by the hearing did not knock the church off its feet.

Modern Mormonism's capacity to adapt to its social environment has been explained in terms of its belief in continuing revelation. As Jan Shipps has noted, at several junctures in L.D.S. history "disappointment was overcome as revelation operated to strengthen the ritual and institutional dimension of this developing religious tradition."<sup>11</sup> Continuing revelation is not of itself sufficient to legitimize change, however, if only because of the conflict inherent in undoing a past revelation, even with a present one. Removing a part of religious conviction can easily remove the whole of it. This is especially true where the part is thoroughly integrated into the whole, as was plural marriage for the Latter-day Saints. The enduring willingness of the Saints to sacrifice respect, property, liberty, and life in order to maintain the practice between 1841 and 1905 is an easy measure of the doctrine's significance. Less noble, but equally telling, is the longer history of lying about the practice by an otherwise sternly ethical people. No doubt persecution made the Saints hold to the principle less critically than they might have done. More than the psychology of persecution, however, is required to explain the Saints' persistent practice of their uniquely antisocial form of family life.<sup>12</sup>

Several forces contributed to the L.D.S. church's stubborn conflation of religious faith and marital practice. Each of these forces

had to be dealt with if Joseph F. Smith was to change the church's practice without destroying its faith. The first can be characterized as historical. Joseph Smith spent the last three years of his life implementing a theology and ecclesiology of temple worship that made plural marriage or "celestial marriage," as it was also called within the L.D.S. church, the highest sacrament of the church. As Joseph Smith's final prophetic effort, plural marriage was necessarily given added significance by those who had entered into the practice under his tutelage. Thrust into leadership by Joseph Smith's murder, these early initiates organized the Utah church according to their understanding that celestial marriage constituted the fulfillment of Joseph Smith's mission to restore the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Smith himself called celestial marriage "a new and an everlasting covenant . . . instituted for the fullness of . . . [God's] glory," and Brigham Young agreed.<sup>13</sup> In 1852, shortly after the grant of territorial status to Utah and the arrival of the last refugees from Illinois, the decision to make plural marriage a churchwide practice was justified on the grounds that it was a revelation "given [by God] to our Prophet, Seer, and Revelator . . . only about eleven months before he was martyred for the testimony of Jesus."<sup>14</sup> Later, when the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (R.L.D.S.), led by Joseph Smith's son, identified itself in opposition to polygamy and denied that Smith had ever practiced it, the Utah church's identity became further defined in terms of plural marriage. Not only for the nation, but for the Saints as well, to be a true follower of Joseph Smith was to accept plural marriage in theory and practice. Any successful attempt to stop the practice of plural marriage had to find within Joseph Smith's life and thought an equally powerful expression of the church's restorationist claims and an equally differentiating belief from that of other churches.

A second force sustaining the practice of plural marriage arose from the L.D.S. church's long contest with the federal government. Though not all Latter-day Saints practiced polygamy, all were subject to and affected by government sanctions against it. Raided by federal marshals and accused of barbarism and immorality by Protestant ministers and dime novelists, the entire church population lived for decades in an atmosphere of fear, antagonism, and shame. After the failure of the U.S. Army to effect sufficient change in mid-century, the forms and forums of American law were increasingly employed to impose the nation's moral sensibilities upon the Saints. Naturally then, as federal law became the instrumentality for enforcing Protestant morality upon them, the Saints' resistance to the law became framed increasingly in legal terms. For example, in 1870, when anti-

polygamy legislation was tightening its hold over the Utah Territory, the following resolution was adopted by the Saints:

The doctrine of Celestial Marriage or plurality of wives was revealed to the prophet Joseph Smith and by him established in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a revealed law of God, therefore be it. Resolved that we the members of said Church, in general mass meeting assembled do now most earnestly and solemnly declare before Almighty God that we hold that said order of marriage is a cardinal principle of our religious faith affecting us not only for time, but for all eternity and as sacred and binding as any other principle of the Holy Gospel of the Son of God.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond any theological significance it may have, this resolution was an explicit, first amendment claim to constitutional protection from federal regulation of L.D.S. marriage practices. The way the Latter-day Saints saw it, “free exercise of [L.D.S.] religion” could only be preserved by the state’s ceasing to criminalize church-sanctioned marriages. Six years later, as they felt the Poland Act’s efforts to make antipolygamy laws effective, the Saints strengthened their legal argument by canonizing Smith’s revelation on celestial marriage. The 1876 edition of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants added Smith’s revelation, which was written in 1843. Thus, canonization of the doctrine in scripture occurred thirty-three years after its formalization by Smith and twenty-four years after its publication by Young, but contemporaneous with renewed efforts by Congress to quash the practice. The choice to formalize in scripture their belief in celestial marriage strengthened the Latter-day Saints’ “free exercise” claim in federal courts. It also, however, further complicated the succeeding generation’s task of deposing of the practice: proscription of plural marriage would have to be established with equal legitimacy and formality as had its prescription.

Finally, in addition to the history of polygamy and the effects of litigation on it, the Saints’ marital practices were thoroughly integrated with their doctrines of personal salvation and church administration. During Joseph Smith’s lifetime, plural marriage was practiced secretly and only among leadership elite. Consequently, at the time of his death in 1844, the doctrine was not well developed by sermon or other public exposition. This omission had been thoroughly corrected by the turn of the century. Indeed, thirty years prior to inheriting the burden of doing away with the practice, then-apostle Joseph F. Smith had said in a sermon, “I understand the law of celestial marriage to mean that every man in this Church, who has the ability to obey and practice it in righteousness and will not, shall be damned. I

say I understand it to mean this and nothing less, and I testify in the name of Jesus that it does mean that."<sup>16</sup> For the Latter-day Saints, damnation was to cease to progress in the hereafter. Though not equivalent to traditional Christian notions of hell, it did mean not going to heaven. For the Saints, monogamy alone constituted a rejection of Joseph Smith's canonized teaching that "there are three heavens . . . ; And in order to obtain the highest a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it."<sup>17</sup> The bracketed definition was inserted into the text of the published scripture and, hence, made explicit the relation of "this order of priesthood" to the revelation which followed in the text, namely, plural marriage. Thus, this definition makes explicit also the doctrinal connection between the plural marriage and priesthood, as well as salvation. The stubbornly enduring practice of polygamy within the leading counsels of the church until approximately 1905 is theologically based in this aspect of L.D.S. doctrine.

Because plural marriage constituted for the Saints an "order of the priesthood," not to practice it was to lack a form of priesthood authority or certain mediating rights prerequisite to leading the congregation of the church. This meant that plural marriage was a necessary condition of L.D.S. leadership position and priestly power. When Senator Hoar observed to Joseph F. Smith, during Smith's 1904 testimony in the Smoot hearing, that the New Testament "apostle says that a bishop must be sober and must be the husband of one wife," Smith responded, "At least."<sup>18</sup> Hoar was amused, but Smith could not have been. His task was formidable. To ensure the temporal survival of the church, Smith had to enjoin the practice and amend the Saints' belief in celestial marriage. Thus, the centennial anniversary of Joseph Smith's birth, which occurred on the eve of Joseph F. Smith's dismissal of two apostles and polygamy's public demise, provided a much-needed opportunity to reweave the threads of memory which bound the Saints to their founding prophet. Like all commemorations, the dedicatory ceremony in Vermont, together with dedicatory services held throughout the church, involved not simply remembering, but also forgetting.

### **Retracing Their Steps**

On December 18, 1905, L.D.S. church president Joseph F. Smith gathered what was left of his administration and boarded a special train car that would carry his party from Salt Lake City to Sharon, Vermont.<sup>19</sup> Before returning to their headquarters behind the

mountains, this aging, second generation of church leaders and their mature children would travel 5,500 miles and visit the formative sites of their faith, preaching the Mormon past and future at gatherings in the East and Midwest. The trip to Vermont, with its choices of where and where not to go, and the commemoration of Joseph Smith's birth, with its inscribed-in-stone meanings of his life, both symbolized and effected twentieth-century Mormonism. When Joseph F. Smith dedicated the monument to Joseph Smith, the nephew was not only remembering the uncle; he was also initiating the collective forgetting of Joseph Smith's last revelation: plural marriage. In its place, President Smith gave renewed significance to Joseph Smith's first revelation, which introduced church belief in a non-Trinitarian deity and the inauthenticity of other Christian denominations. In short, Joseph F. Smith was creating a new and more socially tolerable source of otherness for his people, whose existing differences with the rest of the country were threatening it again with extinction.

No one was better suited to the task of melding past and present into a new future than its current president, Joseph F. Smith. "Joseph F.," as he was called by his people, was a curious combination of frontier toughness, political sophistication, and religious certainty. He had participated in every stage of the Latter-day Saints' colonization of a vast territory in the American West and had traveled widely throughout the United States, the Pacific Islands, and Europe. For a self-educated frontiersman, he had a surprising breadth of knowledge and facility with argument, as the Senate hearing committee would discover. While he was his people's undisputed leader in spiritual matters, having served in the highest counsels of church government since 1867, he was also captain of the church's many industrial, commercial, and political enterprises. Politically, he had served both his church and state as colonist, city councilman, legislator, Washington lobbyist, and drafter of Utah's constitution. It was Smith who engineered the church's alignment with the Republican party, and he was Smoot's chief advocate against those within the church who called for resignation rather than endure the scrutiny of a Senate investigation. The source of his people's confidence in him, however, was probably not a function of his skilled leadership but of his identity with all the trials they had endured to date.<sup>20</sup>

Joseph F.'s character and personality were shaped in an environment of extraordinary personal sacrifice and by experiences of abject loss and extreme terror. Born in 1838, Smith was immediately caught in the Saints' brutal flight to Illinois, catalyzed by Missouri's extermination order. Over the next few years, Smith saw the Mormon utopia, Nauvoo, Illinois, created out of a swamp on the Mississippi

River and soon evacuated by force of mob violence. On his thirty-sixth birthday, Smith wrote in his journal, "my soul has never thoroughly dispelled the darkening shadows cast upon it by the lowering gloom of that eventful period."<sup>21</sup> The church's second exodus in six years was precipitated by the murder of Joseph F. Smith's father and uncle, when Joseph F. was five and a half. The memories of it were sufficiently traumatic that Smith did not visit the site of his father's violent death until 1906, despite his having been in the vicinity several times. Joseph F. Smith matured in the Utah Territory under circumstances that continued to school him in the destructive antagonism between his church and the United States. His mother died from the hardships of building a homestead in the barren Salt Lake Basin, making him an orphan at thirteen. His temper earned him an early mission call at the age of fifteen to the Sandwich Islands. When he returned five years later, he found "all Utah . . . aflame with the war spirit. . . . preparing to resist the impending invasion of Salt Lake Valley." President James Buchanan had sent the U.S. Army to subdue the Mormon kingdom, and Smith's first night home from the mission field was spent, he said, "molding rifle bullets from a pig of lead. . . . I then proceeded to the front."<sup>22</sup> For the next forty years, Smith was on the front line in every battle his church fought with its host nation, including of course the furor over the Latter-day Saint practice of plural marriage. Smith had five plural wives and forty-two children by the time he was subpoenaed to testify in the Smoot hearing. When, the following year at age sixty-seven, he boarded the train to Joseph Smith's Vermont birthplace, Joseph F. embodied his church for the faithful no less than the man he sought to memorialize.

Arriving on December 22, the party from Salt Lake City, joined by Mormons from New York and Boston, must have nearly overwhelmed the little hamlet of South Royalton, Vermont. Royalton's hospitality was equal to the occasion, however. Locals greeted the visiting Latter-day Saints with a resolution "recognizing the right of said [L.D.S.] persons to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience" and, in a "broad spirit of toleration," were offered use of the town hall. The welcome was no doubt warmed by the financing and entertainment incident to constructing and hauling to such a remote place "the largest polished shaft we know of in America, and perhaps the world." The spectacle included planking roads; shoring up bridges; shearing off groves of trees when granite went awry; and hitching as many as twenty-two horses to a specially made wagon and, behind them, another four horses with a battering ram "for the last push."<sup>23</sup> Why all the effort? President Smith had stated the goal at the end of his address at the Latter-day Saint's semiannual

conference held the previous October in Salt Lake City. The Saints must, he said, proclaim "that 'Mormonism' is a living, moving entity; that it is not dead nor sleeping, but that it is alive and awake, growing and advancing in the land; and let the world know it."<sup>24</sup> The effort to celebrate the legacy of Joseph Smith was meant to signal that the movement he founded had both the intentions and the resources necessary to carry on and to do so on a grand scale.

Of course, this message was sent to those critics who declared that "the Smoot case will abolish Mormonism without war."<sup>25</sup> But, the outside world was not Joseph F. Smith's only audience. The monument to Joseph Smith sent a message to the believing, but demoralized, Latter-day Saints also. Testimony solicited from their church leaders during the Smoot hearing had at times challenged Latter-day Saint beliefs. Especially difficult had been Joseph F. Smith's testimony that the "guidance" he received from God was "the same as any other member of the church."<sup>26</sup> Thus, it was serendipitous that the centennial of Joseph Smith's birth came at a time when the faithful needed something to celebrate and needed particularly to celebrate Joseph Smith as first in a succession of modern prophets. Significantly then, for its first public celebration of Joseph Smith in the twentieth century, the church chose an occasion unrestrained by any theological or ecclesiastical associations except those that the dedication party would bring with them. Memorialization of a birth is, after all, the blankest of slates upon which to write retrospective meanings. The monument erected in Vermont was susceptible to embodying not only the nature and the permanence of Latter-day Saint claims about their founding prophet but also their claims about the nature and permanence of their church.

The dedication ceremony celebrated the Latter-day Saints' sameness to, as well as their difference from, their host nation. Joseph F. Smith responded to Royalton's welcome by hosting a patriotic meeting and inviting everyone to the festivities the next day. Going east as they did in the midst of the crisis posed by the Smoot hearing, the Mormon party was not unaware of the renewed attacks on their patriotism and never failed to remark on their identification with American origins. Calling the first members of the church "pilgrim fathers No. 2," one L.D.S. speaker reminded his Vermont listeners that the Mormons were "descended of stock from New England—from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont and from everywhere else."<sup>27</sup> In Boston, apostle and future church president, George A. Smith, noted that "'Mormon' people have been the builders of a great commonwealth in the . . . Western country. And now for the first time they have turned their faces back, as it were, to begin to

build in New England."<sup>28</sup> Like the decision to send Smoot to Washington in the first place, the monument erected to Joseph Smith's memory signaled the church's intent to come out from behind its mountain barrier and claim a place in America at large. Whereas Smoot's election constituted a claim to participate in America's future, the monument staked a claim to America's past. For the Saints, the dedicatory ceremonies marked an attempt at homecoming and healing: "And now we come back. The west and the east meet here. . . . We want your friendship; and you have ours."<sup>29</sup> Joseph F. Smith's party came to celebrate their church's New England origins with New Englanders and express their shared history and citizenship with all Americans at every stop along the way.

There was, however, also an exclusivity to their dedicatory celebration when they reflected upon the historical significance of reversing their pioneering trek and remembered the losses that characterized their youth. Indeed, all the Latter-day Saints assembled in memorial services held in congregations throughout the church were "reckoning the time from the birth of their prophet, leader and organizer."<sup>30</sup> According to that reckoning, their history not only "repeated the labors and successes of the Pilgrim Fathers" but also was "the fulfillment of the dreams of the ancient prophets. . . . Jerusalem, Shechem, and Capernaum rise again from the great American Desert, and the Lord has remembered His promise to Jacob."<sup>31</sup> Rehearsals of church history during the dedication were, therefore, preludes to assertions of survival and even of triumphant growth in numbers and status. Such reckoning typifies the work inherent in commemoration, especially in times of crisis.

Maurice Halbwachs inaugurated and many have built upon his studies of collective remembering.<sup>32</sup> Central to his thesis is the insight that commemoration is inevitably a function of selective memory and entails the equally important task of forgetting. As David Thelan has paraphrased Halbwachs: "People develop a shared identity by identifying, exploring, and agreeing on memories. . . . In the course of taking a picture or creating an album they decide *what* they want to remember and *how* they want to remember it."<sup>33</sup> In 1905, the Latter-day Saints were about to turn the American landscape into their scrapbook. During Joseph F. Smith's administration, the church began to recover and reconstruct the sites of its early history in New York, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa. Consistent with Pierre Nora's observation generally, the Latter-day Saints felt the need for "places of memory" at the very time when they felt at risk of a breach with their past.<sup>34</sup> The Utahns' claim to a piece of Vermont constituted a collective act of remembering that helped them forget a past they

could not carry with them into the future. They would be so successful that eventually they would hardly be aware that they were agreeing to forget and, if made aware, would tend to think they were forgetting Joseph Smith's immediate successors, who had dedicated their administrations to implementing broadly and defending at any cost the practice of plural marriage. In fact, however, the Progressive-Era Saints were in the process of forgetting portions of Joseph Smith's legacy that subsequent church presidents had taken so literally.

Leaving overt historicizing to others, Joseph F. Smith spoke during the dedication ceremonies only to bless the monument. His prayer stipulated the elements of Joseph Smith's mission that would be carried forward into the twentieth century as inviolable, even to the consciousness of change. Thanking God for "the great Prophet and Seer of the nineteenth century," Joseph F. made an offering of each element of the monument in terms of its significance. The huge cement foundation symbolized the primitive church or "the foundation Thou has laid, of Apostles and Prophets, with Jesus Christ, Thy son, as the chief corner stone." Upon this foundation was laid a four-foot thick, thirty-ton granite base "typifying the rock of revelation." Finally, erected on the base and measuring a foot for each year of his life, a thirty-eight-and-a-half-foot shaft of granite represented Joseph Smith's life. The shaft was polished to symbolize Smith's "reflecting the light of heaven" and crowned to illustrate successful completion of his earthly mission and the possibility for all to be similarly glorified.<sup>35</sup> These three elements—a foundational restoration of Christ's church from apostasy; a base of continuing revelation from heaven; and an assertion of Joseph Smith's revelatory power and divine authority bestowed to those who follow—are arguably the core elements of L.D.S. doctrine and frame the Latter-day Saint church's identity within American denominationalism. In place of their nineteenth-century emphasis on theocratic and familial kingdom-building, the Latter-day Saints were prepared by crisis to return to less grandiose but still large claims regarding restoration of the primitive church, divine sponsorship, and living prophets. These claims were carved in stone both literally on the surface of the Joseph Smith monument and figuratively in terms of the church's identity.

Inscribed on the monument's northerly side was a reference to Joseph Smith's initial theophany in 1820, when he was instructed not to join any existing church. Other surfaces were devoted to Smith's subsequent experiences of angelic restoration of knowledge and authority to organize "the Church of Jesus Christ in its fullness and perfection."<sup>36</sup> Arguably, these assertions of restored truth, authority, and church order, which Smith based on models found in both Old

Testament prophecy and New Testament apostolic witness, constitute the creative material out of which the L.D.S. church adapts itself over time. Moreover, because these claims comprise both the boundaries and content of Latter-day Saint identity—the sense of separateness from non-Mormons and of sameness of being Mormon—they mark the outside limit of what may be changed without disturbing the sense of continuity with their past. Virtually every other aspect of L.D.S. belief is relatively fungible, making the church extraordinarily adaptable and identifiable at the same time. This can be seen by the deployment of these claims both to compensate for the loss of celestial marriage and to defend against the threat this loss posed to the founding prophet's legacy, especially as it authorized those prophets who succeeded him.

### **Putting First Things First**

Joseph Smith claimed to have received many revelations, all of which were, to varying degrees, indices of his prophetic stature and mined for their theological significance by successive generations of believers. This is especially true of what is called the "First Vision," which, according to Smith's own account, occurred in 1820 when concerns caused by competitive revivalism motivated the fourteen-year-old Smith to try to choose which of the evangelical churches to join. Relying on biblical injunction to pray for wisdom, Smith retired to the woods to ask "which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)—and which I should join."<sup>37</sup> The canonized account of the vision states that two divine personages appeared to Smith and identified themselves as God and Jesus Christ. As foreshadowed in Smith's restatement of his question, they "answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong."<sup>38</sup> Hence, two key teachings of Mormonism make their first appearance in this First Vision.

Of greatest import in the nineteenth century was the instruction not to join any of the existing churches. This private message to Joseph Smith of Christian apostasy was publicly elaborated later through the 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon. The second doctrine is implicit in the description of God and the Son as "personages," which marked an immediate and radical break with traditional Christian creeds. Yet, if noted at all by Mormonism's early critics, Latter-day Saints' belief in a godhead of three separate personages was considered only one among many unpleasantly distinctive elements of Mormonism and secondary in concern to the faith's new scripture, priesthood hierarchy, economic communalism, temple building, modern revelation, and, of course, plural marriage.<sup>39</sup>

Many factors contributed to the relative lack of interest in the First Vision by nineteenth-century believers and nonbelievers. Most have been identified by Latter-day Saint scholars in a variety of articles attempting to validate the historicity of the event or its relationship to developments in L.D.S. doctrine.<sup>40</sup> Though these studies disagree on the First Vision's theological implications, what matters for our purposes is that all agree, in the words of James B. Allen, author of the most extensive study, that "the weight of evidence would suggest that it [the First Vision] was not a matter of common knowledge, even among church members, in the earliest years of Mormon history."<sup>41</sup> As Allen's research makes apparent, though the First Vision is used in a sermon as early as 1883, the turning point in the status of the First Vision occurs during the administration of Joseph F. Smith and, significantly for the purposes of this essay, contemporaneous with the Smoot hearing and its immediate aftermath. The story is first used in Latter-day Saint Sunday School texts in 1905; in priesthood instructional manuals in 1909; as a separate missionary tract in 1910; and in histories of the church in 1912. Moreover, in 1907, the Smith family farm in Palmyra, New York, was purchased and passed into church ownership in 1916. A grove of trees on the site where Joseph Smith was assumed to have had the First Vision became an increasingly popular pilgrimage site, culminating in centennial celebrations in 1920. By mid-century, Joseph Smith's account of his theophany was denominated "The Joseph Smith Story." Eventually, this story would be granted the status of "the beginning point, the fountainhead, of the restoration of the gospel in this dispensation."<sup>42</sup> In the First Vision, Progressive-Era president Joseph F. Smith, whose tenure lasted until his death in 1918, had found a marker of L.D.S. identity whose pedigree was as great as, and would be made greater than, that of plural marriage for the twentieth-century Saints.

The First Vision contained all the elements necessary to fill the historical, scriptural, and theological void created by the abandonment of plural marriage. To the extent that plural marriage had captured Latter-day Saint loyalties as Joseph Smith's last revelation, the *First* Vision, as its referent indicates, was equally appealing. It also, like polygamy, was both a historical event and an idea that could be characterized as attracting persecution. By claiming to be the only true church in a religiously plural society, nineteenth-century Saints had not endeared themselves to their neighbors. Moreover, though it was not of as much note as the Book of Mormon or other doctrines, the Saint's rejection of Trinitarianism appears to have been a source of some antagonism. Joseph Smith's mother recounted, "The different denominations are very much opposed to us. . . . The Methodists also

come, and they rage, for they worship a God without body or parts, and they know that our faith comes in contact with this principle."<sup>43</sup> Whether the Methodists knew this from accounts of Joseph Smith's theophany did not matter to the twentieth-century Latter-day Saints: they believed it to be so.<sup>44</sup> From here it was a small step to finding in the First Vision a source of the Latter-day Saints' continuing identity with their forebears. In 1909, still feeling the aftershocks of the Smoot hearing through negative press reports, Joseph F. Smith told the church: "From the day that the Prophet Joseph Smith first declared his vision until now . . . the enemy to direct revelation from God and to the inspirations that come from the heavens to man has been arrayed against this work."<sup>45</sup> New emphasis on the First Vision served to maintain a sense of religious difference and, as such, provided the equally necessary sense of internal cohesiveness and historical continuity in terms of persecution.

Significantly, however, the First Vision changed the arena of confrontation over differences from social action to theological belief, a necessity created not only by the experience of persecution but also by Supreme Court law. In *Reynolds v. U.S.*, the Court made clear that the American government would tolerate only differences in religious thought, not religiously motivated actions that compete with social mores.<sup>46</sup> New emphasis on the First Vision successfully reframed the Latter-day Saints' necessary sense of otherness so that it fit safely within the politics of American religion. Unlike his teachings on plural marriage, Joseph Smith's First Vision placed his followers at odds only with other churches, not the state, and shifted the battle from issues of public morality to theological tenets.

Like plural marriage, however, the First Vision was capable of being formalized as doctrine fundamental to the faith. An account of it had been added to the church's scriptural canon in 1880 on motion of Joseph F. Smith, then counselor in the L.D.S. church's presidency. Thus, this first revelation to Joseph Smith was susceptible to as formal and central a role as his last. Moreover, in 1902 under the direction of Joseph F. Smith, the text of Joseph Smith's autobiography was divided into chapters and verses and integrated by reference to the rest of L.D.S. scripture. This served to give Joseph Smith's First Vision status equal to the visions of biblical and Book of Mormon prophets. The successful formalization of the First Vision and its placement at the core of L.D.S. identity is neatly summarized by an apostle called to his position during the Smoot hearing: "One outstandingly distinguishing feature of this Church is divine authority by direct revelation. The appearing of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith is the foundation of this Church. Therein lies the secret of its strength and

vitality. . . . What God is, is answered. His relation to his children is clear. His interest in humanity through authority delegated to man is apparent. The future of the work is assured."<sup>47</sup>

The "assurance" provided by the First Vision was in no small part due to its synthesis of those ideas so necessary to L.D.S. faith: an immanent God, modern revelation, and divine imprimatur for ecclesiastical authority. Despite such extravagant endorsement of the First Vision's theological substance, however, the significance to the church of Joseph Smith's account of his early experiences is not adequately understood if it is seen merely as a container for L.D.S. theology. The twentieth-century role of his autobiography can only be appreciated when it is viewed as a narrative, even a story of origins or a myth with the capacity to order the reader's experience of time. The Latter-day Saints had a particular need for order during Joseph F. Smith's administration; and so it is that during these years Joseph Smith's autobiography emerges not only as a source of doctrine but also as the modern church's master narrative.

### Mormonism's Master Narrative

Joseph Smith's autobiography covers only his early years and is commonly referred to within the church as "The Joseph Smith Story." As indicated by the broad attribution in its title, the narrative is deemed to communicate the essence of Smith's life and work, although it is limited to only a few events during a nine-year period that, significantly, preceded the organization of the church in 1830. The events around which the narrative is constructed are: (1) Smith's First Vision in 1820 of the Father and the Son; (2) several appearances between 1823 and 1827 of an angel named Moroni, who instructed Smith and directed him to the hiding place of the record that he would publish as the Book of Mormon; and (3) an appearance in 1829 of the resurrected John the Baptist, who ordained Smith and a colleague to priestly authority. While other versions of Smith's autobiography include additional events, and the contemporaneously kept record of Smith's life is voluminous, only these early events were legitimized by canonization and employed as Smith's "Story."<sup>48</sup> Why they were considered sufficient to constitute *the* Joseph Smith story and were deemed worthy of canonization can be deduced in part from the earlier discussion of the dedication of the Joseph Smith monument. Namely, these three events in Joseph Smith's life correspond directly to the three principles memorialized in the 1905 dedication ceremonies and lie at Mormonism's core: a foundational restoration of Christ's church from apostasy, a base of continuing revelation from

heaven, and an assertion of Joseph Smith's revelatory power and divine authority bestowed to those who follow.

As a narrative, however, the Joseph Smith autobiography places these principles in a plot that, by definition, is an ordering of events in time that allows its readers to experiment with the world offered by the plot. In theory, by sympathetic participation with a narrative and by interpreting the writer's offered order of events, readers construct meaning for themselves. "It is," Ricoeur argues, "the very heart of reading [and hearing, one assumes] that explanation and interpretation are indefinitely opposed and reconciled."<sup>49</sup> Reconciliation of contemporary oppositions by its readers is anticipated by the other names given to the Joseph Smith story, namely, the "Joseph Smith Testimony" and, in the most recent version of L.D.S. scripture, "Joseph Smith—History." In its appeal to these types of discourse—story, testimony, history—the Joseph Smith autobiography signals its narrative uses that exceed simply bearing a theological message.

Naturally, the "reconciled" meaning the reader derives from any story will depend upon the immediate questions that he or she brings to it. Thus, one way to understand the appeal or explanatory power of a given narrative in a given time is to consider its community of readers and their circumstances. For the Joseph Smith story, which achieved its popularity in the L.D.S. church between 1905 and 1920, this means seeing it through the eyes of a church readership struggling—in the midst of external attack and on the verge of internal schism over abandoning nineteenth-century commitments—to know whether their church was still "the only true and living church on the face of the whole earth."<sup>50</sup> From its very first sentence, there can be no doubt that Joseph Smith's 1838 canonized autobiography is an explanatory defense of church origins:

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 to militate against its character as a Church and its progress in the world—I have been induced to write this history, to disabuse the public mind, and put all inquirers after truth into possession of the facts, as they have transpired, in relation both to myself and the Church.<sup>51</sup>

After a brief introduction, the narrative begins immediately by describing the tension inherent in Joseph Smith's search for religious certainty amid competing truth claims, and it ends ten printed pages later with the hero's receipt of heavenly endowments of power to organize a church.

In the different accounts of his experience, Joseph Smith emphasized different motivations for his 1820 prayer. As indicated above, in the canonized version of the story, Smith's First Vision was prompted by his concern to know which of contending denominations was God's church.<sup>52</sup> Dictated in 1838, just months after Joseph Smith was forced from Kirtland, Ohio, by mob action, this version reflects its contemporaneous circumstances: an organized and hunted church in combat with its neighbors. The account is, therefore, not surprisingly preoccupied with persecution, using the word seventeen times in its ten pages. On one level, then, the story's appeal to the early twentieth-century church, embattled in another antipolygamy campaign and fearing constitutional disfranchisement, is obvious. By his own account, Joseph Smith's sense of persecution was aroused by accusations regarding his family's poverty and local treasure-hunting activities, as well as other aspersions on his own integrity. For twentieth-century readers of the account, however, what mattered most were those portions of the story related to allegations of heresy by Protestant critics, as indicated above by Joseph F. Smith's conclusion that persecution resulted primarily from his uncle's doctrine of God. In addition, Progressive-Era Saints, so small in numbers and capital relative to the larger population, must have been drawn to the story's portrait of endurance and certainty of purpose:

It caused me serious reflection then, and often has since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them a spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and it was often the cause of great sorrow to myself. However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had beheld a vision. I have thought since, that I felt much like Paul, when he made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice; but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew, and would know to his latest breath, that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise. So it was with me. I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that

light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; . . . I had found the testimony of James to be true—that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided.<sup>53</sup>

This was the Latter-day Saints' "perfect man" whom they memorialized in polished granite: the seeker who became a prophet by means of theophany and unwavering, public witness.<sup>54</sup> It was this type of perfection under pressure that they themselves aspired to when they built the monument in 1905 and began reading his story with renewed interest.

The second, pivotal event in the narrative is the appearance of an angel who, according to the account, repeatedly instructed Joseph Smith about the meaning of biblical scripture and directed him to new scripture, the Book of Mormon. This is the second of the three themes celebrated in the Joseph Smith monument: restored truth through divine communication with a prophet. For twentieth-century L.D.S. leaders, the numerous biblical references made in Joseph Smith's account of the angel's instruction provided an additional basis for demonstrating the holy pedigree of several L.D.S. doctrines. As one church leader explained:

At the second vision that the Prophet Joseph received, . . . [a]mong the things that were revealed to him was the principle of vicarious work for the dead, and the principle of the gathering of the people, principles of our Church that are unique to it. These were given by the angel Moroni. He also read from the book of Malachi about the hearts of children being turned to their fathers, and the fathers' hearts to the children. He read to him the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, which refers to the gathering; and other principles he explained to the young man. Today we have heard read how much has been given for temples and for temple buildings, and this shows that the Latter-day Saints believe in the principle revealed to the Prophet Joseph as early as 1823.<sup>55</sup>

Here the practice of performing ordinances vicariously for the dead, a particularly twentieth-century initiative of the church, is validated by

the Joseph Smith story.<sup>56</sup> Though Smith had introduced baptism for the dead as early as 1840, the primary focus of his Nauvoo discourses had been the role of the temple in relation to doctrines of deification and celestial marriage, or its sanctifying import for the living. As I will discuss hereafter, the definition of celestial marriage would be adapted and new priority assigned to vicarious work for the dead during the twentieth century. Though not the sole source by any means, the Joseph Smith story became an important authorizing agent for twentieth-century theologizing on L.D.S. temples and priesthood.

Most fundamental, however, the account of Moroni's appearance to and education of Joseph Smith conveys the necessity of revelation and its triumph over worldly opposition. The narrative makes the latter point when it relates a failed attempt to validate the Book of Mormon's historical claims by showing its purportedly ancient script to Columbia University professor Charles Anthon. According to the account, once Anthon realized the source of the characters, he withdrew his endorsement, "saying, that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels."<sup>57</sup> In Professor Anthon's reaction, later readers of the Joseph Smith story would see, as did Smith himself in his 1832 account, the fulfillment of the learned-man prophecy of Isaiah 29 and be reminded that they should not expect, neither would they need, worldly assistance. When, in 1905, the dedication party included in its itinerary a prayer meeting on the hill where Joseph Smith said he retrieved the Book of Mormon record, they came away with a renewed conviction of "the truth of the latter-day work and the fortelling [*sic*] its ultimate triumph over opposing powers."<sup>58</sup> Thus, the second of Smith's visions also was a useful source of interpretation of present events and of continuity with their past.<sup>59</sup>

The final event in the canonized version of Joseph Smith's story occurs in 1829 and illustrates the same principles as the previous events: on-going revelation in an atmosphere of opposition but with promises of triumph. Motivated by questions during his work on the Book of Mormon and accompanied by his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, Smith prayed again for guidance. Implicit in the result of the prayer is concern for authority. An account of baptism in the Book of Mormon had left the pair wondering how to receive remission of sin if, as they believed, no existing church were an acceptable agent of God. The short of the story is that a resurrected John the Baptist appeared to Smith and Cowdery; ordained them with authority not only to baptize but also to organize a church; and promised that further authority would be bestowed in the future. The words Smith ascribed to the angelic visitor provide the prechurch beginnings of churchly authority to receive continuing revelation: "Upon you my fellow

servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the Gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall *never be taken again* from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness."<sup>60</sup>

The endowment of authority and promises of permanence, like experiential knowledge of God modeled in the First Vision and continuing knowledge from God illustrated in the second, provide the foundation upon which the Latter-day Saints could tolerate a changing church. Thus, Smith's story is also denominated his "testimony." No less than other canonized narratives, the official account of Joseph Smith's early years begins "a history directed by a 'promise' and moving to a 'fulfillment.'"<sup>61</sup> When, in the first decades of this century, the Latter-day Saints broke finally with their immediate past, they found present stability—not merely theology—in Joseph Smith's testimony of promises made prior to the organization of their church. Herein lay the greatest strength of the church's new twentieth-century uses of the Joseph Smith story as a myth of Mormon origins.

To the extent that Joseph Smith's canonized story is concerned exclusively with events that occurred prior to the organization of the church, but were foundational to it, the narrative's concerns are primordial and function like other myths of origination. "In recounting how these things began and how they will end," says Ricoeur, "the myth places the experience of [the reader or listener] in a whole that receives orientation and meaning from the narration. Thus, an understanding of [L.D.S.] human reality as a whole operates through the myth by means of a reminiscence and an expectation."<sup>62</sup> The Joseph Smith story captured the attention of the Progressive-Era church because it "oriented" them. It not only gave order to their contemporary experience of crisis with authority,<sup>63</sup> but it also provided hope for the future in its promise that their bond with the sacred would not be broken. Throughout Joseph Smith's explanation of Mormon origins, the reader's "expectation," to use Ricoeur's term, is shaped by promises of divine relationship, revelation, and authority, all of which eased the church's entry into the twentieth century. Probably the most extravagant and comforting promise was the last, namely, that the authority by which the church could be organized (and, implicitly, susceptible to reorganization) "shall *never be taken again* from the earth" until it accomplishes its purpose of latter-day preparation for a millennial reign of Christ. The believing reader of the Joseph Smith story is thereby assured that Smith's restoration is permanent. With this promise, Smith's canonized story *cum* testimony *qua* history of church origins climaxes in an affirmation of unchangeable,

ecclesiastical authority that has the capacity to mediate divine knowledge and power.

Richard L. Bushman concluded his biography of Joseph Smith's early years with the observation, "What distinguished Mormonism [in the nineteenth century] was not so much the Gospel Mormons taught . . . but what they believed had happened—to Joseph Smith, to Book of Mormon characters, and to Moses and Enoch. . . . Mormonism was history, not philosophy."<sup>64</sup> As implied by reference to Moses and Enoch and by placing Smith in such company, it is obvious to anyone familiar with L.D.S. reworking of the traditional Jewish and Christian canon that the Mormon sense of history is a cosmological one.<sup>65</sup> Thus, it is also possible to elaborate on Bushman's observation to conclude that what distinguished Mormons was the conviction that the cosmological order was expressed immediately—in the mundane. Note, for example, that Smith's canonized autobiography was placed in L.D.S. scripture immediately following the L.D.S. version of Moses' and Abraham's theophanies and is of a type with them: a type bearing promise of fulfillment in a new aeon in God's relation to his people. A sermon by one who participated in the revival of Joseph Smith's story illustrates Smith's relation to this biblical type: "There has been some reference here today to the First Vision of the Prophet Joseph, which we look upon as the dawn of this last dispensation, the dispensation of the fullness of times."<sup>66</sup> This sense of new time, a "fullness" of time given by Joseph Smith's narrative of churchly primordial events, contributed significantly to the third-generation Latter-day Saints' capacity to embrace change in church doctrines and programs without a sense of loss of identity or continuity with their past.

For the Latter-day Saints, Progressive-Era changes were ordered within a cosmology of promise and fulfillment, which lent stability to efforts to revoke the theocracy, economic communalism, and plural marriage of the previous generation. The Latter-day Saints' confidence in their cosmology may have been shaken by the defensive and prevaricating testimony of church witnesses at the Smoot hearing; by the confusion and disarray in church policy; and by the judgment and removal of Taylor and Cowley, but the history of their prechurch origins of their bond with the sacred, as explained in Joseph Smith's story, was a means of restoring that confidence through the constructive capacity of both nineteenth-century writer and his twentieth-century readers. The Latter-day Saints managed the dislocating experience of passage into the twentieth century by inscribing their present experience onto Joseph Smith's, which promised changeless duration, even the "fullness of times." In placing confidence in the promises of divine presence, revelation, and authority that, as the angel

promised, "shall never be taken again from the earth," not in particular practices or doctrines, the believing reader of Joseph Smith's testimony could appropriate a future in which failure was impossible.

Indeed, the Joseph Smith story was no less effective in providing a new basis for individual L.D.S. identity. In the process of inscribing their own experiences onto his, the believing readers made of Joseph Smith the model of modern Latter-day Saint-hood. A church authority and major interpreter of doctrine during this period wrote, "The whole latter-day work was initiated by Joseph Smith's search for truth. . . . Thus came the first great vision of Joseph Smith; and as a consequence of his search for truth came the other revelations, and the enduring light-giving structure of the Church. . . . It is understood that every worthy member of the Church must likewise seek and find truth for himself."<sup>67</sup> The *sine qua non* of Latter-day Saint religious experience is to seek and find the true church through revelation. Thus, as a pattern for individual spirituality, also, the church's new emphasis on the Joseph Smith story effectively strengthened Joseph Smith's status as a prophet.

Ultimately, however, Mormonism's transition had to be made collectively. To remain the same to itself and others, the Mormons had to enter the twentieth century as a "people," not merely believing individuals. Acts of collective memorial; new emphasis on claims to restored order, authority, and revelation; and a shared mythos of origination provided a nondiscursive redefinition of Latter-day Saint identity. Discursive redefinition was also necessary, however. Certain subjects could not be discussed, and new names had to be found for others; just as certain places were remembered and others were not. The return itinerary of the dedication party both effected and symbolized this final way of changing and remaining the same.

### Accentuating the Positive, Eliminating the Negative

Leaving Vermont the day after the dedication, Joseph F. Smith and his party traveled to Massachusetts and held public services in Boston in the afternoon and evening of December 24, 1905. Christmas Day was occupied by a visit to the Massachusetts homestead of the progenitors of Joseph Smith. From there the party traveled to Palmyra, New York, paying homage at the Smith family farm and its "sacred grove," site of the First Vision, and holding a prayer meeting at the Hill Cumorah, reputed discovery site of the Book of Mormon. From New York, the party traveled to Kirtland, a small town in northern Ohio, where Joseph Smith had gathered his followers on the new frontier in 1831, eight months after organizing the church in New York.

This was the final site of commemorative activities related to Joseph Smith's role in the church. The travelers made only one more stop on their way home: Chicago. There they spent the majority of their two-day visit observing local industries such as the Swift Stockyards and the Jeffries Automobile Factory and paying respect to various business leaders.

Thus, the travelers retraced the church's steps only as far as Kirtland, Ohio, and the final years of Smith's ministry went unremarked. In geographic terms, this meant that the party did not visit Independence, near Kansas City, Missouri, and site of Joseph Smith's first attempt to build an American Zion. Neither did they stop in Nauvoo, the town from which the Latter-day Saints had fled to the Rocky Mountains and which lies on the western border of the Illinois midway between Chicago and Omaha. Both Independence and Nauvoo have powerful associations with later developments in L.D.S. doctrine. For example, plural marriage was first practiced in Nauvoo, as were the nascent forms of theocratic government which would find full expression in Utah. Similarly, the anticapitalist principles that had characterized Utah's economy were revealed in Kirtland but first practiced in Missouri. Finally, though Kirtland was the site of the first L.D.S. temple, the ceremonies and oaths of such concern to the Smoot hearing panel were performed only later, in Nauvoo. In sum, those practices that placed the church in conflict with American institutions were largely a product of the Latter-day Saints' history in Missouri and Illinois, and to these sites the dedication party did not go.

While stopping at either Independence or Nauvoo would have been a detour for the travelers, it would have been no more of a detour than Kirtland, to which they backtracked from Cleveland, "going at a slow pace, because of the condition of the road and of the hills and hollows, at the old-fashioned ox-team speed."<sup>68</sup> Moreover, in an itinerary that took them by train from Chicago to Omaha, they chose to skip over Nauvoo, which was directly in their path. But for the fact that the travelers spent two days sight-seeing in Chicago, one could explain the omission in terms of time constraints. Whatever the reason, the result was that their itinerary emphasized the less controversial stages of Joseph Smith's life, and similarly their sermons to church member and nonmember alike emphasized his less controversial ideas.<sup>69</sup> In this respect, too, the dedication party illustrated a means by which Mormonism transformed itself during the period.

Avoidance of certain ideas was to be expected from the travelers. Since the 1880s, the church had abandoned all efforts to defend plural marriage to outsiders and had become very careful even within the church. Only at local conferences of the Saints, where nonmembers

were unlikely to overhear, had the subject been taught. It was no surprise, then, that the few allusions to polygamy made by these travelers were indirect and defensive. In Chicago, for example, Joseph F. Smith assures visitors: "We are not seeking for women; we have women of our own and they are as good and pure as ever women were on the earth."<sup>70</sup> On other subjects, too, the church became increasingly careful, and its public discourse changed on such subjects as theocracy, millennialism, and deification. For example, the phrase "fullness of the gospel" was sometimes employed to represent the complete primitive church, as opposed to its former comprehension of all ordinances and truths ever revealed and then some. Past emphasis on deification shifted to appeals for ethical perfection: "'Mormonism' is to benefit mankind. Obedience to it makes good men better, and bad men good. No man dare continue in wrongdoing and still claim membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That is one of the distinctive features of our people, and of this work." So said President Smith to the Vermonters, and his companions repeated the message throughout their trip: "If the Gospel will not make us better, by obedience to its precepts, then it is no better than any other religion. . . . The religion that will make men the best of all in the world is the best religion and that religion has been embraced by the members of this Church, for it is the religion of Jesus Christ."<sup>71</sup>

Significantly, the message to member and nonmember became indistinguishable during this period. Instead of being admonished to do the works and receive the blessings of Abraham, the Saints were encouraged to manifest Yankee virtues and Progressive-Era values. Exhortations to missionary work overtook the other elements of nineteenth-century millennialism: growth, not gathering to Zion, was the rallying cry. During Joseph F. Smith's tenure, immigration to Utah was officially ended, and the church began to build centers of membership abroad. Finally, celestial marriage was redefined in terms of the eternity, not the multiplicity, of the marriage covenant. It becomes exclusively understood as "temple marriage" for time and eternity. The version of Mormonism lived publicly in the twentieth century was that taught in the first years of Joseph Smith's life and preached in New York and Ohio. The more exotic doctrines from the Missouri and Illinois periods remained in temples and, thus, privately practiced. As Jan Shipps noted in her analysis of a conference address given by Joseph F. Smith ten years later:

By concentrating on what the Mormons regard as essential principles of the gospel—the nature of God, Christ's role as Savior, the restoration of the church and its place, and the place of the priesthood, in humanity's quest for salvation and eternal

life—Joseph F. Smith conveyed to the Saints his confidence that the changes which had occurred during his tenure were not changes which had in any way diminished the strength of the relationship between God and his chosen people.<sup>72</sup>

Whatever gap may have been created by defining *inter alia* plural marriage as temple marriage, gathering as growth, and deification as moral perfection was bridged by the classic restorationist claims enumerated above. Studies show that the incidence of sermons at L.D.S. General Conference on the theme of an apostasy by the primitive church was nearly four times greater in the decades at the turn of the century than in either period before or after it. Assertions that the L.D.S. church was the “only true church” were nearly three times greater than the preceding and subsequent two decades. Mention of fellowship with other faiths was lower than at any other time, except between 1830 to 1859.<sup>73</sup> This development is even more pronounced given that, during this period, other restorationist churches were minimizing their claims to primitive Christianity and choosing between evangelical or fundamentalist forms.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to these interpretive strategies that minimized Joseph Smith’s revelation on plural marriage, the church had to act more formally to reposition the founding prophet’s revelations within church dogma, both because the Senate demanded it and because the Saints needed it. Specifically in response to the Senate’s demand, the church canonized its abandonment of plural marriage by adding the 1890 Manifesto against polygamy to the Book of Doctrine and Covenants as an “official declaration.”<sup>75</sup> The church-owned *Deseret News* announced without fanfare the new publication: “A new edition of the Doctrine and Covenants has just been prepared and is for sale at the Deseret News Book Store. . . . [In addition to a concordance] the edition also contains the official declaration generally known as the Manifesto of President [Wilford] Woodruff. We call special attention to this edition of one of the four standard works of the Church.”<sup>76</sup> The inclusion of the Manifesto in scripture was not introduced or later explained by church leadership. Silence on the new publication was profound, although it was a matter of considerable concern among church leadership and many alternatives were considered.<sup>77</sup> Publicly, however, it was treated simply as an editorial determination, like the addition of a concordance.

Having so legitimated the Manifesto, it was necessary to account for the church’s nearly fifteen years of disobedience to it. The official explanation was that post-Manifesto plural marriages were few in number, initiated by individuals, and caused by understandable differences of interpretation:

Since that time [ratification of the Manifesto in 1890] the Church has not performed any plural marriages or authorized any violation of the law thus forbidden. But there were some persons who construed the language of that manifesto to signify plural marriages within the boundaries of the United States, that being "the land" wherein the laws spoken of extended. They, therefore, went or removed to Mexico and thus acted on that which they believed to be right without violating the manifesto. They looked on plural marriage within the United States as *malum prohibitum* and not *malum in se*.<sup>78</sup>

Published in 1911 within church periodicals and in pamphlet form, this legalistic interpretation of the recent past and disclaimer of church involvement attempted to satisfy insiders and outsiders that the institution itself was not responsible for polygamy's continuation into the twentieth century. Such had been the official position throughout the Smoot hearing, and the church would stick to it whenever asked. Eventually outsiders lost interest in the question and insiders accepted the interpretation at face value. Those members who needed particular reassurance received it privately. One very upset, post-Manifesto polygamous wife sent her brother to Joseph F. Smith to ask whether her marriage was legitimate. She turned to Smith not because he was president of the church, but because he had performed the ceremony. In an interview years later, the brother said that Smith told him "to tell his sister that her marriage was o.k., but he had had to say what he did in Washington to protect the Church."<sup>79</sup> Those members, however, who could not accept the change and who contracted plural marriages after an injunction by Smith in 1904 were subjected to church disciplinary courts beginning in 1911.<sup>80</sup>

For those who were willing to change, the effect of the abandonment of the practice was cushioned doctrinally by three strategies. First, and most obvious, the church did not repeal Joseph Smith's revelation as canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 132, and, indeed, subordinated to it the 1890 Manifesto both by placing the Manifesto at the back of the Doctrine and Covenants and by entitling it a declaration, not a revelation of equal weight with those contained within the main text of book. As stated by its own terms, the Manifesto's addition to the Doctrine and Covenants was understood to memorialize only a suspension of church law and to do so merely out of respect for "laws enacted by Congress . . . pronounced constitutional by the court of last resort."<sup>81</sup> True to the *Reynolds* decision, the Latter-day Saints would believe, but would not act—except in the afterlife, that is. Second, then, change in practice was palliated by continuing commitment to doctrine. Moreover, the

church continued to practice plural marriage to the extent that males whose previous wives were deceased were permitted to have subsequent marriages sanctioned by temple ordinance, which is believed to ensure marital status after death. Finally, through sermon and other doctrinal exposition, the doctrine of celestial marriage was equated exclusively with eternal marriage, rather than plural marriage. Though this had been a defensive strategy in legal arguments since 1880, it now was universally applied within the church as well.<sup>82</sup>

By avoiding Independence, Missouri, and Nauvoo, Illinois, the 1905 dedication party avoided more than problematic theology, however. These were sites of martyrdom and persecution that had been the rallying cry to establishing an autonomous kingdom in the West. Missouri was legendary among the Latter-day Saints for “mobocracy” or state-sanctioned efforts to exterminate Mormonism. In Illinois, Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were murdered while in the governor’s protective custody. While these places would not be forgotten and, in the next few years, would become developed as sites of pilgrimage, the 1905 centennial celebration’s emphasis was not on justice and struggle but on forgiveness and progress.

Joseph F. Smith’s progressiveness was also demonstrated in more subtle initiatives through which he successfully reframed the L.D.S. church’s sense of its past, shaping its history onto the American terrain and directing his people’s attention beyond the Rocky Mountains to where he believed their future lay. Besides the Vermont birthplace, Joseph F. Smith directed the purchase of the Smith family farm in New York; various plots of land in Missouri associated with the church’s failed attempt to build Zion and continuing expectations of Christ’s second coming; the jail in Carthage, Illinois, where Joseph and Hyrum Smith were murdered by anti-Mormon mobs; and a cemetery near Omaha at Winter Quarters, Iowa, dedicated to those who did not survive the forced exodus from Illinois. Each of these places was a rich mine of Mormon history and, as such, was a uniquely powerful resource for the constructive maintenance of Mormon identity under stress. These sites constitute the focus of Mormon monument-building and pilgrimage to this day.

Finally, Joseph F. Smith’s constructive use of the church’s more distant and less morally complicated past was facilitated by the variety of centennials that occurred in the early twentieth century, beginning as we have seen with Joseph Smith’s birth date. Where centennial anniversaries did not provide the occasion, Joseph F. Smith developed his own. For example, paramount among identity markers for the Latter-day Saints was, of course, the heroic arrival of the pioneers to the Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1847. Individual communities

sometimes had held celebrations on this date to honor their aging settlers, and Joseph F. Smith's predecessor was known for planning the Pioneer Jubilee in 1897. Smith was the first, however, to incorporate a ritual celebration of the event into the church calendar. Not waiting for a centennial occasion, Joseph F. Smith announced in 1905 that July 24 was to be celebrated annually by the church's Sunday schools. Typically, he did so with an eye to the future, not the past; on resourcefulness and triumph, not privations and travail; on rights, not wrongs. He personally instructed his people:

The leading purpose of the celebration is to provide an object lesson to our young people and create within their hearts feelings of patriotism and loyalty for those who pioneered the way to our western homes . . . The object lesson should be given by a procession representing the condition of the Saints when they crossed the plains between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains . . . It is not the intention to make every Twenty-fourth of July an occasion for so elaborate a celebration, but it is hoped that it may be sufficiently frequent to keep alive in the hearts and the memories of our youth the instructive lessons of our pioneer life.<sup>83</sup>

As demonstrated by their annual "Pioneer Days" and their reconstruction of L.D.S. historical sites across the United States, the Latter-day Saints are proof of Connerton's hypothesis that "images of the past . . . are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances," not merely texts.<sup>84</sup> The Saints demonstrate, however, that the combination of text and ritual is an especially powerful means of shaping the past to ensure a future.

## **Conclusion**

It is of limited, if any, use for us to construe the L.D.S. church's actions during the Smoot hearing as "an intentional response to particular and variable social and political contexts."<sup>85</sup> We can only observe that central to the dynamism of L.D.S. history during the Progressive Era is "inertia" or persistency, as Connerton would call it, or inherent "grammar" or tradition, in Ricoeur's terms, of the narratives and rituals employed by Joseph F. Smith to maintain both his peoples' religious faith and their American citizenship. The point of this analysis is not that Smith invented consciously or planned his way into the solutions that hindsight has shown to be so effective. Like most historical actors, he was subject to his share of ironic results and unintended consequences. Certainly, he did not intend a four-year Senate investigation when he sent Smoot to the Senate in 1903, or the five

grueling days he spent on the witness stand at “the seat of war” in Washington.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless and notwithstanding the variety of intentions and opportunities that competed for causal power in the years during which Mormonism changed, the actions taken by Joseph F. Smith beginning in 1905 remain key to understanding the present shape and twentieth-century success of the L.D.S. Church. Smith’s actions also illuminate the uses of religious narratives and rituals to negotiate the inevitable crises of religious communities who must change over time but also remain identifiable with their originating vision.

## Notes

This essay has benefited greatly from the comments of Richard Bushman, Jan Shipps, and Jed Woodworth. I also thank those members of the North American Religion Section of the America Academy of Religion and the BYU Smith Institute for the Study of Latter-day Saint History who, in 1999 and 2002 respectively, heard and offered suggestions on significant portions of this essay. Of course, I remain solely responsible for its content.

1. The term “Mormon” is heavily freighted with both historical and theological baggage. “Mormon” originated in the nineteenth century as a pejorative reference for members of the L.D.S. church, to whom the Book of Mormon is scripture. In a biblically based culture, the term communicated succinctly the extreme otherness of the new religion. During the period discussed here, “Mormon” retained its highly negative connotation. Understandably, the church objected to its use as a denominator and preferred that its people be referred to as “Latter-day Saints,” which expressed the believer’s sense of continuity with primitive Christianity. In the present text, I will use the terms as nearly as possible in conformity with the meaning given them by the antagonists and protagonists of the Smoot hearing. Finally, it must be noted that capitalization here of the first article in the church’s name reflects its legal name. To avoid confusion, this style is employed only when the entire name of the church is used. For further details, see *Style Guide—The Name of the Church* at <http://www.lds.org/> (July 5, 2002).

2. The nearest analogy to a Latter-day Saint apostle is probably found in the office of Catholic cardinal, though the comparison can fail to express the extent of the apostle’s plenary authority over L.D.S. church affairs at all levels of administration. Technically, “apostle” is a priesthood office and lifetime appointment given members of the church’s leading hierarchy of fifteen men: three of whom comprise the “First Presidency” and the remainder, the “Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.” Upon the death of the church’s president, his successor is chosen from among the apostolic quorum, another source of concern to the protestors.

3. The secondary literature on each of these topics is voluminous. The most complete guide to it is available in James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, eds., *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). For aid in finding primary materials, see David J. Whittaker, ed., *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995). A particularly helpful source for primary documents related to the church's history of conflict with the American government is Susan L. Fales and Chad J. Flake, comp., *Mormons and Mormonism in U.S. Government Documents: A Bibliography* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989). Both primary and secondary materials are available on CD-ROM from several sources, the most scholarly of which is *New Mormon Studies CD-ROM: A Comprehensive Resource Library* (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1998). The L.D.S. church's canon, as well as other documentation of its beliefs and practices, are available at the church's official Web site, <http://www.lds.org>.

4. See, generally, Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Leo Lyman, *Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); and Edwin Firmage and Richard Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

5. For a comprehensive account of the changes to Mormonism during this period, see Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

6. Of course, public curiosity periodically requires the church to dispose of the subject of comment on their present relationship to plural marriage such as in the September 8, 1998, CNN interview of current church president Gordon B. Hinckley. "When our people came West, they permitted it on a restricted scale," he explained, but "that's 118 years ago. It's behind us." A transcript of the interview is available at [http://www.lds.org/en/4\\_News\\_Update/19980908\\_CNN\\_Transcript.html](http://www.lds.org/en/4_News_Update/19980908_CNN_Transcript.html) (September 29, 1998) or see CNN Transcript 98090800V22.

7. Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 116.

8. See, for example, C. P. Lyford, *The Mormon Problem: An Appeal to the People* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1886), and Dyer Daniel Lum, *Utah and Its People: Facts and Statistics Bearing on the "Mormon Problem" by a Gentile* (New York: R. O. Ferrier, 1882).

9. On the Taylor-Cowley incident, see Victor W. Jorgensen and B. Carmon Hardy, "The Taylor-Cowley Affair and the Watershed of Mormon History," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48 (Winter 1980): 4–36.

10. Joseph F. Smith, Sermon, *Seventy-Fourth Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1904), 70. (Hereinafter cited as *Conference Reports*.)

11. Shipps, *Mormonism*, 148. The evolution of the L.D.S. theology of revelation is analyzed in William R. Persons, "An Analysis of Changes in the Interpretation and Utilization of Revelation in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1830–1918" (Ph. D. diss., Iliff School of Theology, Denver, 1964).

12. A number of dates could be chosen to mark the beginning and end of L.D.S. polygamous practices. Because the emphasis here is not on Joseph Smith's own conviction but on the larger church's adherence to polygamy, I have chosen a more limited period. These dates represent the years between Joseph Smith's extension of the practice to others within the church and Joseph F. Smith's first disciplining of members for the practice, discussed below. The broadest definition of the L.D.S. practice of plural marriage would circumscribe events occurring between 1833 and 1911. Joseph Smith himself appears to have practiced polygamy as early as 1833. See Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997). Church discipline was not applied to the church at large until 1911, when the first excommunications occurred. For comprehensive treatment of L.D.S. marital customs, using data on individuals who practiced plural marriage and the effects of the antipolygamy campaign on those customs, see Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001) and Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamist Families: Life in the Principle*, Publications in Mormon Studies, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987). For a discussion of the public misrepresentation of plural marriage, see B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 363–80.

13. The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), Section 131, verses 11–12; Section 132, verses 4, 6. Those who did not agree formed their own churches emphasizing other principles. Most notably, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (R.L.D.S.) ordered themselves on the contrary principle that Smith had never practiced polygamy and that his sons, who had stayed in Illinois with their widowed and antipolygamous mother, had sole authority to lead the church their

father had founded. For the history of the R.L.D.S. (now Community of Christ), see Inez Smith Davis, *The Story of the Church* (Independence, Mo.: Herald House, 1977). For a description of the many groups organized out of Smith's Nauvoo church after his death in 1844, see Steven L. Shields, *Divergent Paths to the Restoration: A History of the Latter Day Saint Movement* (Bountiful, Utah: Restoration Research, 1975).

14. Orson Pratt, "Celestial Marriage," in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, England: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 1:53–66. This sermon was delivered in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on August 29, 1852. Technically, Joseph Smith's revelation regarding plural marriage was not his last. As indicated, Joseph Smith practiced the principle as early as 1833 but did not reduce it to writing until 1843. Hence, the 1852 sermon inaugurating churchwide practice of plural marriage in the Utah Territory is not correct when it states that the doctrine had been *received* by Joseph Smith in the last year of his life. This sermon is correct, however, to the extent that church members did not learn of this principle, if at all, until the last months of Joseph Smith's life. Thus, the Latter-day Saints experienced plural marriage as Joseph Smith's last revelation. Since it is their experience and the meaning ascribed to it that matters for the purposes of this essay, I, too, will refer to plural marriage as Joseph Smith's "last" vision.

15. *Minute Book of the School of the Prophets*, March [30], 1870, Scott G. Kenney Papers, Special Collections and Manuscripts, J. Willard Marriot Library, University of Utah, box 12, fd. 9.

16. Joseph F. Smith, "Law of Celestial Marriage," in *Journal of Discourses*, 21:9–13. This sermon was delivered at the funeral services of pioneer settler William Clayton, Salt Lake City, December 7, 1879.

17. Doctrine and Covenants, Section 131, verses 11–12.

18. U.S. Senate, 59th Cong., 1st sess., Committee on Privileges and Elections, *Proceedings before the Committee on Privileges and Elections of the United States Senate in the Matter of the Protests against the Right Hon. Reed Smoot, a senator from the State of Utah, to hold his seat* (S. Rept. 486) (Washington, D.C.: Govt. Print. Off., 1904–1906), 4 vols. [Serial Set 2932–2935], 1:210. (Hereinafter cited as *Proceedings*.)

19. Apostles Heber J. Grant and George Teasdale had been sent to England and Mexico, respectively, placing them beyond the reach of Senate subpoena. A third known advocate of polygamy in the apostolic quorum, Marriner W. Merrill, was too ill to travel and would die within two months. Of course, Taylor and Cowley were still in flight from Senate subpoenas and Smoot was preparing for trial in Washington, D.C.

20. There is no scholarly biography available on the life of Joseph F. Smith. The L.D.S. church has published the following book-length treatments: F. M. Gibbons, *Joseph F. Smith: Patriarch and Preacher, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), and Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., *Life of Joseph F. Smith, Sixth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938; repr., 1999). See also Scott Kenny, "Joseph F. Smith," in *The Presidents of the Church*, ed. Leonard J. Arrington (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 178–209.

21. Quoted in Preston Nibley, *Presidents of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 147.

22. Joseph F. Smith, "My Missions," *Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City), December 21, 1901. Notwithstanding such preparations on both sides, the battle between the L.D.S. church and U.S. Army was a bloodless one. The conflict is chronicled in Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict, 1850–1859* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960; repr., Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977).

23. *Proceedings at the Dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial Monument* (Salt Lake City: privately published, 1906), 1–14. (Hereinafter cited as *Dedication*.)

24. Joseph F. Smith, Sermon, in *Conference Reports, Seventy-Fifth Semi-Annual Conference*, 96.

25. Murat Halstead, "Introduction," in J. H. Beadle, *Polygamy or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: World Bible House, 1904), xvi.

26. *Proceedings*, 1:96. Joseph F. Smith's statement was intended to respond to the accusation that the Latter-day Saints' belief in prophetic leadership subverted obedience to the laws of the Republic.

27. *Dedication*, 17.

28. *Ibid.*, 54.

29. *Ibid.*, 17.

30. *Ibid.*, 29.

31. *Ibid.*, 30–31.

32. For Halbwachs' foundational studies, see Maurice Halbwachs, *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1925); and Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950). More recent studies include: E. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 1983); David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For the critical adaption of the theory of collective memory to the American context, see James McConkey, ed., *The Anatomy of Memory: An Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); and Edward T. Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

33. David Thelan, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History* 75 (March 1989): 1123. Emphasis added.

34. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7–25.

35. *Dedication*, 22.

36. *Ibid.*, 26.

37. All relevant references that follow are to the canonized account published as "Joseph Smith—History: Extracts from the History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet," in *The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 47–59. For an analysis of other versions, see Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 275–96.

38. "Joseph Smith—History," 1:19.

39. Anti-Mormon literature is prolific. A contemporary indictment of Mormonism that catalogues the traditional bases for complaint and their relative weight is Frank Cannon and Harvey J. O'Higgins, *Under the Prophet in Utah: The National Menace of Political Priestcraft* (Boston: C. M. Clark, 1911), earlier published as an eight-issue serial in *Everybody's Magazine*. An interpretation of the literature, taking for its title a phrase used in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1911, is Terry L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

40. Thomas G. Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," *Sunstone* 5, no. 4 (July/August 1980): 24–33; James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's 'First Vision' in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1966): 29–45; James B. Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 43–61; Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Circumstantial

Confirmation of the First Vision through Reminiscences," *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 373–404; David L. Paulsen, "The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives," *BYU Studies* 35, no. 3 (1995–96): 7–94; and Dan Vogel, "The Earliest Mormon Concept of God," in *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 17–33.

41. Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental," 53.

42. Milton V. Backman, Jr., "First Vision," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:515–16.

43. Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool, England: S. W. Richards, 1853), 146.

44. See, for example, Joseph F. Smith's statement that "the greatest crime that Joseph Smith was guilty of was the crime of confessing . . . that he saw those Heavenly Beings. . . . That is the worst crime he committed, and the world has held it against him. . . . He suffered persecution all the days of his life on earth because he declared it was true." Quoted in *Two Sermons by President Joseph F. Smith*, Sermon Tract, no. 1 (Chattanooga, Tenn.: Southern States Mission, 1906).

45. Joseph F. Smith, Sermon, in *Conference Reports*, Seventy-Ninth Annual Conference, 4.

46. *Reynolds v. U.S.*, 98 US 145, at 166 (1879). ("Laws are made for the government of actions, and while they cannot interfere with mere religious belief and opinions, they may with practices.")

47. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals: Selections from the Discourses of David O. McKay, Ninth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953), 85.

48. At least eight accounts of the First Vision were produced during Joseph Smith's life. The one chosen by the L.D.S. church as the official version was dictated by Smith to a scribe in 1838 and published originally in a Latter-day Saint newspaper in 1842. The texts of all eight accounts are found in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–92), 1:3–7, 127–28, 267–75, 389–91, 405–9, 429–30, 444, 448–49, 461.

49. Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, *Essays in Hermeneutics*, vol. 2, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 124.

50. Doctrine and Covenants, Section 1, verse 30.

51. "Joseph Smith—History," 1:1.

52. In an earlier account, Joseph Smith had characterized the primary motivation for his prayer in classic revivalist and primitivist terms: "My mind become exceedingly distressed for I become convicted of my sins and by searching the scriptures I found that mand <mankind> did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament and I felt to mourn for my own sins and for the sins of the world." Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:5–6. In this, his 1832 account, Smith's question is more personal: how was he to be saved if none of the churches acted consistently with the Bible? The answer was similarly personal yet includes a rejection of false religion and promises judgment: "Joseph <my son> thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy <way> walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory. . . . <behold> the world lieth in sin and at this time and none doeth good, no not one they have turned asside from the gospel and keep not <my> commandments they draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me." Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:6–7. By 1838, Smith's object in writing and his circumstances had shifted to defending his church. Hence, his representation of the First Vision likewise changed to meet this institutional purpose. As discussed above, this later purpose was much more responsive to the conditions of the twentieth-century church as well.

53. "Joseph Smith—History," 1:23–26.

54. *Dedication*, 10.

55. Anthon H. Lund, Sermon, in *Conference Reports*, Ninetieth Annual Conference, 19, 21.

56. James B. Allen, Jesse L. Embry, and Kahlile B. Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers: A History of the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1894–1994* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, Brigham Young University, 1995), 59–90.

57. "Joseph Smith—History," 1:65.

58. *Dedication*, 67. Joseph Smith's identification of Anthon with the learned man in Isaiah 29 is discussed in Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 86–89.

59. The search for true knowledge and the unhelpfulness of temporal means and unbelieving persons is an unremitting theme in L.D.S. sermons, including those of the early twentieth century. See, for example, Frank Y. Taylor, Sermon, in *Conference Reports*, Seventy-Fifth Semi-Annual Conference, 30. See also Joseph F. Smith, Sermon, in *Conference Reports*, Seventy-Third Semi-Annual Conference, 2; and Hyrum M. Smith, Sermon, in *Conference Reports*, Eightieth Semi-Annual Conference, 68.

60. Doctrine and Covenants, Section 13. Emphasis added.

61. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1967), 262.

62. *Ibid.*, 6.

63. The entire history of the L.D.S. church can be written as a crisis of authority. See, for example, Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989). The particular crisis that came to a head during the Smoot hearing may have originated as early as the Saints' disappointed expectations of a Second Coming after the Civil War and the increasing dominance of their kingdom by the federal government during the 1870s and 1880s. Certainly by the early twentieth century, however, when the Smoot hearing precipitated the dismissal of Taylor and Cowley, the Saints needed reassurance that their church was truly capable of fulfilling its millennial mission or, for that matter, simply true.

64. Bushman, *Beginnings of Mormonism*, 188–89.

65. Shipps, *Mormonism*, 109–29; Kathleen Flake, "'Not to Be Riten': The Nature and Effects of the Mormon Temple Rite as Oral Canon," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 9 (Summer 1995): 1–21.

66. Lund, Sermon, in *Conference Reports*, 19.

67. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 46.

68. *Dedication*, 68.

69. A historical study of Joseph Smith's theology during this period is found in Ronald K. Esplin, "The Significance of Nauvoo for Latter-day Saints," *Journal of Mormon History* 16 (1990): 71–86, and T. Edgar Lyon, "Doctrinal Development of the Church during the Nauvoo Sojourn, 1839–1846," *BYU Studies* 15, no. 4 (Summer 1975): 435–46. See also Shipps, *Mormonism*, 67–86, for an analysis of the increasingly esoteric nature of Joseph Smith's teachings.

70. *Dedication*, 86.

71. *Ibid.*, 42, 57–58.

72. Shipps, *Mormonism*, 145.

73. Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, *A Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984), 229–59.

74. Richard T. Hughes, "Why Restorationists Don't Fit the Evangelical Mold; Why Churches of Christ Increasingly Do," in *Re-Forming the Center:*

*American Protestants, 1900 to the Present*, ed. Douglas Jacobsen, Jr., and William Vance Trollinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 194–213.

75. The 1890 Manifesto was entitled “Official Declaration 1” and placed at the back of the Doctrine and Covenants. It reads as follows:

*To Whom It May Concern:*

Press dispatches having been sent for political purposes, from Salt Lake City, which have been widely published, to the effect that the Utah Commission, in their recent report to the Secretary of the Interior, allege that plural marriages are still being solemnized and that forty or more such marriages have been contracted in Utah since last June or during the past year, also that in public discourses the leaders of the Church have taught, encouraged and urged the continuance of the practice of polygamy—

I, therefore, as President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, do hereby, in the most solemn manner, declare that these charges are false. . . . Inasmuch as laws have been enacted by Congress forbidding plural marriages, which laws have been pronounced constitutional by the court of last resort, I hereby declare my intention to submit to those laws, and to use my influence with the members of the Church over which I preside to have them do likewise.

There is nothing in my teachings to the Church or in those of my associates, during the time specified, which can be reasonably construed to inculcate or encourage polygamy; and when any Elder of the Church has used language which appeared to convey any such teaching, he has been promptly reprovved. And I now publicly declare that my advice to the Latter-day Saints is to refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land.

WILFORD WOODRUFF,  
President of the Church of Jesus Christ  
of Latter-day Saints

76. *Deseret Evening News*, December 18, 1908, 4. The other three referenced “standard” or canonized works are the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Pearl of Great Price, which contains the “Joseph Smith—History,” as well as other of Smith’s revelations.

77. Charles W. Penrose (Liverpool) to Joseph F. Smith (Salt Lake City), March 31, 1908, Kenney Collection, box 11, fd. 15.

78. James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833–1964*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 1:224.

79. Stanley S. Ivins, *Diary*, November 29, 1944, Kenney Collection, box 11, fd. 14B. In his 1904 appearance at the Smoot hearing, Joseph F. Smith

had testified that “. . . there never has been a plural marriage by the consent or sanction or knowledge or approval of the church since the manifesto.” *Proceedings* 1:130.

80. All stake presidencies (the diocesan level of church administration) were notified by letter of October 5, 1910, from the presidency of the church that they were to excommunicate or disfellowship as appropriate all members in violation of the 1904 prohibition of plural marriage. See Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:216. Marriages between 1890 and 1904 were not actionable, unless a source of public embarrassment to the church. See, for example, Anthony W. Ivins, *Diary*, January 7, [1911], Anthony W. Ivins Collection, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City. The seminal articles evaluating the evidence of post-Manifesto polygamy are: Michael D. Quinn, “L.D.S. Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890–1904,” *Dialogue* 18 (Spring 1995): 9–104; and Kenneth L. Cannon II, “After the Manifesto: Mormon Polygamy, 1890–1906,” *Sunstone* 8 (January–April 1983): 27–35.

81. L.D.S. excommunication of polygamists in their midst is based on a contest of authority, not plural marriage *per se*. In other words, Mormon fundamentalists, as they are often called to the discomfort of both groups, are in schism over the legitimacy of authority claimed by church leaders to suspend the practice of plural marriage. As with most internecine arguments, the literature on this subject is voluminous and excited. See, for example, Dennis R. Short, *Questions on Plural Marriage with a Selected Bibliography and 1600 References* (Salt Lake City: privately published, 1975). A more accessible and scholarly discussion of the “Monogamous Triumph” in Utah is Hardy’s *Solemn Covenant*, 336–62.

82. See Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 297–99, and Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 60.

83. Joseph F. Smith, “Celebration of the Twenty-Fourth of July by the Sunday Schools,” *Juvenile Instructor* 40 (March 1905): 178–79.

84. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 4.

85. *Ibid.*, 103–4.

86. George A. Smith (Salt Lake City) to Reed Smoot (Washington, D.C.), February 27, 1904, Reed Smoot Collection, box 51, fd. 10, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.