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**Dissenters:
Portraying the Church as Wrong
So They can be Right Without It**

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DISSENTERS:
PORTRAYING THE CHURCH AS WRONG
SO THEY CAN BE RIGHT WITHOUT IT

Brian C. Hales

Abstract: This essay addresses the reasons many persons have left The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In particular, there are those who publicly assert the Church is not led by inspired leaders so they can feel at peace about their decision to leave it. One common argument used to justify their estrangement is the “Samuel Principle,” which ostensibly would require God to allow his followers on earth to go astray if they chose any level of unrighteousness. Problems with this interpretation are presented including examples from religious history that show that God’s primary pattern has been to call his errant followers to repentance by raising up righteous leaders to guide them. Also explored are the common historical events that dissenters often allege have caused the Church to apostatize. The notion that the Church and the “Priesthood” could be separate entities is examined as well. The observation that Church leaders continue to receive divine communication in order to fulfill numerous prophecies and that a significant number of completely devout Latter-day Saints have always existed within the Church, obviating the need for any dissenting movement, is discussed. In addition, several common scriptural proof-texts employed by some dissenters and their ultimate condition of apostasy are analyzed.

A longstanding process that affects most religions occurs when dissenters portray their parent church as *wrong* because they are determined to be *right* without it. This

phenomenon has affected the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the past as individuals have left it but apparently did not wish to discard its doctrines. Usually underlying their reasons for leaving is the belief that they possess superior knowledge, superior righteousness, superior priesthood power, superior practices, and/or superior extra-worldly experiences than those found within the church. Before they can embrace this superiority, however, they must demonstrate that at some point the church and its membership have lost knowledge, righteousness, priesthood power, practices, and/or extra-worldly experiences. Hence for these dissenters, their formal or informal estrangements signal not a departure from truth but from church members they perceive as being *less* (or possessing *less*). Sometimes they embrace the title of “fundamentalist,” asserting they have returned to the “fundamental” teachings introduced by Joseph Smith—teachings they believe have been abandoned by the mainstream membership.¹

Being a successful dissenter or fundamentalist requires the ability to embrace Joseph Smith without fully espousing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which claims

1 Throughout this text I will refer to “Mormon fundamentalists” as a title rather than a description. “Mormon fundamentalists” prefer the name “Fundamentalist Mormons.” While I mean no disrespect, I do not believe they qualify through their works to be so addressed. “Mormon fundamentalists” are similar to fundamentalist groups that have attached themselves to other religions such as Islam, Catholicism, and the Jewish faith in that they selectively emphasize a few fundamentals while ignoring many others. For example, Mormon fundamentalist leaders like Lorin C. Woolley, John Y. Barlow, Joseph W. Musser, Leroy Johnson, Rulon C. Allred, Elden Kingston, and Joel LeBaron placed little or no emphasis upon missionary work—the need to preach the gospel and baptize unbelievers. The fundamentalist leaders sent some missionaries to gain converts to polygamy, but unlike Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and John Taylor, they did not set the gathering of Israel as a priority (see D&C 84:75–76, 88:68; 110:11). The historical record demonstrates that missionary work was more fundamental to Joseph Smith than polygamy. See Brian C. Hales, *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006), 451–78.

continuity to the church he established in 1830 and its leaders. This might sound easy but in reality is not because the church professes to be led by a living prophet and by personal revelation to those called to leadership positions. Consequently, those who leave must demonstrate two things: first, that God would allow a disconnect to occur between the heavens and church leaders and its members, and second, that such a disconnection has occurred historically.

Two strategies are commonly employed to support this interpretation. One affirms that under certain conditions it is possible that God would allow the church and its leaders to go astray. That is, priesthood authorities are not infallible and could lead the Latter-day Saints into apostasy. Once this belief is established within their own minds, dissenters simply need to pick an historical event as the trigger. A second approach asserts that the “priesthood” (and its highest offices) is an *organization* that can exist separate from the “church.” Once embraced, dissidents need simply declare that the church has gone astray but the “priesthood” (organization) has not and then claim to be members of the “priesthood.”

The “Samuel Principle”

Before proclaiming when and how the church apostatized, dissenters need to establish that God would allow such an apostasy to occur. To do this, they emphasize the principle of “common consent” mentioned in D&C 26:2: “And all things shall be done by common consent in the church, by much prayer and faith, for all things you shall receive by faith.” In other words, they reason that if the majority of members “consent” to a wayward path or an uninspired leader, even if they don’t realize it, God is going to respect their agency and allow them to stray. To justify this interpretation, dissenters seek scriptural examples where God gave an individual or a

group of his followers what they wanted, not what they needed spiritually. A few examples can be identified:

1. The Lord told Samuel to fulfill the Israelites' request for a king when they rejected him (1 Samuel 8:6–10).²
2. Joseph Smith was granted permission to give Martin Harris the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon even though many previous requests by Joseph had been denied (D&C 3, 10).³
3. The Lord gave the Israelites in the desert the Law of Moses when they rejected the higher law (JST Exodus 34:1–2).⁴

Selectively emphasizing these events supports the idea that God would let the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints go astray if the membership chose to disobey. Joseph W. Musser, a fundamentalist leader, elaborated in 1940:

2 Joseph W. Musser taught in 1936: “We believe that he [Wilford Woodruff] signed the Manifesto discontinuing the practice of Plural marriage IN THE CHURCH because of the demand of members of the Church, who grew tired of the conflict and demanded a change, just as Israel of old demanded a king. Israel wanted to be as other people, and the Lord, after warning them, and they rejected His warning, told Samuel to give them a king. History records the terrible results thereof. And so this people, in face of the warnings of the early leaders of the Church, demanded an opportunity to live as Babylon, and the Lord yielded; for after all, the free agency of man cannot be abridged. And for this reason, and this alone, was the Manifesto permitted to be signed by Wilford Woodruff. This is the most that can be conceded that the Lord had to do with the Manifesto of 1890.” Joseph W. Musser, “Slanderous Statements Refuted,” *Truth* 2/8 (January 1937): 130; emphasis in original. See also David W. Jeffs, “Fulfillment of Isaiah’s Words,” *Truth* 6/1 (June 1940): 21, and Gilbert Fulton, *The Most Holy Principle*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Gems, 1970–75), 4:66.

3 Heber Bennion, *Gospel Problems* (n.p., n.d.), 43, 49–50; Fulton, *Most Holy Principle* 4:66; and Jeffs, “Fulfillment of Isaiah’s Words,” in *Truth*, 19–20.

4 Dennis R. Short, *Questions on Plural Marriage With a Selected Bibliography and 1600 References* (Salt Lake City: Dennis R. Short, 1974), 25; Joseph W. Musser, “The Aftermath of Compromise,” *Truth* 18/10 (March 1953): 315; Joseph W. Musser, “What Authority Sanctioned the Manifesto,” *Truth* 20/6 (November 1954): 201; Editor [Joseph W. Musser], “Editor’s Comments,” *Star of Truth* 3/7 (July 1955): 276; Joseph W. Musser, *Marriage – Ballard/Jenson Correspondence* (n.p., 1935), 76.

To the time-worn statement that the Lord will not permit the leaders to lead His people astray one need but reflect on the history of the past. The Saints have been led astray by their leaders on numerous occasions. The Jews were so led by the recreant High Priests in the days of Christ – indeed they were led to crucify the Savior. King Noah and the priests of his day caused the people to stray from the simple truths of the Gospel until only a few faithful ones, under the leadership of Alma remained and they were driven into the wilderness. So it is in the present day [1940], by permission of the leaders, laws and ordinances have been broken and changed to better accommodate the efforts of the Saints to be one with the world.⁵

Musser stretches the concept somewhat, but he affirms that church members can sustain leaders who are capable of leading them into apostasy. That is, God’s respect for free agency would prevent him from intervening if the membership sustained an uninspired leader by common consent.

Using the “Samuel Principle” logic, dissenters posit that somewhere in the last 200 years church members became disobedient and chose unrighteous leaders, and God could not and did not intervene. The dissenters, however, claim the religious high ground where apostasy supposedly has not occurred. They generally claim inspired authority and/or leadership independent of the errant church. In a few cases, like with the FLDS polygamists in Colorado City, Arizona, and Eldorado, Texas, they may also affirm to be God’s true church, having completely supplanted the Utah-based church.

Several problems can be identified with efforts to generalize the “Samuel Principle” to all places and times. First, a far more

5 Joseph W. Musser, “Evidences and Reconciliations,” *Truth* 6/5 (October 1940): 109.

common pattern in the scriptures is for God to raise up inspired prophet-leaders to declare repentance to apostates. Second, God can maintain inspired leadership within his church without encroaching upon the free agency of the membership. And third, multiple revelations support that the church established by Joseph Smith was destined to continue and expand until the millennium.

God Calls Prophets to Declare Repentance when his Followers Go Astray

The common pattern in the scriptures is for God to call prophets to declare repentance to mortals rather than respecting their wicked choices. So if the Latter-day Saints had begun to stray from the truth, the general reaction in the scriptures would have been for the Lord to raise up leaders to correct them. A classic example is the account of the Zoramites in the Book of Mormon who “had had the word of God preached unto them. But they had fallen into great errors” (Alma 31:8–9). In response to their apostasy, Alma and several other missionaries were sent to preach repentance to them (Alma 31:5–6). The Zoramites were not given a lesser law or ignored by God, who dissenters would say was bound to respect their choices. Instead they were given new inspired leaders to bring them back to truth. Multiple other examples can be found involving Enoch, Noah, Isaiah, and a host of lesser prophets (see, for example, Moses 6:27, 8:23, 2 Kings 20:1, Jacob 2:2, Words of Mormon 1:17, Mosiah 12:1, Helaman 7:2).

When early church members exhibited false practices, Joseph Smith called them to repentance:

Soon after the Gospel was established in Kirtland, and during the absence of the authorities of the Church, many false spirits were introduced, many strange visions were seen, and wild, enthusiastic notions were entertained; men ran out of doors under the influence

of this spirit, and some of them got upon the stumps of trees and shouted, and all kinds of extravagances were entered into by them; one man pursued a ball that he said he saw flying in the air, until he came to a precipice, when he jumped into the top of a tree, which saved his life; and many ridiculous things were entered into, calculated to bring disgrace upon the Church of God, to cause the Spirit of God to be withdrawn, and to uproot and destroy those glorious principles which had been developed for the salvation of the human family. *But when the authorities returned, the spirit was made manifest, those members that were exercised with it were tried for their fellowship, and those that would not repent and forsake it were cut off.*⁶

While there may have been a few exceptions in the religious record (like Samuel giving Israel a King), God’s pattern (see D&C 52:14) is not to neglect his followers who err but to call prophets to declare repentance and lead them back to truth.

God Can “Raise Up” Righteous Leaders and Still Respect Free Agency

But what if the followers of God sustain and support errant leaders? Isn’t God obligated to follow their decisions? While on rare occasions, he has chosen to intervene so his children would learn a specific gospel principle, the scriptures demonstrate that God’s purposes are not vulnerable to the choices of his followers on earth. Joseph Smith’s revelations plainly teach that due to two processes, God can respect free agency and always have inspired leaders in his church if that is his design.

The first process involves God’s control over when and where we are born on earth. George Q. Cannon explained that

6 Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 213, emphasis added.

in the premortal world, “the courts of heaven were thronged with spirits anxious to take upon themselves tabernacles of flesh.”⁷ Spirits in the primordial world are anxious to come to earth, but the timing of our mortal births is according to God’s purposes. Paul explained that the Lord has “determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of [our] habitation” (Acts 17:26). For example, Joseph F. Smith taught that certain “choice spirits” were reserved in the premortal heavens to be born in the “fullness of times” because they would be then needed: “The Prophet Joseph Smith, and ... Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and other choice spirits ... were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work” (D&C 138:53). Without question, the location and timing of our mortal births are under God’s complete control.

In addition, God can determine when we die (Hebrews 9:27). He “holds the destinies of all the armies of the nations of the earth” (D&C 117:6) and can end or prolong our mortal lives according to his divine will. For example, Isaiah warned King Hezekiah: “Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live” (Isaiah 38:1). Hezekiah wept and prayed: “O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight” (Isaiah 38:3). Isaiah was then instructed: “Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years” (Isaiah 38:5; see also 2 Kings 20:6). Similarly, when Joseph Smith’s enemies incarcerated him in the Liberty Jail in 1839, God comforted him saying: “their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do” (D&C 122:9).

7 Jerreld L. Newquist, comp., *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of George Q. Cannon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 21.

Accordingly, the Lord determines when and where we are born and can control when and where we pass away. This power gives him ultimate control over who is guiding his church on earth. At no time does he need to tolerate an uninspired leader. He can simply bring them home (Alma 40:11), thus allowing a more righteous leader to preside in his place. Brigham Young explained:

The Lord Almighty leads this Church, and he will never suffer you to be led astray if you are found doing your duty. You may go home and sleep as sweetly as a babe in its mother's arms, as to any danger of your leaders leading you astray, for if they should try to do so the Lord would quickly sweep them from the earth.⁸

Wilford Woodruff echoed this concept:

The Lord will never permit me nor any other man who stands as the President of this Church, to lead you astray. It is not in the program. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so He will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty.⁹

Accompanying God's complete power over life and death is his foreknowledge. He knows "the end from the beginning" (Abraham 2:8). He assures us that "all things are present before mine eyes" (D&C 38:2). Nephi explained: "the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for

8 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:289.

9 Brian H. Stuy, ed., *Collected Discourses Delivered by President Wilford Woodruff, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles and Others*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: B. H. S. Publishing, 1987–92), 2:137.

behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words” (1 Nephi 9:6).

These two powers — controlling birth and death as well as knowing the future — allow God to raise up righteous, inspired leaders and believers on earth to perpetuate his work whenever he desires. God told ancient Israel: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee” (Deuteronomy 18:15). This process also influenced the creation of the Constitution of the United States. The Lord informed Joseph Smith: “I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose” (D&C 101:80). If God can “raise up wise men” to bring forth the Constitution, he can also assure that righteous men are always in position to guide his church on earth.

Claims from dissenters that God’s respect for our free agency renders him essentially impotent to maintain righteous, inspired leaders to guide his church after Joseph Smith’s death are unfounded and diminish his divine stature.

Prophecy Supports the Restored Church Will Continue to the Millennium

Multiple revelations and statements from Joseph Smith support that the church he established will persist to the millennium. The plainest was uttered in October of 1831 in Hiram, Ohio:

The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth. (D&C 65:2)

Joseph Smith’s God has the power to fulfill his promises including that the gospel will “roll forth unto the ends of the earth.”

In addition, several revelations plainly acknowledge that the church established through Joseph Smith is the “last kingdom” (D&C 88:70, 74, 90:6; see also D&C 24:19, 27:12–13). That is, it would not apostatize or be given to another people.

Therefore, thou art blessed from henceforth that bear the keys of the kingdom given unto you; which kingdom is coming forth for the last time. (D&C 90:2)

For unto you, the Twelve, and those, the First Presidency, who are appointed with you to be your counselors and your leaders, is the power of this priesthood given, *for the last days and for the last time*, in the which is the dispensation of the fulness of times. Which power you hold, in connection with all those who have received a dispensation at any time from the beginning of the creation; For verily I say unto you, the keys of the dispensation, which ye have received, have come down from the fathers, and *last of all*, being sent down from heaven unto you. (D&C 112:30)

Other revelations reflect the same expectation:

And to none else will I grant this power, to receive this same testimony among this generation, in this the beginning of the rising up and the coming forth of my church out of the wilderness—clear as the moon, and fair as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. (D&C 5:14; see also D&C 33:5, 109:73)

Behold, I, the Lord, have made my church in these last days like unto a judge sitting on a hill, or in a high place, to judge the nations. (D&C 64:37)

That through my providence, notwithstanding the tribulation which shall descend upon you, that

the church may stand independent above all other creatures beneath the celestial world; (D&C 78:14)

Yea, the word of the Lord concerning his church, established in the last days for the restoration of his people, as he has spoken by the mouth of his prophets, and for the gathering of his saints to stand upon Mount Zion, which shall be the city of New Jerusalem. (D&C 84:2)

Similarly, the Prophet taught:

And again, another parable put He forth unto them, having an allusion to the Kingdom that should be set up, just previous to or at the time of the harvest, which reads as follows — “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but, when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.” *Now we can discover plainly that this figure is given to represent the Church as it shall come forth in the last days.*¹⁰

In summary, the “Samuel Principle” apparently applied to the unique circumstances that the prophet Samuel faced, but it does not represent God’s normal interaction with his followers on earth. The scriptures demonstrate that the Lord’s pattern is to call prophets to declare repentance. Controlling birth and death and knowing all things allow him to always have inspired leaders when he desires. Multiple revelations and declarations indicate the church established by the Prophet will continue and expand until the millennium.

10 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 98.

Allegations of Apostasy

Despite the weaknesses inherent in the “Samuel Principle,” dissenters may affirm that certain events in church history triggered the loss of true leaders, true authority, and/or God’s divine guidance.

D&C 84

The earliest allegation historically is found in an 1832 revelation that condemned the Saints of that time.¹¹

And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written. (D&C 84:54–57)

Allegedly, the Saints apostatized from the truth at that time and never recovered. This stance is contradicted by several verses in the same revelation that support that their condemnation was temporary. Earlier in verse 2 of that revelation we read: “Yea, the word of the Lord concerning his church, established in the last days for the restoration of his people, as he has spoken by the mouth of his prophets, and for the gathering of his saints to stand upon Mount Zion.” Verse 61 promises: “For I will forgive you of your sins with this commandment—that you remain steadfast in your minds in solemnity and the spirit

11 Denver C. Snuffer, Jr., *Passing the Heavenly Gift* (Salt Lake City: Mill Creek Press, 2011), 376–85.

of prayer, in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you” (D&C 84: 61). Later verses in the same revelation acknowledge that church members were still the Lord’s representatives:

Nevertheless, search diligently and spare not; and wo unto that house, or that village or city that rejecteth you, or your words, or your testimony concerning me. Wo, I say again, unto that house, or that village or city that rejecteth you, or your words, or your testimony of me. (D&C 84:94–95; see also 99:4, 124:8)

At the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in 1836, Joseph Smith prayed: “Remember all thy church.... That thy church may come forth out of the wilderness of darkness, and shine forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners” (D&C 109:72–73). In response, the Savior declared:

Let the hearts of your brethren rejoice, and let the hearts of all my people rejoice, who have, with their might, built this house to my name. For behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house. Yea, I will appear unto my servants, and speak unto them with mine own voice, if my people will keep my commandments, and do not pollute this holy house. Yea the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands shall greatly rejoice in consequence of the blessings which shall be poured out, and the endowment with which my servants have been endowed in this house. And the fame of this house shall spread to foreign lands; and this is the beginning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people. Even so. Amen. (D&C 110:6–10)

During the dedication proceedings, multiple extra-worldly experiences were enjoyed by the Saints.¹² Additionally, the Lord provided a name for the church in 1838, which would have been surprising if the church had been permanently rejected in 1832:

For thus shall *my church* be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Verily I say unto you all: Arise and shine forth, that thy light may *be a standard for the nations*; And that the gathering together upon the land of Zion, and *upon her stakes*, may be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth. (D&C 115:4–6)

Multiple evidences demonstrate that the Lord accepted his church in 1838, well after the conditional condemnation of section 84 was issued.

D&C 124

One dissenter recently criticized the Nauvoo Latter-day Saints as deeply unrighteous and “ungrateful and oblivious.”¹³ He wrote that the time required to build the Nauvoo Temple (four years and two months) was too long, resulting in the Lord’s irrevocable condemnation.¹⁴ He bases his interpretation upon D&C 124:31–32:

But I command you, all ye my saints, to build a house unto me; and I grant unto you a sufficient time to build a house unto me; and during this time your baptisms

12 See Steven C. Harper, “A Pentecost and Endowment Indeed”: Six Eyewitness Accounts of the Kirtland Temple Experience,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestation 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2005), 327–71.

13 Snuffer, *Passing the Heavenly Gift*, 118.

14 Snuffer, *Passing the Heavenly Gift*, 96–119, 265–87. It is worth noting that the Saints settled in the Utah territory in 1847, but thirty years passed before the St. George Temple was complete. In addition, building the Salt Lake Temple took forty years (1853–1893).

shall be acceptable unto me. But behold, at the end of this appointment your baptisms for your dead shall not be acceptable unto me; and if you do not these things at the end of the appointment *ye shall be rejected as a church*, with your dead, saith the Lord your God. (D&C 124:31–32; see also 47–48)

Asserting that the church and its members in the early 1840s were so unrighteous that the Lord was forced to withdraw his Spirit and authority is difficult to sustain from a documentary standpoint. During the years the Saints settled Nauvoo, the high council aggressively disciplined all moral transgressions (see appendix to this essay). Joseph administered temple ordinances in 1842, expanding in 1843 and 1844 to include dozens of church members. He also organized the Council of Fifty in the spring of 1844.¹⁵ These activities support the Lord was with his church and his prophet. On July 23, 1843, Joseph Smith declared: “I see no faults in the church. — Let me be resurrected with the saints whether to heaven or hell or any other good place — good society. what do we care if the society is good?”¹⁶ Just days before the martyrdom, as Joseph left Nauvoo for the last time, he paused when they got to the Temple and remarked, “This is the loveliest place and the best people under the heavens.”¹⁷ Many other evidences are available to show that in Nauvoo, the Latter-day Saints were still approved of God and

15 As its name implies, this council was composed of fifty men but usually varied from that number. It was unique among the councils established by the Prophet in that its membership could include individuals who were not members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was functioning only when church leadership were inspired to call it into activity and to direct its actions. See D. Michael Quinn, “The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945.” *BYU Studies* 20 (Winter 1980): 163–97.

16 Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 234, W. W. Richards reporting, 23 July 1843 (Sunday Afternoon).

17 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 379.

experiencing visions, speaking in tongues, dreaming inspired dreams, and enjoying other gifts of the Spirit.

1890 Manifesto

The most common trigger-event promoted by dissenters allegedly causing the church to lose the truth is the issuance of the 1890 Manifesto. Through it, the commandment then incumbent upon church members to practice plural marriage was removed.

Fundamentalists universally vilify the Latter-day Saints in the 1890s, declaring that the Saints of that time became more concerned with their property and worldly possessions than with keeping the commandments of God. They affirm that church members were then hounding Wilford Woodruff “day and night for a declaration of recession of polygamy.”¹⁸ As fundamentalist leader Joseph W. Musser stated: “It became necessary for the leaders to pacify the multitude.”¹⁹ Fundamentalist “High Priest Apostle”²⁰ Lorin Woolley taught:

[Church members were writing letters] asking the leaders to do something, as the Gentiles were talking of confiscating their property in connection with the property of the Church. These letters not only came from those who were living in the Plural Marriage relation, but also from prominent men who were presiding in various offices of the Church who were not living in that relation. They all urged that something

18 Musser, “Evidences and Reconciliations, in *Truth*, 255.

19 Joseph W. Musser, “What Authority Sanctioned the Manifesto,” *Truth* 20/6 (November 1954): 200.

20 According to Musser and Woolley, a priesthood office exists called “High Priest Apostle,” which is higher than the apostleship of the Twelve. See Joseph W. Musser, *A Priesthood Issue* (n.p.: n.d. [1948]), 10–11; Lorin Woolley quoted in “Book of Remembrance of Joseph W. Musser.” *Holograph*, 31. This teaching has been jettisoned by most fundamentalists groups today even though it ironically is the only source to which they can trace their claims to sealing authority.

be done to satisfy the Gentiles so that their property would not be confiscated. (1929 Account)

It is true that in the 1880s some church members had inquired to see if the church's position on polygamy could be changed. Others had vocalized the trials they were required to bear. However, neither of these actions should be interpreted to mean the general church membership were desirous of a Manifesto if such a doctrinal change would limit their eternal exaltation or place them condemned before the Lord. For members to state that they are enduring hardships is not tantamount to requesting that the trials be removed, especially if a spiritual penalty is attached.

Regardless, fundamentalists depict church members as demanding relief at any cost, and so in harmony with the principle of agency and "common consent" (D&C 26:2), the Lord granted it, permitting his servant to produce a manifesto independent of his will and inspiration.²¹ Musser explained:

It is evident from what has already been written that we as a people did assume all responsibility and voluntarily surrendered plural marriage. God had nothing to do with it, only insofar as He permitted the people to use their own agency in accepting or rejecting the responsibility of His law.²²

Fundamentalists suggest that after the Manifesto of 1890, the Saints rejoiced in their property and in the prospect that they would no longer suffer on account of polygamy. This idea fits well into their narratives and doctrines, but unfortunately for them it is not supported by available historical documentation. In fact, the Saints in 1890 were mostly confused by the Manifesto. They sustained it because they sustained President

21 Musser, "Evidences and Reconciliations," in *Truth*, 60.

22 Joseph W. Musser, "Priesthood Items," *Truth* 8/9 (February 1943): 202.

Woodruff who presented it to them. The ongoing confusion prompted church leaders to explain its meaning to the people in many subsequent discourses.²³

Accordingly, the Fundamentalist “party line” that the Saints wanted a Manifesto at any cost to remove their persecutions is unsupported. Church members followed their leaders and accepted the counsel of President Woodruff. To reject a prophet’s instruction, is to reject the prophet. The Saints did not do this. Regarding the Manifesto, Wilford Woodruff later explained:

I have had some revelations of late, and very important ones to me, and I will tell you what the Lord has said to me. The Lord has told me by revelation that there are many members of the Church through Zion who are sorely tried in their hearts because of the Manifesto ...

Now, I want you to understand that [President Woodruff] has not lost the Spirit nor is he about to apostatize. The Lord is with him, and with this people. He has told me exactly what to do, and what the result would be if we did not do it.²⁴

That the Lord was still guiding his church is evident in the spiritual blessing enjoyed at the dedicatory services of the

23 See Stuy, *Collected Discourses*, 2:288–289; Durham, *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, 218; and Woodruff, “Testimony before the Master in Chancery,” 19–20 October 1891, published in the *Deseret News Weekly*, 23 October 1891, 4–5. See also Edward Leo Lyman, *Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 299.

24 Wilford Woodruff, Cache Stake Conference, Logan, Utah, Sunday November 1, 1891. Reported in *Deseret News Weekly*, November 14, 1891. Parts found in “Excerpts from three addresses by President Wilford Woodruff regarding the Manifesto,” found after Official Declaration –1, *Doctrine and Covenants*, 1981 edition.

Salt Lake Temple three years later. There President Woodruff disclosed a portion of what the Lord had revealed to him:

I feel at liberty to reveal to this assembly this morning what has been revealed to me since we were here yesterday morning. If the veil could be taken from our eyes and we could see into the spirit world, we would see that Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and John Taylor had gathered together every spirit that ever dwelt in the flesh in this church since its organization. We would also see the faithful apostles and elders of the Nephites who dwelt in the flesh in the days of Jesus Christ. In that assembly we would also see Isaiah and every prophet and apostle that ever prophesied of the great work of God. In the midst of these spirits we would see the Son of God, the Savior, who presides and guides and controls the preparing of the Kingdom of God on the earth and in heaven.²⁵

To say the church was then rejected is inconsistent with these and many other experiences.

Priesthood Keys Lost by President Grant

Another trigger or watershed moment according to some dissenters occurred when Heber J. Grant became church president in 1918. Dissenters have claimed that President Grant never received a revelation in his life and publicly admitted the fact. Joseph W. Musser wrote:

President Grant, on numerous occasions and with commendable frankness, has acknowledged the absence of any revelation to him. He has, according

25 Wilford Woodruff, Minutes of the Salt Lake Temple Dedication Held April 6–24, 1893 quoted in Stuy, *Collected Discourses*, 3:274. See also Archibald F. Bennett, *Saviors on Mount Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 142–143. Also Joseph Heinerman, *Temple Manifestations* (Salt Lake City: Magazine Printing and Publishing, 1974), 118–119.

to his testimony, had no spiritual manifestations that could be interpreted as a revelation from the Lord; he has not seen an angel, nor the face of his Lord.²⁶

On another occasion Musser wrote:

The present leader (Heber J. Grant) has recently stated to friends and associates, and even in his public addresses he has reiterated it, that he has never seen the face of the Savior, nor had any other special manifestation from the Lord; and further, said he, “I don’t know that I want any because of the great responsibility such would entail.”²⁷

In 1882, Heber J. Grant was called to the Apostleship by a direct revelation to President John Taylor:

Thus saith the Lord to the Twelve, and to the priesthood and people of my Church: Let my servants George Teasdale and Heber J. Grant be appointed to fill the vacancies in the Twelve, that you may be fully organized and prepared for the labors devolving upon you, for you have a great labor to perform; and then proceed to fill up the presiding quorum of the Seventies, and assist in organizing that body of my priesthood who are your co-laborers in the ministry. You may appoint Seymour B. Young to fill up the vacancy in the presiding quorum of Seventies.²⁸

26 Joseph W. Musser, “Voting Rights of Saints,” *Truth* 6/3 (August 1940): 61.

27 Joseph W. Musser, “Continuous Revelation,” *Truth* 4/9 (February 1939):175; see also Joseph W. Musser, “Prophets, Seers, and Revelators,” *Truth* 8/8 (January 1943): 175.

28 Quoted in *My Kingdom Shall Roll Forth: Readings in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), 50.

Heber J. Grant related that subsequent to his calling to the Apostleship of the Twelve he became qualified to serve as a genuine apostle:

So I went to the president's office, and there sat brother Teasdale, and all of the ten Apostles, and the Presidency of the Church, and also Seymour B. Young and the members of the seven presidents of Seventies. And the revelation was read calling brother Teasdale and myself to the apostleship, and brother Seymour B. Young to be one of the seven presidents of Seventies. Brother Teasdale was blessed by President John Taylor, and George Q. Cannon blessed me ...

I was a very unhappy man from October to February. For the next four months whenever I would bear my testimony of the divinity of the Savior, there seemed to be a voice that would say: "You lie, because you have never seen him." One of the brethren had made the remark that unless a man had seen the Lamb of God — that was his expression — "he was not fit to be an Apostle. This feeling that I have mentioned would follow me. I would wake up in the night with the impression: "You do not know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because you have never seen him," and the same feeling would come to me when I would preach and bear testimony. It worried me from October to the following February.

I was in Arizona, traveling with Brigham Young, Jr., and a number of other brethren, visiting the Navajo Indians and the Moki Indians.... I had this feeling that I ought not to testify any more about the Savior and that really, I was not fit to be an Apostle. It seemed overwhelming to me that I should be one. There was

a spirit that said: “If you have not seen the Savior, why don’t you resign your position?”

As I rode along alone, I seemed to see a Council in Heaven. The Savior was there; the Prophet Joseph was there; my father and others that I knew were there. In this Council it seemed that they decided that a mistake had been made in not filling the vacancies in the quorum of the Twelve, and conference had adjourned. The chances were the brethren would wait another six months, and the way to remedy the situation was to send a revelation naming the men who should fill the vacancies. In this council the Prophet said, “I want to be represented by one of my own on that council.”

I had always understood and known that my mother was sealed to the Prophet, and that Brigham Young had told my father that he would not marry my mother to him for eternity, because he had instructions from the Prophet that if anything happened to him before he was married to Rachel Ivins she must be sealed to him for eternity, that she belonged to him.

That is the reason that father spoke up in this council to which I have referred, and said: “Why not choose the boy who bears my name who belongs to you, to be one of the Apostles?” That is the inspiration that was given to me.

I can truthfully say that from February, 1883, until today I have never had any of that trouble, and I can bear testimony that I know that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, and that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of the living God.²⁹

29 Heber J. Grant, *Conference Report*, October 1942, 24–26; see also *Improvement Era*, November 1942, 756–757.

Dissenters who declare that Heber J. Grant did not receive the required witness to be an apostle are simply denying the historical record.

Declaring the “Church” and the “Priesthood” are Separate Entities

The second stratagem embraced by some dissenters in order to place themselves in a superior position to church members is the notion that the “church” is one entity and the “priesthood” is another and the two can coexist apart from one another. This reasoning serves fundamentalist purposes in several ways. First, it allows them to claim the authority needed to legitimately exist, but also allows the church to legitimately exist. Priesthood is required in order to effectuate valid ordinances. Joseph Smith taught that there is “No salvation between the two lids of the bible without a legal administrator.”³⁰ Second, they can delegate to the “church” all the priesthood duties they do not wish to perform. Most commonly they assign the responsibility to do missionary work to the church, so they do not have to do it. Fundamentalist leaders often encourage followers to proselytize new converts to their ways of thinking, but they do not send missionaries out to baptize as Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and John Taylor did (see D&C 1:4, 4:4, 6:9, 18:44, 33:8–10, 42:6, 60:2, and 68:8). For many decades, temple building was also delegated to the church. Third, their “priesthood” organization is always loftier than the “church” and subtly reinforces the superiority complex they already feel over church members (more on this later).

Sometimes the dichotomy is described in confusing ways. One former member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints explained:

30 Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 235.

The church's ordinations and ordinances remain vital to the restored Gospel, and the plan of salvation. *Whether or not there is any person in the church with priesthood power*, every person who joins the church, and keeps its ordinances will be invited through those ordinances, to come and receive the Lord.³¹

This counsel is very different from that revealed by Joseph Smith. When asked why rebaptism by an authorized priesthood bearer was required to enter the church, the Lord responded:

Behold, I say unto you that all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this thing; and this is a new and an everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning. Wherefore, although a man should be baptized an hundred times it availeth him nothing, for you cannot enter in at the strait gate by the law of Moses, neither by your dead works. For it is because of your dead works that I have caused this last covenant and this church to be built up unto me, even as in days of old. Wherefore, enter ye in at the gate, as I have commanded, and seek not to counsel your God. Amen. (D&C 22:1–4)

True priesthood is needed to effectuate any valid ordinance including those of the new and everlasting covenant. The idea that a man might not have the priesthood, but could still perform ordinances that would be recognized by the Lord is novel, but false.

Also, the doctrine that the priesthood could exist outside of the church is incorrect. Joseph Smith explained that the “priesthood continueth *in the church* of God in all generations” (D&C 84:17). He also counseled: “You will receive instructions

31 Denver C. Snuffer, Jr., *Passing the Heavenly Gift* (Salt Lake City: Mill Creek Press, 2011), 37, emphasis added.

through the order of the Priesthood which God has established, through the medium of those appointed to lead, guide and direct the affairs of the Church in this last dispensation.”³²

The connection between the priesthood and God’s church can be illustrated by observing the Pacific Naval Fleet during World War II. Towards the end of the conflict, the fleet was led by Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. At that time, the naval headquarters was not located permanently in Hawaii, San Francisco, or some other location. The headquarters for the entire Pacific Navy was wherever Admiral Nimitz was positioned. If he was on a ship, then the fleet headquarters was on the ship. If he was visiting Hawaii, then headquarters was in Hawaii.

Similarly, wherever the man holding the “keys” of the priesthood is located (D&C 132:7, 18, 19), there is God’s church. The keys cannot be in one place and the church in another. Also, it does not matter whether he has formally registered his organization with the government of that country. In God’s eyes, the followers of the key holder constitute his church (see D&C 10:67–68). Equally, if the presiding priesthood leader — the key holder — leaves a church organization, then that church organization is unrecognized and is in apostasy, and those following the priesthood key holder would become the new true church with all of the accompanying blessings and responsibilities (like missionary work). This separation has not occurred since Joseph Smith organized the church on April 6, 1830, although dissenters have posed arguments to the contrary as discussed above.

32 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 228.

Prophecies of a “Gathering,” a “Marvelous Work and a Wonder,” a “Sweeping of the Earth,” and a “Rolling Forth”

One problem with the dissenters’ view that describes the church as going astray involves many prophecies regarding its responsibilities in the latter-days. Christ declared there would be a final “gathering”: “I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion” (3 Nephi 21:1). Likewise, a “marvelous work and a wonder” will be performed: “And the Lord will set his hand again the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state. Wherefore, he will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men” (2 Nephi 25:17; see also 27:26). In addition, “truth” will “sweep the earth”: “And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth” (Moses 7:62). And as quoted above, the gospel will “roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth” (D&C 65:2).

Dissenters who affirm an apostasy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints apparently embrace the position that the “gathering,” the “marvelous work and a wonder,” the “sweeping the earth” with “righteousness and truth,” and the “rolling forth” were stillborn. Or they may maintain that the church has strayed and the efforts have diminished after an initial expansion. Another view is that the efforts are sputtering forth to fill small parts of the whole earth. Or perhaps they will defend some hybrid notion that the church is in apostasy but still possesses enough truth and authority to sufficiently fulfil

these prophecies — which is impossible to do from a doctrinal standpoint, but it does conveniently absolve the critics from the need to fulfill them.

This global perspective is usually left unaddressed by dissenters who generally maintain a much smaller focus; one that commonly places them and their concerns on center stage.

The Use of Scriptural Proof-Texts

Dissenters typically employ a set of *proof-texts* to support their view that the church is in apostasy. A *proof-text* is a scripture that is extracted from its context in order to change its meaning. Several verses of scripture have been recruited by dissidents to support the idea that Joseph Smith and/or the Book of Mormon prophesied that the church established by the Prophet would apostatize. Usually included is the idea that a remnant of true believers would exist. Of course, the dissenters promoting this view willingly imply or proclaim that they are the worthy offshoot.

3 Nephi 16:10–11

Perhaps the most common verse so misused is 3 Nephi 16:10–11 where the Savior informs the Nephites:

And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day *when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel*, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, *I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them*. And then will I remember my

covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them. (3 Ne. 16:10–11)

Dissenters label the “gentiles” in this verse as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and conclude that the “gospel” will be brought from among them — that they will apostatize. This interpretation is problematic for several reasons. First, the Book of Mormon identifies the “gentiles” generally as the Caucasian people who populated America, primarily from England, but also from other nations of western Europe (1 Nephi 13:12–15). The Book of Mormon further divides the “gentiles” into two groups: the believers and the unbelievers. Nephi explained that “as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord” (2 Nephi 30:2).³³

In order to discover which group the Savior is referring to in 3 Nephi 16:10–11, readers simply need to back up two verses: “But wo, saith the Father, unto *the unbelieving of the gentiles*” (3 Nephi 16:8). In other words, the “unbelieving of the gentiles” in North America will not universally accept the restored truth. Hence, believing gentiles and converts from the “house of Israel” (Book of Mormon peoples) will redirect their missionary work to countries outside of North America — to other nations where the house of Israel descendants are living. George Q. Cannon explained:

The Prophet Joseph Smith in this translation [of the Book of Mormon], showed forth with great clearness, that the Gospel would be revealed, and that it should be received by some of the Gentiles; that when it should be received by the Gentiles, it should be carried by them to the descendants of Nephi and his brethren, who by that time should have become a filthy and a

33 Mormon referred to the believing gentiles as “the gentiles who have care for the house of Israel” (Mormon 5:10).

loathsome people. The Indians of our continent should receive the message of life and salvation. The Gospel should be carried to them. They would receive it with gladness. They would come to a knowledge of their Redeemer, as well as to a knowledge of the principles and doctrines and covenants which their fathers understood, and which their fathers had received. Wonderful prediction! And most wonderfully has it been fulfilled....

The Gentiles did receive the Gospel of the Son of God, when it was revealed. Burning with zeal to carry this Gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue and people; inspired by the Holy Ghost, they went out among the Indian races as well as others, and fulfilled the predictions of the Book of Mormon....

When the Gentiles do reject the Gospel—as I fear they will from their conduct in the past—that is, as a nation—although I trust there will yet be many hundreds and thousands—yea, I would that I could say millions—of Gentiles gathered in by this Gospel; I trust that this will be the case, though the prospects are not very hopeful at present. It seems at present that as a nation, the Gentiles will reject the Gospel. When they do reject it, as they have in part, then God will commence, as the Savior said, to do a great work among the house of Israel. He will carry his Gospel there, and the work will commence then among all the scattered remnants of the house of Israel, over the whole earth.³⁴

34 George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 25:123.

Orson Pratt³⁵ and Parley P. Pratt³⁶ agreed with this interpretation.

A second problem with the dissenters' interpretation is that 3 Nephi 16:11 states the gospel will be given to the "house of Israel," which is defined in the Book of Mormon as the descendants of Lehi (2 Nephi 29:2, 2 Nephi 33:13, and 3 Nephi 10:4–5). While most dissenters would gladly claim to be the recipients of the gospel they say the church has lost, they do not qualify genealogically.

A third inconsistency is found in Nephi's description of the latter days:

And after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine, after the gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel, the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, *should be grafted in*, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer. (1 Nephi 10:14; see also 1 Nephi 15:16)

The house of Israel was going to be "grafted in" with "the gentiles [who] had received the fullness of the Gospel." The house of Israel was not to displace them. Nephi further explained:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, thus saith our God: I will afflict thy seed by the hand of the Gentiles; nevertheless, I will soften the hearts of the Gentiles, that they shall be like unto a father to them; wherefore, *the Gentiles shall be blessed and numbered among the house of Israel.* (2 Nephi 10:18)

35 Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:133; Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:298–99; Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 18:27.

36 Parley P. Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 5:200.

Fourth, the fullness of the gospel has already been taken from the “gentile” nation of North America and given to the “house of Israel” as the majority of the population of Latter-day Saints live outside of North America and the most popular language spoken in the church is Spanish— not English.

2 Nephi 28:11–15

Another popular proof-text is found in 2 Nephi 28:11–15:

Yea, they have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted. Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up. They rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries; they rob the poor because of their fine clothing; and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart, because in their pride they are puffed up. They wear stiff necks and high heads; yea, and because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men. O the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines, and all those who commit whoredoms, and pervert the right way of the Lord, wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!

These verses severely condemn individuals whose doctrine had become “corrupted” (v. 11). Dissenters affirm they are referring to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the twenty-first century. This seems to be supported by the statement that “they have all gone out of the way” (v.

11). However, a careful reading shows that the time period described in the verses is when the Book of Mormon was to come forth to be translated and published. “Wherefore, at that day when the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken [Joseph Smith]” (2 Nephi 27:12). 2 Nephi 28:3 reaffirms the events described are in “that day.”

Mormon 8:32–33

An additional popular scripture is found in Mormon 8:32–33:

Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins. O ye wicked and perverse and stiffnecked people, why have ye built up churches unto yourselves to get gain? Why have ye transfigured the holy word of God, that ye might bring damnation upon your souls? Behold, look ye unto the revelations of God; for behold, the time cometh at that day when all these things must be fulfilled.

Dissenters often assert that this condemnation is directed at the restored church. They fail to note that the statement “it shall come” refers to an event mentioned earlier in the chapter in verse 16:

And blessed be he that shall bring this thing to light; for it shall be brought out of darkness unto light, according to the word of God; yea, it shall be brought out of the earth, and it shall shine forth out of darkness, and come unto the knowledge of the people; and it shall be done by the power of God. (Mormon 8:16)

Moroni’s harsh condemnation is directed at “churches” that exist in the “day” when the Book of Mormon “shall come” or “shall be brought out of darkness” — when it is translated and published. That day is referenced in several other verses just previous to verses 32–33.

And it shall come in a day... Yea, it shall come in a day... Yea, it shall come in a day. (Mormon 8:27, 28, 29)

In other words, the Book of Mormon “shall come in a day” of wickedness.³⁷ Then, as verse 22 declares: “the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on, until all his *promises* shall be fulfilled.” His promises include the final *gathering*, the *marvelous work and a wonder*, and the *sweeping of the earth* with truth. Their latter-day beginning shall come in a day of spiritual darkness. That is, the Book of Mormon “shall be brought out of darkness unto light, according to the word of God; yea, it shall be brought out of the earth, and it shall shine forth out of darkness, and come unto the knowledge of the people” (Mormon 8:16). From there it “shall shine forth” and the gospel “shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth” (D&C 65:2).

A review of all scripture fails to identify any predictions or prophecies that the church established by Joseph Smith would apostatize or be replaced by another. Threats were made that if the Saints did not comply, consequences would have followed (see D&C 43:14, 60:2–3, 64:40, 83:2, 84:55–57, 98:19–21, 103:14, and 124:32, 46–48). However, a sufficient number of Latter-day Saints have always responded sufficiently to allow the church to continue to progress. In addition, a few scriptures can be quoted out-of-context to make it appear that a falling away might occur, but such interpretations contradict numerous other less ambiguous statements.

Church Leaders Are Still Inspired

Without exception, dissenters today believe the leaders of the church depend on man’s wisdom to lead because they have lost the ability to converse with God and his Son. To be an

37 See also 2 Nephi 28:11–15.

Apostle, one must be a “special witness of Jesus Christ.”³⁸ The testimonies of the apostles in the church today indicate that they do qualify in every sense of the requirement. However, the Holy Spirit restrains open discussion of sacred things. Elder Boyd K. Packer explains:

We do not talk of those sacred interviews that qualify the servants of the Lord to bear a special witness of Him, for we have been commanded not to do so. But we are free, indeed, we are obliged, to bear that special witness.³⁹

Nonetheless, such references are made but are just denied by unbelievers. For example, in 1971 Elder Packer declared:

I have heard one of my brethren declare: “I know from experiences, too sacred to relate, that Jesus is the Christ.” I have heard another testify: “I know that God lives; I know that the Lord lives, and more than that, I know the Lord.”⁴⁰

In the April 2014 General Conference, President Packer stated plainly: “I bear my witness that the Savior lives. I know the Lord.”⁴¹ Elder Russell M. Nelson testified in General Conference in 1992:

38 Oliver Cowdery encouraged the first members of the Quorum of the Twelve to “Never cease striving until you have seen God face to face” (B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1960), 2:195–196.

39 Boyd K. Packer, *Conference Report*, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (April 1980), 86. See also Alma 12:9; Hyrum Smith, “To the Brethren of the Church,” *Times and Seasons* 5/6 (March 15, 1884): 474; and Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:288.

40 Boyd K. Packer, *Conference Report*, April 1971, 122–25; Boyd K. Packer, “The Spirit Beareth Record,” *Ensign*, June 1971, 88.

41 Boyd K. Packer, “The Witness,” General Conference (webpage), accessed April 20, 2014, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/print/2014/04/the-witness?lang=eng&clang=eng>.

As a special witness of Jesus Christ, I testify that He lives! I also testify that the veil of death is very thin. I know by experiences too sacred to relate that those who have gone before are not strangers to leaders of this Church.⁴²

More recently in a Regional Conference meeting, Elder M. Russell Ballard referred to Elder Richard G. Scott then sitting on the stand saying, “Few men know the Savior as well as Elder Scott.”⁴³

Dissidents need uninspired leaders in the church to justify their claims, but if the works of the church in fulfilling the prophecies are not enough to demonstrate divine guidance, a careful listening of their testimonies verifies that they are his special witnesses today.

Perfection Is Not Required

Dissenters often emphasize unrighteousness that exists among a portion of the membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints where weekly church attendance is around 50%.⁴⁴ Of those participating, only a fraction hold temple recommends and not all recommend holders are genuinely trying to keep the commandments. In addition, many of those who are inactive may flaunt the church’s standards and even those who attend may stumble and behave hypocritically.

However, to label all members as unrighteous is not accurate. It can be argued that sincere, believing, complying Latter-day Saints have always existed within the church and that their numbers have always been greater than any

42 Russell M. Nelson, “Doors of Death,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 74.

43 Related to me by S. Johnson, a bishop who was in attendance.

44 Evaluating the attendance and apostasy figures of prominent fundamentalist groups like the FLDS and the Allred Group (AUB) would likely reveal an even smaller percentage who are actively attending their religious meetings.

group of dissenters or fundamentalists. Nevertheless, by ignoring the members who have sincerely sought to keep the commandments, dissidents can portray the whole church membership as being less faithful. This perception helps them justify their disaffection but is, nevertheless, a deception.

In addition, Joseph Smith described a God of “loving kindness and long-suffering” towards his children (1 Nephi 19:9), who is a God of “compassion,” (D&C 64:2), who is “pitiful” (1 Peter 3:8; D&C 133:53), and who is “merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end” (D&C 76:5). To ancient Israel, his hands remained “stretched out still” (2 Ne. 19:12, 17), despite their unrighteousness. When Christ appeared to the Nephites, he explained:

And many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations. O all ye that are spared because *ye were more righteous* than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? Yea, verily I say unto you, *if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life*. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me. (3 Nephi 9:12–14)

The darkness and devastations that preceded Christ’s visitation to the Nephites spared the “more righteous”—not those that were nearly perfect. The level of obedience needed to avoid destruction was not perfection. And those who were “more righteous” were then invited to improve and to “come unto Christ” in order to “have eternal life.”

Similarly, through Joseph Smith, God promised his spiritual gifts “for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and *him that seeketh so to do*” (D&C 46:9).

Joseph Smith prayed in 1836: “O Lord, remember thy servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., and all his afflictions and persecutions — how he has covenanted with Jehovah, and vowed to thee, O Mighty God of Jacob — and the commandments which thou hast given unto him, and that he *hath sincerely striven to do thy will*” (D&C 109:68). God’s gifts and blessings are not only for those who are perfect, because no mortal has been including Joseph Smith. They are for those who seek to “keep all the commandments” and who “sincerely strive” to do his will. This level of righteousness has always existed in the church and among its leaders. Never since the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized in 1830 has this earth been bereft of church authorities and members who were worthy to receive inspiration and carry forth God’s work on earth.

Dissenters Are in Apostasy

Among Mormon fundamentalists and dissenters are many sincere people who genuinely desire to serve God. A significant percentage are willing to make almost any sacrifice in order to obtain the blessings promised to the obedient as described by the Prophet Joseph Smith. What, then, can explain their need for the church to be wrong, so they can be right without it?

Joseph Smith taught: “for nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God.”⁴⁵ He further warned:

Behold, verily I say unto you, that there are many spirits which are false spirits, which have gone forth in the earth, deceiving the world. And also Satan hath sought to deceive you, that he might overthrow you. (D&C 50:2–3)

45 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 205.

The Prophet also advised that in the last days, false prophets would arise that can deceive even the elect according to the covenant. That is, those who have received the new and everlasting covenant and perhaps even the blessings of the temple can be deceived:

Behold, these things I have spoken unto you concerning the Jews; and again, after the tribulation of those days which shall come upon Jerusalem, if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe him not; For in those days there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that, if possible, *they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant*. Behold, I speak these things unto you *for the elect's sake*. (Joseph Smith–Matthew 1:21–23)

Just weeks before his martyrdom, Joseph Smith explained:

Woe to that man or woman who Shall lift up their or his hands against god's witness for the[y] are rasing their hands or arms against the power of god and the[y] will be cursed. But in these times in the last days there will many fals prophets arise and false teachers and decieve many the[y] Shall have many followers by their deceit. the[y] Strive to have power and by their pernitious ways lead of[f] many — for Brother Joseph Smith was chosen for the last dispensation or Seventh Dispensation The time the grand council Set in heaven to organise this world Joseph was chosen for the last & greatest Prophet to lay the foundation of gods work of the Seventh Dispensation.⁴⁶

46 Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 369–70.

Brigham Young encountered many who promoted doctrinal claims that contradicted his inspiration. Some would declare their own visions and visitations from heavenly messengers. How did he respond? With tongue-in-cheek he remarked: “I say to such persons, Go ahead, and get all the revelations you can. If brother Joseph visits you every night, go ahead, and tell him to bring brother Hyrum, father Smith, Don Carlos Smith, St. Paul, Peter, James, and John, and Jesus Christ, if you can induce him to do so.”⁴⁷ Then President Young explained:

I could almost lay my hand on that Bible and swear that the man or woman who gets such revelations has been guilty of adultery, or of theft, or has been rebellious and apostatized in feelings, but has come back again, and now professes to have such revelations. Hell is full of such revelations ... I have had men come to me and tell the wonderful great dreams and visions which they have, when those very persons have apostatized heretofore, have denied their God and their religion; and I knew it. Many come to me and tell me what wonderful visions they have – that their minds are open to eternal things – that they can see visions of eternity open before them and understand all about this kingdom, – many of whom have at some time been guilty of betraying their brethren.⁴⁸

Then he added: “I never notice them much. I sit and hear them talk about their wonderful knowledge, but it passes in and out of my ears like the sound of the wind. It is for me to see to this kingdom, that it is built up, and to preserve the Saints from the grasp of the enemy. The visions of the class I have mentioned are nothing to me. They may exhibit their great

47 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 5:352.

48 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 5:352.

knowledge before me; but when they have done, it is all gone from me.”⁴⁹

Joseph Smith explained that individuals who criticize leaders holding higher priesthood authority are not inspired. Those voices can and will deceive:

I will inform you that it is contrary to the economy of God for any member of the Church, or any one, to receive instruction for those in authority, higher than themselves; therefore you will see the impropriety of giving heed to them; but if any person have a vision or a visitation from a heavenly messenger, it must be for his own benefit and instruction; for the fundamental principles, government, and doctrine of the Church are vested in the keys of the kingdom.⁵⁰

I will give you one of the Keys of the mysteries of the Kingdom. It is an eternal principle, that has existed with God from all eternity: That man who rises up to condemn other, finding fault with the Church, saying that they are out of the way, while he himself is righteous, then know assuredly, that that man is in the high road to apostasy; and if he does not repent, will apostatize, as God lives. The principle is as correct as the one that Jesus put forth in saying that he who seeketh a sign is an adulterous person; and that principle is eternal, undeviating, and firm as the pillars of heaven;⁵¹

Such critics may publish books or post on blogs or interject their critiques in threads on the Internet, but according to Joseph Smith’s teachings, such criticisms of the church and its

49 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 5:352.

50 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 21.

51 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 156.

leaders could not be inspired by God and the proponents will apostatize, if they haven't already.

This applies to a recent movement to ordain women to the priesthood.⁵² According to Joseph Smith's teachings, God does not inspire individuals to seek change in the Church through the processes now effectuated by the proponents of women ordinations. Whether they realize it or not, their position not only advocates female priesthood conferral but also a transformation away from the Prophet's basic teachings regarding revelation, inspiration, and order within the Church (D&C 58:55, 132:8). It is unclear whether they are ignorant of Joseph's teachings or just feel they are outdated.

In these cases, church leaders may be obligated to excommunicate these "alternate voices," so the church membership will not confuse their spurious teachings with official doctrines. Alma explained: "And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep; and he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed" (Alma 5:60). While it may seem ironic, excommunicating apostates glorifies God. Joseph revealed:

And him that repenteth not of his sins, and confesseth them not, ye shall bring before the church, and do with him as the scripture saith unto you, either by commandment or by revelation. And this ye shall do *that God may be glorified*—not because ye forgive not, having not compassion, but that ye may be justified in the eyes of the law, *that ye may not offend him who is your lawgiver*. (D&C 64:12–13; emphasis added)

52 See, for example, Ordain Women: Mormon Women Seeking Equality And Ordination to the Priesthood (website), accessed March 31, 2014, <http://www.ordainwomen.org>.

The scriptures demand that they be “cast out” (D&C 42:20–28, 75) and their names “blotted out” (Mosiah 26:36, Alma 1:24, 5:57, 6:3, Moroni 6:7, and D&C 20:83).

Notwithstanding, the dissenter can return: “Inasmuch as they do repent and receive the fulness of my gospel, and become sanctified, I will stay mine hand in judgment” (D&C 39:18). This is the invitation to all those who have left the ranks through excommunication or disillusionment. As Joseph Smith wrote to W. W. Phelps who had previously vilified the Prophet, but repented and desired forgiveness:

Come on, dear brother [or sister], since the war is past,
For friends at first, are friends again at last.⁵³

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53 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 166.

APPENDIX

Nauvoo High Council Disciplinary Actions

	Individual	Charge	Date	Outcome
1841				
1	Theodore Turley	Sleeping with 2 females, kissing females	Feb. 6	Sustained--fellowship retained after repentance
	Unnamed	Crime or imprudence with an unmarried woman	Mar. 2	Joseph Smith dealt with episode privately
1842				
2	Jessee Turpin	Adultery	Apr. 22	Fellowship withdrawn
3	Chancy L. Higbee	Unchaste conduct	May 20	Expelled from the church
4	Catherine Warren	Unchaste behavior	May 25	Restored to fellowship
5	Lyman Littlefield	Unvirtuous conduct	May 27	Disfellowship
6	Darwin Chase	Unvirtuous conduct	May 27	Restored to fellowship
7	Joel S. Miles	Unvirtuous conduct	May 27	Disfellowship
8	Justice Morse	Unvirtuous conduct	May 28	Disfellowship
9	Amanda Smith	Insinuating adultery	Jun. 10	Sustained but fellowship retained after repentance
10	Gustavus Hills	Illicit intercourse	Sep. 3	Disfellowship
1843				
11	Enoch King	Adultery	Jan. 21	Acquitted
12	Mary Eggleston	Adultery	Jan. 21	Acquitted
13	John Thorp	Adultery	Jan. 21	Cut off from the church
14	Sarah Miller	Adultery	Jan 21	Cut off from the church

15	Thomas Prouse	Adultery	Jan. 21	Disfellowship
16	Charity Thorp	Adultery	Jan. 12	Disfellowship
17	John Blazard	Adultery	Jan. 28	Cut off
18	Mrs. Pool	Adultery		Cut off
19	James Reed	Adultery		Held in fellowship
20	Mary Powell	Adultery		Held in fellowship
21	John W. Taylor	Adultery		Expelled from Church
22	Mary Cook	Adultery		Expelled from Church
23	Job Green	Attempt to go to bed two young females	Mar. 4	Not sustained
24	Jordan Hendrixson	Adultery	Apr. 1	Not sustained
25	Elizabeth Rowe	Adultery	Jul. 22	Fellowship withdrawn
26	George J. Adams	Adultery	Sep. 1	Not sustained
27	Quartus R. Sparks	Impregnating a woman	Nov. 18	Fellowship withdrawn
28	Harrison Sager	Seducing a young girl	Nov 25	Not sustained
1844				
28	Harrison Sagers	"Spiritual wives"	Apr. 13	Not sustained

Of these 23 cases, 15 resulted in discipline. Sexual impropriety has never been tolerated by leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

