The Restoration's Shattered Promises and Great Hope

Denver Snuffer

Presented at the Sunstone Symposium

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Terry Turner: The title of this session today is The Restoration's Shattered Promises and Great Hopes. Welcome to the closing session for Saturday. Following this session there will be a linger longer picnic with music by Angela Soffe, the Angela Soffe Band. Following the music there will be an evening of storytelling with Robert Kirby, Gina Colton, and Courtney Clark Kendrick. Tickets are limited but available for purchase at the registration desk. This session is being recorded and you will be able to purchase it after the presentation ends at the registration desk on the main floor. Please silence your cell phones and be respectful. As you leave us tonight we want to thank you all for coming and being part of Sunstone. You have now participated in a tradition of Mormon history that is over 40 years old. Mormonism can be what we make it and your participation helps us make Mormonism a little more diverse, listening, and inclusive. Regardless of your relationship with the Restoration we claim you as an important part of this community. You are wanted. Your voice is needed. You claiming the identity in your own way is an act of resistance against hate, division, and intolerance. Thank you for having the courage to show up and for engaging at Sunstone. Please support Sunstone by making a donation, subscribing to the magazine, by attending our regional conference. You are invited to attend our next regional conference in Glasgow, Scotland on September 1. Register at Sunstone.org. This session is 90 minutes long and we ask you, both the audience and presenters, to keep within the framework so that folks can get out to dinner on time.

About this presentation: This session presents a candid assessment of the trajectory taken by the restoration during Joseph Smith's lifetime and following his demise. The landscape of current restorationist factions will be considered. Our present disappointments will be considered against the background of hope to be found in the blueprint of the future presented in the Book of Mormon and by Joseph Smith's teachings. This was going to originally be my role. My name is Terry Turner. I am here today to introduce the next presenter, the only presenter apparently, Denver Snuffer. I have known Denver for 41 years. We met on the first day of law school at BYU in 1977. Denver and I formed a study group during our first year of law school and we forged a lifelong friendship, and I began to develop an appreciation for his intellect and his irreverent sense of humor. On one occasion we were both at a brown bag luncheon in the Moot courtroom at the law school with LaVell Edwards, the legendary BYU football coach, and he was going to speak. I was called on to say the opening prayer. As I walked down the aisle, Denver shouted from the back of the room, "Give 'em hell, Terry!" I was so discombobulated by his encouragement that I lost my train of thought completely and proceeded to give about an eight minute rambling prayer. In law school it was drilled into us to think like a lawyer, that was the famous phrase. We developed skills that included analysis, skepticism, and reason, and I knew that Denver had many of these qualities innately but as a friend I've watched him over the years hone these qualities and concepts in his professional and religious life.

Denver converted to the LDS Church in 1973 while in the Air Force in New Hampshire. He was invited to a friend's home to take the first discussion and showed up with a six-pack of beer as refreshments. Once converted, I watched him as he dedicated himself to a lifetime of rigorous analysis of the scriptures. He has written 13 books beginning with *The Second Comforter: Conversing with the Lord through the Veil* in 2006 and ending with *A Man Without Doubt* in 2016. He has written extensively on his website and blog space. For several years he also taught Institute classes at the University of Utah Law School and at BYU Education Week. I do not know another person on this planet who has scrutinized the Joseph Smith papers in more detail than Denver Snuffer. His unwillingness to cease publication of his 2011 work, *Passing the Heavenly Gift* – and only for that reason – was he excommunicated in 2013 from the LDS Church. With no intention of starting his own new religion or becoming a prophet, Denver's lectures and writings have inspired the formation of many fellowships around the world, groups of like thinkers who have come together, thinking on several of the subjects regarding the restorations of Christ's church through Joseph Smith. Many of these writings have been canonized into scripture by attendees of conferences around the world. In 2017 Mormon Wikileaks revealed a chart that was shown in 1015 to the LDS Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. On that chart, Denver was assigned a bubble that identified him as one of 17 "issues and ideas leading people away" from mainstream LDS doctrine. At lunch a few days later Denver asked me to be sure and tell John Dehlin, who is another good friend of mine, that Denver's bubble on the chart was bigger than John's, and that size does matter. I have always found Denver to be a seeker of truth, a good friend. I give you Denver Snuffer.

Denver Snuffer: (I don't want to hold the microphone. I feel like a lounge singer if I'm holding it.)

This year's Symposium addresses the theme: "*Threads in the Mormon Tapestry*." In June, I participated in a conference at Boise, Idaho that invited various religious groups claiming Joseph Smith as their founder to meet and share ideas. That conference was the first Joseph Smith Restoration Conference, which is hoped to become an annual event. The theme of that conference was, "*What Unites Us is Greater Than What Divides Us*."

Both last month's Boise conference and this month's Symposium, reflect an undisputable fact about the restoration through Joseph Smith: It is fractured into over an hundred parts. All claiming Joseph Smith as their founder, these factions disagree with one another so strongly that they refuse to fellowship with one another. Last month's Boise conference was an attempt to replace division with dialogue. The two largest bodies refused to accept an invitation to send representatives to speak at that conference but several others were represented. Perhaps the history of the two largest bodies accounts for their reluctance to participate.

The largest Mormon group is the one headquartered in Salt Lake City and controlled by the Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But there is only one person who actually belongs to that corporation sole. Yet he claims to lead some 16 million followers at present, of which about 4 million are nominally active enough to

self-identify as Latter-day Saints. I refer to this group of Mormons as “Latter-day Saints” in keeping with the directive from one of their presidents, Gordon B. Hinckley, who pronounced that members of that group cease to refer to themselves as “Mormons.”

The Salt Lake City-based church has been the most fecund restorationist mother. Following her abandonment of plural wives, she gave birth to numerous fundamentalist organizations. Her progeny include:

The Council of Friends: an early polygamist group founded by Lorin C. Wooley in 1920. It in turn gave birth to numerous other polygamist offspring.

The Apostolic United Brethren, splintered from the Council of Friends, but like them, claims its founding reckons from 1886 with authority given by John Taylor. It has an estimated 9,000 members.

The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, founded by Leroy S. Johnson in 1954 also claims its authority came from the 1886 John Taylor incident. It is progeny from the Council of Friends. It has an estimated 6,000 members.

The Latter-day Church of Christ (Kingston Clan) incorporated as a church in 1978 by Ortell Kingston, and has roots that go back to 1926 with Charles Kingston. It has an estimated 1,200 members.

The Church of Jesus Christ (Original Doctrine), Inc., is a daughter of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and great-granddaughter of Brigham Young’s Salt Lake organization. It split from its mother because Bishop Winston thought Warren Jeffs was too dictatorial, and led 700 people away from that group. This organization has about 1,000 members today and is also referred to as the Blackmore Group.

There is no accurate count of all the daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters that have come from splits from the Salt Lake City mother-church. The overwhelming cause of these departures has been the abandonment of plural wives. When the corporation sole chose property over principle, some believed the principle more important than fidelity to their mother. The daughters want both principle and property, but as Warren Jeffs’ Fundamentalist Church has learned by sad experience, Federal Courts can still appoint receivers over sexually deviant religious cults that trade women like possessions.

The second largest church is headquartered in Independence, Missouri and is now called the Community of Christ. It claims to have 250,000 members. There was a time when the landscape of the restoration had the Brighamites in Utah and Josephites in Missouri, both claiming they were the authorized successor to Joseph Smith. Brighamites - because Brigham Young eventually claimed the right to succeed Joseph as leader. Josephites - because Joseph Smith III was the direct lineal descendant of the slain founder.

Like its larger sister, the Community of Christ also has produced unwanted daughters. One new daughter from the Community of Christ is The Restoration Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. It is also headquartered in Independence, and split from the Community of Christ in 1991. They were disaffected by the decision to ordain women and adopt other innovations. Those who have departed the Community of Christ for the Restoration Church have other reasons for their changed alliance. During the Boise Conference, a Restoration Church leader lamented the Community of Christ's change in attitude toward the Book of Mormon as one of his main reasons for changing his membership to the Restoration Church.

In 2001, a year following the name change from RLDS to Community of Christ, church president W. Grant McMurray admitted doubts about the Book of Mormon as sacred scripture, declaring: "The proper use of the Book of Mormon as sacred scripture has been under wide discussion in the 1970s and beyond, in part because of long-standing questions about its historicity and in part because of perceived theological inadequacies, including matters of race and ethnicity." Then during the 2007 Community of Christ World Conference, church president Stephen M. Veazey ruled it out of order to consider a resolution to "reaffirm the Book of Mormon as a divinely inspired record." In so doing he stated "while the Church affirms the Book of Mormon as scripture, and makes it available for study and use in various languages, we do not attempt to mandate the degree of belief or use. This position is in keeping with our longstanding tradition that belief in the Book of Mormon is not to be used as a test of fellowship or membership in the church."

Both of the largest two Mormon divisions have experienced significant splintering. They may have good reason to fear dialogue between these divisions. As part of encouraging dialogue, this talk will deal with two issues. Both have been used to attack and criticize Joseph Smith. If you are conversant with historical or theological Mormon material you may have seen or heard of these subjects, but some of the branches of Mormonism may not have provided any information related to these subjects. The first, and more important topic is Joseph's ascent theology, encouraging man to seek reunion and at-one-ment with God and Christ in the heavens. The second defends Joseph against the accusation that he advocated and practiced the heresy of polygamy.

The institutions claiming to be an authentic version of what Joseph Smith founded have failed to produce the results Joseph foretold. This failure is due, in large measure, because Joseph's teachings have been abandoned or contradicted. There is still a great deal left undone.

Joseph told us to expect great events among the gentiles, Native Americans and remnant of Jewish people before Christ's victorious return. He did not live to see this happen. Upon his death, he left a great deal for others to complete.

Assuming the work Joseph began is to be finished, it will not happen by heaven laboring independent of us. We have work to do. At the conference in Boise, speaker James McKay from the Restoration Church in Missouri observed, there was still no holy city and no

gathering of Israel. He posed the question: "whose fault is that; God's or ours?" The answer, according to the Book of Mormon, is that we must do the work, while God, as Master of the Vineyard, labors alongside us. But fault lies with us. God has been willing to do His part of the labor from Joseph Smith's day until now. God directs the work, and in this way "labors alongside" us. We must resist the temptation to insert our own agenda for God's. If we fail to grasp that the direction must come from heaven rather than as part of an agenda created by uninspired corporate planners, imaginative and even well intended individuals, then we risk working at odds with heaven. God's kingdom is a kingdom in every sense of the word, and the King is entitled to direct all of its affairs.

Today, we see all of the quarreling restoration mothers, daughters and siblings accusing the others of apostasy and preaching falsely. If you are trying to find a "true" version of what Joseph Smith founded from the quarreling contenders of today, you face the same query Joseph posed at the beginning: "Who of all these parties are right? Or are they all wrong together? And if any one of them be right, which is it? And how shall I know it?"

Sadly, it seems now as the Lord said to Isaiah: "the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes." These daughters lust after women, and property, power, authority, and make merchandise of the souls of men.

I was a one-time member of the largest branch, but as some of you know, was excommunicated over the demand I retract things I had written about their history. The resulting independence has allowed me to pursue a more unfettered search into Mormon origins, miscarriages, and missteps. Latter-day history has been so radically revised by revelations in the recent records released that anyone reading is left reeling. LDS history written before 1980 is antiquated. And we never had the more complete panoply of Brigham Young's conjectures, rants, and vulgarities until 2009.

The vast expansion of available and reliable historical materials for those interested has increased the schism rate for all the restorationist groups. There is a lot more kicking and pricking afoot, but it is increasingly more difficult to distinguish between kicks and pricks. The tapestry expands as more threads arrive.

But Mormonism's tapestry is not limited to the committed or devout. It now includes hundreds of thousands, perhaps more, disaffected former-Mormons who remain unable to fully depart. Mormonism exerts a religious gravitational pull almost impossible to fully escape. It remains with all of us, whether you are active in one of the two mother churches or one of their progeny. Mormon denominational splintering continues unabated.

Sunstone attracts believers and disbelievers, the disaffected, the orthodox and the apostate. Why does Mormonism exert that pull?

The religion Joseph Smith ignited echoes with the wonder and appeal of God doing among us what He once did long ago with the people in the Bible. The restoration suggests that the long, awaited moment of Christ's return is at last approaching. Therefore we either hope

this to be true or need it to be exposed as a fraud. Either way, our fears or hopes are emphatic.

Accordingly, we all must decide what to make of Joseph Smith. All our fear, wonder and hope rests on resolving what to make of the life of Joseph.

This frames the dichotomy in the legacy of that man:

- With hope in his authenticity, we see him as God's messenger.
- With doubts about him, we see him as a charlatan.

Those polar opposites are inherent in his life, and were foretold at the beginning and reconfirmed toward the end of his life.

The angel who appeared to Joseph in September 1823 said: "He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me and that his name was Nephi, that God had a work for me to do, and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people."

My mother taught me to hold Joseph for evil. I've studied his life carefully, read what his critics and admirers have claimed for and about him. I've tried not to be hasty in reaching a conclusion. After four-and-a-half decades I have decided to hold Joseph for good. I'm all in. To me he is the real thing: a messenger sent from God to deliver a message that we reject at our peril and accept for our blessing. He had a great soul that searched, stretched, believed, hoped, fought fiercely, defied pain and persecution, and bore the hallmarks we should expect from a prophet messenger from God. He was a brilliant light: rough cut, homespun, and rustic. But he was also ablaze with insight, keen and penetrating, able to capture with a phrase a glimpse of the infinite.

At the beginning, Joseph Smith's restored religion included noble, thrilling and aspirational words, worthy enough for them to belong to God. If you divorce these words from an opinion of Joseph, and allow them to be independent ideas, they are worthy of meditation. Joseph Smith left religious writings and sermons that are the equal of the New Testament. They are the equivalent to the Vedas. They are as worthy as the Tibetan Book of the Dead.14 They stand alongside the Tao Te Ching. But they trace their origin to Joseph Smith, and therein lies the rub.

I was raised among those who had Joseph's name for evil. Baptists regard Joseph as a deceiver, liar and imposter. They find the English vocabulary has an insufficient supply of caustic adjectives to heap enough scorn on him. To paraphrase Billy Beane's description of his Oakland A's: There are bad men; and there's devils. Then there's 50 feet of crap. And then there's Joseph Smith.

When Mormon missionaries began pestering me in New Hampshire, I was amused at their sincerity and could not take seriously anything they offered. To me, they defended a false

cult founded by a charlatan. I experienced an internal conflict between my mother's credo to be polite to others and her instruction that Joseph Smith was a fraud. Without resolving that conflict, I listened politely while pondering profanity.

Having nothing better to do one weekend, I went with the Mormons to a camp out in Sharon, Vermont, the birthplace of Joseph Smith. There I obtained a copy of the Doctrine & Covenants from the visitor's center. Steve Klaproth, himself a convert, showed me Section 76. Reading it was the first time I took seriously anything that came from Joseph. The words gripped me. They inspired my mind to deep reflection. They had value. It shattered the paradigm and left me unable to trust a dismissive view for Joseph. He required evaluation. Joseph's words inspired my investigation of the restoration.

In Joseph Smith's History there is a passage that still appeals to my heart and mind. He wrote, "During the space of time which intervened between the time I had the vision and the year eighteen hundred and twenty-three, (having been forbidden to join any of the religious sects of the day, and being of very tender years, and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends and to have treated me kindly — and if they supposed me to be deluded, to have endeavored in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me)…"[1] That is still going on. Joseph is still being posthumously persecuted.

Persecution is what happens when an idea cannot be opposed on its merit. Persecution is the product of fear typically experienced by those lacking knowledge. There are two great competing forces in the whole of creation: Love and fear. I think God's love for us is exemplified in Him speaking to Joseph Smith. And I am grateful for how that has enriched my life.

Here are some of the great thoughts God inspired and Joseph Smith conveyed to us:

> It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God. Nevertheless, they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart, only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word. And he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until they know them in full. And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries;[2]

This is one of the great and succinct declarations about coming to know God. Finding Them is deeply personal. We come to God by giving "heed and diligence" to what God asks of us. I cannot do that for you, nor can you do it for me. It is the sojourn of every individual.

[1] T&C 2:10
[2] NC Alma 9:3

The path requires motion. We remain in motion all the time. There is no stasis, no holding a position. We advance (that is, experience restoration) or we recede (that is, experience apostasy). There is no avoiding movement.

The mysteries of God are His hidden but simple truths. They set a man's bones on fire.

To pay heed to God requires that we not harden our hearts. When we have hard hearts we know less. Even what we once knew can be lost. Eventually, we know nothing of God's mysteries and we are left alone, without God in the world.

Another similar inspired thought:

Woe be unto him that crieth, All is well. Yea, woe be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men and denieth the power of God and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Yea, woe be unto him that saith, We have received and we need no more. And in fine, woe unto all those who tremble and are angry because of the truth of God. For behold, he that is built upon the rock receiveth it with gladness, and he that is built upon a sandy foundation trembleth, lest he shall fall. Woe be unto him that shall say, We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God for we have enough.[3] (See NC 2 Ne. 12:5-6)

All truth must come from God. The precepts of men are not only unreliable but they are corrupted by their source. God's truths do not end. This thought, like the one before, reminds us that we must seek the constant nourishment of our minds and souls to be in God's path. When God is silent, then you are cut off from truth. Those God can save are those who listen for His voice. No matter how unlikely the source from which God's voice comes, if it is God's word it is to be prized. Even when it comes from the Joseph Smith your mother warned you about.

The hallmark reaction from those disinterested in what God is saying is their angry rejection and refusal to acknowledge more. When you are content - you perish. When you hunger and thirst - you live. Living organisms require constant additional nourishment. That's how you know they are alive.

Then another profound declaration along the same line:

> And because that I have spoken one word, ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another, for my work is not yet finished, neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever. Wherefore, because that ye have a bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words, neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written. (NC 2 Ne. 12:10)

Last year I delivered a talk at the Sunstone Symposium titled *Other Sheep Indeed*. In it I invited others with sacred writings to come and bring them. That invitation was first

[3] See NC 2 Ne. 12:5-6

offered by Joseph Smith in 1840. He anticipated a temple to be built in Nauvoo to which records would be brought from all over the world "bring every thing you can bring and build the house of God and we will have a tremendous City which shall reverberate afar… then comes all the ancient records dig them up… where the Saints g[ather] is Zion." Not all of God's words are in the Bible. God has spoken to every nation (meaning religious body of people). Truth is everywhere, among all people. If we love God and truth we will want to search for it. We will not be content to leave it unexplored and undiscovered. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after more righteousness. Blessed are those who are followers of righteousness, desiring to possess great knowledge, and to be greater followers of righteousness and to possess greater knowledge. And blessed are those who do not suppose the scriptures contain all God's words and They (the Gods) have not provided more.

One of the world's greatest religious epistles was composed in Liberty Jail. It includes the following passage:

> [T]he things of God are of deep import, and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Your mind, O man, if you will lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost Heavens, and search into and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss, and expand upon the broad considerations of Eternal expanse. You must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God than the vain imagination of the human heart? None but fools will trifle with the souls of men. How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations: too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God, according to the purposes of his will from before the foundation of the world[.][4]

These words enlarge the soul. Only a great religion challenges us to stretch as high as the utmost heavens! Search into and contemplate the darkest abyss! An expansive religion that urges us to become godlike in our interest, in our search for truth! We are clearly directed to turn our attention to the heavens and learn how they function, what they are, and who is to be found there. This is a vast religion. It is not confined to the earthly, and certainly not under the control of any institution's administrative regimentation or stifling controls. It cannot be what institutional Mormonism has become:

"O God, God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of [modern Mormonism]!
Fie on 't, ah fie!
'Tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed.

[4] T&C 138:18-19

Things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely.
That it should come to this."[5]

The restoration is far too great to have been reduced to the vain, trifling, low, mean, vulgar, and condescending versions presented in today's Mormon institutions. If we are going to hold a conference, it should aspire to stretch our minds upward! To make us reach beyond, and never remain content. This Sunstone Symposium deals with diverse, interesting thought, important issues and wonderful contrasts. God is being honored here. Churches should aspire to be as informative and thought-provoking.

This search into the highest heaven is the search to find holiness. Joseph Smith wanted us to ascend, like the ancients, into that realm of light and truth. How can any of us be content to listen to the institutional fare? It is incapable of sustaining spiritual life. Joseph's ideas and teachings are as far above those teachings of today as the heavens are above the earth. The restoration once sought to find what God declared as "His way" to Isaiah: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." How the restoration has fallen! It is little wonder so many now hold Mormonism in contempt. It has become unnecessarily contemptible when it ought to be inspiring.

The restoration's delight has turned to dismay; its ingenuity turned to ineptitude. Silk has become burlap. How have we allowed it to become so?

During confinement in Liberty Jail, Joseph reflected on the tragic and sudden disarray that priesthood leaders inflicted on the restoration. Whereas Joseph first envisioned an authoritative administration for the incipient faith, in Liberty Jail he stripped priesthood of all its right to exercise control and dominion. These inspired words not only undo Joseph's initial investiture of priestly authority, it also rejects the long-established Roman Catholic decision to make priesthood non-forfeitable and independent of individual worthiness:

> Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen, and why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson — that the rights of the Priesthood are inseparably connected with the Powers of Heaven, and that the Powers of Heaven cannot be controlled nor handled, only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us, it is true, but when we undertake to cover our sins or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control, or dominion, or compulsion, upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the Heavens withdraw themselves, the Spirit of the Lord is grieved, and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the Priesthood or the authority of that man. Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself to kick against the pricks, to persecute

[5] *Hamlet* Act 1, Scene 2

> the Saints, and to fight against God. We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the Priesthood; only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned, by kindness and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul... (T&C 139:5-6)

Consider how these ideas affect religion. A calling to priesthood does not accomplish anything if the individual is not "chosen" by God. We can ordain men but heaven must ratify and elect that man. No one is permitted to function on God's behalf without God's personal imprimatur of approval.

Priesthood is connected to heaven. Without a connection to heaven, there is no priesthood. The "powers of heaven" are, of course, the angels themselves. Priests must have angelic accompaniment to claim priesthood. And angels cannot be manipulated by the ambition, self-will, or worldly ambition of men.

The called, but unchosen, use office and position to cover their sins or to gratify their pride and vain ambition. They are like the Jews who persecuted Christ, while sitting in the chief seats. Likewise, there is no priesthood in the possession of any man who exercises control, dominion, or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men in the current sects of Mormonism. Christ's gentle example of kneeling to serve presents a neon-bright example of how priesthood is to be used. He came to serve, not to be served.

He taught, invited, bid others to repent, and clarified a better understanding of the scriptures for others. He did not demand support. He ministered light and truth for all who would listen. Any other kind of conduct antagonizes the heavens, which then withdraw themselves. The Spirit of the Lord is grieved, and when it is withdrawn, that's an end to the Priesthood.

Imagine how different things are when you know that there is no power or authority in the priesthood itself. But the power to influence others comes only by persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, and by kindly presenting pure knowledge. Imagine that a teacher must greatly enlarge your soul to actually claim priesthood. How different would that be for you? You would be drawn to attend a meeting for what great light it could provide to you. You would no longer endure those meetings, conferences and conversations that are low, mean, vulgar and condescending; leave if they do, if you're not edified and your soul is not enlightened. Religious classes and meetings that bore us are an obscenity. Discussions filled with a myriad of unenlightened personal opinion are the real pornography of today's Mormonism.

Joseph Smith revoked the right of priesthood to govern, and replaced it with the priesthood's obligation to teach and inspire. This ideal should still be central. We should all

repent and forsake the false models of a controlling hierarchy. All the accretions of power, wealth, compulsion and dominion of the various Mormon sects should end this instant.

Another statement from Joseph makes it clear the restoration was intended to reintroduce the original religion of the Bible, not the diluted "Christianity" of his day. The original faith, in the first dispensations, had more understanding than what we find preserved in the Bible. Joseph was searching back into these beginnings. His heart was "turned to the fathers" of the first generations. He wanted a return of their original as part of the end. It was to be nothing less. Consider this declaration:

> [H]as the day of miracles ceased? Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he so long as time shall last, or the Earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. For it is by faith that miracles are wrought. And it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men. Wherefore, if these things have ceased, woe be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain. For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name. Wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also, and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made. (NC Moroni 7:7)

If the heavens open to us, we have faith. If the heavens are brass, we are faithless. Without faith, it is as if Christ provided us no redemption. These words are as inspiring as they are sobering.

At the conclusion of the vision of the three-heavens, Joseph wrote the following. It clarifies that we are supposed to access heaven, and see for ourselves the glory to be found there:

> But great and marvelous are the works of the Lord, and the mysteries of his Kingdom which he showed unto us, which surpasses all understanding, in glory, and in might, and in dominion, which he commanded us we should not write while we were yet in the Spirit, and are not lawful for men to utter, neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love him and purify themselves before him, to whom he grants the privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves that through the power and manifestation of the Spirit, while in the flesh, they may be able to bear his presence in the world of glory. (T&C 69:29)

This privilege of seeing and knowing for ourselves is available to us "while in the flesh." The restoration aimed to reconnect us to heaven in a literal way. This is the same that transpired with Enoch and others in earlier dispensations.

The Book of Mormon is filled with ascension lessons and examples. There is one verse that captures Joseph Smith's ascent theology. That verse compresses it into a single sentence. It explains why the Book of Mormon contains the "fullness of the gospel." And it's perhaps Joseph's most inspired declaration:

> Verily thus says the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsakes their sins, and comes unto me, and calls on my name, and obeys my Voice, and keeps all my commandments, shall see my face and know that I Am, and that I am the true light that lights every man who comes into the world[.] (T&C 93:1)

"Every soul" includes you and me. Every one of us has equal access to the Lord. The conditions are the same for all. Forsake sins; come to Christ; call on His name; obey His voice; keep his commandments. This is far more challenging than obedience to a handful of "thou shalt nots" because so much is required to be *done*, so much required to be *known*. A great deal of study and prayer is required to stand in the presence of the Lord. Once done, we shall see His face and know that He is the true light that enlightens every one. He is the God of the whole world.

Immediately after His resurrection, Christ did not minister to gentiles. But after the Book of Mormon came forth, gentiles are also eligible for Christ's ministry in very deed:

> And it shall come to pass that if the gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word and also in power, in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks[.] (NC 1Ne 3:25)

His promise to us is predicated on "hearkening" to the Lamb. Gentiles failed to do so, and upon Joseph's death, a great dearth set upon the restoration. Until there is gentile repenting and returning, it will continue to unwind. Since June 27, 1844 we have a restoration slow moving car wreck. The pace of that decay is accelerating.

We must rage against the fading of that light. "And seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience we may possess your souls, and have Eternal life."

Evidence of Christ is everywhere. Joseph used cosmological terms in a passage describing the importance of light coming from Christ and His Father:

> [H]e is in the sun and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. ...[H]e is in the moon and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made, as also the light of the stars and the power thereof by which they were made, and the earth also...

If you are alive, you are connected to Christ. If you detect the light of the sun, you detect a testimony of Christ. If you behold the moon moving in her cycles overhead, you behold a testimony of Christ.

False traditions are as destructive for us as outright disobedience. The result is the same. The difference is that when we know we disobey we feel guilt. But false traditions fool us into thinking we're obedient when we are merely misled.

Joseph Smith also provided us with Christ's personal explanation of what He endured in order to atone for our sins. It is a profound statement, more so than anything found in the Four Gospels about the suffering that Christ had:

There are hundreds of potential quotes that could be added to this paper. One final quote will end this part of the paper:

> [W]hen ye are in the service of your fellow beings, ye are only in the service of your God. (NC Mosiah 1:8)

This was how Christ lived His life. He showed forth the glory of God by serving and elevating others. We, too, can serve God by giving comfort to our fellow men and women. There is no end to the opportunities to help others. This life is abundant in opportunity to reflect God's grace, kindness and help by service to others. If you act that part, you are in God's service. Think Sub-for-Santa and consider joining Sub-for-God. It will add 364 days of opportunity.

The angel who visited Joseph in 1823 said his name would be had for good and evil among all people. A similar message was repeated 16 years later in March 1839 when the voice of the Lord spoke to Joseph in Liberty Jail. God said to Joseph, "The ends of the earth shall inquire after your name, and fools shall have you in derision, and Hell shall rage against you, while the pure in heart, and the wise, and the noble, and the virtuous shall seek counsel, and authority, and blessings constantly from under your hand. And your people shall never be turned against you by the testimony of traitors, and although their influence shall cast you into trouble, and into bars and walls, you shall be had in honor." Although these two are similar, there is a profound difference between the angel's statement in 1823 and the voice of God in 1839. The angel only said people would speak good and evil of Joseph. But God added a description of those who would speak evil, and those who would speak good of Joseph.

That voice of God said, "fools shall have [Joseph] in derision." Because I accept this statement as God's, I am led to conclude all who have spoken derisively of Joseph have done so foolishly. We ought to stop our foolishness. We need to end the derision of Joseph.

God also condemned the "testimony of traitors" against Joseph. While alive, Joseph identified some of his contemporary traitors and named them: George Hinkle, John Corrill, Reed Peck, David Whitmer, W.W. Phelps, Sampson Avard, William McLellin, John Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, Thomas Marsh, and Orson Hyde. These had been prominent leaders, trusted friends, and one-time believers in Mormonism. It was false testimony by those from within the flock that led to imprisonment of Joseph and other leaders.

The traitors of 1838 were joined by yet more traitors between 1842-44. In Missouri, Joseph was accused of treason and inciting violence. In 1842-44 Joseph's traitors accused him of adultery, polygamy and lying. John C. Bennett was a sexual predator who claimed amidst his secret seductions that Joseph Smith authorized him to engage in his promiscuity.

When his misconduct came to light, Bennett admitted Joseph authorized no such wickedness. He swore under oath, "that he never was taught any thing in the least contrary to the strictest principles of the Gospel, or of virtue, or of the laws of God, or man, under any circumstances, or upon any occasion either directly or indirectly, in word or deed, by Joseph Smith: and that he never knew the said Smith to countenance any improper conduct whatever, either in pubic or private; and that he never did teach me in private that an illegal illicit intercourse with the females was, under any circumstances, justifiable; and that I never knew him so to teach others."

William Law was also involved in secret adultery, and Joseph Smith refused to seal Law's marriage. A conspiracy of traitors in 1844 included William Law, Charles Ivins, Francis Higbee, Chauncey Higbee, Robert Foster and Charles Foster who published the Nauvoo Expositor accusing Joseph Smith of the very evil Joseph had been hunting down and eradicating through high council proceedings since the Bennett affair had become public two years earlier.

Joseph was unequivocal in his opposition to adultery and plural wife taking. About the time Bennett's misconduct was beginning to come to light, Joseph Smith organized the Female Relief Society to encourage moral and chaste conduct in Nauvoo. In addition to the steps he took privately to discipline those involved directly, he made many public declarations against plural wives and in favor of chastity and moral purity. These included, among many others:

> "Inasmuch as the public mind has been unjustly abused through the fallacy of Dr. Bennett's letters, we make an extract on the subject of marriage, showing the rule of the church on this important matter. The extract is from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and is the only rule allowed by the Church. 'Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy; we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.'"

That was published in the *Times and Seasons*.

And then a letter that was also published in the *Times and Seasons*:

> "As we have lately been credibly informed, that an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter-day Saints, by the name of Hiram Brown, has been preaching Polygamy, and other false and corrupt doctrines, in the county of Lapeer, state of Michigan. This is to notify him and the Church in general, that

> he has been cut off from the church, for his iniquity; and he is further notified to appear at the Special Conference, on the 6th of April next, to make answer to these charges."

And then in a talk that he [Joseph Smith] gave:

> "What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one. I am the same man, and as innocent as I was fourteen years ago; and I can prove them all perjurers."

He also encouraged the Relief Society to adopt a declaration titled *A Voice of Innocence*. It was read publicly by W.W. Phelps on March 7, 1844, then edited by Emma Smith, adopted by the Relief Society, and published in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* on March 20, 1844.

Because of the testimony of traitors, Joseph Smith has been held in derision from 1842 to the present. He is accused of being a sexual predator, liar, and adulterer. Fools have repeated the accusations originally made by the confessed adulterer John C. Bennett, though Bennett testified under oath that Joseph was not responsible and never behaved in any improper way toward women.

In the derision of Joseph today we now have a chorus that includes the LDS Church, which claims him as their founder. It comes from Brian Hales, who claims to be an accurate biographer. It comes from anti-Mormons, and Christian ministers, and fundamentalists who have created a caricature they claim to be Joseph. There is little difference between these people and William Law, Charles Ivins, Francis Higbee, Chauncey Higbee, Robert Foster and Charles Foster who published the Nauvoo Expositor. There is an immense chorus of fools holding Joseph in derision, even among those who claim to be devout followers of the faith he restored.

I think the voice Joseph heard in Liberty Jail was God's. If I am right, then God's advice to the pure in heart, wise, noble and virtuous is to seek counsel, authority and blessing from Joseph. God's advice leads me to adopt a view of Joseph that is consistent with nobility and virtue. I do not believe you can regard Joseph as a sexual predator, liar and adulterer without holding him in derision. The chief and unavoidable result of thinking of Joseph in those terms has been a legacy of excusing institutional lying, and promoting adulterous thoughts, and inappropriately entertaining the concept of women as mere breeding stock for the use of men.

It is not possible to harbor lustful, deceitful and adulterous thoughts in your heart and claim to be pure in heart. I do not believe you can conspire to commit bigamy and adultery and claim to be virtuous. I do not believe you can decide to trust the words of traitors and villains who contradict Joseph's account of his marital fidelity to Emma and to claim to seek counsel from Joseph. In short, those who claim to accept the restoration, but believe Joseph was a sexual predator, do not qualify as noble, wise, virtuous or pure in thought.

All the restorationist groups that descend from the Brighamites are religious polygamists. Whether they think it right to practice that abomination at present, or only think it a true part of their religion, they are polygamists. Their faith descends from a great whore, and her daughters are likewise whores. It is time for those involved to awaken to their awful situation and admit their mother is a whore.

Joseph said and wrote a great deal publicly to condemn plural marriage. He said nothing in public to defend or justify it. We have an enormous record of Joseph opposing and condemning. We have no public declaration from Joseph Smith advocating or defending it. Clearly he did not want to be known as its advocate. He wanted to be understood as a staunch opponent of it.

It is important to realize the restoration was hijacked by polygamy and has never regained the momentum Joseph envisioned. That abomination has darkened men's hearts and broken women's hearts. It is used to justify looking upon women with lust in men's hearts, contrary to the Lord's command in the Sermon on the Mount.

I hold Joseph in some considerable esteem. On the lightning-rod issue of plural wives, I've decided the historical record does not convict Joseph of polygamy, lying, deception, sexual improprieties, or exploitation of women. If I thought of Joseph Smith as a man capable of such things I would join his traitors in deriding him. I prefer to think him virtuous and noble. I think it is only possible for any person whose heart is pure, and who prizes virtue, wisdom and nobility to respect Joseph Smith by regarding him as pure, wise, noble and virtuous. To me, adultery, promiscuity and deceit are none of those things.

I reject adultery by any name or description. It is morally wrong if you call it plural wives, polygamy, "celestial marriage" or any other misnomer. Adultery is prohibited in the Ten Commandments, and remains an important prohibition for any moral society.

Mormonism should never have been saddled with Brigham Young's program of making adultery a sacrament. But Mormonism should not have been saddled with many institutional accretions. Between June 27, 1844 and today, there have been too many incorrect subtractions, and far too many uninspired additions. Mormonism today requires both dramatic subtractions and necessary additions. No-one seems willing to do that with the precision required to "Strive to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Brigham Young was not the only one who betrayed Joseph and caused his memory to be held in derision. David Whitmer betrayed Joseph in 1838, testified against him, and helped cause his Missouri imprisonment. Many years later, Whitmer's testimony as a traitor and accuser was published in *An Address to All Believers in Christ*. Though he had been excommunicated in 1838 and never lived in Nauvoo, he accepted and echoed the Nauvoo Expositor's claims about Joseph and polygamy.

Bastille posed the question in a song, *Pompeii*[6]: "Where do we begin? The rubble or our sins?" I think it begins with our sins. They first have to be set aside through Christ. But afterwards we have a Mormon landscape filled with rubble, out of joint, out of level, out of plumb, collapsed or collapsing. Mormonism's founding texts tells us this is as it should be for the present. We were never supposed to see Zion before the witnessed gentile failure and apostasy.

Christ declared to the Nephites a warning to the gentiles:

> "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 fullness 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 fullness of my gospel, Behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fullness of my gospel from among them."

This is not phrased as a possibility but as an inevitability. It was never a question of "if" the gentiles would reject the fullness. It has always been only a matter of "when" it would take place. The various institutions quarrel over whether it has happened. Some of them deny it can or will happen. The soothing mantra "we will never lead you astray" defies the message Christ was commanded by the Father to declare to us.

Joseph Smith has been held in derision for too long. Even those who claim to follow the commandments from God that came through him, deride his memory. This has gone on unchecked for far too long. The saints fell under condemnation in 1831 for taking lightly the Book of Mormon and former commandments given through Joseph Smith. Then eight years later were warned it was foolish to hold Joseph in derision. Reclaiming the restoration requires repentance. First, recovering and accepting the text of the Book of Mormon, and restoring the former commandments to what God originally spoke. That has been done by a small group of remnant believers. But second, we need to end the derision of Joseph and acknowledge that he was pure of heart, noble and virtuous, and to act accordingly. It is foolish to magnify his errors to justify our own. It's wicked to attribute uncommitted sins to him to give ourselves a license to sin. Generations have been cursed for this error. We have been led astray. All of us in every branch of Mormonism err.

We stumble, and we have fallen down. We have discarded the expansive theology of Joseph Smith. The earliest dispensations had truth from heaven as their guide. Joseph began re-assembling what was lost, but was slain before it was completed. We are the offspring of heaven, and are capable of reuniting with heaven while mortal. We also have the opportunity, through eons of progression, to become as our Parents, the Gods.

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[6] Daniel Smith, *Pompeii*

Now is time to awaken, arise, and shake off the dust.

Some will awaken, arise, shake off the dust and push forward to recover the restoration. God will set His hand a second time to accomplish His covenants. We are promised there will be a last-days' Zion established on this, the American continent. We know that when it is here:

> "[E]very man that will not take his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety, and there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under Heaven, and it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another. And it shall be said among the wicked, Let us not go up to battle against Zion, for the inhabitants of Zion are terrible, wherefore we cannot stand. And it shall come to pass that the righteous shall be gathered out from among all nations, and shall come to Zion singing with songs of everlasting joy."

The restoration has indeed squandered many opportunities by those who went before. Most of those who accept Joseph Smith as a founder of their religion are still squandering the opportunity to see the work continue. But God's purposes do not fail and we have the option to proceed now. Some generation, at some point, still has a glorious, promised completion to anticipate. As long as some, even a very few, are willing to walk in God's path, they will see the completion of this glorious, final work. "This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who shall disannul? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"

Why not now? Why not us? All that is required is to repent and return. The promise we have in exchange for our returning to the path is the stuff all the prophets and righteous from the days of Adam have eagerly anticipated.

Q&A Session

Terry: I can see you are already lining up. When you step up here we have 20 minutes until 6:30 and we're going to end on time, just as we began on time. Go ahead.

Question 1: Hello, Denver. I'm a third generation polygamist. I have three wives. I have daughters and I would say shame on you for calling them whores.

Denver: I didn't call them, I called the churches whores. I would say its adultery. I wouldn't say it's necessarily...

Question 1: ...That's not how I took it. So you are saying that they came from a whoredom act, that's what you're saying.

Denver: I'm saying that all the restoration churches in the present condition are all whores, all the restoration churches.

Question 1: That's a nice spin around that. Here's my question: Joseph Smith himself in 3 Nephi Chapter 2, right? Excuse me, Joseph of Egypt, is saying that he's going to have a choice seed come from him, who is going to be a revelator, a prophet, a seer, correct?

Denver: Yes.

Question 1: Now, did Joseph, if this is true, if Joseph of Egypt is saying that Joseph Smith Jr. is coming through his seed, is not Joseph Smith Jr. the product of polygamy?

Denver: Joseph Smith Sr. and Jr. and their descendents came as a result of a marriage that Jacob intended to contract for Rachel. It was not Jacob's choice to engage in a scene that reminds us of modern day Las Vegas, and in the morning behold, it was Leah. He had contracted for Rachel. Given the nature of the wedding ceremony, how it's conducted, the veiling of the face, the drinking that goes on, and the wedding night festivities, he woke up in the morning with the woman he did not intend to marry.

Question 1: So you had said that he was cursed rather than blessed.

Denver: He complained, and what he learned was the tradition among those people was it's not meet that the younger sister should be married before the older sister and therefore the older sister had been given to him. It was a breach of the agreement that had been made in order to obtain his wife, Rachel. Upon learning of the breach, and learning of the custom among the people, he agreed to honor their custom and he agreed to work another seven years in order to get the wife that he wanted. But he was already married to Leah, and he had two wives. The woman he wanted, the one he wanted to honor...

Question 1: ...That was Rachel...

Denver: ...The woman that he intended to sire his progeny with, Rachel, proved to be barren.

Question 1: So then, was God himself in sin when he gave Jacob his vision in the valley where he laid his head down on a rock and had the vision of Jacob's Ladder, and actually saw God Himself...

Denver: What you're trying to do is to say that the different circumstances in a different culture, in which Jacob found himself entrapped by the chicanery of his father-in-law equals the voluntary knowing and promiscuous engagement and marriages with reckless abandon.

Question 1: ...No... That's not what I'm saying.

Denver: You tell me. Look, the progeny of the inbreeding that has gone on in the plural marriages...

Question 1: ...All plural marriages?

Denver: ...Has resulted in genetic problems for people living today. There are more genetic issues in the progeny of the polygamists because the genetic code has been replicated too often. There are biological reasons to avoid plural marriages. You're telling me that if God favors this, why would God then curse genetic issues on the progeny?

Question 1: God knows the beginning from the end, correct? Because he told Jacob that he was going to be with him.

Denver: God's foreknowledge is not the same thing as God's will being implemented.

Question 1: I don't want to take up all of the time. This is becoming an argument.

Terry: Let me suggest that we limit it to one question and one follow-up question. Thank you.

Question 2: As someone who's interested...

Denver: ...And you're a descendent of polygamists and you're engaged in....?

Question 2: No, actually we come late in the game. As someone who's interested in repenting as you suggest, what then do you envision to be the next step in the process of the restoration?

Denver: There was a step that was able to be taken as a consequence of work to recover the scriptures, that occurred in a conference up in Boise where the scriptures got approved. As part of that, a covenant allowing gentiles to accept the status of covenanting, to accept the Book of Mormon, which had never been done from the time of Joseph Smith until the Boise conference – as a covenant between the believers and God – the terms of the covenant are contained in the new set, the new volume of scriptures. It's the third volume. Repent, be baptized, enter into the covenant that accepts the Book of Mormon as the word of God and the direction given to us. The covenant requires some work to be done among the remnant of the Jews and some work to be done among the Native Americans. That is something that is being attended to but not everything that is going on is necessarily something that ought to be broadcast publicly for everyone and everywhere. We all have our obligations and we all have our responsibilities. Some people have very specific responsibilities that they've accepted and that they're discharging to take care of things involved in the covenant.

There's always an obligation, when God has a people, to build a temple. When God first established the original religion at the time that He created Adam and Eve, He put them in what is a temple setting. It was a garden in which God, angels, and man mingled together. They were cast out of the garden but when He's had people on the earth He has commanded that they construct sacred space. The purpose of the sacred space has always been to reunite heaven and earth. It's not to endlessly repeat a ceremony that you can memorize if you go often enough. Its purpose is to reunite heaven and earth and to accomplish what was originally the status of mankind in the Garden of Eden, being reunified with heaven itself. We don't have a commandment to do that but we have been told we are going to be commanded to do that. And so an effort has been made to begin to gather funds necessary. There's a statement that nothing is to be done in haste. Haste brings pestilence. Pestilence is not just bugs and vermin, pestilence is also confusion and disorder and chaos. That process is underway and at some point will culminate in an identified place and a command to build a specific, conforming structure.

Question 3: ....

Denver: And how many wives do you have?

Question 3: I am actually the son of a convert.

Denver: Oh, good.

Question 3: ...I [had a] convert father, whom I don't even speak to any more. But I'm very much a believer in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. I resonate with a lot with what you said, and I have for years, about the deficiency of the Church, about the leadership of the Church, about the deficiencies of the religion that we hold to. We pretend to teach, and I can say pretend. As a Latter-day Saint I grew up in Rhode Island, a very miniscule portion, and will remain indefinitely miniscule because of what we teach. My big question to you, my brother, is how can you believe that there were no faithful disciples of Joseph Smith? I can't go there, I really can't. Why were there no faithful disciples of Joseph Smith? How can you take that position?

Denver: He's asking, how can I believe that there were no faithful disciples of Joseph. One of the problems that was had in that day is limited means of communication. Joseph would talk. There was an effort made to gather some of that material in order to disseminate it in the *Times and Seasons* and the *Nauvoo Neighbor* but access was limited and the Church historian that had control of the material boxed everything up in Nauvoo, moved it out to Utah. There was a member of the Church historian's staff in Nauvoo who also worked in the historian staff in Salt Lake City, Charles Wandell. Charles Wandell reported in his journal that the papers that involved Joseph Smith, the diaries, the journals, were actively being changed in order to reflect the new order of things in Salt Lake City. So when the announcement was made publicly in 1852 by Orson Pratt and then advocated by Brigham Young, the average person on the street did not have access to information to be able to

challenge anything related to that. The people that had possession of it were saying, this is the way it was, and they altered the documents.

This is too big a topic. I believe that many of the pioneers that sacrificed did so in truth, in valor, in honesty, so far as they knew. The problem was not whether they were good people. There were enormous numbers of devout, good, sacrificing people that laid everything on the altar and gave us a legacy that we ought to be grateful for. But the leadership had another agenda. I don't know how you can look at Brigham Young, the first multi-millionaire west of the Mississippi, and conclude that this guy was in it solely for devout religious reasons and he was a pious, holy man. When I mentioned Brigham Young's vulgarities, I kid you not, I think his favorite word for emphasis was "shit". Brigham Young was not the guy you think he is. And if you have access to his complete set of journals you ought to read 'em, and then you ought to ask yourself, can I sustain that man as prophet, seer, and revelator? Can I sustain him as God's presiding High Priest? Because if so, you probably like Trump, too.

Question 4: I was wondering when you came to the conclusion that Joseph was not a polygamist, and if that's always been your position?

Denver: No, it's not always been my position. It probably took more than 40 years of study. For the longest time I did not reach a conclusion. I simply didn't think there was enough information there. And even today, there's not enough information available to unequivocally resolve that question, even today. If someone says they know the story of Joseph Smith well enough to be able to affirm that he was indeed a polygamist in the fashion of Brigham Young they don't have the proof. They're leaping to that conclusion. Once property became an issue in the 1860s and litigation was underway there were a lot of people who they knew the practice was of god because it has been advocated from the pulpit from 1852 on, and they were perfectly willing to stand up and to testify to support the position of the Church. But there's nothing in 1842, '43, '44, up until June 27 of 1844, out of Joseph Smith's mouth, out of his pen, out of his teachings, that say it's where his mind is. There is a great deal that says that's not where his mind is and he's unequivocally opposed to it and condemns it.

Question 5: I'm taking from this a clarion call for all of the institutional forms of Mormonism to repent and stop holding Joseph in derision. I suspect institutional repentance is highly unlikely and that leaves personal repentance personally to stop holding Joseph in derision and to seek a blessing under his hand. Whether one happens to be a polygamist or not, evidently all of us in one way or another are in need of repentance and prizing what came from God through Joseph more fully. The question then: What advice would you give those who want to personally repent and no longer hold Joseph in derision?

Denver: There's a lovely book written by Carol Lynn Pearson, *The Ghost of Eternal Polygamy*. I think that's the name of it. Hand out copies of that book to Relief Society sisters. Speak up. Look, the reason why it is conventional wisdom that the argument's over, the issue is settled; everyone knows Joseph was a polygamist after the fashion of Brigham

Young's version of polygamy, the reason that's over is because no one is saying, wait a minute! Brian Hales did three volumes titled, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*. In the entirety of the three volumes he admits there is only one document that exists that ties Joseph Smith to plural marriage. It is a copy in the handwriting of Joseph Kingbury. You will see it on the wall of the Church History Museum. Kingsbury says that he copied from what the actual secretary, William Clayton, [who] purportedly wrote it down. Then Kingsbury – not a clerk to Joseph Smith, Kingsbury worked in the store – Kingsbury says he copied it and he did so quite contemporaneously. The best version is that Joseph Smith gave Emma the right to burn the original of that document. But the original of that document was read by Hyrum Smith to the Nauvoo High Council. Many of the Nauvoo High Council to whom that was read did not go west. Some of them remained in the east. Those who had a record, those who had a memory, and those who commented on it, who heard what Hyrum Smith read to the High Council, said it had nothing to do with practicing plural wifery today. It was an answer that was given about antiquity and what happened in antiquity. It had nothing to do with authorizing the practice now. But when they break out in 1852 and they publish it, they publish what's in the handwriting of Kingsbury, not a scribe of Joseph Smith. And Brian Hales says that is the single document, that's it. That's the whole body of evidence that we have that existed to tie Joseph Smith to the practice Brigham Young would institute.

Question 6: One question is fine. You quoted before, talking about how the truth scratches your eyes out and how difficult a process it is. Can you comment personally, in your own journey, how both the Church, polygamy, and these other issues as you have come to understand them, the personal effect they've had?

Denver: I'm going to answer that question in a really narrow personal example. One of my Mormon heroes, I loved the man, was Parley Pratt. The entirety of the American sense of humor recons from Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain. That's where Americans get our sense of humor from, Ben Franklin and Mark Twain. Parley Pratt learned the art of spinning a yarn, telling a history but spinning it in a yarn that just made you belly laugh, in his autobiography. I loved that book and I loved that man. One of the problems that I've run into as I've searched and searched; you sometimes learn a lot of things you don't want to learn. The varnish has been stripped off Parley. He stole the man's wife. He took the man's kids. He got murdered by a jealous husband, and there wasn't a jury in Arkansas at that time that would have convicted him if he sat on the witness stand and gave you in graphic detail what he did to murder Parley. After his death Brigham Young said that Parley deserved what he got and that Parley died an adulterer. Because in Brigham Young's view, the only one that could authorize the taking of a woman was Brigham Young himself, and Parley took Eleanor without Brigham's blessing. Therefore, that was adultery. You see how fine a line it is between you're home safe and you're out. It's just that fine a line. When you read about the sad events that lead up to the death of Parley Pratt and the practices that were going on, and the internal conflicts, and the disputes over who had authority to do what, and Brigham Young himself a practicing polygamist, regarding Parley Pratt's murder as God's vengeance and just outcome because he was an adulterer, it begins not only to take the varnish off of Parley, one of my former heros, but it also begins to take the varnish off the rest of what was going on.

History is filled with all of the foibles of mankind's weakness. The amazing thing to me is that the closer I've looked at Joseph Smith the more he stands up to scrutiny. He had one enormous flaw. He tended to think, sort of like my wife – I don't do this, she does – he tended to think that everyone has the same heart he has. Everyone was just as good and decent and penitent as he was. Joseph had liars lying to him and he accepted as though they were telling him the truth and he honored them as though they were telling the truth but they weren't, time and time again. There still isn't a good history. But my notes in the Joseph Smith Papers make really good reading if you ever sit down and read the margin notes.

Thank you all for being here and thank you, Terry.

[Transcript v2.1]