

# THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE IN MORMON THEORY AND PRACTICE

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*Continuing Dialogue's "Assessment of Mormon Culture," this article reviews and evaluates the history of the Church's position and practices with regard to politics. J. D. Williams, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah, received the B'nai B'rith Human Brotherhood Award in 1963, is a former bishop and is presently a member of a stake high council in Salt Lake City.*

When the Savior said it, it seemed simple enough — to “render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.”<sup>1</sup> But when the demands of Caesar’s world encroach on the spiritual sphere, or when the oracles of God feel obliged to intervene in politics, separating church and state becomes a truly troublesome and frustrating task.

Where do loyalty and duty lie, for example, when your Stake President asks you as president of a Mormon Elders’ Quorum to have your quorum distribute campaign pamphlets for a one-senator-per-county reapportionment measure — a proposal you strongly disapprove? How should you vote in High Council meeting when the question is raised, “Should petitions for an anti-pornography ordinance be available in the ward chapels for signing on the Sabbath day?” And what should your reaction be when an Apostle of your

Church uses the pulpit at General Conference to charge the President of the United States, whom you worked to elect, with unconstitutional programs which are leading the nation to socialism?

Such are the kinds of personal dilemmas which confront the lay member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but they pale in comparison alongside those affecting the Church as a whole. 1965-66 was a year of such dilemmas for the Church: Opposing a "miniature-bottle" liquor bill being considered in the State Legislature, the Church found itself in March, 1965, with a civil rights picket line in front of its headquarters demanding the Church speak out for a fair housing bill before the same Legislature; and while the First Presidency was publicly petitioning Mormon Congressmen during June, 1965, to protect "right-to-work" laws, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was resolving to petition countries in the U. N. to deny visas to Mormon missionaries because of the Church's Negro doctrines.

In the cacaphony of these voices, one thing was certainly clear: That the Mormon Church, in trying to administer the Kingdom of God on Earth, was deeply immersed in the politics of the kingdom of men on Earth.

Viewed against the activities of other churches, these Mormon forays into the arroyos of politics seem but part of an American pattern. The National Council of Churches endorses school integration, the Salt Lake Ministerial Association declares war on Sunday operation of grocery stores, Episcopal Bishop James Pike raises questions about a Catholic President, and Archbishop Rummel of New Orleans bluntly tells Catholic legislators in Baton Rouge to vote against a bill threatening their racially-integrated parochial schools.

All of which leads one, in this day and age, to wonder what kind of a wall Thomas Jefferson had in mind when he wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802. The First Amendment in the Bill of Rights, he told them, had created "a wall of separation between church and state."<sup>2</sup> But the question arises: A wall that restricts only what government may do to churches? Or a wall that restrains in both directions, restricting governmental encroachments on religion and also limiting what churches may do in politics?

Our law books are filled with cases protecting churches from governmental interference. But the "other side of the wall" presents a different picture. Writers from de Tocqueville to Paul Blanshard have raised questions about the propriety of church involvement in

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<sup>1</sup> New Testament, Matthew, 22:21.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of January 1, 1802. *Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1853), vol. 8, p. 113.

politics; but this author knows of only two actual restrictions on church political activity in modern American history. The first was Utah's constitutional prohibition (Art. I, Section 4) — "There shall be no union of church and state, nor shall any church dominate the state or interfere with its functions." The second was an ominous warning from the Salt Lake City office of the U. S. Internal Revenue Service in the midst of a 1954 reapportionment contest in which some Church leaders were heavily involved, a warning which said that "Tax-exempt organizations cannot participate in political campaigns without losing their tax status."<sup>3</sup>

To this day, the perplexing question remains, how far may a church and its leaders invade the political arena without seriously breaching the separation of church and state? With that question in mind, we shall focus here on four aspects of the problem within the framework of Mormon experience: (a) The major constructs of Mormonism which bear on politics, (b) the struggle-for-statehood period which shaped latter-day political thinking and practice, (c) the forms of L.D.S. Church involvement in politics, and (d) the issues and dilemmas which are posed by such involvement.

Four aspects of Mormonism seem particularly significant in understanding the Church's stance in regard to the political world. The first of these is the key theological concept of *continuing, modern-day revelation*. The accepted notion is that Church leaders enjoy inspiration from God in the conduct of their religious affairs. The political significance of the doctrine lies in the belief of many Mormons that divine inspiration may be transferable when Church leaders speak out on secular (including political) affairs.

The second construct consists of the *strong, hierarchical lines* from general church authorities through regional leaders (stake presidents) down to neighborhood officers of the Church (the ward bishops). The hierarchical system provides a network which can be used to communicate policy statements and decisions of any sort (including political) with almost no questioning in the ranks.

Third is the *superb organization* of the Church at the neighborhood level. Organized down to family units, with a visiting system that reaches every L.D.S. home at least monthly, a Mormon ward is ready for united action on very short notice. As a case in point, one bishop a few years ago was able to get over a hundred of his parishioners to the State Capitol in Salt Lake City on two hours' notice to protest the opening of a liquor store in their neighborhood.

Fourth and most complicated is the *ambivalence in Mormon*

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<sup>3</sup> *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), October 22, 1954.

*theory and practice* which permits the contemporary Church to find precedents either for involvement or against involvement in politics. Note on the one hand theocratic elements (which support church political activity): The Book of Mormon is filled with chronicles of men who were both high priest and king (or chief judge). The first Church president, Joseph Smith, held three sceptres: Head of the Church, Mayor of Nauvoo, and General of the Nauvoo Legion. In Utah's pioneer period, Brigham Young was President of the Church and Territorial Governor from 1850-58. And like most Christians, Mormons anticipate the establishment of a religious monarchy upon the second coming of Jesus Christ: "And the government shall be upon His shoulders; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."<sup>4</sup>

Pitted against that theocratic tradition is another one in Mormonism which supports separation of church and state, not government by church leaders. Note, for example, the powerful defense of government by majority rule in the Book of Mormon.<sup>5</sup> Beyond that is the strong L. D. S. commitment to the U. S. Constitution (with its First Amendment separation of church and state) as a divinely-inspired document.<sup>6</sup>

Most impressive of all is the open and announced dedication of the Church to separation of church and state in the 134th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. Written by early Church leader Oliver Cowdery and officially ratified as doctrine by a general conference of the Church on August 17, 1835, the 134th section recognizes the necessity of government in the lives of men, holds that government must respect the free exercise of conscience, and then marks out the respective domains of church and state:

- v. 4. We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to Him, and to Him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others; but we do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul.

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 9:6.

<sup>5</sup> Book of Mormon, Mosiah 29:25-32. Some may say that majority rule would not necessarily preclude either an established church or the election of church officials to public office. But recognition of that fact must not obscure the critical difference between majoritarian democracy and theocracy: In the former, government rests on the consent of the governed; in theocracy, *imperium in imperio ex cathedra*.

<sup>6</sup> Doctrine and Covenants, 98:5-7, 101:80.

- v. 5. We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the the respective governments in which they reside, while protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments; and that sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected, and should be punished accordingly; *and that all governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest;*<sup>7</sup> at the same time, however, holding sacred the freedom of conscience.
- v. 9. We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government, whereby one religious society is fostered and another proscribed in its spiritual privileges, and the individual rights of its members, as citizens, denied.

Despite the apparent clarity of that doctrine, the ambivalence in Church practice remains.<sup>8</sup> The hostility of governments to the Church and the indifference of governments to mob action against the Church in early days in Missouri and Illinois propelled the Church into politics for self-protection. And today, with the normal power imperatives of any large organization with much at stake, the L.D.S. Church remains in politics.

In understanding why the Church is as involved politically as it is, one must turn to the long struggle for Utah statehood, 1850-1896, to see the formative influences as they began to take shape after the migration to Utah in 1847.

#### POLITICAL GESTATION, 1850-1896

Three years after an ailing Brigham Young had looked down on the valley of the Great Salt Lake and proclaimed, "This is the Place," the Mormons of Deseret had achieved territorial status under the laws of Congress. Six attempts and forty-six years later, their children and grandchildren finally achieved statehood.

Between 1850 and 1896 lay a wasteland of fear, ill-will, and conflict between "the Saints" and the federal government. On that wasteland was fought the abortive Utah War of 1857-1858, which led to the occupation of Deseret by a federal army under an officer who was later to become famous in the Civil War, General Albert Sydney Johnston. And from that wasteland were to grow the weeds of distrust that would delay statehood for almost five decades.

<sup>7</sup> (Italics added.) In the author's judgment, this key phrase of verse 5 precludes church dictation or directives to public office holders. But the language would not seem to prohibit the expression of church views on public questions in the manner of any other interest group in a free society.

<sup>8</sup> Brigham Young could say in 1844 in the face of the 134th Section, "No man can draw the dividing line between the government of God and the government of the children of men." Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (hereinafter cited as *Documentary History*) (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1950), vol. 6, p. 322.

Three things in particular contributed to Congressional hostility toward the Mormons: polygamy, theocracy (no separation of church and state), and the absence of a normal-looking, major two-party system.<sup>9</sup> Congressional reaction to polygamy was especially stern and undoubtedly served as one of the most lasting influences in shaping the defensive attitude of Mormons against government.

### *Congress Outlaws Polygamy*

The first of three anti-polygamy statutes was the Merrill Act of 1862. A straight penal law, it forbade the practice of plural marriage in the territories.<sup>10</sup> Conviction of a group of Mormons, and the constitutionality of the Act itself, were sustained in *Reynolds v. U. S.*, 1878.<sup>11</sup>

A tougher statute followed in 1882, the Edmunds Act.<sup>12</sup> Not only imposing five-year imprisonments on convicted polygamists, the new law deprived them thereafter of the right to vote and hold office. The Utah Commission appointed by President Chester A. Arthur to enforce the law's electoral provisions imposed a test oath on potential voters (to the effect that they did not practice polygamy) and made the oath retroactive.<sup>13</sup>

Still seeking the extirpation of plural marriage, Congress moved its attack in 1887 from the *practice* to the *organization* behind the practice, the L.D.S. Church itself. The Edmunds-Tucker Act of that year<sup>14</sup> disincorporated the Corporation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a legal entity chartered under territorial law and escheated all its properties to the federal government which were not used for worship or cemeteries. The act abolished the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company, which had subsidized the immigration of Mormon converts from Europe. The statute then annulled Utah's woman suffrage laws, abolished the existing apportionment of the Territorial Legislature and

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\* Other variants of these which concerned the Congress were a Church-dominated school system and the absence of the secret ballot in elections.

<sup>10</sup> 12 Stat. 501, July 1, 1862. It is interesting to note that the Act forbade cohabitation among the married but not among the unmarried. Mining camps like Park City and Alta were to have plenty of the unprohibited kind! See Orma Linford, "The Mormons and the Law," *Utah Law Review*, Winter, 1964, v. 9:308-371, and Summer, 1965 v. 9:543-592.

<sup>11</sup> 98 U. S. 145 (1878). Note that this decision preceded by twelve years the 1890 Manifesto of Church President Wilford Woodruff abandoning polygamy.

<sup>12</sup> 22 Stat. 30, March 22, 1882.

<sup>13</sup> A procedure which a modern-day Supreme Court might possibly find unconstitutional (see *U. S. v. Brown*, 381 US 237, 456-8, 1965)."

<sup>14</sup> 24 Stat. 635, March 3, 1887. The words of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights should be borne in mind as one reads the provisions of this law: "Congress shall make *no* law respecting an establishment of religion or abridging the free exercise thereof."

(shades of Earl Warren) ordered equal representation in both chambers. The law retained the test oath for voting and the criminal penalties of the two earlier statutes.<sup>15</sup>

With its leaders facing imprisonment (some of whom were in hiding on "the Underground") and the Church facing bankruptcy, Church President Wilford Woodruff announced the end of plural marriages on September 29, 1890.<sup>16</sup>

It is not wisdom for us to go forth and carry out this principle (polygamy) against the laws of the nation. . . . The Lord has given us commandments concerning many things and we have carried them out as far as we could; but when we cannot do it, we are justified. . . .<sup>17</sup>

To a substantial degree, the Manifesto and the L.D.S. leaders' plea for amnesty removed the obstacle of polygamy to statehood (although plural marriage — or the spectre of it — later resulted in the unseating of one Utah Congressman, Brigham H. Roberts, and the near expulsion of a U. S. Senator, Reed Smoot).

But the Congress still needed convincing that another face of Mormonism, Brigham Young's theocracy, had also had a face-lifting before "those Mormons" could be admitted to the Union.

#### THEOCRACY AND THE PARTY SYSTEM<sup>18</sup>

Statehood for Utah was delayed because Congress was convinced that the Mormons had too many wives and too few political parties.

Prior to 1870, the parties were few enough, all right — just one. Called the "People's Party," it was the political vehicle of the Mormon leaders for such tasks as electing the territorial legislature and Utah's Delegate to Congress. But this one-party system came under challenge in 1869, when a group of Brigham Young's critics (headed by William Godbe) were excommunicated from the Church and moved almost at once to set up a party of their own.

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<sup>15</sup> Edmunds-Tucker, undoubtedly the closest law in our history to disestablishing a church, was upheld by the Supreme Court in the *Late Corporation of the Church of Jesus Christ v. U. S.*, 136 U. S. 1, 1890. The Court held that the plenary powers of Congress to regulate the territories were ample enough to prohibit all means of carrying on the practice of polygamy. Even the "Establishment Clause" would not prevent the disestablishment of the corporate arm of the Church (because the Church could carry on its legitimate religious activities without corporate status). That same year, the Court upheld an Idaho statute which denied the vote to members of any church which espoused polygamy. *Davis v. Beason*, 133 U. S. 333, 1890.

<sup>16</sup> The "Manifesto" was voted upon and accepted by the General Conference of the Church in October, 1890. It is to be found at the end of the Doctrine and Covenants.

<sup>17</sup> General Conference remarks, as quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1961), pp. 608-9.

<sup>18</sup> We are indebted to the able master's thesis of R. J. Snow, *The American Party in Utah* (University of Utah, 1964) for the historical tracing of the party struggle in Utah prior to statehood.

But the Godbeites were not dealing with political novices. In calling their mass meeting of independents to order in February, 1870, they found the hall filled with infiltrators from the People's Party who proceeded to install their own chairman and nominate a slate of pro-Church candidates.

Later that year, the independents succeeded in forming the Liberal Party, spokesman for the Gentile (non-Mormon) segment of the population in Utah. With the *Salt Lake Tribune* (founded in 1869) as the Liberal trumpet and the *Deseret News* speaking for the People's Party, the two parties went forth into a quarter-century battle of the worst kind — political warfare fought on religious lines.

The absence of the Democratic and Republican parties on the Utah scene puzzled many in the Congress. The presence instead of a "Church Party" could be taken as proof that church and state had not yet been separated. And there was not much Congressional stomach for admitting a polygamous theocracy to the Union.

Sensing that the atypical nature of their party system was an obstacle to statehood, some Utahns began to take steps in the 1880's toward the establishment of Democratic and Republican Clubs. By April of 1890, a nucleus of the Democratic Party had been formed and, a year later, the Central Republican Club was in being.

Then came the dramatic, now humorous, sequence of events in which theocracy served as midwife for the birth of democracy in Utah. Sometime in 1891 (a day uncertain) at a meeting of the leaders of the People's Party (the Church party), the First Counselor in the Church Presidency, George Q. Cannon, made an appearance. President Cannon informed the party officials that the First Presidency of the Church wanted the existing parties scrapped and the national parties instituted in their place. He then warned that the old religious warfare would be perpetuated under new labels if all the People's Party became Democrats and the Liberals became Republicans.<sup>19</sup>

So the word went forth from that meeting that Mormons should join both national parties. And as the word moved down the hierarchy, some imaginative bishops at the ward level gave "practical translation" to the advice: They stood at the head of the chapel aisle and indicated that the Saints on one side (dare we say "right"?) should become Republicans and those on the other (left?) should become Democrats.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley, *James Henry Moyle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1951), pp. 213-14.

<sup>20</sup> Mr. Joseph Nelson, later head of the Saltair Corporation, was present when his ward was divided politically in this fashion (as personally related years ago to Wallace F. Bennett, later U. S. Senator, and then related to this author).



The People's Party disbanded in 1891 as President Cannon had requested and the Liberal Party followed suit in December, 1893. Ecclesiastical edict had produced a two-party system which Congress could understand.

### *Statehood*

Congress passed the Enabling Act in 1894, which permitted the writing of a draft constitution. Remnants of the old Liberal Party opposed statehood, lest a fully-empowered state legislature under the 10th Amendment of the Federal Constitution lift the ban on polygamy. But the proposed Constitution specifically prohibited polygamy (Article III). And as a further persuader to Congress, the document also contained the prohibition (noted above) in Article I, Section 4, against any union of church and state.

In a popular referendum, the Constitution was approved 31,305 to 7,687 opposed. On the proclamation of President Grover Cleveland, Utah entered the Union on January 4, 1896.

It had been a long struggle — a federal occupation, crushing statutes, imprisonment of Church leaders, alteration of a Church doctrine and marital pattern, and the reformation of a party system. Strains and memories cast up during this gestation period were to shape for years to come the Mormon attitude toward, and posture in, politics.

### *FORMS OF MORMON INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS<sup>21</sup>*

#### *Setting the Metes and Bounds of the Political Arena in Mormonism*

Whenever one church claims the membership (in fact or nominally) of 72% of the people of a state, as the Mormon Church does in Utah, its doctrines and practices are certain to have a pervasive influence on the folkways of the state. In so doing, even if it never took a stand on a political question, the Mormon Church would still significantly influence the metes and bounds of the political struggle in Utah.

Sale of liquor by the drink, taxation of church welfare properties (farms, clothing mills, etc.), pari-mutuel betting and legalized gambling are all probably among the political questions which lie "beyond the pale" in Utah because of the folkways of its predominant Mormon population.

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<sup>21</sup> A caveat is in order: The phrase "Church involvement in politics" is often a generic slur describing what is really only individual conduct. Both author and reader would do well to keep the distinction in mind.

*Church Leaders as Candidates and Public Officeholders*

A far more visible hand in politics than setting the metes and bounds is apparent when Church leaders become candidates for election to office or accept high-level appointive positions in government.

The practice of Church leaders' standing as candidates for political office had a dramatic beginning in 1844. The Mormons had been embittered against the Democratic Party ever since President Martin Van Buren's statement that "Your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you" (during the Missouri travail of the Church). Van Buren's successors, William Henry Harrison and John Tyler, had not secured them relief, either.

As the 1844 elections neared, the L.D.S. authorities queried the announced candidates for the Presidency as to their views on the "Mormon question."<sup>22</sup> Highly dissatisfied with the responses, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles nominated Joseph Smith as candidate for the Presidency of the United States on January 29, 1844.

Smith told them that every speaker in Nauvoo would have to campaign throughout the land, advocating "the 'Mormon' religion, purity of elections and call upon the people to stand by the law and put down mobocracy."<sup>23</sup> Having published his views on the issues of the day,<sup>24</sup> Smith then explained why he had become a candidate: The Saints had been deprived of their rights in state after state; Presidents and Governors had turned deaf ears on their pleas. "In view of these things, I feel it to be my right and privilege to obtain what influence and power I can, lawfully, in the United States, for the protection of injured innocence. . . ."<sup>25</sup>

But Smith's martyrdom on June 27, 1844, ended his hopes of using a Presidential campaign as a kind of national "soap box" to dramatize Mormon woes. Nevertheless, the precedent had been set of Church leaders running for political office.

*The Moses Thatcher Candidacy, 1895*

At the time when Church leaders were trying to "force feed" the Republican Party,<sup>26</sup> three General Authorities ignored orders and campaigned strenuously for the Democratic ticket in 1892 — Elders Moses Thatcher (an Apostle), Brigham H. Roberts, and

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<sup>22</sup> *Documentary History*, vol. 6, pp. 64-65, 187-88.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-209.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11 (February 8, 1844).

<sup>26</sup> But see Wilford Woodruff's and Joseph F. Smith's published denial, *Deseret News*, March 17, 1892.

Charles W. Penrose. The sanction of excluding them from the long-awaited dedication of the Salt Lake Temple brought them to "repentance" and back into good graces once again.

But not for long. Elders Thatcher and Roberts ran as Democrats in 1895 for the forthcoming U. S. Senate and House seats, respectively, anticipating Utah's entry into the Union. They lost the election and were again rebuked by Church leaders. A "Political Manifesto" was drafted which attested that the Church had not been involved in politics and required henceforth that all high office-holders in the Church should obtain prior clearance from their ecclesiastical superiors before ever running for political office.<sup>27</sup> For his refusal to sign, Elder Thatcher was dropped from the Quorum of the Twelve for insubordination and apostasy — a classic case in the use of church discipline against an Apostle who violated the established rules.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Frank Cannon and the "will of the Lord"*

It was a time of trouble for Republican as well as Democratic candidates as Utah entered the Union. Republican Frank Cannon, son of George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency, had been Utah's Territorial Delegate in Congress, and became in 1896 one of the state's first two Senators. Almost immediately, he bolted the Republican Party in the 1896 election for their national platform's rejection of bimetallism. Having supported the local Democratic ticket both in 1896 and 1898, he hoped the Democratic Legislature would re-elect him as U. S. Senator early in 1899.

Finding himself opposed by another Democrat, whose candidacy was championed by an Apostle, Heber J. Grant, Senator Cannon rented the Salt Lake Theater and delivered a tirade against church interference in politics. The Senator was then called to Church President Lorenzo Snow's home. The Prophet told the Senator that it was the "will of the Lord" that he should step aside gracefully to permit his father, George Q. Cannon, President Snow's first counselor, and a Republican, to be elected to Cannon's seat.<sup>29</sup> The Senator refused to follow the dictate; the Democratic Legislature refused to

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<sup>27</sup> Thus the origin of the practice still observed by some Mormon candidates of "clearing with 47 East South Temple" before filing for public office.

<sup>28</sup> The L.D.S. First Presidency published a "white paper" at the time of Thatcher's dismissal. *The Thatcher Episode* (Salt Lake City; Deseret News Publishing Co., 1896), 47 pp. See also Stanley S. Ivins, *The Moses Thatcher Case* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1963?), 11 pp.

<sup>29</sup> Frank J. Cannon, *Under the Prophet in Utah* (Boston: C. M. Clark Co., 1911), pp. 230-31.

elect father or son; and Utah suffered the ignominy of being represented by only one Senator from 1899 to 1901.

### *Other Candidacies*

Back in good graces once again, Brigham H. Roberts ran for Congress in 1898 and won. But the House of Representatives refused to seat this admitted polygamist, further deepening the state's embarrassment.

The turn of the century brought the return of Apostles to the hustings. Elder Reed Smoot, complying with the 1896 Manifesto, asked and was refused permission to stand for the Senate in 1901. But he received Church permission two years later and was elected by the legislature.

For four years, however, from 1903 to 1907, his right to retain his Senate seat was challenged during the long "Reed Smoot trial" before a Senate Committee. All the old charges came back to haunt him and his Church: church domination of politics (for here was an Apostle elected to the Senate) and polygamy (which Elder Smoot did not practice). But he was cleared of the charges and went on to become the most powerful Senator ever to represent Utah in Washington (serving from 1903 to 1933).

At lower levels of government, the election lists in Utah are replete with stake presidents who serve in the state legislature and on school boards.

On the appointive side, individual involvement of L.D.S. leaders is extensive: On boards of trustees of state institutions of higher learning (Elder Richard Evans, Alma Sonne, et al.), little Hoover Commissions (President Thorpe B. Isaacson), and the Legislative Reorganization Commission (President Nathan Eldon Tanner), among many others; and at the national level, one General Authority, Elder Ezra Taft Benson, has held a Cabinet post (Agriculture Secretary in the Eisenhower Administration, 1953-60).

### *Endorsement of Candidates*

Nowhere does Mormon ambivalence in politics show through more than in a third area of "Church" involvement, the endorsement of political candidates.

The ambivalence began with Joseph Smith himself. In August, 1843, he bluntly told his parishioners:

I am not come to tell you to vote this way, that way, or the other.  
In relation to national matters I want it to go abroad unto the whole

world that every man should stand on his own merits. *The Lord has not given me a revelation concerning politics* – I have not asked Him for one. . . .<sup>81</sup>

But a paragraph later, Joseph intimated that his brother, Hyrum, had had a political revelation (“for the people to vote for Hoge”), “and I never knew Hyrum to say he ever had a revelation and it failed. Let God speak and all men hold their peace.”<sup>81</sup>

A month afterward, Joseph endorsed a *Times and Seasons* (Church newspaper in Nauvoo) editorial that advocated a “reward your friends and punish your enemies” stance for the Church in national elections: “. . . that we may fix upon the man who will be the most likely to render us assistance in obtaining redress for our grievances; and not only give our own votes, but use our influence to obtain others. . . .”<sup>82</sup>

Thus the pattern was set at an early date for the Church to take cognizance of candidates. But Nauvoo “cognizance” was barely a hint of Brigham Young’s practices in the theocracy of Deseret. Consider for a moment this scene in a Church conference on Sunday, June 19, 1853, President Brigham Young presiding:

It came into my mind when Brother Bernhisel was speaking, and the same thing strikes me now, that is, inasmuch as he has done first-rate, as our delegate in Washington, to move that we send him again next session; though it is the Sabbath Day, I understand these things and say as other people say, “We are Mormons.” We do things that are necessary to be done when the time comes for us to do them. If we wish to make political speeches, and it is necessary, for the best interest of the cause and the Kingdom of God, to make them on the Sabbath, we do it. Now suffer not your prejudices to hurt you, do not suffer this to try you, nor be tempted in consequence of it, nor think we are wandering out of the way, for it is all embraced in our religion from first to last.

Brother Kimball has seconded the motion that Dr. Bernhisel be sent back to Washington as our Delegate. All who are in favor of it, raise your right hand. (More than 2000 hands were at once seen above the heads of the congregation.)

This has turned out into a caucus meeting. It is all right. I would call for an opposite vote if I thought any person would vote. I will try it however. (Not a single hand was raised in opposition.)<sup>83</sup>

Territorial records reveal no other public election for Delegate being held that year.

<sup>80</sup> *Documentary History*, vol. 5, p. 526. (Italics added.)

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 40.

<sup>83</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1854), vol. 1, p. 188.

In later years, endorsement took somewhat less blatant form than *in cathedra* elections without opposition candidates. In 1912, for example, President Joseph F. Smith utilized the pages of the *Improvement Era* to eulogize William Howard Taft and urge his re-election: "Should the people call him once again to the presidential chair, it is not likely that they will regret it, but, on the contrary, will find their action wise, sensible, and sound."<sup>34</sup> In that election, an old motto was revised to read, "As Utah goes, so goes Vermont" — the only two states carried by Taft.

More subterranean, and less official, were the endorsement tactics used in the heated Thomas-Bennett election for the U. S. Senate during 1950. A "watch-and-ward society" called the Law Observance and Enforcement Committee had become appended to the Church hierarchy prior to this time. Its primary job was to report to the First Presidency on violations of liquor, tobacco and prostitution laws in Salt Lake County. But in 1950 this committee extended itself in publishing a list of candidates who would support Church standards. Attached to a mimeographed talk which was to be read in the monthly Fast and Testimony Meeting, the list began with the candidates for Senator and Congressman and ran on through thirty-two local offices. Seventeen of the thirty-four Democrats had been crossed out; two of the thirty-four Republicans.<sup>35</sup>

Like Moses Thatcher of old, Mormon Democrats felt their Church had betrayed them. In the ensuing crossfire, the First Presidency issued a disclaimer through the Salt Lake press declaring that they had neither approved a list of acceptable candidates nor directed the circulation of such a list. But the list, and other gratuitous insults against Thomas, had their effect. He was defeated in November by the prominent Utah businessman-Churchman, Wallace F. Bennett.

The 1950 imbroglio led to a more cautious Church posture in the 1952 Presidential election. In closing the October Conference, President David O. McKay proclaimed the neutrality of the Church in the election. He denied rumors that the General Authorities had met and agreed on supporting one party. "The President is the President of the Church, not favoring in this election either political party." Noting membership in the Church of both Democrats and Republicans, President McKay indicated that "Both parties will be treated impartially by the Church."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Improvement Era*, vol. 15, pp. 1120-21.

<sup>35</sup> See Frank Jonas, "The Mormon Church and Political Dynamiting in the 1950 Election in Utah," *Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters* (1963), vol. 40, pp. 94-110.

<sup>36</sup> *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 6, 1962, p. 1. But rents appeared in this veil of neutrality

But 1952 produced an Eisenhower and an Eisenhower elevated Elder Ezra Taft Benson to Cabinet status, a position that would transform the Apostle into an active Republican partisan for eight years. Everyone understood that the Secretary of Agriculture had to campaign for Republican Congressmen and Senators. But many Mormons were mystified by Elder Benson's use of the pulpit to help carry out that role.

In his October 3 address to the 1954 semi-annual Church Conference, for example, Elder Benson laid down four tests by which Mormon voters could judge political candidates and issues:

- (1) Is the proposal (or candidate) right as measured by the Gospel?
- (2) Is it constitutional?
- (3) Does it have the approval of "the living oracles of God"?
- (4) How will it affect the morale and character of the people?<sup>37</sup>

Having urged his Sunday audience (under the third test) to listen to the "counsel of the living oracles of God," Apostle Benson would then take to the political stump to lay down sound Republican doctrine.

In the late fifties, perhaps as a counterbalance to Elder Benson's Republican barnstorming, Elder Hugh B. Brown of the Quorum of the Twelve was given permission by President McKay to make a Democratic state convention appearance and some radio spots in behalf of Democratic candidate for Congress, David King.

At lower levels of the Church, the practice of endorsing political candidates also occasionally appears. The author has been present in a ward priesthood meeting, for example, where an effort was made to concentrate the Mormon vote on one of two Mormons running for the school board in that area. Another form of endorsement, equally rare, is a letter from a stake presidency to bishops within their stake identifying a school board candidate, for example, as a devoted Mormon committed to the protection of released time seminary programs.<sup>38</sup>

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in 1960 and 1964, when President McKay openly wished Richard Nixon and Barry Goldwater, respectively, success in their campaigns. After the 1960 comment, President McKay said that "he was speaking as a Republican." (*Deseret News*, October 11, 1960.) The 1964 episode closed with a formal statement from the First Presidency for Mormons to support conscientious men "who are aware of the great dangers inherent in Communism and who are truly dedicated to the Constitution in the tradition of our Founding Fathers." (*Deseret News*, November 2, 1964.)

<sup>37</sup> *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 4, 1954, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from the Granite Stake Presidency endorsing the candidacy of Neil Kooyman for the school board, October 29, 1960 (author's files).

*Advising the Electorate on Issues of Public Policy*

The records of the Church and its newspaper, the *Deseret News*, are filled with examples of advice to the electorate on matters of public policy:

- Against the repeal of prohibition, 1933<sup>39</sup>
- Against communism, 1936 (reiterated many times since)
- Against a peacetime draft, 1946
- Against tactics of the John Birch Society, 1963
- For civil rights for all people, 1963
- Against the repeal of "right-to-work" laws, 1965
- For tight controls on pornography, 1966
- Against political extremists, 1966<sup>40</sup>

While the pulpit is occasionally used by Church speakers for the discussion of political issues, one surmises that it is less frequently done in Mormon meetings than in gatherings of the Unitarian Society, for example. Probably the rarity of it is the thing which catches Mormons by surprise when an occasional Church speaker uses the pulpit to expound on topics like the United Nations, reapportionment of the state legislature, or the threat of socialism in the United States.<sup>41</sup>

On occasion, more covert actions to influence the electorate are tried than front-page editorials and sermons from the pulpit. One thinks particularly of the efforts made by key Church people in 1954 to secure a favorable referendum vote on a one-senator-per-county reapportionment amendment.

To secure that vote in populous Salt Lake County (which would thereby cost the county six out of its seven state senators), a political committee of the Apostles was formed under the co-chairmanship of Elders Henry D. Moyle and Harold B. Lee. They authorized Stake President Junius Jackson to form the Salt Lake Valley Stake Presidents Committee as the campaign vehicle. Under the aegis of that

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<sup>39</sup> But largely ignored by Utah voters, for Utah was the required 36th state to ratify the 21st Amendment.

<sup>40</sup> In the six weeks preceding the April Conference, 1966, there were abortive efforts by the John Birch Society to obtain an implied endorsement from the Church of their activities. The *Church News* responded on March 26, 1966, with a blunt editorial on "Politics and Religion," which said in part: "We have been taught to avoid extremes and extremists, whether in the Word of Wisdom, in politics or in any other area of thought. The Lord's work is not accomplished by immoderate measures and radical groups. . . ."

"The Lord justifies us in defending our Constitution and this land for which it was written. But He does not justify radicalism in doing so. . . ."

"The Church has nothing to do with Communists, nothing to do with racists, nothing to do with Birchers, nothing to do with any slanted group. But it does have everything to do with the eternal salvation of human souls."

<sup>41</sup> As a case in point, see the address of Elder Marion G. Romney to the Priesthood session of the April General Conference, 1966, on the problem of socialism.



committee, pro-reapportionment pamphlets were prepared and then distributed by Deseret Industry trucks, ward teachers, Beehive girls — by anyone who carried the “Church stamp” so as to convey the impression of Church endorsement of the proposal.<sup>42</sup>

But in the end, the ground was cut from beneath the entire effort by the release of a letter to the press which the First Presidency had written to Professor Frank Jonas, plainly saying that “the Church takes no position with reference to it. . . . No one is authorized to align us with either side of the controversy.”<sup>43</sup> The effort to use Church channels for political campaigning was thereby successfully interdicted and the proposed constitutional amendment went down to defeat on election day.

### *Church Influence on Public Policy-Makers*

Although the 134th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants recognizes that “governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest,” Church leaders have not hesitated to advise governments on their view of where the public interest might lie. And in the case of the Grand Council of the Kingdom, the Church obviously contemplated far more than “giving advice.”<sup>44</sup> Believed to have been organized in March, 1844, the Grand Council (or “Council of Fifty”) was to be the government of the Kingdom of God (which Kingdom was not the Church but the ultimate governing body for all mankind). The Council was composed of two non-Mormons and forty-eight to fifty Mormon high priests. As Brigham Young described it:

The Kingdom of God will protect every person, every sect, and all people upon the face of the whole Earth in their legal rights; I shall not tell you the names of the members of this kingdom; neither shall I read to you its constitution, but the constitution was given by revelation. The day will come when it will be organized in strength and power.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Kenneth H. Mitchell, “The Struggle for Reapportionment in Utah” (unpublished master’s thesis, University of Utah, 1960), pp. 113-117.

<sup>43</sup> *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 2, 1954.

<sup>44</sup> A member of the Council, John D. Lee, said that its full name was the “Municipal Department of the Kingdom of God set up on Earth and from which All Emanates, for the Rule, Government and Control of all Nations. . . .” Juanita Brooks and R. C. Cleland, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1955), v. 1:80. Perhaps the best sources on the Grand Council are Klaus J. Hansen, *Millennial Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History*, scheduled for 1966 publication in book form from Michigan State University Press; and James R. Clark, “The Kingdom of God, the Council of Fifty, and the State of Deseret,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* (1958), vol. 26, pp. 131-148.

<sup>45</sup> *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 17, p. 156, as quoted in Hyrum L. Andrus, *Joseph Smith and World Government* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1958), p. 5.

The picture is one of a secret government, responsible not to the governed but to ecclesiastical authority, which will provide benign rule for all people, without election.<sup>46</sup>

One of the chief assignments of the Grand Council in the Nauvoo period apparently was handling preparations for the westward expansion of Mormonism.<sup>47</sup> And the Council did come west with the pioneers, as indicated by minutes of its meetings as late as 1880 which are still extant.<sup>48</sup> While the laity have no sure knowledge of its demise, one presumes that the Council, like polygamy, was abandoned about the time of statehood as the full machinery of civil government replaced the vestiges of theocracy.

But the practice of Church officials' making suggestions to public administrators and law makers has never died. As a case in point, one thinks of the Law Observance and Enforcement Committee during the 1940's when it reported to Second Counselor David O. McKay. Word from the Committee about a grocery store's selling cigarettes or beer to minors would lead to a "high level" call to Public Safety Commissioner Ben Lingenfelter, and the police would then check out the offending grocer.

Up until recent times, there were close ties between Church headquarters and city and county planning and zoning officers to assure the reservation of lots for new ward houses as subdivision plats were filed. But the responsibility has now shifted to the ward bishops to negotiate with subdividers.

In the legislative area, relations between Church officials and lawmakers are still very direct. Some are out-in-the-open for the public to see; others are behind the scenes. Communiques to members of Congress are periodically sent by the First Presidency. Two famous ones were the 1946 admonition to the Utah Congressional delegation to oppose a peacetime draft<sup>49</sup> and the 1965 letter to all Mormons in Congress to resist the repeal of "right-to-work" laws.<sup>50</sup>

Another technique at the state level is to call Mormons in the Legislature into Church headquarters during the biennial session

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<sup>46</sup> A reader of this manuscript observes: "The secrecy of the Council was not of its essence; only the hostility of public opinion kept the Council underground."

<sup>47</sup> *Documentary History*, vol. 7, pp. 213, 379.

<sup>48</sup> Andrus, *op. cit.*, p. 2, n. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Reprinted in the *Deseret News*, January 3, 1946.

<sup>50</sup> *Deseret News*, June 25, 1965. Five of the Congressmen and Senators replied sternly, "While we respect and revere the offices held by the members of the First Presidency of the Church, we cannot yield to others our responsibilities to our constituency, nor can we delegate our own free agency to any but ourselves." Indicating their willingness at any time to receive the views of the First Presidency, the five forewarned that "we cannot accept them as binding upon us." *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 13, 1965. President Hugh B. Brown then commented, "They have the right to tell us to jump in the lake, and they did just that." *Wall Street Journal*, August 10, 1965, p. 12.

for briefings on bills of concern to the Church (e.g., proposed changes in liquor laws).<sup>61</sup> Moreover, individual General Authorities do not hesitate to telephone or write their views to state legislators.

*CHURCH INTERFERENCE IN POLITICS: ISSUES AND DILEMMAS*

At least seven major issues are raised by the kinds of religio-political activities just described. They concern the felt need of any church to deal with real life, temporal problems, the rights of church and citizens in a democracy, schisms within the church, and the impact upon democracy itself when churches intervene in politics.

*Issue No. 1: Must Not the Church Be in the World to Change the World?*

Communities would lose a vital, energizing force-for-good if a kind of "Hatch Act" were imposed on religionists, barring them from politics.

Visualize the Catholic priest that led the successful reform movement against a corrupt Democratic machine in Flushing, Ohio; or the courage of Archbishop Francis Rummel of New Orleans in pioneering school integration in Louisiana; or the Protestant minister in Colorado sermonizing on the need for a school bond issue; or a phalanx of clergy from all faiths marching shoulder to shoulder for civil rights in Selma, Alabama. Religious leaders may be among the most sensitive of all observers and among the most courageous of all spokesmen on community affairs. Can one see a Martin Luther King excommunicated from politics?

Beyond the possible benefits to the community, the Church itself has great reason for concerning itself with public issues. As a number of Mormon Prophets have taught, a religion that cannot save people in this life cannot save them in the next. Churches cannot ignore temporal problems, many of which lie in the domain of public policy, and, therefore, by our definition, in the domain of politics. Such questions include racial discrimination (violating Christ's Second Commandment), pornography, governmental corruption, and factors contributing to divorce and juvenile delinquency, among others.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Confidential interviews with some of those who have attended these briefings indicate the omnipresence of pressure but the absence of arm-twisting.

<sup>62</sup> As Elder Benson said in his own defense against critics of his speaking out firmly on political issues: "I . . . believe that the institutions of church and state should be separated, but I also do not agree that spiritual leaders cannot comment on basic issues which involve the very foundation of American liberty.

"In fact, if this were true, we would have to throw away a substantial part of the Bible. Speaking out against immoral or unjust actions of political leaders has been the

*Issue No. 2: The Right of the Church to Protect Itself  
From Hostile State Action*

As the historical record of Mormonism so clearly attests, the wall of separation between church and state does not always protect churches from hostile government action. Somewhere in natural law there is the principle of the inherent right of self-protection.

If the Mormon Church sees a tax measure coming which would greatly hamper its welfare farms, or bills that represent frontal assaults on its doctrines (e.g., sale of liquor by the drink), may it not plainly tell legislators and the public how it feels? Inherent right and the First Amendment would strongly suggest that it may speak, that it may "petition the government."

*Issue No. 3: Do Church Leaders Abdicate Their Rights as  
Citizens on Assuming Church Office?*

When the religionist dons the vestments of high church office, must he put aside the tunic of citizenship? We have no Hatch Act that says so. But some would argue that separation of church and state requires church officials to stay out of politics. Such a proscription ends up depriving churchmen of their rights as citizens. We expect civil servants to make such a sacrifice (which this author deplores); should we expect it of our religious servants as well?

*Issue No. 4: Schism Within the Church*

One of the undeniable *victims* of heavy church involvement in politics is "unity of the faith." During the 1930's when many of the leaders of the Mormon Church became outspokenly Republican, a political fissure appeared in the foundation of the Church. That it has now reached serious proportions is indicated in part by the cutting quality of recent Mormon humor:

"I thought I saw Brother Williams in the Temple last week."  
"Why that's impossible. He's a Democrat, you know."

OR

"Brother Williams, you pray just like a Republican!"

Stripped of any humor, the sentiment is plain and simple: "J. D., you can't be a Democrat and a Mormon!"

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burden of prophets and disciples of God from time immemorial. It was for this very reason that many of them were imprisoned. Nevertheless, it was their God-given task, as watchmen on the towers, to speak up." "Stand Up for Freedom" (Salt Lake City, Utah Forum for the American Idea, February, 1966, mimeo), p. 6.

The schismatic threat to the Church probably reached its twentieth century apogee during the months of February-April, 1966. The rental of the Assembly Hall in February to a Birch Society front group for five lectures (with paid admissions); Elder Benson's keynote speech in that series, defending the Birch Society in its fight against Communism; a "Dear Brethren" letter during March to L.D.S. bishops from the Utah coordinator of the Birch Society inviting them to hear Birch head, Robert Welch, during the week of April General Conference; and the last-minute substitution of President J. Reuben Clark's picture for that of President David O. McKay on the April cover of the Birch Society magazine, *American Opinion*, all created a climate of fear that the Church was on the verge of officially endorsing the Birch Society.<sup>58</sup> That the Church stepped back from the abyss is to the credit of some courageous and far-sighted General Authorities.

In assaying the tensions and conflicts that are created when politics rears its head in a religious setting, one wonders if political admonitions by leaders of the Church are even worth the price. The sad commentary is that alienation of some groups within the Church may be occasioned by counsel on political matters that may not even be central to their spiritual welfare, and matters on which the "law and the prophets" have provided no authoritative guidance.<sup>54</sup>

#### *Issue No. 5: Threat to Democracy From Church Interference*

The paradox is that, while communities may benefit from the churchman in politics, citizens may be harmed. The danger is that, in a system which hopes for self-governing individuals, those individuals may simply go to sleep when religious guardians do their citizen's work for them.

The threat is especially great in Mormondom, with its belief in continuing, modern-day revelation. Mormons believe that their spiritual leaders have inspiration from on high in their church roles. Some Mormons assume that the same inspiration carries over into the secular, political activities of those leaders. "If Nixon is good enough for President McKay, he's good enough for me." That sentiment is the breeding ground of theocracy and the burying ground of democracy.

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<sup>58</sup> Reflections of the problem in the April Conference sessions can be seen in the April 9, 1966, sermon of Elder Harold B. Lee, the sermon that same night of Elder Marion G. Romney to the General Priesthood meeting, and the addendum to President McKay's remarks before the same gathering.

<sup>54</sup> As Elder Harold B. Lee has tellingly warned, "If our brethren who engage in political matters, politics, or partisan politics, on issues where the Lord or His prophets have not

As President Brigham Young warned a long time ago:

I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by Him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation and weaken that influence they could give their leaders if they would know for themselves by the revelations of Jesus that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates or not.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, a central precept in the revealed word of Mormonism is that God has not commanded in all things:

Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves.<sup>56</sup>

That principle, taken together with the church-state boundaries laid out in the 134th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants, strongly suggests that politics is one of those areas which the Lord has left, largely untrammelled, in mortal hands.<sup>57</sup>

*Issue No. 6: Doctrinal Restraint on Church Interference in Politics*

It should be remembered that all the forms of L.D.S. Church involvement in politics take place on a stage whose backdrop is the 134th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants.

To repeat, that great charter marks out "Caesar's world" and "God's world." It would leave to government the definition of the public interest (verse 5). And in the plainest language it says: "We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government. . . ." (verse 9).<sup>58</sup> Reviewing the entirety of our history, one wonders if those proscriptions perhaps have been honored more in the breach than in the observance.

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spoken, they are almost certain to draw fire from those of contrary minds." B. Y. U. address, "Be Ye Not Deceived," May 4, 1965.

<sup>55</sup> Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, as edited by John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1925), p. 209.

<sup>56</sup> Doctrine and Covenants, 58:26-28.

<sup>57</sup> One additional anti-democratic effect of the use of the pulpit for advice on politics is the inability of dissenters to challenge the speaker and "present the other side." Democracy does not thrive on one-way communication to captive audiences.

<sup>58</sup> A policy strongly reiterated by the First Presidency in their "Address to the World," April, 1907; reprinted in Brigham H. Roberts, ed., *A Comprehensive History of the Church* (Salt Lake City; Deseret News Press, 1930), vol. 6, p. 436.

Issue No. 7: *The Constitutional Prohibition in Utah*

As plain as the language in the 134th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants is the prohibition in Section 4 of Article I of the Utah Constitution: "There shall be no union of church and state, nor shall any church dominate the state or *interfere with its functions.*" Church directives to police chiefs, pressure on governing boards and planning officials, and some forms of lobbying with legislators raise questions of compliance with that constitutional mandate.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the face of some doctrinal and constitutional restraints on Church involvement in politics, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or its individual leaders have never been able to ignore Caesar's world for very long. Caesar has not always been kind to Mormons, and Mormons have consequently sought to have Caesar with them rather than against them. In taking political stances down through the years, the Church has reflected the freedom and the pluralism of America: The right of men to organize and assemble, to speak and publish, and to petition the government.

The Church's record in politics has been highly pragmatic — ranging from near-theocracy in Nauvoo and early Utah days when threats to the Church's existence were especially great on to somewhat less involvement in politics in the late nineteenth century when such a course might hasten statehood.

The diversity of means used to cast a religious influence on the political scene has been striking — ranging from pulpit admonitions to editorials in Church publications to the endorsement of candidates for public office and the candidacy, on occasion, of General Authorities, among other techniques.

Through it all are interspersed unusually difficult dilemmas as to the propriety and the consequences of the Church and its leaders taking any active part in political matters. What courses of political action would be appropriate for laity and leadership in Mormonism to consider for the future?

First, the membership of the Church must understand that responsibility for good government rests primarily on their shoulders, not on their Church officials.

Second, direct Church action would seem to be clearly justified in two political areas: whenever the *rights* of the Church might be endangered by government or pressure groups; and whenever Church doctrines are frontally threatened by political developments. In either of those two instances, the First Presidency should declare the position of the Church in bold terms.

Beyond those two areas, optional courses of action are open to us: wide participation in politics by many Mormons, high and low, with a diversity of viewpoints as the safeguard against any image of "Church commitment" to one point of view; or a self-restraining policy where the top leadership of the Church essentially eschew politics.

As to the option of unrestrained involvement in politics, two principles call for recognition: that chapels and worship services should be off-limits to all of us in treating political questions; secondly, that the disclaimer be regularly entered (and more clearly understood by the Church membership) that Mormon spokesmen speak for themselves and not for the Church when they deal with partisan questions. The benefits of such an open-participation policy would be to assure Church leaders their rights as citizens to speak out without committing the Church, and to stimulate individual members to think for themselves as they see Church leaders arrayed on various sides of political issues.

But on the other hand, a policy of non-involvement of top Church leaders in political matters also has something to be said for it. The avoidance of unnecessary schisms within the Church would be a prime consideration. Secondly, there is the hope that the pure word of God, without detours into politics, is all that men really need to find the good life. Elder Harold B. Lee reminded the Church in April Conference, 1966, of Paul's counsel to the Corinthians:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. — That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.<sup>80</sup>

"I would," Elder Lee added, "that all who are called to high places in the Church would determine as did this Apostle to the Gentiles to know and to preach nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."<sup>80</sup> In similar fashion, the Book of Mormon prophet, Alma, had commanded his disciples "that they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord, who had redeemed His people."<sup>81</sup>

Finally, it may be argued that the Church should remain aloof from politics simply because the spiritual welfare of the people is a full-time calling. As the Prophet Joseph Smith once put it: "I

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<sup>80</sup> I Corinthians 2:1-5.

<sup>80</sup> Sermon reprinted in the *Church News*, April 16, 1966, pp. 13-14.

<sup>81</sup> Book of Mormon, Mosiah 18:20.



think it would be well for politicians to regulate their own affairs. I wish to be let alone that I may attend strictly to the spiritual welfare of the Church.”<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps the appropriate course was really set out long before by the Book of Mormon leader, Alma the Younger, who effected a classical separation of church and state in his own ministry. It was this civil-religious leader who relinquished the civil sceptre to another man while retaining to himself the spiritual one, “that he might preach the word of God unto (his people) . . ., seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Documentary History*, vol. 5, p. 259.

<sup>63</sup> Book of Mormon, Alma 4:19.

*Some persons, by hating vices too much, come to love men too little.*

*Edmund Burke*