The Political Background of the Woodruff Manifesto

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As the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints moves past the centennial of Wilford Woodruff's announcement on plural marriage, there is still considerable misunderstanding as to what the "Manifesto" was and how it came about. Most people who know anything about the Church and its long struggle with the United States government over the practice of polygamy know that the Woodruff announcement was pivotal in relieving mounting pressures and that it was in some way instrumental in attaining Utah statehood. However, many details in the political background of these events remain obscure. This essay seeks to place the Woodruff Manifesto within the context of these developments.

From the beginning of Mormon settlement in the Great Basin, Church leaders and their political friends recognized the desirability of self-government, possible only through statehood. Only as a state could voters elect local officials instead of having them imposed from outside through an appointive, "carpetbag" process. However, the Church's 1852 public acknowledgment of plural marriage essentially doomed for years to come any real possibility of attaining their desired political independence. Soon thereafter, the infant Republican party's first platform declared against polygamy, and the party continued an undiminished opposition through the ensuing three decades during which party members were largely ascendant on the national political scene. Just after the Civil War, the two most powerful members of the

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House of Representatives, so far as statehood was concerned, Speaker Schuyler Colfax and territorial committee chairman William H. Ashley, visited Utah and specifically informed Church authorities that their fervent goal could never be attained so long as the practice of plural marriage continued (Whitney 1893, 2:121–39). While Mormons determined to maintain what they considered a divine principle, their political activists stubbornly continued to seek statehood for Utah. But government officials were equally determined to root out the objectionable practice, and anti-polygamy "raids" became increasingly bitter during the 1880s (Larson 1971, 91–206).

Early in 1887, the Edmunds-Tucker Bill, aimed at weakening the Church by confiscating most of its property, passed its final obstacles in the House of Representatives. When the best efforts of Mormon lobbyists failed to thwart it, some friendly to the Church devised the so-called "Scott Amendment," which proposed to delay the effect of the new law for six months. In the interim, the resolution suggested, Utah citizens might hold a new constitutional convention to frame and ratify a fundamental law with specific prohibitions against polygamy (Wolfinger 1971, 336–46). The sponsors of the Edmunds-Tucker Act refused to consider the proposal, but Church agents decided to pursue that course even though the restrictive law was already being implemented (Lyman 1986, 42–50).

Those representing Church interests in the nation's capital, particularly General Authority John W. Young, had developed a cordial relationship with Democratic President Grover Cleveland and several of his chief advisors, including Solicitor General George A. Jenks. In fact Jenks actually drafted the anti-polygamy clause for the proposed Utah constitution and even journeyed to Utah during the summer convention to quietly help incorporate the provisions into the document (J. Young 1887a).

Even more crucial was the reaction of the highest leaders of the Church to the proposed Scott Amendment. Initially President John Taylor opposed it, believing approval of a constitutional statement against plural marriage might convey the impression that Church leaders or their followers intended to surrender on the principle of plural marriage. Continuing communications from the nation's capital, particularly from Charles W. Penrose, a Salt Lake City Church leader and newspaper editor then temporarily assigned to the lobby in Washington, D.C., argued that accepting such a constitution was purely a political matter in which non-polygamous Mormons, the only ones then able to vote, were simply acting in their capacity as citizens. Penrose noted that polygamists were not committing themselves on the matter at all, although they might benefit from the fact that, should

Utah be admitted as a state, law enforcement would be carried out by locally elected officials instead of by less sympathetic outside appointees (J. Young 1887a; Penrose and Richards 1887; Taylor and Cannon 1887; Jack 1887).

President Taylor finally approved the Scott Amendment approach after learning that President Cleveland was anxious for such a response. But the Church leader reiterated that his approval did not in any way hint at changes in Church doctrine. The venerable Taylor, in his last six months of life, demonstrated understanding of Penrose's arguments when he replied, "If a constitution should be adopted according to its [Scott Amendment] provisions it would, at worst, only be punishing ourselves for what our enemies are now punishing us." Mormon leaders and Cleveland officials effectively orchestrated the necessary constitutional convention and implemented the requisite provisions against plural marriage. Utah voters ratified the constitution in late summer.

However, many of the Democratic majority in Congress were not so easily convinced that a simple constitutional clause was proof of changed Mormon practices. In September 1887, after President John Taylor's death, the Quorum of the Twelve read and discussed a document presumably drafted by a Democratic leader in the national legislature. The document stated that unless Mormons who were summoned before the Utah courts to answer charges of polygamy or unlawful cohabitation "shall promise to obey the laws against that offense," it would be impossible to "bring the Congress of the United States to believe" that Church leaders were being "honest in adopting a constitution prohibiting polygamy." Church attorneys prepared a statement for use in court, but after extensive deliberation, the apostles concluded that "no Latter-day Saint could make such a promise and still be true to the covenants he had made with God and his brethren" at the time of marriage. "If such a promise was necessary as a condition to our securing statehood," the apostles concluded, "we at once give the administration at Washington to understand that we could not accept it" (Grant, 29 Sept. 1887). Thus the most extensive Utah statehood effort collapsed because congressional leaders demanded greater concessions than Church authorities felt they could make.

Yet some Democratic leaders, cognizant of the political advantages not only of continued Mormon allegiance to the party but of Utah statehood, did not let the matter drop completely. Early in 1888, territorial committee chairman William Springer proposed an amendment to the U.S. Constitution allowing Congress to intervene in any state that failed to enforce its polygamy laws. Convinced that such assurance would markedly enhance prospects for Utah's admission, most of Springer's committee associates approved the proposal, as did

some of the strongest supporters of Utah statehood. But again Latter-day Saint leaders firmly rejected the proposals as too restrictive, even when the provisions were "modified" to make them "as harmless" as possible. This firm resistance to another substantive concession again handcuffed Democratic efforts to gain Utah statehood (Lyman 1986, 58-59).

Similarly, at the end of 1888, "friends in the East" for a third time attempted to persuade Church authorities to make some real compromise on plural marriage. Church leaders discussed a lengthy document that essentially asked Latter-day Saints to promise to strictly conform to the laws of the land. Not all Mormon officials rejected the proposals outright, although after deliberations, none thought the benefits promised—presumably related to statehood—were sufficient to warrant that course. Others present firmly stated they could only accept such a change if it came as "the Word of the Lord through the servant of God whose right it is to speak" (Grant, 20 Dec. 1888). There had been no acting president of the Church since the death of John Taylor in July 1887, but all General Authorities understood that the president of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, Wilford Woodruff, was the man entitled to such divine direction, even before he was sustained as president in April 1889.

This rejection ended for some time attempts at Utah statehood by Democrats since the reins of national government were about to pass to a Republican president, Benjamin Harrison, who had a friendly majority in Congress. The new chief executive and many of his fellow Republicans were still determined to make the Mormons conform to the law. To do this, they intended to deny all members of the Church the right to vote. But although some Republicans supported such stringent tactics, others began to seek Mormon political allegiance. This was possible only because many Latter-day Saints had become disillusioned with the Democrats' failure to deliver statehood—a failure that was not entirely their fault, considering the persistent refusal of Church leaders to make any concessions. Ironically, the party that most effectively wielded the heavy hand with the Saints ended up benefiting most from their political support.

Pivotal to this political transition was Mormon disappointment with the role of members of the formerly friendly Democratic party in instituting what was first known as the Idaho Test Oath. Formulated by Democrat H. W. "Kentucky" Smith, a long-time anti-Mormon activist, and implemented by other Democrats, this law denied the vote to all believers in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, even those who did not practice plural marriage. Although the initial legal tests of the law were upheld in the Idaho Territorial Supreme Court in

March 1888, the Mormons there determined to continue their fight against disfranchisement. Their strategy was a test case where, in the words of the leading spokesman for the Church in Idaho, William Budge, they would "have the opportunity to bring in the presidents of stakes, bishops and other leading men of the Church in Idaho to show whether or not that doctrine is now preached, practiced, etc." (Budge to Woodruff 1888). Certain their opponents could find no recent evidence against them, the Mormons would thereby establish judicially that they had conformed to the law (Lyman 1977, 8–10).

As Budge and his associates began implementing this approach, a new judge was appointed to the Idaho Supreme Court, Democrat Charles H. Berry, former attorney general of Minnesota. It soon became evident that he would have jurisdiction over the district from which the test case arose. Besides using Utah Congressional delegate John T. Caine to generate suitable pressures on the judge through political friends back home, Budge boldly traveled to the Blackfoot judicial headquarters to confer with Berry before he rendered his decision. The judge, who recorded the conversation as accurately as he could recall, claimed the Church leader first quoted U.S. Solicitor General Jenks as saying that if the test oath law was taken before the United States Supreme Court, "it would not stand for a moment." Budge also stressed the crucial nature of the pending decision on the continued allegiance of the Idaho Mormons to the Democratic party (Berry 1888).

Berry's reply demonstrated considerable admiration for Mormon industry and economic accomplishments but firmly stated his intent to "administer the laws as they were." He made it clear he could not allow political considerations to affect his decision and expressed regret that the Mormons could not bring their marriage relations into "regulation step" with the rest of American society (Berry 1888). The published decision (*Idaho Daily Statesman*, 17, 20 Oct. 1888; *Wood River Times*, 16, 17, 24 Oct. 1888) not only upheld the test oath but ruled the Mormon arguments that they no longer taught or practiced plural marriage were merely a temporary posture of no importance so long as the general Church had made no changes on the question. The kind of concession necessary to relieve the disfranchisement onslaught, Judge Berry stressed, was a formal renunciation of the doctrine at a Church general conference, not unlike what actually occurred several years later.

Even more ominous than events in Idaho, early in 1890 the test oath was upheld by the highest court in the land. With this Supreme Court decision, *Davis v. Beason*, the way was cleared for anti-polygamy advocates to enact similar legislation nationwide. Bills to that effect were introduced in the House of Representatives by Isaac N. Struble

of Iowa, and in the Senate by Shelby M. Cullom of Illinois. These showed every evidence of breezing through to passage until Mormon agents, led by former Utah congressional delegate and first counselor in the First Presidency of the Church, George Q. Cannon, who had begun the process of switching his personal political allegiance to the Republican party, discovered possible powerful assistance from within that party.

Republican party official James S. Clarkson later recalled that at the crucial time Cannon was giving up on securing any effective assistance from the Democrats, he and the party's foremost leader and strategist, James G. Blaine, "were studying the elements of voters in the United States to try to secure a majority for the political principles in which [they] believed." The party was just then making its last-ditch bid to enfranchise black voters in the South through the so-called "force bill," and prospects were not at all good for breaking the Democratic grasp on the vote from that section. The West certainly appeared to hold more promise. Republican leaders accepted the inflated figures lobbyists Isaac Trumbo and Morris M. Estee generated from census and Church membership records and were impressed with "the magnitude of the Mormon people, the greatness of their development in many states besides Utah, and the large part that they were sure to bear, for good or evil, in the destiny of this republic" (Clarkson 1894).

The most decisive event arising out of this new alliance, later reported to Church leaders in an over-laudatory manner by Clarkson, was Blaine's appearance at a congressional committee hearing on the Cullom or Struble bills, "protesting against such an outrage upon any portion of a free people, asserting that no republic of free men could tolerate such a wrong and live." Clarkson concluded, "Of course your people know something of the courage and loyalty of Mr. Blaine towards you in oppression." But, he continued, "the summit and sublimity of it all was reached when he stood in the small committee room and smote down with the giant strength of his indignant wrath the further attempt—in a free government to degrade still further a people already wronged too much" (Clarkson 1894). There is no reason to doubt that such an event occurred. In fact, contemporary Mormon historian Orson F. Whitney, who had good access to Church authorities, similarly credited Blaine with blocking the Cullom-Struble bill (Whitney 1893, 3:743).

At about this time, as passage of the disfranchisement legislation seemed certain, Utah delegate Caine called in desperation upon one of the few Utah Church members already affiliated with the Republican party, Ogden newspaper editor and former assistant to Caine, Frank J. Cannon. Cannon's lengthy testimony before the Senate Committee

on Territories was an effective exposition of the grossly unfair aspects of the proposed law. He stated, referring to the earlier Edmunds-Tucker law, which barred polygamists from any participation as American citizens, "Our parents were punished for an act, but the [Cullom-Struble] bill proposed to punish us for a thought." He explained that the intended law sought to restrict a class of people who had obeyed the law and expressed every intention of continuing to do so. Then following the lead of friendly committeemen, Cannon testified that the monogamist Mormons he represented disavowed their personal acceptance of plural marriage each time they took the oath required by the Edmunds-Tucker Act in order to vote. He also assured the committee that the monogamous Saints would amend the Church practice if they had the power, but that such alterations in Church doctrine came only through the head of the Church—who did not bow to popular opinion (U.S. Senate 1890, 12–14).

Delegate Caine did not realize young Cannon was in the East at the behest of his father, George Q. Cannon, who was personally directing the Church fight against the disfranchisement bills. Under his guidance, Frank conferred with Blaine, an old congressional friend from the senior Cannon's earlier service as Utah delegate. Now secretary of state to President Harrison, Blaine instructed young Cannon to make private personal pleas to individual committee members considering the Cullom and Struble bills, and offered to help him should any prove hesitant. However, Blaine warned that such influence would only temporarily alleviate the problem; a permanent solution was only possible if the Saints would "get into line" so far as marriage practices were concerned (Cannon 1911, 85–91).

Upon reporting Blaine's comments to his father, Frank Cannon claimed President Cannon divulged, "President Woodruff has been praying. . . . He thinks he sees some light. . . . You are authorized to say that something will be done." With this, young Cannon approached the committee members, confidentially relaying his father's message. He conferred with an influential Republican member of the Senate Committee on Territories, Orville Platt, along with others, and "told them that the Mormon church was about to make a concession concerning the doctrine of polygamy." He later claimed that these assurances at least temporarily halted progress on these bills (Cannon 1911, 85–91).[1]

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[1] Frank J. Cannon's book, *Under the Prophet in Utah*, first published as a muckraker exposé of abuses of the Mormon hierarchy by a former insider-turned apostate, has long perplexed students of Church history. Author Lyman once presumptuously chided his former professor, the late Gustive O. Larson, for relying perhaps too fully

Cannon's account is essentially corroborated by the author of the bills, Utah anti-Mormon lobbyist Robert N. Baskin, who later wrote that the Senate committee had decided to report his bill favorably. Then he learned that the Church agents "had requested that further action on the bill be temporarily delayed." Senator Cullom apprised him that "he had been assured by a delegation of prominent Mormons, that if further action on the bill was delayed for a reasonable time, the practice of polygamy would be prohibited by the Mormon church." Explaining that Struble had received similar assurances, Baskin recalled the delay was granted, but with the clear understanding that if polygamy was not prohibited within a reasonable time, vigorous action on the pending bills would be resumed. Though his disfranchisement measure never became law, Baskin credited the threat of it with being "the last straw" that forced the issuance of the Woodruff Manifesto (Baskin 1914, 183–86).

A coded letter written during this time by George Q. Cannon to his fellow First Presidency members, Wilford Woodruff and Joseph F. Smith, offers further insight. He reported from Washington, D.C., that "we shall have time to get in some work," adding that he favored "the proposition which Tobias [a code name for Church lobbyist Isaac Trumbo, who was then one of Woodruff's closest confidants] submitted to you, and which you referred to me, if the party will now accept the business on those terms." Although it is impossible to prove conclusively, it is likely that the lobbyists' proposition was for a retrocession on plural marriage if the Republicans would halt further progress on the Cullom-Struble bills. Cannon promised to do all he could at the nation's capital and affirmed belief that he was being divinely assisted. He reported that Trumbo had conferred with Basil [Blaine] and stated that he felt good about the situation, which Cannon judged to be "encouraging" (G. Cannon 1890).

It is clear that political considerations also persuaded Republican sponsors to postpone passage of the disfranchisement legislation. Upon his return to Salt Lake City, President Cannon reported to fellow Church leaders that the outlook for Utah was brighter than it had been for many years. Alluding to the Clarkson-Blaine strategy of increasing the number of Mormon Republicans in the West, he stated, "We would doubtless have been disfranchised by the Struble bill if the Republican leaders in Washington had not been given to understand

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on Cannon's over-laudatory accounts of his own role in several crucial events in the era. However, his brother Abraham's scrupulously honest journal and other source materials cited herein consistently corroborate Frank's version of the events of the crucial summer of 1890.

that there were Republicans in Utah and that a wise course on the part of the Republicans would doubtless make more" (in R. Young 1892). Cannon was also quoted as saying that "the Republican party are [sic] becoming more favorably impressed with regard to the importance of securing Mormon votes and influence" (A. Cannon, 10 July 1890).

Several weeks after the disfranchisement crisis was averted, Frank Cannon's half-brother, Apostle Abraham H. Cannon, was in New York City for medical treatment. He recorded in a 12 June 1890 journal entry that while visiting his father there, he was shown a paper drafted by Blaine, who expressed hope that Church authorities would accept the document. Young Cannon described what he saw as a "virtual renunciation of plural marriage," which caused the dedicated young polygamist to "revolt at the prospect of signing such a promise." It is possible that the proposal was in some way revised, but on 10 July, the apostle noted in his journal a private reading of an important First Presidency resolution made 30 June in regard to plural marriage. The resolution, he noted, was to the effect that no such marriages would be permitted to occur "even in Mexico unless the contracting parties, or at least the female, was resolved to remain in the Mormon colonies" recently established there, largely for that purpose. This quiet dictum is a most significant development on the subject of plural marriage, a concession like what had been promised to Republican leaders. Though the Woodruff Manifesto issued almost three months later has usually been emphasized as the most important step, it was in a real sense merely the public announcement of a policy previously implemented.

A letter soon thereafter from President Joseph F. Smith to his good friend and later counselor in the First Presidency, Charles W. Nibley, illustrates further details of the new Church stance. Nibley had inquired about the possibility of a mutual friend (probably himself) then taking another plural wife. Smith replied that he personally approved of the idea in principle but confessed that "times have changed, the conditions are not propitious and the decrees of the powers that be" were against the move. He explained that he was referring to powers within the Church, though prudence dictated they also defer to governmental authority. Smith further stated, "The decree now is that there shall be no p——— m———s [plural marriages] in the United States, and that there should be none anywhere else—unless one or both of the parties remove beyond the jurisdiction of the government to make their home." He added that he did not know how long that condition would prevail, but that the almost "absolute prohibition" was for the present the law of the Church. He assumed the family of the woman in question would hesitate to allow her to live

in Mexico, alone much of the time, and attempted to convince the applicant that he was already sufficiently involved in plural marriage to satisfy any of God's requirements on the subject. But, President Smith assured, "should the clouds roll by and the gloom pass away . . . it would be altogether a different matter" (Smith 1890a).

At about the same time, Joseph F. Smith also implied another motive for the momentous change in stance on plural marriage. He confided to another close associate, L. John Nuttall, that "we are making a strong effort to do something in defense of the rights of our 'monog' brethren," adding a hope that Church leaders could "do as much in their behalf as they have done in ours"—presumably referring to the loyalty of nonpolygamous Church members to the controversial doctrine amidst the onslaught of the Edmunds-Tucker and Cullom-Struble imperatives (Smith 1890b). Besides this, Mormon leaders may well have recognized that a Church announcement ending sanctions of new plural marriages might remove the polygamy issue as an obstacle in the Utah statehood fight. With the formal Church organization absolved of responsibility for the continuance of plural marriages, those later charged with such offenses would have to stand on their own. Under such circumstances, monogamist Mormons could not justifiably be disfranchised or even the territory denied statehood simply because some Church members continued the offensive practice on their own.

While word of the new Church position quietly circulated among the faithful, Gentile territorial officials were not so apprised and continued to seek further legislative measures to pressure the Saints into submission. The most active agency in these efforts was the Utah Commission, formed by Congress at least partially for that purpose. At a 7 August 1890 meeting of that body, R. S. Robertson was asked to gather the material for an annual report to the secretary of interior. The commissioners agreed that the report should present a full and accurate statement of the "existing status of the polygamous question—including facts and statistics as may show, or tend to show the increase or decrease of the practice." Robertson's subsequent draft was considered, to an extent edited, and finally adopted and forwarded to Washington, D.C. (U.S. Utah Commission Minutebook D, 7 Aug. 1890). Made public soon thereafter, it charged that forty-one male Mormons had entered polygamous relations in Utah territory since the previous annual report (U.S. *House* 1890, 13:414–20). Although this may well have been the case, the evidence presented hardly substantiated the allegation, and several Church leaders soon referred to the reported new plural marriages as a blatant falsehood (Caine 1890a; Smith 1890b). Some, including Apostle Moses Thatcher, expected the report

to be a source of considerable trouble unless the Church could "offset" it in some way. President Woodruff also worried that the Utah Commission report might well lead to further legislation inimical to Church members (Grant, 30 Sept. 1890).

That late summer was a busy time for the First Presidency. As soon as they returned from a short train trip to New Mexico, they embarked for San Francisco. There they met with former Republican National Convention Chairman Morris M. Estee of Napa, who urged them to make an announcement "condemning polygamy and laying it aside," by then standard Republican advice. The Californian had already been passed over twice for a place in Harrison's cabinet and had no influence with the administration. Estee may have reinforced the First Presidency's resolve, but they had already set their course toward the momentous announcement. There was another reason for their journey to the coast. Abraham H. Cannon confided in his journal that the First Presidency wished to avoid being subpoenaed as witnesses before the court in matters related to the Church property suits then about to begin (Quinn 1985, 42-3; A. Cannon, 3 Sept. 1890).

In their absence, hearings commenced before Colonel M. N. Stone, a special commissioner appointed by the Utah Supreme Court to review the accounts and actions of Frank H. Dyer, former receiver of Church property escheated under provisions of the Edmunds-Tucker Act. A primary purpose of the proceedings was to determine if an earlier territorial supreme court decree prevented further government efforts to secure Church property not already in the hands of the new receiver, Henry W. Lawrence. The U.S. attorney for Utah, Charles S. Varian, indicated a special interest in the Utah temples in St. George, Logan, Manti, and Salt Lake City. Dyer was criticized for allowing a compromise between the Church and government that enabled the temples to remain in Mormon hands. The government attorney appeared to be probing for an opportunity to reopen the Church suits sufficiently to allow the government to confiscate that sacred property. Varian expressly desired to keep the hearings open long enough to compel President Woodruff to testify, but the summons servers could not locate their man. The presidency outwaited their would-be inquisitors. However, as soon as the First Presidency returned, Church attorneys undoubtedly warned them of the danger to Church property, particularly the temples (*Deseret Weekly News*, 13, 20, 27 Sept. 1890).

Within a week of his return, President Woodruff confided in his diary the oft-quoted observation, "I have arrived at a point in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when I am under the necessity of acting for the temporal salvation of the Church" (25 Sept. 1890). Though he referred to government attempts to sup-

press polygamy as the main reason for making his subsequent declaration, the threat of temple confiscation was undoubtedly on his mind as well. Certainly "the temporal salvation of the Church" would include protecting these sacred edifices from presumed enemy hands. Apostle Marriner W. Merrill, then acting as president of the Logan Temple, discussed the impending announcement with Woodruff as it was about to be released. He commented in his diary on 24 September 1890 that the Manifesto "seems the only way to retain the possession of our temples and continue the ordinance work for the living and dead which was considered of more importance than continuing the practice of plural marriage for the present." This clear statement of purpose was of the same tenor as Woodruff's own subsequent statements justifying his actions in announcing the Manifesto.[2]

These worries pressed upon the prophet. But the Church had withstood pressures at least as serious in the past. Even figuratively backed to the wall and faced with practical considerations that demanded concessions, Woodruff cannot necessarily be denied the possibility of divine inspiration that he and his associates claimed motivated his decision. George Q. Cannon later told of the numerous earlier suggestions for such action from within and outside the Church. Cannon explained the time chosen in terms fellow believers could easily understand: "At no time has the Spirit seemed to indicate that this should be done. We have waited for the Lord to move in the matter." Finally, he said, on 24 September 1890, Woodruff felt what he deemed to be spiritual direction, and the Manifesto was the result (*Deseret Weekly News*, 18 Oct. 1890).

On the afternoons of 24 and 25 September, the First Presidency and several apostles met and considered the text of the momentous announcement Woodruff had drafted, undoubtedly with assistance from

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[2] In the most detailed of these statements, delivered at Cache Stake Conference in Logan 1 November 1891 and reported in the *Deseret Weekly News* 14 Nov. 1891, Wilford Woodruff stated: "The Lord has told me to ask the Latter-day Saints a question. . . . Which is the wisest course for the Latter-day Saints to pursue—to continue to attempt to practice plural marriage, with the laws of the nation against it . . . at the cost of the confiscation and loss of all the Temples . . . ? The Lord showed me by vision and revelation exactly what would take place if we did not stop this practice. . . . [A]ll ordinances would be stopped throughout the land of Zion." Since 1981, editions of the Doctrine and Covenants designate the Manifesto Official Declaration 1 and include an additional page entitled "Excerpts from Three Addresses by President Wilford Woodruff Regarding the Manifesto." (See Lyman 1979.) All three quotes, including a larger version of the above, were part of a paper the author presented at the Mormon History Association meeting at San Francisco in April 1979, entitled "The Woodruff Manifesto in the Context of Its Times." A commentator's copy of the paper was subsequently loaned by an employee of the Church Historical Department to someone in the First Presidency's office.

other writers. After careful examination and discussion, they agreed with its contents as worded. With such approval, what became known as the Woodruff Manifesto was released to the Associated Press and forwarded to congressional delegate John T. Caine for initial dissemination from the nation's capital (W. B. Dougall 1890). Caine's accompanying letter, published with the first announcement in the *Washington Evening Star* on 25 September 1890, denounced the Utah Commission report for attempting to stimulate negative legislation such as disfranchisement. The delegate expressed hope that the Church announcement would prevent any such action. The opening paragraph of the Manifesto indicated the same intent, with the one following answering charges that a particular plural marriage had taken place under Church supervision during the past year. After referring to the court decisions upholding the laws prohibiting plural marriage, Woodruff affirmed his intention to submit to those laws and use his influence with Church members to do likewise. He pointed out that nothing in his recent teachings could be construed as encouragement or even mention of polygamy, concluding, "I now publicly declare that my advice to the Latter-day Saints is to refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land" (D&C—Declaration 1).

Although word of the Manifesto spread quickly throughout the Mormon communities, most General Authorities withheld comment until regular quorum meetings began on 30 September. There the Brethren freely expressed their impressions, recorded in considerable detail in the journals of Heber J. Grant and Abraham H. Cannon. The apostles understood that only such an announcement could alter the increasingly negative public opinion regarding the Church. Several agreed with Grant who, referring to the ban within the United States, stated that "President Woodruff had simply told the world what we had been doing and if there were any advantages to secure by the Manifesto I feel that we should have them." Most strikingly, the apostles' comments indicate that they saw little, if any, personal application of the declaration. It merely banned new marriages within the United States. Several of the Brethren expressed their intention to continue their present marital arrangements. John Henry Smith pledged that only incarceration in prison would restrain him from living with his wives. His close associate, Francis M. Lyman, endorsed that same sentiment saying, "I design to live with and have children by my wives, using the wisdom which God gives me to avoid being captured by the officers of the law" (in A. Cannon, 30 Sept. 1890; Grant, 30 Sept. 1890).

At the time the Manifesto was released, President Joseph F. Smith wrote to his plural wife Sarah, then residing in Nephi, that she would soon likely hear of a "pronunciamento by Prest. Woodruff in relation to our political and domestic status" that would "no doubt startle some

folks." He assured her that "it will not startle you, neither will you be worried about it for you and the rest of us are all right." He explained that it was only "those who could and would not, and now can't, who will be affected by it. They may growl and find fault and censure, but not those who have done their whole duty." Here it is abundantly clear that those who had already been obedient to the divine injunction to enter plural marriage were considered beyond the sweep of the declaration. It was more an announcement that other Latter-day Saints had procrastinated too long and would not now be able to enter into practicing the presumed higher law (Smith 1890c).

In further discussions, the General Authorities wondered about additional action regarding the Manifesto. During general conference the first week of October 1890, this question was resolved by a telegram from Caine, who reported that the secretary of interior had informed him the official declaration would not be recognized until it was formally accepted in general conference (Caine 1890b). The next day one of the Church's most popular orators, Orson F. Whitney, addressed a huge throng at the Tabernacle. He prefaced his remarks by reading Joseph Smith's Articles of Faith. He probably gave special attention to the twelfth article, which states: "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law." After Whitney had read the text of the Manifesto, senior apostle Lorenzo Snow moved that it be accepted by the congregation. Though there was no recorded dissent, there was apparently little enthusiasm, and many showed disapproval by abstaining (Quinn 1985, 47–48).

Following the vote, President Woodruff and George Q. Cannon offered justifications for the declaration. Cannon recounted an instance when a Missouri mob had prevented the Saints from carrying out what they considered a divine injunction to build a temple at Jackson County. He then read what was accepted as a revelation to Joseph Smith relieving them of their charge and condemning those who prevented completion of the task. It was on the same basis, Cannon stated, that Woodruff felt justified in issuing the Manifesto. President Woodruff followed, reminding all that, given his age, he was not long for this world and soon expected to meet his predecessors and his God. Claiming the Manifesto had not been issued without earnest prayer, he testified that "for me to have taken a stand in anything which is not pleasing in the sight of God, or before the heavens, I would rather have gone out and been shot." Woodruff explained that it was not his purpose to "undertake to please the world," but with laws enforced and upheld by a nation of sixty-five million people, reality must prevail. "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. The Lord does not require at our hands things that we cannot do" (*Deseret Weekly News*, 18 Oct. 1890).

Throughout this time, the Church's leading opponents criticized the Manifesto. Utah Governor Arthur L. Thomas, in a 27 September 1890 interview in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, pointed out that the declaration "in no way asserts that polygamy is wrong or the law right." The 18 October *Deseret Weekly News* replied, "There is nothing in President Woodruff's declaration in regard to faith, or doctrine, or tenets, but it contains a volume in a few words as to practice." It was only with practices, not beliefs, that laws and governments were empowered to impose conformity. The *News* editor commented in disgust that the demands limiting beliefs carried concessions further than Church leaders had thought they would need to go.

That was the problem. Possibly some national government officials had indicated that something like the Manifesto would suffice, but it was now certain that territorial officials and their newspaper allies would not let the Saints off so easily. The hierarchy of the Church obviously did not intend to disrupt present polygamous marriages or renounce beliefs in plural marriage. But if they had possessed assurances that they had done all that was necessary, further requests for the government to clarify their present status would not have been so promptly forthcoming.[3]

Woodruff sent such an appeal to E. C. Foster of the U.S. Department of Justice less than a month after the Manifesto. After acknowledging Foster's previous letter, which had expressed concern for the humane treatment of those still imprisoned for unlawful cohabitation, Woodruff stated that his people would gladly avail themselves of any clemency the government saw fit to grant. He particularly hoped that a "better understanding would be reached as to the treatment that can be lawfully extended to the women who have entered into plural marriage and their offspring." He explained that some of his brethren's continued hesitation to make court promises to obey the law was because judges had construed unlawful cohabitation laws in such a manner that many felt promises to obey such laws would be "dishonorable in them, and would amount to an entire repudiation of past obligations" (Woodruff 1890). He gave an example of a man who had visited the home of a plural wife to see his sick child and had been sent to prison on unlawful cohabitation charges. Making his plea specific, Woodruff

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[3] Gordon Thomason argued twenty years ago in a DIALOGUE article entitled "The Manifesto Was a Victory!" that Church leaders had gained assurance of security and sanctity for existing plural marriages before they made their own concessions. In light of material present herein—particularly Woodruff's letter to E. C. Foster, this thesis is untenable.

said that "having acceded to the requirements of the law, it has seemed to us that a more lenient interpretation of what constituted unlawful cohabitation might now be rendered and enforced." After voicing confidence that action would be taken satisfactory to all concerned, he concluded, "The practice being now stopped, those who have innocently entered into this relation should not be made to suffer more than absolutely necessary."

This request for a more acceptable legal definition of unlawful cohabitation and clarification of the rights of plural wives and their children was not fulfilled. At the next general conference in early April 1891, George Q. Cannon described the continuing dilemma of women bound to their husbands with ties as sacred as if they were the only wife. He asked what should be done with them and expressed a continuing hope that the government would resolve the question. The Church leader then stated he thought this would occur when the proper officials became "convinced of our sincerity in issuing this Manifesto declaring that plural marriages should cease." He implied that those officials were not yet convinced, undoubtedly because of negative reports sent to the East by the press and territorial officials. He therefore admonished the Latter-day Saints to move one step closer to abandoning plural marriage. President Cannon recalled that he had testified to a president of the United States of his belief in plural marriage, a belief he asserted was embedded into his very being. Yet, he added, he had consented to obey the law. He appealed to each Latter-day Saint involved to seek spiritual guidance to reconcile this seeming contradiction with formerly held dogmas, encouraging all to "trust in our God for the results." Cannon then proclaimed, "I say now publicly that it is the intention of the Latter-day Saints to obey the law and leave the results with the God of Heaven" (*Deseret Weekly*, 11 April 1891).

The respected Church leader was close to asking husbands to avoid even the appearance of cohabitation with plural wives when he stressed that each must "accommodate himself to affairs so that we shall not create a feeling that will be a continuation of the antipathy manifested through the doctrine." Further enjoining the Saints to live so that the world could recognize their sincerity in the matter, Cannon candidly defined what the presidency now felt constrained to adopt as the Church's difficult compromise position regarding existing polygamous relationships. He explained, "We have made covenants it is true, but each man must arrange his affairs so that he would not violate those covenants, thereby bringing down the displeasure of God"; at the same time, he added pointedly, each man must also honor the law of the land (*Deseret Weekly News*, 11 April 1891).

Later in the year Woodruff appeared to go even further toward discouraging any form of cohabitation. By that time Church leaders

had been given some hope of recovering confiscated Church property if they could convince certain officials that it would never be used to help promulgate polygamy doctrines. The First Presidency therefore consented to appear in court before Master-in-Chancery Charles F. Loofbourow. In conferences with their attorneys prior to the court appearance, the General Authorities stipulated "that polygamy had ceased in good faith, and as to the course we will take if it is ever revealed anew, we cannot say, though there is no human probability of its restoration" (A. Cannon, 12 Oct. 1891). Although at that time non-Mormon counsel W. H. Dickson stated that law officers had no intention of preventing a man from providing for his family, his former law partner, U.S. attorney C. S. Varian, sought to elicit testimony to the contrary.

Placing Woodruff on the stand, Varian asked, "Do you understand that the Manifesto applies to the cohabitation of men and women in plural marriage where it already exists?" The witness replied he could not say for sure but thought that "the effect of it is so." Continuing, Woodruff stated that he did "not see how it can be otherwise," adding the prohibition of polygamy was intended to be universal, in foreign countries as well as the United States (*Deseret Weekly News* 24, 31 Oct. 1891). It was obvious from subsequent private discussions among the General Authorities that Woodruff was not satisfied with the impression he had conveyed; however, he could see no alternative to the testimony he had given. He said that if a man deserted or neglected his plural families he would likely be disfellowshipped from the Church. Clearly Church leaders continued to advocate the policy enunciated earlier in the year by George Q. Cannon (A. Cannon, 12 Nov. 1981).

Although change was not apparent for some time, the Manifesto did help elicit some alteration in federal government policy. In November 1890, United States Attorney General W. H. H. Miller informed James S. Clarkson that he had advised law enforcement officers in both Utah and Idaho to be "exceedingly careful not to do anything that may look like persecution" of the Mormons. This was not only a precautionary measure aimed at preventing misunderstandings while high government officials assessed the Mormon leaders' position, but since Miller also sent a copy of the letter to those same Church authorities, it was obviously an attempt to assure at least a measure of good faith or reciprocation. This was not an easy task for Miller, who had to beware of getting too far ahead of his much more hesitant friend, President Harrison. Late the following year, some Mormon polygamists, including Joseph F. Smith, began appealing to the president for amnesty for past offenses. However, Harrison's lack of enthusiasm for that cause dragged the process on until just before the end of his term early in 1893. By that time polygamous relationships were being kept

extremely circumspect, and prosecutions were markedly curtailed. An enabling act for Utah statehood would be passed midway through the following year.

Thus the tremendous pressures generated by heightened government activity aimed at eliminating Mormon plural marriages did in fact force at least statements of outward conformity to the law. The changes enunciated in the Woodruff Manifesto clearly aimed at relieving these tensions, and over a period of several years this goal was essentially accomplished. President Joseph F. Smith, who would continue to play the primary role in guiding the future Church position on plural marriage for the next several decades, summed up the intended purpose of the strategic announcement and the policy following immediately thereafter, when he stated late in 1891, "What the Lord requires is that we shall not bring upon ourselves the destruction intended by our enemies, by persisting in a course in opposition to the law" (Smith 1891). That was the fundamental purpose of the Woodruff Manifesto.

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