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## THE FACTIONS ON POLYGAMY AND SPIRITUAL WIFERY.

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The impression prevails with many that the factions into which the church divided after the death of Joseph and Hyrum Smith in 1844 did quite generally adopt the theory and practice of polygamy or some form of spiritual or celestial wifery.

Upon the supposition that this theory is correct it is reasoned, that the doctrine must have had a common source, hence it must have been taught or practiced, or both, prior to the death of Joseph Smith, as these factions had no fellowship or communion with each other afterwards. The strength of this reasoning is apparent, and if the premises are correct, then there is strong circumstantial evidence in favor of this doctrine having been introduced by Joseph Smith, whom they all recognized as a prophet of God. It is then both legitimate and highly proper to inquire into the premises of this argument, Did these rival factions as a rule adopt polygamy, or did they quite generally reject it?

If a general acceptance of the dogma of polygamy is evidence that the original church from which they sprang favored it, then a general rejection of the principle is evidence that the church in which they had their origin was opposed to it. We therefore submit some authentic records touching the attitude of these parties regarding the subject.

SIDNEY RIGDON.

The organization under Sidney Rigdon, who was one of the counselors of Joseph Smith, expressed itself in the following vigorous language, in the *Messenger and Advocate*, published by Sydney Rigdon at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, March 15, 1845:—

PREAMBLE AND RESOLUTIONS, OF THE CHURCH  
OF CHRIST.

Whereas, the connection which has heretofore existed between ourselves and the people calling themselves the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints renders it necessary that we publish to the world a succinct statement of facts relating to the position we now sustain to God and our fellow men; and

Whereas, in consequence of the rejection by that people, of what we undoubtedly deem to be the order of the church and kingdom of God, and the introduction of doctrines and practices clearly inimical to the law of God, and altogether subversive of the laws of the land, abrogating the marriage contract, and substituting under the professed sanction of Heaven, a system of extreme licentiousness, uprooting every legal restraint, and eminently calculated in its very nature to produce the entire destruction of every virtuous tie, and pouring contempt upon every holy principle contained in the revelations of God to his creature man, and must inevitably entail upon that people abject wretchedness and woe, subjecting them to the righteous condemnation of every virtuous intelligence, whether in heaven or on earth; and

Whereas, the better to conceal the justly odious system of polygamy, duplicity, hypocrisy, and falsehood are inculcated as virtues, the most sacred obligations constantly violated, and families and individuals plunged into irrevocable ruin and despair; therefore

Resolved, that we hold no fellowship with the people calling themselves the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and can have no communion with them, unless they repent and obey the principles of righteousness and truth.

Resolved, that we maintain the truth and the truth only, at all hazards, renouncing at once and forever, the unsanctifying dogma that it is sometimes lawful to lie.

Resolved, that our subjection to the law of God impels us to yield implicit obedience to the law of the land,

Resolved, that we maintain and do earnestly contend for the faith which was once, and is again, delivered to the saints, contained in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Book of Covenants.

Resolved, that we feel it a solemn and imperative obligation we owe to God and our fellow men to disseminate to the extent of our ability, correct information regarding certain pernicious doctrines and practices which are secretly taught by the leaders and many of the members of the society called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; verily believing them demoralizing and destructive, combining all the worst features of barbarism, and containing all the elements of the wildest anarchy, and would if unchecked by the power of truth, ultimately extinguish the species.  
—*Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 1, p. 176.

#### JAMES J. STRANG.

Though Mr. Strang did teach and practice polygamy years afterward, it is evident that he did not so do before 1848.

It was not claimed by him, nor is it claimed by his adherents, that he received this doctrine from Joseph Smith or from the church at Nauvoo; but from the Book of the Law which Mr. Strang claimed to have translated from plates by himself found in the earth. This also appears from the following quotations, all of

which are taken from publications issued by authority of Mr. Strang and his organization.

At a conference held by them at Kirtland, Ohio, August 7-10, 1846, they adopted the following:—

Resolved unanimously. That we utterly disclaim the whole system of polygamy known as the spiritual wife system lately set up in Nauvoo, by the apostates who claim the authority there, and will neither practice such things nor hold any fellowship with those that teach or practice such things.—*Voree Herald*, September, 1846.

This was confirmed at a General Conference held at Voree, Wisconsin, October 6-19, as the following will show:—

The proceedings of the special conference, at Kirtland, of August 6, 7, 8, and 9, were presented by President Strang.

On motion of General Bennett, resolved unanimously, that this General Conference cordially approve of the reorganization of the stake of Kirtland, and of the proceedings of its special conference.—*Voree Herald*, October, 1846.

In *Zion's Reveille* for July 22, 1847, is an article from the pen of the editor, James J. Strang, entitled, "Polygamy not Possible in a Free Government."

In the same publication for August 5, 1847, there is an article from the pen of John E. Page, one of the Twelve Apostles at the time of Joseph Smith's death, from which we extract the following:—

TO THE SAINTS; *Greeting:—*

Our eyes and ears are sometimes saluted with communications from abroad that there are persons who profess to be adherents to President J. J. Strang, who are privately teaching and some practicing what is called the "western camp doctrine,"

or, in other words, "*spiritual* wifery" or polygamy. We also hear that there are some persons who do President Strang the injustice to say that he justifies the principle above stated.

This is to say emphatically, and we mean just what we say, and if our course in the future does not prove us true in this matter then let that execration rest on us that is due to such a course of conduct, that we believe ourself to be as much ingratiated into the confidence of President Strang as any other man. (This we say without egotism, merely to discharge a moral duty.)

We have talked hours, yea, even days with President Strang on the subject of the temporal and moral condition and character of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and we find to our utmost satisfaction that he does not believe in or cherish the doctrine of polygamy in any manner, shape, or form imaginable whatever.—Vol. 2, p. 83.

The same publication for August 12, 1847, contains a card from James J. Strang relating to the above, reading as follows:—

Elder John E. Page has referred me to an article in No. 20 addressed "To the Saints; Greeting." In the remarks he has there made he has justly and truly represented my sentiments. I am only astonished that it should be necessary to state them at all. Within three years I have, in the work of the ministry, traveled over sixteen thousand miles, visited all the States north of the Carolinas but three, most of them several times, preached to large congregations in all the principal cities and in most of the large branches in the country. And I have uniformly and most distinctly discarded and declared heretical the so-called "*spiritual wife system*" and everything connected therewith. It is a well-known fact that several men of talent and influence have separated from me and from the Church of God, merely because I would not in any manner countenance such a doctrine. One of them,

Reuben Miller, has, in a pamphlet extensively circulated, given as a reason for separating from the church and becoming a Brighamite that I did not believe in the "spiritual wife system." I have recently refused to ordain a man to a high and responsible office, although a warm personal friend, and after he had been sustained by the unanimous vote of a General Conference, for no other reason than that it was discovered that he believed in "spiritual wifery." I now say distinctly, and I defy contradiction, that the man or woman does not exist on earth or under the earth who ever heard me say one word, or saw me do one act, savoring in the least of *spiritual wifery*, or any of the attending abominations. My opinions on this subject are unchanged, and I regard them as unchangeable. They are established on a full consideration of ALL the Scriptures, both ancient and modern, and the discipline of the church SHALL conform thereto. But I do not profess to be *omniscient*, and if any are found in this fault, not in my presence, it is necessary that those who know the facts present them to the proper council and attend to it. If, like many I know of, when a brother finds others in this sin he renounces the prophet and denies the faith, or like others STANDS STILL, HIS damnation is sure. I know little difference between the heresy in the one case or the other.

JAMES J. STRANG,

President of the Church.

VOREE, August 6, 1847.

—Vol. 2, p. 88.

The October conference minutes for 1847 contain the following entries:—

James M. Adams, apostle, excommunicated for apostasy and believing the spiritual wife system. Delivered over to the buffetings of Satan till he repent. And the whole congregation lifted their hands against him.

Benjamin C. Ellsworth, excommunicated for teaching and practicing the spiritual wife system.

Delivered over to the buffetings of Satan till the day of the Lord. And the whole congregation lifted their hands against him.—*Gospel Herald*, Oct. 14, 1847, vol. 2, p. 122.

On December 23, 1847, J. W. Crane was tried before the First Presidency, J. J. Strang being present, and convicted under nine counts, the third being:—

Heresy; teaching that it is right to plunder unbelievers; three witnesses. Teaching that saints may have other women than one wife; five witnesses.—*Gospel Herald*, vol. 2, p. 192.

These extracts show conclusively that whatever Strang may have subsequently taught on this subject, he did not receive the doctrine until more than three and a half years after the death of Joseph Smith.

In addition to the above we quote from a letter of Charles J. Strang, son of J. J. Strang, under date of July 18, 1882:—

In 1846, at Voree, Strang pronounced a curse upon certain ministers, a portion of which I here quote: "As for those who, as gospel ministers, have assumed to teach such damning, soul-destroying doctrines (that deceit, fraud, lying, perjury, plundering unbelievers, polygamy, fornication, and adultery are required by the command of God in the upbuilding of his kingdom) in the name of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, may their bones rot in the living tomb of their flesh; may their flesh generate from its own corruptions a loathsome life for others; may their blood swarm a leprous life of motelike ghastly corruption, feeding on flowing life, generating chilling agues and burning fevers. . . . And I prayed unto God, saying, Oh, God, curse them not, and let me not raise my voice against my fellows! But he said, *Curse, curse, curse!* I will altogether curse, until they return to me, for they have perverted my law and deceived my serv-

ants; unto the Destroyer shalt thou deliver them, for their prayer is sin."

CHARLES B. THOMPSON.

Charles B. Thompson claimed to be the Baneemy spoken of in Doctrine and Covenants 102:8. He located at Preparation, Monona County, Iowa. He placed himself upon record, by presenting the following as revelation from God to him:—

And, behold, polygamy, or a plurality of wives, is an abomination before me, and is forever forbidden, in this my Holy Presbytery of Zion, saith the Lord Jehovah.—The Law and Covenants of Israel, pp. 184, 185.

J. C. BREWSTER.

The organization under Hazen Aldrich and J. C. Brewster, usually called Brewsterites, which operated at Kirtland, Ohio, and Springfield, Illinois, from 1848 and after, and some of whom emigrated in 1850 to New Mexico or California, were equally emphatic on this point.

In an article against polygamy by J. Goodale, one of their Presidency, on July 29, 1849, occurs the following:—

The above is sufficient to silence every one that would dare to teach the doctrine of polygamy and at the same time pretend to believe in the Book of Mormon. And I believe that there is not one of the different and conflicting parties into which the church is divided, that teach or believe the doctrine of polygamy, except that which has gone west under the guidance of Brigham Young; and yet they are accusing all of being apostates that cannot and will not follow their teaching in all things.—*Olive Branch*, vol. 2, p. 20.

WILLIAM BICKERTON.

The declaration of the company or organization under William Bickerton was no less emphatic upon this point. Here is their declaration found in their articles of faith published in a pamphlet issued by them called the *Ensign*, page 20:—

We believe that a man shall have but one wife, and concubines he shall have none; for I, the Lord God, delighteth in the chastity of women, and whoredoms are an abomination before me: thus saith the Lord of hosts. Again in the second chapter of Malachi, verse 15: "And did he not make one? Yet had he the residue of the Spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth."

So far as we have learned, polygamy and spiritual wifery were confined for at least three years after the death of Joseph Smith unto such organizations as were controlled or influenced by members of the Quorum of Twelve. The logical inference therefore is that if there existed a common school where these theories were inculcated, that school must have been in the Quorum of the Twelve over which Brigham Young presided.

This inference too is made stronger when we consider a statement made by Brigham Young, on June 21, 1874, as reported in his organ, the *Deseret News* of July 1 of that year. While speaking on this doctrine he said:—

While we were in England (in 1839 and 40), I think, the Lord manifested to me by vision and his Spirit things that I did not then understand. I never opened my mouth to anyone concerning them, until I returned to Nauvoo; Joseph had

never mentioned this; there had never been a thought of it in the church that I ever knew anything about at that time; but I had this for myself, and I kept it to myself.—*The Messenger*, vol. 1, p. 29.

It is only necessary to say in conclusion that when Elder Young in August, 1852, desired the church to approve of the revelation authorizing polygamy, he gave it a date nine years previous to its presentation, and connected Joseph Smith's name with it. He well knew that the name of Joseph Smith was revered and honored by the people, and anything presented in his name would be more likely to be approved than if coming in his own name.

It is also quite significant that the witnesses by which Joseph Smith's complicity with the doctrine is sought to be established, have in a large majority of instances been themselves implicated in the practice before testifying.

We have presented these historical truths with but little comment, leaving the readers to form their own conclusions. Our position, however, is, as often before stated; viz.: The paramount and vital question is not, "Who practiced polygamy, but it is this: *Is it right?*"

We have hitherto answered in the negative, and the more we investigate the more are we confirmed in our verdict.

LAMONI, Iowa, February 21, 1900.