

BISHOP R. C. EVANS

VERSUS

MR. R. C. EVANS



BY T. W. WILLIAMS

BISHOP R. C. EVANS VERSUS MR. R. C. EVANS.

During the late General Conference of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, held at Independence, Missouri, April 6, 1918, certain matters were presented to the joint council comprising the leading church representatives which necessitated an investigation of the affairs of the local church at Toronto, Canada. The investigation involved the work and ministry of Bishop R. C. Evans.

As a result a committee comprising President of the Church Frederick M. Smith, Presiding Bishop Benjamin R. McGuire, and Apostle John W. Rushton, was directed to proceed to Toronto to investigate and make such disposition of the case as the committee might elect in harmony with the laws and usages of the church.

These men were proceeding with their investigation in a manly, Christianlike manner when Mr. Evans suddenly resigned his ministry and membership in the church, since which time he has made vicious and unjustifiable attacks on the church and her leading representatives. We herewith present some interesting sidelights to this unusual occurrence.

There is no man in Canada or the United States who has made a more unequivocal defense of the life and character of Joseph Smith, the Seer, and his son

Joseph, the late President of the Church, than has R. C. Evans.

In books, pamphlets, and sermons, on the rostrum and in the pulpit, in public and private, Mr. Evans has fearlessly maintained that both of these men were true servants of Jesus Christ and that God blessed and honored their ministry. He has, with characteristic boldness, affirmed that they were men of pure character and exalted purpose. He has defended Joseph the Seer against the false calumny and malicious charge that he was either responsible for, or implicated in, the teaching or practice of spiritual wifery or polygamy. No man has ever spoken in higher terms of the late President Joseph Smith than he. His present attitude is therefore anomalous, to say the least.

No valid proof, neither testimony direct nor circumstantial, has ever been adduced which would implicate Joseph Smith the Seer either in the introduction or practice of polygamy.

On this point let me present the statements made by Mr. Evans himself when he was a minister of the church. The following is taken from a pamphlet entitled, "Evans versus McKenzie," being a correspondence between Mr. Evans and the Reverend Mr. McKenzie. This letter is dated February 23, 1917:

"Those who knew and loved Joseph Smith, that is, his wife, his three sons, and many thousands of his people, urge that he was innocent of the charge. There is not a single word in all the sermons, lec-

tures, editorials, books, or other literature published during the lifetime of Joseph Smith wherein he, by a single word, indorsed the doctrine of polygamy. Eight years after his death, long after Brigham Young had departed from the faith, organized a new church, different in faith, hope, and doctrine from the true Latter Day Saints Church, far away in Utah, Brigham Young presented a paper to his people which he claimed Joseph Smith had given on the subject of polygamy. When challenged to produce the original paper he said Emma Smith, Joseph's wife, had burned it. Now, sir, Mrs. Smith lived to be an old woman, loved and respected by all who knew her, and she claimed all through her life to the day of her death that she had never seen or heard of that paper; that she did not burn it; that her husband never had any wife but herself.

“You choose to reject all the public sermons, all the books and other literature given to the world by Joseph Smith, turn down the testimony of his wife, his children, and thousands of his followers, and accept the word of Brigham Young and those who with him wallow in the cesspit of polygamy. Yes; you prefer to take the word of Brigham Young and his kind. Well, I have heard that ‘A man is known by the company he keeps.’ You are welcome to the inference. I prefer to take the word of Joseph Smith, his wife, his children, and thousands of good men and women. You may continue to take the word of Brigham Young.”

On June 3, 1918, Mr. Evans stepped out of the church, since which time he has gone over to the side of Mr. McKenzie in his effort to assail the memory of Joseph Smith the Seer as well as that of his son. *"A man is known by the company he keeps."*

In his sermon entitled "Polygamy," which is found in his book of sermons, Mr. Evans states:

"Polygamy was never acknowledged nor taught nor practiced during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, by his consent, nor by the consent of the church."—Page 324.

"If it was done secretly or practiced privately by some individual of the church, then the church should not be held responsible for that, any more than the church is held responsible today when some of its members commit murder or rob a bank."—Page 324.

Mr. Evans then proceeds to present the testimony of a number of witnesses to prove that Joseph Smith was not the author of polygamy in the church. He gives the statement of Brigham Young to the effect that he (Young) was responsible for the doctrine, as follows: "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 kept it to myself."—Messenger, vol. 1, p. 29.—Page 326.

Mr. Evans shows from the testimony of a number of witnesses of the Utah Mormon Church that polygamy was not introduced until after Brigham

Young had apostatized and led his followers to Utah. He quotes George Q. Cannon who said:

“Joseph and Hyrum Smith were slain in Carthage goal [jail], and hundreds of persons were persecuted to death previous to the church having any knowledge of this doctrine.”—Journal of Discourses, vol. 14, pp. 165, 166.—Page 325.

He gives the statement of H. B. Clawson, a son-in-law of Brigham Young, to the effect that “Polygamy, at that time (that is, at the time of Joseph Smith’s death) was not known among those of the Mormon faith. The doctrine of polygamy was not promulgated until they got to Salt Lake; not, in fact, until some little time after they arrived there. (Salt Lake Herald, 1882.)”—Page 325.

Mr. Evans presents in this sermon the statement of Brigham Young given in an interview with Senator Trumbull in 1869 to the effect that,

“It (polygamy) was adopted by us as a necessity after we came here.”—Page 325.

“Polygamy was not practiced by the Mormons prior to, and at the time of, the execution of Joseph Smith.—Ephraim Jensen, a leading Utah Mormon.”—Page 325.

Statement of Elder Whitaker:

“‘Go back to the founding of our church, April 6, 1830. There was no polygamy practiced or taught in Mormon literature until five years after that band of persecuted saints reached Utah.’—New York Herald, January 8, 1900.”—Page 325.

Please remember that all these are witnesses used by Mr. Evans. In referring to Mrs. Emma Smith and her testimony, Mr. Evans states:

“Emma Smith lived to be an old woman. When she died she was loved and honored by thousands. Her house was surrounded, her gardens were dotted with people, who came for miles to weep at her funeral. If every person for whom she had done good was to drop one tear upon her grave, it would be thoroughly immersed in the waters of sorrow. There is not a man or woman living on record outside of Utah Mormonism but what will say that she was a woman of the highest and noblest character.

“On the other hand, you have the vile polygamist and criminal, Brigham Young. There is such a thing as gregariousness. In other words, ‘Birds of a feather flock together.’ If you want to stand by Brigham Young as against Emma Smith, you can do it. I would not. . . . There is not a sermon, book or pamphlet printed in the lifetime of Joseph Smith, under his instructions, that can be produced to show that he ever taught, practiced, or sanctioned polygamy.”—Pages 327, 328.

Suppose we say he (Joseph Smith) did teach, practice, or sanction polygamy privately, but the church did not know it. If he did, the church should not be to blame for that. Again, if Joseph Smith secretly taught or practiced polygamy, he did it contrary to all public revelations. He did it in direct conflict with the Book of Covenants, with the Book of

Mormon and with the Inspired Translation of the Bible.—Page 328.

Let it be said here, without the slightest fear of honorable controversy, that Mr. Evans has no additional evidence in his possession at this time but was available to him at the time this sermon was delivered.

Yet since his withdrawal Mr. Evans, in a lecture delivered at Broadway Hall, Toronto, Canada, on Sunday evening, June 9, 1918, stated:

“Joseph Smith [the Seer] dominated the church until the people were done out of thousands of dollars. Manhood, virtue, and morality were sacrificed by him.

“Young Joseph took his father’s place. Unfortunately he told so much about his father that the church did not want it. A book was published with much of an unpleasant character in it.

“Finally, Attorney Kelley got hold of the books and destroyed them. He told Young Joseph, ‘The witnesses are all dead; all we have to do is to deny it.’ Everyone of them have been destroyed; plates, type, and copy was all destroyed. Finally, I found one of these old books in New York. It opened my eyes and strengthened my suspicions. Later, in the States, I met a person who had paid one hundred and fifty dollars for a volume of this book. It confirmed the villainy of Joseph Smith [the Seer]. When the evidence is placed in my hands, should I continue to cover up or be an honest man? Joseph’s [the late

President's] policy was to cover it up. Don't disturb it."—Stenographic report.

At the Sunday morning service delivered in the same hall Mr. Evans stated:

"God called Joseph Smith, but just how long after that call he began to sink into unspeakable iniquity I cannot tell. I do not know just when it occurred. I know before we get through we will find many things we have believed, are untrue. The evidence come to me we have been mistaken in his conduct. I know one man who picked up an old book out of publication, paid one hundred and fifty dollars for it and, thank God, that was not the only one. I have that book that wakened me up to a realization that we had been deceived on many things.

"I found a book published when Ed Kelley was supreme lawyer of the church, with the confession that Joseph Smith made concerning the church with regard to spiritual wifery and polygamy. He destroyed the type, bought up all the books they could buy, but I bought one. These are some of the reasons why the angel commanded me [to withdraw from the Reorganized Church.—T. W. W.] for the leaders were leading the people astray."—Stenographic report.

Mr. Evans, in justification of his present position, states that he has only recently come into the possession of "a book" which was published by the Reorganized Church and which contained damning admissions made by the late Joseph Smith, implicating

his father; that E. L. Kelley had these books suppressed, and that the late Joseph Smith acquiesced, as his "policy was to cover it up. Don't disturb it." This mysterious book to which Mr. Evans has recourse is none other than the *Life of Joseph the Prophet*, by Edward W. Tullidge. He also makes reference to the first volume of *Saints' Herald*, which contains a statement made by William Marks and which has been quoted by Mr. Evans in his book of Sermons. (See page 326.) The statement from Marks shows that Joseph Smith opposed polygamy.

This Tullidge book was published in 1880. It received quite a circulation. Subsequently, when the general church elected a church historian and began the publication of an accredited history of the church, there was no demand for this other book, therefore it went out of circulation. The book was not suppressed. Books in circulation were not called in or destroyed. Mr. Evans has had access to this book ever since its publication. He has shown this same book to members of the church as much as seven years ago. This book may be found in the private libraries of many of the ministers and members, also in the general library of the church.

The position taken by the late Joseph Smith has been that he had no knowledge of his father's complicity in the teaching or practice of polygamy, nor had there been sufficient proof adduced to implicate his father, though he had searched diligently in every possible quarter to discover same. He also

said that even if his father should be proved guilty it was equally wrong in his father as in any other man.

There never has been any book, published by the Reorganized Church, which fastens the guilt of either the introduction or practice of spiritual wifery or polygamy on Joseph Smith.

There is no book containing any statement from the late Joseph Smith upon which any such a charge can be predicated. E. L. Kelley is not guilty of the charge made against him.

We now present a matter which will prove interesting reading. We commend same to the prayerful consideration of Mr. Evans.

On December 13, 1914, the Toronto Branch of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints held a memorial service in commemoration of the late Joseph Smith. Frank Gray, who was then branch correspondent, reported the affair. The same was published in the *Saints' Herald*, December 30, 1914, vol. 61, no. 52. Mr. Gray said:

"A remarkable incident took place during this service which is worthy of note. The same hymns were sung as sung at the funeral services of the prophet, and as the quartet was singing that song written by Joseph, 'Lights on the other shore,' Brother Evans was wrapped in vision. A number of brethren noticed he was in the Spirit; among whom was Brother Pement of Chicago, who passed a note directly afterwards, asking him what he saw. There were two Utah Mormon elders in the congregation, and during the latter part of the service Brother

Evans made some magnificent points to show how the church stood in regard to the teaching of Joseph the Seer, and our Joseph, relative to the polygamy question, and under the Spirit he again buried Utahism deeper than ever, resulting in the following vision as he resumed his chair, which I requested him to write for me for the benefit of the Saints at large."

Before recounting this vision it is pertinent to remark the foregoing quotations from the sermon of Bishop Evans in which he outlines the position taken on this occasion. He also recounted a little incident in the life of Joseph Smith where one morning he spoke rather harshly to his wife Emma with the consequent result that he could not proceed with the translation of the Book of Mormon. He returned later and asked his wife's forgiveness. The matter had been so trivial that Emma had forgotten all about it. Mr. Evans remarked that a man who had such a tender regard for his wife never could have been the author of polygamy.

In his speech just before he saw this vision, referred to by Brother Gray, Mr. Evans exonerated Joseph the Seer, eulogizing his son Joseph, and outlined the general position of the church. Now to the vision:

"Elder Frank Gray: According to promise, I write for you the vision. Last Sunday afternoon while the quartet was singing, a song composed by Joseph entitled, 'Lights on the other shore,' I was wrapped in glory. The church passed away and I found myself

in a most gorgeous park or garden with majestic trees, pretty flowers, verdant slopes, and murmuring waters. While gazing with delight upon nature in all her wealth of beauty, I beheld six persons walking towards a magnificent fountain of water. I was given to know them, and with great joy in my soul I watched them as they approached the marble circle that surrounded the base of the fountain. The persons whom I recognized were Jesus, Joseph the Seer, Hyrum Smith, our Joseph, Alexander, and David. The Master was speaking and the brethren were listening with great attention as they neared the fountain. Our Joseph recognized me; he waved his hand and smiled very sweetly.

“Having arrived at the base of the fountain they stood there, when, all of a sudden the Master turned toward me, and walking four steps away from the brethren, he lifted his hand and looking at me, spoke my poor name, in a gentle but firm tone of voice saying, ‘Richard you are justified in taking the position that the principle of polygamy is an abomination in my sight.’ I watched them for a moment as they stood by the fountain of water, when the vision closed, and I found myself bathed in tears, seated behind the pulpit, surrounded by Saints.

“Perhaps I had better say to you that none of the six persons looked to be more than thirty years of age. Our Joseph and Alexander, whom I knew in life to be men weighing more than two hundred pounds, were not nearly so fleshy as when in the

flesh; they appeared as young men, strong and beautiful, in the full vigor of manhood, as did the others.

“My whole being was charmed and filled with joy when our Joseph, looking at me, smiled and waved his hand. When I saw him last he was looking worn, weary, decrepit and feeble, suffering, as he said, ‘R. C., please do not pray that I recover; I am so tired I want to go to rest’; and now to see him young, strong, and smiling, in the company of the Master whom he served so faithfully, strolling along mid flowers of perpetual bloom, gazing with pleasure on the sparkling waters gushing from the majestic fountain, enjoying the society of his father, uncle, and his two brothers, I was glad beyond expression. May the Lord give us each strength to wage a faithful warfare, so that when the struggle here is over, we, too, may be permitted to bask mid the sunbeams of celestial splendor in the presence of Jesus and those who have kept the faith, is my prayer.—R. C.”

At the time this vision was seen by Mr. Evans he had just completed a brilliant defense of Joseph the Seer and of his son, whose memorial service was even then being observed; he had outlined the position of the church on polygamy and denounced the doctrine. As confirmation to him that his position was correct, God gave him this vision.

From the above we gather: These men were with Jesus. They were enjoying his presence; they had

"kept the faith"; they had "waged a faithful warfare"; they were permitted to "bask 'mid the sunbeams of celestial splendors' in the presence of Jesus and those who have kept the faith."

What say you, dear reader, as to Mr. Evans's present attitude? Did Mr. Evans really see this vision? If he did, then his position today is all wrong. If he did not see the vision then his testimony is unreliable in every particular. This man is condemned out of his own mouth.

Mr. Evans has slandered the memory of the best friend he ever had in the world,—the late Joseph Smith. He has accused him of dishonesty, of knowingly covering up crime. He has sought to steep him in the "cesspit" of polygamy.

In his recent book entitled, "Songs, Poems, Notes and Correspondence of Bishop R. C. Evans," Mr. Evans recounts the tender solicitude of Joseph who, when Mr. Evans was seasick en route to Europe to the effect that on "the first night out, Brother Joseph took my shoes off and helped me into bed, and in every way possible ministered to my needs. He was kindness personified during the entire trip."—Page 157.

Again, "President Smith has been like a father to me, and in a thousand ways has endeared himself to me by ties that are stronger than death."—Page 158.

And what is Mr. Evans's return for all this kindness? When his friend is dead and can make no de-

fense, he cruelly assails his honor and accuses him of covering up crime! For an exemplification of ingratitude I refer you to Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans was in his right mind when he offered the following tribute to the memory of Joseph Smith:

“He came to the church when it was under the ban of suspicion. He has championed the cause amid the gloom of misunderstanding; he has stood in the front of the ranks mid the roar of battle. He has championed the cause for fifty years; he has been in all those years an example worthy of imitation, kind and gentle, just and generous, good and honorable. Even those who eloquently misrepresented the cause he loved dearer than his life have frequently spoken in the highest and most glowing terms of the man, forgetting that he was really the product of the latter-day glory, the output of the angel’s message; but if his character was unapproachable by way of conduct, it was because that character was formed under the principles of the latter-day work.”—Page 160.

“If ever the divine paradox of saintly power in frail humanity was exemplified, it has been in him,—gentle, yet forceful, loving yet determined, bold yet cautious, mindful of many interests yet responsible alone to God. Like a guardian angel he has stood mid stormy scenes in defense of the weak, the friendless, and deserted. He has ever been the defender of the downtrodden and oppressed. He has thrown him-

self in the thickest of the battle to protect those who have been misunderstood in the hour of their adversity.

“I have gazed upon him when merciless and cruel criticism was hurled against him from where it should never have been expected. There he stood, dignity and pity shining from his tear-stained face, till instinctively my mind reverted to the Master of men, and in soliloquy I have said, There is the most perfect representative of the Manger-cradled King.”
—Page 155.

Reader, do you think a man possessing a character as described above would be guilty of deceiving the membership of an entire church and acquiesce in the suppression of facts which might undeceive these people? The above testimonial was written after Mr. Smith had gone to his account. His character did not change. Who has changed? Let Mr. Evans answer. I can pity a man who, in the burst of anger, misrepresents the living. There is no excuse for the man who so far forgets the relation of “friend” and “companion” as to unjustly assail the dead.

Mr. Evans charges that Frederick M. Smith is an “autocrat” a “base hypocrite and debauchee.” But these charges lack definiteness, and there is a notable absence of a single concrete instance or specific fact cited.

Mr. Evans was in attendance at the General Conference of the church which convened at Lamoni,

Iowa, Tuesday, April 6, 1915. It was at this conference that Frederick M. Smith was chosen as President of the Church. Several of the leading men of the church gave expression to their appreciation of, and confidence in the man. Mr. Evans was among the number. He said:

“Mr. Chairman, Brothers and Sisters: It is with profound pleasure and I deem it a duty to speak upon this occasion. As many of you know, by the revelations of the Almighty, I was closely associated with Frederick Madison Smith as counselor in the First Presidency under his father. For years we served together in this capacity. I have sat with him not only as presiding officer at the conferences, but in the high councils of the church when cases of grave importance were being heard by us. I have been with him in almost every condition of life, those of pleasure and of hard work, and I have found him to be a careful, fair, honorable, Christian brother—modest and yet firm; sympathetic and yet just; tender and yet true to his convictions of that which is right. When in examination of cases before the High Council I have known him to study deeply in profound silence for a long time before he would pass one word of judgment.

“I feel that God has called him to this high and honorable position, and knowing the man as I do, both in boyhood and manhood, before he held the priesthood and since, I feel that the church is and should be happy in the selection God has made as

his servant and our President in the person of Frederick Madison Smith.”—Conference Minutes, 1915, p. 2054.

To show that this expression of confidence and good will was continued I herewith present copy of a Christmas telegram which Mr. Evans sent to Mr. Smith on December 24, 1917. This telegram was delivered to Mr. Smith's office in Independence, Missouri, by the telegraph company and forwarded by mail to El Paso, Texas, where Mr. Smith was then.

HOLIDAY GREETING.

Western Union Telegram.

“Toronto, Ontario, 24.

“President Fred Smith,

“Independence, Missouri.

“May God's first Christmas light illumine thy soul. May his matchless love radiate thy heart. May he impart to thee spiritual understanding as the chief custodian of his work, regulator of his will. May you stand triumphant as the most prominent representative of his church on earth.

“The same, R. C. Evans.

“4:14 p. m., December 25, 1917.”

What becomes of Mr. Evans's charges of autocracy, of hypocrisy and debauchery? Mr. Evans made these statements voluntarily. Now, when his official acts are under investigation and it is clearly evident that he must answer therefor to the responsible officials and judicial bodies of the church, he, rather than meet this investigation, resigns his position as

bishop of the Toronto District, relinquishes his membership in the church, and institutes a campaign of vilification and abuse.

Mr. Evans's commendation of Frederick M. Smith as late as Christmas Day, 1917, precludes any side-stepping. His present position is inconsistent and defenseless.

His eulogy of Joseph Smith the Seer was given under the influence of the Spirit of God. In confirmation thereof he beholds a vision which portrays Joseph Smith, his brother Hyrum, and his three sons, Joseph, Alexander, and David associated with Jesus Christ; and Jesus, speaking to Mr. Evans, confirms the position which he had taken concerning the life and work of this man.

Mr. Evans's puerile attacks on his own ministry and the lives and works of the servants of God will be as impotent as the attacks of his opponents during the passing years of his successful career in the church. His testimonials in commemoration of the virtue and manliness of the late President Joseph Smith preclude renunciation now. His personal assaults on President Frederick M. Smith but show the extremity to which a man will go who does not wish to face the consequences of his own official record.

We cannot contemplate the condition of Mr. Evans without experiencing inexpressible sadness and pity; pity because he has the potential qualities for doing great good among men; sadness, in that he has

thrown discretion to the wind and, in desperation, seeks to overthrow the work of a lifetime. Thank God that the work which he upheld in righteousness will stand despite his present attitude! May God be merciful to him!

As a fitting tribute to the character of President Fredrick M. Smith we append the address of Congressman W. P. Borland.

With love for all and malice toward none,

Yours only for the truth,

Thomas W. Williams.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, July 10, 1918.

Statement of Congressman W. P. Borland.

“Mr. President, my friends, ladies and gentlemen:

“I esteem it a great honor to be called upon to occupy even a few minutes of the time of this important deliberation as your guest today. My own heart is with our soldier boys in the field; my work at home, and in Washington, has but one aim today and that is the perpetuation of our American institutions and the victory to our boys who have gone so gallantly forth to offer their lives upon the altar of our country.

“I know that in whatever assemblage we find ourselves, particularly in a religious assembly, the subject of ‘Our Boys’ is very close to our hearts; it is close to my heart. I am very glad to see this numerous assemblage here in the capital city of our

county, in the capital city of our congressional district. I have had the pleasure on frequent occasions of working with your distinguished President, Reverend Frederick M. Smith. I regard it, my friends, as a privilege to say to you that no man stands higher in my estimation for a clear cut, transparent, manly character, a man of influence in the community, and in the Nation, than Frederick M. Smith, of Jackson County, Missouri.

“Whatever I have had the honor to receive in the way of communications from him, has had my unbounded, complete, and perfect confidence in its reliability and in the fact that it represented the highest type of citizenship and moral attainment in the community. I am glad to find that he represents an element which is aggressive for the good of mankind; he is always on the moral side, on the betterment side of every proposition. He has always felt free to consult with me upon any question of public importance; I have found that his sympathies are broad; they are nation wide and worldwide; they extend to our colonial and insular possessions; they have always touched with a healing hand in every enterprise in which they have engaged. I want to renew to him and to you my feelings of the deepest sympathy and cooperation, and tender to you upon every occasion my own services along lines which I know, in advance, will be for the betterment of humanity.

I want to say to you that I shall in the future, as

in the past, take it as a matter of honor and privilege to work in the same harness, side by side, with such distinguished leaders as preside over you today, for the great betterment not only of my own district, for we are not narrow in our sympathies, but for the better interests of the United States of America, and for the colonial possessions which have come under our charge, and for the world which looks to us, today, for the leadership of humanity. I thank you.