



# FAITH OF OUR FATHERS LIVING STILL

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SPEAKING FOR

THE REORGANIZED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS  
INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

## THE TEMPLE

KIRTLAND, OHIO

The celebrated, beautiful Temple, pictured on the cover, is a memorial to the faith and labor of the founders of the original church, who removed westward from its location in Ohio, making thousands of converts in the 1830's and on. They built well spiritually and materially, and their work endures.

The building is located at Kirtland, near Willoughby, Ohio, eighteen miles east of the city of Cleveland. It is owned by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, legal successor to the work begun by Joseph Smith and others in 1830. Thousands of people visit it every year because of its historical significance and its architectural beauty.

# Faith of Our Fathers Living Still

By ELBERT A. SMITH

This pamphlet embodies the substance of an address delivered before the congregation of the First Methodist Church in one of the midwestern cities of the United States of America. Each Wednesday evening during a certain autumn this congregation, under the liberal leadership of their pastor, listened to a representative of some one of the Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish churches. By their courtesy I was invited to meet with them, and outline to them the history and beliefs of our people. The reception given was very warm and gracious and the response very satisfactory, there being present that evening a number of ministers of other denominations and members from a number of other churches. The address was first published in the *Saints' Herald* under the title, "An Address to Inquiring Nonmembers." It is here reproduced under a different title in the hope that it may help open-minded and fair-minded inquirers after truth to a better understanding of our divinely inspired message.

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THE HERALD PUBLISHING HOUSE  
Independence, Missouri



From an oil painting by Maude Guinand.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH, APRIL 6, 1830

*"The rise of the Church of Christ in these last days . . . it being regularly organized and established agreeably to the laws of our country, by the will and commandments of God . . . which commandments were given to Joseph Smith, Jr., who was called of God and ordained an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the first elder of this church; and to Oliver Cowdery, who was also called of God an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the second elder of this church . . . according to the grace of our Lord and Savior . . . to whom be all glory both now and forever. Amen."—Book of Doctrine and Covenants, 17: 1.*

*"We still continued to bear testimony . . . and also made known to our brethren that we had received commandment to organize the church, and accordingly we met together for that purpose . . . (being six in number). Thursday, the sixth day of April, A. D. one thousand eight hundred and thirty."—Joseph Smith.*

## Faith of Our Fathers Living Still

THE THING THAT YOU people are doing seems to me to be very fine. It indicates a freedom from religious intolerance that is rather unusual and very refreshing. It indicates a willingness to hear the other fellow's story, to walk around a question and look at it from both sides.

### THE TWO SIDES TO THE SHIELD

It is said that centuries ago when knighthood was in flower two knights in armour rode into a little village from opposite directions. They met in front of a tavern and from a beam projecting out over the door of the tavern there hung a big shield, broadside between them as they faced each other. Having nothing better to quarrel about they fell to disputing about the shield. One affirmed it was of gold and the other that it was of silver. So in order to settle the truth of the matter they resorted to arms, as men do today. They backed their horses away, presented their lances, and rode at each other full tilt, slam-bang. They passed each other, neither one being unhorsed, and then turned about for another tilt; but now they had reversed their positions and they discovered to their surprise that one side of the shield was gold and the other silver. They could have found that out without a fight if they had exercised a little patience and courtesy, and had been willing to look at both sides of the shield. Every shield has two sides and many questions have two sides.

Sensational and unreliable books, exposés, newspaper and magazine articles almost without number have been

written about my people. They were written to sell—the more sensational they were the better they would sell. I am happy to tell you something of the other side of the story. I will attempt to tell you briefly and affirmatively about our history, our beliefs, and our objectives.

### A BRIEF HISTORY

The church was organized April 6, 1830, by six young men. My grandfather, Joseph Smith, was then twenty-four years old. Five of the six were under twenty-six years of age. They were utterly inexperienced in church building. They knew nothing about church administration. But one thing you must recognize if you are to evaluate our movement at all, they felt deep down in their hearts a burning conviction that God had spoken again and commanded them what they should do. Three of the six young men, fifty per cent of the charter members, were doomed to die because of mob violence as a result of their religious convictions. A testimony sealed with the blood of the testators commands respect.

The church grew rapidly and spread abroad in America and foreign countries. Very soon after its organization a considerable number of our people came to Independence, Missouri, which had been designated as the chief place of their gathering. They established a printing house, stores, farms, and purchased several thousand acres of land for the settlement of church members. My own home lot on which I live in Independence is a part of the land purchased at that time for that purpose. Unfortunately they had trouble in Missouri. Perhaps it was partly their own fault. The net gathers of all kinds and we had some people who were unwise. They talked too much. They boasted too

much. Some of them did not live their religion. But even that was not justification for capital punishment.

The main causes for our difficulty was that our people were ardent and sometimes hot-headed abolitionists, and they were living in a community that believed in slavery; they were eastern men, different in habits and speech from their neighbors; and, above all, they had a different sort of religion. They were the victims of religious intolerance, the same kind of intolerance that Jesus had in mind when he said to his disciples, "When they persecute you in one city flee to another." The same sort of religious intolerance which drove John Wesley out of America. In any event, they were driven out of Independence and eventually out of Missouri, with violence.

The church headquarters were then established at Nauvoo, Illinois. In 1844 Joseph Smith and Hyrum, his brother, were killed by a mob and the church was driven and scattered. A considerable number of church members, including some prominent men in the church, followed the leadership of Brigham Young west and settled in Salt Lake City, Utah, where the Utah Mormons still have their church headquarters.

My grandmother, Emma Smith, the widow of Joseph, and their sons, Joseph, Alexander and David, remained in Nauvoo, and presently, with other members of the church who refused to follow Brigham Young's leadership and would not endorse the doctrines introduced under his ministry, effected a reorganization of the church, and Joseph, the son of the founder of the church, then commonly referred to as "Young Joseph," became its presiding officer. He and many of our people returned to Independence. As a small boy he had been driven out of Missouri with others under the edict

of the Governor of the State that all Mormons must leave the State or be exterminated, and the word "exterminated" meant exactly that. Those who did not leave with sufficient celerity were exterminated. In his later life he came back and lived in Independence an honored citizen. When he died the *Kansas City Journal* gave him an editorial tribute which said: "He was the prophet, but first of all he was the Christian gentleman and the good citizen . . . kindly, cheerful, loyal to his own creed and tolerant of those of others, standing for modesty, simplicity, good citizenship, embodying in his private and public life all the virtues which adorn a character worthy of emulation—such is the revelation that Joseph Smith leaves to the world as the real interpretation of an ecclesiastical message translated in terms of human character."

That is a fine tribute to a good man. We who are of the family, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, most of us have endeavored to live as good citizens and Christian men and women that we might command the confidence and respect of other good citizens and lift from the name of the church any opprobrium that might once have rested upon it.

At his death President Joseph Smith was succeeded in the presidency by his son, Frederick Madison Smith, who is now president of the church founded by his grandfather. (The civil courts have twice recognized us as the church in succession to the one organized in 1830, as opposed to the Utah Mormon Church.)

#### THE ROOTS OF OUR THEOLOGY

The roots of our belief are in the Bible. That is a good place for them to be. Probably you have heard the old story of the man who, passing an open black-



smith's door and looking in, saw the blacksmith pounding iron on the anvil and in the corner of the shop a pile of broken and worn out hammers. He said to the blacksmith, "How many anvils have you had to wear out so many hammers?" The blacksmith said, "The hammers do not wear out the anvil. It is the anvil that wears out the hammers." Agnostics for centuries have rained their blows of criticism upon the Bible. They are broken and discarded and almost forgotten while the Bible remains the best selling book in the world. It has been translated, I am told, into more than 800 languages and dialects and more than twenty-five million copies are distributed or sold annually.

I will admit that this particular copy of the Bible that I have with me is somewhat battered and worn but not because I have pounded it in the pulpit. I cling to it for sentimental reasons. I have carried it with me on many thousands of miles of travel. There is an even more intimate reason: one time when I was leaving home, going on a mission—and it is always a difficult task for me to leave my home—my wife handed me a rose she had picked from a bush in our yard. I put it in my Bible in order to press the petals and keep them as a memento. Later, when I opened the Bible I discovered that I had placed the rose exactly opposite John's statement, "This is the message that we have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." I carried the rose in this book until the petals were worn out; and I seemed to get a better vision of love of God and man, my wife, children, and home.

Now, I will strike what to some of you will seem a discordant note. While we believe the Bible we also believe the *Book of Mormon*. This book, the *Book of Mormon*, is a history of the civilized peoples living in

North, South and Central America, long before Columbus discovered America. The infidel, Ingersol, one time challenged a group of Christian ministers with this statement, "The Christian God was ignorant of the very existence of America until Columbus told him about it." This book is our answer to that challenge. God was not ignorant of America, neither did he ignore it. Those people had their prophets and their ministers. In the great ruined cities that have been unearthed in recent years in Central and South America archaeologists have found the symbol of the cross: they knew the story of Christ.

This other book, the Book of *Doctrine and Covenants*, contains revelations that we feel have come to us during our church history. H. G. Wells, the English historian and lecturer, in his book, *The Salvaging of Civilization*, devoted a part of one chapter to speculation as to why the Bible came to an end. Why did God cease to speak to people? Why does he not speak to people now? This book would be our answer to that challenge. We believe that he did not cease to speak to people. This book is our still open canon of Scriptures.

#### SOME ITEMS OF DOCTRINE

There is one incidental question that I know is in the back of your minds. It is always thrown at us, and I will answer it before I go further with the analysis of our belief,—and that is the question of marriage. I am glad to say that we are and always have been monogamous in teaching and in practice.

We believe that there should be but one wife for one husband. That doctrine we find supported by the Three Books that I have just mentioned. In the Bible

we read that when God had the stupendous task to people the earth he gave Adam one wife. After the flood when it was necessary to repeople the earth he gave Noah and his sons each one wife. The prophet Malachi, speaking about the matter said, "Why one?" seeing he had "the residue of the spirit." He could have easily given thirty or forty. But the answer was "That he might seek a godly people."

The *Book of Mormon* is very emphatic on this question: "Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me saith the Lord" (Book of Jacob, chapter 2, paragraph 33).

A great many Christians have been troubled by the fact that David and Solomon and those ancient worthies were in polygamy. Well, here is the answer to their problem. The *Book of Mormon* says that it was abominable in the sight of God. Solomon had, I believe, seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. He was reputedly a very wise man, but 999 times he made a fool of himself. Then the *Book of Mormon* continues, "There shall not any man among you have save it be one wife and concubines he shall have none" (Book of Jacob, chapter 2, paragraph 36).

The book of *Doctrine and Covenants* is equally specific. It says, "Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart and shall cleave unto her and none else." If a man loves his wife with all his heart he has none of it left to give some other woman. Our marriage covenant, found in the book of *Doctrine and Covenants*, and adopted by the church as long ago as 1835, while my grandfather Joseph Smith still presided over the church, has this question which is always used by us in every marriage ceremony, "You both mutually agree to be

each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition, that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?"

The church under the ministry of Joseph Smith never sanctioned polygamy, neither has it under our administration. Some may have taught, even practiced it before Joseph's death, and before Brigham Young introduced it publicly in Utah, if so they did it *covertly* and as *individuals*, the church was never compromised. The question, "Was Joseph involved in either the practice or teaching of polygamy?" is secondary in importance. Nothing that he did or did not do would change our convictions. Personally I do not believe that he either taught or practiced it.

The utterances of Joseph Smith published during his life that can be verified are all against polygamy. I have quoted from the *Book of Mormon* and the *Doctrine and Covenants* given by him to the church as standards of belief. And here is another thing: to him and his wife Emma, my grandmother, there has been born a posterity numbering more than one hundred and ninety souls. To no one of the women alleged to be his plural wives was there ever born a child by him—if there had been one you may be assured that it would have been placed in evidence.

I pass now to some fundamental phases of our belief. Our epitome of faith opens with the statement, "We believe in God." We believe in that God who appears in the opening chapters of Genesis, the first five words of the first chapter of the first book in the Bible, striking a tremendous keynote to which all the other revelations are pitched: "In the beginning God created!" No adequate philosophy of life and existence

and the universe can ever be formulated by anyone who ignores that proposition.

The next statement is that we believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God. We believe that he was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, that he was crucified on Calvary's cross and ascended up on high, and that he will return again. That last item of belief I will speak about later.

### RESTORATION

Our people differ from both Catholic and Protestant churches in one matter. Our Catholic friends believe in *succession*: that their authority and doctrines have come down to them from the days of the apostles in an unbroken line of succession. Protestant churches believe that there was a rather complete apostasy during the Dark Ages. Their hope of escape from that dilemma was found in the *reformation*. We have a third proposition; we believe in *restoration*, that God moved again to restore his church on earth. You can never understand my people unless you realize the intensity with which they held and do hold to that conviction. They put it into one of their favorite hymns:

The Spirit of God like a fire is burning,  
The latter-day glory begins to come forth,  
The visions and blessings of old are returning,  
The angels are coming to visit the earth.

Their convictions in this matter may be measured by their sacrifices. Their homes were burned almost over their heads. They were driven from the farms they had bought and paid for. They were murdered. At Haun's Mill men, women and children were shot

to death. They were hacked to pieces with corn knives. They were thrown into an old well in one common bloody sepulchre. When we sing, "Faith of our fathers living still, in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword," it is more than poetry to us, for less than one hundred years ago dungeon, fire and sword were more than figures of speech in our experience.

Our people stressed the form of church organization and believed that the original form had been restored, with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and other officers, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. They believed in certain doctrinal principles set forth by Paul in Hebrews 6. They sought the gifts of the Spirit, named in 1 Corinthians 12, wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy, healing of the sick.

Now a few words as to the scope of the Restoration movement. We believe that early in the nineteenth century God began a great movement of restoration in what has been termed "the dispensation of the fullness of times." Do not misunderstand me. We do not think that his work is limited to our church, which has always been comparatively small in numbers. A tremendous change began to take place on earth about the beginning of the nineteenth century. In a very short time we passed from the age of the ox cart to the age of the airplane, from the pony express to the radio. The world has literally been made over and in haste. And now the world is in confusion. The instruments that science gave it that might have served humanity are being used to destroy humanity. Kingdoms are being overthrown. God is working toward a final consummation. That I will speak about just a little bit further on.

## OBJECTIVES

We have a major objective that is common to all Christians, that is, the salvation of men and women. We seek their salvation here and hereafter, individually and collectively. Christ begins his work with the individual. A certain businessman came home at night weary and sought to read his newspaper, but he was pestered by his little daughter who persisted in asking questions. Finally, to keep her mind occupied, he drew from his desk a big cardboard on which was a map of the world. He cut it into pieces and gave it to her and told her to put the map together. He went back to his paper, but in about five minutes he was interrupted again. The little daughter said, "Daddy, I have put the map together." He replied, "You could not have done so. You don't know enough about geography to put the map of the world together in so short a time." She replied, "But, daddy, on the back of the cardboard there was the picture of a man. I put the man together and when I got the man together right the world was right."

Jesus addresses his message first to the individual: "You must be born again. You must get right." But he does not intend his work to go on as an individualistic movement. He has his social message. Religion is not limited to preaching or doctrines or even worship. It is to be carried into all the business of life.

Jesus said that in the latter days because iniquity should abound the love of many would wax cold. That word "iniquity" means wickedness, of course, but it has another meaning. The root of meaning of the word is *inequity*, inequality, and the inequality existing in the world is causing trouble between capital and labor and setting the nations of the earth at war between Communism and Fascism.

We have a parable in the *Book of Covenants* which goes something like this: "What man among you, being a just man, and having twelve sons, would say to some of them, you sit here in robes and riches, and to others you sit there in rags and poverty?" It is not pleasing to God that his children who profess to believe in him as their Father are so unequal, some having more wealth than they know how to use wisely, and others, perhaps in the same neighborhood, in want.

Under divine inspiration, as we believe, our people worked out a philosophy of economics a great many years ago and the fundamental postulate is that Christian believers should be equal in temporal things. The next postulate is that this equality is not to be based on artificial considerations, so many dollars to each man, or a certain sized house to each family, but its basis is in their *needs* and their just wants, every man receiving according to his needs and his wants, inasmuch as his wants are just. The next postulate in the series is that men are stewards. All wealth belongs to God by right of creation. Men hold it as stewards and their term is very temporary. It is quite another thing, however, for them to recognize voluntarily their stewardship as a sacred trust. That is a part of our philosophy. The next postulate is that strong and able men who create a surplus over and above their ample needs shall consecrate that surplus for the use of the worthy poor, thus lifting them up to a higher standard of life and at least beginning to approximate equality.

### "ZION THE BEAUTIFUL"

All of this that I have been telling you is related to a part of our program, namely, the habit of our people to gather together at designated places, particularly in



and around Independence, Missouri. That was what brought them to Independence in 1831, to build and establish that sort of a social order. That was our purpose and it is now. That is what we call Zion. I have no apology for the vision. I am proud of it. I must apologize for our slowness in working it out and for the blunders that we have made. I come telling you of the vision. Sometime I hope one of our men will come and tell you of its realization and invite you to come to Independence and see such a social order actually functioning.

This society that we vision and hope to build is all gathered up in our minds under the name "Zion." President Frederick M. Smith has embodied its challenge in his splendid hymn: "To God give the glory, to him lift the song, Zion the Beautiful beckons us on."

#### THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

All of this preparation I have been talking about is in anticipation of a great world event that is coming in the future, namely, the second coming of our Lord and Master. H. G. Wells, British historian, says that when he wrote his *Outline of History* he approached his theme as a historian and not as a believer, but found he could not write the history of the world and not give central place to an obscure teacher from Nazareth.

If we cannot write the history of the past without giving central place to Christ, neither can we prognosticate the future without reckoning with him as the pre-eminent one. We have believed and taught from the beginning of the church that He is coming again to this earth. We are glad that others are joining with us in that thought.

We believe that the lines are being drawn for the final great conflict between forces of evil and forces of righteousness, and the time is near when Christians can no longer play back and forth across that line. We are happy to co-operate with all those who are working for morality and temperance and righteousness.

(Letters of inquiry relative to our history and beliefs may be addressed to The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri.)

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