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A Response to Denver Snuffer's Essay on Plural Marriage, Adoption, and the Supposed Falling Away of the Church – Part 2: Facade or Reality?

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A RESPONSE TO DENVER SNUFFER'S ESSAY ON PLURAL MARRIAGE, ADOPTION, AND THE SUPPOSED FALLING AWAY OF THE CHURCH

PART 2: FACADE OR REALITY?

Brian C. Hales

Abstract: Part 2 of this response to Denver Snuffer's essay entitled "Plural Marriage" posted on March 22, 2015, will primarily address non-plural marriage issues as discussed in the last twenty pages.¹ Snuffer's portrayal of adoption teachings and practices is analyzed and shown to be in error, along with his interpretation of presiding priesthood quorums as described in the Doctrine and Covenants. His primary thesis, that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is in apostasy, is also examined including Snuffer's personal need for the Church to have fallen away in order to create an opening for his new visionary voice. The lack of evidence supporting such an apostasy is also reviewed including the obvious absence of any prophesied latter-day "dwindling in unbelief." Snuffer is compared to other dissidents who have come and gone over the past century showing his claims are not unexpected or original. While the Latter-day Saints could be more obedient, a core group of righteous members and leaders has always existed in the Church through which the Lord could perform His restorative works.

Despite the title of Denver Snuffer's "Plural Marriage" essay, the article's focus shifts away from polygamy on page 28, devoting the last twenty pages to other topics, which are addressed below.

Sealing to Our "Fathers in Eternal Glory"

Snuffer first discusses a related topic — that of adoption — alleging: "Joseph knew it would do no good to seal ourselves to our dead ancestors" (p. 29). This declaration is apparently based upon Snuffer's unique interpretation of Joseph Smith's March 10, 1844, discourse. Wilford Woodruff recorded his instructions given that day:

¹ Denver Snuffer, "Plural Marriage," accessed June 19, 2015, <http://denversnuffer.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Plural-Marriage.pdf>.

Again the doctrin [sic] or *sealing power* of Elijah is as follows if you have power to seal on earth & in heaven then we should be Crafty, the first thing you do go & *seal on earth your sons & daughters unto yourself, & yourself unto your fathers in eternal glory*, & go ahead and not go back, but use a little Craftiness & seal all you can.²

Here Joseph tells us to be sealed to our “fathers in eternal glory,” but who are these fathers? Are they our biological fathers who are now dead or someone else? Snuffer’s answer may be surprising: “The ‘fathers in eternal glory’ are not your kindred dead in the spirit world. They are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ... The family of man needed to reconnect to the family of ‘the fathers’ who had risen from the dead and become exalted” (p. 29). Snuffer interprets the “fathers in eternal glory” as resurrected and exalted beings. He argues that they could not be our deceased biological fathers because they now reside as unresurrected spirits in the spirit world.

Fortunately, on January 21, 1844, Wilford Woodruff also wrote the Prophet’s instructions, which clarify the identity of the “fathers”:

The gospel to be estblished the Saints of God gatherd Zion built up, & the Saints to Come up as Saviors on mount Zion but how are they to become Saviors on Mount Zion by building thair temples erecting their Baptismal fonts & going forth & receiving all the ordinances, Baptisms, Confirmations, washings anointings ordinations & *sealing powers* upon our heads *in behalf of all our Progenitors who are dead* & redeem them that they may Come forth in the first resurrection & *be exhalted to thrones of glory* with us.³

Joseph taught that the “sealing powers” are for our “progenitors who are dead” who will “be exhalted to thrones of glory with us.” There is no mention of Abraham or other patriarchs.

Additional evidence discounting Snuffer’s view is found by investigating all of the known references of Joseph Smith to the fathers, their children, and Elijah’s mission. The Prophet mentioned Malachi’s

2 Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 331–32 (Wilford Woodruff Diary, Sunday, March 10, 1844); italics added.

3 Ibid., 318; italics added.

prophecy in multiple revelations, writings, and discourses. In none of these did he indicate that the “fathers” were patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In fact, it can be argued that in every case Joseph Smith’s audiences would have understood that the “children” and “fathers” he mentioned were direct biological relatives. Their hearts were to turn toward each other resulting in the performance of sealing ordinances to bind them eternally together.

| Joseph Smith’s References to the Fathers and Children | |
|--|--|
| Malachi 4:6 | “hearts of the children to their fathers” |
| D&C 2:2 | “turn to their fathers” |
| D&C 27:9 | “children to the fathers” |
| D&C 98:16 | “hearts of the children to their fathers” |
| D&C 110:15 | “the children to the fathers” |
| D&C 128:17 | “the heart of the children to their fathers” |
| D&C 128:18 | “wedding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children” |
| Joseph Smith History 1:39 | “the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers” |
| <i>Words</i> * 11 | “hearts of the children will have to be turned to the fathers, & the fathers to the children living or dead to prepare them for the second coming of the Son of Man” |
| <i>Words</i> 241-42 | “the hearts of the children to the covenant made to their fathers” |
| <i>Words</i> 244 | “covenants to seal the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers” |

| Joseph Smith's References to the Fathers and Children | |
|--|--|
| Words 318 | "our progenitors who are dead & redeem them that they may Come forth in the first resurrection & be exalted to thrones of glory with us" |
| Words 327 | "sealing of the hearts of the children unto the fathers & the hearts of the fathers unto the children even those who are in heaven" |
| Words 334 | "to seal or bind or turn the hearts of the fathers to their children" |
| Words 336 | "to seal the hearts of the Fathers to the children – and the children to the Parents" |

*Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*.

Abraham, of course, would be somewhere in the links, but creating a chain back to Adam was the primary focus. Joseph explained there needs to be a "welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time" (D&C 128:18). We must be linked back to Adam because he was a son of God (Luke 3:38). Through a chain of sealings leading back to him, we, too, are sealed to God.

Nauvoo Adoption Sealings

Snuffer's view of adoption sealings is problematic in other ways. Sealing records from the Nauvoo Temple show that a total of 82 individuals were sealed to their own biological parents through child-to-parent sealings.⁴ Importantly, five of Hyrum Smith's own children were sealed to him by proxy — a plain case where a living person was sealed to a dead biological father in contradiction to Snuffer's declaration.

4. Extracted from Lisle Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: A Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841–1846* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006). See also Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, *The Nauvoo Endowment Companies, 1845–1846: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), 399–400), 410, 423, 493–94, 497, 505–06, 516–17, 536, 549, 551, 565, 581, 583, 585–86, 609.

In addition, 211 people were sealed to non-parents, generally prominent Church leaders.⁵ No person was sealed to Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob or any of the Old Testament patriarchs, which would indicate that they did not interpret the meaning of “fathers” as Snuffer does.

| Adoption Sealings Performed in the Nauvoo Temple, Jan. 11-Feb. 6, 1864⁴ | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Dates in 1846 | Father | Leadership Position | Non-Biological Children | Biological Children | Mother |
| Jan. 28 | Bent, Samuel | - | 1 | - | Kilborn, Mary |
| Jan. 31 | Cutler, Alpheus | - | 4 | 8 | Lethrop, Lois |
| Feb. 6 | Farr, Winslow | - | 7 | 3 | Freeman, Olive Hovey |
| Jan. 11 | Hyde, Orson | Apostle | - | 2 | Johnson, Nancy Marinda |
| Jan. 12, 25, Feb. 1 | Kimball, Heber C. | Apostle | 38 | 6 | Murray, Vilate |
| Feb. 5 | Lee, John D. | | 22 | - | Woolsey, Aggath Ann |
| Jan. 25 | Lyman, Amasa M. | Apostle | 3 | 3 | Tanner, Mariah Louisa |
| Jan. 25 | Miller, George | Bishop | 3 | 3 | Fry, Mary Catherine |
| | | | - | 5 | Bouton, Elizabeth |
| | | | - | 4 | Wallace, Sophia |

5. Lisle Brown's totals differ from mine. He lists 202 adoption sealings and 92 child-to-biological parent sealings. *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings*, 361. The reasons for the discrepancies are unclear.

| Adoption Sealings Performed in the Nauvoo Temple, Jan. 11-Feb. 6, 1864 ⁴ | | | | | |
|---|--------------------|--|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Dates in 1846 | Father | Leadership Position | Non-Biological Children | Biological Children | Mother |
| Feb. 3 | Morley, Isaac | - | - | 6 | Gunn, Lucy |
| Jan. 17 | Pratt, Orson | Apostle | - | 2 | Bates, Sarah Marinda |
| Jan. 25 | Richards, Willard | Apostle | 3 | 2 | Richards, Jennetta |
| Jan. 30 | Smith, Don Carolos | | - | 2 | Coolbrith, Agnes Moulton |
| Jan. 25 | Smith, George A. | Apostle | 11 | 2 | Bigler, Bathsheba W. |
| Jan. 26 | Smith, Hyrum* | Church Patriarch - Associate President | - | 5 | Barden, Jerusha |
| Jan. 25 | Smith, John | Patriarch | - | 3 | Lyman, Clarissa |
| Feb. 3 | Smith, Jr. Joseph | President | 13 | - | none listed |
| Jan. 31 | Spencer, Daniel | - | - | 1 | Pomeroy, Sophronia Eliza |
| | | | - | 1 | Lester, Sarah |
| | | | - | 1 | Spencer, Mary |
| Jan. 27 | Spencer, Orson | - | 1 | 5 | Curtis, Catherine |

| Adoption Sealings Performed in the Nauvoo Temple, Jan. 11-Feb. 6, 1864 ⁴ | | | | | |
|---|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Dates in 1846 | Father | Leadership Position | Non-Biological Children | Biological Children | Mother |
| Jan. 17, Feb. | Taylor, John | Apostle | 26 | 3 | Cannon, Leonora |

* Italics denote the sealings were performed by proxy

No additional adoption sealings were performed by the Saints after the Nauvoo Temple closed on February 6, 1846, until the opening of the St. George Temple in 1877. In Utah temples two types of adoptions were performed, some to non-kindred “fathers” (like Church leaders but never Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob) and others to biologically related progenitors. Sealings to non-relatives were discontinued in 1894 when Wilford Woodruff clarified that we should all be sealed to our biological parents as far back as the genealogical records would allow.

Snuffer states that because of a vision Brigham Young received on February 17, 1847, “The practice of adoption came to an end” (p. 31). This is ironic for a couple of reasons. First, as discussed above, adoptions were only performed in the Nauvoo Temple between January 11 and February 6, 1846 — less than a month. Either they ended at that time or decades later after 1877 when they were again performed in the St. George Temple. The second irony is that Snuffer treats Brigham Young’s vision as genuine even though he paints him as an adulterer leading the Saints into whoredoms at that time (p. 41).

Confusion about Priesthood Keys and Presiding Quorums

On page 40 Snuffer changes the topic by criticizing the organization of the Church after Joseph Smith’s death:

The First Presidency under Joseph Smith was a quorum equal to the quorum of the 12. ... [T]he Quorum of the 70 formed a quorum equal in authority with the quorum of them and

6. Extracted from Lisle Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: A Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841–1846* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006). See also Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, *The Nauvoo Endowment Companies, 1845–1846: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), 399–400, 410, 423, 493–94, 497, 505–06, 516–17, 536, 549, 551, 565, 581, 583, 585–86, 609.

therefore with the First Presidency also. None of the equality survived Brigham Young! The standing High Councils of Zion formed a quorum equal in authority with the First Presidency and the quorum of the 12. All the “keys” (if that term is used) were held 100% by the First Presidency, 100% by the Quorum of the 12, 100% by the Quorum of the 70, and 100% in the High Councils. This meant that there was no primacy in the twelve. (p. 40)

In this statement Snuffer teaches multiple falsehoods regarding several of the Prophet’s teachings. It is true that section 107:21–26, 36–37, explains that the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the Seventy, the standing high councils, and the high council in Zion all form quorums that are “equal in authority.” However, God’s house is a house of order (D&C 20:68; 28:13; 58:55; 132:8, 18). Those verses were not saying that there are five presiding quorums who function independent of each other. Rather, they hold similar authority to build up the Church and receive revelation to fulfill their individual stewardships.

Integral to the order of God’s house is *presiding* authority. The First Presidency presides over the Quorum of the Twelve: “The Twelve are a Traveling Presiding High Council, to officiate in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Presidency of the Church” (D&C 107:33). Together, these two quorums preside: “For unto you, the Twelve, and those, the First Presidency, who are appointed with you to be your counselors and your leaders, is the power of this priesthood given” (D&C 112:30). The Seventy act under the Twelve: “The Seventy are to act in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Twelve” (D&C 107:34). The other two councils mentioned, “the standing high councils, at the stakes of Zion” and “the high council in Zion,” are not discussed further.

Snuffer states that each of these quorums holds “all the ‘keys,’” which contradicts D&C 132:7. In that verse we learn that “there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred.” The “one” is not a quorum, but a man who controls all the keys: “I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days” (v. 7).

The President of the Quorum of the Twelve presides when the First Presidency is not available. The Lord explained to Thomas B. Marsh, President of the Twelve in 1837:

Verily I say unto you, my servant Thomas, thou art the man whom I have chosen to hold the *keys of my kingdom, as pertaining to the Twelve*, abroad among all nations.

That thou mayest be my servant to unlock the door of the kingdom *in all places* where my servant Joseph, and my servant Sidney, and my servant Hyrum, cannot come. (D&C 112:16–17; italics added)

Upon the death of the keyholder, the First Presidency is dissolved and is no longer capable of presiding. The “keys of the kingdom” pass to the President of the Quorum of the Twelve because at that point, he presides “in all places.”

Contrary to Snuffer’s allegation, Brigham Young did not change Joseph Smith’s teachings regarding presiding priesthood authority and keys. He fulfilled them exactly. At the time of the martyrdom, Brigham Young was President of the Quorum of the Twelve. Upon learning of the death of the Prophet, Brigham recalled: “Brother Orson Pratt sat at my left; we were both leaning back in our chairs. Bringing my hand down on my knee, I said, ‘the keys of the kingdom are right here with the church.’”⁷

It is also clear that Joseph Smith had prepared Brigham Young to preside. Just a few months earlier, in January of 1844, the Prophet instructed the senior apostle in the Quorum of the Twelve regarding the administration of the highest temple ordinances and then authorized him to administer them to other members of the quorum.⁸ The Quorum of the Twelve was the only priesthood quorum of general authority status that had received all temple ordinances.⁹ Brigham explained: “No man can put another between the Twelve and the Prophet Joseph. Why? Because Joseph was their file leader and he has committed into their hands the keys of the Kingdom for all the world.”¹⁰

7 “History of Brigham Young,” *Millennial Star*, 26 (June 4, 1864): 359.

8 Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the Mormon Succession Question,” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), 145.

9 Ibid., 192.

10 Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898*, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–85), 2:437 (August 8, 1844).

“Joseph Left an Incomplete Building”

The observations above illustrate an ongoing weakness in Denver Snuffer's works. It appears he quotes specific scriptures and statements, often giving a novel interpretation, but he fails to deal with numerous contradictory evidences to his ideas. Sometimes it appears he is trying to rewrite LDS Church history to comply with his own ideas rather than trying to document what actually occurred and what was actually taught. Toward the final pages of Snuffer's plural marriage essay, he continues this process by going on the attack, not against polygamy but against Joseph Smith and the Church over the past decades.

A consistent theme in Snuffer's writings is that the Restoration is incomplete, lacking, unfinished, and inadequate. God's efforts to establish the gospel in this dispensation have sputtered. According to Denver, “Joseph left an incomplete building and an incomplete family or house of God” (p. 28):

Joseph Smith was working backward in restoring the earliest teaching, scripture, covenants and ordinances as part of his brief ministry. That ended abruptly with his death. The still-not-completed restoration of the Gospel must return again the original body of teaching, covenants and ordinances revealed in the beginning to the first fathers, who are now resurrected, and in heaven.

There was such haste and foolishness in Joseph's day that it hindered God's work. (pp. 31–32)

We know almost nothing at this point of the full scope of the original body of teachings, revelations, ordinances and rites. Even all that came through Joseph is but a glimpse. (p. 34)

Joseph Smith was beginning to work ... in Nauvoo but never finished. (p. 47)

Contradicting this view are God's words to Joseph Smith in 1843: “I am the Lord thy God, and I gave unto thee, my servant Joseph, an appointment, *and restore all things*” (D&C 132:40; italics added). Is it possible that he died before God was able to complete this restoration? Joseph explained: “I know what I say, I understand my mision & business God Almighty is my shield & what Can man do if God is my friend *I shall not be Sacrafised untill my time Comes* then I shall be

offered freely.”¹¹ This statement declares that Joseph would live until his time was come and the Lord stated that through the Prophet He would “restore all things.” After the Martyrdom, Joseph Fielding wrote the following in testimony of this fact:

All had been done. Joseph and Hyrum had done all that they could have done and the foundation of the great work of the last days was laid so that it could be finished by the Twelve Apostles who had been instructed in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth.¹²

The Prophet taught: “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith, 9), so additional revelations are expected. However, to allege that God did not restore everything that He wanted to restore through Joseph prior to the martyrdom is unsupported.

“The History of the Church Has Been A Long, Downward Path”

Perhaps the leading message of Denver Snuffer's more recent writings and discourses deals with the alleged apostasy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. According to Snuffer, the apostasy unfolded in parallel with the earliest efforts of the Restoration: “The jarring and contention, envying and strife of Joseph's time was so toxic. Heaven weeps at us when it might instead rejoice over us” (p. 36). To support his view, he emphasizes in his writings multiple events that either initiated or perpetuated an apostasy:

1832 — D&C 84 — Treating lightly the Book of Mormon¹³

1838 — “Expulsion from Missouri” (p. 39)

1841 — D&C 124 the five-year building time of the Nauvoo Temple¹⁴

11 Ehat and Cook, comps. and eds., *Words*, 158 (Wilford Woodruff Diary, Sunday, January 22, 1843); italics added.

12 Ehat, Andrew F. “‘They Might Have Known That He Was Not a Fallen Prophet’ — The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding,” *BYU Studies* 19/2 (Winter 1979): 153; spelling modernized.

13 Denver C. Snuffer, Jr., *Passing the Heavenly Gift* (Salt Lake City: Mill Creek Press, 2011), 376–85.

14 Ibid., 96–119, 265–87.

1846 — “Forced exodus from Nauvoo” (p. 39)

After 1847 — “The afflictions, judgments and wrath of God at the Saints, at the their pride, lying, deceit, hypocrisy, murders, priestcrafts, and whoredoms” (p. 39)

After 1847 — “Inquisitorial abuse of the population” (p. 40)

1857 — “Mass-murders” (p. 40)

1890 — The Manifesto¹⁵

1900s — “Contradictions in ‘fundamental’ teachings, changes to the ordinances” (p. 40)

1978—“Changes to temple rites” (p. 40)

2000s—“Quest for popularity” (p. 40)

It seems that without missing any opportunities for criticism, Denver points his finger of scorn at any perceived imperfection or imperfect behavior manifested by Church members over the decades, contending that this event or that event caused the Church to lose its favor with God (and apparently the authority to perform valid ordinances and receive inspiration). His vitriol reaches its height on pages 39 and 40:

You can see them [signs of apostasy] all along the way, from the condemnation in 1832, to the expulsion from Missouri, the forced exodus from Nauvoo, the suffering during and following the exodus, the afflictions, judgments and wrath of God at the Saints, their pride, lying, deceit, hypocrisy, murders, priestcrafts, and whoredoms (as Christ foretold), inquisitorial abuse of the population once isolated from the US, mass-murders, contradictions in “fundamental” teachings, changes to the ordinances including the temple rites, quest for popularity and centrally-controlled, tightly correlated rejection of teachings — the history of the LDS Church has been a long, downward path. It has walked away from the light, and increasingly embraced darkness. Its members are now ruled by traditions that contradict the scriptures and commandments of God. They are asleep and cannot be awakened. God will now do something new and leave them to make their own way. (pp. 39–40)

15 Ibid., 166–84.

In Denver Snuffer's version of Church history, unrighteousness overwhelmed the Saints from the very first years after the organization of the Church, leaving the entire movement in paroxysms that prevented it from ever gaining spiritual traction on earth.

LDS leaders acknowledge that through the decades since the Church's 1830 organization, there were groups of Latter-day Saints who were unrighteous and merited condemnation. But that is not Snuffer's message. He implies not only errant members but also severe transgressions among core leaders in the highest councils. In his reconstruction, there is no critical mass of obedient Saints to keep inspired guidance and authority in the Church.

The Need for an Apostate Church

Snuffer's rhetorical offensive against the Church is not unexpected. Whether his readers recognize what is happening, his denunciations fulfill a critical need in his overall theology. He must demonstrate that a huge void exists on the Restoration landscape.

Snuffer's efforts are impressive. He eloquently describes a religious organization that has been, from the earliest days, compromised in its mission. The apostasy began early and has experienced additional convulsions since the 1830s. By his accounting, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has simply limped along spiritually to the twenty-first century.

The overwhelming question generated throughout Snuffer's writings is simply, "What are the Latter-day Saints living today to do?" The answer in his view is also just as obvious. The Saints must find a new visionary voice that can save the entire endeavor. The apostasy as described by Snuffer creates a wide opportunity for a new reformer who is in some ways just like Joseph Smith, only he will be more successful and apparently more righteous.

In other words, there would be no need for Denver Snuffer's declarations and ideas if the Church established by Joseph Smith still held the priesthood keys and prophetic leadership. Anyone wishing to garner influence among the Latter-day Saints must foment the belief that something is now missing in that organization and that an antidote for the described mess exists.

Denver Snuffer: A New Visionary and Seer?

In my first general response to Denver Snuffer's claims that was posted on <http://JosephSmithsPolygamy.org> in April 2015, I predicted that at some point in the future he would make claims to priesthood authority:

Denver Snuffer's situation is even more distanced from Joseph Smith's teachings as he struggles to deal with his lack of priesthood authority. Joseph taught that genuine authority was always needed. No exceptions. But Snuffer doesn't have any authority and has yet to claim a new dispensation of authority. That may yet come as his condemnation of the Church rises in pitch and volume. Many other dissenters in the past have followed this course and gathered a following around them claiming new revelation and eventually even new priesthood powers. Time will tell.

Ironically, we did not need to wait long for this assertion. Evidently, it can be found in Denver's essay on plural marriage. On page 38 he provides a modified drawing originally penned by Orson Hyde where he identifies a line of priesthood authority. Snuffer then writes in the names of early patriarchs who held the priesthood in a continual line from Adam to Melchizedek. Then he writes: "After the days of Shem, who was given the new name 'Melchizedek,' the direct line of the Patriarchs fell unto apostasy and lost the birthright. There was no continuation of the line of government because it was broken by apostasy and had to be restored again (p. 38)."

Snuffer posits an apostasy between Melchizedek and Abraham, which is puzzling since they were contemporaries. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek: "For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all" (Hebrews 7:1–2; see also Alma 13:15). Regardless, Snuffer expounds how Abraham sought for "a restoration": "Abraham sought it out after his fathers 'turned from their righteousness ... unto the worshipping of the gods of the heathen.' He sought for a restoration of the kingdom of God. He wanted a restoration of this right or 'blessing of the fathers,' which only one man on the earth can hold at a time (p. 38)."

Apparently this is also a reference to a restoration of the sealing keys, which God explained: "There is never but one on the earth at a time on

whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred" (D&C 132:7).

Snuffer continues to explain that God directly "cured" the apostasy Abraham experienced.

When there is a living man who is in possession of that there is no problem for him to ask God and get an answer. It was the right belonging to the fathers. After a period of apostasy, and the break of this line, Abraham received it by adoption across generations who were dropped from the government or family of God. Therefore, God has the ability to cure the break in generations by restoring us again. (p. 39)

The inferences are clear: If God could cure an apostasy in Abraham's time, then God can cross "generations" and restore again the "blessing ... which only one man on earth can hold." Snuffer asserts a similar apostasy today. But who is the new Abraham? Who is the recipient of Abrahamic-level blessings? Snuffer tells us that he is the new "witness" who has been appointed: "All that was left at the end was for a witness to be appointed, to come to declare, 'Now it has come to an end.' In the last talked [sic] in the 10 lecture series I said, the witness has now come, and I am he (p. 39)."

Elsewhere, on page 42 he writes: "I was shown ..." This is the language of a *seer*. While I am not privy to Snuffer's additional teachings on this subject. He has encouraged rebaptism, which could not occur without priesthood (D&C 26:1–4). I do not wish to misrepresent Denver Snuffer's messages, but the overall implication is that the Lord has cured the reported apostasy by giving him new truths and new authority just like Abraham received. As a result, Snuffer is the "one man on the earth" holding priesthood keys.

Is Denver Snuffer Unique?

As a researcher who has studied Mormon dissenting groups for over two decades, I can attest that Denver Snuffer's claims are not unique. During the 1990s, researchers Bruce Lawrence, Martin E. Marty, and Scott Appleby studied many different dissenting groups and their leaders throughout the world.¹⁶ They have identified several factors that are common to most dissenting movements:

16 See Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *The Fundamentalism Project*, Vols. 1–5 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991–95); Bruce Lawrence, *Defenders*

1. They advocate a minority viewpoint.
2. They see themselves as a righteous remnant.
3. They demonize their opposition.
4. They are usually led by a charismatic, authoritarian male.
5. They are selective regarding their traditions and beliefs, emphasizing specific tenants while ignoring others of equal historical importance.

In these things, Denver Snuffer and his followers seem very consistent. However, they are not alone in LDS history. That is, they are not the first and will certainly not be the last to break away from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, claiming their own revelations and divine mandates.

Dozens of similar individuals can be identified in the historical record in just the twentieth century alone:

Lorin C. Woolley (1920–1930) claimed multiple visits with Jesus Christ, even having “seen him laugh” in one of their conversations.¹⁷ He claimed priesthood authority given under the direction of a resurrected Joseph Smith who was physically present.¹⁸

John T. Clark (1920s) claimed to be the “one mighty and strong” of D&C 85:7 and reported that he had “seen the Savior several times also Joseph Smith and his successors in office.”¹⁹

of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 1989); Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University Of Chicago, 1991); Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *The Glory and the Power: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

17 Mark J. Baird and Rhea A. Kunz Baird, *Reminiscences of John W. and Lorin C. Woolley*, 5 vols. (N.p.: N.d.), 5:34.

18 The event was first recorded in 1929 and published five years later. Joseph White Musser and J. Leslie Broadbent, *Supplement to a New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage* (N.p.: 1934), 56–62. Available at <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/MF0054.doc>.

19 Joseph W. Musser Journals, May 24, 1922, CHL. Available at <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MF0131.pdf>. See Brian C. Hales, “John T. Clark: The ‘One Mighty and Strong,’” *Dialogue*:

Maurice Glendenning (1930s–1960s) heard voices in the “Adamic language,” a language that was taught to him in the “twinkling of an eye.”²⁰ He claimed new Aaronic priesthood authority and revelations.

Leroy Wilson (1930s) reported a vision in 1933: “I came to a belief in this because God revealed it to me. I have seen the Savior, I have conversed with my Father in Heaven, and I have seen my glorious Heavenly Mother.”²¹

Joseph W. Musser (1930s–1950s) reported divine prophecies and revelations and described a priesthood organization that existed independent of the Church.²²

Elden Kingston (1940s–1950s) reported that after seeking divine guidance in a cave in Davis County, an angel visited him and appointed him to lead.²³ He organized the Davis County Cooperative and his own Church.

Ben LeBaron (1950s) wrote: “The world is the wickedest ever in the history. Yea, about 20%. I am sure. The Lord has told me. ... The Mormon people are so wicked and stiff-necked that three fourths will have to be destroyed. They have apostatized to be a friend of the world and do not follow the Holy Spirit.”²⁴ Ben and several of his brothers claimed to hold the priesthood keys.

A Journal of Mormon Thought 39/3 (Fall 2006): 46–63. Available at <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MF0135.pdf>.

20 Hans A. Baer, *Recreating Utopia in the Desert: A Sectarian Challenge to Modern Mormonism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), 49.

21 LeRoy A. Wilson, “John W. Taylor — Fact or Fable,” unpublished manuscript, 9. Copy in possession of the author. Available at <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MF0253.pdf>.

22 Joseph W. Musser, *Joseph W. Musser or Journal of Joseph White Musser, 1872–1954* (N.p.: N.d. [1948]). Available at <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MF0140.pdf>.

23 Joseph W. Musser Journals, August 1, 1935; original CHL. Available at <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MF0132.pdf>.

24 Ben LeBaron, letter to Samuel W. Taylor, December 9, 1957. Available at <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/MF00032.pdf>.

Gerald Peterson (1970s) reported angelic visitations of a deceased individual: “Within an hour, after Rulon C. Allred was killed, he was seen entering my office. ... This happened about 5:00 p.m. on 10 May 1977. He came to where I was sitting in my chair, and spoke to me, very clearly and plainly” (1 Gerald 1:59).

James D. Harmston (1980s–2000s) described that in response to a prayer circle he held in his home, the heavens were opened and he and his wife received visits from divine messengers including the Father and the Son.²⁵ He also reported that on November 25, 1990, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses appeared to him to bestow priesthood keys they had allegedly taken from LDS Church leaders.²⁶

Robert C. Crossfield (1960s–present) has dictated numerous revelations from Jesus Christ currently compiled as *The Second Book of Commandments*.²⁷

Brian David Mitchell (1990s–2000s) quoted God in a revelation dated February 9, 2002, stating: “I have raised up my servant Immanuel David Isaiah, even my righteous right hand, to be a light and a covenant to my people ... in my servant, Immanuel David Isaiah, is the fullness of the gospel, which I, the Lord brought forth out of obscurity and out of darkness through my servant Joseph Smith, Jr.”²⁸

Addam Swapp (1980) received a revelation on December 26, 1987, stating “Thus saith the Lord unto my servant, Addam ... this generation is a most wicked generation. It is the most wicked ever to inhabit the face of the earth.”²⁹ Three weeks later Addam Swapp placed a bomb in the LDS Stake Center

25 Elaine Harmston (James Harmston’s first wife), telephone interview by Brian C. Hales, March 16, 1991.

26 John R. Llewellyn, *Polygamy Under Attack: From Tom Green to Brian David Mitchell* (Scottsdale, Ariz.: Agreka Books, 2004), 58.

27 To learn more see <http://www.2bc.info/onias/Home.html>.

28 Brian David Mitchell, *The Book of Immanuel David Isaiah*, unpublished manuscript, April 6, 2002, 1. Copy in possession of the author.

29 Addam Swapp, “Revelation to Addam Swapp 26 December 1987,” *Sunstone* 12/6 (November 1988): 12. Available at <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MF0239.pdf>.

in Kamas. Exploding at 3:00 a.m., it did considerable damage, but no one was physically harmed.

Further research would identify many, many more alternate voices, primarily men, who have proclaimed their own revelations and divine visions including those that arose in Joseph Smith's day and later in the nineteenth century. Is Denver Snuffer's message significantly different from those of the men mentioned above? The details may be different, but generally speaking, he is not alone in the types of claims and teachings he proclaims.

Why Would God Allow an Apostasy after the Restoration?

A critical issue is why God would have allowed an apostasy to occur after the 1830s Restoration. The heavenly anticipations for that restoration were immense. There were premortal preparations, prophesies of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon through a "choice seer" named Joseph, the creation of the small plates of Nephi to compensate for the 116 pages of the Book of Lehi that would be lost by Martin Harris, and many other things. To posit another falling away after such an elaborate restorative effort would not be expected unless it was unavoidable in God's arithmetic.

Evidently the driving force for the apostasy described by Snuffer is the principle of "common consent," which, according to him, binds God to the unrighteous decisions of Church members: "And all things shall be done by common consent in the church, by much prayer and faith" (D&C 26:2). In other words, if the majority of members "consent" to a wayward path or an uninspired leader, even if they don't realize it, God is going to respect their agency and allow them to lead the Church astray.

To justify this interpretation, dissenters cite scriptural examples where God gave an individual or a group of his followers what they wanted, not what they needed spiritually. Included are references to the Israelites receiving a king in the time of Samuel (1 Samuel 8:6–10),³⁰ of Joseph Smith giving Martin Harris the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon even though many previous requests by Joseph had been denied

30 Joseph W. Musser, "Slandorous Statements Refuted," *Truth* 2/8 (January 1937): 130; emphasis in original. See also David W. Jeffs, "Fulfillment of Isaiah's Words," *Truth* 6/1 (June 1940): 21; Gilbert Fulton, *The Most Holy Principle*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Gems, 1970–75), 4:66.

(D&C 3, 10),³¹ and of the Lord giving the Israelites in the desert the Law of Moses when they rejected the higher law (JST Exodus 34:1–2).³²

However, God has made it clear that He is not bound to unrighteous choices: “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise” (D&C 82:10). In July of 1828, the Lord first introduced this principle to Joseph:

For God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.

Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men. (D&C 3:2–3)

Here we learn that God’s work will not be “frustrated” by the “work of men.” Men’s choices and decisions will not cause God to “vary from that which he hath said.” Concerning evil men, the Lord instructed: “I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil” (D&C 10:43).

But how can God assure that the Church stays on the right path? He told Joseph Smith: “All things are present before mine eyes,” (D&C 38:2; see also Isaiah 46:9–10). God’s foreknowledge guarantees that nothing will happen within the Church or outside of it that will surprise Him.

In the premortal world, the Lord selected the individuals that would be His “rulers” in the Church here on earth; “Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers” (Abraham 3:22–23). Joseph Smith explained: “Every man who has a calling to minister to the Inhabitants of the world, was ordained to that very purpose in the

31 Heber Bennion, *Gospel Problems* (N.p.: N.d.), 43, 49–50; Gilbert Fulton, *The Most Holy Principle*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Gems, 1970–75), 4:66.

32 Dennis R. Short, *Questions on Plural Marriage With a Selected Bibliography and 1600 References* (Salt Lake City: Dennis R. Short, 1974), 25; Joseph W. Musser, “The Aftermath of Compromise,” *Truth* 18/10 (March 1953): 315; Joseph W. Musser, “What Authority Sanctioned the Manifesto,” *Truth* 20/6 (November 1954): 201; Editor [Joseph W. Musser], “Editor’s Comments,” *Star of Truth* 3/7 (July 1955): 276; Joseph W. Musser, *Marriage – Ballard/Jenson Correspondence* (n.p.: 1935), 76.

grand Council of Heaven before this world was — I suppose that I was ordained to this very office in that grand Council.”³³

Certainly a man could have received a premortal ordination and then fail to magnify that office after receiving it in mortality. However, Snuffer's view is that Joseph Smith failed to be valiant, Brigham Young failed to be valiant, and virtually every Latter-day Saint he mentions failed, even though they would have been ordained before birth to fulfill their callings. Snuffer's version of premortal foreordination conflicts with the scriptures and the Prophet's teachings. If God, who knows “the end from the beginning” (Abraham 2:8), knew these men would fail, why did He call them, one right after another?

Denver quotes from D&C 138 on page 41, so he apparently believes the revelation is genuinely from God. Verses 53–54 name several Church leaders — Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff — saying they were “reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work, including the building of the temples and the performance of ordinances therein.” In Snuffer's version of Church history, these men were reserved to come forth and preside in their unrighteousness over a stumbling church that has consistently failed to progress as God intended. It doesn't appear these men were very special since according to Snuffer, they accomplished so little.

An alternate view is that God called valiant premortal spirits who, although imperfect and presiding over imperfect Church members, have guided the Church just as God knew it could progress. If a leader apostatized in his or her feelings, they were released by God's hand: “For verily thus saith the Lord, that inasmuch as there are those among you who deny my name, others shall be planted in their stead and receive their bishopric” (D&C 114:2; see also D&C 64:40). This has already happened to Denver Snuffer who no longer serves in any calling in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The callings he held in the past are now fulfilled by other Church members.

On April 6, 1861, Apostle John Taylor assured his listeners that if a “corrupt man” should preside, he would be removed according to God's time:

Suppose a corrupt man is presiding in a certain place, his corruptions are soon known. People need not strive to turn

33 Ehat and Cook, comps. and eds., *Words*, 366 (Thomas Bullock Report, Sunday Morning, May 12, 1844).

good into evil because they think that some man does wrong. They need not turn calumniators and defamers, for all will come right in its turn. Then attend to your own business, work the works of righteousness, sustain the constituted authorities of the Church until God removes them, and he will do it in his own time.³⁴

The design of the Church is for callings to be issued in an orderly way through bishops who are inspired judges in Israel (D&C 58:17). God's house is a "house of order" (D&C 132:8, 18). The Prophet explained:

I will inform you that it is contrary to the economy of God for any member of the church, or any one, to receive instruction for those in authority, higher than themselves, therefore you will see the impropriety of giving heed to them: but if any have a vision or a visitation from a heavenly messenger, it must be for their own benefit and instruction, for the fundamental principles, government, and doctrine of the church is vested in the keys of the kingdom.³⁵

In more extreme cases, God could "remove" a leader by calling him or her home through death. For example, David W. Patten, President of the Quorum of the Twelve in 1838 died on October 25 in the battle of Crooked River. Was God responsible for his death? Without explaining why, the Lord told Joseph Smith plainly: "David Patten I have taken unto myself" (D&C 124:130). Brigham Young agreed that God holds this power:

The Lord Almighty leads this Church, and he will never suffer you to be led astray if you are found doing your duty. You may go home and sleep as sweetly as a babe in its mother's arms, as to any danger of your leaders leading you astray, for if they should try to do so the Lord would quickly sweep them from the earth.³⁶

This is not to say that Patten would have apostatized, but it shows that God's omnipotence and omniscience assure that His Church on earth will be led by men and women who will accomplish His will. These observations are very important in interpreting Denver Snuffer's

34 John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:14.

35 "History of the Church," *Times and Seasons*, 5 (January 1, 1844): 752.

36 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:289.

message. They mean that if an apostasy occurred after 1830 when Joseph Smith established the Church, it could only have occurred if God had intended it to happen.

Scriptural Predictions of an Apostasy Four Hundred Years after Christ's Visit

We are promised: "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Therefore, if a latter-day apostasy was a future part of the restoration started by Joseph Smith, we might expect God's prophets to have revealed a warning to His followers who were going to apostatize. It is clear that the scriptures predicted an apostasy that would occur four hundred years after Christ's visit to the Americas. Alma explained: "Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief" (Alma 45:10). Many other prophets referred to an apostasy.³⁷ That the truth would be lost from the Lehites and they would "dwindle in unbelief" was a huge issue for God's leaders in the Book of Mormon.

A restoration was also predicted:

Yea, even if they should dwindle in unbelief the Lord shall prolong their days, until the time shall come which hath been spoken of by our fathers, and also by the prophet Zenos, and many other prophets, concerning the *restoration of our brethren*, the Lamanites, again to the knowledge of the truth. (Helaman 15:11; italics added)

And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall commence his work among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, to bring about the restoration of his people upon the earth. (2 Nephi 30:8)

The Church was established to accomplish this restoration:

Yea, the word of the Lord concerning his church, established in the last days for the restoration of his people, as he has spoken by the mouth of his prophets, and for the gathering of

37 See 1 Nephi 12:12–22, 13:35; 2 Nephi 1:10; Alma 45:12; Helaman 13:5, 9–10, 15:11, 3; Nephi 21:5; Mormon 8:6, 9:20; Moroni 10:1.

his saints to stand upon Mount Zion, which shall be the city of New Jerusalem. (D&C 84:2; received in 1832)

Anciently the Lord explained to Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, concerning a “choice seer” that would be raised up to do the work of the restoration:

A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers. ... And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation.” (2 Nephi 3:3, 15)

Without ambiguity, the Book of Mormon predicts both an apostasy of the Lehtes and a restoration through a prophet named Joseph.

No Prophecies of a Latter-day Apostasy and Restoration

A weighty question is whether the scriptures also prophesy of a latter-day apostasy and restoration, one occurring after Joseph Smith performed his work? Denver Snuffer and other critics allege that they do. Perhaps, the most popular verses quoted are Jesus Christ’s words in 3 Nephi 16:10–11:

And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.

While critics may affirm this is a prophecy of a latter-day apostasy, the language is certainly indefinite when compared to the prediction of a “dwindling of unbelief” of the entire church four hundred years after Christ. While the Savior refers to a time where “the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel,” the identity of the “gentiles” is less clear.

Snuffer and his followers affirm those “gentiles” are the Latter-day Saints (and their leaders) in the twenty-first century, not just a portion, but the entire Church membership. The argument goes that they are the only ones who have received the “fulness of the gospel,” so they are the only ones who could reject it. To support this view, they further allege that currently Church members are guilty of pride, lyings, deceits, mischiefs, hypocrisy, murders, priestcrafts, and whoredoms.

An alternate interpretation is that the gentiles who reject the fullness of the gospel do not need to have first embraced it. If someone offers me an apple, I don't need to first take a bite out of it before I can reject it. I can simply look at the apple and say, “No, thank you.” Similarly, investigators who reject the message of the missionaries today simultaneously reject the ordinances of baptism and the fullness of the gospel, which the missionaries also offer. They don't have to be baptized and attend the temple before they can “reject the fulness of the gospel.”

George Q. Cannon explained the Gentile's rejection would lead to the gospel being preached to the descendants of Nephi: “The Gospel would be revealed, and that it should be received by some of the Gentiles; that when it should be received by the Gentiles, it should be carried by them to the descendants of Nephi and his brethren, As they have rejected the gospel message, missionaries have been called to other lands to preach to those who are not of the house of Israel.”³⁸

Consistent with this view are the Savior's comments two verses earlier. “But wo, saith the Father, unto *the unbelieving of the gentiles*” (3 Nephi 16:8; italics added). Christ condemned the unbelievers without addressing the believers, which are not mentioned any time in the discourse. Verse 10's condemnation of the “gentiles” is just a continued discussion of the gentiles He identified in verse 8. To interpret this as saying that all Church members in the latter-days were gentiles, and they would apostatize is not warranted. There would be unbelieving and believing gentiles in that day. The believers would continue missionary work and building up the Church.

38 George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 25:123.

Other scriptures are also advanced by critics as containing prophecies of latter-day apostasy including 2 Nephi 28:11–15 and Mormon 8:32–33. I have addressed them in other writings, but the verses are not specific.³⁹ Multiple valid interpretations of these verses are possible with Snuffer's being less defensible.

To summarize, the Book of Mormon predicts a dwindling in unbelief four hundred years after Christ's visit and a restoration through a "choice seer" centuries later. The language is plain and unmistakable. However, there is no parallel prophecy of latter-day apostasy and second restoration. Ambiguous language found in a few verses can be recruited and narrowly interpreted in order to support Snuffer's assertions, but his allegations of a complete apostasy necessitating a new dispensation in our day are without scriptural support.

Prophecy Supports that the Restored Church Will Continue to the Millennium

If the scriptures do not prophesy of a later apostasy, what do they predict? Multiple revelations and statements from Joseph Smith support that the church he established will persist to the millennium. One of the plainest was uttered in October of 1831 in Hiram, Ohio: "The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth (D&C 65:2)." Snuffer's version is apparently that the gospel would not roll forth in 1831 but would wobble forth through a "long downward path" (p. 40) until after 2010 when a new visionary would arise to reset the gospel rolling.

Several other revelations plainly acknowledge that the church established through Joseph Smith is the "last kingdom" (D&C 88:70, 74; 90:6; see also D&C 24:19, 27:12–13). That is, it would not apostatize or be given to another people.

Therefore, thou art blessed from henceforth that bear the keys of the kingdom given unto you; *which kingdom is coming forth for the last time.* (D&C 90:2)

39 Brian C. Hales, "Dissenters: Portraying the Church as Wrong So They can be Right Without It," accessed June 22, 2015, <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/dissenters-portraying-the-church-as-wrong-so-they-can-be-right-without-it/#comment-14075>.

For unto you, the Twelve, and those, the First Presidency, who are appointed with you to be your counselors and your leaders, is the power of this priesthood given, *for the last days and for the last time*, in the which is the dispensation of the fulness of times. Which power you hold, in connection with all those who have received a dispensation at any time from the beginning of the creation; For verily I say unto you, the keys of the dispensation, which ye have received, have come down from the fathers, and *last of all*, being sent down from heaven unto you. (D&C 112:30–32)

Other revelations reflect the same expectation. In March of 1829, the Lord described the Joseph Smith's efforts as "the beginning of the rising up and the coming forth of my church out of the wilderness — clear as the moon, and fair as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners" (D&C 5:14; see also D&C 33:5, 109:73). The Snuffer version depicts a bannerless Church that is not "clear like the moon" or "fair like the sun" and never has been.

Similarly, the Prophet taught: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but, when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.' *Now we can discover plainly that this figure is given to represent the Church as it shall come forth in the last days.*"⁴⁰ Was that "coming forth" to begin in 1830 or 2010?

Although the Church was very small in the beginning, Joseph Smith had a prophetic sense of its grand destiny. Wilford Woodruff recalled a priesthood meeting at Kirtland, Ohio, in April 1834:

The Prophet called on all who held the Priesthood to gather into the little log school house they had there. It was a small house, perhaps 14 feet square. But it held the whole of the Priesthood of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were then in the town of Kirtland, and who had gathered together to go off in Zion's camp. That was the first time I ever saw Oliver Cowdery, or heard him speak; the first time I ever saw Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, and the two Pratts, and Orson Hyde and many others. There were no

40 Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (rpt; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 98.

Apostles in the Church then except Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.⁴¹

After the meeting had begun, the Prophet tried to awaken the brethren to a realization of the future state of God's kingdom on earth:

When we got together the Prophet called upon the Elders of Israel with him to bear testimony of this work. Those that I have named spoke, and a good many that I have not named, bore their testimonies. When they got through the Prophet said, "Brethren I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord, that you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother's lap. You don't comprehend it." I was rather surprised. He said "it is only a little handful of Priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America — it will fill the world."⁴²

How Can the Church Be True When the Latter-day Saints Manifest Unrighteousness?

The negative vitriol directed at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Snuffer's writings and in his "Plural Marriage" essay contains a kernel of truth: *The Latter-day Saints have not been as righteous as they should have been*. Ever since 1830, Church leaders have been concerned and have consistently admonished members to improve.

Today the problem persists. Attendance at Church meetings is far lower than it should be and many adults who participate are not spiritually engaged. The percentage of adults holding temple recommends is small, and those who qualify for sacred ordinances could honor them better. The youth sometimes struggle with distractions and moral issues. Nevertheless, these observations do not validate Snuffer's claims nor justify his harsh criticisms. Why? Because his standard of requisite obedience is vastly different from the Lord's. "God does not look on sin with allowance, but when men have sinned there must be allowance made for them."⁴³ Our Heavenly Father does not require near-perfection

41 Wilford Woodruff, *Conference Report*, April 1898, 57.

42 Ibid.

43 Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, p. 240–41. Cf. D&C 1:31–33.

that Snuffer implies is needed in order to qualify to assist with God's work and receive His blessings.

To Joseph Smith the Lord explained His standard and His method of dealing with imperfections:

Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.

And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known;

And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed;

And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent;

And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time. (D&C 1:24-28)

God deals with the Saints "in their weakness," not "in their perfection." If they "erred," the penalty was to make it known. If they "sinned," they would be chastened so they would repent. In either case, the consequence was not abandonment by the Lord. And if they were humble, they would be blessed and inspired.

The scriptures describe our Lord as filled with "loving kindness and long-suffering" towards his children (1 Nephi 19:9) who is a God of "compassion" (D&C 64:2), who is "pitiful" (1 Peter 3:8; D&C 133:53), and who is "merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end" (D&C 76:5). To ancient Israel, His hands remained "stretched out still" (2 Nephi 19:12, 17), despite their transgressions.

Through the Prophet, this loving Heavenly Father described the standard of compliance that must be met if mortals are to receive knowledge, revelation, prophecy, and other spiritual gifts. Those blessings are "for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and *him that seeketh so to do*" (D&C 46:9; italics added). *Keeping* all the commandments is not required, but *seeking to keep* all the commandments is required.

Similarly, Joseph Smith prayed in 1836: "O Lord, remember thy servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., and all his afflictions and persecutions

— how he has covenanted with Jehovah, and vowed to thee, O Mighty God of Jacob — and the commandments which thou hast given unto him, and that he *hath sincerely striven to do thy will*” (D&C 109:68). Again, perfection was not the expectation, but sincerely striving to do God’s will was the requirement.

So the Lord is willing to bless those who seek to keep the commandments and sincerely strive to do His will. However, has a core group of believers always existed among the members and leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were doing that? Critics like Snuffer may answer no, but a simple review of Church history shows that they are in error.

The willingness of early Saints to make sacrifices, like practicing polygamy, building temples stone-by-stone, and migrating to the West, supports that they were sincerely striving and seeking to be obedient. In the past century, different indicators like fulfilling mission calls, keeping the word of wisdom, attending the temple, serving in Church callings, paying tithing and offerings, and trying to become Christ-like have always existed. It is an undeniably fact that among the leadership and within each congregation, some Latter-day Saints have fulfilled the Lord’s requirements. Even if the number of sincere seekers has been small in the eyes of the critics, it has never been zero. The Latter-day Saints may have faltered in their quests for perfection over the past 170 years; however, they have never “dwindled in unbelief” as the Lehtes did after about 400 AD.

The continued presence of seekers and strivers within the Church and especially among its priesthood leadership supports that God has never had a reason to abandon the Latter-day Saints. Since the beginning of the Restoration, the Church has continued to expand its membership, increase missionary work, build temples that now dot the earth, and establish a tradition of conservative moral values among its members. These areas of growth are consistent with the prediction that the Church has left the “wilderness” (D&C 33:5) to become an “ensign for the nations” (Isaiah 11:12). The actions of the Church literally fulfill prophecies:

And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth.” (Moses 7:62)

Denver Snuffer has depicted the Church as a “vast wasteland” of immorality (p. 41), but this is because he needs this façade in order to legitimize his position as a new visionary among the people. He is like many other dissenters who have come and gone in the past. Latter-day scripture and the history of the Church both witness to the fact that the restored Kingdom of God that started rolling in 1830 continues with an accelerated pace in its onward motion today.

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