

The Consolidation of Church and State: Brigham Young's Telestial Kingdom

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Summary:

Brigham Young's brief tenure (1851-58) as Territorial Governor and Church President allowed him to wield the power of both church and state. How he used this authority reveals much about the man. During the brief reign as God's representative and United States' regent, his sermons reveal how precarious a challenge it presents to consolidate church and state power. His predecessor, Joseph Smith, sought to establish heaven on earth. In contrast, Governor Young had the lesser concern of establishing and operating a "Telestial Kingdom," while aggregating power and making pragmatic decisions in the present world. This article explores Brigham Young's Governorship as a "king's rule," unsuited to the American republic. It includes cautionary advice from the Book of Mormon against attempting this very thing.¹

Background:

Brigham Young was elected president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at Winter Quarters in December 1847. Two months later, on February 2, 1848 Mexico signed the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and ceded the Great Basin region to the United States. On March 4, 1849, Brigham Young summoned a convention to draft a constitution for the State of Deseret that he hoped would be approved by the United States Congress. The work of the convention was rapidly completed, the documents drafted, and an election held eight days later. Voters approved the constitution and elected Brigham Young, Governor, his First Counselor, Heber C. Kimball elected Chief Justice, and Second Counselor, Willard Richards elected Secretary of State. All 674 voters approved each of these decisions.

There were discrepancies between the constitutional offices and the slate of elected officers. Further, the constitution set the initial election for "the first Monday of May," not eight days after the convention. The departure from the constitution was because Brigham Young and the Council of Fifty predetermined the outcome. Voters ratified President Young's actions, ignored the constitution, and chose the selected slate in conformity with his wishes. Church Historian Leonard Arrington attributed this discrepancy to "the informal manner in which Brigham and his coterie of

¹This paper considers Brigham Young's own statements made during the time of his Governorship, and does not cover later statements made after his removal. He learned from his experiences and mistakes, and would later change many of his beliefs because of these experiences. However, those are not relevant to understanding what he believed from 1851-58. For that, I trust in the validity of the Lord's observation: "For of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." Luke 6: 45

associates ran things.”² That particular “informality” was only possible because of the unique roles of Brigham Young.

The Council of Fifty was a shadow government established by Joseph Smith that influenced the thinking of Brigham Young throughout his time as Governor. Therefore, the story of his 1851-1858 Governorship must necessarily begin years prior to Congress establishing the Territory of Utah, and the Presidential appointment of Brigham Young as its first Governor. We must turn back to 1844 when Joseph Smith first organized the Council of Fifty.³

The full name of the Council of Fifty was “The Kingdom of God and His Laws with the Keys and Power[s] thereof, and Judgment in the Hands of His Servants, Ahman Christ.”⁴ The name was too long and therefore was not widely known or regularly used. The two most frequently used names were “The Kingdom of God” or “The Council of Fifty.” Today, most Latter-day Saints aware of its existence would recognize it as the “Council of Fifty.” However, the early church leaders generally called it “The Kingdom of God” or “The Kingdom.”⁵ It was the venue where Joseph Smith established his own “Kingship” by being chosen as “our prophet Priest, & King by Hosannas.”⁶ When Joseph Smith spoke in the late-Nauvoo period about “the Kingdom,” or “the keys of the Kingdom,” he was referring to this council which elevated him to kingship. It was in this council Joseph Smith gave “the keys of the Kingdom” to his inner group of followers to permit them to perpetuate this “Kingdom of God” after his death.

Joseph’s kingship anointing culminated the promise of his exaltation. God intends to “exalt” those who were worthy, a status associated with kingship in this life and godhood in the next. The

²*Brigham Young, American Moses*, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1985) p. 224.

³ The minutes of this Council on April 10, 1880 record the council “was organized by the Lord. April 7th 1842.” This is apparently when Joseph Smith first received a revelation about the Council. However, he did not act to establish the Council until March 13, 1844. I use the date of its organization as the commencement date. See D. Michael Quinn, *The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945*, *BYU Studies* 20, No. 2 (1980), pp. 2-3. There is some discrepancy on the date of March 13, 1844. Both Wilford Woodruff and Franklin D. Richards state the organization occurred on March 10, 1844. See Quinn, p. 2, footnote 4, citing *Wilford Woodruff Journal*, 10 March 1844 and *Franklin D. Richards Journal*, 10 April 1880.

⁴ See Quinn, p. 3.

⁵ Heber C. Kimball and John Henry Smith would use “The Kingdom of God” and Joseph Smith, Willard Richards and Heber C. Kimball would call it “The Kingdom.” Quinn, pp. 3-4; also footnotes 12, 13 and 14.

⁶ *William Clayton Journal*, 11 April 1844. By 18 April 1844 the Council was filled. Brigham Young’s name was number “23” on the list. William Clayton’s description says the list is “of those who have called upon to form the grand K. [Kingdom] of G. [God] by revelation.” There were 52 total names listed. *William Clayton Journal* 18 April 1844.

consolidated revelations recorded July 12, 1843⁷ state: “Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.”⁸

Joseph lived and died in stratified antebellum America. The nation was divided over slavery. In that setting a religious idea of subservient angels obeying the commands of a worthy and exalted man in a stratified afterlife was easy to grasp and accept. We may find it conceptually hard in post-Civil War/post-Civil Rights America,⁹ but Joseph and his contemporaries lived in a differently ordered society. The idea that in the afterlife, mankind would be divided into groups of angels who would be subject to and serving more worthy gods was accepted and comfortable to them. To understand their behavior we need to consider their very different world.

Like his predecessor, Brigham Young was ordained a “King, Priest and Ruler over Israel.” Though the date of that ordination is not clear,¹⁰ remarks by Governor Young clearly indicate he viewed his status to rule over others as God-given and kingly.¹¹ This testimony was given by Reynolds Cahoon’s son, Bishop Andrew Cahoon, in 1889: “The King of that Kingdom that was set up on the earth was the head of the Church. Brigham Young proclaimed himself King here in Salt Lake Valley before there was a house built, in 1847.”¹²

In a sermon delivered on June 19, 1853, two years into his initial term, Governor Young addressed the saints in the Salt Lake Tabernacle as the church president.¹³ He explained: “We have got a Territorial Government, and I am and will be Governor, and no power can hinder it, until the

⁷ I have discussed the history of this revelation (Section 132) at length in *Passing the Heavenly Gift*, (Mill Creek Press, Salt Lake City, 2011), showing it to be an amalgamation of at least five different revelations beginning in 1829.

⁸ D&C 132: 20.

⁹ For Latter-day Saints perhaps the difficulty may best be reckoned from Official Declaration 2 announced on June 8, 1978. This extended priesthood and Temple blessings to the descendants of former American slaves.

¹⁰ “Although the exact date of which Brigham Young obtained the theocratic ordination of King, Priest, and Ruler over Israel is not presently known, he undoubtedly received it in the same manner that Joseph Smith did on 11 April 1844 and John Taylor did on 4 February 1885.” (Quinn, p. 18.) On that same page Quinn discusses an account of the John Taylor coronation ceremony, as recorded by Franklin D. Richards.

¹¹ Given his insistence on being elected church president in 1847, over the active opposition of several other Apostles, it is likely he would not have waited long before receiving the kingship rites, as well. His successor, John Taylor, was elected church president in 1880 and received kingship five years later.

¹² See Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire, The Political Kingdom of God and The Council of Fifty in Mormon History*, (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1967), p. 200 in footnote 74.

¹³ The dual nature of his status becomes apparent because Governor Young addressed the church conferences about governmental concerns and the Legislature about religious concerns. The two roles were entirely conflated. This is best understood in the context of a Divine appointment as a “king” which allowed him to move seamlessly in both capacities.

Lord Almighty, says, ‘Brigham, you need not be Governor any longer,’ and then I am willing to yield to another Governor.’¹⁴

Arrington’s explanation for the “informal manner in which Brigham and his coterie of associates ran things” is best understood against this other, less public Mormon practice. Brigham Young felt comfortable contradicting the draft Territorial constitution because he was a king, and could exercise kingly rule. He called the convention, gave them the mandate, and wanted Territorial recognition from Congress. He knew they would not approve a Rocky Mountain monarchy, and so he at least wanted the appearance of democratic rule. The deviations from what the convention established, and what Brigham Young decreed, gives a glimpse into the difference between Mormonism’s public theatre and private reality. A failure to recognize this (or an effort to obscure it) creates a veil which impairs the real view of these events. We cannot understand the conduct if we are not willing to recognize his motivation.

Brigham Young is best understood in the context of his sincere belief he possessed kingship given to him by God. His behavior and sermons reflect the conviction it was a king speaking; those who listened were expected to respond accordingly.

The way the “kingdom” was to function under his leadership is not left unexplained. Brigham Young was the one in control, and he did what he understood Joseph Smith wanted done. He believed ultimately that Jesus was in control, but Brigham was the local, immediate leader in charge in this world,¹⁵ and he was following what he understood Joseph Smith wanted done:

If I could have the desire of my heart I would know precisely the will of Joseph concerning me and how to dictate this people. I do not want to skip Joseph, Peter, Jesus, Moses and go to my Father in Heaven. All I ask for is to be guided by the spirit of Joseph, then let others be governed by their head, or priesthood. Joseph enjoyed the privileges which I never thought I had. Joseph was called of God. I was called of Joseph. I ask you have you ever lost one particle of confidence in me. I do not believe there is one being on earth. Now restore your confidence in yourselves and then in one another, and it casts fear on the minds of the world.¹⁶

¹⁴ *The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young*, Richard S. Van Wagoner editor, (Smith-Pettit Foundation, Salt Lake, 2009) Volume 2, p. 680 (hereafter “*Complete Discourses*”). All quotes are left uncorrected, as in the original.

¹⁵ Brigham Young did not openly call himself “king” in his public statements. This is similar to church presidents not calling themselves “prophets.” The title of “prophet” is used by others when referring to the presidents of the church. The presidents themselves have been reluctant to use the term publicly. Similarly, the title of “king” was clearly what Brigham Young claimed beginning in 1847. See footnote 12, *supra*.

¹⁶ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 1108, May 25, 1856.

Kingship among gentiles in the Americas is disapproved of in the Book of Mormon. It directs: “[T]his land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon this land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles.”¹⁷ Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon. Brigham Young was converted because of it. Therefore, we should consider the meaning of this limitation on “kingship.”¹⁸ Joseph Smith was anointed “king” before Brigham Young, but Joseph’s kingship was entirely theological, private, and non-governmental. His precedent did little to support the form of “kingship” implemented by Brigham Young,¹⁹ and far less to justify rebellion against the government.²⁰

The earliest events in Utah combined church and state in the person of Brigham Young. Without him, there was no order-- social, religious or political. Everything revolved around the church, and after December 1847 the church revolved around him. Colonizer, Governor, Church President, Prophet, Apostle, Lion of the Lord, American Moses, orator, and first citizen; the society of saints were overshadowed by this leader in a way which mirrored, if not exceeded, the way colonial America respected and followed George Washington. Either man could have cut corners, had they elected to do so. In the case of Washington, we have no instance of him doing so. In the case of Brigham Young, however, corners were cut beginning with his election as Governor of an unrecognized territory.²¹ President Washington first laid down his authority at the end of the Revolutionary War, and then again after two terms as US President. Brigham Young resisted laying down either of his offices, had to be removed as Governor by the US Army, and only surrendered his church position at death.²²

¹⁷ 2 Ne. 10: 11.

¹⁸ The restriction is attributed to “God” (i.e., “this land, saith God,” etc.) in 2 Ne. 10: 10-12.

¹⁹ The first elections in Nauvoo resulted in John C. Bennett elected Mayor. Joseph was also not included in a second tier of City Aldermen. Joseph was elected to the third tier, as a member of the City Council for the Third Ward. John S. Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, (Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 2011), p. 14.

²⁰ Rather than retain the weapons when the community was threatened by mobs prior to his death, Joseph surrendered the Nauvoo Legion’s rifles to the State of Illinois. Similarly, the Zion’s Camp movement from Ohio to Missouri ended without a single shot being fired in hostile action. Joseph disbanded the camp when they faced opposition, and left it to the civil process to sort out the wrongs suffered by his followers.

²¹ As we look at his words, we find him using his Governorship while speaking in religious assemblies, and his church presidency while addressing the Legislature. I will note when he spoke as church president and when as Governor. The roles are consistently conflated.

²² The LDS church follows the Brigham Young example, and not the most revered Book of Mormon leader, King Benjamin, for succession to the office of church president. King Benjamin surrendered his office and authority when he grew old, rather than holding it until his death as Brigham Young elected. (See, Mosiah 1: 9-10.) Similarly, King David surrendered his authority before he died. (1 Kings 1: 33-35.) Nephi also appointed another to be king before his death. (Jacob 1: 9.) The church’s structure and legal organization

States have a monopoly on the power to take property, fine, punish, imprison, and even kill its citizens. Brigham Young's religion, however, held no such authority. "[W]e do not believe that any religious society has authority to try men on the right of property or life, to take from them this world's goods, or to put them in jeopardy of either life or limb, or to inflict any physical punishment upon them. They can only excommunicate them from their society, and withdraw from them their fellowship."²³ When analyzing Brigham Young's tenure as Territorial Governor, it is impossible to distinguish between his role as head of state and head of church. Parsing his conduct on the basis of the kind of power used (i.e., the power to punish beyond fellowship) reveals the two roles merged into kingship. The result is a thoroughgoing blend of church and state, where both powers are consistently used simultaneously. Brigham Young ruled as if there were no separation between the two.

When those church members who followed the Quorum of the Twelve were expelled from Nauvoo mid-winter, they governed themselves through the church.²⁴ "[C]hurch authorities believed that the Kingdom of God was a political as well as a spiritual kingdom, and that the Priesthood was directly responsible for the effective conduct of civil government."²⁵ Church revelations clarified to Latter-day Saints that there simply is no distinction between the "temporal" and the "spiritual."²⁶

makes passage of the Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints automatic and only upon death of the senior church apostle.

²³ D&C 134: 10.

²⁴ Less than a year after Joseph and Hyrum's deaths, the Quorum of the Twelve addressed a letter to "the President of the United States of America; To the Governors of the several States; And to the Rulers and People of all Nations" laying out the demand for acknowledgement of God's kingdom. Among other things, the Proclamation demands: "And now, O ye kings, rulers, and people of the Gentiles: hear ye the word of the Lord: for this commandment is for you. You are not only required to repent and obey the gospel in its fullness, and thus become members or citizens of the kingdom of God, but you are also hereby commanded in the name of Jesus Christ, to put your silver and your gold, your ships and steam-vessels, your railroad trains and your horses, chariots, camels, mules, and litters, into active use, for the fulfillment of these purposes. For be it known unto you, that the only salvation which remains for the Gentiles, is for them to be identified in the same covenant, and to worship at the same altar with Israel. In short, they must come to the same standard. For, there shall be one Lord, and his name one, and He shall be king over all the earth." James R. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, (Bookcraft, Salt Lake, 1965), Vol. 1, p. 255. This Proclamation goes on to explain that God "will assemble the Natives, the remnants of Joseph in America; and make of them a great, and strong, and powerful nation: and he will civilize and enlighten them, and will establish a holy city, and temple, and seat of government among them, which shall be called Zion." *Id.*, p. 259. These ideas would find their way into later public declarations of Governor Young.

²⁵ James B. Allen, *Ecclesiastical Influence on Local Government in the Territory of Utah, Arizona and the West*, Vol. 8, No 1 (Spring 1966), p. 36.

²⁶ D&C 29: 34-35: "Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created. Behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave

The church-in-exile from America had little choice other than to become self-governing. On January 14, 1847 Brigham Young issued his only canonized revelation proclaiming “The Word and Will of the Lord.”²⁷ The opening voice of the revelation is not identified.²⁸ The voice of Jehovah does not clearly emerge until verse 21. The first 20 verses establish the order for the western exodus, patterned after the 1834 Zion’s Camp march from Ohio to Missouri led by Joseph Smith.²⁹ Church leaders provided the entire leadership structure and government throughout the western migration and first years of settlement.

After the body arrived in the Great Basin, and before the United States provided any recognized appointments, the church filled the void. “The early colonies in Utah were located and settled under the direction of the church leaders. Until counties were fully organized, necessary civil functions in each area were carried out by local bishops and elders. In Provo, for example, a meeting of the ‘branch’ of the church was held in July of 1849, at which laws were passed imposing fines for gambling with Indians, as well as for shooting in or near the fort.”³⁰ Initially, the only residents were church members. The church had an existing structure capable of governing and the doctrine of the church made no distinction between the temporal and the spiritual. It only made sense the church would provide the structure of both church and state. “[T]he church was in a position to have direct influence on the conduct of county government, for leaders of both institutions were usually the same men; and, because of their ecclesiastical positions, they carried an aura of authority which most settlers respected.”³¹

Despite all the practical reasons, and obvious necessity for the church to step into the void, the distinction between church and state *does* matter. The church was an institution of limited authority, confined to spiritual matters. As we have seen, the scriptures confined it to “fellowship,” and never extended into life, property or “this world’s goods.”³² The state is another matter.

unto him commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him, for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual.”

²⁷ This was eleven months prior to him being elected church president.

²⁸ It is possible to interpret the first 20 verses as Brigham Young, the Twelve, or Jehovah speaking as “the Lord.” The common view is that Jehovah speaks throughout, but it is not until verse 21 that interpretation is clearly established.

²⁹ See D&C 103: 30-34.

³⁰ Allen, *supra*, p. 37.

³¹ Allen, p. 39.

³² “[W]e do not believe that any religious society has authority to try men on the right of property or life, to take from them this world’s goods, or to put them in jeopardy of either life or limb, or to inflict any physical punishment upon them. They can only excommunicate them from their society, and withdraw from them their fellowship.” (D&C 134: 10.)

The power of the state is derived from the right of individuals in a state of nature to punish and retaliate for offenses to the individual. John Locke stated in his *Second Treatise on Civil Government*:

That, he who has suffered the damage has a right to demand in his own name, and he alone can remit: the damnified person has this power of appropriating to himself the goods or service of the offender, by right of self-preservation, as every man has a power to punish the crime, to prevent its being committed again, by the right he has of preserving all mankind, and doing all reasonable things he can in order to that end: and thus it is, that every man, in the state of nature, has a power to kill a murderer, both to deter others from doing the like injury, which no reparation can compensate, by the example of the punishment that attends it from everybody, and also to secure men from the attempts of a criminal, who having renounced reason, the common rule and measure God hath given to mankind, hath, by the unjust violence and slaughter he hath committed upon one, declared war against all mankind, and therefore may be destroyed as a lion or a tiger, one of those wild savage beasts, with whom men can have no society nor security: and upon this is grounded that great law of nature, Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. And Cain was so fully convinced, that everyone had a right to destroy such a criminal, that after the murder of his brother, he cries out, Every one that findeth me, shall slay me; so plain was it writ in the hearts of all mankind.” (Section 11, spellings have been modernized.)

Locke’s and Young’s reasoning on the use of state power were similarly respectful of scriptural precedent. But it is difficult to feel the weight of principle when there is an immediate threat to address. When you add to this difficulty the combination of these two forms of power in a single man occupying the head of both church and state, unfortunate results should be expected. The Book of Mormon weighs in and has little to recommend combining the office of “High Priest” over the church with “Chief Judge” over the land. Alma refused it, ceding the power of government to Nephiah and retaining the office of “High Priest over the Church” for himself.³³ Likewise,

³³ Alma 4: 16-20: “And he selected a wise man who was among the elders of the church, and gave him power according to the voice of the people, that he might have power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given, and to put them in force according to the wickedness and the crimes of the people. Now this man's name was Nephiah, and he was appointed chief judge; and he sat in the judgment-seat to judge and to govern the people. Now Alma did not grant unto him the office of being high priest over the church, but he retained the office of high priest unto himself; but he delivered the judgment-seat unto Nephiah. And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them. And thus in the commencement of the ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, Alma delivered up the

Joseph Smith, by revelation, gave Hyrum the priesthood and made him co-President, as Joseph assumed the office of “king.”³⁴ Unlike Alma, Governor Young chose to remain both with such tenacity that it required an Act of Congress, the United States President acting as Commander in Chief, and the US Army to pry from President Young the Governorship.

One of the first issues facing the provisional Governor and Legislature was property rights. Settlers were building houses, developing farming lots, and distributing water, all of which required a legal framework to provide security for their labors. “[U]ntil it took steps in this direction the people could obtain not title to their homes. Much anxiety was felt by them in consequence. While waiting for the National Government to dispose of the soil, the Provisional Government made temporary grants to its citizens, of the lands they occupied, including the use of grazing ground, with water and timber for milling and lumbering purposes.”³⁵ These temporary measures were necessarily undertaken, and had the effect of promoting community development and reaffirming the authority of the church and its leaders. The resulting level of fidelity to these community benefactors is difficult for us to understand from our vantage point. The lives of the citizens were utterly dependent upon the good graces of the church. The inevitable result elevated Governor Brigham Young in the hearts and minds of his followers.

The Territorial government’s provisional application to become a United States Territory was not without controversy. Debate lasted for nearly a year in the US Senate. When finally passed, President Millard Fillmore signed the bill on September 9, 1850 and appointed Brigham Young the first Territorial Governor of the Territory of Utah. Although appointed in September, the news did not arrive in Utah until January 27, 1851.³⁶ Brigham Young was touring northern settlements and did not hear until the next day. He was officially sworn into the office of Territorial Governor on

judgment-seat to Nephiah, and confined himself wholly to the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to the testimony of the word, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy.”

³⁴ See D&C 124: 91 (giving Priesthood) and 94-95 (making him prophet to the church). *William Clayton’s Journal* records on July 16, 1843 Joseph said the following: “Hyrum held the office of prophet to the church by birthright... the Saints must regard Hyrum for he has authority.”

³⁵ Orson F. Whitney, *Popular History of Utah*, (Deseret News Press, Salt Lake, 1916), p. 66.

³⁶ The appointment was reported in the *New York Tribune*, which found its way to San Francisco. Returning missionary Henry E. Gibson brought a copy of the newspaper with him when he returned to Salt Lake. In the paper was a list of appointments, including Brigham Young’s. (*Id.*, p. 72, and footnote found there.) The church and Territory learned of the appointment through the *Fifth General Epistle Of the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, dated April 7, 1851. The letter can be found in James R. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, (Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, 1965), Vol. 2, p. 62-73

February 3, 1851. “Brigham Young, Governor of Deseret by popular vote, was now Governor of Utah by presidential appointment[.]”³⁷

The “Act to Establish a Territorial Government for Utah” included in Section 2, the following language:

That the executive power and authority in and over said Territory of Utah shall be vested in a governor, who shall hold his office for four years, and until his successor shall be appointed and qualified,³⁸ unless sooner removed by the President of the United States. The governor shall preside within said Territory, shall be commander-in-chief of the militia thereof, shall perform the duties and receive the emoluments of superintendent of Indian affairs, and shall approve all laws passed by the legislative assembly before they shall take effect: he may grant pardons for offenses against the laws of said Territory, and reprieves for offenses against the laws of the United States, until the decision of the President can be made known thereon; he shall commission all officers who shall be appointed to office under the laws of the said Territory, and shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed.³⁹

The US Government granted rights that only confirmed the existing reality. It was a politically astute move by President Fillmore. Brigham Young’s and Utah’s appreciation is reflected in naming Millard County and Fillmore City as a tribute to him.

On June 15, 1851 the two roles merge. When speaking about horse theft and Indians, Brigham Young said, (after explaining Indians are taught to steal from birth and whites were taught not to steal): “[W]hile they are in their degraded state, it rests upon us to use wisdom and judgment in their behalf. I say to the Saints, kill every white man you see stealing and not kill the Indian for it, for the white men know better. I speak to the Saints not as the Governor of Utah, but you and I are sent to save Israel not to kill them.”⁴⁰ He spoke of killing (an impermissible penalty for the church). The audience was “the Saints,” and yet he stressed he did not speak as “Governor of Utah.” Six days later he told the Saints: “[W]e are a kingdom and must bring the kingdom in subject to the will of God.”⁴¹ He conflated the two, because President/Governor Young led both simultaneously.

³⁷ Orson F. Whitney, *supra*, at p. 72. Interestingly, although the church’s First Presidency acknowledged the Act of Congress established the Territory of “Utah,” the church continued to refer to “citizens of Deseret” in correspondence. See, James R. Clark, *supra*, Vol 2, pp. 68, 74.

³⁸ He was appointed to a four year term, but served seven years because a replacement was not made until Alfred Cumming was appointed by President James Buchanan.

³⁹ 31st Congress, Session 1, Chapter 51, 1850, *Act to provide a Territorial Government for Utah*, September 9, 1850.

⁴⁰ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 1, p. 434.

⁴¹ *Id.*, p. 436, June 22, 1851.

President Young gave a definition of “liberty” in a sermon on June 29, 1851, some of which reads like John Locke:

The spirit of liberty is the spirit of submission. If you wish to enjoy liberty in your fullness you must submit to the rule to the land of liberty. The privilege of living in liberty to all eternity adopt every holy principle and gather together every thing on earth and make you happy... You are not at liberty to infringe on the rights of your neighbors. If a man injure me, I am at liberty to make him pay for it. Every person in heaven is at liberty when they have the privilege to organize a kingdom for themselves, but unless they are submissive to their presidents on earth, they never can have the privilege to the last day of eternity. If they are faithful here, they will be make gods in eternity.⁴²

Submission to “their presidents on earth,” meaning church leaders, was the price of godhood in eternity. Liberty meant “submission” to the king and the prize for submitting to the earthly president will be eternal godhood. This was the motivation for his followers. They were willing to be his subjects here in the hope of becoming something godlike hereafter.

Governor Young did not believe that Mormon governance was limited to the Great Basin. He explained: “All things will have to bow to Mormonism or eternal light and truth. We have the true government of all the earth.”⁴³ If Mormonism had the right to govern “all the earth” and Brigham Young was its earthly king, then it follows there should be no conceptual end of his kingdom.⁴⁴

President Young wanted his kingdom to be self-sufficient. Therefore, he did not want his believers to buy from non-Mormon suppliers. “Everything is against Mormonism and Mormonism is against everything. Everything is against us. Hear it, O earth, for the Kingdom of God is against all earth and hell. This is true and we shall fight them until the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our God. We shall fight battle after battle until the victory is won; we have to fight and lay down our lives for Christ’s sake.”⁴⁵ The rhetoric was overwrought, and the impressions left were undoubtedly significant. The “battles” underway in 1851 were anything but violent. The political appointment of non-Mormon judges by Washington was unacceptable to Utah, and Utah’s social structure was unacceptable to them. These hostile judges intended to return to Washington and raise political opposition to Utah’s (and therefore the church’s) leaders.

⁴² *Id.*, p. 440.

⁴³ *Id.*, p. 448.

⁴⁴ Compare Isaiah 9: 7: “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”

⁴⁵ *Id.*, p. 461, October 6, 1851.

Fiery rhetoric from Brigham Young was commonplace. Initially it was more alarming in tone than in effect. However, continuing fiery rhetoric combined with deteriorating environmental circumstances did finally result in unfortunate events which were only possible because church and state merged in Brigham Young.

In January 1852, Governor Young spoke to the Legislature about slavery, sin and punishment. Borrowing from the Law of Moses, he declared: “The time will come, that if a man will take the name of God in vain, he will be hewn down without judgment or trial!”⁴⁶ He added: “The time will also come when if the parents are sanctified before the Lord, and their children rise up in disobedience against them, they will be hewn down.”⁴⁷ This talk discussed a topic that is still controversial.⁴⁸ He advanced the idea a man must be killed for his own sins by shedding his blood:⁴⁹

In the days of ancient Israel, justice was dealt out in a manner that showed they understood principle, and revered the commandments of God. It was a mercy to many to have justice and judgment executed upon them on the Earth, even to be slain and have their blood poured out upon the Earth, that it might be tolerable for them. God made a covenant with Abraham and his seed, that He would save them. When they committed sin, He slew them, that He might save them, by their spilling their blood as an offering. Had they lived in sin, they might have sinned so as not to have been forgiven or saved. It was mercy to slay them.⁵⁰

The next day he added: “It is the greatest blessing that could come to some men to shed their blood on the ground, and let it come up before the Lord as an atonement.”⁵¹ Brigham Young, as king, thought it his burden to create righteous people from those over whom he held authority,

⁴⁶ *Id.*, p. 466, January 4, 1852.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ He also spoke in this address about Negros being descended from Cain, their lineage being cursed, and therefore, denied priesthood, and that intermarriage with descendants of Cain justified execution of both parties. However, that issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴⁹ This was not altogether original to Brigham Young. Joseph Smith responded to a Nauvoo City debate over hanging by stating his preference for shooting or cutting the throat of an offender: “In debate on the bill, Geo[rge] A. Smith thought imprisonment better than hanging. Mayor [Joseph Smith] said he was opposed to hanging. If a man kill another[,] shoot him[,] or cut his throat[,] spilling his blood on the ground[,] and let the smoke thereof ascend up to God. If I ever have the privilege of Making a law on this point[,] I will have it so.” Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, (Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 1989), pp. 326-28. Brigham Young's advocacy greatly expanded the idea beyond Joseph Smith's desire to see capital punishment result in blood being spilled in the Nauvoo City debate.

⁵⁰ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 1, p. 467, January 4, 1857.

⁵¹ *Id.*, p. 469

even if it required some to die to accomplish it.⁵² As Commander in Chief of the Territorial Militia he could use military force, and he could invite the Legislature to pass laws which included the death penalty.⁵³ A few years later this kind of rhetoric would bring about the Mormon Reformation, which was the beginning of the end for his Governorship.

In an address to the two houses of the Legislature on January 29, 1852, he commented: “we find it is a hard matter to enact human laws to govern a divine kingdom.”⁵⁴ The Governor and church president, or ‘priest and king,’ saw the challenge in these terms. They were stewards over “human laws,” but he was steward over “a divine kingdom.” The solution to the challenge, he explained to the Legislature, was to “draw out from the laws which God has given for His divine Kingdom. And make enactments to control all people, to a certain extent under the divine control of His own Kingdom on Earth, this I also believe.”⁵⁵ To clarify that his ambition was not limited to the Territory of Utah, but would expand to dominate the whole world, Governor Young declared:

For as the Lord lives, and as this people lives, they have this to do sooner or later. They have to usher forth their enactments, to govern the Jews and the Gentiles, and all the nations which are included with Israel, and with the Gentiles, that every professed Christian, every religious denomination, and every government under the whole heaven may find shelter under this broad banner which shall be spread over them by the Lord Almighty. That I also believe.⁵⁶

If God owns this world, then His Kingdom ought to rule over all of it. The scope is necessarily universal. This cosmic reach reflected the Governor’s religious convictions. As he concluded his remarks he declared: “Jehovah is my king. I care not what can be said to the contrary. The Lord Jehovah is my king and instructor, and I wish you to serve Him. That is the way I would do it if I was in the Legislature[.]”⁵⁷

Non-Mormon federal appointees left Utah and accused Governor Young of being a dictator. Brigham Young thought he had the right to dictate. He was not limited by traditional American

⁵² Mormon scripture also disapproved coerced behavior, even if the object was to “save” souls. See, e.g., Moses 4: 1-3.

⁵³ For a discussion about Utah’s legacy of capital punishment see Martin R. Gardner, *Mormonism and Capital Punishment: A Doctrinal Perspective, Past and Present*, Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 1989, pp. 9-26.

⁵⁴ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 1, p. 475, January 29, 1852.

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*, p. 476.

constraints. He answered to a much higher authority. His response revealed that he thought his prerogative reckoned from God and the Council of Fifty. His status was given by God:

I am accused by our honorable judges who have left this Territory last fall of entering into the Legislative Hall and there dictating them. That is an objection that will be raised and will be presented to President Fillmore; that I entered into the Halls of Legislature and there dictate them. I do dictate and I never expect to see the day while I am Governor amongst this people that I don't do it, and I want it published abroad for it is what I believe in, and it is what you believe in. ...I want these Gentlemen to realize, to be fully sensible of, is simply this; that when they meet here in a legislative capacity, not to forget that they are Elders in Israel, Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they are Saints of the Most High God, and I hope and pray that a feeling to the contrary of this may never arise in the bosom of anyone of these men. ...[Referring to pre-Territorial days]We then legislated for the benefit of the inhabitants of the State of Deseret. The most of them belonged to the council that is called the Council of Fifty.⁵⁸

Reflecting on the possibility the he could be removed as Governor by President Fillmore, he added: "They may send another governor here, but I shall govern the people by the Eternal Priesthood of the Son of God."⁵⁹

At the end of the next month, the Legislature threw a social party. The Governor addressed the party. In his lengthy remarks, he reflected on the difficult burden he carried to be everyone's constant adviser. He recommended physical labor for its health benefits, and then declared he couldn't cut wood or hoe a garden because he was constantly interrupted by someone wanting counsel. He declared, "I have given it up, I do not intend to work any more at manual labor."⁶⁰ He explained to them how he knew they were God's chosen Kingdom on Earth. "When you see all the powers of the evil one combined against a community, you may know that is Christ's kingdom. Everything has proved that this is God's kingdom."⁶¹ In other words, positive proof of God's favor can be found in resistance and opposition from anywhere. Governor Young detected universal proof of God's favor.

⁵⁸ *Id.*, p. 476-77, February 4, 1852.

⁵⁹ *Id.* p. 477.

⁶⁰ *Id.*, p. 485, March 4, 1852. This notion the ruler is spared manual labor for his own support is contrary to the kingship model of King Benjamin. See Mosiah 2: 12-19.

⁶¹ *Id.*, p. 487.

President Young addressed the General Conference a month later, and expounded on how every man's property should be bound to the church. He wanted it so that if a man wanted to apostatize from the religion their economic survival prevented it:

If any man is in darkness through the deceitfulness of riches, it is good policy for him to bind up his wealth in this Church, so that he cannot command it again, and he will be apt to cleave to the kingdom. If a man has the purse in his pocket, and he apostatizes, he takes it with him; but if his worldly interest is firmly united to the Kingdom of God, when he arises to go away, he finds the calf is bound, and, like the cow, he is unwilling to forsake it. If his calf is bound up here, he will be inclined to stay; all his interest is here, and ever likely the Lord will open his eyes, so that he will properly understand his true situation, and his heart will chime in with the will of his God in a very short time. Were we to dedicate our moral and intellectual influence, and our earthly wealth to the Lord, our hearts would be very likely to applaud our acts. This reasoning is for those who do not feel exactly to subscribe to all that has been said this morning, with regard to dedicating ourselves to the cause of truth. This is what you must do to obtain an exaltation. The Lord must be first and foremost in our affections, the building of His kingdom demands our first consideration.⁶²

President Young envisioned merging Saint to church, church to state, and himself in control of it all. One great beehive, united and working for one purpose: to support the king's efforts to further his King's will. There was something much bigger going on for Brigham Young. He had a grander purpose: "The Millennium consists in this—every heart in the Church and Kingdom of God being united in one; the Kingdom increasing to the overcoming of everything opposed to the economy of heaven, and Satan being bound."⁶³

In the words of Brigham Young, there is a seamless harmony between it all. But the seamlessness requires us to view it the same as did he. Until you recognize his kingship, you don't see what the Governor was trying to accomplish.

On August 29, 1852 the private practice of having plural wives was made public. As church president he spoke after the announcement and declared:

[I]t will sail over and ride triumphantly above all the prejudice and priestcraft of the day; it will be fostered and believed in by the more intelligent portion of the world as one of the best doctrines ever proclaimed to any people. Your hearts need not beat; you need not think that a mob is coming here to tread upon the sacred liberty

⁶² *Id.*, p. 491, April 6, 1852.

⁶³ *Id.*

which the Constitution of our country guarantees unto us, for it will not be.⁶⁴

He then quoted an unidentified US Senator⁶⁵ who advised in favor of this public disclosure, suggesting it would be something the entire country would welcome as an advantage to public health. The expected public acceptance never happened. Nor did the principle ultimately receive Constitutional vindication. Those matters, however, were not resolved until long after Brigham Young's Governorship.

Criticism from all sides continued to mount against Governor Young from the national press, as well as from dissidents and non-Mormons. In an October address to the church, President Young declared how futile it was to consider removing him as Governor:

What says the United States? "Let us send a governor there; let us send our judges there." But what do they cry? "We have no influence or power, for there are other men there who rule, and we cannot help it; they have the reins of government and turn the people whithersoever they will, and we cannot help ourselves." What did a gentleman say to Mr. Fillmore? Said he, "You need not send anybody there, for Brigham Young is Governor, and he will govern the people all the time; and there is no other man that can govern them." If there is any truth in this, it is, he will do so as long as the Lord lets him.⁶⁶

It is apparent President Brigham Young said exactly what he meant. Later events, including removing him from power over the state, the abolition of plural marriage, domestication of the church by the nation, all influence the way Mormons now interpret the words of Brigham Young. Consider for a moment these words in their literal meaning: "How are this people to be ruled, to be dictated in their future course. The Lord Almighty had built up his kingdom, here is the church and kingdom of the Lord God Almighty upon the earth. This is the kingdom [the church] to this kingdom [the world]."⁶⁷

Five days later, another preview of a coming Reformation appears in his conference address. Speaking of those who killed Joseph Smith, including the governor and militia who were involved, Brigham Young said, "[if they] had come and had us to cut off their heads and let their blood be shed on the ground to atone for their sin. The nation might have redeemed themselves, if they had

⁶⁴ *Id.* p. 582, August 29, 1852.

⁶⁵ Stephen A. Douglas was the unnamed source.

⁶⁶ *Complete Discourses, supra*, Vol. 1., p. 591, October 3, 1852.

⁶⁷ *Id.* p. 595.

taken those murderers and spilt their blood, but they have held their peace.”⁶⁸ The result, he declared, would require innocent blood to be shed in their place, for the nation to wipe their sin away.⁶⁹

In June 1853, President Young addressed a church conference complaining of Judge Brocchus, the Territorial judge appointed by the federal government who abandoned his position and returned to Washington to complain. “It is true, as it is said in the Report of these officers, if I had crooked my little finger, he would have been used up, but I did not bend it.”⁷⁰ He conceded he has the power to ‘use up’ a critic by the smallest of gestures, and noted that he refrained. However, he went on to caution “apostates, or men who never have made any profession of religion, had better be careful how they come here, lest I should bend my little finger.”⁷¹ Protecting his kingdom from internal apostasy or waywardness was another matter. He could be provoked into action by anything he suspected as apostasy.

In this talk, President Young again remarked about his right to remain as head of state: “I have no fears whatever of Franklin Pierce excusing me from office, and saying that another man shall be the Governor of this territory.” He explained some of the history of getting the Territory recognized, remarking that he told the original delegation “I will be Governor still, after you have done every thing you possibly can do to prevent it.” It was his right. God, and the Council of Fifty, had made him king. Therefore, “We have got a Territorial Government, and I am and will be Governor, and no power can hinder it, until the Lord Almighty says, ‘Brigham, you need not be Governor any longer,’ and then I am willing to yield[.]”⁷²

The Governor’s Reformation:

With that background we turn to the Mormon Reformation. By 1856, Willard Richards had died (March 11, 1854) and was replaced by Jedediah M. Grant in the First Presidency of the church. Brigham Young had been Governor for five years. Political conditions were complicated by increased criticism both in the Territory, and the nation. Plural wives, as expected, had not been welcomed. The kingdom was struggling. A new national political party was emerging whose popularity was driven by its opposition to both slavery and polygamy.

⁶⁸ *Id.*, p. 596.

⁶⁹ This is an early harbinger of the events later played out at Mountain Meadows.

⁷⁰ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 680, June 19, 1853.

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

Beginning in 1855, in addition to political and social difficulties, President Young was confronted by natural disasters. “The first major calamity was a grasshopper plague. On April 30, 1855 Brigham Young noted that ‘grasshoppers have made their appearance and are doing extensive damage.’”⁷³ A drought was underway, and the plague added to crop losses. Food became scarce. “The drought was followed by a severe winter. In an effort to find more suitable grazing, it was decided to move many cattle, including more of the church herd, northward to Cache Valley. Biting snow and extreme cold soon proved this to be an unwise decision, and the loss in stock was extensive. Brigham estimated that two-thirds of all church stock had perished, while Wilford Woodruff recorded that only five hundred cattle remained from a herd of twenty-six hundred.”⁷⁴ The winter of 1855-56 was another catastrophe atop the already direful circumstances. The January and February 1856 deep snow killed cattle they could ill afford to lose. Not only were cattle lost in Cache Valley, but horses also. Conditions required them to be kept in barns and fed hay to survive. By spring, two-thirds of all the livestock had died.⁷⁵ The entire kingdom was threatened. These disasters “in one year, wiped out the entire social surplus and placed the 35,000 persons in the territory in the same position of semistarvation in which the early Salt Lake colonists found themselves before the Gold Rush.”⁷⁶ How was the king to view a kingdom that had been rebuked by nature’s God? Where was the blame to be placed?⁷⁷ What was to be done?

Although there were two explanations for these calamities, Brigham Young apparently only considered one. Either the leaders had brought this onto the kingdom, or the subjects had failed. Someone had offended God and needed to repent. Of the two alternatives, President Young chose to blame the subjects. What followed was a “Mormon Reformation” designed to “rekindle faith and testimony throughout the Church.”⁷⁸ This period is, to say the least, still controversial. It excites extravagant claims by critics and brings out equally extravagant apologies from church defenders. A

⁷³ Paul H. Peterson, *The Mormon Reformation of 1856-1857: The Rhetoric and the Reality*, *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 15, 1989, p. 62, (citing Brigham Young’s letter to John Taylor, April 30, 1855, *Brigham Young Letterbooks*, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah).

⁷⁴ *Id.*, p. 63.

⁷⁵ See Polly Aird, *Mormon Convert, Mormon Defector: A Scottish Immigrant in the American West, 1848-1861*, (Arthur H. Clark, Norman Oklahoma, 2009), p. 156; citing *Millennial Star* 18 (June 21, 1856): 396-97; Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, p. 125-136.

⁷⁶ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, p. 148.

⁷⁷ “Gentile conflicts, assimilation problems, difficulties with apostates, and especially natural disasters, all implied that the Lord was not happy with the atmosphere in Mormondom.” (Paul H. Peterson, p. 63.)

⁷⁸ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Vol. 3, p. 1197, “Reformation (LDS) Of 1856-1857.”

dispassionate view is difficult, if not impossible. Here is a semi-official⁷⁹ explanation for the controversy:

The era of the Reformation is often regarded as a controversial period. Some critics have claimed that Blood Atonement was practiced at this time. While President Young did preach that forgiveness for certain sins could come only through the sinner's shedding his blood, such comments reflect his style more than his intent. Many of Brigham Young's utterances were rhetorical and designed to encourage (or even frighten) Saints into gospel conformity. While publicly he threatened, privately he instructed Church leaders to forgive those who expressed sorrow for sin and repented.⁸⁰

Here is a contrary view by Polly Aird, which begins by quoting Peter McAuslan:

"With all their [the Mormons'] honesty, they have often been led to do wrong, even to the taking of the lives of their fellows. This I know by my experience in Utah. Two prominent instances of such you will remember of when I mention the names of the places at which they occurred, Springville and Mountain Meadows."

George A. Hicks, to whom Peter reported in the Nauvoo Legion, wrote later that in this period "a spirit of secret murder stalked abroad among the people, and many of the 'undesirables' lost their lives by being murdered by unknown assassins, unknown so far as the general public were concerned." And Peter wrote, "I know from my experience in Mormonism that to give it [the church] the power it would rewrite the world's history with the blood of its inhabitants. This you may think is strong language but it is in accord with the spirit of the leaders of the Mormon Church when I was in Utah."⁸¹

The first explanation is drawn largely from Mormon academics employed by the church. They are obligated to the institution responsible for the events. Their description relies on characterizations and subjective interpretation, and their natural sympathies for their employer is understandable.

⁷⁹ *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* was prepared by an editorial board consisting of recognized Mormon scholars. It included, from Brigham Young University, Daniel H. Ludlow, Robert J. Matthews, Charles D. Tate, Jr., Robert K. Thomas, Stan L. Albrecht, S. Kent Brown, Ronald K. Esplin, Truman G. Madsen, Terrance D. Olson, Larry C. Porter, Noel B. Reynolds, and John W. Welch; from the University of Utah, Addie Fuhrman, and from Columbia University Richard L. Bushman. None of these individuals could speak "officially" for the church. However, they represent at least the best thinking of Mormonism's academic community. An "official" position for the church is a challenge few have solved. See the FAIR prepared article titled "*What is 'Official' LDS Doctrine?*" at www.fairlds.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/What_is_Mormon_Doctrine.pdf as one recent effort.

⁸⁰ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 1197, November 30, 1856.

⁸¹ Aird, p. 219-220; footnotes omitted.

When choosing between these two opposing views, even though it is biting, the second appears more accurate. Polly Aird took statements from those who lived through the events. She is non-Mormon, but not anti-Mormon, and she can report what she thinks true without being accused of faithlessness. Faithful Mormons like me are often regarded as weak in the faith if they are both believing and honest. Even church leaders sometimes find church history so disturbing they prefer it advocated by apologists. But human failure does not make any religion false. I do not believe shortcomings by those who practice my faith can ever damage it.

Governor/President Young's rhetoric, which followed the trials of 1855-56, blamed the subjects of his kingdom for the judgments of God. Something needed to be done to appease an angry Deity. Here are excerpts from his March 2, 1856 address, given as the kingdom was emerging from that difficult winter, facing starvation again in the early spring:

[L]et me say to the Latter-day Saints that they stand upon slippery places. They do not all fully know the paths they walk in, they do not all perfectly understand their own ways and doings, many do not altogether realize their own weaknesses, do not understand the power of the devil and how liable they are to be decoyed one hair's breadth, to begin with, from the line of truth. They are first drawn by a fine line, in a little time it becomes a cord, it soon increases to a strong rope, and from that to a cable; thus it grows from the size of a spider's web, in comparison.

Let a Saint diverge from the path of truth and rectitude, in the least, no matter in what, it may be in a deal with his neighbor, in lusting after that which is not in his possession, in neglecting his duty, in having an over anxiety for something he should not be anxious about in being a little distrustful with regard to the providences of God, *in entertaining a misgiving in his heart and feeling with regard to the hand of the Lord towards him, and his mind will begin to be darkened. ...*

If there is a misgiving in the heart with regard to confidence in our God, do you not see that there is a chance for one to slide a hair's breadth from the truth? ...

I will tell you what this people need, with regard to preaching; you need, figuratively, to have it rain pitchforks, tines downwards, from this pulpit, Sunday after Sunday. Instead of the smooth, beautiful, sweet, still, silk-velvet-lipped preaching, *you should have sermons like peals of thunder, and perhaps we then can get the scales from our eyes. ...*

I know the condition of this people, I know what induces them to do as they do, I know the secret springs to their actions, how they are beset, the temptations and evils that are around them, and how liable they are to be drawn away, consequently, *I tell you, brethren, that you need to have the thunders of the Almighty and the forked lightnings of truth sent upon you, to wake you up out of your lethargy. ...*

[I]f the kingdom of God is on the earth it is here, ... The people should be preached to, but they need something besides smooth teaching. Comparatively speaking, they should have their ears cuffed and be roughly handled, be kicked out doors, and then kicked in again. Most of the Elders who preach in this stand ought to be kicked out of it, and then kicked into it again, until they overhaul themselves and find out what is the matter with them. ...

Do you not know that you need the Spirit of the Almighty to look through a man and discern what is in his heart, while his face smiles upon you and his words flow as smoothly as oil? *If you had the power of God upon you, you might see the sword lurking within him, and that, if he had the power, he would plunge it in your heart and destroy you from the earth.* I meet many such men in these streets, and in the houses round about.

...
The time is coming when justice will be laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet; when we shall take the old broad sword and ask, "Are you for God?" and if you are not heartily on the Lord's side, you will be hewn down. I feel like reproving you; you are like a wild ass that rears and almost breaks his neck before he will be tamed. It is so with this people. ...

You may expect the best and worst of all God's creation mingled here together. The foolish will turn from correct principles, go over to the wicked, and cease to be righteous, so that they can go to hell with the fools.⁸²

To understand how direful circumstances were at the time, fourteen days later President Young advised members of his kingdom to go no more than five days without eating something.⁸³ His followers were severely suffering. He made the diagnosis and prescribed the cure: Thorough, severe and complete repentance needed to happen, and the kingdom's leaders needed to cause it.⁸⁴ In other words, Mormonism needed to be reformed. Repentance needed to be significant enough to remove God's ire. Brigham Young intended to set that in motion using fiery rhetoric and, failing that, fiery enforcement.

As to his status as kingdom leader, he continued in his confidence that the hand of God upheld him.⁸⁵ Therefore, any anger he provoked from the US government was inconsequential:

⁸² *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 2, pp. 1058-1061, March 2, 1856, emphasis added.

⁸³ *Id.*, p. 1070, March 16, 1856.

⁸⁴ The clear thinking of where responsibility lay for these problems is shown in Apostle Pratt's remarks during that snowy February: "One calamity after another, one punishment after another. ... Will it not learn us a lesson? ... O Lord, let thy chastening hand be upon this people, until they learn to obey those good and wholesome counsels that are poured out from this stand by those who preside over us." Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 3, p. 297, February 10, 1856.

⁸⁵ In the many public talks during this period, I found no suggestion he questioned whether he had done or was doing something offensive to God. If he did, it was concealed from public view.

I shall be Governor as long as the Lord Almighty wishes me to govern this people.

Do you suppose that it is in the power of any man to thwart the doings of the Almighty? They may as well undertake to blot out the sun. I am in the hands of that God, so is the President of our nation, and so are kings, and emperors, and all rulers. He controls the destiny of all, and what are you and I going to do about it? Let us submit to Him, that we may share in this invisible, almighty, God-like power, which is the everlasting Priesthood.⁸⁶

The subjects of the kingdom needed to be purged. If they were unwilling or unable to conform to the demands of righteousness, then they would need to be cut off like a dead branch. Clearing away these dead branches would only benefit the remainder:

[M]ercy is not always to be extended to the people, judgment must claim its right.

If we wish this Church and kingdom of God upon the earth, to be like a find, healthy, growing tree, we should be careful not to let the dead branches remain too long. ...

When we have learned that they are really dead, then there is danger in suffering them to remain too long, for they will begin to decay and tend to destroy the tree. When we are satisfied that a limb is dead we clip it off close to the trunk, and cover up the wound that it may not cause any more injury. ...

[D]isfellowship them, and let them know that they must observe the laws of this kingdom, or eventually be cut off.⁸⁷

During this time, to show their increased zeal, the entire Utah Legislature was rebaptized as an official act.⁸⁸ The purpose of the rhetoric of the Reformation was twofold: Either increased devotion to the kingdom, or scare all disloyal subjects into fleeing. The Utah Legislature increased devotion. Hundreds fled.

By September 1856, Jedediah Grant was preaching “Reformation.” In the Reformation, Brigham Young linked killing sinners and salvation together. Here is one of his earliest sermons on the subject which was reported in the *Deseret News*, spread throughout the Territory, and repeated in national newspapers:

There are sins that men commit for which they cannot receive forgiveness in this world, or in that which is to come, and if they had their eyes open to see their true condition, they would be perfectly

⁸⁶ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 1070, March 16, 1856.

⁸⁷ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 2, pp. 1072-73, March 23, 1856.

⁸⁸ Ardis E. Parshall, *Pursue, Retake and Punish: The 1857 Santa Clara Ambush*, Utah Historical Quarterly, Winter 2005, Vol. 73, No. 1, p. 68.

willing to have their blood spilt upon the ground, that the smoke thereof might ascend to heaven as an offering for their sins; and the smoking incense would atone for their sins, whereas, if such is not the case, they will stick to them and remain upon them in the spirit world.

I know, when you hear my brethren telling about cutting people off from the earth, that you consider it is strong doctrine; but it is to save them, not to destroy them.⁸⁹

According to Governor Young, it was an act of Christian charity to kill. Indeed, the more enlightened could see the value of killing the wicked for the purpose of saving them:

I know that there are transgressors, who, if they knew themselves, and the only condition upon which they can obtain forgiveness, would beg of their brethren to shed their blood, that the smoke thereof might ascend to God as an offering to appease the wrath that is kindled against them, and that the law might have its course. I will say further; I have had men come to me and offer their lives to atone for their sins.⁹⁰

Rhetoric has consequences. “As with any reform movement, there were problems, excesses, and improprieties.”⁹¹ This kind of language has been excused by many Mormon apologists, who recognize this highly charged language requires some explanation. However, less than a year later the Mountain Meadows Massacre happened in the southern part of the kingdom. There was a connection between rhetoric and killing.

The Encyclopedia of Mormonism states: “Many of Brigham Young’s utterances were rhetorical and designed to encourage (or even frighten) Saints into gospel conformity.”⁹² The recent book co-authored by Assistant LDS Church Historian Richard Turley states: “From Young’s perspective, the reformation accomplished a great deal of good, though tough talk about blood atonement and dissenters must have helped create a climate of violence in the territory, especially among those who chose to take license from it.”⁹³ D. Michael Quinn observes: “Despite the suffering imposed by anti-Mormons on them, despite hearing repeated sermons about blood atonement, despite singing hymns of vengeance, despite receiving patriarchal blessings promising them the privilege of taking revenge on their enemies, the historical evidence indicates that most early Mormons avoided

⁸⁹ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 1169-1170, September 21, 1856.

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ Paul H. Peterson, p. 72.

⁹² *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Vol. 3, p. 1197.

⁹³ Ronald Walker, Richard Turley Jr., and Glen Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008), p. 25-27.

violence and were saddened by the news of such incidents.” By 1890, when the abandonment of polygamy made statehood at last possible, Mormonism reached a point of “abandonment of its violent culture and the beginning of its selective memory of a turbulent past.”⁹⁴ Paul H. Peterson explained, “[A]s the Reformation progressed, it became clear to the church leaders that not all would reform and that community purity would never become a reality until all polluting elements were removed. Thus, getting rid of incorrigibles came to be nearly as important as purifying those who were earnest in their desire to do better.”⁹⁵

There is not yet enough distance between events and emotions to allow dispassionate history by faithful Mormons to be accepted. Moreover, once the church abandons a practice, the mention or memory of these past practices is removed from the institution as the new view is adopted.⁹⁶ This is a challenge for faithful Mormons who would like to better understand their faith’s history. Perhaps the recent work of Richard L. Bushman signals the possibility of change.⁹⁷ The single most violent episode of the era still tears at the community. The sole party executed for the Mountain Meadows Massacre, John D. Lee, was posthumously reinstated to full church blessings in 1960.⁹⁸ A direct lineal descendant of his, Rex Lee, was my Law School Dean at Brigham Young’s J. Reuben Clark Law School. His son, Michael Lee, is a US Senator from Utah, and another son, Thomas Lee, is currently a Utah Supreme Court justice. The early events of Utah’s history are not distant from living citizens. The dead are an integral part of prominent families who remain anxious to defend

⁹⁴ D. Michael Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, (Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 1997), pp. 260-61.

⁹⁵ Paul H. Peterson, p. 73.

⁹⁶ During the candidacy of B.H. Roberts for Congress in 1901, statements made by the candidate embarrassed the church. As a result a Declaration of Principles was published disavowing the concept of “kingdom” by the church as anything other than a millennial eventuality. See footnote 151, *infra*. The necessity arose because of the text of Parley P. Pratt’s *Key to Theology*, which states on pages 68-69 that the church’s priesthood held “the right to give laws and commandments to individuals, churches, rulers, nations, and the world; to appoint, ordain and establish constitutions and kingdoms: to appoint kings, presidents, governors or judges.” Parley P. Pratt, *Key to Theology*, (George Q. Cannon & Sons, Salt Lake City, 1891, fifth edition).

⁹⁷ His book, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, (Knopf, New York, 2005), is not a traditional apology, and was sold in LDS Church owned Deseret Bookstores. Some fellow-Mormons took offense at the book’s faithlessness. Those reviews can be read at Amazon.com.

⁹⁸ John D. Lee died claiming he was a “scapegoat” and not the one primarily responsible for the killings. He was a member of the Council of Fifty, and its scribe for part of his life. His final *Confessions* included the declaration: “I am a true believer in the gospel of Jesus Christ, I do not believe everything that is now being taught and practiced by Brigham Young. I do not care who hears it. It is my last word—it is so. I believe he is leading the people astray, downward to destruction. But I believe in the gospel that was taught in its purity by Joseph Smith, in former days. I have my reasons for it.” *Mormonism Unveiled, Or Life & Confessions of John D. Lee*, (Fierra Blanca Publications, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2001), p. 394.

ancestral honor.⁹⁹ It is easy to confuse dispassion with an attack, making any discussion still problematic among Latter-day Saints.

In the recent book coauthored by Polly Aird, Jeff Nichols and Will Bagley, there is an observation in the *Preface* discussing the challenge of dispassionate history:

An odd defensiveness still characterizes the “faithful” version of Mormon history, which occasionally borders on paranoia: the mildest critical analysis is often condemned as yet another example of the faith’s long-sanctified history of persecution. To this day, the religion’s protectors paint the motives of those who do not subscribe to their faith-promoting version of history as suspect. Among defenders of the faith, firsthand critical commentaries on Mormon theocracy can be dismissed as prejudicial and thus ignored. This is true even if these sources describe the reality of life in Utah Territory much more accurately than the fairy-tale history so tediously defended in Apostle Orson F. Whitney’s *History of Utah* and more competently argued in B.H. Robert’s official chronicles. At times it seems that any scholar not thumping a tub for the restored Gospel is untrustworthy and relegated to an enemies’ list dating all the way back to the 1830’s.¹⁰⁰

We will never understand the full implications of Brigham Young’s kingship unless we are also willing to recognize the contours and trends of his administration. If we accept his words, he believed sincerely in his kingship. If we accept his rhetoric, he intended to either frighten his wayward subjects to repent or flee. Failing repentance or removal from the kingdom, he fully expected some to be killed. The question is left to each of us to decide how much or how little of what Brigham Young said we will take at face value.

In the Reformation, “[s]uccess could also be measured by the plans of a certain class of people to leave Utah in the spring. Brigham Young summarized these indications of successful reformation in January 1857: ‘the reformation still continues ...Meetings are frequent and well attended. You may believe that it makes the ‘Sinner in Zion afraid, and fearfulness seize the hypocrite, and we trust it will be too warm for such characters to remain in our midst.’”¹⁰¹

The New York Times reported in August:

We have another arrival from Mormondom. An emigrant train, containing a large number of women and children –one hundred persons in all—has just reached this city [Lawrence, Kansas] ...The

⁹⁹ Professor Thomas G. Alexander, who responded to the excerpt from this paper at the 2012 Sunstone Symposium mentioned his own ancestral connection to Kirtland and Nauvoo.

¹⁰⁰ *Playing with Shadows: Voices of Dissent in the Mormon West*, (Arthur H. Clark, Norman, Oklahoma, 2011) p. 13.

¹⁰¹ Parshall, p. 68, (internal quotation marks corrected).

members of this company are, or rather were, professors of the Mormon faith, but they have fled from the holy land, partly to escape from the relentless tyranny of the Brigham Young oligarchy, and partly to improve their pecuniary affairs. When they left, there was great dissatisfaction among the Saints, and about a thousand persons abandoned Utah at the same time. Several trains departed for the States, and nearly four hundred started for Oregon. It was with difficulty that they escaped, and many threats were made that violence would be committed upon them if they attempted to leave the country. The large number of those who left is believed to have been their protection.¹⁰²

The exodus from Utah was deliberately provoked. President Young admonished them to leave if they wouldn't subordinate themselves completely to God's kingdom. The Reformation included a twenty-seven question interrogation put to all the saints by inquisitorial Home Missionaries. These questions asked about issues such as "betraying your brothers or sisters," committing adultery or shedding innocent blood.¹⁰³ These three sins were grounds for blood atonement. The questions were designed to bring into the homes of every resident of the kingdom the reality that their unfaithfulness may not be tolerated by the kingdom.

In his August 17, 1856 address he proclaimed just how complete surrender must be: Either surrender and follow the kingdom and its leader, or leave it.¹⁰⁴ But he warns if you leave, you will ultimately be destroyed by God; completely annihilated:

I do not wish you to think that I chastise good men and good women; chastisements do not belong to them, but we have some unruly people here, those who know the law of God, but will not abide it. They have to be talked to; and we have to keep talking to them, and talking to them, until by and by they will forsake their evils, and turn round and become good people, or take up their line of march and leave us. . . .

¹⁰² *New York Times*, August 5, 1857; cited in footnote 8, p. 68 of Parshall.

¹⁰³ The first four questions were: "Have you committed murder, by shedding innocent blood, or consenting thereto? Have you betrayed your brethren or sisters in anything? Have you committed adultery, by having any connection with a woman that was not your wife or a man that was not your husband? Have you taken and made use of property not your own, without the consent of the owner?" For a complete list see Paul H. Peterson, *The Mormon Reformation of 1856-1857: The Rhetoric and the Reality*, *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 15, 1989, p. 59, p. 70.

¹⁰⁴ By June 7, 1857 President Young commented on the success of this intimidation program: "The spirit of reformation has taken hold on the people; it has kindled the fire of the Almighty in Mount Zion to burn out many of the ungodly that could not stand it, and they have fled. . . . I hope this fire will continue to burn among this people until those poor, miserable curses—those poor, miserable gentlemen, shall all leave us, I pray that the fire of God may burn them out. I pray for this continually." *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, pp. 1274-75.

The principles of eternity and eternal exaltation are of no use to us, unless they are brought down to our capacities so that we practice them in our lives. We must learn the principles of government, must learn ourselves, the eternal government of our God, the interest that the Father has here on the earth and the interest that we have; then we will place our interest with the interest of our Father and God, and will have no self-interest, no interest only in His kingdom that is set up on the earth; then we will begin and apply these principles in our lives. ...

The moment a person decides to leave this people, he is cut off from every object that is durable for time and eternity, and I have told you the reason why. Everything that is opposed to God and His Son Jesus Christ, to the celestial kingdom and to celestial laws, those celestial laws and beings will hold warfare with, until every particle of the opposite is turned back to its native element, though it should take millions and millions of ages to accomplish it. Christ will never cease the warfare, until he destroys death and him that hath the power of it. Every possession and object of affection will be taken from those who forsake the truth, and their identity will eventually cease.¹⁰⁵

Beginning in mid-November 1856, and continuing through April 1857, President Young forbade the entire church from administering and receiving the sacrament.¹⁰⁶ In October and November, the Willie and Martin Handcart disaster happened. On December 1, 1856 President Young's fellow counselor, and Mormon Reformation advocate Jedediah Grant died prematurely at age 40. The second terrible winter not only claimed livestock, but several Salt Lake homes collapsed under the weight of the snow. The roof of the Bowery on the temple block where church conferences were held also gave way. Instead of questioning the propriety of his "kingship," these signs instead reconfirmed to Brigham Young the need for rigor within his kingdom. President Young added a new threat: "frequently giv[ing] warning that if the people did not reform, they would be left without their leaders and lose the higher (Melchizedek) priesthood."¹⁰⁷ To emphasize the threat, Brigham Young went into hiding for over a month.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 2, pp. 1149-55, August 17, 1856.

¹⁰⁶ Parshall, p. 67-68; Paul H. Peterson, p. 77.

¹⁰⁷ Paul H. Peterson, p. 74, also: "The members were warned that the higher priesthood would depart into the wilderness among either the Lamanites or the Ten Tribes, and the Saints would be left with the Aaronic (lower) Priesthood and the law of carnal commandments." *Id.*, citing *Richard Ballantyne Journal*, December 28, 1856, MS, Church Archives; *Wilford Woodruff Journal*, December 28, 1856; *William Gibson Journal*, December 8, 1856; *Salt Lake City Fifth Ward Teachers Meetings Minutes*, MS, Church Archives, December 9, 1856.

¹⁰⁸ Paul H. Peterson, p. 76.

Daniel H. Wells replaced Jedediah Grant in the First Presidency of the church. Wells was also the Lieutenant General leader of the Nauvoo Legion. Like Grant before him, his fidelity was to Brigham Young and the kingdom, not the United States. On February 8, 1857, President Young instructed his kingdom:

I could refer you to plenty of instances where men have been righteously slain, in order to atone for their sins. I have seen scores and hundreds of people for whom there would have been a chance (in the last resurrection there will be) if their lives had been taken and their blood spilled on the ground as a smoking incense to the Almighty, but who are now angels to the devil, until our elder brother Jesus Christ raises them up –conquers death, hell and the grave. I have known a great many men who have left this Church for whom there is no chance whatever for exaltation, but if their blood had been spilled, it would have been better for them. ... If you have sinned a sin requiring the shedding of blood, except the sin unto death, would not be satisfied nor rest until your blood should be spilled, that you might gain that salvation you desire. That is the way to love mankind.¹⁰⁹

Two days prior to this talk, as he emerged from hiding, Governor Young issued letters on February 6, 1857 instructing violence be used to punish several targeted individuals known to have violated the law. One letter was addressed to three recipients, including stake president Isaac C. Haight¹¹⁰ at Cedar City. The letter stated,

Be on the look out now, & have a few trusty men ready in the case of need to pursue, retake & punish. We do not suppose there would be any prosecutions for false imprisonment, or tale bearers for witnesses... Make no noise of this matter, & keep this letter safe. We write for your eye alone, & to men that can be trusted.¹¹¹

The letter resulted in the Santa Clara Ambush, which is the topic of Parshall's article in *The Utah Historical Quarterly*, cited earlier. News of the ambush found its way into newspapers throughout the United States. Parshall explains:

The Santa Clara ambush was not what Brigham Young intended, in that it was not two backsliding felons who were attacked in the dark. But the ambush was the result of events he set in motion. He directed subordinates to take extra-legal action under specified conditions, knowing that innocents might suffer with the guilty

¹⁰⁹ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, p. 1229, February 8, 1857.

¹¹⁰ Isaac C. Haight's area included Mountain Meadows, and he supervised John D. Lee.

¹¹¹ See Parshall, p. 74, quoting letter of February 6, 1857 from the Brigham Young Collection of letters in the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

because no “tale bearers” were to be spared. If he did not intend Dame and Haight to read his instructions as they have been interpreted here, that reading is justified by the indirect phrasing of his letters. If residents of southern Utah went beyond the mark in implementing his instructions, no effective chastisements occurred. All of the men to whom letters were sent retained their church, civil and military positions as though nothing untoward happened. But something had happened, with repercussions beyond the injuries and losses to Tobin and his companions. News of the attack spread quickly through the nation, heightening tensions on the eve of the Utah War. When the wounded victims were carried to San Bernadino, rumors flared that endangered the lives of Mormons living there. Lack of accountability following the Santa Clara ambush did nothing to allay a local impression that violence was a suitable response to perceived threat, an impression, which seemingly played a role at Mountain Meadows later that year. Most chilling to contemplate, survival of the Santa Clara victims and their public exposure of the attack may have strengthened a determination at Mountain Meadows to spare no competent witness.¹¹²

The Santa Clara ambush may have included unintended victims. The action may have been well beyond the intent of Brigham Young when he wrote the instructions. However, Parshall’s explanation above is inadequate. If Brigham Young wrote the letter as a king, as head of both church and state, then the process was not “extra-legal” at all. It was a sovereign’s right to issue the order. He was imposing order, as was the king’s right to do.¹¹³

As 1857 continued, the king’s ire spread from “reigning pitchforks”¹¹⁴ from the podium, to the fruit of his rhetoric that cost some their lives. After Santa Clara, the violence spread. As it spread, neither the church nor the state over which Brigham Young presided displayed any inclination to hold a single person accountable for the deaths. Beyond that, there was no curiosity to find out the truth, or identify those involved. Parshall describes the events of that turbulent year:

Failure to hold anyone responsible for the Santa Clara ambush foreshadowed the silence to follow the Potter-Parish murders in Springville the next month, the massacre at Mountain Meadows in September, the October bludgeoning death of Richard Yates in Echo Canyon, the murders of the Aiken party near Nephi in November – a catalog of bloodshed without accountability in the surreal year of 1857.

¹¹² Parshall, pp. 84-85.

¹¹³ “We know that the world is angry at us, and that we cannot help. We mean to pursue our course, build up the kingdom of God on earth, and establish Zion. We have also got to assist in rebuilding Jerusalem[.]” *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, p. 1277, June 7, 1857.

¹¹⁴ This was the phrase used in his March 2, 1856 talk; see footnote 74, supra.

The events were too much. The United States was buzzing with alarm. The Utah Territorial Legislature issued a proclamation claiming the Territory's law was superior to Federal Law. New First Presidency member and commander of the Nauvoo Legion, Daniel Wells, issued General Order 1 at the beginning of April. This order was "notifying Nauvoo Legion members that they now belonged to the armed forces of God's Kingdom."¹¹⁵ "President Buchanan in late May decided to unseat [Brigham Young] as governor and ordered the US Army to escort his successor to Great Salt Lake to restore federal authority in Utah."¹¹⁶ Given Brigham Young's widely reported refusal to surrender the Governorship unless "God Almighty" would tell him to submit, President Buchanan concluded the US Army was necessary to install a new Governor. This has been called The Utah War, or The Mormon Rebellion.

The Utah War has been characterized as a "bloodless" event. When it concluded in 1858, the *New York Herald* observed it "may thus be summarily historized: --killed, none; wounded, none, fooled, everybody."¹¹⁷ Recent scholarship has revisited the war, and at least one scholar changed his view from being "bloodless" to being quite bloody. His revised view is now:

Overlooked or intentionally excluded from these views is the Mountain Meadows Massacre as a wartime engagement on September 11, 1857. It was an atrocity in which a detachment of the Utah territorial militia (Nauvoo Legion) supported by Indian auxiliaries executed about 120 disarmed men, women and children, the largest organized mass murder of white civilians in American history until the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.¹¹⁸

That author goes on to put the entire sweep of violence in Brigham Young's kingdom in 1857 into the wartime context. When that is done, he concludes the Utah War rivaled "Bleeding Kansas" in fatalities.¹¹⁹

The violence of Mormons in that aberrational year has been difficult to justify. It is a milestone departure from all prior Mormon conduct. Mormons transitioned from victims to murderers. One recent attempt explains it this way:

¹¹⁵ David L. Bigler and Will Bagley, *The Mormon Rebellion: American's First Civil War, 1857-1858*, (University of Oklahoma, Norman, 2011), p. 114.

¹¹⁶ *Id.*, p. 132.

¹¹⁷ *New York Herald*, July 19, 1858.

¹¹⁸ William P. MacKinnon, *Lonely Bones: Leadership and Utah War Violence*, *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2007, p. 124.

¹¹⁹ *Id.*, p. 124-25.

Scholars who have investigated violence in many cultures provide other insights based on group psychology. Episodes of violence often begin when one people classify another as “the other,” stripping them of any humanity and mentally transforming them into enemies. Once this process of devaluing and demonizing occurs, stereotypes take over, rumors circulate, and pressure builds to conform to group action against the perceived threat. Those classified as the enemy are often seen as the transgressors, even as steps are being taken against them. When these tinderbox conditions exist, a single incident, small or ordinary in usual circumstances, may spark great violence ending in atrocity.

The literature suggests other elements are often present when “good people” do terrible things. Usually there is an atmosphere of authority and obedience, which allows errant leaders to trump the moral instincts of their followers. Atrocities also occur when followers do not have clear messages about what is expected of them—when their culture or message from headquarters leave local leaders wondering what they should do. Poverty increases the likelihood of problems by raising concerns about survival. The conditions for mass killing—demonizing, authority, obedience, peer pressure, ambiguity, fear, and deprivation—all were present in southern Utah in 1857.¹²⁰

Of these conditions, Brigham Young’s leadership supplied the demonizing, authority, obedience, peer pressure, ambiguity and fear. His purpose was to establish this very environment. Brigham Young’s own son would characterize the Reformation as “a reign of terror.”¹²¹ One woman who lived through that time reflected: “it was a fearful ordeal, and fear is a slavish passion and is not begotten by the Spirit of God!”¹²²

This was Brigham Young’s purpose and he said he understood exactly how to govern to accomplish what was needed. He explained how few men were qualified, as he was, to lead people to accomplish what a leader wanted:

There are but few men who know how to govern in temporal things, fewer still who know how to control the feelings of the people, how to guide the power of any kingdom that was ever organized on the earth. Nations and kingdoms of this world rise up and flourish only for a season. What is the difficulty? They contain the seeds of their own destruction, sown therein by the framers of human governments; those combustive elements are organized in their constitution from the first. ...Why are they thus led to sow the seeds

¹²⁰ Walker, Turley, Leonard, Preface p. xiv.

¹²¹ *Brigham Young Jr. Diary*, December 15, 1862.

¹²² *Hannah Tapfield King Diary*, October 8, 1856, cited in Bigler & Bagley, p. 98 and footnote 13. Her diary is one of the more important sources for information during this period.

of their own destruction? Because the kingdoms of this world are not designed to stand. When men are placed at the head of government who are not actually controlled by the power of God by the Holy Ghost they can lay plans, they can frame constitutions, they can form governments and laws that have not the seeds of death within them, and no other men can do it.¹²³

If we take him at his word, then the deathly harvest of 1857 was what he hoped to accomplish. Often overlooked by all writers is the claim that he knew exactly what he was doing, and was controlled by the power of God through the Holy Ghost, therefore perfectly capable of achieving what he intended through his subjects.

There is another rhetorical milestone immediately prior to the tragedy of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. In August 1857, Governor Young knew the Army had been dispatched to install a new Governor. He learned on the 11th that the Army had arrived 118 miles below Laramie.¹²⁴ On the 16th he gave a talk about the Army, his intent to fight them, and the direful results the nation should expect if they persisted in moving forward into combat with the kingdom. Only 26 days prior to the Mountain Meadows Massacre, Governor Young warned the United States:

Now if the United States send an army here and commences war on us, their travel across this country must stop; their train cannot cross. To accomplish this I need only say to them for the Indians will use them up; and they will do it. ...I warn them and fore warn the United States, that if they commence war upon us, they need not expect me to hold the Indians while they shoot them. ...

Had it not been for the "Mormons" in these mountains, nineteen out of twenty of this seasons emigration would have been cut off by the Indians. Had it not for our settlements here, overland emigration would have been stopped years ago, and yet they turn around and condemn me and this people for conniving with the Indians. This people have always done good to the travelers; they have kept the Indians from injuring them and have done all in their power to save the lives of men, women and children, but all this will cease to be, if our enemies commence war upon us.¹²⁵

¹²³ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 1233, March 8, 1857.

¹²⁴ "On Friday evening, the 11th inst. two of the brethren who accompanied brothers Samuel W. Richards and George Snider from Deer Creek to 118 miles below Laramie, came in, and reported that soldiers and a heavy freight train were there encamped opposite to them and on the south side of the Platte." *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, pp. 1329-30; September 6, 1857.

¹²⁵ *Id.*, Vol. 3, p. 1321, August 16, 1857.

Twenty-six days later a Mormon led attack killed over one-hundred twenty men, women and children. The slaughter was staged to look Indian caused,¹²⁶ and reported as an Indian attack;¹²⁷ as if the event was quick proof of the seriousness of the Governor's warning. The proximity of the talk and the attack appeared to be swift vindication, but did not deter the Army's progress or the United States' determination to remove Governor Young.

As the Army approached, Governor Young repeatedly warned them against coming. Not only would Indian uprisings afflict the United States,¹²⁸ but God would also come out of His hiding place and fight for the kingdom.¹²⁹ He predicted a spectacular defeat, with the unseen "soldiers of

¹²⁶ Men, women and children were all killed. Unlike Indians, white attacks normally would not include women and children as victims. The bodies were stripped and all belongings and livestock were all stolen. These were typical of Indian attacks, and staged here to conceal Mormon involvement.

¹²⁷ "In the years following the mass killing, the white participants persisted in blaming the tragedy primarily on the Paiutes. Even [Nephi] Johnson, who saw most of what happened from his position on the hill, at times joined in the finger-pointing. But during a conversation with a senior Mormon leader from Salt Lake City in 1895, Johnson said that 'white men did most of the killing.'" (Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, (Oxford University, 2008), p. 204, citations omitted.) *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* reported on May 25, 1861: "We visited the Mountain Meadow Monument put up at the burial place of 120 persons killed by Indians in 1857. The pile of stone was about 12 feet high, but beginning to tumble down. A wooden Cross was placed on top with the following words: Vengeance is mine and I will repay, saith the Lord. President Young said it should be: Vengeance is mine and I have taken a little." (Vol. 5, p. 577.)

¹²⁸ A month before Mountain Meadows Massacre, he prayed: "We also pray the [sic] our Father to turn the hearts of the Lamanites even the sons of Jacob unto us that they may do thy will & be as a wall of defense around about us." *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, p. 1315, August 9, 1857. Two days after the Massacre he declared again: "Again if they Commence the war I shall not hold the Indians Still by the fist any longer for white men to shoot at them but I shall let them go ahead & do as they please and I shall Carry the war into their own land and they will want to let out the Job before they get half through." *Id.*, p. 1342, September 13, 1857. Seven months later he reiterated: "President B Young said If the US Troops make a war of extermination against this People they will have all the Indians on this Continent to Fight for they are of Israel and the Course which the army are now taking towards them will have a tendency to cause the Indians to make war upon them." *Id.*, p. 1426, April 15, 1858.

¹²⁹ "You need have no fear but the fear to offend God. If you have any trembling in your hearts, or timid feelings with regard to our present situation, let me tell you one thing, which is as true as that the sun now shines, that whatever transpires with us, with our enemies, with the world here or there, will still more promote the kingdom of God on earth, and bring to a final end the kingdoms of this world. . . . The world are determined to destroy the kingdom of God upon the earth; they wish to obliterate it. The kingdoms of darkness are determined to destroy this kingdom. In their feelings they are fighting against you and me, and do not know that they are contending against Jehovah. They have not the least idea of that, but think they are contending against the 'Mormons.' They are not contending against you and me—they are contending against the God of heaven." *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, pp. 1289-90, June 28, 1857. "Be faithful, and God will not only fight for us, but will also lead us to victory. What has been said today is true." *Id.*, p. 1344, September 20, 1857.

the Lord” defending the kingdom.¹³⁰ The threatened war and the prospects of the kingdom defeating the coming Army pleased Governor Young. He proclaimed:

I do not know that I have ever felt better in my life, more satisfied, more rejoicing in my heart, or had more of the testimony and witness of the Spirit within, than when I have said, You Latter day Saints may be driven to move, if you will take your own part, and “I the Lord your God am with you, and I will help you and I will fight your battles.” It is rather a bold statement; it is rather a bold step for a handful of men here in the mountains to think that they can cope with the extensive government, the government of the United States, the powerful kingdoms of darkness. Upon natural principles we cannot, but we can fight them in the name of, God Almighty, and with his aid we can keep them off from us.¹³¹

This pleasure was in part because of his belief war prevented apostasy.¹³²

He warned the United States not to come because they risked utter defeat.¹³³ The whole world was watching this conflict, making God’s Kingdom renown.¹³⁴ The outcome of this conflict was certain.¹³⁵ Brigham Young asked, “Cannot this kingdom be overthrown? No. They might as well try to obliterate the sun.”¹³⁶ It was not the kingdom Brigham Young led that was vulnerable to

¹³⁰ “Yes; there are ten to one for us more than those against us; but the difficulty is that all have not eyes to see. The soldiers of the Lord are in the mountains, in the canyons, upon the plains, on the hills, along the mighty streams, and by the rivulets. Thousands and thousands more are for us than those who are against us, and you need not have any fears. They may be permitted to kill our bodies, but that is yet to be determined. They try to fire a pistol; the cap snaps, and they are in the lurch; for some would have dagger into them before they would know it. Or, if they tried to shoot with a rifle, perhaps the person aimed at would be standing a little one side of the range of the bullet.” *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, p. 1302, July 19, 1857. This prediction of misaimed fire is akin to the Book of Mormon account of Samuel the Lamanite, who could not be hit with stones or arrows aimed at him. See Helaman 16: 2-3, 6.

¹³¹ *Collected Discourses*, Vol. 3, p. 1317, August 16, 1857.

¹³² “I was not afraid of men’s apostatizing when war and trouble are on hand, for then they will stick together. It is in calm weather, when the old ship of Zion is sailing with a gentle breeze, and when all is quiet on deck, that some of the brethren want to go out in the whaling-boats to have a scrape and a swim; and some get drowned, others drift away, and others again get back to the ship.” *Id.*, p. 1401, January 17, 1858.

¹³³ “But I warn and fore warn our enemies to let this people alone. The Elders of Israel are almighty, and it will soon be said, ‘let us not go up to Zion, for the inhabitants of Zion are terrible.’” *Id.*, p. 1320.

¹³⁴ “There has been a great deal said in the lower world about this little handful of people; for you terrify the whole world! Not alone in the United States, but in England, in France, in Italy, in Germany, and in every State upon the eastern continent, the people are looking to see the result of the present movements of our Government towards this people.” *Id.*, p. 1326, August 30, 1857.

¹³⁵ “While we have been learning how to sustain the kingdom of God upon the earth, the Devil and his pupils have been learning how to sustain the kingdom of darkness. From the very nature of the two kingdoms upon one planet, the crisis must come where there will be a literal open warfare, just as much as there is now a warfare within us against evil; ...[T]he spirits of darkness will have to give way to the kingdom of God, and that ‘Mormonism’ will triumph, and that no power can hinder it.” *Id.*, pp. 1348-49, October 7, 1957.

¹³⁶ *Id.*

destruction, but the United States was at peril and about to be destroyed by God.¹³⁷ He said “millions” would die in the conflict, and he expected to live to see his kingdom govern throughout the continent.¹³⁸ The destruction of the US Army was, according to Governor Young, part of God’s design to acquire a respected name and a fearful character again in this world.¹³⁹ Terrorized European nations would soon remove their hats in reverence when Mormons passed through.¹⁴⁰ Some of his rhetoric is reminiscent of Sidney Rigdon’s excesses during the succession debates in Nauvoo, fourteen years earlier.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ “President B. Young in his Sermon declared that the thread was cut between us and the U.S. and that the Almighty recognized us as a free and independent people and that no officer appointed by government sent to should come and rule us from this time forth.” *Id.*, p. 1332, September 6, 1857. “I do not want to fight the United States but if they drive us to it we shall do the best we can & I will tell you as God lives that we shall Come off Conqueror for we trust in God. For God has set up his kingdom on the Earth & it will never fall but it will stand. We shall do all we can not to fight but if they drive us to it God will overthrow them. *Id.*, September 12, 1857.

¹³⁸ “God and the Saints being my helper I will make millions of them bite the dust before I go through the vale. These are my private feelings. If they will persist in trying to take away my life, they have got a job on hand if the Lord continues to be on my side, and I think he will if I do not forsake him and his commandments. ...I mean to live until their names are forgotten from the earth, until Zion is established on this continent, and the law of Zion is the law of the land, and the people are governed by the eternal priesthood.” *Id.*, pp. 1394, 1395, January 16, 1858.

¹³⁹ “The Lord Almighty wants a name and a character; and he will show our enemies that he is God, and that he has set to his hand again to gather Israel, and to try our faith and integrity. And he is saying, ‘Now, you, my children, dare you take a step to promote righteousness, in direct and open opposition to the popular feelings of all the wicked in your Government? If you do, I will fight your battles.’” *Id.*, p. 1341, September 13, 1857. “The great God has set this hand to roll forth his purposes, and the hand that opposes it shall be palsied. The power of God shall be felt among the nations that reject the truth.” *Id.*, p. 1362, October 31, 1857.

¹⁴⁰ “[T]he news will go that there a people in the mountains called Mormons, and that they are in the fastness of the rocky mountains, and the United States can do nothing with them, and the time will soon be that their name and sound, and the pride of the people will be, ‘I am from Utah,’ and I am a Latter day saint, and this will strike terror to the Christian and to the heathen world, and that time is close at hand. And let me say while upon this subject that if there is a much performed in ten years to come, as has been in ten years past that time will not pass till our government and the Governments of Europe will take off their hats, and make a bow. When that time comes lean then say to a State, to England, to France, to the German States, or any other kingdom on the earth ‘Let our Elders in there, or we will attend to your case; you bar your gates against our Elders, and I am after you; let them go in peace and preach the gospel to the poor.’” *Id.*, p. 1385, December 25, 1857.

¹⁴¹ Sidney Rigdon’s propensity for elevated rhetoric, on display in August, 1844, was one of the reasons the Saints voted against his claim to be the church’s guardian. “Declaring that the Lord’s ways were not their ways, he veered into his favorite topic, the prophecies of Armageddon. The time was near at hand, he warned, when the Saints ‘would see one hundred tons of metal per second thrown at the enemies of God,’ and blood would flow as deep as the ‘horses’ bridles.’ With his usual extravagance he trumpeted: ‘I am going to fight a real bloody battle with sword and with gun ...I will fight the battles of the Lord. I will also cross the Atlantic, encounter the queen’s forces, and overcome them—plant the American standard on English ground, and then march to the palace of her majesty, and demand a portion of her riches and dominions, which if she refuse, I will take the little madam by the nose and lead her out, and she shall have no power to

As King Brigham preached to the Utah Legislature during the winter of 1857, the US Army was quartered down for winter still hundreds of hard miles away. He believed his kingdom would not only win this conflict, but the triumph would lead to control over all nations by God's kingdom—over which Brigham Young would preside:

The Lord should reign and rule over us in all our business transactions The Kingdom of God is one thing, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is another, yet it is one, and when the Kingdom of God is set up upon the earth it will be a temporal Kingdom, and that is the Kingdom Jesus referred to, and which his saints would fight for. The Kingdom of God is a temporal Kingdom and the Church of Jesus Christ is His Church and Kingdom. The Kingdom of God will enact laws that will govern and control all people whether Saint or sinner, whether they worship God, the Sun, Moon or Stars. The Law that will issue forth, from Zion will control the nations of the Earth, and give to each one his rights in the free exercise and enjoyment of his[.] ...Here is the Kingdom of God in embryo, which will enact laws for the Government of all people, nations, kindreds and tongues upon the face of the whole earth, and in our deliberations our eyes should be single to this point, that this doctrine has been preached and acted upon, and the Kingdom of God was organized in the days of Joseph [Smith], and was called the council of Fifty, and that was the commencement for to issue forth laws for the nations of the earth.¹⁴²

As God's earthly king, established through the Council of Fifty, Governor Young remained defiant of federal authority. He answered to a higher authority.¹⁴³ But no higher authority rallied the

help herself. If I do not do this, the Lord never spake by mortal.” Richard S. VanWagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*, (Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 1994), p. 337, footnotes omitted.

¹⁴² *Id.*, p. 1381, December 15, 1857.

¹⁴³ In mid-winter, 1858, while US troops waited for Spring to resume their march to Utah, Brigham Young explained his understanding of God's great plan. In the beginning of man, the original revelation from God to Adam “was of a temporal nature. Most of the revelations he received pertained to his life here. That was also the case in the revelations to Noah. We have but very few of the instructions the Lord gave to Enoch concerning his city; but, doubtless, most of the revelations he received pertained to a temporal nature and condition. And certainly the revelation Noah received, so far as in our possession, almost exclusively pertained to this life. The same principle was carried out in the days of Moses, and in the days of his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We may say that eight or nine-tenths of the doctrines and principles set forth in the revelations given to those men were of a temporal nature.” He went on to contrast that with Christ: “The greatest recorded digression from that course was when the Saviour came. He repeatedly alluded to a spiritual kingdom, in his sayings to his brethren. The people had become so corrupt that it was all useless to then endeavour to establish a literal kingdom of God on the earth. ...[T]he Saviour had not opportunity to more than drop a hint, as it were, about a temporal kingdom. ...The first revelations given to Joseph were of a temporal character, pertaining to a literal kingdom on the earth.” He went on to assert that the missionary work of the church was so converts’ “eyes may be open to see that the Lord is commencing a literal kingdom upon the earth.” The conflict with the US was to make that kingdom independent. “[T]he Lord in his

Indians, nor came out from His hiding place to destroy the Army, nor caused unseen soldiers to slay US forces. Instead, the Army came and Brigham Young negotiated an end to his earthly rule over the Utah Territory. He served a total of seven years, although appointed only for four. The act allowed him to continue “until his successor shall be appointed and qualified, unless sooner removed by the President of the United States.” Governor Cumming peacefully assumed office in April of 1858, and was introduced by Brigham Young to a congregation of Saints as “my friend Gov. Cummings” on April 25, 1858.¹⁴⁴ After all the preliminary excitement lasting for two years prior to his arrival, the transition was cordial.

A Telesial Kingship

Mormonism may have ended at the death of Joseph Smith if not for Brigham Young’s leadership. Because he acted decisively, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints remains an organized body of believers, perpetuating the structure established through Joseph. Mormonism was preserved in structure, but altered in content with Brigham Young at the helm. History has acknowledged his great contribution in preserving the faith, but it has not yet adequately acknowledged how greatly he changed the content and practice of Mormonism.

Many of the most provocative statements of Governor Young and violent acts by Mormons were reported in the national press at the time. As mentioned before, the resulting public impression was so unfavorable, the President was compelled to send the US Army to intervene. This extraordinary action was popularly approved because of the belief Brigham Young had established a despotic and rebellious monarchy in the Rocky Mountains, and nothing short of intervention by an armed force could end it.

Almost every religion has some doctrine(s) beyond man’s capacity to implement. Until Saint Francis accomplished it, Catholicism doubted man’s capacity to live the Sermon on the Mount for over a thousand years. Few have repeated his achievement. Nevertheless, the ideal remains firmly a part of Catholicism.

All Mormon men may be called to rise up by heaven’s invitation and become something more, something far greater in Mormonism’s priestly service, but few are ever chosen by heaven to

providence led the people into these mountains to separate them from the Gentile world, in order that he might establish his kingdom—his laws, and commence his Zion in the mountains, where his people could have but little connection with the world. They were taught that when they first came here; and now the prospect is very fair for separating us from the rest of the world, and most of the people can see it.” *Id.*, pp. 1398-99, January 17, 1858.

¹⁴⁴ *Id.*, p. 1427.

do so. This is because it is so easy to stray from the virtues of meekness, humility and gentleness to pursue earthly ambition, control or dominion. Mormon scripture laments this near-universal propensity to fail.¹⁴⁵

Kingship is perhaps both the greatest ideal and worst temptation in Mormon Theology. Brigham Young's belief in his status as a king is strengthened when the comments of other church authorities are considered. This paper confined the topic to Brigham Young's own comments, and therefore, none of those others are included. The difficulty of acting as a king is on public display in the Governorship of Brigham Young.¹⁴⁶ His is a cautionary tale for us about the greatest challenge faced by faithful Mormons who hope to be sons of God and joint-heirs with His Son.¹⁴⁷

John Locke wrote in his *Second Treatise of Civil Government* that "all princes and rulers of independent governments all throughout the world, are in a state of nature[.]"¹⁴⁸ Brigham Young viewed his status as God's earthly head of an independent kingdom, and conformed conduct to that view. Therefore, as John Locke would expect, his behavior was like man "in a state of nature" where he had the right to "restrain, or where it is necessary, destroy things noxious to [him]."¹⁴⁹ Locke's description is apt.

Before Governor Young surrendered public office, the President of the United States granted a complete pardon to the Governor and all those who, under his direction, engaged in the Utah War.¹⁵⁰ The pardon given by President Buchanan was the most sweeping granted by a US President at the time and ended both a war and Brigham Young's direct control of the state.

If, during Brigham Young's lifetime, America viewed Mormonism as one of the "twin relics of barbarism," as the Republican Platform Abraham Lincoln ran on described it, subsequent events

¹⁴⁵ D&C 121: 34-42.

¹⁴⁶ Governor Young believed fervently in his Divine appointment because he believed fervently in Joseph Smith. He attributed his behavior to his sincere desire to accomplish the purposes which Joseph originally held: "We could not stay in the States, and if we had gone to Texas, where Lyman White [sic] went, before this day the Saints would have been driven from there. Such would have been the case if we had gone to any other place but in the midst of these Mountains. There is the place when Joseph said we could build up the kingdom of God, and all hell could not remove it. He tried to get us here, and talked of it year after in our private counsels. A great many have wondered how I came here. Joseph talked about it, when he had his brethren about him, for years, and we knew all about it." *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, pp. 1285-86, June 21, 1857.

¹⁴⁷ See 1 John 3: 2; Romans 8: 17.

¹⁴⁸ Locke, Chapter 2, Section 14.

¹⁴⁹ *Id.*, Section 8.

¹⁵⁰ Brigham Young said he was mystified by the pardon: "I thank President Buchanan for forgiving me, but I really cannot tell what I have done. I know one thing, and that is that the people called Mormons are a loyal and law abiding people and have ever been. Neither President Buchanan nor anyone else can contradict that statement." *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, p. 1439, June 12, 1858.

domesticated Mormonism. Mormonism went from being a Great Basin Monarchy to an uber-American, flag-waving, rock-solid red-state on the most conservative side of the ledger at present. Both the state and church Brigham Young led have become 'house-broken' to Americanism.¹⁵¹ This year's Presidential election reflects the long road Governor Young's people have travelled.¹⁵²

Explaining the violence in Utah during the tenure of Governor Young, one writer says this: "the point here is not to claim that no vigilante crimes by angry Mormons protecting their interests ever occurred in territorial Utah. The point is that overattention to such activities obscures the fact that they were very rare compared to elsewhere in the West, where no concerted effort to undermine a popularly supported government was going on as in Utah."¹⁵³ This measure concedes too much. It presumes to compare God's kingdom to how others in this world behave; in Mormon vocabulary, the standard is Telestial.

When Christ spoke of His kingdom, He declared it was "not of this world."¹⁵⁴ The inspiration for Brigham Young's ambition to be king came from Joseph Smith and the Council of Fifty. But Joseph Smith surrendered his own life, "as a lamb to the slaughter" even when he had the largest militia in Illinois, the Nauvoo Legion, at his command to prevent his arrest.¹⁵⁵ Christ was killed, Joseph Smith was killed, and both claimed an otherworldly kingship. Brigham Young, on the other hand, made it clear he would never submit to similar surrender and self-sacrifice. Referring back to Joseph and Hyrum being killed in Illinois he declared: "I Carried a large Bowie knife with

¹⁵¹ "Church leaders also reinterpreted the doctrine of the Kingdom of God to push its earthy application into the millennium. Instead of arguing, as church leaders like Parley P. Pratt in the nineteenth century had, that the priesthood-directed Kingdom of God was the only legitimate government on earth, in December 1901 the First Presidency stated that though the church might instruct in temporal as well as spiritual matters, it 'does not infringe upon the liberty of the individual or encroach upon the domain of the State.'" Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930*, (University of Illinois, Urbana, 1986), p. 289.

¹⁵² During an earlier political campaign involving church leader B.H. Roberts' bid for election to Congress, the First Presidency of the church thought Elder Roberts went too far in stating church ambitions. They issued a Declaration of Truths containing the following retractions of the earlier ambition for a kingdom: "IV. That no church, ecclesiastical body, nor spiritual advisor should encroach upon the political rights of the individual. V. That in a free country no man nor body of men can, with safety to the State, use the name or the power of any religious sect or society to influence or control the elective franchise. VI. That a trust is imposed upon each citizen in a free country to act politically upon his own judgment and absolutely free from control or dictation, ecclesiastical or otherwise." See Michael Harold Paulos, *The Mormon Church on Trial: Transcripts of the Reed Smoot Hearings*, (Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 2008), p. 219, footnote 8; also the testimony of B.H. Roberts before the Senate beginning on p. 218-19 where he testifies of the church's abandonment of the ambition for a kingdom in favor of democratic rule.

¹⁵³ Eric A. Eliason, *Review of: Forgotten Kingdom: The Mormon Theocracy in the American West, 1847-1896*, FARMS Review of Books 12/1 (2000), pp. 101-102.

¹⁵⁴ John 18: 36.

¹⁵⁵ D&C 135: 4.

me and I said that any man that laid hands upon my Shoulder and said Mr. Young you are my prisoner I would send that man to hell across lots & I have said that all the time since and I say it now. I have broken no law neither will I be taken by any United States officer to be killed as they have killed Joseph.”¹⁵⁶

The form of kingship demonstrated by Christ and Joseph Smith is approved in the Book of Mormon. In this form the king is servant, and not a master. This form of king is in God’s service while kneeling and laboring to serve others, without boasting and without imposing grievous burdens.¹⁵⁷ In other words, the Book of Mormon approves a Celestial kingship, which serves through self-sacrifice,¹⁵⁸ and meek example as the model of leadership, but utterly rejects control, compulsion and dominion by an earthly king. Hence the sad observation made by Joseph Smith that it is the nature of almost all men as soon as they have a little authority to begin to exercise unrighteous dominion over others.¹⁵⁹

Mormon apologists do not apply a Celestial standard for the Reformation. Nor do they use the Book of Mormon to measure Governor Young. Consistently, they compare the kingdom’s conduct to gentiles elsewhere in the West.¹⁶⁰ By that standard, Governor Young presided over a marginally violent Telestial Kingdom, meriting only an above average grade in the number of killings. In the end, whether you are sympathetic, dispassionate, or critical of this era of Mormon history, all writers Mormon and non-Mormon alike, seem willing to concede it was a Telestial Kingdom over which Governor Young reigned. By that standard he did well enough. However, should Mormons be satisfied? Is it enough that he did not cause more violence? Is Mormonism to be measured against its highest ideals, or instead its better-than-average performance?¹⁶¹ If we use

¹⁵⁶ *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, p. 1333; September 12, 1857.

¹⁵⁷ See Mosiah 2: 14-19.

¹⁵⁸ Such kings lay down their lives for their friends. (John 15: 13.) In contrast, Brigham Young developed an entirely different approach. Under his administration kings were protected by the subjects who would lay down their lives to protect kings. There were volunteers, like Bishop Warren Snow, who considered it their God-given duty to “stand between” his leaders and all threats. Taking life or sacrificing his own life to preserve church leaders’ lives was his “mission.” See, John A. Peterson, *Warren Stone Snow, A Man In Between: The Biography of a Mormon Defender*, Master’s Thesis, BYU, December 1985, pp. 2-7.

¹⁵⁹ D&C 121: 39: “We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.”

¹⁶⁰ Another example of comparing Salt Lake with surrounding areas is in Paul H. Peterson, pp. 73-74: “It would be easy to exaggerate the amount of violence in Utah Territory, however. In an age and a land where violence was commonplace, Salt Lake City and its environs had conspicuously little.”

¹⁶¹ Even now Mormons often point to their lower-than-average divorce rate for Temple marriages, rather than the scandal represented by any Temple marriage failing. Tim B. Heaton, *Dealing With Demographics*, at

the steep incline in the number of killings beginning in 1857 as a trend, then the fruit of the Mormon Reformation begun the previous year was an ominous harvest. Had the US Government not intervened to remove Governor Young in 1858, the trend suggests something even more dreadful was coming. Perhaps all of us should recognize in Johnson's Army the very thing Brigham Young wanted to hear before he would surrender his Governorship: the voice of God Almighty telling him he no longer needed to be Governor.

President Young lamented that he never was visited by God. He told his followers:

I have flattered myself, if I am as faithful as I know how to be to my God, and my brethren, and to all my covenants, and faithful in the discharge of my duty, when I have lived to be as old as was Moses when the Lord appeared to him, that perhaps I then may hold communion with the Lord, as did Moses. I am not now in that position, though I know much more than I did twenty, ten, or five years ago. But have I yet lived to the state of perfection that I can commune in person with the Father and the Son at my will and pleasure? No, though I hold myself in readiness that he can wield me at his will and pleasure. If I am faithful until I am eighty years of age, perhaps the Lord will appear to me and personally dictate me in the management of his Church and people. A little over twenty years, and if I am faithful, perhaps I will obtain that favour with my Father and God.¹⁶²

For President Young, in the absence of the Lord appearing “and personally dictat[ing to him] in the management of his Church and people,” hearing “the voice of Almighty God” was a matter of common sense. He told the kingdom, after learning that President Buchanan had ordered the Army to go to Utah, how he was able to conduct the kingdom's affairs: “I am not going to interpret dreams; for I don't profess to be such a Prophet as were Joseph Smith and Daniel; but I am a Yankee guesser[.]”¹⁶³ From our vantage point, we can question why he did not hear it in the early death of Willard Richards,¹⁶⁴ nor in the drought, grasshopper swarms, crop failures, bitter winters, livestock deaths, buildings collapsing under the weight of unusually heavy winter snows--including the church's Bowery, in the handcart company disasters, premature death of Jedediah Grant,¹⁶⁵ nor in his own life-threatening illness in February 1857. God's voice throughout those

FAIR.org website, explains: “the lifetime divorce rate may be around 25% to 30%. I would guess the temple divorce rate is in that range. It's pretty high, but it's still a lot lower than the national 50% rate.” Ideals exceed our grasp, but should be the only aspiration we measure against.

¹⁶² *Complete Discourses*, Vol. 3, p. 1498, September 1, 1859.

¹⁶³ *Id.*, Vol. 3, p. 1306, July 26, 1857.

¹⁶⁴ Willard Richards died March 11, 1854 at age 49.

¹⁶⁵ Jedediah Grant died December 1, 1856 at age 40.

difficulties only said to the Yankee guesser that God condemned the subjects of the kingdom for their lack of fidelity to the earthly king's righteous leadership.

The Book of Mormon promises the American continent was to remain a place of liberty.¹⁶⁶ This land is not for kings and kingdoms. The gentile occupants are warned to never establish a king here, or they would be cursed.¹⁶⁷ Using the Book of Mormon teachings, the collision between Brigham Young and the United States could be interpreted as a conflict between God's decree against kingship and Governor Young's insistence upon it. In that sense, the arrival of the Army to remove the Governor *was* at last the voice of Almighty God he heard.

Even good men make poor idols. Before reaching a conclusion on the enigma of Brigham Young there is an idea borrowed from the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) involving testing. Many materials and products require destructive testing. That is, to "prove" performance, the material is destroyed. For example, concrete hardness is measured in compressive strength by putting the material under enough pressure to cause it to break. The point at which it breaks proves the material's hardness. Crash testing of automobiles requires actual collisions. Crash "ratings" are the results of destroying specific car models.

In the Book of Abraham a pre-earth discussion occurs between God, Christ and a council that included Satan. The discussion concerned creating this world and sending all of us here to "prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them[.]"¹⁶⁸ What if we envision that "testing" as necessarily destructive? After all, we are all going to die. If the process of "proving" involves establishing our limit by the circumstances we find ourselves in, our lives are a revelation to us of what we can do, what we really are, and how we respond to a process that will end, in this phase, with our descent into the grave.

¹⁶⁶ "Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever." (2 Ne. 19: 7.)

¹⁶⁷ "But behold, this land, said God, shall be a land of thine inheritance, and the Gentiles shall be blessed upon the land. And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles. And I will fortify this land against all other nations. And he that fighteth against Zion shall perish, saith God. For he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish, for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king, and I will be a light unto them forever, that hear my words. Wherefore, for this cause, that my covenants may be fulfilled which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh, I must needs destroy the secret works of darkness, and of murders, and of abominations." (2 Ne. 10: 10-15.)

¹⁶⁸ Abraham 3: 26; the word "prove" is frequently used in LDS scripture in a similar context: 2 Ne. 11: 3; Ether 12: 35; D&C 98: 12-14; 124: 55; and 132: 51.

Brigham Young faced greater challenges than we do. We can no more view ourselves living in antebellum America than view ourselves in the shoes of Brigham Young. Therefore, even if we think we understand him, we should hesitate to judge him. That judgment remains best left to God. The most we ought to offer is gratitude we were not given his many tasks to perform, because that test would expose to public view and history's memory our own assortment of human failure.

Governor and President Brigham Young was a colonizer, leader, religious symbol, and American icon. He rightly deserves a place in American and Mormon history, even if some of the praise and criticism given him is both too little and too much.

POST SCRIPT: An abridgement of this paper was presented at the 2012 Sunstone Symposium. Professor Thomas G. Alexander rebutted the idea of any intention to establish an actual kingship on the part of Governor Young. His criticism has helped to sharpen the focus of this final version. As a result, I added footnotes 1, 12, 15 and 96, as well as a few sentences in this final version.

Brigham Young had himself declared a king before any houses were constructed in 1847. This is now explained in the paper to remove the notion that this was an entirely theoretical idea entertained by Brigham Young. Footnote 1 also clarifies the time frame considered was 1851-58, and acknowledges that, once the anticipated kingdom did not succeed and Brigham Young was removed as Governor, he changed, and the narrative changed.

Brother Alexander's remarks illustrate the anxiety this topic causes, and the desire of many historians to see Brigham Young's remarks in the light of subsequent events, rather than taking them at face value. Readers should be aware of Brother Alexander's criticism, and can listen to his remarks on the Sunstone website. The major criticism he advanced in remarks following the Sunstone presentation was that Brigham Young never self-identified as a "king." That argument is answered in footnote 15, which also references the reader to footnote 12. I am confident that Brother Alexander would not deny the title of prophet to church presidents, even though they do not self-identify with that title. Therefore this criticism proves too much, and is not a reasonable test of Brigham Young's intentions.

Throughout this paper, Brigham Young has been allowed to speak. This, and not Brother Alexander's or my characterization of the man, is the best measure of his heart, as footnote 1 explains.