



We, Children of the Temple, Who Long for a Prophetic and Public Faith

Matthew J. Frizzell

A Change in Spirit

I wrote this essay in the shadow of two recent events. Both suggest a subtle, yet profound change on the course of our church's last forty years of history. This history has been a basic struggle to move away from RLDS sectarianism. Particularly there has been a prophetic attempt to pull our religious tradition away from sectarian authorities and the inward pull of sectarian forms of faith. The thrust of these movements began most noticeably in the early 1960s. As we face the twenty-first century, the Community of Christ is the church it is today because spiritual leaders have responded to God's call to move away from religious insularity and move toward an ecumenical, forward-moving, and publicly minded faith.

Two events seem to signify a change on that road of transformation. The first of these two was the church's reinstatement of the discriminatory 1982 Standing High Council Statement on Homosexuality. This World Church Leadership Council decision reactively followed President W. Grant McMurray's *affirming* testimony of gay and lesbian persons' undeniable call to ministry in 2002.¹ The second event was the First Presidency's recent public censure of Church Historian Mark Scherer on October 17, 2005. This reaction was a response to a quotation attributed to Dr. Scherer in the October 17, 2005, edition of *Newsweek*, which speculated on Joseph Smith Jr.'s intent with regard to polygamy.² Both these events seem to be signs of a new disposition taking hold in the church. As leadership decisions, they potentially reveal a shift on behalf of our spiritual leaders toward a reactive position of religious self-preservation, which is reminiscent of RLDS sectarianism. But more importantly, they

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show a profound reversal of the spirit that possessed the church even twenty years ago.

The Shift in Leadership

This turn of events also coincides with a deeper change occurring within the church. Reflected in these decisions is the profound transition in the church's approach to spiritual leadership. Specifically, as the church has moved its sense of spiritual direction away from the President's prophetic role as seer and revelator, church leaders have slowly moved toward sharing this prophetic responsibility with the membership as a whole. This, I believe, is a prophetic move.

However, this shift has made the church's sense of spiritual direction increasingly difficult to discern. The reason is that the responsibility for discerning church direction has been somewhat decentralized and organizationally much more diffused. As a result, truly prophetic decisions on important theological and ethical issues such as human sexuality, just war, rebaptism, or the use of scripture have gone essentially undecided. More and more, they've been deferred to internal structures and organizational processes concerned with education and dialogue, which promise to build consensus and carry the church through its time of difficult transition.

Church leadership, in this context, has become increasingly defined by organizational needs and institutional preoccupations. Namely, church leaders have been charged with the responsibility to spiritually lead the church, while also develop the financial and spiritual resources necessary to support the institutional structures and processes that promise to redefine the church's mission and identity and bring about its new sense of direction. Combined with the effects of decline in North America and the challenge of growth abroad, these shifts in the church's overall corporate culture have overshadowed its sense of prophetic responsibility. Moreover, they have left the church anxious. Over the last twenty years, as the church has faced crucial questions, responses have been, at best, diluted and, at worst, reactionary. Without a renewed sense of prophetic direction, the forward-moving and publicly

minded spirit of our church's most recent past has potentially run aground. Unanswerable questions about denominational mission and identity challenge the church's sense of prophetic movement. The faith carrying the church over the last forty years appears to be compromised. It affects both Community of Christ leaders and members alike.

The Concern

The central concern of this paper is that a new kind of sectarian gravity is developing in the church during this time of transition. This gravity threatens, with its centripetal force, to consistently call the church's locus of concern inward upon itself. Having turned our faith away from our tradition, yet wanting to capitalize on the prophetic movement of our most recent history, the consistent shift of spiritual leadership away from prophetic direction and toward organizational development and institutional processes has produced a set of internalizing forces that are taking hold within the church. These forces threaten to undo the church by monopolizing its faith and spiritual direction.

Having accepted the risks and promises of transformation at least since the 1980s, the church in North America has increasingly undergone transition. The schism precipitated by women in the priesthood and subsequent building of the Temple sent the church courageously out on a new search for meaning and identity. But, having found consensus only on a new name, the church now struggles to find movement without a felt sense of assurance or clarity. Such a search is reflected in the challenge to clarify a practical sense of denominational mission and corporate faith identity. Shedding our RLDS-ness has also meant moving away from the traditional role of prophetic authority, which guided the church in times of challenge in the past. To fill this vacuum, the emerging Community of Christ persistently looks to new sources of religious authority. Corporately, this has meant turning to new definitions of spiritual leadership and organizational philosophies in order to provide the church the direction it seeks to redefine its religious identity and mission as a corporate body. My concern is that completely incorporating the paradigms and meeting the

demands of these new philosophies also threatens to redefine the church's essential prophetic movement.³

In response, this essay represents a call to remember the prophetic direction that marks our last forty years as a movement. This history is defined by a series of prophetic decisions and events, which identify a trajectory toward an outbound, worldwide, and public witness as a church. It is this movement that has made the Community of Christ we know today even possible.

Together, the acceptance of Section 156 and the building of the Temple mark a pivotal turning point in this forty-year period. From these events, we can see the Spirit of transformation most clearly. Responding to this Spirit, the church accepted the end of RLDS sectarianism, its patriarchal forms, and religious insularity. Moreover, the RLDS Church responded to a promise for new life that would emerge from within the Temple's public witness and call to ministry.

As a symbol, the building of the Temple is the church's response to a call to move its faith and identity out into the world. It signs the passing of RLDS sectarianism and the promise of new life found in transforming ministries. This transformation began in a prophetic call to move outward as a church, which is now symbolized in the name Community of Christ. As such, the Temple stands as symbol of our church between two names, two identities, a past understanding and a future identity. In this historical and spiritual sense, the Temple still prophetically calls the church beyond itself to forever become a worldwide community dedicated to the public witness of a prophetic Christian faith.

Children of the Temple

Where is all this coming from? All ideas, even proclamations like these, come from a certain perspective and place in history. The perspective I wish to introduce here is that of a *Child of the Temple*. I consider myself to be a Child of the Temple. From within this perspective, I understand the church, its prophetic movement, and place in history.

Children of the Temple are those whose faith in God's living and revealing Spirit was formed in the historic decisions and

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events surrounding Section 156 of the Doctrine and Covenants. This is the Restoration document that explicitly called for women in the priesthood, called forth the building of the Temple, and set Christ at the center of the church's life and ministry.⁴

A Child of the Temple is one whose faith identity was forged in the wake of these unsettling, yet prophetic historical events. These are events whose inception can be first traced to the Presidency of W. Wallace Smith. This period of church history can be defined by a set of decisions and movements that 1) introduced a spirit of openness and questioning into the life of the church; 2) upheld the discipline of critical and ecumenical inquiry (not restricted to the classroom or a seminary) within the church; 3) led to the questioning of reigning forms of religious authority within the church; and 4) which sustained the church in a movement toward ecumenical and publicly minded faith as evidenced in World Church action to address world hunger,⁵ open Communion, and the role of women in the 1970s and 80s.

The church's faith in these prophetic and critical movements is what sustained the church through the controversies over open Communion and women in the priesthood. Moreover, it was this faith that responded with an out-pouring witness in the face of a schismatic crisis. Building the Temple voiced the RLDS Church's commitment to embrace its prophetic voice and move out into an uncertain future. Because of this commitment, the church has become the Community of Christ it is today.

For Children of the Temple, these prophetic decisions and critical events shape our understanding of the church's prophetic nature and its call to faith. It is in this history of events that we find our heritage. Together, they convey to us this church's capacity for courage, sacrifice, and world vision as a people and as a faith.

Where Are the Children of the Temple?

Judging from these recent events, it appears that the prophetic direction that guided the church to these transformative events and was called for in Section 156 is changing. Specifically, the decisive faith and vision to take on critical matters of theological difference, public concern, and greater inclusion is diminishing. Instead, the

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church today is more and more preoccupied with the demands of managing its own transitions. Members are consistently challenged to seek consensus over conflict or clarity on issues of theological and moral authority. Church leaders are pouring energy into organizational restructuring and resource development in order to respond to the challenges of international growth and North American decline. In sum, the church's attention is increasingly being drawn off by a change in direction and an inward turn of faith to concerns that are defined within the church itself. The centripetal forces that have been created by ongoing financial, theological, and organizational changes threaten to overshadow the hope of becoming a forward moving, publicly minded, and courageously committed post-Temple church. The prophetic Spirit that once pushed our faith outward onto matters of social justice and prophetic participation in the world, now summons us inward toward our personal beliefs and organizational approaches that are supposed to meet congregational needs and harmonize our differences. Without a clear sense of identity or direction, our spiritual attention is fixed upon utopian hopes for harmony and consensus, as well as looming concerns over sustaining the church's transforming organization and faith.

How'd we get here? Since before Section 156, the quest to be relevant to an expanding and changing world drove RLDS leaders to critically engage in new kinds of theological and ecumenical inquiry. The story of these decisions and events should be told and celebrated. As these critical movements began to have effect, a new generation in the church was able to respond. The opportunity to transform the church and make it relevant to their changing world became a spiritual call. However, with this call came certain risks. Specifically, as the church has continued to seek relevance outside the critical guidance and resources of its unique tradition, transformation risked being little more than becoming more and more reflectant of the church's surrounding culture.

In respect to the RLDS Church in North America, shedding our sectarian heritage without a clear and new understanding of our tradition's prophetic witness, the church's ethos has become increasingly conflicted and subdivided like America's own

religious culture. Leaders, priesthood, and members alike struggle together, often against each other, to put new wine into old wineskins. In the natural tensions that accompany such changes, the relationships between institutional leaders, congregational ministers, and members are put under strain. Anxiety increases as expectations are generated and direction changes. Pressures mount. The church's spiritual leaders continue to press the church to unite the authority of new ideas and new vision with the church's existing structures (i.e., the Restoration's traditional priesthood hierarchy of headquarters officers and congregational ministers in their traditional roles). As these wineskins burst, the new wine spills. Ineffectiveness and broken expectations begin to take their toll.

Transformation, we're learning, is increasingly difficult. It does not come without cost. A generation of members has been arguably lost to the church.⁶ The church's present theological and financial struggles have also resulted. But, most importantly, a new corporate culture has grown in the vacuum left by the authority of the tradition. Moreover, this new corporate culture has the power to overturn the courageous spirit and prophetic path the church began just some forty years ago.

To explain this developing corporate culture within the church, I will return to the shifting meaning of the church's spiritual leadership. As church leaders and members have envisioned a response to the need for transformation over the last two decades, a deeper set of expectations has been nurtured and allowed to grow. These expectations have been subtle, even unconscious, while others have been explicit. Whatever the case, a constellation of hopes and beliefs has been fostered among leaders and members that now guides the church and its decisions. Specifically, they suggest that 1) transformation will realize a new spirit of unity much longed-for after the church's break-up over women in the priesthood in the 1980s; 2) transformation will accommodate the membership's diverse spiritual needs and personal beliefs through redefining old programs and new initiatives; 3) church members will participate in the forming of the emerging church's new identity and mission; 4) this will be accomplished by upholding the

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sanctity of each member's personal yearnings, beliefs, and moral views.⁷ To meet these hopes and expectations, corporate processes have been implemented—as well as organizational changes—to shift from the rule of traditional authority to the newfound authority found in theological innovation, group process, and collective consensus. New theological language and spiritual insights have been implemented. All of which is intended to align the church with the hopes and dreams of its transformative vision.

The shift in the role and function of prophetic leadership has been instrumental in bringing about these changes. In an act of prophetic leadership and trust, the church's last President/Prophet, W. Grant McMurray, called the church body, itself, to take on its prophetic responsibility. We've been called to become a "prophetic people."⁸ When this call was sounded, however, the absence of prophetic direction created by this shift was already filled by a new understanding of spiritual leadership. Leadership in the church was already being redefined by institutional and congregational functions: mentoring, teaching, pastoring, and administration.

As the church shifted the meaning of spiritual leadership away from traditional definitions and toward institutional and congregational functions, the very idea of the church's *spiritual leadership* has been reformed. Unsure what to do with the call to be prophetic, the reemphasis on the organizational and interpersonal aspects of spiritual leadership now overshadows any past sense of prophetic direction. The essential meaning of spiritual leadership in the church now lies in the force of opposing imperatives: 1) the demand to uphold and safeguard the personal views and beliefs of each member, while simultaneously 2) maintain the organization in its time of transition through keeping a sense of corporate unity. Between these two poles, what is *spiritual* is now more monopolized by the needs to *increase, organize, and manage* the church. We uphold the "worth of persons"⁹ by sanctifying each person's journey, beliefs, and moral opinions, while equally strengthen the church by and upholding the call to "community." Herein, a de facto theology is born that replaces any need for tradition or understanding of the church as a prophetic movement. It essentially proclaims a divine balance

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between the church's corporate viability and each member's moral views, personal religion, and spiritual needs.

At worst, such a definition of spiritual leadership tends toward corporate salvation formulas in the face of organizational conflict, financial crises, and theological controversy. With a concept of spiritual leadership that increasingly distances itself from prophetic responsibility and the tradition, the church's spiritual leaders increasingly turn to organizational strategies, leadership philosophies, and "pastoral" approaches to preserve and aid the church through its transitions. The cost is high as the church's faith is pushed more and more into the organizational and personal spheres. Moreover, the church's corporate life is increasingly devoid of that prophetic spirit, which is lost in a climate of diminished returns, ongoing dialogue, and corporate compromise.

Left critically unattended, this kind of "transformation" runs the risk of emptying the church of its prophetic movement toward a critically engaged and public-minded kind of faith. Once more, it risks filling this vacuum with religious individualism and the logic of corporate culture. Enforced by its rule of common sense, individualism obliges the church to suppress conflict for the sake of respecting each person's religious opinions and moral views. In its "corporate sense," the church, then, justifies prioritizing the welfare of the organization at the expense of deferring and excluding others—such as those refusing rebaptism or barring the sacraments of marriage and ordination from the gay, bi-sexual, lesbian, and transgendered community. In short, without prophetic action, the church adopts and defends in practice a new set of cultural and religious norms. As a result, the church is not transformed, but merely adopts new, more relevant, and contemporary versions of the old sacred cows.

Distancing ourselves from our most recent history of prophetic movement, we simply repeat old mistakes in our attempt to avoid them. Moreover, the Spirit working within the church, which brought about the prophetic events surrounding Section 156 seems forgotten. The events seem impossible to repeat. Specifically they were 1) the decision to confront reigning forms of authority in the church, 2) the challenge to risk our faith for the sake of fuller-

inclusion (in 1984, it was ordination of women), and 3) the call to public witness to the future through substantial out-pouring of resources and sacrifice for the sake of building a Temple. They are no longer a part of our church's memory, but rather lost to history.

Remember?: We Were Once Children of the Temple

To move forward, my hope is that the Community of Christ locates its sense of prophetic direction. To do this, it must remember what it means to be *prophetic* and what it means to be a *movement*. This requires church leaders and members alike not to become comfortable in the status quo of institutional paradigms or the functions of denominationalism. In our present world, such comfort and stability is increasingly diminishing. Rather, we must collectively recall from whence the call to transformation comes. Only this story and its Spirit can tie the two identities that form our emerging church together. From within this sacred story, the church might find again its prophetic direction.

The thrust of my argument here is as historical as it is theological. Specifically, the Community of Christ is as much a product of the Christian tradition as it is a product of a prophetic movement. This is to say, the Community of Christ as a denomination today—no matter how struggling or transforming—is wholly a product of the prophetic decisions and historical events surrounding the RLDS Church's acceptance of Section 156. And, in this way we are all in some way *Children of the Temple*.

The prophetic decision to include women in the priesthood and build the Temple marks a decisive point in RLDS history. The history of people and decisions surrounding these events is precisely the history to which the Community of Christ is historically and spiritually indebted. The sense of prophetic movement and faithful response surrounding these events, therefore, must be integrated into Community of Christ identity and mission. For without it, the Community of Christ remains devoid of both a history and tradition. And without these, the Community of Christ may never become, transform, or find itself again as a spiritual movement.

Secondly, Community of Christ identity is equally fixed on the centrality of the life and death of Jesus Christ. The Community of Christ must discover how Jesus' life and death lies at the center of its corporate life together. One way to do this is to consider how Jesus' life and death defines the church at a decisive point in RLDS history.

The Temple provides the church with such a historical symbol. As a public display of faith, the Temple stands at a pivotal point in RLDS faith. Section 156 testifies that the Temple was to be a place where the essential meaning of the Restoration was given new life and understanding, inspired by the life and witness of the Redeemer of the world.¹⁰ The church's name change followed less than ten years after the Temple's completion. Seen in this way, it stands not unlike the cross on Calvary as a promise for new life to RLDS people. It stands as a call for the church to venture outside itself and its own self-understanding into a world longing for peace, reconciliation, and healing. This is nothing if it is not a public witness and public ministry.

Conclusion

Last year, I suggested that the "concept of incarnation is the theological foundation from which the post-Temple church must plot its future, herald its transformation, and embrace its new name."¹¹ Today, I complement that prescription with this argument: The prophetic decisions and events leading up to and following Section 156 constitute the prophetic heritage through which the Community of Christ must come to understand itself as a prophetic movement. This is its prophetic responsibility, which belongs to the whole of the church. The historic decisions and events surrounding Section 156 constitute the foundation upon which the church we know today was even made possible. Unless the Community of Christ is going to allow its emerging identity to become alienated from this prophetic heritage, spiritual leaders and theologians alike must find ways to weave Jesus' life and ministry and the prophetic responsibility of the church intimately together. Some of us will begin by recounting how we were once Children of the Temple.

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In remembering the prophetic Spirit that called our church to embrace women in the priesthood and build the Temple dedicated to peace, we find the meaning of our current transformation. The emergence of the Community of Christ follows a unique symbol of RLDS history. As an ensign to the world,¹² the Temple also declares an end to insular faith. It represents an irrevocable commitment to peace, reconciliation, and healing that is both public in its witness and prophetic in its character. As such, it critically calls the church—its mission and identity—onward and outbound. Those of us who grew up RLDS and saw the modern-day Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth in this new commitment must testify. This is why we call ourselves Children of the Temple. It is why we remain with this church and embrace its new name.

Notes

1. “I have been present in conferences where persons I knew to be in long-term, committed homosexual relationships were approved for priesthood in jurisdictions where their lifestyle was known and their ministry was accepted. The conflict within me was between lawgiver and pastor. To enforce the policy would have required me to intervene and prevent the ordination of someone whose call to ministry I could not deny. This I could not do. This I will not do.” See W. Grant McMurray’s 2002 World Conference Sermon, “Called to Discipleship,” given April 7, 2002. Available at <http://www.cofchrist.org/wc2002/sermons/Grant2002.asp>. Accessed January 27, 2005.
2. The First Presidency responded with a public media release to a quote attributed to Church Historian Mark Scherer in the October 17, 2005 edition of *Newsweek* article, “Mormon Odyssey.” (A copy of the first media release is included at the end of this essay, entitled Appendix A.) The Church Historian’s quote was clearly a provocation concerning Joseph Smith Jr.’s intention with the institution of polygamy. The First Presidency’s initial media release censured Scherer by describing his professional judgment as “a matter of personal opinion.” The media release followed with a restatement of the RLDS Church’s longstanding position against polygamy. Specifically, it stated that the church doesn’t believe that Joseph Smith Jr. taught the doctrine of polygamy. A follow-up statement was also made to the church. Its substance is available on the web on the church’s “Frequently Asked Questions” page, <http://www.cofchrist.org/seek/faq.asp>, under the question, “What position does Community of Christ take on Joseph Smith Jr.’s alleged involvement in polygamy?”

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3. An important question to ask is how exactly do these new organizational approaches threaten the church's prophetic movement? To answer this question fully is outside the scope of this present essay. However, suffice it to say that these new paradigms threaten the church's sense of prophetic direction by refocusing the church's spiritual and material resources inward upon the church itself. They begin by redefining the church's sense of authority. Supplanting the directional control of the church's religious tradition, organizational paradigms are deployed which redefine the church as a corporate system. The whole is reduced to manageable parts. These parts are, then, understood dynamically in relationship with each other. For instance, on the one hand, the church is its institutional officers and their related functions. On the other, it is the body of its total membership. As a whole, membership is understood as the sum total of each member's contribution to the life of the church and the church is a reflection of each member's personal beliefs. In an organizational paradigm like this, the role of leadership is now set in motion. The purpose of leadership is to lead the church through providing a corporate vision; however, it must also pastorally respond to the membership's spiritual needs while aligning institutional responsibilities and infusing the membership with the church's overall sense of corporate mission. To succeed in these goals, new organizational structures and processes are developed which command the church's energy and attention. As the church responds to its new organizational approach and the conflicts of organizational change become more apparent, the centripetal force created by the hope and promise of these new paradigms pull the church inward. They override the spirit of expanding horizons that define the church as a prophetic movement. Attention is shifted away from the public sphere, away from controversial matters of theological, moral, or political importance. Instead, conflict is either avoided or submerged by corporate process that seek harmony on the road to transformation. The result is a threat to the prophetic movement, which marks our last forty years as a church.
4. Cf. Section 156:5
5. The church's "World Hunger Fund" was established in 1978. See *RLDS World Conference Bulletin* (April 7, 1978). See also "World Hunger, World Conference Resolution 1148," *Rules and Resolutions* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1990), 76. Thanks to Matthew Bolton for this reference.
6. Fully developing the meaning and implication of this statement for the church falls outside the scope of this essay. However, suffice it to say, the concern for "young adults" that was ignited in the church some ten years ago was a response to the sharp decrease in the number of young people entering the membership that had begun around 1980. This decline has had a real impact on the number of Generation Xer's (born approximately 1962 to 1982) in the church. For more information, see Larry Tyree, "Mission to

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North America” report. Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. (Independence, Missouri), 2001.

7. These demands are precipitated by liberalism’s (for the lack of a better term) historic separation of the public and private spheres, which divides the rights of the collective body and the individual into the rights of the whole (the corporate church) versus (the member’s) personal freedom. Out from under the weight of tradition and under the authority of these new premises, the structure and responsibility of church authority is increasingly redefined. Authority is redirected, forced to manage the diversity of forces, which dictate it to protect the rights of individual members (and their views) and threaten the survival of the corporate entity. These divisive forces are perpetuated by the surrounding culture of capitalism: the market creates religious options while the unifying hold of tradition decays. This is due to the fact that under liberalism, religion is relegated to the private sphere, and thus becomes game for commodification. In the marketplace, religion is negotiated, subject to the demands and lifestyle of the consumer. In the church, the rules of membership are supplanted by those of the customer. Everything is subject to his or her demand and comes at a price. The church, then, is forced into self-promotion and marketing for survival. If what the church is selling or promoting is being undersold and does not convert enough new and adequately contributing members to the religion because existing members are demanding to control the product, the business eventually fails. This oversimplified analysis provides a simple, yet revealing perspective on the church’s current state of affairs.
8. See W. Grant McMurray’s 2000 World Conference Sermon, “A Call to Commitment,” given April 9, 2000. Available at the Community of Christ website http://www.cofchrist.org/docs/wc2000/en/call_to_commitment.asp See also W. Grant McMurray’s 2004 World Conference Sermon, “The Passion of the Disciple: From Cross to Community,” given March 28, 2004. Available at <http://www.cofchrist.org/wc2004/sermons/03-McMurray.asp>. Both accessed January 8, 2006.
9. Section 151:9
10. Specifically, in looking to the Temple’s Christ-centered witness, we can look to Section 156:5e, “And it shall be a place in which the essential meaning of the Restoration as healing and redeeming agent is given new life and understanding, inspired by the life and witness of the Redeemer of the world.”
11. Matt Frizzell, “Section 161:1a: Beyond Anti-fundamentalism and Liberal Retreat,” in *Theology: Clashing Worldviews: Evangelicalism, Fundamentalism, and the Community of Christ*, eds. Ruth Ann Wood and Dale E. Luffman, vol. 13 (Independence, Missouri: Graceland Press, 2005), 138.
12. Section 156:6.

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Appendix A

Media Release following “Mormon Odyssey,” *Newsweek* October 17, 2005.

----- Original Message -----

From: [FirstPresOffice](#)

To: [FirstPresOffice](#)

Sent: Monday, October 17, 2005 10:47 AM

Subject: Community of Christ in the Media

Due to time constraints, we were not able to translate this message into French and Spanish. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.

To save you having to search for where the article is located, it is in the October 17 edition of *Newsweek* and also on MSNBC.com at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9630255/site/newsweek/>

Community of Christ in the Media. First Presidency Responds

The church historian was quoted recently in a U. S. magazine regarding the issue of polygamy and Joseph Smith Jr. This comment was made as a matter of personal opinion.

The Community of Christ has maintained a consistent position regarding polygamy. We have a great appreciation and respect for the leadership of Joseph Smith Jr. who began the church that is so precious to us. We believe him to have been a highly principled leader who shared with all persons the struggle with his own human nature. Joseph Smith III articulated our position regarding polygamy in his address to the Amboy Conference April 6, 1860.

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“There is but one principle taught by the leaders of any faction of this people that I hold in utter abhorrence; that is a principle taught by Brigham Young and those believing in him. I have been told that my father taught such doctrines. I have never believed it and never can believe it. If such things were done, then I believe they never were done by divine authority.”

The First Presidency,

Stephen M. Veazey
Kenneth N. Robinson
David D. Schaal