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The Political Kingdom of God as a Cause for Mormon-Gentile Conflict

KLAUS HANSEN

The afternoon of October 30, 1838, saw one of the most brutal butcheries of men and children ever to occur in the annals of the state of Missouri. At about four o'clock, relates Joseph Young, one of the eyewitnesses, "a large company of armed men, on horses" advanced towards a mill on Shoal Creek, where about thirty Mormon families had gathered for refuge. Defenseless, the Saints scattered, some into the woods, others into a blacksmith shop. Overtaken by the mob, nineteen men and boys were killed, a dozen wounded. One nine-year-old boy had found refuge under the bellows. Discovered by a mobster, the child was killed by a gun-blast in the head. Boasted the butcher afterwards: "Nits will make lice, and if he had lived he would have become a Mormon."¹

The shots of the Haun's Mill massacre were to keep ringing in the ears of the Saints, reminding them that Satan was fighting with real bullets against the Kingdom of God, a kingdom that, if it was not of this world, nevertheless marched vigorously and militantly in it. Persecution, then, was to be expected. It had been with the Church from the publication of Joseph Smith's first revelation; it was to continue throughout the history of the Church in the nineteenth century. Joseph himself was to seal his testimony with his blood. Even the exodus to the Rocky Mountains would not silence the voice of persecution. Not until the Saints had submitted to the government demands for the abolition of plural marriage was the conflict between the Church and the world to diminish, finally to end.

To the faithful Saint, the problem of historical causation found a simple and straightforward answer. As already implied, Satan would inevitably have to oppose the work of God; this

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¹William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, *Among the Mormons* (New York, 1958), p. 103.

opposition became in itself one of the touchstones for the divinity of the work; and the blood of the martyrs was transformed into seed for the Church.

But in addition to such considerations the historian should search for other objective, historical elements of causation. In the history of Mormon-Gentile relations one of the most significant institutions contributing to the conflict has so far received altogether too little, if any, attention. This institution is the political Kingdom of God.

First of all, then, the development of the political Kingdom of God in Mormon history will have to be outlined. Space limitations will obviously limit the comprehensiveness and scope of this investigation, a task made even more difficult by the fact that large stretches of the course of the political Kingdom of God are still uncharted.² Consequently, only a sampling of incidences of conflict at certain crucial periods of church history will be made to suggest general trends.

It should be remembered that in history beliefs are equally as important as facts. Whether or not Joseph Smith actually planned treasonable action against the United States fades into a pale academic question before the bullets of assassins who believed that this was so, irrespective of fact. Likewise, the political Kingdom of God caused persecution more by its distorted image in the eyes of its enemies than by the actual ideals and realities it represented in the eyes of its adherents and defenders.

The strong emphasis on the millennial Kingdom in Mormon thought has led some writers to believe that the idea of a political Kingdom preceding the second coming of Christ was never entertained by the Saints. Mormonism was not to establish a temporal Kingdom, but to wait for Christ.³ This erroneous no-

²Various aspects of the political Kingdom of God have received recent attention. See Hyrum Andrus, *Joseph Smith and World Government* (Salt Lake City, 1958); Alfred L. Bush and K. J. Hansen, "Notes towards a definition of the Council of Fifty," (mimeographed MS, Brigham Young University Library, 1957); James R. Clark, "Church and State Relationships in Education in Utah" (dissertation, Utah State University, 1958); James R. Clark, "The Kingdom of God, the Council of Fifty and the State of Deseret," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXVI (1958), 130-148; Klaus J. Hansen, "The Theory and Practice of the Political Kingdom of God in Mormon History, 1829-1890" (thesis, Brigham Young University, 1959).

³See G. Homer Durham, *Joseph Smith, Prophet-Statesman* (Salt Lake City,

tion may have been caused partly by the fact that it is extremely difficult to differentiate between the apocalyptic Kingdom and its predecessor. Since the one was to lead to the other, they were to be almost identical in nature, at least theoretically. The main difference between the two was mostly a matter of chronology. The one would be the kingdom militant, struggling against a hostile world; the other was the kingdom victorious, having subdued all its enemies. The political Kingdom, then, was organized because the Mormons did not believe that they could wait for Christ to establish his world government without some preparation. The Saints may have believed in miracles; but they were also of a practical mind and thus believed in aiding the Lord as much as they could. Seen in this context, the efforts of the Saints to establish a political kingdom in preparation for the apocalyptic Kingdom became the application of the belief that, while man can accomplish nothing without the aid of the Lord, God only helps those who help themselves. This idea found expression by John Taylor, who once remarked that "It is not all a matter of faith, but there is some action required; it is a thing that we have to engage in ourselves."⁴

Thus, the Saints had been engaged in temporal matters almost from the day the Church was founded. Experience in government they had gained in Kirtland, Missouri, Nauvoo and, most of all, in Deseret. "The time will come," predicted George Q. Cannon at a missionary conference in 1862,

when . . . [the elders] will be called to act in a different ambassadorial capacity. The nations are not going to be all destroyed at once, as many have imagined; but they are going to stand and continue to some extent with their governments; and the kingdom of God is not all the time to continue its present theological character alone, but is to become a political power, known and recognized by the powers of the earth; and you, my brethren, may have to be sent forth to represent that power as its accredited agents Young men now here today may be chosen to go forth and represent God's kingdom. You may be called to appear and represent it at the courts of foreign nations⁵

1944), p. 101; Therald N. Jensen, "Mormon Theory of Church and State" (dissertation, University of Chicago), p. 20; Keith Melville, "The Political Ideas of Brigham Young" (dissertation, University of Utah, 1950), p. 11.

⁴*Journal of Discourses*, IX (1862), 341. (Hereafter cited as *J.D.*)

⁵*Millennial Star*, XXIV (1862), 103.

What Cannon failed to tell his audience was the fact that the Kingdom of God had already embarked on its political course, almost twenty years earlier.

In the spring of 1844, Reuben Hedlock, president of the British mission, received a letter from Brigham Young and Willard Richards in which the writers informed him that "the Kingdom is organized; and although as yet no bigger than a grain of mustard seed, the little plant is in a flourishing condition, and our prospects brighter than ever."⁶ Such news must have seemed strange to a man who had been actively engaged in furthering the "kingdom" for some time, unless the term "kingdom" expressed here a more specific meaning than in its usual context which equated it with the Church in both its spiritual and temporal manifestations. Young and Richards were, indeed, referring to the political Kingdom of God, whose governing body had been organized on March 11, 1844, as the Council of Fifty by the Prophet Joseph Smith himself.⁷ According to one of its members, this council was "the Municipal department of the Kingdom of God set up on the Earth, and from which all Law emanates, for the rule, government & controle of all Nations Kingdoms & touns and People under the whole Heavens."⁸ In order to prepare itself for this ambitious mission, the Council met regularly in Nauvoo to discuss principles of government and political theory under the leadership of Joseph Smith. Before the prophet's death, "a full and complete organization" of the political Kingdom of God had been effected.⁹

⁶*Ibid.*, XXIII (1861), 422.

⁷This is the date given in the *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (2d ed., Salt Lake City, 1950), VI, 260-261, (hereafter cited as *D.H.C.*), and in the "History of Brigham Young," *Millennial Star*, XXVI (1864), 328. For reference to a revelation concerning the organization of this body, received by the Prophet as early as April 7, 1842, see "Minutes of the Council of Fifty," (typed MS, Brigham Young University Library), April 10, 1880. The official name of the council apparently was to be kept a secret. "General Council," "Council of the Kingdom," "Council of the Gods," and "Living Constitution" are some of the names applied to the council in the literature referring to it. The term "Council of Fifty," referring to the approximate number of members, appears to have been used most frequently and was, therefore, adopted to identify the council in this paper.

⁸John D. Lee, *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848-1876*, ed. Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks (San Marino, California, 1955), I, 80.

⁹Brigham Young, *J.D.*, XVII (1875), 156.

The basic law of this world-government, received through revelation, resembled the constitution of the United States.

In keeping with a strong Mormon emphasis on the doctrine of individual rights, non-Mormons were to represent the Gentiles in the government of the Kingdom. Whether or not Gentiles actually sat as members of the Council of Fifty is difficult to ascertain, but the possibility points up a significant distinction between the Church and the political Kingdom. When, after the death of Joseph Smith, George Miller and Alexander Badlam wanted to "call together the Council of Fifty and organize the Church," apostles George A. Smith and Willard Richards could inform the two petitioners "that the Council of Fifty was not a Church organization." Membership in that group was irrespective of religious beliefs; "the organization of the Church belonged to the Priesthood alone."¹⁰ But if the distinction between the Church and the political Kingdom seemed important in one sense, in another it was highly theoretical, for the leading officers of both organizations were identical.

When David Patten became the first apostolic martyr of the Church at the battle of Crooked River in Missouri, in October, 1838, the doctrine of the political Kingdom of God apparently had not been fully formulated. And yet, even at this time the suspected Mormon ambitions to establish a political Kingdom of God figured prominently in the expulsion of the Saints from Missouri. The testimonies of a number of apostate Mormons before Judge Austin A. King at Richmond, Ray County, in 1838, insisted that Joseph Smith had in mind to establish a temporal kingdom of God. These testimonies, given by enemies of the Church, can hardly be considered accurate and unbiased. Some of them are obvious distortions of Joseph's plans, such as George M. Hinckle's assertion, that

The general teachings of the presidency were, that the kingdom they were setting up was a *temporal* as well as a spiritual kingdom; that it was the little stone spoken of by Daniel. Until lately, the teachings of the church appeared to be peaceable, and that the kingdom was to be set up peaceably; but lately a different idea has been advanced—that the time had come when this kingdom was to be set up by forcible means, if necessary.¹¹

¹⁰*D.H.C.*, VII, 213.

¹¹U.S., Congress, Senate, *Testimony in Trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., for High*

But in the light of subsequent events the temporal if peaceful plans of Joseph Smith cannot be denied.

The fact that Joseph Smith insisted on leadership in both spiritual and temporal matters also caused some internal difficulties in the Church. Thus, refusal to acknowledge the authority of the Church in temporal matters played an important role in the excommunication of Oliver Cowdery. Answering charges "for virtually denying the faith by declaring that he would not be governed by any ecclesiastical authority or revelations whatever in his temporal affairs,"¹² Cowdery declared:

The very principle of . . . [ecclesiastical authority in temporal affairs] I conceive to be couched in an attempt to set up a kind of petty government, controlled and dictated by ecclesiastical influence, in the midst of this national and state government. You will, no doubt, say this is not correct; but the bare notice of these charges, over which you assume a right to decide is, in my opinion, a direct attempt to make the secular power subservient to church direction—to the correctness of which I cannot in conscience subscribe—I believe that the principle never did fail to produce anarchy and confusion.¹³

But Cowdery's objections were shared by few of the Saints. Neither did the temporal claims of Joseph Smith deter the influx of converts to the city of Nauvoo after the expulsion of the Saints from Missouri, in spite of the fact that civil and ecclesiastical government were practically identical in that city. And to the faithful Saints, who were building the Kingdom by building their city, it may have been difficult to imagine how it could have been otherwise. Thus, they would see no incongruity when their prophet made the celebration of the eleventh anniversary of the organization of the Church not only the occasion for the laying of the cornerstone of their new temple, but showed himself head of the Nauvoo Legion in an impressive display of newly acquired temporal power. Carried away by their enthusi-

Treason, 26th Cong., 2d Sess., 1841, Senate Doc. 189, p. 23. Parley P. Pratt, referring to this investigation, wrote in his autobiography: "this court of inquisition inquired diligently into our belief of the seventh chapter of Daniel concerning the kingdom of God, which should subdue all other kingdoms and stand forever. And when told that we believe in that prophecy, the court turned to the clerk and said: 'write that down; it is a strong point for treason.' Our lawyer observed as follows: 'Judge, you had better make the Bible treason.' The court made no reply." Quoted in *D.H.C.*, III, 212.

¹²Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1930), I, 431-432.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 433.

asm, the Saints believed that in time this power would be able "to rescue the American Republic from the brink of ruin."¹⁴ Exulted the *Millennial Star*:

Nauvoo . . . is the nucleus of a glorious dominion of universal liberty, peace and plenty; it is an organization of that government of which there shall be no end—of that kingdom of Messiah which shall roll forth, from conquering and to conquer until it shall be said, that "*the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ,*" "AND THE SAINTS OF THE MOST HIGH SHALL POSSESS THE GREATNESS OF THE KINGDOM UNDER THE WHOLE HEAVEN."¹⁵

The editor of the *Millennial Star* most likely did not know that shortly before this article appeared Joseph Smith had received his revelation concerning world government and the organization of the Council of Fifty.¹⁶ Gentiles, of course, were even less informed about Joseph Smith's plans for the organization of the political Kingdom of God. But after the Council of Fifty had been organized in 1844 its existence may have been kept secret for a while, but not its activities. For it was this council which organized and supported Joseph's candidacy for the presidency of the United States as one of several alternatives for the possible establishment of the political Kingdom. Negotiations were also entered in with Sam Houston for the acquisition of a large tract of land in the Texas region as an alternate possibility for the settling of the Saints and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, scouting expeditions were sent west to explore yet another possible location for the future Kingdom.

The secrecy of Council of Fifty deliberations may well have been a protective measure not only against the possibility of misunderstanding by the Gentiles but by the Saints as well. Benjamin F. Johnson, one of the charter members of the Council of Fifty, declared that only after attending some of its meetings did he and his associates begin,

. . . in a degree to understand the meaning of what he [Joseph Smith] had so often publicly said, that should he teach and practice the principles that the Lord had revealed to

¹⁴*Millennial Star*, III (1842), 67-69.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁶"Minutes of the Council of Fifty," April 10, 1880.

him, and now requested of him, that those then nearest to him in the stand would become his enemies and the first to seek his life.¹⁷

But secrecy, to some degree, destroyed its own purpose, for it contributed to false rumors and half truths which gave to the political Kingdom, in the eyes of Gentiles and apostates, the aspect of the sinister and the subversive. The opposition that led directly to the assassination of the Prophet was partly caused by rumors "that the Mormons entertained the treasonable design, when they got strong enough, of overthrowing the government, driving out the old population and taking possession of the country, as the children of Israel did in the land of Canaan."¹⁸ The Laws and Foster, in the *Nauvoo Expositor*, objected, among other things, against "any man as king or law-giver in the church." Wilson Law, after his excommunication, even made an attempt to obtain a warrant against Joseph Smith for treason on the grounds that on one occasion, while listening to the Prophet preaching from Daniel 1:44, he heard him declare "That the kingdom referred to was already set up, and that he was the king over it."¹⁹ Governor Ford, in his *History of Illinois*, gives a highly imaginative account of Joseph's temporal aspirations, the source of which must ultimately be sought in the secret deliberations of the Council of Fifty:

It seems, from the best information that could be got from the best men who had seceded from the Mormon Church, that Joe Smith about this time conceived the idea of making himself a temporal prince as well as spiritual leader of his people. He instituted a new and select order of the priesthood, the members of which were to be priests and kings temporally and spiritually. These were to be his nobility, who were to be the upholders of his throne. He caused himself to be crowned and anointed king and priest, far above the rest; and he prescribed the form of an oath of allegiance to himself, which he administered to his principal followers. To uphold his pretensions to royalty, he deduced his descent by an unbroken chain from Joseph the son of Jacob, and that of his wife from some other renowned personage of Old Testament history. The Mormons openly denounced the government of the United

¹⁷Letter of Benjamin F. Johnson to George S. Gibbs, between April and October, 1903 (typed MS at Brigham Young University Library), p. 9.

¹⁸LeRoy Hafen and Carl C. Rister, *Western America* (2d ed., New York, 1950), p. 335.

¹⁹*Millennial Star*, XXIV (1862), 359.

States as utterly corrupt, and as being about to pass away, and to be replaced by the government of God, to be administered by his servant Joseph.²⁰

Had fact and fiction, curiously intermingled in this document, been separated, and had Governor Ford and the enemies of Mormonism been informed of the truth concerning the Kingdom of God—that it was to be established entirely by peaceful, legal means, and that the Saints believed that worldly governments would dwindle of their own accord, or rather by their wickedness—persecution would most likely have been just as relentless. Theocracy, no matter of what form, was highly obnoxious to most mid-19th century Americans. The Saints themselves were not unaware of the fact that kingdom-building was a major cause for persecution and to a large degree responsible for the death of Joseph Smith. E. W. Tullidge, writing in the *Millennial Star*, observed:

It is because there has, day after day, and year after year, grown up and fast spread in America a realization, and with it a fear of the empire-founding character of "Mormonism" and the "Mormons," that this Church has such heartrending pages in its history. It is because of the growth of this presentiment and fear that a Joseph, a Hyrum, a Parley, a David Patten, and many others of the chief Elders and Saints have been directly or indirectly Martyred.²¹

Martyrdom, however, contrary to Gentile hopes and expectations, proved no deterrent to Mormon ambitions of building the Kingdom. If anything, the Saints continued their efforts with renewed vigor.

How deeply the idea of the establishment of a theocratic Kingdom of God had been embedded in Mormon thinking was revealed by the succession controversy and its resulting schisms. Alexander Badlam and George Miller, as mentioned previously, wanted to "call together the Council of Fifty and organize the Church." Lyman Wight, who led a colony of Saints to Texas, likewise considered the authority of the Council of Fifty superior to that of the Quorum of the Twelve, and lamented the fact that the reorganization of the Church had not taken place under the leadership of the legislature of the Kingdom of

²⁰Thomas Ford, *History of Illinois* (Chicago, 1854), pp. 321-322.

²¹*Millennial Star*, XXIII (1861), 125.

God.²² Splinter groups such as the Hedrickites, Morrisites, Bickertonites, and Brewsterites attempted to establish theocratic governments. Gladden Bishop, who attracted a group of Wisconsin Saints to his cause after the death of the Prophet, organized, according to one observer, "what he calls the Kingdom of God, and it was the queerest performance I ever saw."²³ James Strang, one of the most vociferous claimants to the mantle of the Prophet, insisted on the establishment not only of a church but a political Kingdom of God and had himself installed as king of a theocratic community on Beaver Island. If Strang may never have been a member of the Council of Fifty himself, his organization, nevertheless, looked like a highly garbled product of that Council. The fact that Strang claimed two former members of Joseph's legislature of the Kingdom as his followers would suggest that any similarities between Smith's ideas of the Kingdom and those of his self-styled successor were more than coincidental.

It seems only logical to assume, then, that Brigham Young, whose claim as the rightful heir to the mantle of the Prophet was sustained by a special conference of the Church held in Nauvoo on August 8, 1844, would continue the organization of the political Kingdom of God. Under his practical leadership, the Council of Fifty assumed the responsibility of directing both the policies and the administration of the government of Nauvoo. Even more important, the group resumed its earlier activities of looking for a place where the Saints could settle peacefully and establish the Kingdom without Gentile interference. As a result, the Council of Fifty was both to organize and direct the exodus of the Saints to the Rocky Mountains.

It seems not surprising, then, that the Gentiles would capitalize on rumors of the existence of a secret council in the city. In a writ issued for the arrest of prominent citizens of Nauvoo for treasonable designs against the state mention was made, among other things, of a private council of which the accused supposedly were members.²⁴ And John S. Fullmer, a member

²²Joseph Smith and Heman C. Smith (ed.), *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1836-1844* (Lamoni, Iowa, 1920), II, 90-91.

²³Sarah Scott to her mother Abigail Hall, March 31, 1848, in George F. Partridge (ed.), "The death of a Mormon Dictator. Letters of Massachusetts Mormons, 1843-1848," *The New England Quarterly*, IX (1936), 614.

²⁴*D.H.C.*, VII, 444.

of the Council of Fifty, reported while on an errand for the Council that

. . . the apostates are trying to get up an influence with the president of the United States to prevent the Saints emigrating westward, and that they have written to the president informing him of the resolutions of the General Council [Council of Fifty] [sic] to move westward, and representing that Council guilty of treason, etc.²⁵

But as subjective a term as treason leaves wide room for interpretation; and neither the Federal Government nor the Council of Fifty saw any impediments that would prevent Mormon men from wearing the uniform of the U. S. army. If one member of the Council of Fifty, no doubt voicing the sentiments of many of the Saints, nevertheless declared that he "was glad to learn of war against the United States and was in hopes that it might never end until they were entirely destroyed,"²⁶ such a statement must be recognized as an expression of hyperbole caused by the intensity of the persecution. Furthermore, the fine distinction made by Brigham Young between loyalty to the Constitution and "the damned rascals who administer the government"²⁷ was no doubt adopted by most Mormons who saw in this expression a possibility of reconciling American patriotism with kingdom-building. Words that must have inevitably sounded like treason to gentile ears might well have been uttered, then, by a faithful Mormon who may have considered himself an exemplary patriot. But the enemies of Mormonism, understandably enough, refused to accept what to them may have appeared merely a semantic distinction. And sand and sagebrush proved little more of a barrier than semantics. As a result, controversy followed the Saints to their refuge; only too soon, the halls of Congress would pick up the echoes of conflict from the everlasting mountains and keep them reverberating until not only polygamy, but the political dreams of a Mormon empire, likewise, would be crushed.

But in 1847 and the years immediately following these dreams seemed on the verge of realization. Guided by Brigham Young and the Council of Fifty, the Saints, under heroic sacrifices, began to carve a verdant empire from an arid desert. The

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 495-498.

²⁶Diaries of Hosea Stout (typed copies of originals, Brigham Young Uni-

reins of government for this empire in embryo were placed in the hands of the Council of Fifty, which controlled the legislature of the state of Deseret and established its ambitious boundaries. Exulted the *Millennial Star*: "The nucleus of the mightiest nation that ever occupied the earth is at length established in the very place where the prophets, wrapt in sacred vision, have long since foreseen it."²⁸ Brigham Young himself, in a sermon to the Saints, declared that the Kingdom of God was "actually organized and the inhabitants of the earth do not know it."²⁹ That he was referring to the political Kingdom and not its spiritual counterpart was made clear in the context of the sermon. President Young made this statement in 1855, although the establishment of Territorial government in 1851 had, at least nominally, ended theocratic government. This change, however, had diminished the controlling influence of the Council of Fifty but little and was, furthermore, looked upon as merely an expedient until the Saints could obtain statehood for their commonwealth. Statehood, in pre-Civil War days, would have given the Council of Fifty virtually a free hand in regulating the affairs of the Kingdom of God. Frank Cannon's contention that the Mormons attempted to gain admission to the Union in order to escape the Union's authority, as paradoxical as this may sound, has, then, a kernel of truth in it.³⁰ Thus it was not polygamy alone which was to keep Utah under the rule of carpetbag Federal officials for such a long time.

The opposition which the Kingdom of God was to encounter in its new Zion already began to rise dimly on Utah's political horizon in 1849. If a prophet could have had access to a letter in the territorial papers of the U. S. Senate, referred to the Committee on Territories on December 31, 1849, he would have recognized accusations that were to be reiterated again and again, for over fifty years. This petition of William Smith, brother of the Prophet Joseph and former member of the Council of Fifty, and "others, members of the Church of Latter-day

versity Library), II, 253-254.

²⁷Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City), September 8, 1851, p. 4.

²⁸XIX (1857), 630.

²⁹J.D., II (1855), 310.

³⁰Frank J. Cannon and George L. Knapp, *Brigham Young and His Mormon Empire* (New York, 1913), p. 117.

Saints, against the admission of the Salt Lake Mormons into the Union as a State," maintained that the petitioners

. . . know most assuredly that Salt Lake Mormonism is diametrically in opposition to the pure principles of virtue, liberty, and equality, and that the rulers of the Salt Lake Church are bitter and inveterate enemies of our government. They entertain treasonable designs against the liberties of American freeborn sons and daughters of freedom. They have elected Brigham Young, (who is the president of their church) to be the Governor of the proposed State of Deseret. Their intention is to unite church and state and whilst the political power of the Roman pontiff is passing away, the American tyrant is endeavoring to establish a new order of political popery in the recesses of the mountains of America. . . .³¹

If the Saints failed to obtain statehood for Deseret in 1850, however, this was not so much due to possible Mormon antagonism in Congress, which at this time was negligible. But the sectional controversy over slavery worked just as effectively to frustrate Mormon ambitions. Territorial government for Utah was one of the results of the compromise of 1850.³²

The arrival of federal officials in the summer of 1851 gave a preview of things to come. To their perhaps a little naive amazement they found organized government already well established. The celerity with which the Saints had responded to their new status and had called for the election of a territorial legislature and officers gave the newly arrived officials a vague feeling that the Saints were attempting to run things their own way. Whatever the causes for the speedy elections, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that the Council of Fifty may have thought it much easier to exert its influence on the formation of the new legislature without the supervision and interference of possibly unsympathetic Gentile members of the new government. This conjecture may serve as an added explanation for what the federal appointees, on their arrival, considered undue haste in the formation of the new government.

B. D. Harris, territorial secretary, flatly refused to recognize the legislature as a legal body. The secretary's obstinacy, and some unwise and tactless remarks by Judge Brocchus concerning

³¹U.S. Congress, Senate, Territorial Papers 1789-1873; Utah, December 13, 1849-June 11, 1870.

³²See Richard D. Poll, "The Mormon Question Enters National Politics, 1850-56," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXV (1957), 117.

the virtue of the ladies in the territory, touched off a controversy that was to give the Mormons a first taste of the difficulties with federal officials that were to plague them for forty years. If this explosion was ultimately to bring the "twin relic" into national prominence, the immediate cause for the conflict had, nevertheless, primarily been the theocratic nature of the new government. This controversy was to take on larger proportions in the not too distant future. For the time being, however, more serious difficulties were avoided by the rapid departure of the "foreign" officials from the territory.³³

President Buchanan's ill-starred Utah expedition of 1857-58 was to a large degree a reaction of the northern Democrats to the Republican "twin relics" platform of 1856.³⁴ This crusade against polygamy, however, threatened the political Kingdom quite as much, since the two seemed inseparably connected. When the first news of the approaching army reached Salt Lake City, Brigham Young seriously considered secession from the Union. In a speech on August 2, 1857, he declared:

The time must come when there will be a separation between this kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. Even in every point of view, the time must come when this kingdom must be free and independent of all other kingdoms.

Are you prepared to have the thread cut today? . . . I shall take it as a witness that God desires to cut the thread between us and the world when an army undertakes to make their appearance in this Territory to chastise me or to destroy my life from the earth. . . . We will wait a little while to see; but I shall take a hostile move by our enemies as an evidence that it is time for the thread to be cut.³⁵

But the superior strength of Colonel Johnston's troops and Brigham Young's good sense opened a wide interpretation to the term *hostile move*. The mediating efforts of Colonel Kane and the moderation and tact of Governor Cumming further convinced President Young that the Lord apparently did not want the thread cut at this particular time, and the conflict found a peaceful solution.

Young's speech, however, had made it clear that irrespective

³³U.S., President, 1850-53 (Fillmore), *Message from the President of the United States Transmitting Information in reference to the condition of affairs in the Territory of Utah*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., Executive Doc. No. 25.

³⁴Poll, p. 131.

³⁵Journal History, August 2, 1857.

of historical exigencies the political Kingdom of God was bound to achieve independence. But if the Lord would indicate to the Saints when the propitious moment for cutting the thread with the world had come they must be prepared. They must watch themselves for the time when the political Kingdom of God could send its accredited ambassadors abroad.

The outbreak of the Civil War seemed to portend the speedy consummation of these hopes. Joseph Smith himself had predicted that war, beginning in South Carolina, would envelop the earth and lead to the "full end of all nations."³⁶ The destruction to be poured out over the United States was to be a punishment for her failure to redress the wrongs committed against the Saints. Such failure, predicted the Prophet Joseph, would result in the utter destruction of the government. "Not so much as a potsherd [would] be left."³⁷ Remembering these prophecies, the church leaders predicted the inevitability of conflict even before the outbreak of hostilities. Anti-Mormon writers charged the Mormons with desiring a confederate victory. What the Saints really seem to have hoped for, at least during the beginning of the war, was a mutual destruction of both sides. Such expectations find expression in the diary of Charles Walker who, in 1861, wrote:

The Virginians are preparing to seize the capital at Washington, and where it will end they know not, but the Saints know and understand it all. . . . Bro. Brigham spoke of the things in the East said he hoped they would both gain the victory said he had as much sympathy for them as the Gods and Angels had for the Devils in Hell.³⁸

But whatever the rhetorical expressions of the Mormons and their leaders, no openly hostile actions towards the government occurred. The Saints assumed a waiting attitude; if the Lord saw fit to permit the destruction of the United States they would be ready to take over. Declared Heber C. Kimball: "We shall never secede from the Constitution of the United States. We shall not stop on the way of progress, but we shall make prepa-

³⁶*The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1951), section 87.

³⁷*D.H.C.* V, 394.

³⁸Diary of Charles Walker (typed copy of original, Brigham Young University Library), I. 225.

rations for future events. . . . God will make the people free as fast as we are able to bear it."³⁹

In keeping with this idea of preparedness, the Council of Fifty held itself in readiness to take over when other earthly governments would have crumbled. After it had failed to obtain statehood for its revived state of Deseret in 1862, the Council nevertheless continued the state organization in the enigmatic meetings of the so-called ghost legislature of Deseret which convened the day after the close of the session of the territorial legislature during the 1860's. A private message given to this "legislature" by Brigham Young in 1863 reveals its nature and its purpose:

Many may not be able to tell why we are in this capacity. I do not think that you see this thing as it is. Our organization will be kept up. We may not do much at present in this capacity, yet what we have done or shall do will have its effect. . . . This body of men will give laws to the nations of the earth. We meet here in our second Annual Legislature, and I do not care whether you pass any laws this Session or not, but I do not wish you to lose one inch of ground you have gained in your organization, but hold fast to it, for this is the Kingdom of God, . . . We are called the State Legislature, but when the time comes, we shall be called the Kingdom of God. Our government is going to pieces, and it will be like water that is spilt upon the ground that cannot be gathered. . . . I do not care whether you sit one day or not. But I do not want you to lose any part of this Government which you have organized. For the time will come when we will give laws to the nations of the earth. Joseph Smith organized this government before, in Nauvoo, and he said if we did our duty, we should prevail over all our enemies. We should get all things ready, and when the time comes, we should let the water on the wheel and start the machine in motion.⁴⁰

But with the victorious emergence of the Union from the Civil War the Council of Fifty would have to find other ways of establishing the Kingdom, and the meetings of the ghost legislature were finally abandoned. There seemed to be no need for keeping the wheel in working order when water apparently was nowhere in sight.

Mormonism itself, nevertheless, seemed viable enough even

³⁹*Deseret News*, IX (May 1, 1861), 65. Note Kimball's careful wording: "We shall never secede from the *Constitution*. . ."

⁴⁰Journal History, January 19, 1863.

to its enemies that it apparently would not suddenly fall apart like Oliver Wendell Holmes' celebrated "One Hoss Shay." If vigorous measures seemed indicated to bring it to its doom, the cessation of polygamy alone, which became the avowed primary cause for persecution, would not automatically stop anti-Mormon attacks. The suspected activities of the political Kingdom of God, to some Gentiles, served as quite as important a cause to renew the crusade for the eradication of Mormonism. John Hyde, for instance, a Mormon apostate, declared: "As a religion, Mormonism cannot be meddled with; as a civil polity it may."⁴¹ "From its very inception," maintained another enemy of the Church, "Mormonism has . . . been essentially a politico-religious organization, and as such, has clashed with the governmental institutions of every state and territory in which it has acquired habitat."⁴²

This clash was to intensify with the increased influx of Gentiles into the territory after the advent of the railroad in 1869. The economic activities of these outsiders threatened the identity of the political Kingdom by drawing it into the economic pattern of the surrounding areas, largely dominated by eastern capital. As a result, the Council of Fifty had to tighten its muscles to protect the Kingdom of God. A program of defensive economic action, stressing self-sufficiency through home manufacture and boycott of Gentile merchants, was, according to the evidence available, decided upon by the Council of Fifty. Its implementation the Council placed in the hands of the School of the Prophets. Under the leadership of the "schools," almost every Mormon community in the territory saw the establishment of a cooperative store.⁴³

It is understandable, then, that waning profits would bolster

⁴¹*Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs* (New York, 1857), pp. 307-308.

⁴²Joseph Nimmo, Jr., *The Mormon Usurpation* (Huntington, L.I., 1899), pp. 6-7.

⁴³According to Professor Leonard Arrington, the School of the Prophets became the successor to the Council of Fifty (see *Great Basin Kingdom* [Cambridge, Mass., 1958], pp. 245-251). I disagree with this interpretation, however. For evidence that the Council of Fifty was active in the late 1860's and organized the cooperative movement see the Minutes of the Provo School of the Prophets, in the Provo Stake Tabernacle Records (microfilm copy, Brigham Young University Library), October 13, 1868, and the Records of the Bishops' Meetings, Provo, 1868-1875 (microfilm copy, Brigham Young University Library), October 15, 1868.

the anti-Mormon sentiments of Gentile merchants and lead to their support of such proposed anti-Mormon legislation as the Cullom Bill of 1870, aimed at wresting political control from the Saints through increased federal controls.

During the 70's and 80's, a veritable flood of printer's ink inundated the presses and carried a wave of anti-Mormon sentiment across the country. This sentiment, to be sure, was primarily directed against polygamy and, in retrospect, has somewhat drowned out the voices of those who saw the political Kingdom of God as Mormonism's greatest threat to America. These latter voices, however, were often raised in such a shrill tone that they could be heard even through the din of the anti-polygamy crusade. Beadle, for instance, author of the notorious *Life in Utah*, insisted that it was "the union of Church and State, or rather, the absolute subservience of the State to the Church, the latter merely using the outside organization *to carry into effect decrees already concluded in secret council*, that makes Mormonism our enemy."⁴⁴ The following excerpt from one of the numerous anti-Mormon pamphlets of the period further illustrates this position:

Had Deseret been admitted as a state of the Union, the States would be [sic] confronted not only by polygamy, a foul blot upon civilization, but by a state dominated by an autocratic hierarchy, whose cardinal principle it is that the so-called 'Kingdom of God on Earth,' *i.e.* the Mormon Church-State [sic] is the only legitimate government on earth, and that all other states and nations must eventually acknowledge its sway. The expurgation of this incubus upon the nation would undoubtedly have involved a civil war.⁴⁵

Another pamphlet, entitled *The Mormon Conspiracy to Establish an Independent Empire to be called the Kingdom of God on Earth; the Conspiracy Exposed by the Writings, Sermons and Legislative Acts of the Prophets and Apostles of the Church*, published in Salt Lake City by the Tribune Company, assessed the role of polygamy in the fight against the Kingdom of God:

Congress after Congress has been importuned by the saints for the privilege of coming in [to the Union], but the request has been denied each time, wholly on account of the polygamous

⁴⁴(Philadelphia, 1870), pp. 400-401.

⁴⁵Nimmo, p. 9.

practices of Utah's people, which they could not give up. How strange it is, that a matter of comparatively small consequence to the nation as polygamy is, should have served as the sole means of many years to hold in check this diabolical conspiracy for the founding of a theocratic empire in the very heart of the greatest and freest Republic the world has ever known!⁴⁶

However much Mormon ambitions were exaggerated and distorted, these articles, in places, nevertheless come close to the truth. The Saints were certainly not engaged in any evil and insidious conspiracies, but, as demonstrated through the activities of the Council of Fifty, the Kingdom of God was definitely more than merely an ecclesiastical concept.

The death of Brigham Young in 1877 apparently terminated the activities of the Council of Fifty until shortly before the reorganization of the First Presidency of the Church under John Taylor. In the spring of 1880, George Q. Cannon, prominent member of the Council of Fifty and congressional representative of the Territory in Washington, forwarded the records of the Council of Fifty, which he held in custody, to the leaders of the Church.⁴⁷ On April 10, the reorganization of the Council took place at the Council House in Salt Lake City.⁴⁸

This reorganization takes on special significance in the light of the political circumstances of Utah in 1880 and the following years. In 1879, the U. S. Supreme Court had sustained the conviction of George Reynolds for polygamy. This conviction portended an intensified anti-Mormon onslaught. The available evidence suggests that the Council of Fifty may have become a central committee to direct the defense of the Kingdom. A somewhat cryptic letter by L. John Nuttall, a recent member of the Council, to Bishop William D. Johnson of Kanab, seems to indicate that the Council of Fifty either expanded its organization, or else created subsidiaries to meet with the new emergency.⁴⁹ But with the passing of the Edmunds law in 1882, and the Edmunds-Tucker law in 1887, even a Council of Fifty proved powerless to protect polygamy and the political Kingdom of God from destruction. In 1890, the leaders of the

⁴⁶pp. 15-16.

⁴⁷L. John Nuttall, Letter Book 1879-1881, pp. 168, 178.

⁴⁸"Minutes of the Council of Fifty," April 10, 1880.

⁴⁹Nuttall, Letter Book 1879-1881, p. 356.

Church decided to submit to the demands of the government.

With the proclamation of the *Manifesto* not only polygamy ceased to be an issue in Utah politics, but the political Kingdom of God, likewise, gradually lost its controversial nature. A new era in Utah politics obviously had no room for the activities of a Council of Fifty. Thus, with the main causes for persecution removed, Mormonism, in the eyes of the world, became gradually acceptable, finally respectable. A new era had dawned. During this second period of Mormon history the Saints looked upon the restoration of the gospel primarily as a preparation for the Kingdom of Heaven. A carefully worked out plan of salvation, as revealed by Joseph Smith, still required many spiritual and temporal duties of the faithful; but dreams of a political Kingdom of God had faded away into a dim and almost forgotten past.