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# The Chicago Experiment

## Finding the Voice and Charting the Course of Religious Education in the Church

*Casey Paul Griffiths*

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In many professions, Latter-day Saints often struggle to find harmony between their religion and their career. The nature of Mormonism often leads its members into moral dilemmas concerning the standard practices of their chosen field and the teachings of the gospel. This has been especially true in academia, in most of its diverse disciplines. These challenges were particularly fierce when the Church began developing its own corps of professional religious educators to teach and lead in the newly founded seminary and institute programs of the early twentieth century. Elder Boyd K. Packer summarized some of the struggles from this era:

There was encouragement, both for the men in the institute program and for the teachers of religion at Brigham Young University, to go away and get advanced degrees. “Go study under the great religious scholars of the world,” was the encouragement, “for we will set an academic standard in theology.” And a number of them went. Some who went never returned. And some of them who returned never came back. They had followed, they supposed, the scriptural injunction: “Seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). But somehow the mix had been wrong. For they had sought learning out of the best books, even by study, but with too little faith. They found themselves in conflict with the simple things of the gospel. One by one they found their way outside of the field of teaching religion, outside of Church activity, and a few of them outside of the Church itself.<sup>1</sup>

This is the story of one group of those teachers. In the early 1930s, religious educators in the Church developed a close relationship with the School of Divinity at the University of Chicago. Though eleven young Latter-day Saint scholars attended the school at the Church’s request during that period, this study will focus only on those who left behind extensive

recollections and correspondence. It will seek to tell their stories in their own words, whenever possible. The aim of this paper is not to judge which of the eleven Elder Packer may have been speaking of, but simply to tell their story. In examining what occurred, the dynamic between faith and scholarship in the field of religion may be further explored. Several more questions will also be raised, such as, What is the proper mixture between faith and study in revealed religion? What does the outside scholarship of the world have to offer the religious studies of the Church? and, most importantly, What is the role of the religious educator in the Church? Many of these questions came to a head in the crucible of what could properly be termed “The Chicago Experiment.”<sup>2</sup>

Viewed from the wider scope of American religious history, this episode also fits into the larger picture of the battles between theological liberals, commonly called “modernists” during this era, and their conservative enemies, termed “fundamentalists.” By sending Church educators to the University of Chicago’s School of Divinity, one of the focal points of the conflict, the Church had inserted itself directly into the modernist-fundamentalist controversy.<sup>3</sup> In the battle between the two camps, one that hoisted the banner of science and another that decried the abandonment of traditional biblical views, where would the Latter-day Saints land?

Before these questions may be explored, it is necessary to understand the origins of the unique corps of religious educators created in the early twentieth century by the Church.

### **A New Kind of Educator in the Church**

In the early twentieth century, a radical shift took place in Church education. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the Common School Movement began to bring state-sponsored schools into every community throughout the Intermountain West. Church leaders, concerned over the secularizing influence that public education might have on the youth of the Church, launched a system of academies to counter the state schools. Church academies lasted roughly thirty years, from 1890 to 1920. However, the geographical limitations of the academies, combined with the exorbitant cost of providing private education while free public schools were opening throughout the region, led to the eventual decline of the system. So a new innovation was introduced: released-time seminary. Under this system, students would attend public schools, being “released” for one period a day to attend religion classes at a nearby seminary building. Beginning at Granite High School in 1912, the seminary program spread rapidly throughout the Church until it had virtually replaced the academy system

by the mid-1920s. As a less expensive alternative to academies, the seminary program allowed the Church to deliver religious education to nearly all of its students throughout the Intermountain West.<sup>4</sup>

The seminary program created a new model for Church education and brought with it a different series of issues that needed to be addressed. Among the most pressing was the recruitment and training of teachers in the new system. In a Church of lay clergymen, was there room for a group of professional theologians? In the early days of the Church, there were no professional religious educators. Rather, leaders in the Church hierarchy acted in this role, interpreting scripture and doctrine with the weight that came from ecclesiastical authority. When the academies began, religion classes were taught on a part-time basis by teachers who specialized in other disciplines.<sup>5</sup> Even at Brigham Young University, the hub of the Church school system, the only faculty member teaching theology full time was President-Emeritus George H. Brimhall.<sup>6</sup> As Church education shifted and the need for full-time religion teachers arose, so did the compelling question: Would this new group of religion scholars be defenders of the faith or ambitious Pharisees?

Adam S. Bennion, appointed Church superintendent of education in 1919, took seriously the question of how this new breed of educators in the Church should be trained. In the summer of 1920, Bennion organized a summer school for seminary teachers in the hopes of producing more standardized training and curriculum for the seminaries.<sup>7</sup> The next year, Bennion added theological training to the summer-school agenda, inviting several General Authorities to lecture, among them Melvin J. Ballard, Joseph Fielding Smith, George F. Richards, Anthony W. Ivins, and David A. Smith. These training sessions were eventually moved to Aspen Grove in Provo Canyon, where the teachers would spend six weeks camping, critiquing one another's teaching, and being instructed. With the entire teaching force consisting of about ninety men, the system had a close-knit, family feel.<sup>8</sup> Obert C. Tanner, another teacher from the time recalled, "It was a glorious, inspiring summer. We were exploring, adventuring, trying to write the gospel in our own lives in our own way."<sup>9</sup>

At the same time that Bennion was seeking to elevate the scholarship of the teachers in the seminary system, the teachers also searched individually for ways to improve. Sidney B. Sperry, on his own initiative, left in 1925 to attend the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. He received his master's degree in 1926, specializing in Old Testament studies.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Heber C. Snell, a teacher at Church-owned Snow College, attended the Pacific School of Religion, majoring in biblical studies. In 1928, Snell was invited to lecture at the Aspen Grove summer school, teaching two



Alpine Summer School faculty in the 1920s, including John A. Widtsoe (*front row, far left*) and Adam S. Bennion (*front row, third from the right*). Courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

courses, “Historical Development of the Religion and Literature of the Hebrews” and “Beginnings of Christianity.”<sup>11</sup> The next year, Sperry was invited to teach two classes in Old Testament history and literature.<sup>12</sup>

Snell’s and Sperry’s introductions of outside scholarship deeply impressed the teachers present. Russel B. Swensen wrote of Snell’s class, “I was particularly impressed by his historical approach to the subject and his deep appreciation of the religious message of the Old Testament.”<sup>13</sup> T. Edgar Lyon, a teacher present at Sperry’s lectures, “felt an exhilaration that he had not previously experienced in any religious education.”<sup>14</sup> Lyon felt he was entering a thrilling new realm of biblical scholarship involving the use of original sources and languages. Swensen noted that Sperry’s “friendly personality and his ability as a teacher were most stimulating to me, as well as to most of the other young teachers who were planning to devote their lives to Church education.”<sup>15</sup>

Another person who was deeply impressed, particularly by Sperry, was Joseph F. Merrill, the new Church commissioner of education. As head of the School of Mines at the University of Utah for nearly three

decades, Merrill had a solid background as a scholar and educator. He also brought with him a willingness to embrace higher education. As a young scholar, Merrill had been among the first to leave Utah to obtain higher training in engineering, eventually studying at the University of Michigan, Cornell, and the University of Chicago. In 1899, he received his doctorate from Johns Hopkins University, becoming one of the first native Utahns to obtain a PhD.<sup>16</sup> Influenced by Sperry, Merrill invited Edgar J. Goodspeed, a distinguished New Testament scholar from the University of Chicago, to come and lecture the following year.

If Sperry's teaching had interested many teachers about the University of Chicago, Goodspeed's teaching that summer completely persuaded them. In 1923, he published his own translation of the New Testament, which quickly became a bestseller and elevated him to the front ranks of biblical scholarship. T. Edgar Lyon later described Goodspeed's teaching style: "He was a marvelous lecturer. I was amazed at the way he had these [things] timed. He would never allow any interruption in the classes. . . . He would start lecturing and he'd finish his lectures on the last sentence and the bell would ring. I haven't seen anything so well timed in my life. Then on Fridays we'd just have a free-for-all discussion on what we wanted."<sup>17</sup> Lyon also recalled that after two or three weeks, several General Authorities attended Goodspeed's class. They were so impressed with the lecture that Goodspeed was invited to deliver a Sunday afternoon sermon to a packed crowd in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. To Lyon, Goodspeed's lectures were "the most exciting class I've ever had up to that time." He remarked, "I learned more in Goodspeed's one hour lectures . . . for six weeks than I would have learned in a Sunday School class in a hundred years because the individual had his subject matter and knew how to present it. And he didn't have any people sleeping in his class. He was a scintillating lecturer."<sup>18</sup> Swensen was similarly impressed, remarking in a 1978 interview, "Those summer classes at Aspen Grove really changed my thinking. . . . It really set me on fire to really get more knowledge. I became aware of how little I knew about the scriptures and about history and it was the beginning of a turning point in my life."<sup>19</sup>



Heber C. Snell upon graduation from the University of Chicago, 1939. Courtesy Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.

### The Call to Chicago, 1930

Joseph F. Merrill, deeply impressed by Goodspeed's scholarship, decided to further intertwine the Chicago Divinity School and Church education by calling several promising teachers to travel to Chicago and obtain advanced degrees in religion. Besides the impressive performances of Sperry, Snell, and Goodspeed, there were several compelling reasons for making this move.

The late 1920s and early 1930s were among the most critical in defining the future of Church education. The stock market crash in 1929 only added momentum to the movement away from Church schools, in favor of the less expensive system of seminaries and institutes. When Merrill became commissioner of education in 1928, the first directive given to him was to "eliminate Church schools as fast as circumstances would permit."<sup>20</sup> In a meeting of the Church General Board of Education held in February 1929, the decision was made to eventually close *all* of the Church schools.<sup>21</sup> This choice was made in part because of the successful launch of the institute program ("collegiate seminaries," as they were originally called) at Idaho State University that same year. With a way now provided to bring religious education to college students, Church leaders felt they could no longer justify the massive expenses involved in operating Church schools. At the same time, Merrill knew he would need men with suitable academic credentials to staff the institutes, especially since the early arrangements with most universities allowed college credit for biblical studies.<sup>22</sup>

Only a few months after the decision was made to either close the Church schools or transfer them to state control, events arose that threatened the existence of the seminary system. The Utah state high school inspector, Isaac L. Williamson, issued a scathing report of the seminary program statewide.<sup>23</sup> The report led to an investigative committee of the Utah State Board, which recommended that Church seminaries and public high schools be completely disassociated, released time eliminated, and credit for biblical studies withdrawn. A major point in Williamson's criticism was the teaching of LDS doctrine in biblical classes offered for credit. Williamson charged that such teachings as "the Garden of Eden was located in Missouri; . . . Noah's ark was built and launched in America; . . . Joseph Smith's version of the Bible is superior to the King James version; and . . . Enoch's city, Zion, with all its inhabitants and buildings, was lifted up and translated bodily from the American continent to the realms of the unknown" were being taught in biblical classes for which the state offered credit.<sup>24</sup> In large measure, the crisis that threatened to engulf the seminaries came about because the teachers staffing them were not adequately

trained. Many seminary teachers at the time didn't even have a high school teacher's certificate. Merrill had already seen this as a potential problem. One of his first actions as commissioner was to send a general letter to all seminary teachers, suggesting that they obtain a teaching certificate as soon as possible.<sup>25</sup>

Merrill's response to these events was twofold. First, he wanted to save BYU from elimination and make it into a training school where seminary teachers could receive proper training that would keep them from getting the system into the kind of hot water it was currently in. Writing in favor of the continued operation of BYU, he argued, "A university is an essential unit in our seminary systems. For our seminary teachers must be specially trained for their work. The Brigham Young University is our training school."<sup>26</sup> The training of seminary teachers meant that BYU would need a fully accredited religion department to train in religious studies. Even before Williamson's report, Merrill wrote to President Franklin S. Harris, "May I suggest that serious consideration be given to the problem of making a strong department of religion, or of religious education, whichever you care to call it. . . . It appears to me that there should be good strong courses in Biblical history, providing a strong background for Biblical study."<sup>27</sup> A month after the Williamson report was issued, Guy C. Wilson, the former president of LDS College in Salt Lake City and a close associate of Merrill's, was sent to BYU to start a full religion department.<sup>28</sup>

Merrill wanted the teachers in the institutes to have the very best training available. As a highly trained scholar himself, it seemed natural that a religion teacher should attend divinity school. In a letter to two LDS professors at the University of Idaho, Merrill explained some of his reasoning: "We have felt it very necessary, that at Moscow especially, our Director should have a scholarship in the Biblical and religious field comparable to the scholarship that the University would demand of any one appointed to head one of the departments. For example, if the University is looking for some one to head the department of Physics, it will limit its search to a trained physicist."<sup>29</sup> A group of graduate-trained educators seemed to be the best way to accomplish Merrill's goal of raising the bar on scholarship and professionalism in religious education—and the University of Chicago appeared to be the finest place to launch the venture.

With all these factors in play, Merrill extended a call to three seminary teachers—Daryl Chase, Russel Swensen, and George Tanner—to attend the University of Chicago's School of Divinity. Letters were sent in the spring of 1930 with Merrill explaining that "we have certain positions in the higher division of our [education] work for which we must prepare suitable men as soon as possible."<sup>30</sup> Arrangements were made so that while they



were in Chicago the men would receive half salary and loans from the Church Education Department to pay for their education.

Why the University of Chicago? Besides Sperry's already existing relationship with the school, there were several compelling reasons to send seminary men there—and several reasons for concern. Chicago was among the most liberal divinity schools in the country. At the time, the divinity school was only thirty-eight years old, founded in 1892 by William Rainey Harper, who emphasized research and academic freedom. The views of the scholars there fell heavily on the modernist end of the spectrum, stressing historical methodology and critical linguistic, sociological, and psychological approaches to the scriptures.<sup>31</sup> Many of the conclusions reached by the Chicago



Daryl Chase upon graduation from the University Chicago, 1931. Courtesy Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.

scholars ran contrary to orthodox views of the scriptures among Latter-day Saints. Edgar J. Goodspeed, probably the best-known scholar from the school during this time, was a good example of this unorthodoxy. In his writings on the New Testament, he questioned Paul's authorship of nearly half of the epistles, among them Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews. Goodspeed also ascribed authorship of 1 and 2 Peter to "a Roman Christian, in the name of the apostle."<sup>32</sup> Goodspeed favored nontraditional explanations for authorship of many books of the Old Testament as well. In his view, only about half of the book of Isaiah came from the prophet's pen, while the rest was "a combination of several collections," making it "a veritable anthology, or rather a treasury, of the most brilliant and varied Hebrew prophecy."<sup>33</sup>

Doubtless there were professors on both sides of the spectrum from Goodspeed, but on the whole, the young school prided itself as being a "'hotbed' of radical theology."<sup>34</sup> One of the school's scholars noted that "theologically, the Chicago school broke with the older patterns of authoritative Protestantism, its creeds, confessions, and biblical inspiration. They attempted to retain as much as possible whatever was vital and valid in the older Protestant theology, though they believed that the deposit was relatively small."<sup>35</sup> The school was very evangelistic in promoting its views, publishing widely and sending its scholars on a variety of speaking engagements everywhere possible. At the same time, the school emphasized nonconfrontational approaches toward those who held more conservative

views on scripture. Russel Swensen recalled, “In all the time I was there I never heard one criticism by the professors against the fundamentalist or conservative point of view.”<sup>36</sup>

The choice of the Chicago school also thrust Latter-day Saints headlong into the larger modernist-fundamentalist battles taking place in most American denominations. The use of higher biblical criticism—the use of scientific methods in the study of the Bible—was making waves in almost all American religious realms, and the Chicago school was an epicenter of the controversy. The fundamental issues were not doctrinal so much as global—encompassing the whole scope of how religion should be approached. Modernists favored a fusion of scientific and religious thought, while fundamentalists saw this approach as a Faustian bargain that could ultimately rob religion of its mystique and beauty. The Chicago Divinity School was a stronghold of the modernist camp. Its dean, Shailer Mathews, was the author of the book that best encapsulated the modernist mantra, the *Faith of Modernism*, first published in 1924.<sup>37</sup> Even the most famous clash of the fundamentalists and the modernists, the 1925 Scopes “Monkey Trial,” was heavily influenced by the Chicago scholars. When Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan argued in a Tennessee courtroom over evolution and the inerrancy of the Bible, Darrow, a Chicago attorney, was using ammunition supplied by Chicago scholars.<sup>38</sup> Among the scholars, Goodspeed was somewhat of a moderate, but extreme views of the modernist persuasion abounded on the campus.

Sperry, in selecting the school, and Merrill, in following his lead, were probably well aware of the school’s liberal leanings. Indeed, one of the ironies of the situation may have been that only a very liberal school would accept Latter-day Saints as students in the religious climate of the time.<sup>39</sup> Nor was the “Chicago experiment” the first encounter of Mormonism with higher biblical criticism or with the University of Chicago. William H. Chamberlin, a former mission president and LDS scholar who had studied ancient languages and biblical criticism at Chicago, sparked a controversy at BYU in 1911. The controversy stemmed, in part, from the views Chamberlin and several other professors taught concerning evolution, combined with some questioning of the literal nature of the scriptures. During the controversy, several professors, including Chamberlin’s brother, resigned.<sup>40</sup> Chamberlin stayed at BYU until 1916, but “after years of having his courses dropped from the catalog,” he too resigned.<sup>41</sup>

With a knowledge of all these things, why take the chance on the Chicago school? When George Tanner was asked in a 1972 interview why Merrill took the risk of sending the men to such a liberal climate, he replied, “Sperry had been back there and apparently this hadn’t hurt him at all.”

He said Daryl Chase had concluded that “Joseph F. Merrill had so much faith in the gospel that he thought if we went there we’d be able to find the material so that we could just positively lay out the proof for all of our claims.” Chase believed that “Joseph F. Merrill was naïve enough to believe that that would lead us into proof positive of the various positions we had taken.”<sup>42</sup> While the men may have believed Merrill was being naïve, there is ample evidence to believe he also knew the risk he was taking. Each of the men was informed that if they changed their views, they might not have a position when they returned.<sup>43</sup> Overall, Merrill’s attitude indicated a cautious optimism about the venture. Shortly after the men’s arrival at the school, Merrill wrote to Swensen, “We are glad to find that the religious atmosphere there is full of sympathy and is not wholly critical and scholastic. . . . After all, religion is based upon faith. And religious faith, of course, does not rest wholly on demonstrable facts.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Life at the University**

The university was an environment completely different than anything the men had experienced before. The student body was diverse, running the gamut from middle-aged ministers to former missionaries in the Far East, army chaplains, and, despite the segregationist attitudes of the time, several black students. One of the black students, Benjamin Mays, later became Martin Luther King Jr.’s teacher and delivered the eulogy at King’s funeral.<sup>45</sup> Most of the men roomed together in student housing, enduring the barest of conditions. Tanner recalled taking his wife and three children with him and living on a budget of less than a hundred dollars a month.<sup>46</sup> The close quarters, however, prompted many positive religious exchanges. Swensen wrote home that a young minister in the hall had invited him to speak at his church to correct some hurtful comments about Mormonism made during a sermon there.<sup>47</sup> When an evangelical minister cornered Swensen in a student lounge and began attacking the Church, Swensen was surprised when several young Baptist and Presbyterian ministers rose up in defending Mormonism.<sup>48</sup> The men also invited some of the prominent Chicago professors to speak in the local LDS branch.<sup>49</sup> The environment was not entirely welcoming, however. Sperry, who returned to Chicago to complete his PhD during this time, warned the men that “as a ‘Mormon’ in Gates Hall I either made enthusiastic friends or enthusiastic enemies.”<sup>50</sup>

Relationships with the professors were, for the most part, warm and cordial. The men studied under some of the most prominent biblical scholars of the time, including William C. Graham, an Old Testament specialist; John T. McNeill, a medieval church historian; and William C. Bower, whose

focus was religious education.<sup>51</sup> The LDS students partly felt an obligation to act as missionaries to influence the faculty toward more positive views on Mormonism, and in large measure they were successful. William Warren Sweet, a Chicago professor of American history, had written a book highly critical of Mormonism. He later remarked to Tanner that after meeting the young Mormons, he would rewrite the book if given the chance.<sup>52</sup> Graham remarked privately to Chase and Swensen “that he believed Joseph Smith was inspired of God.”<sup>53</sup> In a gathering where it was jokingly noted that Goodspeed had gone to Utah to try to “convert the Mormons,” Goodspeed rose and offered praise for the Mormon religion, its vitality, and its system of lay leadership.<sup>54</sup>

Writing home from Chicago, Swensen in particular was full of praise for his professors. He wrote to assuage the concerns of his father, saying, “Before you condemn the scholars and thinkers it would pay the price to investigate their way of thinking. They have no diabolical scheme to undermine the truth, but the reverse, to discover it.”<sup>55</sup> Swensen gushed over the “stimulus in study when sitting at the feet of brilliant professors” and wrote that “the past year will be a bright spot in my life.” George Tanner, too, found himself quite enamored with the school: “I learned more about Bible and things there in a semester than you learn in a lot of our Church institutions in five times that length of time.”<sup>56</sup> At the same time, the students perceived some tension among the Chicago faculty. In another letter, Swensen noted, “The school has a strong group of sceptical [*sic*], agnostic professors but our dean is a courageous defender as well as an expounder of the faith. He is often the butt of sharp attacks from conservative Christians but there is no abler teacher of religion in the light of modern science.”<sup>57</sup> Swensen came to nearly idolize Goodspeed, writing home of “the most delightful intimacy with this great scholar” and that Goodspeed was “as charming as a man as he is famous for his learning.”<sup>58</sup>

In contrast, when T. Edgar Lyon arrived at the school in 1932, he was less enamored of the environment. He wrote a scathing assessment of the Chicago scholars’ methodology to his father:

Down in their [the professors’] hearts they are all either infidels or agnostics. . . . I fail to see how a young man can come here to school, then go out after graduation, and still preach what we call Christianity. The U. of Chicago is noted as being the most liberal (and that means Modernism) school in America. All religion is taught as product of social growth and development, and anything supernatural is looked upon as merely a betrayal of one’s own ignorance and primitive mind. They make no attempt to harmonize Science and the Bible—they merely throw the Bible away, and teach scientific “truths” as the only thing to follow. I have taken a course called “Systematic Theology” this summer.

It consisted of a brief discussion of the God of the Old Testament, who was merely a sign of the fear of the Hebrews, how He grew into the Gods of the New Testament, and then Dean Matthews [*sic*] informed us that he only existed in the minds of the believers.<sup>59</sup>

Lyon felt that though the professors feigned enlightenment, they could be just as dogmatic in their views as the most ardent fundamentalist. He continued:

Their God, here at this University, is “the cosmic force of the Universe,” “the personality producing force of the cosmos,” the “in all and all” and a few more phrases just as unintelligible and meaningless. I readily see why the modern preachers talk about psychology, sociology, astronomy, prison reform, etc., in their churches on Sunday—that is all there is left to talk about after they have finished robbing Jesus of His Divinity, and miracles, and resurrection. In fact, around the Divinity School, the professors are always talking of “the Social Gospel.” I am glad that I do not have to accept such rot, and that I do not have to study [it]. . . . The more I see and hear of it, the more it makes me appreciate the simple truths and teachings of . . . “Mormonism,” even though we are called primitive. I am able to see so many places in the lectures each day that seem to me to be so obviously clear and simple for us to accept, yet these “learned men” pass right over them and can not see anything but their own view. I think they are just as narrow minded in their interpretations as they claim we are in ours.<sup>60</sup>

Was Lyon exaggerating in his descriptions of the teachings given at the Divinity School? Contemporary writings from the Chicago school indicate that Lyon was fairly accurate in describing what must have been taught at the school. Shailer Mathews, the school’s dean, was most famous for his writings on the evolution of the concept of God in human thought. In contrast to the anthropomorphic God of Mormon theology, Mathews taught that “the word God in its religious usage does not stand for Being or a principle of concretion. It is a concept evoked by an attempted relationship with a cosmic activity which is other than the human subject.”<sup>61</sup> Lyon comes close in the letter to an almost verbatim quoting of Mathews, who defined God as the “personality-evolving and personally responsive activities of the universe upon which human beings depend.”<sup>62</sup>

While Lyon felt that his emphasis in religious history, rather than theology, spared him the brunt of the modernist teachings, he was also deeply concerned about the attitude of his fellow LDS students who he felt might be abandoning their beliefs to fit into the new environment. In the same letter to his father, he wrote:

We have several of them [LDS students] here on campus who think that they are outgrowing our little narrow-mindedness about our doctrines, and try to go with the world by attempting to take all of the

supernatural elements out of our religion. . . . I suppose that I am too old fashioned to accept their way of thinking, but I fail to see how we can ever discard these views that have been the building force of the Church. Brother Sperry, who receives his Doctor of Philosophy degree here next Friday, and I are the two “Orthodox Mormons” around here, and many of the others laugh at us, for our simple trusting faith. . . .

I am really worried what the outcome of the next thirty years will mean to the church. Even many of the BYU professors are going over to this view, and teaching things that are far more radical than those taught by Peterson and Chamberlain [*sic*] at the time they were dismissed from that institution.<sup>63</sup>

Along with Lyon’s concerns, there is additional evidence that some of the Chicago students were beginning to stray from their theological foundations. Later, George Tanner recalled “a regular transformation, a liberation in clear thinking.”<sup>64</sup> There are also some indications that tension began to grow between the more orthodox LDS students and their free-wheeling counterparts. After Tanner completed his master’s degree and returned to the Moscow Idaho Institute of Religion, Swensen noted some tension between T. Edgar Lyon and the original LDS students. “It seems quite a while since we were indulging in some hilarious theological observations. We haven’t had any with Lyon. . . . Last night Daryl [Chase] and I were down to his place for dinner. His wife asked us to explain some of the ‘new theology.’ . . . Like good priests we changed the subject.”<sup>65</sup> Other new students were drawn to the school’s teachings as they arrived. When Carl Furr, another LDS student, arrived, Swensen noted, “Furr is taking the ‘cure’ quite easily and nicely. His background in literature leaves him more open minded to [a] historical scientific way of viewing things.”<sup>66</sup>

During a trip Swensen and Chase took back to Utah, it began to become clear that there was some evidence of skepticism among Church leaders as well toward the venture. While in Utah after their first year, Swensen and Chase had the opportunity to visit with B. H. Roberts in his office at Church headquarters. When Swensen informed Roberts that his professors were urging him to write a thesis on a Mormon topic, Roberts wryly replied with a puckish smile and mock hyperbole, “Young man, don’t ever write a thesis on a Mormon subject; if you do, you’ll be cut off from the Church. Half the people in the Church would apostatize if they knew the true history of the Church.”<sup>67</sup> After hearing this from Roberts, Chase chose instead to write his master’s thesis on “The Early Shakers,” while Swensen chose “The Rise of the Sects as an Aspect of Religious Experience.”<sup>68</sup> For Tanner, however, Roberts’s prediction proved prophetic. Writing his thesis, “The Religious Environment in which Mormonism Arose,” he ran afoul of some controversy. He reflected, “I was a little amazed when I got in to find

some things. For instance, I'd always been taught that the Word of Wisdom, the section of the Doctrine and Covenants on the Word of Wisdom, was just like lightning out of a clear sky. I got there and started digging in and found the genesis of that thing and the roots."<sup>69</sup> When Tanner arrived home after securing his master's degree, Merrill asked him to publish some of his findings in the Church section of the *Deseret News*. In 1972, Tanner recalled, "I got nasty letters from all over but I had the evidence."<sup>70</sup>

### **The End of the Chicago Experiment**

Latter-day Saint teachers continued to attend the Chicago Divinity School in increasing numbers during the early part of the 1930s. In total, eleven men earned advanced degrees at Chicago during this period.<sup>71</sup> As the 1930s continued, however, fewer and fewer students attended the school, and the relationship between the Chicago scholars and the Church withered. There were several reasons why this may have occurred. Swensen felt that when Joseph F. Merrill was called as an Apostle in 1931 and then sent to preside over the European Mission in 1933, the program lost its main proponent. At the same time, Church leaders began to be skeptical of the liberal spirit of the Chicago school and worried that its approach to the scriptures could undermine the faith of the students. The Church Education Department had brought more Chicago scholars to BYU to teach at the summer school the three years following Goodspeed's impressive debut in 1930, but after 1934 there were no additional efforts made to bring Chicago scholars to teach and train Church educators. Lack of funding as the Depression wore on was certainly also a factor in the decision to end this tie. In addition, when Sidney Sperry and Russel Swensen arrived home and began teaching in the BYU Religion Department, the increasing pool of LDS scholars with advanced training may have no longer necessitated the hiring of outside scholars.<sup>72</sup>

There are also indications that Merrill's replacement as Church commissioner of education, John A. Widstoe, was uncomfortable with the close association with the Chicago school. While Widstoe did arrange to send at least one scholar to Chicago, namely, T. Edgar Lyon,<sup>73</sup> Lyon described Widstoe's attitude toward the school as "non-committal." When Lyon was called as president of the Netherlands mission soon after his return from Chicago, Widstoe urged him to forget everything he had learned at divinity school before he went into the mission field.<sup>74</sup> Despite these changes, some students still chose to go to the divinity school on their own accord. Heber C. Snell, who, along with Sperry, had first sparked the interest in divinity studies, came to Chicago and earned his PhD in biblical studies,



Russel B. Swensen (*left*) and Sidney B. Sperry (*right*) as religion faculty members at Brigham Young University, 1943. Courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

writing a thesis on “The Historical Background of the Teachings of Jesus.”<sup>75</sup> Vernon F. Larsen was the last Church teacher in this era to attend the school, graduating in 1941.<sup>76</sup>

### **Chicago Influence in the Church Educational System**

How did the Chicago students react when they returned as full-time Church educators? The most comfortable, it appears, were Sperry and Swensen, who landed in the Religion Department at BYU. The least happy with his assignment upon his return appears to be Daryl Chase, who was assigned to teach at a high school. He wrote to Swensen, “It is next to impossible to keep from slipping backwards intellectually in such an environment. . . . It is not that I am over-worked, but the monotony is killing.— Six classes of the O.T. daily to little children who have to be told the meaning of half of the words in their text.”<sup>77</sup> In a similar vein, Chase wrote to T. Edgar Lyon, “I used to think that I knew how to teach Old Testament to high school students but after my work at the University of Chicago,



I discovered what an impossible task it was to teach the Old Testament as it actually is, and at the same time feed the religious life of young boys and girls. For that reason I persuaded my associate teachers to relieve me of all Old Testament duties.”<sup>78</sup>

Other teachers experienced difficulty as well. Carl Furr, assigned to the seminary in Richmond, Utah, wrote to Swensen that local members charged that he “lacked spirituality and did not have a testimony of the gospel, and that I never paid enough to hold my job (tithing).”<sup>79</sup> In a scathing letter, Furr remarked, “I know my goose is cooked. I don’t want to come back unless a new principal comes in and they get a stake president who has some back-bone and is not a jelly-fished chicken raiser.”<sup>80</sup> At least from Furr’s letter, it appears that his teachings were popular among the local populace. He remarked that his mutual class “had to meet in the main auditorium to accommodate the people who come to hear the spiritualess, non-mormon teach.”<sup>81</sup> Furr felt that his prayers were “answered just as much as a willy-nilly stake president or jealous seminary principal.”<sup>82</sup> The letter seems to indicate that Furr felt his training and popularity as a lecturer put him in a superior position to his ecclesiastical and occupational overseers.

Criticism was not limited to local Church authorities either. Chase, in particular, had little patience with the higher leadership of the Church. He wrote to Swensen, “Am I completely nuts, or do the facts show that we are facing intellectual ban[k]ruptcy in the leadership of our people? . . . The mass of the people have stopped playing the old game of follow the leader. In the words of ‘my good teachers and friends, and masters,’ S. J. Case, S. Matthews, et al., authoritarianism has played its chief role in the Mormon Church.” Referring to the recent election that repealed prohibition, Chase continued, “Yea verily authoritarianism has played its chief role unless it can be backed up with a more vigorous intellectualism.”<sup>83</sup>

Public controversies accompanied these private expressions as well. Heber C. Snell, for example, created an uproar at a January 1937 meeting of LDS institute directors. In an address entitled “Criteria for Interpreting the Old Testament to College Youth,” Snell publicly questioned the historicity of the book of Jonah and traditional authorship of the later chapters of the book of Isaiah. Snell, a former student of William Chamberlin’s during the 1911 controversy,<sup>84</sup> admonished, “We ought to be governed in our judgments in internal evidence of the books themselves, and by such external evidence as may exist, rather than by mere tradition.” Snell continued, stating that evolution proved to be “not a blind arrangement for continuing species in the world, but a method used by and worthy of a God whose chief glory is Intelligence.”<sup>85</sup> Elder Joseph Fielding Smith was so alarmed by Snell’s declarations that he wrote to Church Commissioner of Education

Franklin L. West, saying, “If the views of these men become dominant in the Church, then we may just as well close up shop and say to the world that Mormonism is a failure.”<sup>86</sup>

### **Response of the Brethren**

General Authorities soon began to publicly respond to some of the more heretical attitudes appearing among religion teachers in the Church. President J. Reuben Clark’s address “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” can be read as a sharp response to the rising current of intellectualism in Church education. Some passages of this address, given at Aspen Grove in 1938, read almost as if they were being delivered to those who had received advanced degrees:

On more than one occasion our Church members have gone to other places for special training in particular lines; they have had the training which was supposedly the last word, the most modern view, the plus ultra of up-to-dateness; then they have brought it back and dosed it upon us without any thought as to whether we needed it or not. I refrain from mentioning well-known and, I believe, well-recognized instances of this sort of thing. I do not wish to wound any feelings.

But before trying on the newest fangled ideas in any line of thought, education, activity, or what not, experts should just stop and consider that however backward they think we are, and however backward we may actually be in some things, in other things we are far out in the lead, and therefore these new methods may be old, if not worn out, with us.<sup>87</sup>

Clark warned that if unorthodox teaching continued, “we shall face the abandonment of the seminaries and institutes and the return of Church colleges and academies.” He added, “We are not now sure, in the light of developments, that these should ever have been given up.”<sup>88</sup>

President Clark’s address provoked strong reactions among educators present. Sterling McMurrin, a young teacher present, remarked, “We divided ourselves up . . . into liberal and conservative camps. . . . Clark laid it out very firmly, and there was considerable discussion



J. Reuben Clark. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

about it around our campfires.”<sup>89</sup> One teacher, Newell K. Young, offered his resignation that night, but it was refused.<sup>90</sup> Another Church educator reported a discussion among his peers where the talk was called “an expression of medieval theology.”<sup>91</sup> President Clark noted the criticism himself in a letter to mission president William E. Tew, noting, “There has been not a little rather severe fault-finding on the part of certain groups because of the things which I said at Aspen Grove. We expect to follow through on this matter and to try to bring our Church education institutions in line therewith.”<sup>92</sup>

In the weeks following the address, Clark made it clear that the talk was not a reflection of his personal views, but a message directly from the First Presidency. Responding to a complimentary letter on the address, Clark wrote back, “We of the Presidency have felt that something should be said about matters that were discussed in my talk at Aspen Grove, and it was decided that I should be the mouthpiece to say them.”<sup>93</sup> The address won praise from other General Authorities as well. Joseph Fielding Smith wrote to Clark, “I have been hoping and praying for a long time for something of this kind to happen. I have talked to many of these teachers, including the Commissioner of Education himself, and realize thoroughly the need of such counsel and wisdom which I hope will bear fruit.”<sup>94</sup> In some respects, the address opened a floodgate of concerns over the direction that Church education had been taking, with Clark acting as the main outlet for criticism. Some of the criticisms were directed pointedly at the outside scholarship that had inundated the system. One member wrote, “I cannot see how a modernist teacher can keep his job and ignore your instructions.”<sup>95</sup> Samuel O. Bennion, the general manager of the Deseret News Publishing Company, wrote, “It was so timely, so necessary, and seemed to me to be a real revelation. . . . I have often wondered why our Church people do not preach the true Gospel of Jesus Christ as given to the Prophet Joseph Smith and told in the Standard Works of the Church, instead of quoting so many needless authorities.”<sup>96</sup> Clark wrote back, “I said a good many things then that I had been thinking for a long while, and wishing to say. I think that most of the parents of the Church will agree with all that I said.”<sup>97</sup>

In the months following the address, Clark continued to emphasize his concerns over religious education. His office journal records the following conversation with Commissioner West on January 23, 1939:

In the course of his observations he [West] spoke of the fact that as a body the institute and seminary teachers had real testimonies of the truthfulness of the Gospel. I told Brother West that I had never had a serious doubt but that the bulk of those teachers did have a testimony. I said that my own view was that their real difficulty was that they could not bring themselves to teach the doctrines of the Church because of

what their non-Church member colleagues would say about them. I said in my judgment the real difficulty was lack of courage. I emphasized this several times in my conversation.<sup>98</sup>

The end of this conversation pointed toward where Clark's next move would take place. When West made the comment that the teachers at BYU specifically were "almost apologetic about the Gospel," Clark replied that such an observation was "evidence to my thesis, namely, that what they lacked was not testimonies, but courage." Both ended the meeting agreeing that "no person should be employed to teach in the college [BYU] who is not in a position spiritually to teach any subject in religion."<sup>99</sup>

With the BYU Religion Department as ostensibly the intellectual locus of religious education in the Church, the first efforts at change were made there. At the end of the 1938–39 school year, when Guy C. Wilson retired as head of the Religion Department at BYU, J. Wyley Sessions, who did not hold a PhD, was appointed as his replacement, which was perceived as a signal that faithfulness was more important than scholarship in Church education. Though Sessions had spent several summers at Chicago working toward a PhD, he was more likely appointed because of the close relationship he had gained with most of the General Authorities, as he served as president of the mission home in Salt Lake City previous to his assignment at BYU. Sperry wrote on September 2, 1939, to John A. Widtsoe, expressing his dismay that "another man is to come in as the head of the department of Religious Education who has had little or no real rigorous training as a number of us have. He is a fine fellow and we will give him our support despite our personal feelings, but it hurts the morale of a department in a University to have men hoisted over our heads when we have gone through the heat and labor of the day."<sup>100</sup> Chase wrote to Sperry, offering his diagnosis: "The brethren who make the decisions in such matters still distrust the scholarship of the specialists in the field of religion."<sup>101</sup>

A few months later the First Presidency, led in this effort by President Clark, made an even more forceful move to give direction to religious education. A memorandum sent to Commissioner West from President Clark stated, "Institutes and Seminaries will hereafter confine themselves exclusively to the following work: a) Fostering and promoting the work of the auxiliary organizations of the Church . . . b) Teaching the principles of the Gospel, as set out in the doctrines of the Church." Teachers were specifically directed to use the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price as the "ultimate authority on all matters of doctrine, save where the Lord shall have given or shall give further revelation through the prescribed source for such—the President of the Church." The letter contained even more pointed references to the influence of the

Chicago school, stating, “Teachers will do well to give up indoctrinating themselves in the sectarianism of the modern ‘Divinity School Theology.’ If they do not, they will probably bring themselves to a frame of mind where they will be no longer useful in our system.” The letter asked teachers to teach “the Gospel and that only, and the Gospel as revealed in these last days.” They were also warned not to use the term “ideology,” which the First Presidency felt placed “the Gospel in the same category with any and every pagan religion or theology.” The letter continued, “This concept, reduced to its lowest terms, may be expressed as conceiving that religion is man-made, that man makes his God, not God his man—a concept which is coming to be basic to the whole ‘Divinity School Theology,’ but which is contrary to all the teachings of the Church and to God’s revealed word.”<sup>102</sup>

Such a direct challenge to the divinity school philosophies indicates that serious concerns were arising in relation to the Chicago men. Even their old ally, Joseph F. Merrill, felt corrections needed to be made. “I am in full harmony with the efforts that are now being made,” he wrote to Christen Jensen. Merrill was wary of “teachers who have seemed to be unwilling to accept wholeheartedly the essential teachings of Mormonism. . . . Of course, if the faith is genuine, all of us feel more or less lenient for conduct of the past, if there shall be a wholehearted desire to make amends for failures as indicated by conduct from now on. Enough said.”<sup>103</sup>

During this time, Clark held multiple conversations with John A. Widtsoe and Merrill, the two Apostles most involved in religious education, to express his concerns. Following a prayer meeting in the Salt Lake Temple held on March 21, 1940, he took Widtsoe and Merrill aside to speak privately. Clark’s notes from the meetings record, “Told them all the Presidency want is the gospel.”<sup>104</sup> This led to two meetings in Clark’s office a few days later. Clark’s notes from one of the meeting with the two Apostles records the terse entry, “Schools—seminaries and institutes—must be brought into line.”<sup>105</sup> Clark’s concern over religious education may have been exacerbated by the fact that his son, J. Reuben Clark III, had recently been hired as a seminary teacher.<sup>106</sup> He expressed his concerns in a letter to a seminary principal in 1941, writing, “I express to you the hope that all the seminaries of the Church will abandon their generalities based on sectarian concepts, frequently, in fact, almost always contrary to the principles and doctrines of the Church, and get back to the great fundamentals of the restored Gospel and Priesthood.”<sup>107</sup>

## Impact on the System

How serious was the concern over the Chicago men in the system? It may be impossible to gauge. The existing documents indicate that the First Presidency was not overreacting to charges of heresy within the system. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure a person's belief, there are indications that the Chicago men could be located on the spectrum from full orthodoxy to near heterodoxy, with most landing somewhere in between. On the orthodox end of the spectrum was Sidney Sperry, who used his scholarly training to write scores of books defending the traditional beliefs of the Church. While many at the Chicago school questioned the authorship of Isaiah, Sperry wrote his master's thesis on "The text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon." Sperry left his divinity school training with a keen desire to use its methodologies to focus on not only the Bible, but also on the other standard works. When the first men after him arrived in Chicago, Sperry wrote enthusiastically to Swensen that "the two of us are going to have a lot of pleasure doing Book of Mormon and Pearl of Great Price problems." In the same letter, he indicated that he had already found linguistic evidence tying the Book of Abraham to the Book of Genesis.<sup>108</sup> Sperry wrote several important books on Latter-day scripture that raised the profile of the Book of Mormon in the Church.<sup>109</sup>

Along with Sperry, T. Edgar Lyon remained a staunch advocate of the Restoration throughout his career. Even while in Chicago, Lyon showed a strong devotion to the unique scriptures of Mormonism. While discussing his thesis with several of the professors, William W. Sweet insisted that Lyon refer to the Doctrine and Covenants as "purported" revelations. Lyon refused, insisting that they were revelations. After further discussion, Shirley Jackson Case, another professor, intervened, much to Sweet's consternation. Lyon was allowed to retain his statements since Joseph Smith referred to the writings as revelations and his followers believed them to be such.<sup>110</sup> Lyon enjoyed a long career teaching at the Salt Lake Institute and authoring several key Church texts, focusing on Church history and the Doctrine and Covenants.

Russel Swensen had a long and distinguished career at BYU teaching in both the religion and history departments. He stayed close to his Chicago roots, but seems to have also followed the Chicago school's admonition on nonconfrontation. Reflecting later on his career, he offered his own assessment of his teaching: "I was aware of our Church traditions. I made it a purpose in teaching to be honest in what I taught, to believe everything that I said. Things that I knew might be too disturbing to an unprepared mind, I would not even try to bring up. I'd teach them the principles of

research, of historical method.”<sup>111</sup> In his writings on scripture, particularly the New Testament, Swensen quoted from Goodspeed extensively, even giving support to some of Goodspeed’s more controversial explanations of authorship. But where Goodspeed’s writings often made absolute statements about his theories, Swensen was always careful to include a lengthy discussion of all the sides involved, then offer his opinion.<sup>112</sup> Swensen left the Religion Department at BYU to join the History Department in 1947, where he served as chairman from 1949 to 1954. He eventually wrote three manuals for the Sunday School on the New Testament and over thirty Church magazine articles.<sup>113</sup>

Daryl Chase’s writings seem to indicate that he relished his role as a gadfly in Church education. He had a sometimes outrageous sense of humor toward his assignments and the contradictions that his views sometimes represented. As indicated earlier, he was full of criticism toward the General Authorities but seemed to genuinely love and relish the doctrines and history of the Church. In a letter to Sterling McMurrin, he wrote, “It is my sincere belief that the only way LDS educators can possibly go forward is to steer by Joseph Smith. He is still greater and stronger than any living man in Mormondom. Then why not tie to him and have him battle for us and tell the historians and Philistines to go to h--- with their criticisms?” Perhaps recognizing the paradoxes in his own thoughts, he wrote, “I am on the verge of going nuts—before committing academic suicide.”<sup>114</sup> Chase flirted with orthodoxy but valued his independence. After being placed on a committee to review Church publications, he joked that his friends were calling him “Chase, the heresy-hunter.”<sup>115</sup> In another letter, Chase wrote that though he felt as if a “big sharp sword” was always hanging over his head, he was committed to his profession. “I’m in for the duration so far as I can look into the future, partly because of my educational background and partly just for the d---d ‘fun’ of it. I do not remain in with my eyes shut; I know that ‘the duration’ for me may not extend beyond tomorrow.”<sup>116</sup> Ironically, shortly after Chase penned those words he left Church education to serve as the Dean of Students at Utah State University (USU). Though Chase later stated he was not seeking to leave the system, he served with distinction in Church education.<sup>117</sup> Later, he served as the president of USU from 1954 to 1968.

George Tanner served as the director of the Moscow Idaho Institute for nearly three decades. According to Tanner in a 1989 interview, his “liberal views” caused some alarm among Church leaders, but he was left alone because of his work with the students.<sup>118</sup> Tanner wore the badge of “Mormon liberal” with honor. In 1972, he defined a liberal as “a person who is not afraid of change” and decried his ideological opposites, saying,

“Conservative people don’t give up on old ideas easily. *Religious* conservatives hardest of all!”<sup>119</sup> Tanner felt that fundamentalist Latter-day Saints had “practically apotheosized the Bible and the other scriptures” and felt that “we should take the Bible for what it is.”<sup>120</sup> He felt Christian service was more important than a claim to absolute truth. He once remarked, “Instead of my saying, ‘I know this is the true Church,’ I’ll say, ‘for my money this is the best Church.’ For many folks the divinity of the Mormon Church is the important thing. To me how well it is doing its job is the important thing.”<sup>121</sup> Tanner did not hesitate to share his views with his students. Leonard Arrington, the famous Mormon historian, was also influenced by Tanner. He wrote, “I most appreciated his introducing me to the latest biblical and historical scholarship. . . . I was happy to be introduced to the Moffat, Goodspeed, and J. Powis Smith translations—versions that I enjoyed reading, not just for proof-text on doctrine, but for exciting narrative and discourse.”<sup>122</sup> Arrington’s Smith-Goodspeed Bible went with him through his collegiate experiences and his service in World War II, remaining on his desk for many years—battered, annotated, and underlined.<sup>123</sup>

As mentioned earlier, among the Chicago men, the one with the most controversial career was Heber C. Snell. After returning from his divinity training, Snell taught at the Pocatello Institute, then later at the Logan Institute. His correspondence indicates he held little patience with or regard for those he characterized as fundamentalists. His letters to Sterling S. McMurrin, also a close correspondent of Chase, provide a window into the thought of some of the more liberal teachers of the period. He wrote to McMurrin, somewhat jokingly, “What would you think of forming a combination—and getting the power from somewhere—either to make the fundamentalists in the Church repent or put them out? You observe that I have a great zeal for the truth, and knowing how sadly they come short of this precious thing I think something should be done about it—something drastic, like calling down fire on them or having them eaten up by bears.”<sup>124</sup> McMurrin wrote back in reply, “Your ‘combination’ is a good idea. I’m for anything that will encourage freedom of speech in the Church. I told Dr. West that all we ask is to be considered as orthodox as those who believe that the ten tribes are on the north star.”<sup>125</sup> Snell held serious misgivings about the nature of the institute program and the emphasis given by Church leaders in the early 1940s to social activities within the institutes. He wrote to McMurrin, “We naively substitute socials for salvation, we must ‘draw our students’ by catering to their pagan desires all the way instead of teaching them Christian truth. I am beginning to be ‘fed up.’”<sup>126</sup>



Along with disapproving of the social side of institute, Snell appears to have been unhappy with the Bible being granted a place alongside, or as he saw it, subordinate to, other LDS scriptures. In another letter he wrote, "This is our registration week and, as usual, students are flocking here to enrol [*sic*] in Lambda Delta Sigma. Classes are incidental prerequisites; I wonder if in LDS circles knowledge will ever come into its own. I find too that Book of Mormon is in much greater demand than 'Bible.' We do succeed admirably in displacing real volumes—yet we are a 'good people,' I imagine. Some paradox!"<sup>127</sup> Both appeared to have been aware of the problems Restoration scriptures held for certain views that were grounded in higher criticism, and they were frank in their discussions about them.

McMurrin wrote to Snell shortly after McMurrin left Church education to accept a university position, "As I recall, you made a statement something like this in your last letter, 'What are we going to do with the Pearl of Great Price?'" McMurrin's first impression was to do nothing at all, but his second impulse was to throw it away, because "those who take it seriously in the orthodox manner constantly employ it as a rather effective weapon to combat an intelligent approach to the bible."<sup>128</sup> While such ideas may not have been widespread among Church educators, the Snell-McMurrin correspondence does provide a view into why Church leaders took the steps they did to ensure orthodoxy among Church teachers of the period.

### **Snell and Sperry: The *Ancient Israel* Controversy**

Snell was embroiled in controversy again when he published his book *Ancient Israel: Its Story and Meaning* in 1948. Snell worked on the book for several years prior, intending originally to publish it through the Department of Education. He wrote to Franklin L. West, "You will like the book if you will read it carefully and without too much attention to an occasional line or paragraph which may not be in keeping with theology as usually understood." Snell overconfidently assured West, "In no case have I intentionally gone against our interpretations," and "there is very little in the book that need ruffle anyone."<sup>129</sup> Snell stated in the preface that the book was "not written as sectarian theology but as history."<sup>130</sup> However, Snell's position as an institute teacher immediately brought him into conflict with Church members and leaders over the work.<sup>131</sup> The book showed no overt trace of atheism, but it did take several positions that could be controversial in consideration of LDS doctrine. No part of the work quoted from LDS scriptures beyond the Bible, and Snell again took up his controversial position that the latter parts of the book of Isaiah were written by an unknown prophet of the Exile.<sup>132</sup> Snell defended his

work, saying it was intended for a “wider public” outside the Church.<sup>133</sup> At the same time, the words “Institute of Religion, Logan, Utah” appeared immediately following his name on the title page of the book.

While the book received positive reviews from sources outside the Church, it soon drew attacks from Church members. A few months after its publication, Earl Harmer, a Church member from Salt Lake City, published an open letter directed against the book, criticizing the modernist tone of the work. He wrote, “Your position reminds me of a somewhat crude but truthful observation made by a young man in our ward recently. He said, ‘There is a growing group of LDS mugwamps. A mugwamp, you know, is that bird that sits on the line of truth with his face on one side and his wamp on the other and tries to make himself and the world believe that he has succeeded in doing the impossible.’” Harmer concluded the letter by calling modernism “sugar coated atheism.”<sup>134</sup> Snell responded to Harmer with his own letter, stating, “It seems evident to me from your criticisms of my book that you have missed its great themes and the heavy support it gives to fundamental LDS theology.”<sup>135</sup> He also asked McMurrin and another friend, Ezra M. Hawkes, to write letters in his defense. This in turn led to a letter sent to Snell and Hawkes from Joseph Fielding Smith, which asked several direct questions about their beliefs concerning the Fall of Adam, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and his views on Isaiah. An added question to Hawkes’s letter asked pointedly, “Do you believe that the great scholars in the Chicago University or elsewhere, who have studied the Bible, know more about it and its interpretation [than] do the modern prophets of the Lord?”<sup>136</sup>

Snell’s conflicts with Church leaders over his book eventually brought him into open conflict with Sidney B. Sperry. Their exchanges throw light on their positions and how wide the spectrum of thought was among the men who attended the Chicago school. Sperry wrote to Snell:

I am not trying to be antagonistic toward you or your text. You know very well what my point of view is and I shall consistently stick to that point of view. I cannot see how a Church School teacher could write a text purely from the outsider’s point of view and expect the Church to accept it. It is quite obvious that you accept the orthodox scholarly point of view with respect to the first five books of the Old Testament. Your constant references to the . . . “Prophet of the Exile” show that you take the same point of view with respect to the authorship of Isaiah. How you can do this in the light of the “Restoration” is beyond me. It is perfectly apparent to anyone who has read the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price that your point of view is out of step with these books. I quite expected to find that point of view in your text, because you have always kept away from mentioning these texts, especially the Book of Mormon. [Do] you really believe in this book? I doubt it.

I justify my attitude on the grounds that I am converted to the Standard Church Works, and also that I am honest in my point of view. Inasmuch as the Book of Mormon is one of the foundation stones of the Church, I cannot [see] how a man who professes to be a Latter-day Saint can fail to use it as a source, when it has so many valuable points to give us with respect to the Old Testament.<sup>137</sup>

Sperry's response and his refusal to use the book at BYU infuriated Snell. Snell wrote to McMurrin, "Is Sperry just 'an innocent' who has not outgrown his childhood theology or is he an opportunist who just doesn't know how to be smart?"<sup>138</sup> Unfortunately, Snell answered in a bitter letter, accusing Sperry of hypocrisy, and charging him with subverting his scholarship to gain popularity. He wrote, "I am interested to learn, in this connection, just why, in your writings on the Bible, you refer to specifically Mormon writings. Do you use them because you honestly believe they throw light on the Bible or because you think such use will give them a certain status and dignity? Or, do you use them because they are your certificate of orthodoxy?"<sup>139</sup> In a postscript to the letter, Snell appealed to Sperry's training in Chicago while highlighting the wide gap in the philosophies of the two men: "You might contrast your own present attitude toward the book with that of a reviewer of some distinction in the July number of the 'Journal of Religion.' On second thought I am constrained to remark, knowing your bias against University of Chicago scholars, that you would not be in the least influenced by the review."<sup>140</sup>

Snell and Joseph Fielding Smith continued to exchange letters over the book for several years. Snell also went before the Church Board of Publications to defend the work. Roughly a year after the controversy sprang up, Snell received a notice from Franklin L. West that his contract would not be renewed for the next year.<sup>141</sup> Though he was of retirement age, Snell saw the letter as a direct result of the controversy. McMurrin called the action a "sacrifice of one of the Church's few great teachers and scholars upon the altar of ignorance, fear, and authoritative dogma."<sup>142</sup> Snell spent the next few years promoting his book, writing letters to General Authorities in the hopes of winning an endorsement. Joseph F. Merrill and John A. Widtsoe both responded with letters of encouragement, if not outright endorsement. Levi Edgar Young, a member of the presidency of the Seventy, offered an enthusiastic endorsement. Snell even wrote to BYU president Ernest Wilkinson seeking for the book to be used as a text and attempting to counter Joseph Fielding Smith's firm opposition.<sup>143</sup>

Snell and Sperry dueled one more time on the issue in the late 1960s, offering a kind of circular symmetry to the Chicago movement. Fittingly, the two teachers who first sparked interest in divinity school training at

Aspen Grove would, near the end of their lives, pick up the discussion once more. An epitaph to the Chicago influence on LDS education, the two old partisans wrote opposing essays in the spring 1967 volume of *Dialogue*. Snell was frank in his disapproval of the Bible's status in the Church. "From occupying the status of the first of two books of scripture in the Church the Bible became, in the course of about two decades, one of four."<sup>144</sup> Snell even felt the Bible was subordinate to the other books in the minds of some Latter-day Saints. He continued, "My work, as a teacher of the Bible in LDS collegiate institutions over a period of a quarter of a century, has failed to convince me that our people have made much advancement in biblical knowledge."<sup>145</sup> The main thrust of Snell's argument was against "proof-texting," or quoting selected passages without context in order to prove a doctrinal point. To prove his point, Snell quoted the several different passages that he saw as examples of this, including Moroni's message to Joseph Smith and Doctrine and Covenants 77 (which Snell called "a bold venture in biblical interpretation"). Joseph Smith only tolerated these methods, in Snell's self-serving opinion, because "he never came in sight of the better methods of biblical study which we know today."<sup>146</sup>

When Sperry was given a turn to respond, he wrote, "Here is a scholar 'telling off' the Prophet, who really understood the scriptures. . . . Professor Snell is more in sympathy with the views of modern scholarship than he is with those expressed by the Prophet. . . . I cannot agree that Joseph Smith would now concur with the scholarship of modern higher criticism, which, for example, denies the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and which disavows Isaiah's authorship of much of the book that goes under his name."<sup>147</sup> Sperry agreed with Snell that context was necessary in understanding scripture but strongly disagreed where the ultimate authority on interpreting scripture rested. "Here is the rub—the Mormon people, including your reviewer, don't happen to believe that either Snell or his 'interpreters' have proved their point. There is too much supposition and guesswork in their exegesis, not enough real proof. If one has to depend upon authority, we would rather depend upon the authority of a great prophet like Joseph Smith, than upon commentators who, sincere and useful in their way, can make no great claims to heavenly wisdom."<sup>148</sup>

Dialogue produced no clear winner, but the conversation is perhaps the best distillation of these two men's views coming out of the Chicago experiment. In a follow-up article, another scholar diplomatically offered his hope that scholars like Snell and Sperry "will assist us in advancing beyond the superficial to a deeper understanding of the scriptures."<sup>149</sup> This comment stung Snell, who insisted that major changes in the attitudes of Church members and leaders regarding scriptural interpretation

were essential to accomplishing the Church's true mission. The differences between the two men were not superficial, but fundamental.<sup>150</sup> The gulf between the two men also encapsulated well the seeds planted in their experiences at the Chicago divinity school. In many ways, the debate was over the nature of modern biblical interpretation and modern scripture. Sperry used the methods of biblical interpretation to bolster the claims of distinctive LDS scripture; Snell seemed to have lost faith in modern scripture through those methods. Nowhere were the differences between the two men thrown into sharper contrast than in their views concerning the Book of Mormon. When Sperry directly challenged Snell's belief in the Book of Mormon, Snell chose not to respond. During the *Ancient Israel* episode in 1948, when Joseph Fielding Smith asked Snell about his belief in the book directly, Snell replied, "The Book of Mormon contains the word of God just as does the Bible."<sup>151</sup> Later, near the end of his life, Snell was more candid. In an oral history, he remarked, "I have never been able to enjoy Book of Mormon. . . . There are some beautiful passages in it. I have wondered how they could be because I am coming, more and more, as I think about it, to question the veracity of this story of the origin of The Book of Mormon."<sup>152</sup>

Sperry, at the other end of the spectrum, wrote a wide range of books dealing with LDS scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon, including *Our Book of Mormon*, *Book of Mormon Testifies*, *Themes of the Restored Gospel*, and compendiums for both the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>153</sup> Because of his divinity school training, some assumed Sperry would be a skeptic. David Yarn, one of Sperry's students, recalled, "I remember being in Dr. Sperry's office when one who was considered a religious skeptic came in to visit with him; upon learning that Dr. Sperry was writing about the Book of Mormon, the visitor said cynically, 'Oh Sid, you don't believe that stuff about the Book of Mormon, do you?' Dr. Sperry, in a courteous and respectful manner, but in firm and unmistakable terms, bore a resolute testimony concerning the Book of Mormon."<sup>154</sup>

### Epilogue—Finding a Voice

What was the outcome of the Chicago experiment? The full impact of those brief years in the 1930s may be immeasurable, except to say they made Church leaders acutely aware of problems that needed to be avoided in religious education in the Church. The resulting concern over potentially poor outcomes certainly had an impact on the relationship Latter-day Saints had with divinity schools in general. No Latter-day Saint educator attended a divinity school for nearly thirty years after the Chicago experience. When

several did begin attending again, they went of their own volition, without Church sanction.<sup>155</sup> Russel Swensen, writing a reminiscence of the Chicago experience, noted that all except Sperry, Tanner, Lyon, and Snell eventually left religious education for other pursuits. When Swensen collected statements for his article, he contacted all of the remaining men who traveled to Chicago. Most held positive feelings about their experience. These reflections, written nearly forty years after their experience at the divinity school, also highlight the importance of the experiment in the minds of its participants. George S. Tanner wrote that the Chicago experiment “resulted in mutual benefit, that is, benefit to the scholars who came and the students they met. The net gain to the LDS Department was considerable; we learned that non-Mormon scholars were honest, sincere, and interested in our welfare. We got acquainted with a number of their scholarly books and liked them.”<sup>156</sup>

T. Edgar Lyon, the most critical of the Chicago movement at the time, called it “a landmark in an educational outreach which the Church had never known before, and which has profoundly influenced the teaching in the seminaries and institutes since that day.” He wrote, “It was a time of an intellectual and spiritual awakening which was the entering wedge that put the Church educational system in contact with the ongoing mainstream of Christian scriptural and historical research. This outlook has aided in the metamorphosis of the LDS Church from a sectionally oriented to a worldwide Church in less than forty years.”<sup>157</sup> Heber C. Snell was more negative in his assessment of the overall effect of the Chicago venture. “Regrettable as it may be, the effect of the visiting scholars on the Church as an institution appears to have been negative. Their work at the Church University seems not to have been appreciated by our Church leaders.”<sup>158</sup>

Joseph F. Merrill seems to have never harbored any regrets in having launched the venture. Russel Swensen recorded a poignant moment with Merrill, years after the episode: “I saw Brother Merrill just before he died and thanked him for what he’d done for me in opening my eyes. I think the Chicago experience really was one of the greatest things of my life. At that time he said, ‘I still believe I was right. Unfortunately I’m the only one of the authorities who could see that way.’”<sup>159</sup> If Merrill had stumbled in his actions, his mistakes were fully understandable. If a miscalculation was made, it may have been to assume that divinity training was the best background for the Church’s religious scholars. This was a natural misconception, though, given Merrill’s application of the logic that a physicist should head the department of physics and so forth. Today the religion faculty at BYU is an eclectic mixture of scholars with degrees in varying fields. Higher education, though, has proved a key asset to the department’s

success, just as Merrill believed. Though the religion department has had numerous struggles and course corrections over the years, it has long been an integral part of the university.<sup>160</sup> In time it became a remarkable center for the type of studies Merrill had sent the group to Chicago to produce in the first place.

### **Conclusions—the Right Mix**

This study began with three questions. First, What is the proper mixture between faith and study in revealed religion? Next, What does the outside scholarship of the world have to offer the religious studies of the Church? And most importantly, What is the role of the religious educator in the Church? Answering the final question first, we must be reminded of the experimental nature of the Church's ventures into religious education in the early twentieth century. As noted, a whole new kind of religious educator was being created, and determining the operational guidelines was often a painful process. The Chicago men raised important questions surrounding the role of a religion scholar in a Church with a lay clergy. After all, their peers at the divinity school would return to their congregations to become the priesthood in their respective churches. Would their scholarly degrees entitle them to similar positions? For better or worse, the battles fought over the introduction of outside biblical scholarship prompted a response from Church leaders that defined the role of a religious educator. J. Reuben Clark's speech at Aspen Grove authoritatively settled the question of the respective values of faith and scholarship in Church education. After stating several basic doctrines, Clark declared, "The first requisite for teaching these principles is a testimony of their truth. No amount of learning, no amount of study, and no number of scholastic degrees, can take the place of this testimony, which is the sine qua non of the teacher in our Church school system."<sup>161</sup> For the Church-employed religion teachers, at least, faith was the crucial element. In that realm, testimony was more important than inquiry. These ideas remained a common theme in Clark's dealings with the religion teachers of the Church throughout the rest of his life. Notes in Clark's papers from a 1954 address to seminary teachers contained two lines that captured his philosophy. Appearing first was, "Sow faith—not doubt," and just below, "No academic freedom in religion."<sup>162</sup>

The actions taken to bring Church education into line were important in defining not only the role of religious educators in the Church, but the role of priesthood leaders as well. In giving the "Chartered Course," the First Presidency was asserting its primacy over Church educators, even if

educators held advanced degrees. Put in scriptural terms, the scribes and Pharisees would serve *under* the priesthood, not over it. On a wider level, the actions taken to bring religious education into line during the 1930s and 1940s were extended to *all* Church organizations. In March 1940, during the height of his concerns about Church education, President Clark gave a major address that was designed to bring all auxiliary organizations of the Church under priesthood direction. Closely echoing the language he used with the Church religion teachers, Clark reminded these organizations of the fundamentals, saying that “the sole . . . aim and purpose of the Auxiliary organization of the Church is to plant and make grow in every member of the Church a testimony of the Christ and of the Gospel, of the divinity of the mission of Joseph Smith and of the Church, and to bring the people to order their lives in accordance with the laws and principles of the restored Gospel and Priesthood.”<sup>163</sup> These early efforts laid the foundation for the Correlation movement of the 1960s, which has immeasurably shaped the modern Church. The problems caused by a few of these teachers who had attended the Chicago Divinity School eventually played a role in prompting some major innovations in Church policies and practices.

Answering the second question, What does the outside scholarship of the world have to offer the religious studies of the Church? it should be noted that the outcomes of the Chicago experiment were by no means completely negative. Nearly all of the Chicago men noted that their time at the divinity school opened ecumenical doors for the Church and helped bring Mormonism further into the mainstream of American religious discourse. At the same time, the scholarly methods learned in Chicago, applied toward modern scripture, led to huge leaps in the quality of Mormon apologetics. Sidney Sperry, T. Edgar Lyon, Russel Swensen, and other Chicago scholars wrote the majority of Sunday School and priesthood manuals used in the Church for decades after they returned from Chicago, and they inspired a new generation of scholars who helped reach out to other religious groups, defending the faith when necessary. While the Church was drawn into the wider controversies other American churches were embroiled in, fighting these battles helped reaffirm the identity of Mormonism in the modern world.

Could these tensions between fundamentalism and modernism in the mid-twentieth century have been resolved in a more harmonious way? The answer to that question can only be answered with speculation. Nearly every major Christian denomination fought a battle over these issues in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Mormonism’s conflict, Philip Barlow points out, was relatively mild.<sup>164</sup> As Leonard Arrington and Davis



Bitton observed, no books were banned, no excommunications occurred, and no schisms took place.<sup>165</sup>

The final question, *What is the proper mixture between faith and study in revealed religion?* may be the most difficult of all to answer. Ultimately, every student of religion has to answer it. This struggle has defined the religious scholarship of the Church in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Each new generation will wrestle with this question. But the crucible of the Chicago experiment, in its own way, moved the Church significantly toward finding its own voice in the world of religious scholarship. While some outcomes were negative, it ultimately proved that faith and scholarship were not mutually exclusive, and the mixture of the two could be a powerful force for good. In the words of Elder Packer, “Happily, though, some of those who went away to study returned magnified by their experience and armed with advanced degrees. They returned firm in their knowledge that a man can be in the world but not of the world.”<sup>166</sup>

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1. Boyd K. Packer, *That All May Edified* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 43.

2. Major sources for this study were the papers of Church teachers who attended the University of Chicago’s School of Divinity in the 1930s. Valuable collections include the papers of Russel B. Swensen, Sidney B. Sperry, and J. Reuben Clark, all located in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. The extensive collection of T. Edgar Lyon, which also provides a valuable window into this period, are located in Perry Special Collections and in the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. The massive collection of Sterling McMurrin, located at Special Collections in the J. Willard Marriott Library at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, also provided a wealth of correspondence and documentation. In addition, the Everett L. Cooley oral history project, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, contains several interviews with Church teachers from this period, most notably Heber C. Snell. The papers of George S. Tanner, housed in Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, were also helpful. The massive papers of Heber C. Snell, located in the Special Collections of the Merrill-Cazier Library at Utah State University in Logan, Utah, contain a copious documentation of the battles fought over orthodoxy in the Church Educational System during this time. Also contained in Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, are the papers of Daryl Chase, which provided valuable context. My deepest gratitude goes to the staff of all of these great institutions

who were tremendously helpful in this project. In addition, several colleagues, most notably Perry Montoya and Paul Murphy, reviewed early manuscripts and made invaluable suggestions.

3. The modernist-fundamentalist controversy raged throughout the early twentieth century, probably reaching its apex with the famous 1925 Scopes “Monkey Trial” in Dayton, Tennessee, where William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow battled over whether the teaching of evolution in schools undermined traditional faith in the Bible. The famous event was later commemorated in the play and film *Inherit the Wind*. For a good summary of the conflict, see *Controversy in the Twenties: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Evolution*, ed. William B. Gatewood Jr. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), and to a lesser extent, Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918–1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

4. See Milton Lynn Bennion, *Mormonism and Education* (Salt Lake City: The Department of Education of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1939), 175–202.

5. Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 53.

6. *Brigham Young University: The First Hundred Years*, ed. Ernest L. Wilkinson, 4 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 2:286; see also Mary Jane Woodger and Joseph H. Groberg, *From the Muddy River to the Ivory Tower: The Journey of George H. Brimhall* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2010), 131–33.

7. Kenneth G. Bell, “Adam Samuel Bennion: Superintendent of LDS Education: 1919–1928” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1969), 75–81.

8. See William E. Berrett, “My Story,” unpublished manuscript, 1974, Perry Special Collections, 37–38.

9. Bell, “Adam S. Bennion,” 80.

10. David H. Yarn, “Sidney Sperry Reminiscence,” in *They Gladly Taught: Ten BYU Professors*, ed. Jean Anne Waterstradt, 3 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University and the Emeritus Club, 1986–88), 1:160.

11. “Summer School Announcement,” *Brigham Young University Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1928): 43.

12. “Summer School Announcement,” *Brigham Young University Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1929): 43.

13. Russel B. Swensen, “Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School,” *Dialogue* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 40.

14. T. Edgar Lyon Jr., *T. Edgar Lyon: A Teacher in Zion* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press), 2002, 115.

15. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 40.

16. *Dedication of the Joseph F. Merrill Engineering Building*, program, University of Utah, February 26, 1960, 1, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City. See also Alan K. Parrish, *John A. Widtsoe* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 117. John A. Widtsoe was studying in Germany at the same time, completing his work a few months after Merrill. The author has been unable to verify if Merrill was the first Utahn to earn a PhD, though in the program cited, which was produced by the University of Utah in conjunction with the dedication of the Joseph F. Merrill Engineering Building, he was recognized as such. For other information on Merrill’s

education background, see Richard R. Lyman, "Dr. Joseph F. Merrill of the Council of the Twelve," *Improvement Era* 35 (November 1931): 9–10; Bryant S. Hinckley, "Greatness in Men: Joseph F. Merrill," *Improvement Era* 36 (December 1932): 74–77, 121; and Gordon B. Hinckley, "Passing of Elder Joseph F. Merrill," *Improvement Era* 55 (March 1952): 144–47, 203–4.

17. T. Edgar Lyon, oral history, interview by Davis Bitton, November 18 and 15, December 2, 9, 16, and 30, 1974; and January 6, 13, 20, 1975, Salt Lake City, Lyon Collection, 93, Perry Special Collections.

18. T. Edgar Lyon, interview by Frederick S. Buchanan and Marshal B. Poulson, February 7, 1973, 13–14, 28, Perry Special Collections.

19. Russel B. Swensen, The Joint Oral History Project of Brigham Young University Archives, BYU Alumni Association Emeritus Club, and Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, interview by Mark K. Allen, September 13, 1978, 9, Perry Special Collections.

20. James R. Clark, "Church and State Relationships in Education in Utah" (PhD diss., Utah State University, 1958), 441.

21. Minutes, February 20, 1929, Minutes of the General Church Board of Education, found in William E. Berrett, CES History Resource Files, 1899–1985, Church History Library.

22. See Dennis A. Wright, "The Beginnings of the First LDS Institute of Religion at Moscow, Idaho," *Mormon Historical Studies* 10 (Spring 2009): 65–84. See also Joseph F. Merrill, "LDS Institutes and Why," *Improvement Era* 32 (December 1929): 135–37; and J. Wyley Sessions, "The Latter-day Saint Institutes," *Improvement Era* 38 (July 1935): 412–15.

23. "Seminaries of LDS Church Put under Study," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 9, 1930, 14–15.

24. "Seminaries of LDS Church Put under Study," 14–15.

25. Joseph F. Merrill to all seminary teachers, October 1, 1928, Salt Lake City, George A. Brimhall papers, Perry Special Collections.

26. William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton, *Readings in LDS Church History from Original Manuscripts*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 3:341–42.

27. Wilkinson, *First Hundred Years*, 2:219.

28. Church General Board of Education, Minutes, February 5 and March 5, 1930, Church History Library; copies in possession of the author.

29. Joseph F. Merrill to E. J. Call, G. L. Luke, and W. V. Halverson, April 18, 1931, Sydney B. Sperry Collection, Perry Special Collections.

30. Joseph F. Merrill to Russel B. Swensen, March 10, 1930, Russel B. Swensen Collection, Perry Special Collections.

31. Swenson, oral history, 11.

32. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Goodspeed Parallel New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 534.

33. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Story of the Bible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 24.

34. Charles Harvey Arnold, *Near the Edge of Battle: A Short History of the Divinity School and the "Chicago School of Theology," 1866–1966*, (Chicago: The Divinity School Association, 1966), 34.

35. Arnold, *Near the Edge of Battle*, 59.
36. Swensen, oral history, 11.
37. See Shailer Mathews, *The Faith of Modernism* (New York: AMS Press, 1924, 1969).
38. William J. Hynes, *Shirley Jackson Case and the Chicago School: The Socio-Historical Method* (Chico, Calif.: Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Press, 1980), ix.
39. Lyon, *Teacher in Zion*, 132.
40. Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 129–34.
41. James M. McLachlan, “W. H. Chamberlin and the Quest for a Mormon Theology,” *Dialogue* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 154–55. McLachlan also notes that in 1921, while on his deathbed, W. H. Chamberlin “received word . . . that he had been chosen to teach religion in the summer school at BYU. . . . Five years after Chamberlin’s death, attitudes in the church had changed. Apostle David O. McKay wrote to Ralph V. Chamberlin [William’s brother] in a letter dated 17 February 1926: “That a lofty, sincere soul like W. H. Chamberlin’s should have been compelled to struggle in our community and to have been misunderstood by those who should have known him best, seems to me to be nothing short of a tragedy.”
42. George Shepherd Tanner, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Oral History Program, interview by Davis Bitton, Salt Lake City, August 24, 1972, 11, Church History Library.
43. Swensen, oral history, 10, Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 40.
44. Joseph F. Merrill to Russel B. Swensen, July 21, 1930, Swensen Collection.
45. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 41.
46. Tanner, oral history, 10.
47. Russel B. Swensen to Swen L. Swensen, December 19, 1932, Swensen Collection.
48. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 42.
49. Russel B. Swensen to Swen L. Swensen, March 2, 1931, Swensen Collection.
50. Sidney B. Sperry to Russel B. Swensen, November 20, 1930, Swensen Collection.
51. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 40.
52. Tanner, oral history, 12–13.
53. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 40.
54. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 42.
55. Russel B. Swensen to Swen L. Swensen, September 21, no year (circa 1931), Swensen Collection.
56. Tanner, oral history, 11–12.
57. Russel B. Swensen to Swen L. Swensen, December 10, 1931, Swensen Collection. The “dean” Swensen is most likely referring to is Shailer Mathews, the dean of the Chicago Divinity School.
58. Russel B. Swensen to Swen L. Swensen, January 28, 1933, Swensen Collection.
59. T. Edgar Lyon to parents, August 21, 1931, T. Edgar Lyon Collection, Church History Library, cited in Lyon, *Teacher in Zion*, 131.

60. T. Edgar Lyon to parents, August 21, 1931, cited in Lyon, *Teacher in Zion*, 131, punctuation modernized.
61. Shailer Mathews, *The Growth of the Idea of God* (New York: MacMillan, 1931), 219.
62. Mathews, *Growth of the Idea of God*, 219.
63. T. Edgar Lyon to parents, August 21, 1931, cited in Lyon, *Teacher in Zion*, 132. Lyon probably has reference here to Ralph Chamberlin, Joseph Peterson, and Henry Peterson, three BYU professors dismissed by the Church in 1911 after publicly teaching controversial concepts at BYU. William H. Chamberlin, also censured during this time had received training in ancient languages and biblical studies at the University of Chicago. See Wilkinson, *First Hundred Years*, 1:412–32; see also Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 129–34.
64. Tanner, oral history, 12.
65. Russel B. Swensen to George S. Tanner, December 31, 1931, Swensen Collection.
66. Russel B. Swensen to George S. Tanner, December 31, 1931.
67. Swensen, oral history, 12; Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 44.
68. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 44.
69. Tanner, oral history, 13.
70. Tanner, oral history, 13.
71. Lyon, *Teacher in Zion*, 136. Those who earned degrees included Anthony S. Cannon, Daryl Chase, Carl J. Furr, Therald N. Jensen, Vernon Larsen, Wesley P. Lloyd, T. Edgar Lyon, Heber C. Snell, Sidney B. Sperry, Russel B. Swensen, and George S. Tanner. See Lyon Jr., *Teacher in Zion*, 143.
72. Wilkinson, *First Hundred Years*, 2:288.
73. Vernon F. Larsen, “The Life and Times of Vernon F. Larsen,” unpublished document, 5:42, Church History Library.
74. Lyon, oral history, 101.
75. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 44.
76. Larsen, “Life and Times,” 52.
77. Daryl Chase to Russel B. Swensen, undated letter (ca. 1933), Swensen Collection.
78. Daryl Chase to T. Edgar Lyon, February 18, 1933, Lyon Collection.
79. Carl Furr to Russel B. Swensen, April 3, 1934, Swensen Collection.
80. Carl Furr to Russel B. Swensen, April 3, 1934.
81. Carl Furr to Russel B. Swensen, April 3, 1934.
82. Carl Furr to Russel B. Swensen, April 3, 1934.
83. Daryl Chase to Russel B. Swensen, ca. 1933.
84. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 140.
85. Heber C. Snell, “Criteria for Interpreting the Old Testament to College Youth,” *Through the Years: Occasional Writings of Heber C. Snell* (Logan, Utah: Merrill Library, 1969), 95–97.
86. Joseph Fielding Smith to Franklin L. West, March 11, 1937, cited in Richard Sherlock, “Faith and History: The Snell Controversy,” *Dialogue* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 27, 38.

87. J. Reuben Clark, "The Charted Course of the Church in Education," in *J. Reuben Clark: Selected Papers*, ed. David H. Yard Jr. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1984), 251–52.
88. Clark, "Charted Course," 254.
89. Sterling M. McMurrin and L. Jackson Newell, *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 115.
90. McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 115.
91. N. L. Nelson to J. Reuben Clark Jr., September 2, 1938, Clark Papers, cited in Scott C. Esplin, "Charting the Course: President Clark's Charge to Religious Educators," *Religious Educator* 7, no. 1 (2006): 107, 117.
92. J. Reuben Clark to William T. Tew Jr., September 22, 1938, Clark Papers.
93. J. Reuben Clark to R. K. Bischoff, September 8, 1938, Clark Papers.
94. Joseph Fielding Smith to J. Reuben Clark, August 15, 1938, Clark Papers.
95. Joseph S. Peery to J. Reuben Clark, August 16, 1938, Clark Papers. At the time this letter was written, Peery was serving as the manager of the Temple Square Bureau of Information.
96. S. O. Bennion to J. Reuben Clark, August 15, 1938, Clark Papers.
97. J. Reuben Clark to S. O. Bennion, August 20, 1938, Clark Papers.
98. J. Reuben Clark, Diary, January 23, 1939, 62, Clark Papers.
99. Clark, Office Journal, January 23, 1939, 63.
100. Sidney B. Sperry to John A. Widtsoe, September 2, 1939, Sperry Collection.
101. Daryl Chase to Sidney B. Sperry, November 27, 1939, Sperry Collection.
102. J. Reuben Clark to Franklin L. West, February 17, 1940, First Presidency Papers, Church History Library, cited in Wilkinson, *First Hundred Years*, 2:381–82.
103. Joseph F. Merrill to Christen Jensen, May 28, 1940, cited in Wilkinson, *First Hundred Years*, 2:384–85.
104. Clark, Office Journal, March 21, 1940, emphasis in original.
105. Clark, Office Journal, March 29, 1940. During this time, Clark was disturbed by articles that had been appearing in *Week-day Religious Education*, a periodical published by the Department of Education. During March 1940, Clark discussed an article written by Alma King in the periodical. See Clark, Office Journal, March 28–29, 1940.
106. Milton Lynn Bennion, *Recollections of a School Man: The Autobiography of M. Lynn Bennion* (n.p.: Western Epics, 1987), 108. Existing correspondence indicates that President Clark's son was a teacher at least as early as 1940 and was teaching during the height of Clark's concerns over the orthodoxy of the system. See Vernon A. Cooley and J. Reuben Clark III to J. Reuben Clark, December 10, 1940, Clark Papers.
107. J. Reuben Clark to J. Karl Wood, May 27, 1941, Clark Papers.
108. Sidney B. Sperry to Russel B. Swensen, November 20, 1930, Swensen Papers.
109. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 18, 25.
110. Dale C. LeCheminant, "T. Edgar Lyon: I Have Never Been Bored!" in *Teachers Who Touch Lives*, ed. Philip L. Barlow (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1988), 178.

111. Swensen, oral history, 19.

112. See Russel B. Swensen, *The New Testament: The Acts and the Epistles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union Board, 1955). Swensen states in his acknowledgments that he had obtained permission to quote two of Goodspeed's works in his text, *An Introduction to the New Testament* and *New Testament, an American Translation*. In many places he agrees with Goodspeed's theories of authorship (Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude) and in many places he doesn't (Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) remaining neutral on the traditional authorship of others (Revelation). See pages 220, 226, 255, 263–65, 279–81, 292. When Swensen does agree with Goodspeed, he closely follows the latter's logic. Compare with Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Goodspeed Parallel New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 502, 534, 562.

113. Swensen, "Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School," 46.

114. Daryl C. Chase to Sterling S. McMurrin, July 26, 1944, McMurrin Papers.

115. Daryl C. Chase to Sterling S. McMurrin, August 31, 1944, McMurrin Papers.

116. Daryl C. Chase to Sterling S. McMurrin, undated letter (ca. July–August 1944), McMurrin Papers.

117. Daryl C. Chase, oral history, interview by Marie Fuhrman Olsen, February 19, 1980, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library.

118. George S. Tanner, interview by John Fowles, June 5, 1989, cited in John Lessing Fowles, "A Study Concerning the Mission of the Week-day Religious Educational Program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1890–1990: A Response to Secular Education" (PhD diss., University of Missouri–Columbia, 1990), 106–7.

119. Tanner, oral history, 40; emphasis in original.

120. Tanner, oral history, 43–44.

121. Tanner, oral history, 37.

122. Leonard J. Arrington, "George S. Tanner: A Teaching Pioneer," in Barlow, *Teachers Who Touch Lives*, 89. See also Leonard J. Arrington, "Why I Am a Believer," in *A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars*, ed. and comp. Philip L. Barlow (Centerville, Utah: Canon Press, 1986), 228–29.

123. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 23.

124. Heber C. Snell to Sterling S. McMurrin, January 5, 1941, McMurrin Papers.

125. Sterling S. McMurrin to Heber C. Snell, January 19, 1941, Snell Papers.

126. Heber C. Snell to Sterling S. McMurrin, May 16, 1943, McMurrin Papers.

127. Heber C. Snell to Sterling S. McMurrin, September 14, 1947, McMurrin Papers.

128. Sterling S. McMurrin to Heber C. Snell, August 30, 1945, Snell Papers.

129. Heber C. Snell to Franklin L. West, August 11, 1947, Snell Papers.

130. Heber C. Snell, *Ancient Israel: Its Story and Meaning* (Salt Lake City: Steven and Wallis, 1948), xiv.

131. For a lengthy discussion of this episode, see Sherlock, "Faith and History," 27–41.

132. See Snell, *Ancient Israel*, 187–88.

133. Heber C. Snell to David O. McKay, May 28, 1951, Snell Papers.

134. Earl W. Harmer, open letter to Heber C. Snell, December 23, 1948, copy in McMurrin Papers.
135. Heber C. Snell, open letter to Earl W. Harmer, January 7, 1949, cited in Sherlock, "Faith and History," 29, 39.
136. Joseph Fielding Smith to Ezra M. Hawkes, May 25, 1949, Snell Papers. Joseph Fielding Smith's letter to Snell with the questionnaire, but minus the final question on the Chicago scholars, is referenced in Sterling S. McMurrin to Heber C. Snell, June 2, 1949, Snell Papers.
137. Sidney B. Sperry to Heber C. Snell, August 31, 1949, McMurrin Papers.
138. Heber C. Snell to Sterling S. McMurrin, November 5, 1949, McMurrin Papers.
139. Heber C. Snell to Sidney C. Sperry, September 20, 1949, copy in Snell Papers.
140. Heber C. Snell to Sidney C. Sperry, September 20, 1949.
141. Franklin L. West to Heber C. Snell, January 5, 1950, Snell Papers.
142. Sterling S. McMurrin to Heber C. Snell, January 16, 1950, Snell Papers.
143. Heber C. Snell to Ernest L. Wilkinson, August 3, 1953, Snell Papers.
144. Heber C. Snell, "The Bible in the Church," *Dialogue* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 56.
145. Snell, "Bible in the Church," 57.
146. Snell, "Bible in the Church," 60–61.
147. Sidney B. Sperry, "Scholars and Prophets," *Dialogue* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 74–75.
148. Sperry, "Scholars and Prophets," 83.
149. Kent Robson, "The Bible, the Church, and Its Scholars," *Dialogue* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 90.
150. Register to the papers of Heber C. Snell, Merrill-Cazier Library.
151. Heber C. Snell to Joseph Fielding Smith, April 23, 1948, Snell Papers.
152. Heber C. Snell, oral history, interview by Frederick Buchanan, Hay Rogers, and Dale LeCheminant, 49–51, Everett L. Cooley Oral History Collection, Marriott Library.
153. Waterstradt, *They Gladly Taught*, 1:161. Sperry also wrote an impressive number of books on biblical topics as well, including *The Spirit of the Old Testament*, *Biblical Aramaic*, *The Voice of Israel's Prophets*, and *Paul's Life and Letters*.
154. David H. Yarn Jr., "Sidney B. Sperry: A Reminiscence," in Waterstradt, *They Gladly Taught*, 1:169.
155. Scott Kenney, "Saints in Divinity Schools," *Sunstone* 3, no. 4 (May–June 1978): 22–24.
156. *Collected Statements of Former Students at the University of Chicago*, 1971, collected by Russel B. Swensen, Church History Library; emphasis in original.
157. Swensen, *Collected Statements*.
158. Swensen, *Collected Statements*.
159. Swensen, oral history, 10.
160. For a brief history of the Religion Department at BYU, see Packer, "Seek Learning Even by Study and Also by Faith," 41–55.
161. Clark, "Charted Course," 249–50.
162. J. Reuben Clark, speech notes from BYU Seminary Teachers Banquet, July 15, 1954, Clark Papers.



163. Memorandum of Suggestions made by President J. Reuben Clark, courtesy Max Mulgard of the Church Correlation Department. Clark made these remarks at a meeting with the Presidencies and Superintendencies of the Church Auxiliary organizations on March 29, 1940, in the Church General Office Building.

164. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 137.

165. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 260. Several attempts were made to excommunicate Snell, but the action never took place. Snell remained active in the Church until his death. See Register to the Papers of Heber C. Snell, Mss. 32, USU Special Collections, accessed October 27, 2010 at <http://library.usu.edu/Specol/manuscript/collms32.html>. Snell referenced the possible excommunication in a letter, never sent, to the high council of the Cache Stake, Heber C. Snell to Cache Stake High Council, Oct. 6, 1962, Snell Papers, Special Collections.

166. Packer, "Seek Learning Even by Study and Also by Faith," 44.