



10-1-2013

Joseph F. Smith and the Reshaping of Church Education

Scott C. Esplin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Esplin, Scott C. (2013) "Joseph F. Smith and the Reshaping of Church Education," *BYU Studies Quarterly*.
Vol. 52 : Iss. 3 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol52/iss3/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Joseph F. Smith and the Reshaping of Church Education

Scott C. Esplin

From 1901 to 1918, President Joseph F. Smith presided over one of the most expansive eras in the history of Latter-day Saint education, when the Church operated a series of after-school religion classes, private secondary academies, normal colleges, and a university. “The course of the church educational system from 1900 to 1930,” observed historian Thomas G. Alexander, “resembled nothing quite so much as a balloon. Expanding during the period to 1920, it shrank rapidly during the 1920s.”¹ Interestingly, though President Smith chaired the Church Board of Education during an era of explosive educational growth, near the end of his presidency he remarked, referring to the high cost of public education in the state of Utah, “I believe that we are running education mad.”² Responding to this concern, President Smith oversaw policy decisions during his administration that set the stage for the Church’s drastic reduction of the academy system following his death. Ultimately, it was his presidency that supported growth in the Religion Class system and the creation of the released-time seminary program, innovations that reshaped Church education, guiding it toward the supplementary education model it employs today.³ This paper analyzes the educational

1. Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 157–58.

2. Joseph F. Smith, in *85th Semiannual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915), 4.

3. The Religion Class program was instituted in 1890 to provide separate weekday religious instruction for children attending first through ninth grades

Scott C. Esplin

As a parent to young children, I am applying something I learned as a graduate student in BYU's Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations: there is great value in examining how and what we learn. As the means by which families and societies transmit core knowledge and beliefs to the next generation, education demonstrates what is most important to a people. Much of my time with my family is spent finding ways to help my own children



know what I know and love what I love. How I spend my time with them demonstrates what I most value. Within Mormonism, the early revelations of Joseph Smith contained numerous educational directives (see D&C 55, 88, and 93), and educational venues like a schoolhouse in Zion and the Kirtland Temple were among the faith's first completed structures. While communities including the Latter-day Saints seek to use education to shape society, in many ways educational practices reflect cultural values as much as they influence them.

For these reasons, I find the educational history of the Church during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries particularly insightful. As others have argued, during this period the Church transitioned from its pioneer to its modern era. Educationally, it began the era by isolating itself from outside influence, endorsing an expansive academy system over the growing public school system as it sought to preserve its core values. Eventually, the faith shifted its course, embracing public education by augmenting it with private religious education in the form of a growing seminary and institute program. As an active participant in both the isolationist and accommodationist paradigms, President Joseph F. Smith personifies Mormonism's transition. The educational changes of his era reflect the values of Latter-day Saint society and how it balanced these priorities within a broader culture. The educational choices we make, either as families or as societies, not only shape those whom we care about deeply, but they act as windows into our own souls.

background, philosophy, and legacy of Joseph F. Smith and their impact on Church education. Beginning with his own limited education, it traces the role President Smith played as a counselor in the First Presidency in expanding the academies and later in facilitating the formation of the seminary system as Church President. It places these changes within the context of the dramatic growth in public education and the financial challenges faced by the Church and its academy system that occurred during the Smith era, demonstrating how he was shaped by his time and the part he and others played during the transformative era of Church education.

Joseph F. Smith's Educational Background and Philosophy

While little is known about Joseph F. Smith's formal education, it seems apparent that his early life experiences heavily influenced his later educational philosophy. Though he grew up in frontier settlements, education was a hallmark of the communities where Smith was raised. Nauvoo, where he lived until he was nearly eight years old, enjoyed a robust educational system. "From the unsettled state of the Saints, in consequence of being driven from their inheritances, and their sudden transitions from affluence to poverty," Joseph F. Smith's uncle Don Carlos Smith editorialized in the *Times and Seasons* in 1841, "the education of their children has consequently been neglected.—But we hope the night of darkness has passed away, and that we behold the dawning of a refulgent morn, which shall shine upon our youthful city."⁴ Encouraged by this educational zeal, each of the city's four wards operated a school, overseen by the board of regents of the University of the City of Nauvoo. These common schools were augmented by numerous private schools throughout the city.⁵ However, while schools were available in Nauvoo, we know

in public schools. A forerunner to the seminary system for secondary students established during President Smith's administration, it operated until 1929. D. Michael Quinn, "Utah's Educational Innovation: LDS Religion Classes, 1890–1929," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Fall 1975): 379–89; Brett D. Dowdle, "A New Policy in Church School Work: The Founding of the Mormon Supplementary Religious Education Movement, 1890–1930" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2011).

4. "The City Council, and General Bennett's Inaugural Address," *Times and Seasons* 2 (February 15, 1841): 319.

5. Paul Thomas Smith, "A Historical Study of the Nauvoo, Illinois, Public School System, 1841–1845" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1969), 80–81.

only that Joseph F. Smith frequented school one winter in the City of Joseph, attending Merilla Johnson's class in the basement of the *Nauvoo Neighbor* print building.⁶

Smith had what one of his biographers later termed an abbreviated childhood, brought about by the death of his father when the boy was five.⁷ For what should have been his common school years, his widowed mother, Mary Fielding Smith, tutored Joseph. "Well-educated, in her own right, and properly reared,"⁸ Mary Fielding Smith received an education in her native Britain, raised in "the home of a pious, refined, intellectual and educated family."⁹ In Kirtland, Ohio, she taught school and tutored pupils privately for a brief time in the fall of 1837 before marrying Hyrum Smith later that December.¹⁰ The influence she had on young Joseph left a deep impression. Later in life, he declared, "To her I owe my very existence as also my success in life, coupled with the favor and mercy of God."¹¹ His son Joseph Fielding Smith similarly observed, "Most of his education up to the time of his mother's death had been obtained from her. Busy as she was with the many cares and tribulations, she nevertheless found time to teach her children some of the fundamentals of education, she being a well educated woman."¹²

Though Nauvoo was different for the Church and Joseph F. Smith following the death of his father and uncle, the drive to educate the children of the Church was not extinguished. At a conference in October

6. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith: Sixth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 225–26.

7. Francis M. Gibbons, *Joseph F. Smith: Patriarch and Preacher, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 7–9.

8. Don Cecil Corbett, *Mary Fielding Smith, Daughter of Britain: Portrait of Courage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 13.

9. Susa Y. Gates, "Mothers in Israel," *Relief Society Magazine* 3 (March 1916): 123.

10. Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr, eds., *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982), 58, 63–64.

11. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 4.

12. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 225. Mary reared the five surviving children of Hyrum Smith and his first wife, Jerusha Barden, who died in 1837. A seven-year-old son died in September 1841. The oldest daughter, Lovina, married Lorin Walker in June 1844, shortly before her father's martyrdom. Mary also gave birth to Hyrum's two youngest children, Joseph Fielding and Martha Ann.

1845, the Church and its leaders discussed various business items preparatory to their westward exodus the following winter. Addressing the congregation, Heber C. Kimball declared, "There is yet another piece of business of great importance to all who have families; that is, to have some school books printed for the education of our children, which will not be according to the Gentile order." Answering the call, it was moved that "W. W. Phelps write some school books for the use of children."¹³ Joseph F. Smith, however, seemed not to have benefited much from these educational endeavors. Rather, since Smith left Nauvoo at age seven, his education became a practical one, as he forsook formal education for the rigors of riding herd and leading oxen.¹⁴

Education continued to be stressed in the Utah territory of Smith's boyhood. The first schoolhouse in the Salt Lake Valley sprang up in an old military tent just three months after the arrival of Brigham Young and his pioneer company. In time, it was replaced by a log schoolroom inside the city's old fort. By 1850, the *Deseret News* reported the beginnings of a Parent School, designed to qualify teachers for schools across the region.¹⁵ Wilford Woodruff was reported to have "a large and well selected assortment of school books," and wards were invited to "procure a supply that their children may be rapidly advanced in the various branches which will be taught."¹⁶ While the educational conditions varied throughout the territory, Leonard Arrington later summarized, "School was held wherever a place could be found."¹⁷

Arriving in the valley in September 1848, Joseph F. Smith settled with his mother and siblings in the Mill Creek area, where they built a small cabin. While schools sprang up around him, Smith continued his practical learning. "My principal occupation from 1848 to 1854," he later recalled, "was that of herd-boy, although I made a hand always in the harvest field and at threshings, and in the canyons cutting and

13. "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 6 (November 1, 1845): 1015.

14. For Joseph F. Smith's reminiscences of his parents, his childhood, and his experiences on the trail, see *Reminiscences, 1838–circa 1848*, Joseph F. Smith Papers, 1854–1918, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

15. "The Parent School Commenced on Monday Last," *Deseret News*, November 16, 1850, 4.

16. "Parent School," *Deseret News*, November 30, 1850, 7.

17. Leonard J. Arrington, "The Latter-day Saints and Public Education," *Southwestern Journal of Social Education* 7, no. 9 (1977): 11.

hauling wood.”¹⁸ His son later wrote, “After the family was settled in the Salt Lake Valley, the children found time to attend school a portion of the time, but the many cares and labors of those early days did not permit of any extended course of schooling.” The lack of formal education seems not to have deterred Joseph F. Smith’s learning. His son continued, “However, being of a studious mind, Joseph F. Smith never let an opportunity to gain knowledge escape him. The early records which he kept all bear strong evidence of this great desire, and it can truthfully be said, that in his later life he stood preeminently among his fellows for the extensive knowledge and wide understanding which he possessed.”¹⁹ Smith’s youth was further changed when his mother died and he lost his guiding light. “It was in 1852 that my blessed Mother passed away,” he later recalled, “leaving me fatherless & motherless, but not altogether friendless at the early age of 13 years. . . . After my mother’s death there followed 18 months—from Sept 21st, 1852 to April, 1854 of perilous times for me. I was almost like a comet or fiery meteor, without attraction or gravitation to keep me balanced or guide me within reasonable bounds.”²⁰

While it is unclear what formal schooling Smith received in Utah prior to his mother’s death, one known reference to his education comes from the era of imbalance that followed her passing. Speaking of the influence Church leaders had on Joseph F. Smith, George A. Smith recalled, “His father and mother left him when he was a child, and we have been looking after him to try and help him along. We first sent him to school, but it was not long before he licked the schoolmaster, and could not go to school. Then we sent him on a mission.”²¹ Years later, President Smith elaborated on the incident:

The reason [I] had trouble with the schoolmaster was that the schoolmaster had a leather strap with which he used to chastise the children. He was a rather hard-hearted schoolmaster, one of the olden type that believed in inflicting bodily punishment. My little sister [Martha Ann] was called up to be punished. I saw the school-master bring out the leather strap, and he told the child to hold out her hand. I just spoke up loudly and said, ‘Don’t whip her with that!’ and at that he came at me

18. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 163.

19. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 226.

20. Joseph F. Smith to Samuel L. Adams, May 11, 1888, cited in Richard N. Holzapfel and R. Q. Shupe, *Joseph F. Smith: Portrait of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 20.

21. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 229.

and was going to whip me, and instead of him whipping me, I licked him good and plenty.²²

Ending his limited formal education, Smith began informal education through Church service and employment. In addition to his several missions, where he learned to preach the gospel and administer its ordinances, Smith worked in the Church Historian's Office, learning from Elder George A. Smith and other leading brethren about the history of the Church as well as gospel principles and Church organization. "This contact in the Historian's Office," his son later wrote, "was also a wonderful school for the young man who had spent so much time in the mission field." In addition to his work in the Historian's Office, Smith "also engaged in the ordinance work and recording in the Endowment House under the direction of Presidents Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and the Apostles, who were trained in this labor under the Prophet Joseph Smith," further expanding his knowledge of the gospel.²³

The shaping influence of Smith's lack of formal education coupled with his practical training by Church leadership is reflected in his later statements regarding education.²⁴ Indeed, they framed his worldview. Acknowledging that truth could come from many sources, Smith argued as Church President that ignorance was inexcusable. "Search out the truth of the written word; listen for and receive the truth declared by living prophets and teachers; enrich your minds with the best of knowledge and facts. Of those who speak in his name, the Lord requires humility, not ignorance. Intelligence is the glory of God; and no man can be saved in ignorance."²⁵ While encouraging the acquisition of "knowledge and fact," Smith also reflected his upbringing, placing a primacy on the spiritual over the secular. "Educate yourself not only for time, but also for eternity. The latter of the two is the more important. Therefore, when we shall have completed the studies of time, and enter

22. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 229.

23. Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 225–26.

24. Smith seemed conscious of his limited formal education. Near the end of his life, he lamented that, unlike some of his more educated colleagues, "he would be forgotten because he had no written work to leave behind." This prompted John A. Widtsoe to work with others to compile Smith's sermons and writings into the text *Gospel Doctrine*. The volume was formally presented to Smith just seventeen days before his death. Alan K. Parrish, *John A. Widtsoe: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 206–7.

25. Joseph F. Smith, "Testimony Bearing," *Juvenile Instructor* 41 (August 1906): 466.

upon the commencement ceremonies of the great hereafter, we will find our work is not finished, but just begun.”²⁶

While emphasizing the significance of spiritual education, Smith also drew upon his experiences learning from his mother to shape his educational philosophy. As Church President, he challenged parents, “Let [your children] see that you are earnest, and practice what you preach. Do not let your children out to specialists in these things, but teach them by your own precept and example, by your own fireside. Be a specialist yourself in the truth. Let our meetings, schools and organizations, instead of being our only or leading teachers, be supplements to our teachings and training in the home.”²⁷ He later declared, “Schools are instituted to help the home, not to domineer and direct it.”²⁸ The value of education in the home was reflected in Smith’s later support for the Home Evening program, which he instituted in 1915.

Emphasizing more than mere book learning, Joseph F. Smith also reflected the influence of his own practical education and the rural society in which he was raised. “We need manual training schools instead of so much book-learning and the stuffing of fairy tales and fables, which are contained in many of our school books of today,” Smith counseled. “If we would devote more money and time, more energy and attention to teaching our children manual labor in our schools than we do, it would be a better thing for the rising generation.”²⁹ Though he allowed educational diversity in Church schools, Smith editorialized in 1903, “None can deny that there is too great a tendency among the young men, especially in our larger cities, to seek the lighter employments. Politics, law, medicine, trade, clerking, banking are all needful and good in their place, but we need builders, mechanics, farmers, and men who can use their powers to produce something for the use of man.”³⁰

26. *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 269.

27. Joseph F. Smith, “Worship in the Home,” *Improvement Era* 7 (December 1903): 138.

28. Joseph F. Smith, “Dress and Social Practices,” *Improvement Era* 20 (December 1916): 173.

29. Joseph F. Smith, in *73rd Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1903), 3.

30. Joseph F. Smith, “Looking for Easy Work,” *Improvement Era* 6 (January 1903): 229.

Championing Educational Expansion

Armed with an educational philosophy emphasizing both the spiritual and the temporal, Joseph F. Smith was called to Church leadership at a young age. At the age of twenty-seven, he was ordained an Apostle and called as a counselor to Brigham Young.³¹ He continued to serve as a counselor in the First Presidency to Church Presidents John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow, until his call as President of the Church in October 1901. These callings also placed him on the Church Board of Education, giving him influence during a time of significant educational change. In fact, some of the First Presidency statements issued during Smith's years as counselor heavily directed Church education during his own presidency.

The presidencies in which Smith served as counselor faced severe attack centered on the Church's social dominance. This opposition was inextricably linked to education across the Intermountain West. As the population of the region became increasingly more diverse because of the federal military presence in 1858, the discovery of silver in 1863, and the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, Protestant church groups fought to minimize Latter-day Saint control over society. Creating mission schools, Protestant leaders sought to lure away youth with the promise of better education, even boasting, "The Mormon people will send their children to our day schools, and [Church President] Brigham [Young] and his bishops can't prevent it."³² Ultimately, ninety non-Mormon denominational schools operated in Utah from 1869 to 1890. At their peak, they employed over two hundred teachers and enrolled seven thousand students, over half of whom came from Latter-day Saint homes.³³ While Protestant groups made educational inroads among the Church's youth, the federal government sought to reduce the

31. Smith's close association with Brigham Young as a young Apostle also likely influenced his educational view. For Young's role in Utah education, see Frederick S. Buchanan, "Education among the Mormons: Brigham Young and the Schools of Utah," *History of Education Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (1982): 435–59.

32. W. M. Bonais to A. H. Clapp, April 2, 1877, quoted in Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Protestant Clergy in the Great Plains and Mountain West: 1865–1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1988), 164–65.

33. Leonard J. Arrington, "The Latter-day Saints and Public Education," *Southwestern Journal of Social Education* 7 (Spring–Summer 1977): 13; Frederick S. Buchanan, "Mormon Response to Secular Education," *Religious Education* 81 (Fall 1986): 643–54; C. Merrill Hough, "Two School Systems in Conflict: 1867–1890," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1960): 113–28.

Church's political power, likewise influencing schools. The Edmunds-Tucker Act, with the most stringent antipolygamy provisions of the era, made the office of superintendent of district schools appointive rather than elective. The federally appointed replacement was charged to "prohibit the use in any district school of any book of a sectarian character or otherwise unsuitable."³⁴

These attacks on Church dominance in Utah education mirrored national efforts of the common school movement, whose goal, James Fraser described, was "Christianizing, generally 'Protestantizing' Catholic immigrants, Southern slaves and free blacks, and the native population of the land."³⁵ Dominating the mid-nineteenth century, the movement itself was a response to troubling social conditions unleashed by changes in American society, including urbanization, industrialization, immigration, and political democratization.³⁶ Common school advocate Calvin Stowe summarized the perceived threat, "Unless we educate our immigrants, they will be our ruin. It is no longer a mere question of benevolence, of duty, or of enlightened self-interest, but the intellectual and religious training of our foreign population has become essential to our own safety; we are prompted to it by the instinct of self-preservation."³⁷ Religious difference could be tolerated within the schools, so long as the roots were Protestant.³⁸ Though most of Mormonism's founders were Americans themselves, the Church's unique doctrines and hierarchical loyalty caused Protestant America to view Mormons as outsiders as well, a perspective augmented by the flood of immigrant converts to the region at the invitation of the faith's global missionary force.³⁹ Federal

34. Edmunds-Tucker Act, sec. 25, in *Select Statutes and Other Documents Illustrative of the History of the United States, 1861-1898*, ed. William MacDonald (New York: Macmillan, 1903), 388.

35. James W. Fraser, *Between Church and State: Religion and Public Education in a Multicultural America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 103.

36. David B. Tyack, *Turning Points in American Educational History* (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell Publishing, 1967), 120-21. See also David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

37. Calvin Stowe, cited in Tyack, *Turning Points in American Educational History*, 149.

38. See Martin E. Marty, *Education, Religion, and the Common Good: Advancing a Distinctly American Conversation about Religion's Role in Our Shared Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 37.

39. See R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

officials and Protestant missionaries turned to education to acculturate Latter-day Saint youth.

In March 1886, at the height of this opposition, the First Presidency issued a lengthy epistle to the Saints. While Smith did not sign the letter because he was in Hawaii at the time of its issuance, he shared the positions it outlined. In part, the epistle decried efforts in the Idaho Territory to revoke teaching licenses for Church members. Fearing that “the placing of our children, by the help of our taxes, under the tuition of those who would gladly eradicate from their minds all love and respect for the faith of their fathers,” the Presidency declared, “the duty of our people under these circumstances is clear; it is to keep their children away from the influence of the sophisms of infidelity and the vagaries of the sects. Let them, though it may possibly be at some pecuniary sacrifice, establish schools taught by those of our faith, where, being free from the trammels of State aid, they can unhesitatingly teach the doctrines of true religion combined with the various branches of a general education.”⁴⁰ Six months later, another First Presidency epistle praised the work of the Brigham Young Academy in Provo and the Brigham Young College in Logan, declaring, “We would like to see schools of this character, independent of the District School system, started in all places where it is possible.”⁴¹ The call for Church schools came to fruition when, following the death of President John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff announced in 1888, “We feel that the time has arrived when the proper education of our children should be taken in hand by us as a people.” Woodruff formed the Church Board of Education, and stakes were instructed to organize their own local boards and create a stake academy “as soon as practicable.”⁴²

As a counselor to President Woodruff and his successor, Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith witnessed the Church’s enthusiastic response to the call for separate education. From 1888 through President Smith’s

40. John Taylor and George Q. Cannon, “An Epistle of the First Presidency to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in General Conference Assembled,” in *Messages of the First Presidency*, comp. James R. Clark, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 3:58–59 (March 1886).

41. John Taylor and George Q. Cannon, “An Epistle of the First Presidency to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 3:86–87 (October 1886).

42. Wilford Woodruff, “A Letter to the Presidency of St. George Stake,” in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 3:168 (June 8, 1888).

presidency, the Church operated as many as fifty-six schools.⁴³ For those too young to attend one of the Church academies, leaders championed the formation of the Religion Class program, an after-school supplement to secular education prevalent in public schools.⁴⁴ In 1890, Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph F. Smith wrote to local leaders, lamenting “training which our youth receive in the district schools,” noting that it did not “increase their feelings of devotion to God and love for His cause, for, as is well-known, all teachings of a religious character are rigorously excluded from the studies permitted in these institutions.” Their remedy was “that in every ward where a Church school is not established, that some brother or sister or brethren and sisters well adapted for such a responsible position by their intelligence and devotion, as well as their love for the young, be called, as on a mission . . . to take charge of a school wherein the first principles of the Gospel, Church history and kindred subjects shall be taught. This school to meet for a short time each afternoon after the close of the district school.”⁴⁵ As Church President, Smith oversaw an increase in Religion Class enrollment as well as further expansion to the educational system, including the creation of the Big Horn, Dixie, Knight, Millard, San Luis, and Summit Academies, all under his watch.⁴⁶

43. The Church operated as many as thirty-six stake academies and twenty other schools, called seminaries because a corresponding stake academy already existed in the stake. These seminaries are not to be confused with the present Church education endeavor of the same name that was also begun during Smith’s presidency at Granite High School in Salt Lake City in 1912. Scott C. Esplin and Arnold K. Garr, “Church Academies: 1875–1933,” in *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. Brandon S. Plewe, S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard H. Jackson (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2012), 126–27.

44. Quinn, “Utah’s Educational Innovation,” 379–89.

45. Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph F. Smith, “A Letter to the Presidents of Stakes, Bishops, and All Whom It May Concern,” in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 3:196–97 (October 25, 1890).

46. Adam S. Bennion, “A Brief Summary of the Historical Background, the Present Status, and the Possible Future Development of the Latter-day Saint Educational System,” February 1, 1928, Adam S. Bennion Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Though Religion Class enrollment increased during Smith’s presidency, it was criticized by some as a superfluous auxiliary because of its overlap with the Primary and the Sunday School. It also created tension because of church and state questions surrounding the use of public school teachers and buildings. Quinn, “Utah’s Educational Innovation,” 382–83, 388.

As Church school alternatives expanded during Joseph F. Smith's presidency, public school options likewise blossomed. Progressivism led to curriculum expansion and increased educational opportunity.⁴⁷ Growth in the Utah public high school system matched similar growth nationally in secondary education, where, from 1890 to 1920 secondary school population in the United States exploded from 360,000 to 2,500,000.⁴⁸ "If the 19th century was the age of the common (or primary) schools," John L. Rury summarized, "the opening decades of the 20th were the era of the high school."⁴⁹ In Utah specifically, at the beginning of the twentieth century, only six high schools existed in the entire state (Salt Lake, Ogden, Park City, Brigham City, Nephi, and Richfield). Of the six schools, only the schools in Salt Lake and Ogden boasted student populations of more than sixty-five. In 1914, during the height of Smith's presidency, State Superintendent of Public Instruction A. C. Matheson summarized, "No other branch of the public school system has developed so rapidly during recent years. In a little more than a decade the number of high schools has increased from four to forty and the enrollment of students from one thousand to eight thousand." Matheson boasted that the state of Utah constructed twenty-five high school buildings in a six-year period from 1908 to 1914, ranging from "substantial modern structures costing \$40,000 each to the East Side High School, Salt Lake City, which represents an expenditure of \$600,000." Jordan High School in Sandy, Matheson continued, "is declared by leading educators to be the finest and best equipped rural high school in the west."⁵⁰

47. Educational historian Lawrence Cremin described progressive education as "a many-sided effort to use the schools to improve the lives of individuals." An outgrowth of the larger Progressive movement throughout the country, it "began as part of a vast humanitarian effort to apply the promise of American life—the ideal of government by, of, and for the people—to the puzzling new urban-industrial civilization that came into being during the latter half of the nineteenth century." Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), viii. For a brief examination of the impact of Progressivism on the Church, see William G. Hartley, "From Men to Boys: LDS Aaronic Priesthood Offices, 1829–1996," in *My Fellow Servants: Essays on the History of the Priesthood* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2010), 59.

48. Tyack, *Turning Points in American Educational History*, 358.

49. John L. Rury, *Education and Social Change: Themes in the History of American Schooling* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 162.

50. A. C. Matheson, *Tenth Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Utah for the Biennial Period Ending June 30, 1914* (Salt Lake City: Arrow Press, 1915), 24.

A System “Run Mad”: Reining in Educational Exuberance

The expansion of public high schools in the West during the early twentieth century led to a dramatic educational shift during the Smith presidency. During the early years of his presidency, the Church moved toward endorsing public schools, in spite of rhetoric by Smith and his predecessors against taxation for secular curriculum. The softening toward public education came, in part, because of the realization that many members were unable to send their children to Church schools. In fact, if the Church and the public school systems were in competition, the Church’s program was clearly losing, at least from a statistical perspective. In 1890, for example, public high schools in Utah enrolled only five percent of the state’s secondary student population. By the decade after President Smith’s death, ninety percent of all high school students attended public schools.⁵¹ This growth reflected the post-Manifesto easing of tensions between Mormons and non-Mormons and growing confidence by the Church in its ability to protect youth in spite of secular influence.

In February 1905, President Smith and his counselors endorsed the growing public school system. Interestingly, they also expressed support for its secular curriculum. “We wish it distinctly understood that we are not in favor of, but are emphatically opposed to, denominational teachings in our public schools. We are proud of that splendid system of schools, and do not desire that they should be interfered with in any way whatever. For religious and devotional training, other institutions are provided, by our Church as well as by other churches, and we cannot too strongly urge that the two systems continue to be kept entirely separate and apart.”⁵² The open support of public schools came on the heels of national examination of the faith as part of the conflict over the seating of Utah Senator and Apostle Reed Smoot in the U.S. Senate.⁵³ The wide-ranging hearings included criticism of Church influence in public education, especially by its Religion Class program.⁵⁴ As part of the debate,

51. William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton, eds., *Readings in LDS Church History from Original Manuscripts*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 3:338.

52. Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund, “Religion Classes and School Buildings,” *Improvement Era* 8 (February 1905): 302.

53. For information on the Smoot hearings, see Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

54. Dowdle, “New Policy in Church School Work,” 96–97.

both the Utah state superintendent of public instruction and the attorney general opined that Church use of public classrooms for after-school religious instruction was unconstitutional.⁵⁵ Smith's endorsement of public schooling and his urging that religious training be kept separate from it reflect Church efforts to ease non-Mormon feelings about the program. Two years later, Smith and his counselors further clarified, "It has been charged that 'Mormonism' is opposed to education. The history of the Church and the precepts of its leaders are a sufficient answer to that accusation." Summarizing the Church educational legacy from Joseph Smith to the present, Smith concluded, "The State of Utah, now dotted with free schools, academies, colleges, and universities, institutions which have given her marked educational prominence, furnishes indisputable evidence that her people—mostly 'Mormons'—are friends and promoters of education."⁵⁶

Not only did President Smith openly support public schools, but he also sought to get Latter-day Saint teachers employed in them. In May 1911, Smith wrote to the State Board of Education, requesting "recognition of the normal work in our Church schools, so that the graduates from our normal courses may be regarded in the same class as State normal graduates, and be granted certificates to teach in the public schools without examination."⁵⁷ This was done to satisfy the growing need for public school teachers in the region while providing employment opportunities for Church school graduates. While a practical solution both for the burgeoning public school system and the prospective teachers emerging from Church schools, the placing of Church-trained educators in public school classrooms furthered Church interests as well by limiting the impact leaders previously feared regarding secular education.⁵⁸

55. Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund, "Religion Classes and School Buildings," in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:101 (February 1905).

56. Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund, "An Address, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the World," in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:146 (March 26, 1907).

57. Joseph F. Smith to the State Board of Education, May 5, 1911, in William Peter Miller, *Weber College—1888 to 1933*, Church History Library.

58. Two years after Smith's death, as Church leadership debated closing the Church academies, David O. McKay similarly appealed to the training of Latter-day Saint teachers as a reason to preserve Church schools. Arguing for their continuance, McKay reasoned that if the Church normal schools were

President Smith's support of public education may have also been a practical response to the realization that Church members were flooding its classrooms. Eventually, though the state superintendent of public instruction claimed that "the rapid growth of high schools in the state is a matter for congratulation,"⁵⁹ the expense of the burgeoning public and private educational system worried Joseph F. Smith. Knowing he would be "criticized by professional 'lovers of education' for expressing [his] idea in relation to this matter," Smith voiced his concern about escalating costs to support the new programs in his opening address of the October 1915 general conference. "I hope that I may be pardoned for giving expression to my real conviction with reference to the question of education in the State of Utah," Smith declared. "I believe that we are running education mad. I believe that we are taxing the people more for education than they should be taxed. This is my sentiment."⁶⁰ During his presidency, Smith supported others who founded educational alternatives and issued cautions regarding expansion, setting the stage for the modern Church Educational System.

Finding a way to provide religious instruction for Mormon children attending public schools led to the creation of the most significant educational legacy of President Smith's administration, the formation of the modern released-time seminary program. Initiated by Joseph F. Merrill, a counselor in the Granite Stake presidency, as an alternative for Latter-day Saint students attending Granite High School instead of one of the Church's academies, the program quickly blossomed from one program in 1912 to thirteen by Smith's death in 1918.⁶¹ Seminary programs formed

strengthened, they could produce enough teachers in five years to dominate the teacher supply in the state. James R. Clark, "Church and State Relationships in Education in Utah" (PhD diss., Utah State University, 1958), 283. Church Board of Education minutes summarize the prevailing philosophy: "Now, if by cooperation, recommendation, and instruction sufficient number of capable young men and women of the Church can be induced to graduate from the normal colleges and the BYU, and accept positions as leaders in the various public schools and high schools throughout the state, there should be no reason why these schools should not be permeated by a truly wholesome and upbuilding atmosphere of true morality." Minutes of the General Board of Education, March 3, 1920, in Jerry C. Roundy, *Ricks College: A Struggle for Survival* (Rexburg, Idaho: Ricks College Press, 1976), 99–100.

59. Matheson, *Tenth Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction*, 24.

60. Joseph F. Smith, in *85th Semiannual Conference*, 4.

61. For additional information on Joseph F. Merrill's role in the founding of the seminary program, see Casey Paul Griffiths, "Joseph F. Merrill and the

during his presidency include Granite (1912), Box Elder (1915), Mt. Pleasant (1916), American Fork (1917), Lehi (1917), Huntington (1918), Mesa, Arizona (1918), Sandy (1918), Blanding (1918), Roosevelt (1918), Richfield (1918), Pleasant Grove (1918), and Heber (1918). Enrollment jumped from 70 students the first year to 1,528 students in 1918.⁶² At the same time, high school enrollment at Church academies remained steady, ranging between 4,000 and 5,000 students from 1912 to 1918.⁶³ While Smith did not personally effect these changes, as chair of the Church Board of Education, he oversaw those who did.

Spiritual and Temporal Concerns within Church Education

While the seminary program flourished, Church academies caused problems for President Smith during his presidency. In particular, controversial teachings relating to evolution and biblical interpretation shaped Smith's educational legacy. Reflecting on one of the most divisive issues of the era, in 1909 President Smith and his First Presidency published a statement entitled "The Origin of Man." The document, originally drafted by Apostle Orson F. Whitney, was revised and approved by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.⁶⁴ The following year, one of his biographers wrote, "President Smith's conservative approach toward education collided with the competing desires of some of the faculty and students on the Provo campus"⁶⁵ of Brigham Young University, which had become a university in 1903. Perpetuating modernist critiques on the authenticity of the Bible and the origin of man, three BYU professors—Ralph Chamberlin, Joseph Peterson, and Henry Peterson—created a stir by publicly advocating their positions on

Transformation of Church Education," in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, ed. David J. Whittaker and Arnold K. Garr (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 377–402; see also Casey Paul Griffiths, "Joseph F. Merrill and the 1930–1931 LDS Church Education Crisis," *BYU Studies* 49, no. 1 (2010): 93–97.

62. Historical Resource File, 1891–1989, Church Educational System (1970–), Church History Library. For a brief history of the first seminary and its teacher, Thomas J. Yates, see Casey Paul Griffiths, "The First Seminary Teacher," *Religious Educator* 9, no. 3 (2008): 115–30.

63. Seminary and Institute Statistical Reports, 1919–53, Unified Church School System (1953–70), Church History Library.

64. Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 136.

65. Gibbons, *Joseph F. Smith*, 254–55.

evolution and higher criticism. Word of their teachings quickly spread to Salt Lake, where Superintendent of Church Schools Horace H. Cummings was charged to investigate. In February 1911, Cummings reported to the Church Board of Education that “from an educational standpoint,” the three professors were “perhaps the strongest men in the institution, and they have a potent influence with the students, thus making their theological teachings the more dangerous to the faith of the students.”⁶⁶ University President George H. Brimhall sadly concluded, “The only thing that he could see to do was to get rid of these teachers.”⁶⁷ Following additional investigation, Ralph Chamberlin and Joseph Peterson voluntarily left the university; Henry Peterson was dismissed.⁶⁸

President Smith’s educational legacy is connected to his response to the modernism controversy. The flare-up elicited several comments by Smith and ultimately a warning regarding the dangers false educational ideas could pose. In April 1911, he issued editorials in both the *Juvenile Instructor* and the *Improvement Era*, where he explained the Church’s actions. Smith acknowledged that “recently there was some trouble . . . in one of the leading Church schools—the training college of the Brigham Young University—where three of the professors advanced certain theories on evolution as applied to the origin of man, and certain opinions on ‘higher criticisms,’ as conclusive and demonstrated truths.” He explained the investigation that ensued and the conclusion that “teachers in a Church school . . . could not be given opportunity to inculcate theories that were out of harmony with the recognized doctrines of the Church.” Outlining the Church’s position, Smith reflected his own practical educational background: “There are so many demonstrated practical material truths, so many spiritual certainties, with which the youth of Zion should become familiar, that it appears a waste of time and means, and

66. For the full text of Cummings’s report, see Ernest L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, 4 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 1:597–601. See also Bergera and Priddis, *House of Faith*, 139.

67. General Board Minutes, February 3, 1911, in Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 1:424.

68. 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), 178. For additional information about the modernism controversy at BYU, see Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 1:412–33; Woodger and Groberg, *From the Muddy River to the Ivory Tower*, 170–89; Bergera and Priddis, *House of Faith*, 134–48.

detrimental to faith and religion to enter too extensively into the unemonstrated theories of men.”⁶⁹

At the Church’s general conference the same month, President Smith defended sources of eternal truth: “I believe that the Latter-day Saints, and especially the leading men in Israel, have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the principles of the gospel that they know the truth, and they are made free by its possession—free from sin, free from error, free from darkness, from the traditions of men, from vain philosophy, and from the untried, unproven theories of scientists, that need demonstration beyond the possibility of a doubt.” Reflecting the supremacy he placed on revealed truth and the skepticism he shared for unproven ideas, Smith continued: “We have had science and philosophy through all the ages, and they have undergone change after change. Scarcely a century has passed but they have introduced new theories of science and of philosophy that supersede the old traditions and the old faith and the old doctrines entertained by philosophers and scientists. These things may undergo continuous changes, but the word of God is always true, is always right.”⁷⁰ He later warned of the influence of false ideas in a caution to the Church, “There are at least three dangers that threaten the Church within, and the authorities need to awaken to the fact that the people should be warned unceasingly against them. As I see these, they are flattery of prominent men in the world, false educational ideas, and sexual impurity.”⁷¹ President Smith’s response to the modernism controversy at Brigham Young University reflects his philosophy of truth and shaped his direction of Church education.

Concerns about teaching at Church schools were coupled with rising expenditures. Financial pressures had long plagued the Church and, by association, the Church school system. The challenges dogged the Church’s flagship school, the Brigham Young Academy, from its founding in 1875 through the end of the nineteenth century, and doomed most of its sister schools.⁷² Of the nearly thirty academies begun Churchwide

69. Joseph F. Smith, “Theory and Divine Revelation,” *Improvement Era* 14 (April 1911): 548–51; see also Joseph F. Smith, “Philosophy and Church Schools,” *Juvenile Instructor* 46 (April 1911): 208–9.

70. Joseph F. Smith, in *81st Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1911), 7–8.

71. Joseph F. Smith, “Three Threatening Dangers,” *Improvement Era* 17 (March 1914): 476–77.

72. For a discussion of the fiscal challenges facing Brigham Young Academy during the late nineteenth century, see Jed L. Woodworth, “Refusing to Die:

between 1888 and 1895, less than half survived the decade, a casualty of the economic panic of 1893 and the financial distress caused by the antipolygamy crusade.⁷³ Smith inherited these financial difficulties as he moved into his own presidency and struggled with them the entirety of his tenure.⁷⁴ In a 1909 letter to Brigham Young College in Logan, he voiced his concern about escalating expenses at Church schools: “Within less than a decade the annual appropriation for maintaining the Church schools has increased almost ten fold, so rapid has been the growth of the schools. This is altogether out of proportion to the increase of the revenues of the Church; a ratio that cannot longer be maintained.”⁷⁵ In the April 1916 general conference, he further lamented Church school costs. Summarizing Church expenditures for the fifteen-year period from 1901 to 1915, he reported spending \$3,714,455 for schools, the largest expenditure in the entire Church budget for the time period. By comparison, \$3,279,900 had been spent through all Church channels aiding the poor during the same era. Slightly over \$2,000,000 was spent building meetinghouses and only \$1,169,499 was spent on maintenance and repair of temples.⁷⁶ Of concern to President Smith, Church schools were receiving the lion’s share of the faith’s funds and requesting more at an alarming rate.

Financial Crisis at Brigham Young Academy, 1877–1897,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999), 71–123.

73. Berrett and Burton, *Readings in LDS Church History* 3:337; Esplin and Garr, “Church Academies,” 126–27.

74. Describing an era he called the “graveyard of church business ventures,” which claimed businesses such as the Provo Woolen Mills, Consolidated Wagon and Machine, and the Saltair Beach Company, Thomas Alexander summarized, “In many ways, the economic challenges that the church faced during these three decades [1900–1930] could not have come at a worse time. Intent upon shifting from the nineteenth century, when it had been a prime mover in intermountain economic development, to the twentieth century, where the spiritual side of religion received greatest emphasis, the church was caught in pressures which were impossible to control and difficult to manage. . . . Though some enterprises served as harbingers of a brighter future, the period from 1900 through 1930 was not a pleasant time for the temporal kingdom.” Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 87, 91–92.

75. Minutes of the General Church Board of Education, June 30, 1909, citing a May 20, 1909, communication, “To the President and Members of the Board of Trustees of the B. Y. College, Logan, Utah,” in Centennial History Project Papers, Perry Special Collections.

76. Joseph F. Smith, in *86th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1916), 7.

Church Board of Education minutes for April 28, 1915, reflect Smith's growing apprehension regarding educational expenses. Responding to Weber Academy's request for funding to add a normal course, the minutes record:

President Smith explained to the brethren the condition of the Church finances and clearly pointed out that the trustee-in-trust is in no position at present to promise an increase of funds for educational purposes. While he was heartily in favor of the idea of our turning attention to the making of teachers and would be very glad if some of the smaller schools could be turned into public high schools, to have the means thus saved expended for normal work, he did not see how he could undertake at present to branch out and incur more expense; we should simply have to trim our educational sails to the financial winds.⁷⁷

While the minutes report President Smith's concern, they also hint at his solution. By transforming smaller schools into public high schools and focusing on teacher training in the remaining institutions, President Smith saw a way out of the fiscal dilemma Church schools presented.⁷⁸ His successor, President Heber J. Grant, augmented these

77. General Church Board of Education minutes, April 28, 1915, in William Peter Miller, *Weber College—1888 to 1933*, Church History Library.

78. Minutes of the Church Board of Education, June 30, 1909, reflect support for limiting the number of Church schools and emphasizing teacher training:

“This recommendation was also unanimously adopted by the General Board of Education.

“It is not the feeling of either of the committees, nor is it thought a wise policy by this Board to use from the limited money available the large sums that would be needed in giving college education to the comparatively few who are able to take it; but it is thought that this portion of the tithes of the people should be spent in making many Latter-day Saints of our children in high schools rather than a comparative few in colleges.

“Though desirable, the Church cannot maintain a complete system of schools from the primary grade to the college work and has, therefore, concentrated its efforts in maintaining a system of high schools to best meet the needs of the young people.

“Nevertheless, the need for teachers, not only for our own schools, but for the many other organizations of the Church, make it necessary to have a teachers' college; but neither the money at our disposal nor the number of college students in the Church at present who desire to become teachers, is sufficient to warrant maintaining properly more than one such college.

“Therefore the General Board of Education has decided to discontinue all college work in the Church schools except what is really necessary to prepare

solutions with religious instruction through the seminary system that was in its infancy during Smith's administration. Grant concluded the educational transformation begun by Joseph F. Smith by closing or transferring to the state nearly all of the Church academies during the 1920s and early 1930s, replacing them with an expanded seminary and institute program.⁷⁹

Summary and Conclusion

The last Church President to have known Joseph Smith personally, President Joseph F. Smith was a transitional figure, leading the faith from its pioneer founding into its modern era, turning Church attention beyond the Intermountain West.⁸⁰ His legacy continues to impact Church teachings and practice today. Smith personifies the shifts in Mormonism that occurred in his era. His early life and teachings reflect those of an orphaned son with limited educational opportunity. He represented

teachers; and we feel that when the people understand this matter they will see the wisdom of the decision and feel satisfied with it.

"We would be pleased if you would furnish copies of this communication to all the Presidents of Stakes included in the Brigham Young College district that it may be read at their conferences or priesthood meetings or ward meetings.

"Your brethren and fellow laborers in the gospel,

"The General Church Board of Education,

"Joseph F. Smith, President."

Minutes of the General Church Board of Education, June 30, 1909, citing a May 20, 1909 communication, "To the President and Members of the Board of Trustees of the B. Y. College, Logan, Utah," in Centennial History Project Papers, Perry Special Collections.

79. While there was not complete agreement regarding their discontinuance, of the more than thirty Church academies, only four (Brigham Young University, Ricks College, LDS Business College, and the Juarez Academy) survived as Church-sponsored institutions after 1933. Meanwhile, seminary enrollment grew exponentially from nearly three thousand students in 1920 to thirty-four thousand students in 1933. For additional information regarding the discontinuance of Church academies and the growth of the seminary and institute program, see Scott C. Esplin, "Education in Transition: Church and State Relationships in Utah Education, 1888–1933" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 2006).

80. During his administration, the first temple outside the continental United States (Laie, Hawaii) and the first temple outside the United States itself (Cardston, Alberta, Canada) were announced. Historically, he also guided Church efforts in acquiring and developing significant historic sites, including the Carthage Jail, the Joseph Smith Sr. farm, the Sacred Grove, the Joseph Smith birthplace, and the Hill Cumorah.

the tension present in late-nineteenth-century Mormonism as it fought secular influences to preserve the isolationist mentality that had helped it settle the West. This paradigm “necessitated the integration of religion, politics, society, and the economy into a single non-pluralistic community,” something that, by Smith’s later life, “was simply unacceptable to Victorian America.” During his presidency, Smith and his faith transitioned themselves, saving “essential characteristics of their religious tradition” to “provide sufficient political stability to preserve the interests of the church, and allow them to live in peace with other Americans.”⁸¹ Financial expediency, the easing of the Mormon-Gentile conflict, and the genesis of supplementary religious education paved the way for educational change. As demonstrated in 1905 by his championing of public education and the encouragement that it “be kept entirely separate and apart” from religious instruction,⁸² Smith and the Church had accepted “the practical limits of religious life in America.”⁸³

This positioning of Church education within a larger American framework was one of President Joseph F. Smith’s most important legacies. Even though he was the least formally educated Church President of the twentieth century, his keen interest in education marked the faith’s educational trajectory for the century. While others led in its creation, he presided over the formation of the Church’s seminary program, laying the groundwork for the transition to supplementary religious education. Nurtured at his own mother’s knee, he encouraged the beginnings of the modern Family Home Evening program, counseling parents to “gather their boys and girls about them in the home and teach them the word of the Lord.”⁸⁴ His fiscal restraint reined in excess, curtailing Church academy growth. Educationally, he placed a primacy on spiritual learning, and his teachings continue to influence our understanding

81. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 14.

82. Smith, Winder, and Lund, “Religion Classes and School Buildings,” 302.

83. Of this era, historians Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton observed, “A half-century and more of heated confrontation with the U.S. government had taught Latter-day Saints the practical limits of religious life in America. By the end of World War I, if not before, the Mormons were more American than most Americans.” Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 184.

84. Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, and Charles W. Penrose, “Home Evening Program Inaugurated,” in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:338 (April 27, 1915).

of eternal things. Of his teachings, President Harold B. Lee observed, “When I want to seek for a more clear definition of doctrinal subjects, I have usually turned to the writings and sermons of President Joseph F. Smith.”⁸⁵ Indeed, much of the doctrinal understanding and educational practice of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today is an outgrowth of the life and ministry of Joseph F. Smith.

Scott C. Esplin (who can be reached via email at byustudies@byu.edu) is Associate Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. He specializes in twentieth-century Church history and has published articles and book chapters on Church historic sites and the history of Church education, including the LDS academy system and international church schools. His publications on the educational history of the Church have appeared in *Journal of Mormon History*, *Utah Historical Quarterly*, and *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History*.

85. Harold B. Lee, “May the Kingdom of God Go Forth,” *Ensign* 3 (January 1973): 24.