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Brigham Young's Newly Located February 1874 Revelation

Christopher James Blythe

Brigham Young dictated few dialogic revelations (that is, revelations in the voice of the Lord) while he was prophet, seer, and revelator of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Only one of the revelations found in the 138 sections of the Doctrine and Covenants was received under his ministry. Young was often willing to share visions, dreams, and impressions, but he hesitated to place these types of revelations in the language of the Lord, and when he did so verbally, he was even more hesitant to place them in writing.

With this in mind, you can imagine my excitement when I recently stumbled upon a fascinating document titled “The word of the Lord that was reveal[e]d to his People, by his servant the Prophet sear and Reverlator, President Brigham Young, Feb[r]uary 1874[.]” The document had been drafted by Thomas Christmas Haddon (1815–99) and included a discourse Young had delivered in St. George, Utah, just over a week before he officially organized the communitarian united order there. The discourse began with the recital of a revelation:

The word of the Lord that was reveal[e]d to his People, by his servant the Prophet sear and Reverlator, President Brigham Young, Feb[r]uary 1874[.] He speak unto the people saying, Thus saith the Lord it is my will that this people should enter into A Holy united order, by concentrating their labour, there time, and their means together for the interest of my Kingdom, and for their own mutual benefit, And I the Lord will bless them abundantly, they shall get along with less labour, and less means, And become a great deal richer, and happyer, and be enabled to do a great deal more good, And if not the curse of the Lord will be upon

them, for we are got as far as we can get in our present position, for the time is fully come that we should enter into this Holy Order, the Lord is saying come, and Holy angles are saying come, and all good men are saying come, and I say come let us enter into this Holy Order, that the Kingdom of Heaven may continue to advance, till it fill the whole earth with the knowledge and love of God, Hear this oh Israil, I tell you the Kingdom of God cannot advance one step further until we enter into this Holy Order.¹

Only one other historical reference to this discourse is known, but it does not include the dialogic text of the revelation; it simply confirms the invitation Young made after the revelation: “He [Young] said, among other things, in referring to the Order of Enoch, ‘The Father says Come; the Son says Come; the Spirit and the Bride say Come; the servants of God say Come, enter into this Holy Order.’”²

It is from this other source, the Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, that we know the revelation and discourse were delivered on February 1, 1874, in St. George. It makes sense that Young would have believed himself the recipient of a divine revelation at this time. It was the beginning of a new era in his ministry in which he would emphasize the restoration of communal living among the Saints. Decades earlier, the Saints had practiced a form of communal living in Missouri but had since largely stopped following the “law of consecration.” St. George was only the first of numerous united orders Young would establish throughout Utah.³

We know little about this revelation or the manner in which it was dictated. Had Brigham Young dictated or received the revelation previously, before reading or reciting it before the congregation, or was it dictated spontaneously at the meeting? Did Haddon record Young’s words at the time, or did he reconstruct the words of the revelation at a later time? We can narrow the timing of when Haddon recorded this particular text to sometime between February 1875 and April 1877, one to two years after the revelation had been delivered (although he may

1. Thomas C. Haddon, writings, circa 1882, MS 3216, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as CHL). The dating of this particular document is almost certainly earlier than 1882, as noted below.

2. Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, c. 1903–6, p. 10, MS 318, CHL.

3. See Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation among the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 155–75.

have drawn on earlier, more contemporary notes).⁴ Even if Haddon's report of Young's words are verbatim, it is notable that Young did not himself distribute the revelation in a written form. It was not recorded in an official capacity, and there is no evidence that the revelation was intended to be canonized.

In this way, the February 1, 1874, revelation is similar to a revelation Young dictated to Reuben Miller on January 31, 1846. By that time, Miller had come to believe James J. Strang was the successor of Joseph Smith, in part because James J. Strang had dictated a revelation he claimed to be from the Lord, while Brigham Young had not. In response, Young dictated a revelation of his own: "thus saith the Lord unto Reuben Miller through Brigham Young—that Strang is a wicked & corrupt man & that his revelations are as false as he is—therefore turn away from his folly—and never let it be said of Reuben Miller, that he ever was led away & entangled by such nonsense."⁵

Like Reuben Miller, many Latter-day Saints were alarmed that Young recorded and presented so few new revelations to the Saints. Meanwhile, other claimants to Joseph Smith's position as leader and prophet seemed to have no problems producing new revelations and new scripture. Joseph Smith had, after all, dictated an extensive body of revelations, and many expected revelations to continue coming through the Church's new leader. Young frequently assured the Saints that he was able to write revelations but gave two principal reasons for why he did not do so.

First, he argued that the Saints had not lived up to the revelations that Joseph Smith had already revealed. In April 1852, Young stated:

It has been observed that the people want revelation. This is revelation; and were it written, it would then be written revelation, as truly as the revelations which are contained in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. I could give you revelation about going to California, for I know the mind of the Lord upon this matter. I could give you revelation upon the subject of

4. Haddon seems to have drafted the text of this discourse with his accompanying reflections at least a year after Young's February discourse; Haddon noted that after the discourse, General Authorities preached on this subject "for the space of ten or twelve month[s]." He also noted that at the time of his writing, "we [had] nearly finished the temple," which was dedicated on April 6, 1877. The manuscript in which this text has been (presumably) copied is a collection of short essays penned by Haddon at different times. Haddon, writings.

5. Brigham Young, Journal, January 31, 1846, CR 1234 1, Brigham Young Office Files, CHL.

paying your Tithing and building a temple to the name of the Lord; for the light is in me. I could put these revelations as straight to the line of truth in writing as any revelation you ever read. I could write the mind of the Lord, and you could put it in your pockets. But before we desire more written revelation, let us fulfil the revelations that are already written, and which we have scarcely begun to fulfil.⁶

Second, Young believed that the Saints were more accountable when a revelation was framed in the voice of deity. On December 29, 1867, Young explained, “When revelation is given to any people, they must walk according to it, or suffer the penalty which is the punishment of disobedience; but when the word is, ‘will you do thus and so?’ ‘It is the mind and will of God that you perform such and such a duty;’ the consequences of disobedience are not so dreadful, as they would be if the word of the Lord were to be written under the declaration, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’”⁷

Brigham Young apparently had both these reasons in mind when he delivered a dialogic revelation in August of 1874—only six months after his February revelation in St. George—when speaking to the Saints already organized into a united order in Lehi. He explained that the united order “is no new revelation. . . . we have the commandments that have been from the beginning.” He further instructed:

[Those] who wish to have new revelation they will please to accommodate themselves and call this a new revelation. On this occasion I will not repeat anything particular in respect to the language of revelation, further than to say: Thus saith the Lord unto my servant Brigham, Call ye, call ye, upon the inhabitants of Zion, to organize themselves in the Order of Enoch, in the New and Everlasting Covenant, according to the Order of Heaven, for the furtherance of my kingdom upon the earth, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the salvation of the living and the dead. You can accommodate yourselves by calling this a new revelation, if you choose; it is no new revelation, but it is the express word and will of God to this people.⁸

This later statement reveals that Young had considered the possibility of a revelation on the united order. But unlike the February meeting in which he delivered the other revelation on the united order, it seems that

6. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 6:319 (April 1852).

7. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 12:127–28 (December 29, 1867).

8. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:154 (August 1874).

on this occasion, Young thought better of forming the charge to live the united order as a revelation to the people. Rather, the statement following “Thus saith the Lord” was directed to Brigham himself. Ultimately, regardless of how he framed his comments in February or August of 1874, he would most consistently turn to the already established canon of revelations from Joseph Smith when he urged the Saints to live the united order. Haddon’s recording of this discourse and its inclusion of a dialogic revelation allows us to see how Young may have initially contemplated delivering his directions to the Saints as a commandment from the Lord. As Young said on earlier occasions, it was always in his power to present the Saints with revelations, and this seems to have been a rare occasion when he actually did so.

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