
James B. Allen
Personal Faith and Public Policy: Some Timely Observations on the League of Nations Controversy in Utah*

James B. Allen**

For nearly twenty years as a teacher either in the seminaries and institutes of the Church or at Brigham Young University, I have frequently been called upon to counsel with young students as well as adults on various matters. For many the problem of making political decisions is one which seems to cause a great deal of frustration. Constantly I have been asked the question, where does the Church stand on this or that political issue? Repeatedly I have been confronted with statements to the effect that this or that person has said that Latter-day Saints must, if they understand the Gospel, take such and such a stand on such and such an issue. I have been touched by students who become confused and frustrated when they hear leaders and teachers whom they respect cite the scriptures and quote the prophets on opposite sides of the same questions. What role, they seem to be asking, does my faith have in helping me make political decisions? Is it a sign that I don't understand the Gospel if my attitude on some public policy is different from that of a Church leader, or leaders? For most of us here, such questions are probably elementary, for we have solved them long ago. For me, the constant contact with students who still have such questions has led me to search the history of the Church for precedents and

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insights which, in proper perspective, can help young people achieve a personal balance in their quest for a solution to the problem of personal faith and public policy.¹

The League of Nations controversy in Utah presents just such an opportunity. All the questions are raised: American isolationism or world cooperation? Should the Church take a stand on political issues? Should a Church official speak to problems of national policy? Can he turn to the scriptures for support of his position? Where does the lay member find himself when he disagrees with his ecclesiastical leaders on political issues?

Actually a study of this old controversy does not answer any of these questions. But it does demonstrate with one intensely moving incident of fifty-four years ago that men of devout loyalty to the Church, who understand and live the basic principles of the gospel, and who are men of sincere good will toward each other, can and often do disagree on public policy, even to the extent of relating their views on that policy to their religious views. And yet at the same time, they display no public animosity, hostility, or lack of genuine respect toward those with whom they disagree, and see no reason to question the faith or integrity of their opponents. One might even infer from this and similar incidents that part of the strength of Mormonism is its ability to attract and hold tough-minded men of different political persuasion, all involved in the building of the Kingdom. Imaginative, strong-willed, successful leaders are seldom if ever like-minded on every topic, and, a sign of true greatness in such men is that they can disagree, even in public, on some issues and yet do it in such a spirit that their unity on matters that genuinely affect the faith is not inhibited.

Let's review the political drama of 1919, letting the chips fall where they may as I try to tell as accurately as possible what happened as Church members at all levels wrestled with the perplexities of relating personal faith to public policy.

The drama of that year included many sub-plots and characters, all tightly interwoven. Yet we must at the outset separate at least some of them in order to fully appreciate the com-

¹Similar concerns led me to write an earlier article on Mormon attitudes toward presidential elections. See "The American Presidency and the Mormons," The Ensign (October 1962).
plexity of the story and the impact one element could have upon the other.

In the background, but nevertheless clearly visible throughout the controversy, was Woodrow Wilson, Democratic President of the United States, whose idealistic plans for permanent world peace had actually set the stage for the impending drama in Utah. At the end of the Great World War, Wilson went personally to the peace conference in Paris and was able, through much persuasion and compromise, to make his proposed League of Nations an integral part of the peace treaty. At home, however, the battle for ratification of the treaty in the Senate became intensely partisan. Most Republican Senators tended to favor American entry into the League only if certain reservations or amendments were agreed to which they believed were necessary to protect American sovereignty. Leader of this group was Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts. Other Republicans were known as “irreconcilables” because they refused to endorse the League under any circumstances whatsoever. The Democrats, on the other hand, generally supported Wilson, although some of them would have agreed to the Lodge reservations if it were necessary to save the League at all. Wilson became irreconcilable in his own way by refusing to accept any major reservations, and in a direct challenge to the powerful Republican leadership in the Senate, he took his case directly to the American people. The controversy set off a series of debates throughout the country, but hardly any of them more intense, partisan, or emotional than that which took place in Utah. In the end, Wilson’s own followers defeated the League when, after the Senate accepted the Lodge reservations, Wilson instructed them to vote against it.²

The main events in the present plot took place among the Latter-day Saints in Utah, with a few dramatic scenes in Washington, D.C. There were many characters in the drama; the line-up was indeed impressive. Some who played the most active roles were these:

Senator Reed Smoot, the Mormon Apostle who had won nation-wide publicity in 1904-1906 when a long and bitter investigation was carried out by the Senate before it would ac-

cept him as a colleague in that august body, but who now was gaining wide respect not only within the Republican Party but among all his Senate colleagues. A man of unquestioned integrity, he displayed an intense nationalism that led him to question anything, including the League of Nations, that would tend to undermine the total independence of America. From the tone of some of his statements, it would appear that Smoot was almost an irreconcilable, but after much soul-searching he joined forces with Senator Lodge as a "reservationist," and refused to endorse the League of Nations without the proposed amendments.

Although Smoot made no speeches in the Senate on the League and was not known in public as a leader of the reservationists, he often met privately with Lodge and others to help plan strategy to be followed by the reservationist Senators. As a confidante of Lodge, he even acted on one occasion as a go-between when Lodge wanted someone to attempt to persuade former President William Howard Taft that the League, which Taft supported, would never be ratified without the reservations. Smoot's intense concern with the League is seen in the fact that throughout the debates of 1919 and early 1920 he regularly recorded in his diary candid comments on what was happening. In addition, he assiduously collected all the speeches made in the Senate on the treaty and the League and had them bound into a book that "contained over 3000 pages, about 2100 words to the page making a book of about 6,300,000 words."³

Complicating Smoot's role was the fact that he would stand for re-election in 1920 and he realized that generally the people of Utah supported the League of Nations. After repeated warnings from friend and foe alike as to the political implications of his stand, he boldly made his feelings known in the faith that by the time of the election the people of Utah would

³For the best political analysis of Reed Smoot, see Milton R. Merrill, "Reed Smoot, Apostle in Politics," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1950. See especially the sections on "Reed Smoot—American," and "The League of Nations." Unfortunately, at the time Merrill wrote his dissertation the Smoot diaries were not available to him. Additional insight into Smoot's role in the League controversy has been gained as a result of examining the diaries.

³Reed Smoot Diaries. Handwritten manuscript, Brigham Young University Library, 1 October 1919. See also entries for 6 August, 31 August, 6 November, and 18 November.

³Ibid., 5 February 1920. On this date "movie men" (apparently news- men) took pictures of Smoot with the book.
either have been persuaded to his view or the issue would no longer be important. In this he was correct.

Charles W. Nibley, Presiding Bishop of the Mormon Church. Nibley was a close friend of Smoot and was even more intensely opposed to the League than was the Senator. He was, in fact, an "irreconcilable" in attitude. He corresponded frequently with Smoot, met with him in Washington to plan anti-League strategy, and generally became one of the most outspoken voices in Utah against the League. In addition, Bishop Nibley was avidly working for the re-election of Smoot, and used the means at his disposal to achieve that end.

B. H. Roberts, a member of the First Council of the Seventy, and a member of the Democratic Party. He was as much convinced that the Democratic Party came closest to reflecting the will of God as Smoot was that Republicanism, Americanism, and Mormonism were almost inseparable. Roberts had not been as fortunate as Smoot in his quest for a seat in Congress. After being elected to the House of Representatives in 1898, he was refused his seat by that body because he had been a practicing polygamist. In 1919 Roberts became the most active proponent of the League of Nations among the leadership of the Church.

The intensity of Nibley's efforts to keep Smoot in the Senate is illustrated by two interesting incidents. In 1906 Nibley had some reservations about whether Smoot should continue in the Senate. When he expressed these feelings to Joseph F. Smith, the President of the Church brought his fist down emphatically and replied: "If I have ever had the inspiration of the Spirit of the Lord given to me forcefully and clearly it has been on this one point concerning Reed Smoot, and that is, instead of his being retired, he should be continued in the United States Senate." This settled the matter for Nibley, who recalled in 1918: "I withdrew my opposition and from that hour to this . . . I have loyally and faithfully supported Senator Smoot." Charles W. Nibley, Reminiscences (Salt Lake City: Published by His Family, 1934), pp. 125-126. In 1920 Nibley was still loyal and faithful to Smoot. On 26 February he wrote to the President of the Uintah Stake, Don B. Colton, with regard to becoming Republican party chairman in Utah. Wrote Nibley, in part: "Dear Brother Colton: Confirming my conversation with you of this evening over the phone, I am very glad to know that you are willing to accept the job.

President Grant said that they had made a rule a long while ago that stake presidents should as a rule keep out of politics as much as possible, but in this case he was willing. he said, to let you go ahead and do anything you could to try and re-elect Senator Smoot . . . .

"I will do everything I can to back you up with men and means. We must win. There is no such word as fail this time." Charles W. Nibley to Don B. Colton, 26 February 1920. Charles W. Nibley papers, Church Archives, Box 6.
Joseph Fielding Smith, son of the late President of the Church, Joseph F. Smith, and himself a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, who would become the President of the Church in 1970. Other than Reed Smoot, Elder Smith and David O. McKay were the only Apostles who stood in opposition to the League. Elder Smith apparently drew especially close to Smoot during this emotional controversy as he encouraged him through the mails, kept him informed of what was going on among the leadership of the Church, and warned him of possible consequences of a strong, unwavering stand.

George F. Richards, member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who, at the time of the debate, returned from England where he had been presiding over the European Mission. Probably as a result of that mission he was especially conscious of the ravages of war and sympathetic to the yearnings of the European people for the final end of such destruction. Equally convinced with Smoot that God guided the destiny of America, he nevertheless interpreted the direction of that guidance differently. He declared on July 27 in a quarterly conference of the Pioneer Stake:

You know something of the history of our forefathers, how they fought for their liberty, and how the constitution of the United States was framed. The Lord has told us by direct revelation that He had a hand in that matter; that He raised up the men who framed the constitution of the United States; that He inspired them; and we believe firmly that the Lord led the Pilgrim fathers to this land.

I believe that the president of the United States was raised up of the Lord. I believe that the Lord has been with him. He is regarded in Europe as one of the greatest men—a man with one of the greatest minds in the world—Woodrow Wilson . . . . It may be possible that amendments [to the League covenants] may be necessary. Scarcely any great movement has been so perfect in its inception that no amendments were necessary later, and I believe that the league of nations is inspired of God.

Reed Smoot, it would be safe to say, had a hard time believing that Woodrow Wilson was inspired to do anything.

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8Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., to Reed Smoot, 13 September 1919, as quoted in Merrill, "Reed Smoot," p. 321.
9Smith even warned Smoot that many of the brethren were inclined to censure him for his use of Mormon scriptures in opposition to the League.
10Salt Lake Tribune, 28 July 1919. A major portion of Richards' address was devoted to the League.
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In fact, as the controversy heated up in November, and as more was said about the League being the product of inspiration, he wrote in an impassioned letter to George H. Brimhall:

I cannot help feeling that we have made a mistake in thinking that President Wilson has been directed and inspired of God. . . . I think that if the Lord had anything to do with the League of Nations, it was during the last election, when the Senate of the United States was changed from Democratic to Republican.\(^1\)

Heber J. Grant, who had become President of the Church in 1918, had served the Democratic party faithfully in all his early political activities and in this debate was fully and openly on the side of Wilson and the League of Nations.

J. Reuben Clark, Jr., a prominent international lawyer, former member of the judge advocate general's office in the United States Army, and author of an important reference work on the German peace treaty that was being used by the United State Senate. As B. H. Roberts became a sort of traveling spokesman in favor of the League, Clark played the same role in opposition. Highly respected as a scholar, Clark was probably better informed on all matters related to the League, as well as the history of American international relations, than any of the other characters in the drama of 1919.\(^2\)

C. N. Lund, Jr., faithful Mormon, editor of a newspaper in Mt. Pleasant, Utah, and emotionally committed to the League of Nations. He set off a chain reaction of letters and discussions when he wrote to Senator Smoot not only complaining of his stand on the League of Nations, but also questioning how Smoot could refuse to believe that the League was inspired. Reflecting the spirit of what was going on throughout Utah, Lund wrote:

Last Sunday evening I attended a meeting, one of many Church meetings that I have attended where the league has been favorably discussed. The elder who prayed asked God to give the president and the senators sufficient wisdom to adopt this plan as one of the greatest steps forward in the

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\(^1\)Reed Smoot to George H. Brimhall, 17 November 1919. George H. Brimhall papers, Brigham Young University Library.

great upward march of mankind, and as a literal carrying out of the doctrines of the Savior of the world. ... Similar prayers and sermons have been spoken in many a church throughout the length and breadth of the whole United States. I feel justified that the head of our own church, the apostles and leaders and the lay members, almost as a unit, are for this great proposition.

Lund reminded the Senator that, as a high churchman, he believed that God had inspired Christopher Columbus, the Mayflower pilgrims, the writers of the Declaration of Independence, the framers of the Constitution, and Abraham Lincoln. He then went on to inquire:

Now, let me ask, believing so, why you do not see the hand of Providence in this mighty effort in our own day and time, to bring about peace to a war-weary world? Why can you not see that the same God who inspired Washington and Jefferson and Lincoln does also inspire Woodrow Wilson ... in this the greatest step ever contemplated by the human race? 

Smoot sent a long reply to Lund in which some of the overriding themes of our plot were beautifully developed. Smoot's letter, though obviously filled with an emotional attachment to his principles, was exemplary in its lack of emotional wandering, in its solid reasoning, and in the spirit of good will with which the Senator replied to his critic. And it was this spirit of good will which many Church leaders expressed, in spite of their differences, that is the real message of the story we are attempting to unfold. 

Smoot wrote in part:

Dear Friend Lund:

... I want you to know that I appreciate your letter, as I do letters from any of my constituents, expressing their views on public questions.

I think I understand the spirit and meaning of your letter, and why it was written. Your surroundings, and no doubt your first impression that the League of Nations would insure

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13The letter was originally written on 15 July 1919, but apparently Lund misplaced his copy. He rewrote it for the sake of publication on 22 August, and it appeared in the Salt Lake Tribune, 24 August 1919.

14The writer recognizes, of course, that there was also some ill-will displayed among prominent people. But if even a few Church leaders on opposite sides of the question were able to maintain both the image and reality of brotherhood toward those with whom they disagreed, the point of this discussion will have been made.
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the future peace of the world, have convinced you that the League is all that was first claimed for it, and as a friend, you concluded that I was letting political bias warp my better judgment. I hope to be able to convince you otherwise.

Then, after a long explanation of the problems in the League covenant, Smoot came to the question about the Church and inspiration:

You ask me if I want to disappoint the Church and the State in my stand on this question. Certainly, I do not, but I have taken an oath of office to defend the Constitution of the United States. I have prayed as much over this question as any member of the Church, and I think I have studied it with more care than any member of the Church. The responsibility of my vote is upon me. If my vote is cast wrongly, I am the one that in the future will be condemned, not the members of the Church at home.

Yes, I do believe that the framers of the Constitution were inspired of God. I do believe that America, this land of ours, was reserved by God for the establishment of truth and liberty thereon, but I am not prepared to admit that President Wilson has been inspired of God in effecting the Covenant of the League of Nations, either in its original or its present form.

And after another long section on the implication of the League, he continued:

You testify to me that, if my stand on the League is not all that it should be before God and man, I will be badly repudiated at the polls. I want you to know that I am doing what I believe is my duty to my Church, to my Country, and to my God. I would not do otherwise if it cost me every vote in the State of Utah.

I am just as sure as I live that, when the present form of the Covenant is explained to the people, they will support me in standing for and demanding the reservations as I have already outlined. I believe in the Americanism of the Utah people, and will be content to abide by their decision in this matter.

I appreciate your friendship, your good will and your counsel, but in this matter, I am following the dictates of my conscience and the best inspiration I can get from my Heavenly Father.

Do not hesitate to write me upon any public question, for I am always glad to hear the views of my constituents, and I am never afraid to let them know just where I stand. 15

15 Reed Smoot to C. N. Lund, Jr., 11 August 1919. Copy filed with Brimhall papers.
The faculty of Brigham Young University, of which there were fewer than sixty that year. Most of them, as well as several faculty wife, signed petitions asking Senator Smoot to change his position on the League.

The Studentbody of Brigham Young University, and especially the young editor of the student yearbook, Nels Anderson, later a distinguished sociologist, who stood squarely for the League without reservations.

George H. Brimhall, President of Brigham Young University and a close personal friend of Reed Smoot. Brimhall favored the League of Nations, and was frank to admit to the senator that he had told a newsman, "I am for the league of nations, first, last, and all the time, and I have implicit confidence in the United States Senate." But in the controversy he turned out to be sort of middleman between the university community on one hand and Smoot on the other. It was a frustrating position to be in, but he played his role well.

On 15 October 1919, the studentbody of Brigham Young University sent a resolution to the Senate urging immediate ratification of the League of Nations, without reservation or amendments. Smoot, an alumnus of BYU and now a member of its board of trustees, quickly acknowledged the resolution, but took the occasion to write a lengthy letter expressing to the students all his reasons for opposing the League in its present form. Said he, in the spirit of good will in which he conducted nearly all his replies to such petitions,

You must know that it would give me great pleasure to comply with the first request ever made of me as a United States Senator by the studentbody of my Alma Mater, but I am compelled, under my oath of office, and as one who is jealous of America's nationality and who fears the future of our Government in that internationality which is the League's highest aim, to advise you that, unless reservations are made to the League of Nations Covenant that will preserve to the American people the Independence and sovereignty of their Government, I will be compelled to vote against the Treaty. I am a nationalist, not an internationalist, and I cannot vote to submerge our nationality with a super-nationality, which would be the result if the League of Nations in its present form were ratified.37

36George H. Brimhall to Reed Smoot, 7 November 1919. Brimhall Papers.
37Reed Smoot to BYU Studentbody, 22 October 1919, in White and Blue, 5 November 1919.
The students at BYU were not reluctant to debate the issue, even though it meant arguing with an apostle of the Church. Smoot had not attempted to use his apostleship to promote his political ends, but the fact remained that he was a Church leader as well as a member of the board of trustees, and some people might have felt that students should be highly circumspect in the nature of their opposition to him. Student reaction, while not by any means disrespectful, was pointed. On November 11 an editorial appeared in the student newspaper which expressed disappointment at the nature of Senator Smoot’s reply, especially in his personal criticism of Wilson. To be more precise, the editorial accused Smoot of distorting the facts, although the students tended toward a little historical distortion themselves when they said, “We are inclined to accept Oscar Strauss’ [a Republican, by the way] prophetic picture of the progress of the ages. A few days ago in New York he declared, “There are and have been four great land marks in human history. The Ten Commandments, Magna Carta, the Constitution of the United States and the League of Nations.’’” The editorial ended with a heartfelt plea in behalf of student veterans:

Let us say that many of us who are supporting the resolution are not mere idealists; some of us have been in the camps and ‘over there’ in the thickest of the fight. We felt ourselves fighting to end the war and to help secure the ultimate peace of the world. Nor did we feel less loyal to our country because of this larger vision.

At the same time, the BYU faculty expressed similar concerns, and likewise petitioned Senator Smoot to support the League. It was an overwhelming show of solidarity on the issue when over fifty of them signed a letter on October 30 which declared “We feel that objections raised against the League of Nations furnish no substantial reasons for amendment or qualifications requiring reconsideration by the peace conference or any of its associated members.” Such a statement was a direct challenge to Smoot’s oft-stated position that he would endorse the League only with the major reservations being proposed.

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18One student who participated actively in public debates, and who favored the League, Ernest L. Wilkinson, later became president of the university and was well known for his political conservatism.
19White and Blue, 1 November 1919.
20Provo Post, 7 November 1919.
At least two members of the faculty wrote in support of Smoot’s position, but the generally overwhelming opposition of the faculty, their wives and the student body, together with the fact that the chairman of the board (President Heber J. Grant) shared their views, led the harassed senator to confide in his diary that if his position brought any embarrassment to the President of the university he would resign as member of the board of trustees.  

In this troubled spirit the senator wrote a magnanimous letter to President Brimhall:

I have received petitions from the faculty of the University, from the student body of the University, and from the wives of the teachers of the University, asking me to vote for the League of Nations without amendments or reservations. This I cannot do, and I have thought that perhaps my position in this regard is very embarrassing to you and may be resented by the school.

It might be that it will be best for me, under the circumstances, to resign as one of the Directors of the University. I assure you that I will gladly do so if it will advance the interests of the University in any way. I never want it said that my position on any question reflects in any way upon that great institution of learning. Kindly let me know your views on this matter, as I will withhold action until I hear from you.

I want you to know that to do so would cause me regret, but I love the institution well enough to make almost any sacrifice for its betterment.

Such an offer could only have been a bombshell to Brimhall, who was struggling valiantly to keep the debate above personalities, and who, in spite of their political differences, maintained a very close relationship with Senator Smoot. In one of the most touching letters written throughout our drama, Brimhall wrote his good friend as follows:

I am well and regretfully aware of the undue pressure that has been put upon you, and have been severely criticized and soundly abused for not “doing my bit” to bend you into a reversal of your convictions as to what is best for our country and the cause of human life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Our petitioners do not know you as I do; for if they ever did know it, they have forgotten that you faced a world with

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21Smoot diaries, 13 November 1919.
22Reed Smoot to George H. Brimhall, 12 November 1919. Brimhall papers.
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a few friends and won out; and when I say a few friends, I mean that in comparison with your enemies your friends in number were few indeed,²³ but among your friends was He, who with one man is always a majority. The trial of today is just another test of Faith, Hope and Charity which belong on both sides of every issue, and those to whom much of these three qualities has been given, from them much is expected.

One of the weaknesses of a democracy is the imperialism of the majority. This was exemplified in the cry at the court of Pilate, and yet democracy, the youngest of earth governments, will grow, make its own mistakes, learn by what it suffers, and wield the sceptre of power as a gift from God.

I cannot entertain the thought of you resigning from the Board of Trustees of our beloved Alma Mater. The institution cannot afford it. Your head, and your heart, and your hand have guided, comforted, and carried the school in days of almost helplessness.

If standing up for you, or refusing to ask you to reverse yourself works against me I shall enjoy the working.

I am quite sure that both faculty and student body would register a vote against your severing your official connection with the school; and you could not get a single vote from either the Presidency of the school or the Board to sanction your retirement, and the secretary of both of these organizations, granted the opportunity, would register a No.²⁴

Needless to say, Smoot did not resign,²⁵ and the general good will between himself and the student body remained, in spite of a few embarrassing incidents connected with the exuberance of the youthful editors of the school publications.²⁶

²³Brimhall is obviously referring to the controversy in the Senate over the seating of Reed Smoot.
²⁴George H. Brimhall to Reed Smoot, 20 November 1919. Brimhall papers.
²⁵In reply to Brimhall’s touching letter, Smoot wrote, in part: “At the time I wrote you in relation to my resignation as one of the trustees of the Brigham Young University, I had no resentment in my heart. I did it because I thought that it was better for the institution to have the faculty a unit with the teachers of the institution and the student body itself. Before taking any steps, however, I felt that it was my duty to write to the man who had given the best that was in him, and nearly his life besides, endeavoring to make the institution what I believe God intended it to be. I shall take no further action in the matter, but hope to have a heart-to-heart talk with you about the future of the institution as soon as I return to Utah.” Smoot to Brimhall, 28 November 1919, Brimhall papers.
²⁶On one occasion a rather snide remark was included in the joke column, for which the student editor quickly apologized (White and Blue, 19 November 1919, and 26 November 1919). On another occasion Nels Anderson, editor of the yearbook, was giving a lantern slide lecture. After showing a slide of Smoot and Senator Lodge, he said that these were not the only opponents of
These, then, were some of the major characters in the drama taking place within the Church in 1919. There were also several themes that made up the complicated plot, three of which I should like to mention. One was the deep reverence for America and its institutions which was felt among both factions in the controversy. The belief that God had inspired the founding fathers and was guiding the destiny of the country was a basic assumption on both sides. They only disagreed on whether such an institution as the League could also be inspired. Next, and certainly a more complex problem, was the ideal of unity in the faith, and, in connection with it, the question of whether or not the scriptures and the teachings of the prophets could form a doctrinal basis for opposition to or support of such political issues. Finally, the spirit of good will in political debate, as opposed to bitter personal attacks on one’s opponent, forms a conflict theme that is just as important as the issue of the League itself.

But time flies and we have hardly finished the prologue to our drama. This has been deliberate, for the real value of studying such an incident in history is not always in recounting the sequence of events. The value might lie, rather, as in this case, with the insight into what these events meant, and could still mean, in the lives of people, and I hope that some positive thoughts on this will have been stimulated by what I have said and will yet say in this discussion.

Briefly, the major plot would run something like this:

*Latter part of 1918 and early 1919:* Woodrow Wilson

the League of Nations, and flashed on the screen a picture of some monkeys. This brought a flurry of giggles from the audience and was eventually reported, probably with some distortion, to Senator Smoot. Brimhall was dismayed at what he considered an inappropriate embarrassment to a member of the board of trustees. The incident soon brought an exchange of letters between Smoot, Anderson, and Brimhall that are in themselves an interesting study in differing human perspectives. Anderson understood that he was being asked to apologize to Smoot. He wrote to Smoot expressing dismay at such a prospect, for he felt he had nothing to apologize for. This was, to him, only in the category of the same kind of political joke that Smoot himself would laugh at, and he claimed nothing but respect toward the senator. Smoot replied that he was not seeking an apology, but hoped that Anderson would see that there was a difference between a political joke against an individual, and something that would seem to be pointed toward an officer of the institution. In a letter to Brimhall, Smoot declared, “Poor Brother Anderson cannot see the difference between ridiculing an individual as such and doing so before the student body of an institution in which the person ridiculed is an officer. I hope someday that he may.” See Brimhall to Smoot, 11 December 1919; Smoot to Brimhall, 29 January 1920; Smoot to Anderson, 29 January 1920. Brimhall papers. Some of these letters contain copies of still others.
goes to Europe, returns with the treaty. The League of Nations is discussed widely throughout the nation. Smoot, from the beginning, mistrusts Wilson, his motives, and his plans.27

February 22 and 23, 1919: As part of the effort to promote the League, the Mountain Congress of the League to Enforce Peace holds a convention in Salt Lake City. Former U.S. President William Howard Taft attends, as does President Heber J. Grant and other prominent Church leaders. A resolution is passed by the 9,000 delegates from Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming, with only one dissenting vote, declaring that the League of Nations is the means of guaranteeing that peace, liberty, and justice will be established and maintained. Among the members of the platform committee that drew up the resolution is George Albert Smith, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. President Heber J. Grant conducts some of the activities of the convention.28

March 4, 1919: Reed Smoot makes his first public stand on the League by signing the so-called "Round Robin" sponsored by Senator Lodge. Three days later he dictates a form letter to send to those whom he knew would deluge him with mail criticizing the Lodge resolution. By the end of the month debates are being carried on regularly throughout Utah, and B. H. Roberts is becoming a major spokesman in favor of the League.

April 10, 1919: Deseret News editorial signed by the First Presidency calls for support of "peace day" and wide discussion of League of Nations.

27As noted earlier, Smoot made constant reference in his diary to the League controversy. The following are representative of his attitude, December 21, 1918: "Lodge made a great speech on the present world situation and terms of peace. It no doubt will have weight with members of the Peace Conference of foreign countries. It punctured some of Wilson's idealisms." March 1, 1919: "Senate took recess to allow the Republicans to hold a conference to agree upon a legislative program. At the conference it was decided by a vote of 15 to 14 not to prevent the passage of the Bond Bill. Some very pointed remarks against Wilson were made and the 14 in favor of preventing any further legislation with a view of forcing an extra session of Congress charged (and it was well understood by all) that Wilson's statement that he would not call an extra session until he returned from the Peace Conference was in order that the people should not be informed of what was going on at the Conference. The Senate is the only place left that information can be gotten to the people and for this reason Wilson does not intend to call an extra session of Congress if he can help it." August 7, 1919, after noting the President's call for a joint session of Congress to discuss the high cost of living: "This is a clever political move and done to draw attention from the growing opposition to the League of Nations."

28Salt Lake Tribune, 22 and 23 February 1919.
April-May, 1919: Discussions held widely in Utah. Some bitterness is evoked as religion gets involved in the discussions. Both sides seem to feel that the doctrines of the Church support their own points-of-view.

July 15, 1919: C. N. Lund writes his significant letter to Reed Smoot. Result: The Lund letter and Smoot's reply are both eventually published and become the basis for further discussion in Utah.

July 20, 1919: The religious implications of the debate over the League become even more pointed as Apostle Anthony W. Ivins speaks out in favor of the League at the Weber Stake Conference in Ogden. “Those of you,” he proclaims, “who do not want any more war, any more bloodshed, any more destruction, any more devastation in the world make that fact known to your representatives in Congress, that they will not dare to oppose the League or the covenant.” At the close of his address, the eighty-four year old President of the Stake, L. W. Shurtliff, declares himself in hearty accord with all Elder Ivins has said, and calls for a sustaining vote for peace. All hands are raised. When he offers a chance for a vote in opposition to the League, no hands are raised. After the conference, the anti-League Salt Lake Herald attacks Apostle Ivins for his stand, which occasions a defense of Elder Ivins by the Tribune on 16 August.

July 27, 1919: George F. Richards, member of the Council of the Twelve, addresses the quarterly conference of the Pioneer Stake and declares his belief that President Woodrow Wilson was “raised up of the Lord” and that the League of Nations was inspired.

August 11, 1919: As the tempo of the debate increases in Utah, Senator Smoot sends his twenty page reply to Lund.

August 24, 1919: The Salt Lake Tribune publishes the Lund-Smoot Correspondence. On the same day, a reporter visits Reed Smoot in Washington, D.C. and Smoot amplifies his reference in the Lund letter to Mormon scriptures. Mormon scripture, he argues, shows that world peace is impossible.

29Salt Lake Tribune, 22 July 1919, and 16 August 1919; Deseret News, 22 July 1919. There are many exchanges of letters that may be followed in the Salt Lake Tribune, Deseret News, and Salt Lake Herald, showing the bitter intensity of the fight. Only a few representative examples are given here.

30Cancelled.
and this is evidence that the League of Nations will fail. In addition, he says,

I believe this land, now called America, was held in reserve by God for ages, with a view of establishing upon it truth and liberty, and from this land truth and liberty would be carried to the farther ends of the world.

As I have said before, I prefer that America should Americanize Europe and not that Europe should Europeanize America.

If this country enters the League of Nations and mixes up with other nations, they will control and America will not be able to carry out its destiny.31

These arguments reflect the general religious arguments used by Mormon opponents to the League.

August 26, 1919: Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley expresses alarm to Smoot that other Church leaders are active in Stake Conferences urging support of the League.32

August 27, 1919: Smoot records in his diary that the Church newspaper, the Deseret News, has refused to print his reply to Lund, even after Bishop Nibley had offered to pay for it as an advertisement.

August 28, 1919: After considerable prayer and agonizing soul-searching, Joseph Fielding Smith writes a twelve page letter to President Grant about his deep concern over the issue. Two major problems trouble him: (1) that the brethren are in disagreement, which he feels they should not be, and (2) that it would be wrong for America to join the League of Nations. In a touching and eloquent plea he says, in part:

It appears that I am not in full harmony with the majority of my brethren. This is a solemn matter with me for I do not want to be out of harmony. I have but one desire and that is to support my brethren in defense of the truth and live in such a manner that I may at all times be in possession of the Spirit of the Lord. I have prayed about this matter and have lain awake nights thinking about it, and the more I reflect the more the position which I have taken appears to me to be correct. Under such conditions I know of no one to whom I can go, only to you, and I do so in the hope, and I believe the confidence, that I will not be misunderstood and that you will appreciate the position I am in.

31Salt Lake Tribune, 25 August 1919.
32Charles W. Nibley to Reed Smoot, 26 August 1919, in Merrill, "Reed Smoot," p. 315.
He then argues, on the basis of scripture as well as the utterances of former Church leaders, that peace is impossible in the last days, thus making membership in the League really "not a matter of politics, nor party affiliation, but of crying 'Peace, peace, when there is not peace.'"  

**September 1, 1919:** By this time there is widespread national publicity on the fact that Senator Smoot has used Mormon scripture to oppose the League of Nations.  

**September 2, 1919:** J. Reuben Clark, Jr., speaks to a capacity crowd in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, and gives an eloquent, well-studied argument against the League of Nations. In addition to the regular political arguments used by so many national speakers, he declares: "I belong to that great class of American citizens who see in the present situation such a departure from the traditional attitude of our government toward other nations and toward world politics as to constitute this one of the most critical moments in our history.

"'Taught from my infancy that this constitution of ours was inspired; that the free institutions which it created and perpetuated were God given, I am one of those who scan every proposal to change or alter either with a critical eye.'"  

B. H. Roberts attends this meeting, and announces he will reply next week.  

**September 6, 1919:** *The Deseret News* endorses the League of Nations, and criticizes those who say that it is impossible to avoid war. We have an obligation at least to try, reasons the News.  

**September 8, 1919:** B. H. Roberts speaks in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, replying one by one to the arguments of Clark. In addition, Roberts uses Mormon Scripture in support of the League.  

**September 13, 1919:** Joseph Fielding Smith writes to Smoot warning him that some of the brethren are unhappy with his [Footnotes]

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29A copy of a national news service broadside, apparently distributed throughout the country, is on file in the Reed Smoot papers, Church archives. It is dated 1 September 1919, San Francisco. The scriptures quoted include I Nephi 15:19; II Nephi 10:11-12; Ether 1:22; Ether 2:12; and Doctrine and Covenants 87:1-6.  

30Complete text of this address is found in the Deseret News, 6 September 1919.  

31Deseret News, 13 September 1919. Roberts quoted, among other scriptures, II Nephi 12 as a chapter forgotten by the opponents of the League.
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continued public stance against the League and have even suggested some form of censure. He says that only he and Elder McKay are with Smoot, and suggests that Smoot be more guarded in his actions. Nearly all agree, he writes, that “the standard works of the Church in no wise should be used in opposition to the proposed League, such a statement not to be a reflection on you if it can be made without.”

September 21, 1919: A severe blow to Smoot comes when President Heber J. Grant delivers the nearest thing to an official public rebuke. Speaking in a quarterly conference of the Salt Lake Stake, President Grant declares in unequivocal terms: “An illustrated hand-bill has been circulated and has been widely republished in newspapers under the heading: ‘Mormon Bible Prophecies Become Issue in Opposition to the League of Nations.’ The position of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that the standard works of the Church are not opposed to the League of Nations.” Grant also endorses, in the strongest terms, the League of Nations, although he makes it clear that it is on the basis of his own opinion rather than scripture. Later, Grant considers his address important enough that he has it bound with the official report of the following October conference of the Church.

September 23, 1919: President Woodrow Wilson receives a tumultuous welcome in Salt Lake City as he arrives to speak for the League. President Heber J. Grant is on the reception committee. A few days later, Wilson stricken ill, returns to Washington, and spends the rest of his days as an invalid.

September 29, 1919: Bishop Nibley is in Washington, D.C., discussing politics with Smoot. The two decide that Smoot should write President Grant in reply to his conference address, and that Nibley will deliver the reply personally to the President of the Church.

October 3, 4, 5, 1919: The general conference of the Church in Salt Lake City turns into a veritable flood of endorse-

37 Joseph F. Smith to Reed Smoot, 13 September 1919, in Merrill, “Reed Smoot,” p. 321.
38 Conference Report, October 1919.
39 Smoot Diaries, 29 September 1919. It is interesting that in his reply, Smoot used extensively the same language as did Joseph Fielding Smith in his earlier letter to Heber J. Grant. Long passages are verbatim. Why this is so is difficult to ascertain, but it is interesting to note that Smith wrote to Smoot about the same time he wrote to President Grant. Perhaps he included a copy of his letter to Grant, and since Smoot accepted it so wholeheartedly he saw nothing wrong with reinforcing the argument by repeating it verbatim.
ments of the League of Nations, from Orson F. Whitney's opening prayer onward. Smoot, still in Washington, anticipates such a meeting and writes in his diary: "October Conference opened today at Salt Lake. I expect we will have more League of Nations propaganda."

October 4, 1919: An interesting entry in Smoot's diary reveals both his loyalty to the President of the Church and his dismay at the Church leader's support of the League:

I received a telegram from Pres. H.J. Grant in which he quotes a statement made by him at the morning session referring to the sickness of Pres. Wilson as well as the prayer offered by Elder Orson F. Whitney and requesting that I with Senator King convey same to President Wilson. I immediately dictated a letter to the President conveying the information contained in Grant's telegram. Went to King's office, read it to him and we both signed it and I had a messenger deliver it to the White House. Sen. King and I both thought it was not in very good taste. It was a great endorsement of the League of Nations.

October-November, 1919: Although they have been active in the drama to this point, the Brigham Young University faculty and student body now play more prominent roles and find themselves in conflict with a man who is not only an apostle and senator, but also on their board of trustees.

November, 1919: The United States Senate votes on the League of Nations and rejects it.

November, 1919 to early 1920: Attitudes in Utah begin to change, partly as expected by Smoot, and there is no longer so much concern over the League.

"Orson F. Whitney prayed for Woodrow Wilson, "Thy servant who so recently addressed us from this stand with whose remarks and sentiments and the truths that he uttered our hearts so powerfully impressed and illuminated." George F. Richards again declared his belief in the inspiration of the League, and Richard R. Lyman even identified Reed Smoot by name, saying "I have hesitated to do this because my views do not agree with those of my life long friend, the Honorable Reed Smoot, whom I have admired since childhood. But I know this broad-minded statesman well enough to realize that he will have greater respect for me if I speak than he could have if, with my convictions, I were to remain silent." Other leaders also endorsed the League. When Smoot heard of the prayer, in particular, he was dismayed and wrote in his diary: 'Eastern papers reported the action of the Conference at Salt Lake in praying for the President. I know the statement of Pres. Grant and prayer by Elder Whitney will have a great effect upon the people attending conference. I had no objection to a prayer being offered for Wilson but I thought it very unwise to endorse his views on the League of Nations in the prayer or President Grant's statement.' Smoot diaries, 6 October 1919.
March, 1920: In another vote on the League of Nations, the reservations sought by Smoot and the Republicans pass. The treaty with reservations is then voted on, and defeated by the Democrats who, under Wilson's instructions, are demanding all or nothing. Smoot votes for the League with reservations, and the Deseret News, which earlier endorsed the League without reservations, commends him for his vote and criticizes Wilson's unbending stance. Writes the rather bemused Smoot in his diary: "a new thing for the News."

And the curtain falls.

But the epilogue to our drama carries the real message, as far as my theme is concerned, and it ought to go something like this:

The debate over the League of Nations was now all but finished, even though as much as eight years later both B. H. Roberts and Reed Smoot were giving further speeches suggesting the same things they had espoused in the hectic year covered by our play. But the real story lies elsewhere. There was never an official statement regarding the question of whether or not the Church should take a stand, although Grant's instructions that Mormon scriptures should not be used to oppose the League must also have implied that neither could they be used in its support. Throughout the controversy, when bitterness seemed to be raging in the newspaper comments, and the sources suggest that some Mormons at lower levels were allowing the issue to embitter them, questioning each other's faith, tearing down each other, and bringing to bear the scriptures to put down their brothers in argument, the spirit of most leaders of the Church was far above such attacks on personality. In the October Conference of 1920, President Grant recalled what had happened the year before and expressed regret at the bitterness the League controversy had caused. Much of his sermon was devoted to a plea for the spirit of forgiveness to characterize the Latter-day Saints. While he was not speaking directly of the League controversy, the principle certainly applied in context. He referred to the advice which, as a young apostle, he had received from President John Taylor:

My boy, never forget that when you are in the line of your duty your heart will be full of love and forgiveness, even for the repentant sinner, and that when you get out of
that straight line of duty and have the determination that what you think is justice and what you think is equity and right should prevail, you oftentimes are anything but happy. You can know the difference between the Spirit of the Lord and the spirit of the adversary, when you find that you are happy and contended, that you love your fellows, that you are anxious for their welfare; and you can tell that you do not have that spirit when you are full of animosity and feel that you would like to mow somebody down.41

And so the Church went on. Perhaps at no time in its history had there been such divergence of opinion among its leaders, but it seemed to have had little effect upon their working together in harmony to build the Kingdom. Does this answer the question as to whether they should have been unified? Perhaps not, but at least it demonstrates that, in this instance, those who really wanted to follow the example of their leaders would not avoid debate or the expression of personal opinion, but would refuse to let that opinion stand in the way of good will based on genuine respect for the right and responsibility of each man to think and speak for himself on such issues. For those who still doubt that such conciliation is possible, let it be remembered that President Grant soon found himself to be a great admirer and friend of Reed Smoot, his opponent in the League controversy; that another opponent, Bishop Charles W. Nibley, was called to be his second counselor in the Presidency of the Church in 1925; that a third opponent, J. Reuben Clark, became a counselor in 1933; and that still another opponent, David O. McKay, became a counselor in 1934. In this case there is a moral in history.

41Conference Report, October 1920, p. 7.