

Sword-Wielding Angels & Stolen Innocence

By Kim M. Clark¹

“Cautious optimism” best describes my reaction when first I learned that leaders of *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* chose to publically acknowledge the genesis of plural marriage and the extent to which Joseph Smith himself practiced the “new and everlasting covenant of marriage.” My respect abruptly faded, however, when I saw that the online article “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo”² included such anecdotes as a *sword-wielding angel* who threatened Joseph with bodily harm for failing to give a divine edict prompt and deliberate attention. The editorial quickly devolved into a conspicuously obvious campaign to recast their suffering hero as distraught and anguished to learn that an integral part of the Restoration included the requirement that he take unto himself plural wives – some of whom were already married (in one case, 7 months pregnant³) and in 2 cases, only 14 years of age.⁴

What remains to be said of a narrative and defense that includes the quixotic tale of an angry angel? It’s hard to imagine that in the twenty-first century (at a time when science and technology are flourishing) well-educated men⁵ hold firm to beliefs that cannot be mapped onto reality. That such men see nothing shocking or unusual about the metaphysical claim that an angel – an angel! – was sent demanding that Joseph marry women who were *already* married leaves reason to blush with embarrassment. The question: “You’ve got to be kidding?” echoes through my mind. At some level, I’m sure, the Brethren are hopeful that their recent admission that Joseph actively practiced plural marriage will assuage the critics and allay concerns and fears advanced by the rank and file. But it’s what they *didn’t* say (and have altogether ignored) that now attracts an even larger audience of unamused and wary skeptics. While the “Sacrament Meeting Joseph” may be a more adult version of the more familiar “Sunday School Joseph,” both versions pale in comparison to the “Nauvoo Joseph” – the Joseph who *was*; the Joseph I intend to introduce.

I am not looking to pettifog when I remind the reader that there are no known laws of physics that will tolerate for a zeptosecond any serious discussion of resurrected angelic beings and visits (think entropy here). And while I do not intend to linger on the subject of angels any longer than is necessary, identifying why Smith’s virtual agents are non-zero probabilities is a matter of no small importance. That the Brethren actually believe that a sword-wielding angel

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² “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo” (found at <https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?lang=eng>; reconfirmed 10.25.2014).

³ Zina Huntington Jacobs (wife of Henry Jacobs)

⁴ Nancy Winchester and Helen Mar Kimball (see <http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/>; reconfirmed 11.24.2014).

⁵ In the LDS Church’s First Presidency and Quorum of Twelve Apostles are men with MD, JD, DBA, and PhD degrees. And let us not forget that Elder Dallin Oaks – a distinguished member of the Twelve – is a retired justice of the Utah Supreme Court.

appeared (three times, in fact) threatening Smith that unless he took these already married women as plural wives (a threat he confessed to his prospective brides, in an effort to secure their assent) evidences just how irrational and hapless is their online campaign. While the discussion of angels may appeal to members of the LDS Church – given their familiarity with such topics – it is unlikely to curry the favor or respect of non-Mormon investigators; especially those inclined to proportion their beliefs to the evidence. Just where might evidence for angels be found? And it's the absence of evidence for these supernatural proxies that constitutes the basis for my intolerance.⁶

The Prophet practiced both adultery and polygamy
– Emma Smith –⁷

Because “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo” was posted on the LDS Church’s official website, I’ll assume that its contents represent the views of the Mormon hierarchy, namely: The First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. Having made that assumption, Church leaders assert the following:

When God commands a difficult task, He sometimes sends additional messengers to *encourage* His people to obey. Consistent with this pattern, Joseph told associates that an angel appeared to him three times between 1834 and 1842 and commanded him to proceed with plural marriage when he hesitated to move forward. During the third and final appearance, the angel came with a drawn sword, threatening Joseph with destruction unless he went forward and obeyed the commandment fully.⁸

Historians know of at least three occasions when Joseph is reported to have used the “sword-wielding angel” strategy as a means to secure his prospective wife’s acceptance: Zina Huntington Jacobs⁹ (a.k.a. Mrs. Henry B. Jacobs), her sister Prescindia Huntington Buell (a.k.a. Mrs. Norman Buell), and Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner (a.k.a. Mrs. Adam Lightner, about

⁶ Those interested in learning why science repudiates such tawdry claims are referred to the *Afterword*.

⁷ Remarks made by Emma in 1847 (3 years after Joseph Smith’s death) to former apostle William E. McLellin (William E. McLellin Notebook, ca. 1880, John L. Traughber Collection, Ms 666, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, SLC). A photograph from this document was published in *The Salt Lake Tribune*, December 2, 1985. On September 6, 1878, McLellin was visited by Joseph F. Smith and Orson Pratt. Joseph F. recorded in his diary: “He [McLellin] said Emma Smith told him that Joseph was both a polygamist and an adulterer.” Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Life of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938), 239. Bold added by present writer. Citation – to include footnote information taken from: “Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo” by Grant H. Palmer (<http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

⁸ “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo”; emphasis added (found at <https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?lang=eng>; reconfirmed 10.25.2014).

⁹ See Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 80-81 (Signature Books, 1997).

whom I will have more to say later).¹⁰ The angel, it appears, was instructing the dithering Joseph to marry *women who were already married*. But that's polyandry, not polygamy.¹¹

For the sake of argument, let us suppose that angels do exist and that they are not merely agents of the imagination. Even then, there remains no shortage of reasons to persist in rejecting the hypothesis. When it came time to restoring the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its saving ordinances (to include "the new and everlasting covenant of marriage") and appointing a servant to spearhead the divine campaign, I find it hard to believe that Joseph Smith was God's only option. Upon learning of Joseph's reluctance and equivocal posturing (assuming that Smith was "dragging his feet"), why would God choose to employ amateurish tactics familiar to, say, gangsters or *La Cosa Nostra*? What's wrong with the "Joseph, you've had your chance – now, don't call us, we'll call you" approach? If Smith proved to be a cad, what prevented God from simply choosing another more cooperative and competent servant, thus leaving Joseph to stir in his own juices? If God can wait 1800 years before setting out to introduce the Restoration, what's another generation or two in the eternal scheme of things? Sending unnamed sword-wielding angels to "encourage" Joseph is a form of coercion we'd expect from the Godfather ("Make Joseph an offer that he cannot refuse"), the mafia, or, perhaps, a rogue "Gadianton robber" intending to exact revenge. But the behavior is most certainly out of character for a loving and benevolent Heavenly Father-figure. Besides, from Smith's own description: the angel didn't come to "encourage" him; the angel came threatening to take his life!

It's easier to proclaim that a sword-wielding angel threatened to rearrange your anatomy than it is to produce such a despot on command. As Dr. Brian Hales noted, there were some "twenty different reminiscences that recount Joseph Smith's encounters with a sword-bearing angel who commanded him to establish the practice of plural marriage ..."¹² Yet none of those who heard such words fall from the prophet's lips (or who may have contributed to the distribution of the romantic claim) ever witnessed either the angel or his sword. They reported what Smith *said* and *not* what they themselves saw. Eliza R. Snow (one of Smith's plural wives), for example, acknowledged in 1880 and again in 1884 that according to Smith, "the Angel standing with a drawn sword in his hand ... told Joseph if he did not comply with the requirement of heaven that his priesthood should be taken from him¹³ ... and that he should be destroyed."¹⁴ Others (besides Eliza R. Snow and Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner) who personally heard Smith make reference to the menacing angel include Joseph Lee Robinson, Lorenzo Snow, Benjamin F. Johnson, Orson Pratt, Zina Huntington, Helen Mar Kimball, and Erastus Snow.¹⁵ But again, nobody but Joseph claimed to see the angel.

¹⁰ See "The Angel, the Sword, and the Heron Seduction" by Meg Stout (<http://www.millennialstar.org/angel-and-sword/>; accessed 11.07.2014).

¹¹ Furthermore, and in the light of what is found in the *Afterword*, the claim of sword-bearing angels is a nonstarter for the simple and ineluctable fact that outside of a fevered imagination, *there is no respectable evidence for angels*.

¹² Brian C. Hales, "Encouraging Joseph Smith to Practice Plural Marriage: The Accounts of the Angel with a Drawn Sword," *Mormon Historical Studies* Vol. 11, no. 2 (Fall 2010), p. 55.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-70.

“*Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo*”

My contempt for the misleading and, therefore, dishonest campaign waged by the LDS Church to rewrite its early history requires that I identify the specific elements of their editorial that do not pass muster. In what is to follow, “**LDS**” will identify verbatim remarks found in the Church’s editorial: “Plural marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo,” while “**KMC**” will represent the present writer’s rebuttal.

- **LDS:** Although the Lord commanded the adoption – and later the cessation – of plural marriage in the latter days, He did not give exact instructions on how to obey the commandment.
KMC: Are the Brethren suggesting that ambiguity and God’s lack of specificity (i.e., carelessness) explains some or all of Joseph’s missteps? How do they know any such thing – they weren’t there?
- **LDS:** Significant social and cultural changes often include misunderstandings and difficulties. Church leaders and members experienced these challenges as they heeded the command to practice plural marriage and again later as they worked to discontinue it after Church President Wilford Woodruff issued an inspired statement known as the Manifesto in 1890, which led to the end of plural marriage in the Church. Through it all, Church leaders and members sought to follow God’s will.
KMC: “Church leaders and members [may have] sought to follow God’s will,” but they were in no hurry to do so. While the “inspired” Manifesto was presented by then Church President Wilford Woodruff in 1890, it took a “second warning” in 1904 for the more casual sort to realize that it was time to get with the program.¹⁶ Furthermore, in the original 1890 declamation Woodruff stated the following: “We are not teaching polygamy or plural marriage, nor permitting any person to enter into its practice.” But that directly contradicts what Joseph Smith himself conceded. To his friend William Marks, a disconsolate Smith stated, “This doctrine of polygamy, or spiritual wife-system, **that has been taught and practiced among us**, will prove our destruction and overthrow. **I have been deceived; it is a curse to mankind . . .**”¹⁷ Joseph was deceived? – Polygamy was a curse and not a blessing? Maybe plural marriage was Joseph’s idea after all – and a bad idea at that. Woodruff concluded the 1890 Manifesto with this remark: “And now I publicly declare that my advice to the Latter-day Saints is to refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land.”¹⁸ But again, those living the Principle were slow to comply with their prophet’s mandate.
- **LDS:** Many details about the early practice of plural marriage are unknown. Plural marriage was introduced among the early Saints incrementally, and participants were asked to keep their actions confidential.
KMC: Well of course plural marriage was practiced in secret – *what they were doing was illegal!* And in some cases, Joseph didn’t want the husband to discover that he had just married their wife! It’s the *need* for secrecy and confidentiality that concerns me and

¹⁶ See Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism – Shadow or Reality* 5th Edition, Chapter 17 (pp. 232-244-F) for details.

¹⁷ See Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 376; emphasis added (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

¹⁸ Official Declaration – 1 (Doctrine and Covenants, p. 291).

that warrants our fullest attention. What the Brethren failed to mention, however, is (1) just what it is these women needed to keep “confidential” (“secret” better describes the injunction) and (2) what Joseph intended to do to their reputation *if they didn’t keep it secret!* Smith knew full well that polygamy was illegal; sufficient reason, I suppose, why he wanted those who rebuffed his proposal to conduct themselves as if nothing happened – as if the proposal never took place. What’s overlooked in Smith’s deportment, however, is how his clandestine methods violate the very principles Smith claims to champion. In what are known as the *Thirteen Articles of Faith*, Joseph’s behaviors violate what he claims to hold dear.

Article 12: “We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in *obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.*” But if you’re practicing plural marriage, you’re not “honoring and sustaining the law”! To those who say, “Joseph valued God’s laws above the laws of man” – I get it; but then *don’t announce to the world that you intend to obey the laws of the land when clearly you don’t!*

Article 13: “We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men . . . If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” A question for Joseph: Are you being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, and virtuous when you take another man’s wife as your own without *first having the husband’s consent?* Are you being honest, true, and chaste when you take a plural wife without *first securing your own wife’s consent?* I don’t think so. And let us not forget this not so little important detail – and something the Brethren failed to recognize – Joseph began living the “new and everlasting covenant” *before he ever received it!* Compliance by anticipation, I suppose. (I will have more to say about this curious oddity later in the essay.)

- **LDS:** The historical record of early plural marriage is therefore thin: few records of the time provide details, and **later reminiscences are not always reliable.** Some ambiguity will always accompany our knowledge about this issue. Like the participants, we “see through a glass, darkly” and are asked to walk by faith. (Emphasis added.)

KMC: The poverty of the apology should be obvious to even the most myopic observer; unless, of course, you want to believe the apology more than you want to understand the historical facts as such are known. However “thin” the historical record may be, it is *not* opaque and nor is it nonexistent. There is ample evidence with which to make a reasonable judgment. Members are enjoined to “walk by faith” (especially when the evidence is incriminating). They are asked to believe what Joseph (and those who share his opinion) has to say, as they’re expected to ignore competing and conflicting opinions/observations. Can you imagine a judge instructing a jury to consider *only* the evidence that supports the defense and ignore the evidence that does not? Neither can I – at least, not in America.

- **LDS:** The revelation on plural marriage was not written down until 1843, but its early verses **suggest** that part of it emerged from Joseph Smith’s study of the Old Testament in 1831. People who know Joseph well later stated he received the revelation about that time. (Emphasis added.)

KMC: That’s speculation, not a reliable rehearsal of the facts. But if the speculation is true, then all that remains for us to do is to find the evidence for sexual trysts prior to 1831. If, in fact, Smith got a “jump start” on the revelation – well, there’s a name for that: *adultery.*

- **LDS:** Latter-day Saints’ **motives for plural marriage were often more religious than economic or romantic.** (Emphasis added.)

KMC: But that’s an assumption. Outward behavior does not always reflect inner intent. We cannot presume to know what resides in the hearts and minds of others. Besides, as I intend to show, Smith was very interested in sexually consummating many of his plural marriages – to include the ones for which no record of ceremony or eyewitnesses exist.

- **LDS:** Besides the **desire to be obedient**, a strong incentive was the hope of living in God’s presence with family members. In the revelation on marriage, the Lord promised participants “crown of eternal lives” and “exaltation in the eternal worlds.” Men and women, parents and children, ancestors and progeny were to be “sealed to each other – their commitment lasting into the eternities, consistent with Jesus’s promise that priesthood ordinances performed on earth could be “bound in heaven.”

KMC: In the case of Joseph’s polyandrous affairs (11 such marriages), to whom are the children of the biological father sealed for the eternities – to Joseph? But he’s not their father? Does God want such children to have 2 fathers in the eternity? But what if they love their *real* father more than they love Mr. Smith? Why should the child be eternally bound and committed to a decision made by their mother and Mr. Smith? Where’s the freedom and fairness in that arrangement? Moreover, why would the biological father want to “share” his patriarchal duties and privileges with the very man who secretly married his wife *without his consent*?! The reasoning truly is vacant. And then there’s the matter of life after death. In all probability, people believe in the Afterlife because that is what they were taught to believe. But such a belief (however popular) is derived from religious dogma, not the data. There is no respectable evidence that any such place exists.¹⁹

- **LDS:** Most of those sealed to Joseph Smith were between 20 and 40 years of age **at the time of their sealing to him.** The oldest, Fanny Young, was 56 years old. The youngest was Helen Mar Kimball, the daughter of Joseph’s close friends Heber C. and Vilate Murray Kimball, who was sealed to Joseph **several months before her 15th birthday.** Marriage at such an age, inappropriate by today’s standards, was legal in that era, and some women married in their mid-teens. (Emphasis added.)

KMC: In other words, *Helen was 14 years old.* The alarming fact bears repeating: *Joseph took as his bride a 14 year-old girl!* It doesn’t end there: Helen was only 1 of 7 wives who was under the age of 18.²⁰ (I will have more to say about *menarche* or first menstruation later in the essay.) What the Church failed to mention is that Joseph *first* solicited Helen’s mother Vilate – his “close friend’s” wife! Another surprising element to the story is the **“24-hour deadline”** imposed on the 14 year-old Helen, but with the promise that **if she accepted, “it will ensure your eternal salvation and exaltation and that of your father’s household and all of your kindred.”**²¹ What’s that, if not a bribe? Alarmed to learn that “the salvation of [her] whole family depended on it,”²² she

¹⁹ See, for example, Kim M Clark, *Escaping the Darkness of Religious Light*, 216-219 (Copyright © 2014 by Kim M Clark).

²⁰ “The Many Wives of Joseph Smith” (found at <http://cesletter.com/Letter-to-a-CES-Director.pdf>; reconfirmed 10.31.2014).

²¹ Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*, 62; emphasis added (HarperCollins, 2007).

²² Cited in “Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo” by Grant H. Palmer (<http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

succumbed to Smith's extortion, thus becoming his 26th wife. In later years she confessed, "I hated polygamy in my heart."²³ As to Helen's father Heber – and on a personal note – there is this to say: As a father of four children myself (3 of whom are daughters), I cannot imagine surrendering *any* of my then 14 year-old girls to become anyone's plural wife. Does that make me a wicked and disobedient father? Not in my view, and not by *any* reasonable standard! If anything it demonstrates the depth of my love and commitment to protect them; both from themselves and from those looking to prey upon their innocence and naiveté. [As an aside: What may not be known is that Smith tried something similar with another close friend: the daughter of Sydney Rigdon; only the attempt was made behind Sydney's back, like so many of the others. When the 19 year-old Nancy Rigdon became infuriated and told Smith to pound sand, she immediately reported the incident to her father. Needless to say, Sydney was incensed and confronted Smith. At first, Joseph (the coward) denied the accusation, until Sydney showed him a condescending letter he had written to Nancy.²⁴ Caught in a lie, Joseph immediately backpedaled; this time insisting that he was only looking to test Nancy's virtue.²⁵ Well, if that's the case, then (for my money, at least), Nancy passed with flying colors. Of Joseph, however, the same cannot be said.²⁶]

- **LDS:** Following his marriage to Louisa Beaman and before he married other single women, Joseph Smith was sealed to a number of women who were already married. Neither these women nor Joseph explained much about these sealings, though several women said they were for eternity alone. Other women left no records, making it unknown whether their sealings were for time and eternity or were for eternity alone. There are several possible explanations for this.
KMC: There probably are several "possible" explanations for this, but possibilities call for speculation, and speculating ultimately get us nowhere. None of us were there when Joseph wedded (and bedded) already married women (usually without the consent of their husbands). It is sheer arrogance to suggest that only Joseph could provide for these women in the eternities. If that's the case, all wives should become the property of Brother Joseph. But Joseph appeared to choose his wives carefully – even if they happened to already be pregnant at the time!²⁷
- **LDS:** Emma approved, at least for a time, of four of Joseph Smith's plural marriages in Nauvoo, and she accepted all four of those wives into her household. She may have approved of other marriages as well. But Emma likely did not know about all of Joseph's sealings. She vacillated in her view of plural marriage, as some points supporting it and at other times denouncing it. In the summer of 1843, Joseph Smith dictated the revelation on marriage, a lengthy and complex text containing both glorious promises and

²³ *Representative Women of Deseret*, 112 [cited in Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 480 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991)].

²⁴ The untitled letter is found in Joseph Smith's *History of the Church*, Vol. 5:134-136 (Deseret Book Company, 1978).

²⁵ See Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 311 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

²⁶ Details of the Nancy Rigdon account, the reader is referred to: David Fitzgerald, *The Mormons*, 103-105 (Copyright © 2013 by David Fitzgerald). See also Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 310-311 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

²⁷ Zina Huntington was 7 months pregnant (and married to Henry Bailey Jacobs) when, on March 7, 1841, she became Smith's 7th plural wife.

stern warning, some directed at Emma. The revelation instructed women and men that they must obey God’s law and commands in order to receive the fullness of His glory. **KMC:** Yes, Emma did approve – but 4 out of 40 plural marriages²⁸ (estimates range from 33 to 48 or more) cannot be considered a resounding or enthusiastic endorsement. (Historian Todd Compton noted that by far most of Joseph’s plural marriages were performed *without first securing Emma’s consent*; that most of his plural marriages were secured without her knowledge.²⁹ And while the “celestial marriage revelation” was recorded in July 1843, not until 1876 did it at last find its way into LDS canon.³⁰) As it pertains to Emma’s reaction to seeing the revelation in its written form: as recounted by Brigham Young, when Emma was at last furnished a hard copy of the revelation, she threw it in the fireplace and burned it!³¹ Secondly, compliance with celestial marriage required that “the first [wife] give her consent” (D&C 132: 61). Moreover, given that 11 of Smith’s plural wives were already married (to living husbands), how can such women be considered “virgins” as the commandment required?³² In the case of Joseph’s second plural marriage – Lucinda Pendleton Morgan Harris – of her relationship with Joseph she said, “**I am his mistress since four years.**”³³ *A mistress is decidedly not a plural wife.* Moreover, *if* the two were ever married (no documentation exists to confirm that they ever were), Joseph would have been her third husband. Lucinda first married the “famous anti-Masonic martyr William Morgan. Her second marriage [was] to George Washington Harris.”³⁴ Given such details, it’s a stretch to consider Lucinda a virgin. (By the way, not looking to quibble, but when there’s another husband involved, the relationship become polyandrous, not polygamous. Furthermore, if Lucinda was given to Joseph as “a wife in the new and everlasting covenant, and if she be with another man, and I have not appointed unto her by the holy anointing, she had committed adultery” (D&C 132: 41): Would that not require that she suspend sexual relations with Mr. Harris – her only *legal* husband?)

- **LDS:** After Emma opposed plural marriage, **Joseph was placed in an agonizing dilemma, forced to choose between the will of God and the will of his beloved Emma.** He **may** have thought Emma’s rejection of plural marriage exempted him from the law of Sarah. Her decision to “receive not this law” permitted him to marry additional wives without her consent. Because of Joseph’s early death and Emma’s decision to remain in Nauvoo and not discuss plural marriage after the Church moved west, many aspects of their story remain known only to the two of them. (Emphasis added.)

²⁸ In an article featured in the *New York Times* (Nov. 10, 2014), journalist Laurie Goodstein writes that the LDS Church has acknowledged as many as 40 plural wives; some of whom were already married and one as young as 14 years-of-age. “It’s Official: Mormon Founder had up to 40 wives” (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/11/us/its-official-mormon-founder-had-up-to-40-wives.html?_r=1; accessed 11.14.2014).

²⁹ Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 4-6 (Signature Books, 1997).

³⁰ “Sacred Marriage or Secret Affair? Joseph Smith and the Beginning of Mormon Polygamy” (found at <http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no112.htm>; accessed 11.05.2014).

³¹ *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 17:159.

³² List of women already married to living husbands at the time they were married to Joseph may be found at <http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/>.

³³ Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal, *Mormon Portraits: Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and His Friends*, 60; emphasis added (SLC: Tribune Printing & Pub., 1886). Book may be found online at <http://olivercowdery.com/smithhome/1886WWyl.htm#pg053a>; accessed 10.30.2014.

³⁴ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 459 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

KMC: Yes, the revelation made provisions for nonconforming wives: namely, should the obstreperous Emma tell Joseph to get a grip; well, then: “she shall be destroyed.” (D&C 132:64) Yikes! But Emma wasn’t destroyed; she was not turned into a “pillar of salt” (think Lot’s wife here) – she lived another 36 years after throwing a hard copy of the revelation into the fireplace! If anyone was “destroyed,” perhaps it was Joseph – he didn’t last a year! Furthermore, there is no evidence – none – that Emma was *first* consulted before Joseph began establishing the “new and everlasting covenant of marriage,” if for no other reason than he was living it before the commandment was commanded (details to follow)! Bringing Emma into his confidences (in the form of consent) was an afterthought; something he later incorporated into the patriarchal order of marriage process. It was not until plural wife No. 6 (Louisa Beaman) “popularly believed to be Joseph’s first plural wife”³⁵ that Emma saw these arrangements as anything but the workings of a philandering husband. That the Church would highlight what “an agonizing dilemma” celestial marriage was on Joseph is a preposterous claim that does not square with the historical facts. For writer and skeptic David Fitzgerald, an “unchecked libido” and “restlessness in his pants” more aptly explains Joseph’s interest in plural marriage.³⁶ Brodie characterized Smith’s behavior as a “smothered yearning for new experiences, released now by opportunity masquerading as religious duty.”³⁷ But it’s what Joseph’s wife Emma told former apostle William McLellin on August 28, 1847 that exposes Smith for the womanizer that he was:

Mrs. Joseph Smith, the widow of the Prophet, told me in 1847 that she knew her husband – the **Prophet practiced both adultery and polygamy.**³⁸

Long before receiving a copy of the revelation (July 1843), Emma caught her husband having sex with Fannie Alger in the barn (more on that later). By the time Emma learned that her consent for Joseph to enter into the “new and everlasting covenant” was required, there had already been at least 28 well-documented plural marriages.³⁹ And again, to say that Joseph agonized about have sexual relations with other women is an overfitting of the evidence. He certainly wasn’t agonizing in the barn with Fanny! If he agonized about anything it would have been the consequences of getting caught; hence, the injunction that the prospective bride (including those who rebuffed his proposal) must say *nothing*. And, once again, to speculate about what Joseph “may have thought” has no place in the discussion. Nobody (to include Church apologists) *knew* what he “may”

³⁵ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 464 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

³⁶ David Fitzgerald, *The Mormons*, 101 (Copyright © by David Fitzgerald).

³⁷ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 305 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

³⁸ William E. McLellin Notebook, ca. 1880, John L. Traugher Collection, Ms 666, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, SLC. A photograph from this document was published in *The Salt Lake Tribune*, December 2, 1985. On September 6, 1878, McLellin was visited by Joseph F. Smith and Orson Pratt. Joseph F. recorded in his diary: “He [McLellin] said Emma Smith told him that Joseph was both a polygamist and an adulterer.” Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Life of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938), 239. Bold added by present writer. Citation – to include footnote information taken from: “Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo” by Grant H. Palmer (<http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

³⁹ “Remembering the Wives of Joseph Smith” (found at <http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/>; accessed 10.31.2014).

have thought: I certainly don't. But we *can* examine the historical record (which, by the way, gives us plenty to talk about).

- **LDS:** Heber C. Kimball found comfort only after his wife Vilate had a visionary experience attesting to the rightness of plural marriage. "She told me," Vilate's daughter later recalled, "she never saw so happy a man as father was when she described the vision and told him **she was satisfied and knew it was from God**. (Emphasis added.)

KMC: When I hear such reports, *Stockholm syndrome* comes to mind. When somebody truly wants (or, under duress) needs to believe, do not underestimate the power of emotion as it pertains to the "conversion" or "compliance" factor. I had a personal experience with a middle-aged couple in my Sandy, Utah neighborhood decades ago. Committed students of Mormon scripture and history, "Bob and Carol" (not their real names) after prayerful consideration relocated to Manti, Utah where they joined the Harmston fundamentalist group *after* Bob received a "revelation" that he was to live the Principle. After months of equivocating and wrestling with her husband's announcement, it seems that Carol, too, received her own "confirmation of the spirit" that it was, in fact, God's will after all. The plural marriage didn't last (for reasons unknown to the present writer), and Bob committed suicide soon thereafter. (I will have more to say about the fundamentalist group TLC later in the essay.)

Vilate Kimball (Heber's wife) may well have had her own special witness or confirmation that celestial marriage originated from God, and that Joseph was only doing as God directed; but there is no shortage of persons who were not satisfied and unconvinced that God had anything to do with the covenant. Many plural wives in fact despised having to endure the Principle, and did so reluctantly.⁴⁰

- **LDS:** The precise nature of these relationships in the next life is not known, and many family relationships will be sorted out in the life to come. Latter-day Saints are encouraged to trust in our wise Heavenly Father, who loves His children and does all things for their growth and salvation.

KMC: The precise nature of these relations in the next life *would* be unknown, if for no other reason than *nothing* of the "next life" *is* known. As stated above, what people claim to know of the next life is derived from dogma, not data. Once more, members are asked to trust that an unseen Heavenly Father has our best interests in mind, when we have no direct evidence that he does. But please agree that such assurances come from men, not Heavenly Father. From experience, if trust and faith are ever required to square the algorithm, that's the first clue that the claim is insolvent and, in all probability, someone is looking to hijack gullible minds and hearts. Again, no respectable evidence exists that there is such a place as the Afterlife.⁴¹

If the Church is looking to come clean about Joseph Smith and his practice of plural marriage, then they'll have to do better than the anemic article: "Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo." Church leaders are only telling *part* of the story – the parts they are hoping to explain as they selectively ignore or dismiss what they can't. A closer look at what is known about the prophet

⁴⁰ See, for example, "Remembering the Wives of Joseph Smith" (found at <http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/>; accessed 10.31.2014).

⁴¹ This is a subject I write about at length in my book *Escaping the Darkness of Religious Light*, 216-219; 329-411 (Copyright © by Kim M Clark).

and his libidinous practices tells a very different story; one that is certain to challenge the Church's version of the facts and its formative years. According to his wife Emma, in addition to being a polygamist, Joseph was also a self-indulgent adulterer. Of the 33 plural wives documented by Todd Compton, "twelve do not have an officiator, ceremony or witness to their marriage/sealing," writes historian Grant Palmer.⁴² To follow is the evidence that Smith was "practicing both adultery and polygamy simultaneously."⁴³ I begin with Fannie Alger.

Fannie Alger

Fannie Alger is credited with being Joseph Smith's first plural wife at 16 or 17 years of age, although there is *no* documentation or eyewitnesses to support the claim. (In other words, the "marriage" may have been retrofitted into history.) But *if* there was a formal ceremony it would have happened in 1833 while she was living as a "serving girl in the Smith household."⁴⁴ A close friend of Joseph's (Benjamin F. Johnson) said of Fannie that she was a "very nice and comely young woman ... [and] that Joseph loved her. ... Without doubt in my mind, Fannie Alger was, at Kirtland, the Prophet's first plural wife."⁴⁵ While Fannie refused to discuss her relationship with Joseph, "her brother John ... was [introduced] by President Kimball ... as the 'brother of the Prophet Joseph's first plural wife.'"⁴⁶ Corroborating evidence of the relationship is found in a letter Oliver Cowdery wrote to his brother Warren, in which Oliver referred to the Smith-Alger relationship as a "dirty, nasty, filthy affair."⁴⁷

Joseph's legal wife Emma knew *nothing* of the intimate bond her husband had forged with the young Ms. Alger. Fannie's relationship with Emma was described in a very positive light; namely, that Emma was "extremely fond of her ... and their affection for each other was a constant object of remark, so absorbing and genuine did it seem."⁴⁸ But my how things changed when, in 1835, Emma "saw the transaction" (a more discrete way of saying that she espied the two 'romping in the hay') through a crack in the planks of the barn.⁴⁹ Needless to say, "Emma was furious, and drove the girl, who was unable to conceal the consequences of her celestial relation with the prophet, out of her house."⁵⁰ Some would like to believe, no doubt, that Smith was only doing what God required, even though he had done so without first securing Emma's consent. But if that was true, why would Smith later reveal to his close associate Oliver

⁴² "Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo" by Grant H. Palmer (<http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 323 (First Vintage Books Edition, 2007).

⁴⁵ From an unpublished letter written to George S. Gibbs in 1903 by Benjamin F. Johnson, patriarch in the Utah Church and brother of two of Joseph's wives. Citation found in Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 458 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁴⁶ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 458 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 459.

⁴⁸ "Wives of Joseph Smith" (<http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/02-FannyAlger.htm>; accessed 10.30.2014).

⁴⁹ Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*, 60 (HarperCollins, 2007).

⁵⁰ "Wives of Joseph Smith" (<http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/02-FannyAlger.htm>; accessed 10.30.2014).

Cowdery that he had “confessed to Emma” and sought her forgiveness?⁵¹ Joseph’s romp with Fannie has all the markings of a sexual tryst, not a sacred marriage.

You may recall that a fundamental requirement of living the “new and everlasting covenant of marriage” is that you must *first* secure the approval from the first wife. From the so-called “celestial marriage” revelation, we read the following:

... If any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, *and the first give her consent*, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else.” (D&C 132:61; emphasis added)

Given Emma’s explosive reaction, it is plain that Joseph failed to first secure her approval per the revelation’s instructions, suggesting that Joseph was either willfully disobedient, or, perhaps, he had not yet received the revelation and was doing a little “freelancing.” In which case I have to side with Oliver – it probably was a “dirty, nasty, [and] filthy affair.”

Additional evidence that securing Emma’s consent was not a priority is advanced by Emily Partridge who, along with her sister Eliza, was secretly married to Joseph in March 1843. Of the occasion, Emily wrote the following:

[The] Prophet Joseph and his wife Emma offered us a home in their family, and they treated us with great kindness. We had been there about a year when the principle of plural marriage was made known to us, and I was married to Joseph Smith on the 4th of March, 1843, Elder Heber C. Kimball performing the ceremony. My sister Eliza was also married to Joseph a few days later. **This was done without the knowledge of Emma Smith.** Two months afterwards she consented to give her husband two wives, provided he would give her the privilege of choosing them. She accordingly chose my sister Eliza and myself, and to save family trouble Brother Joseph thought it best to have another ceremony performed. Accordingly on the 11th of May, 1843, we were sealed to Joseph Smith a second time, in Emma’s presence, she giving her free and full consent thereto. From that very hour, however, Emma was our bitter enemy. We remained in the family several months after this, but things went from bad to worse until we were obliged to leave the house and find another home.⁵²

Emma’s reluctance to consent and her unwillingness to sustain Joseph in God’s call to establish the patriarchal order of marriage is grounds for divorce, perhaps, but not Smith’s excuse to be dishonest or deceitful. By any reasonable standard, Joseph was a confabulator and adulterer.

⁵¹ Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983), 167. Citation taken from “Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo” by Grant H. Palmer (<http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

⁵² Andrew Jenson, *Historical Record*, May 1887, p. 240; emphasis added (citation found at “Sacred Marriage or Secret Affair” <http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no112.htm>; accessed 11.07.2014).

Facts can be funny things. While the Church claims that Joseph “hesitated to move forward,” the evidence demonstrates no reluctance or hesitation whatsoever on his part. By his own admission, Smith loved the ladies. “When I see a pretty woman,” he confided, “I have to pray for grace.”⁵³ Dr. Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal (1838 – 1896) – described by Eli H. Murray, Governor of Utah Territory (1880 – 1886) as a “highly cultivated and thoroughly reliable gentleman”⁵⁴ – derisively referred to Joseph Smith as the “Don Juan of Nauvoo.” According to “Dr. W. Wyl” (his penname),

It is now a well established historical fact that the origin of Mormon polygamy, or “celestial marriage,” was nothing but the unbounded and ungoverned passion of the prophet for the other sex. “*Joseph and John D. Lee were the most libidinous men I ever knew*” says my friend Webb, who knew the prophet for eleven years. “*Joseph was the most licentious and Brigham Young the most bloodthirsty of men*” says Mrs. Sarah Pratt, who has known all these Mormon leaders during almost their whole career in the church.⁵⁵

When it came to living “the Principle,” the last thing Smith needed was encouragement. He was on it like a fly is to flypaper. When the opportunity to live “celestial marriage” presented itself (or, more likely, when the idea came to Smith’s mind), there were no ifs, ands, or buts about it: Joseph was all in. At first, nobody (especially his wife Emma) knew of his discrete dalliances – that is, no one except the new brides themselves. As Richard Bushman (Professor of History, Emeritus, at Columbia University) noted, “Joseph publicly and repeatedly denied he was advocating polygamy.”⁵⁶ But it’s hard to keep secret what more and more people are coming to know. Word soon got out, requiring that he share with his inner circle the “true principle” of celestial marriage and the need for absolute secrecy. (As it is today, so it was then: polygamy is illegal.) And just how many wives did the “reluctant” Joseph accumulate along the way? LDS historian Todd Compton puts the number of “well-documented” plural wives at 33,⁵⁷ George D. Smith says it was 37,⁵⁸ the LDS Church says it was 40,⁵⁹ and Fawn Brodie puts it at a more robust 48.⁶⁰ As Bushman asked, “Was [Smith] a blackguard covering his lusts with religious pretensions, or a prophet doggedly adhering to instructions from heaven, or something in

⁵³ Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal, *Mormon Portraits: Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and His Friends*, 55 (SLC: Tribune Printing & Pub., 1886). Book may be found online at <http://olivercowdery.com/smithhome/1886WWyl.htm#pg053a>; accessed 10.30.2014.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 53; emphasis found in the original.

⁵⁶ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 491 (First Vintage Books Edition, 2007).

⁵⁷ “A Trajectory of Plurality: An Overview of Joseph Smith’s Thirty-Three Plural Wives” by Todd Compton (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 29:2, pp. 1-38).

⁵⁸ *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 63; 621-623 (Signature Books, 2008).

⁵⁹ “It’s Official: Mormon Founder had up to 40 wives” (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/11/us/its-official-mormon-founder-had-up-to-40-wives.html?_r=1; accessed 11.14.2014).

⁶⁰ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 457-488 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

between?”⁶¹ The more we learn about Joseph’s clandestine behaviors, perhaps the more obvious the answer will become.

Mary Elizabeth Rollins

As to the three angel visits (between 1834 and 1842 spoken of above), well, the Church is only telling *part* of the story. In her acclaimed work *No Man Knows My History*, historian Fawn Brodie provides additional detail:

Mary Elizabeth Rollins [1818 – 1913] ... adored Joseph from the time of her adolescent conversion in New York State and who was now married to the friendly but non-Mormon Adam Lightner. Although not married to Joseph Smith until February 1842, Mrs. Lightner reported that Joseph told her **he had been commanded to take her for a wife** as early as 1834.... The angel came to him three times, the last time with a drawn sword and threatened his life.⁶²

So far as Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner was concerned, she was “the first woman God commanded [Joseph] to take as a plural wife.”⁶³ But what the Church (citing the research of anesthesiologist Dr. Brian C. Hales⁶⁴) failed to acknowledge, are some of the other more titillating and illuminating details; facts that did not escape the discerning eye of our UCLA history professor. Brodie explains that from Smith did Mrs. Adam Lightner learn that she was Joseph’s “before [she] came here [a reference to the pre-existence?], and he said all the Devils in Hell should never get me from him.”⁶⁵ That’s right: Joseph wanted Mrs. Lightner to believe that *she belonged to him*. In February 1842 she consented and was married and sealed to Joseph “for time and all eternity” in the Masonic Hall⁶⁶ by Brigham Young.⁶⁷ Naturally, Mary’s non-Mormon husband Adam was out of town at the time and knew *nothing* of the secret marriage ceremony. In Professor Brodie’s analysis, it is possible that “Mary’s fourth son, born in 1843, was Joseph’s child and that Adam Lightner’s desire to move from Nauvoo came from suspicion or actual knowledge of the relationship between Joseph and his wife.”⁶⁸

According to Mrs. Lightner, not until the third visit (1842) did the angelic messenger manage to bring along the sword, as if to demonstrate that *this time* he meant business! That a third and threatening visit was necessary strongly suggests in Mary’s eyes, at least, that Smith was not yet compliant in living what is euphemistically known as “the Principle.” After all, had Joseph been in compliance, a visit from a hostile angel would have served no useful purpose.

⁶¹ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 323 (First Vintage Books Edition, 2007).

⁶² Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 303; emphasis added (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁶³ Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 65 (University of Illinois Press, 1994).

⁶⁴ Brian C. Hales, “Encouraging Joseph Smith to Practice Plural Marriage: The Accounts of the Angel with a Drawn Sword,” *Mormon Historical Studies* Vol. 11, no. 2 (Fall 2010), pp. 55-71.

⁶⁵ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 303 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ See <http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/09-MaryRollinsLightner.htm>; accessed 10.27.2014.

⁶⁸ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 467 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

But as historians know – and as the evidence will show – Mrs. Lightner was *not* Smith’s 1st plural wife – she was his 9th!⁶⁹ Joseph’s first plural “wife” was Fanny Alger (spoken of above); a young, nubile, and orphaned 16 year old who happened to be living in the Smith household as a domestic servant in 1833 – a full year *before* the first of three threatening angelic visitations to Joseph’s 9th plural wife. By the time Mrs. Adam Lightner also became Mrs. Joseph Smith, Joseph had been living “the Principle” for the better part of a decade!

Lucy Walker

There is nothing unnatural about men identifying and marveling at the beauty of women. But you cross a line when you conspire and strategize to make such women your property. As Brodie wrote, “Six of the girls Joseph took as wives lived at various times as wards in his own home. These were the Partridge sisters, the Lawrence sisters, Eliza R. Snow, and Lucy Walker.”⁷⁰ Of the six, it’s Lucy’s experience with the prophet that underscores the painstaking lengths Smith went to in hopes of satisfying his connubial ambitions.

On the day after her 17th birthday, Lucy Walker would become Joseph’s 25th plural wife. Born April 30, 1826, she was among the oldest of 10 children. Soon after converting to Mormonism, her family moved to Nauvoo where Lucy’s mother contracted and then died from malaria. So how did the prophet Joseph choose to comfort the grieving widower and his 10 inconsolable children? **He sent Brother Walker away on a 2-year mission to the eastern states**⁷¹ with the promise that his children would be loved and cared for in his absence.⁷² That’s right; just when his grief-stricken children need their father the most, Joseph (sensing that “a change of scene, a change of climate”⁷³ would do him good) *sends him away on a mission!* The devastated children (one of whom died while he was away) were separated and sent to various member homes, while Lucy (and older brother Lorin) came to live with Joseph and Emma in January 1842. Reflecting on those difficult days, Lucy wrote: “I rung my hands in the agony of despair at the thought of being broken up as a family, and being separated [sic] from the little ones...”⁷⁴ But it’s her intimate and personal relationship with the strategizing prophet that dilates our understanding and exposes him as a sexual predator. As Lucy explains,

President Joseph Smith sought an interview with me and said, “I have a message for you. I have been **commanded of God to take another wife, and you are the woman.**” My astonishment knew no bounds. This announcement was indeed a thunderbolt to me. **He asked me if I believed him to be the Prophet of God.** “Most assuredly I do,” I replied. He fully explained to me the principle of plural or celestial marriage. **Said this principle was again to be restored for the benefit of the human**

⁶⁹ See, for example, <http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/>; reconfirmed 10.27.2014.

⁷⁰ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 337 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁷¹ See <http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/23-LucyWalker.htm>; accessed 10.29.2014.

⁷² Sandra Tanner – “Joseph Smith as a Sexual Predator” (found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=153jwQIVkB4>; reconfirmed 10.29.2014).

⁷³ See <http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/23-LucyWalker.htm>; accessed 10.29.2014.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

family. That it would prove **an everlasting blessing to my father’s house, and form a chain that could never be broken, worlds without end** . . . How could I speak or what could I say? He said, “If you pray sincerely for light and understanding in relation thereto, you shall receive a testimony of the correctness of this principle.” I thought I prayed sincerely, but was so unwilling to consider the matter favorably that I fear I did not ask in faith for light. . . . I was tempted and tortured beyond endurance until life was not desirable. . . . The Prophet discerned my sorrow . . . and sought an opportunity of again speaking to me on that subject, and said, “Although I can not under existing circumstances, acknowledge you as my wife, the time is near when we will go beyond the Rocky Mountains and then you will be acknowledged and honored as my wife.” He also said this principle will yet be believed and practiced by the righteous. “I have no flattering words to offer. **It is a command of God to you. I will give you until tomorrow to decide this matter. If you reject this message the gate will be closed forever against you.**” This aroused every drop of Scotch in my veins. For a few moments I stood fearless before him, and looked him in the eye. I felt at this moment that I was called to place myself upon the altar a living sacrifice . . . He walked across the room, returned and stood before me with the most beautiful expression of countenance, and said “God Almighty bless you. You shall have a manifestation of the will of God concerning you; a testimony that you can never deny. I will tell you what it shall be. It shall be that joy and peace that you never knew.”⁷⁵

If celestial marriage was a “command of God to [Lucy],” what prevented God from commanding Lucy himself? Why did God have to command Lucy *through* Joseph? If God can speak to Joseph, why can’t he speak to Lucy? Lucy reports that after a sleepless night her “soul was filled with a calm, sweet peace.” Moreover, “Supreme happiness took possession of me, and I received a powerful and irresistible testimony of the truth of plural marriage. . . . The first day of May 1843, I consented to become the Prophet’s wife, and was sealed to him for time and all eternity, at his own house by Elder William Clayton.”⁷⁶ (I can hear the apologists now: “See, God *did* speak to Lucy.” To which I say, not so fast . . .)

Feelings – even warm and pleasant feelings – are not facts. Whatever it is that Lucy felt are emotions derived from mechanical brain states – the brain’s endogenous reward system, to be more precise. Feelings are derivatives of neuromechanical brain operations over which we have *no* conscious control. (To discuss cognitive neuroscience at the length the subject deserves would take us far beyond the intended purposes of this essay. Readers interested in learning more about cognitive illusions and the phenomenal reality the mind-brain nexus creates, are referred to the footnotes.⁷⁷) But in looking to understand how in a matter of hours an anguished and confused young woman could go from a state of existential crisis to “sweet peace” brought to mind the testimony of *another* young plural wife – this one from the Harmston group of Manti, Utah.

⁷⁵ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 477-478; emphasis added (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 478-479.

⁷⁷ This is a subject I write about at length in *Escaping the Darkness of Religious Light*, Vol. 1, pp. 329-411 (Copyright © 2014 by Kim M Clark).

In a 1996 secretly recorded meeting of the fundamentalist breakoff group *The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ and Saints of the Last Days* (located in Manti, Utah and established by their polygamist prophet and leader James D. Harmston) is heard the tearful testimony of a young and struggling plural wife.

I've been searching for a witness of this work and of this church, and since tonight I got my witness and it's burning within my soul of how important this work is and how *true* it is. I *know* it is. And it's hard to believe that just a year ago I was in High School, and now I'm in a plural marriage and [audible sigh] struggling. But I know without a shadow of a doubt that this is the Lord's work – that I have finally found it. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.⁷⁸

What at first blush may be judged repulsive and offensive to ones sensibilities may soon be recognized and embraced as true; especially *if* the source of the injunction (Joseph Smith or James Harmston) is a recognized and revered priesthood authority figure. I cannot help but believe, however, that *confirmation bias* and, possibly, *Stockholm syndrome* best explains this swell of warm emotion; feelings that served to confirm that their prophet was *only* acting upon what the Lord himself had prescribed. In which case, the victim unwittingly becomes complicit in her own victimization.

As Brodie notes, “Emma [accompanied by Lucy’s older brother Lorin] was absent on a shopping trip to St. Louis [buying supplies for the Nauvoo hotel⁷⁹] and was due to return on May 2, which may have explained Joseph’s haste to have Lucy married to him by May 1. Lucy admitted before a court in 1892 that Emma knew nothing of her marriage.”⁸⁰

To painstakingly examine each and every such marriage would take us well beyond the purpose of this essay. But given the nature and secrecy of the clandestine methods employed by Smith raises an important question: Were these truly sacred marriages, or was Smith merely engaged in a pattern of furtive trysts and love affairs? To insist that Joseph was only serving at the pleasure of the Lord – a mere leaf in the stream – is a hard pill to swallow.

The New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage – “The Principle”

As Richard Van Wagoner noted, “[Joseph] Smith never publicly advocated polygamy.”⁸¹ In fact, it was not until 1852 (8 years after his death) that polygamy became a public practice. In February 1831 Smith claimed a revelation in which God revealed that lying and sexual misconduct (fornication and adultery) would not be tolerated. The 1835 version of the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) – a volume of scripture that would have been available to the Saints – states with unambiguous certainty:

⁷⁸ “8.0 – My LDS Journey – Follow the Spirit” (found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycUvC9s4VYA>; reconfirmed 10.29.2014). Citation begins at 5:11 and ends at 6:05 minutes.

⁷⁹ Details found at <http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/23-LucyWalker.htm>; accessed 10.28.2014.

⁸⁰ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 479 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁸¹ Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 2nd ed., 4 (Signature Books, 1989).

Thou shalt not lieThou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shall **cleave unto her and none else**; and he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her ... shall not have the SpiritThou shalt **not commit adultery**; and he that committeth adultery and repenteth not, shall be cast out; but he that has committeth adultery and repents with all his heart ... and doeth it no more, thou shalt forgive; **but if he doeth it again, he shall not be forgiven**Whatever persons among you having put away their companions for the cause of **fornication** [if they repent] you shall not cast them outbut if ye shall find that any persons have left their companions for the sake of **adultery** ... **they shall be cast out** from among you. (1835 D&C Section XIII: 7, 20; emphasis added)

In the 1830s, at least, it seems pretty plain that Joseph's God required of the Saints a strict code of honesty, monogamy, and fidelity. Therefore, Saints living under Smith's leadership (in 1835 and beyond) would have known full well that sexual relationships among Mormons, at least, were reserved for legally married monogamous couples.

But what Smith said publicly (and what he expected from the rank and file) does not cohere with how he comported himself privately. "[F]rom the early days of the church," writes Van Wagoner, "rumor hinted that Smith maintained a private position different from his public posture. His abrupt 1830 departure with his wife Emma from Harmony, Pennsylvania, may have been precipitated in part by Levi and Hiel Lewis's accusations that Smith had acted improperly towards a local girl."⁸² Historian Grant Palmer adds the following: "[It] is generally unknown that [Joseph Smith] was accused of illicit sexual conduct with a number of women from 1827 on, until his death in 1844."⁸³ While living in Harmony, PA (between 1827 and 1829) Joseph was accused by Levi Lewis (Emma's cousin) of seducing the 16 year-old Eliza Winters, "Emma's close friend."⁸⁴ Lewis also claimed that both Joseph Smith and his friend Martin Harris believed that "adultery was no crime."⁸⁵

In March 1832 a gang of "Mormon-baiters led by Symonds Ryder" stormed the Johnson home where Smith was staying. As Brodie describes it, the mob "stripped him, scratched and beat him with savage pleasure, and smeared his bleeding body with tar from head to footand plastered him with feathers."⁸⁶ And what, pray tell, had Smith done to explain such unprovoked anger and savage violence? "It is said that Eli Johnson demanded that the prophet be castrated, for he suspected Joseph of being too intimate with his sister, Nancy Marinda [Johnson]. But the doctor who had been persuaded to join the mob [Dr. Dennison] declined the responsibility at the last moment, and Johnson had to be content with seeing the prophet beaten senseless."⁸⁷

Over two years later (September 1834), the same Nancy Johnson became Mrs. Orson Hyde. And although Orson and Nancy had several children together, upon learning (from Brigham Young) about Nancy's secret tryst with Joseph years earlier, Orson "put away his wife"

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo" by Grant H. Palmer (<http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 2nd ed., 4(Signature Books, 1989).

⁸⁶ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 119 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

(i.e., divorced her). It is estimated that in April 1839 Nancy Marinda Johnson Hyde became Joseph's 4th plural wife.⁸⁸

How do we square what is found in the Book of Mormon with what appears in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C)? Contrast what these respective works of scripture have to say about plural marriage:

- Jacob 2:23-24. ... This people begin to wax in iniquity ... they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son. Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, **which thing was abominable** before me, saith the Lord. (Emphasis added)
- D&C 132: 38-39. David also received **many wives and concubines**, and also **Solomon and Moses**⁸⁹ my servants ... and **in nothing did they sin** save in those things which they received not of me. David's **wives and concubines were given unto him of me** ... (Emphasis added)

The verses don't jibe – they're clearly irreconcilable. And yet in both cases, the same voice of God is said to be speaking. Another aspect of the plural marriage debacle that warrants deliberate scrutiny is the chronology problem: *Joseph's acceptance and practice of plural marriage predated the revelation*. Apologists have argued that we must not judge the recorded date (July 12, 1843) to reflect the date that the revelation was actually received. I get it – but the revelation itself (D&C 132) shows that Joseph was *already* doing what the revelation was only now instructing him to do! *Joseph was obeying a not-yet-received command*. Was he *practicing by anticipation*? How did he know the revelation/commandment was coming? – Unless, of course, the commandment originated from him! Consider the first of two noteworthy verses from D&C 132 that illustrate this point:

- D&C 132:52. And let mine handmaid, Emma Smith, receive all those that **have been given** unto my servant Joseph ... (Emphasis added)

Joseph's compliance preceded the directive. The very first verse of the revelation instructs Joseph to *prepare* himself for what he is *about to receive*.

- D&C 132: 1 Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon**, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having **many wives and concubines** Therefore, **prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you**; for all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same. (Emphasis added)

⁸⁸ Ibid., 462-463.

⁸⁹ There is nothing in the Old Testament that would corroborate the claim that Moses was a polygamist.

No sooner does God instruct Joseph that he must obey what he is *about to receive*, and he instructs Emma *to receive* the women Joseph had already taken! This is important: *Joseph was living a commandment he had not yet received!* The recorded revelation, we are told, came as a result of Smith's inquiry: he was puzzled, so he asked. And because he asked, God answered (in the form of a revelation; namely, D&C 132). The timeline just doesn't follow.

I can accept that Joseph's study of Old Testament prophets *may* have been the catalyst that led him to believe that multiple wives was one of the perks that came with being a prophet. But in light of the above and what is to follow, I submit that living the "new and everlasting covenant of marriage" was Joseph's idea and not the Lord's. A reasonable assumption, I submit, given that he had already put into practice what he feigned only wanting to know. Even if Joseph did receive a revelation instructing him to establish the patriarchal order of marriage, the evidence will show even convincingly that Smith (and LDS apologists) intended to retrofit the revelation to cover past sexual indiscretions.

And then there is this to consider: Where's the evidence that either Isaac or Moses had plural wives? Was God confused or was Joseph making it up as he went? If Old Testament prophets were enjoined by God to practice plural marriage; if plural marriage was in fact a patriarchal order that Joseph, too, was to follow; then we are left to explain why Isaac and Moses failed to comply. Were they, too, visited by a sword-wielding angel and threatened to get with the program, or else? Apparently not! And if not, then plural marriage may not be, after all, what God *designed* but only what Joseph *desired*. I do not disagree with Grant Palmer's analysis: "It seems highly improbable ... that God would bring back or 'restore' an ancient cultural custom that was not a doctrine. There is no evidence in the Old or New Testament that God commanded or directed any prophet or king to practice polygamy."⁹⁰

Conjugal relationships – But only in Heaven?

The idea of "connubial exclusiveness"⁹¹ neither appealed nor resonated with what the progressive-thinking Smith had in mind. Joseph was determined to redefine morality, even if the canard "I'm only looking to emulate the behaviors of Father Abraham" was the mantra required to justify his prurient campaign. Given that polygamy was and continues to be illegal, the need for utter and complete secrecy was of utmost importance. At first no one (but the plural wife) knew of his stealthy maneuvers, to include his wife Emma. But as his closest associates became suspicious, it was deemed necessary to include them in his patriarchal order of marriage. Those who were privy to such details included his brother Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, Heber Kimball, William Clayton, Willard Richards, and Benjamin Johnson. And as Brodie explains, his inner circle was "won over with very little argument."⁹²

Joseph's relationship with his 3rd plural wife (Prescindia Huntington Buell – wife of Norman Buell), suggests that sexual intimacy preceded a formal matrimonial covenant. While it

⁹⁰ "Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo" by Grant H. Palmer (<http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

⁹¹ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 297 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 303.

seems that she was not officially married to Joseph until December 11, 1841,⁹³ somewhere between 1838 – 1839 Prescindia admitted “that she did not know whether Norman Buell or the prophet was the father [of her son Oliver].”⁹⁴ Once more: by even Mormon standards, that’s adultery.

And as to the naïve hope that plural marriage was for the express purpose of raising “seed unto the Lord,” why would Joseph marry a woman who was already 7 months pregnant? Looks to me like the “seeding” had already been done! Zina Huntington Jacobs (sister of Prescindia Huntington Buell) was married to Henry Jacobs on March 7, 1841. And on October 27, 1841 Zina was married to Joseph. Yet again, Henry knew *nothing* of the marriage, “for when he toured southern Illinois with John D. Lee in the winter of 1842, he talked constantly of his wife’s loveliness and fidelity.”⁹⁵

There were 13 women married to Joseph Smith who swore under oath that their relationships with the Prophet were sexual in nature.⁹⁶ A member of Smith’s inner circle, Benjamin F. Johnson reported the following:

On the 15th day of May some three weeks later, the Prophet again came and at my home occupied **the same room and bed, with my sister, that the month previous he had occupied with the daughter of the late Bishop partridge as his wife.**⁹⁷

In a sworn affidavit dated March 4, 1870, Johnson added:

After a short period, President Smith ... came again to Macedonia (Ramus), where he remained two days, lodging at my house **with my sister as man and wife (and to my certain knowledge he occupied the same bed with her).** This visit was on the 16th and 17th of May, returning to Nauvoo on the 18th.⁹⁸

Eliza R. Snow was born January 21, 1804 is believed to be Joseph’s 15th plural wife. She converted to Mormonism in 1835 and came to live with Joseph and Emma in the spring of 1836 while she taught school in Kirtland. After the Smith’s moved to Nauvoo, she later joined them and on June 29, 1842 (at the age of 38) became Joseph’s plural wife. As Brodie reported,

There is a persistent tradition that Eliza conceived a child by Joseph in Nauvoo, and that Emma one day discovered her husband embracing Eliza in the hall outside their

⁹³ Ibid., 302.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 301.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 302.

⁹⁶ See http://www.i4m.com/think/history/joseph_smith_sex.htm; accessed 11.01.2014.

⁹⁷ Letter from Benjamin F. Johnson to George S. Gibbs, 1903, mimeographed copy. Citation found in Gerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism – Shadow or Reality?* 5th ed., 211; emphasis found in the original (Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2008).

⁹⁸ *Historical Record*, Vol. 6, p. 222; emphasis found in the original. Citation found in Gerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism – Shadow or Reality?* 5th ed., 211; emphasis found in the original (Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2008).

bedrooms and in a rage flung her downstairs and drove her out into the street. The fall is said to have resulted in a miscarriage.⁹⁹

In an interview with writer Dr. W. Wyl, C.G. Webb corroborates what is found in Brodie:

[Eliza Snow] used to be much at the prophet's house and "Sister Emma" treated her as a confidential friend. Very much interested in Joseph's errands, Emma used to send Eliza after him as a spy. Joseph found it out and, to win over the gifted young poetess, he made her one of his celestial brides. There is scarcely a Mormon unacquainted with the fact, that Sister Emma, on the other side, soon found out the little compromise arranged between Joseph and Eliza. Feeling outraged as a wife and betrayed as a friend, Emma is currently reported as having had recourse to a vulgar broomstick as an instrument of revenge; and the harsh treatment received at Emma's hand is said to have destroyed Eliza's hopes of becoming the mother of a prophet's son.¹⁰⁰

When Joseph established the Relief Society in March 1842 – appointing his wife as its president – Emma was quick to surround herself with some of the most able women of the community: Mrs. Elizabeth Ann Whitney, Mrs. Sarah M. Cleveland, Elvira Cowles, and Eliza R. Snow. And as Brodie reports, "Eventually every one of these women became [Joseph's] plural wife with the exception of Mrs. Whitney, who granted him instead the privilege of marrying her seventeen-year-old daughter Sarah."¹⁰¹

Joseph's 25th plural wife Lucy Walker, in an affidavit, acknowledged that Emma had given consent to at least 4 of Joseph's plural marriages, and that she (Emma) knew that he "associated and cohabited with them as wives."¹⁰² It was sometime in the spring of 1843 that Smith convinced Emma of the "inevitability of the new marriage system. Like many a Mormon wife after her," writes Brodie, "she agreed reluctantly to let her husband have more wives if she could do the choosing."¹⁰³ At the time three were four young girls living with the Smiths: Eliza and Emily Partridge and, another pair of sisters, the orphaned Canadians Sarah and Maria Lawrence. "After much bitter hesitation," Brodie writes, "Emma selected Emily and Eliza Partridge ... and the ceremony was performed on May 11, 1843. Emma had no idea that these girls had already been married to Joseph some two months earlier." Always the strategist, "Brother Joseph thought it best to have another ceremony performed."¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 470 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

¹⁰⁰ Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal, *Mormon Portraits: Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and His Friends*, 58 (SLC: Tribune Printing & Pub., 1886). Book may be found online at <http://olivercowdery.com/smithhome/1886WWyl.htm#pg053a>; accessed 10.30.2014.

¹⁰¹ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 306 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

¹⁰² Affidavit of Lucy walker Smith Kimball, printed in *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage*, p. 68 by Joseph Fielding Smith (Citation found in Gerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism – Shadow or Reality?* 5th ed., 211; emphasis found in the original (Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2008).

¹⁰³ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 339 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

In the light of the above, for apologists to argue that Joseph's wives were part of his eternal posterity *alone* is a claim that cannot be mapped onto reality. Many of Joseph's plural wives were his for *time* as well as eternity.

Stolen Innocence

While the LDS Church conceded that Smith took brides as young as 14 years of age, what they fail to acknowledge is that the physical maturity of a nineteenth century 14 year-old does not compare with the physical maturity of a twenty-first century 14 year-old. Consider the following:

The average age of menarche (first menstruation) in 1840 was 16.5 years of age – roughly 3.7 years older than it is today. In colonial America, most first marriages occurred between 19 – 23 years of age.¹⁰⁵ Rarely were young women married before the age of 16. Given that the mean age of puberty has declined since the 1840s, some estimate that the “psychological sexual maturity of Helen Mar Kimball in today's average age of menarche would put her psychological age [at the time Smith married her] at 9.1 years old.”¹⁰⁶ If we can agree that one's coming of age occurs with the onset of puberty (*menarche* for females; *spermarche* for males), then, by any reasonable standard, Ms. Kimball was (in all probability) not yet an adult. Not to put too fine a point on it – but wanting to be unmistakably clear all the same – Smith married a girl whose physical and psychological maturity was comparable to that of a 3rd grader! For my money, that's pedophilia.

According to J.M. Tanner, the average age of menarche dropped from about 17 to 12.8 during the period 1830-1962. The rate of decline was roughly 4 months per decade.¹⁰⁷ In *Gynecology: A Clinical Atlas* is found additional evidence that corroborates Tanner's findings; namely, that in 1830 the average age for menarche (first menstruation) was 17 and it drops to 13 in a century and a half.¹⁰⁸

My point is this: a 14 year-old girl living in the 1830s would *not* be at the same physical development or psychosexual maturity as a 14 year-old living in the 21st century. In all probability, Helen Mar Kimball – Smith's 26th plural wife – was a child; she was certainly *not* a woman.

Joseph and Brigham in Action

“You have the most beautiful eyes” is, for some Lotharios, how they intend to get to “first base” and beyond. For Smith, however, his approach was more economical; resembling something you'd hear on a “Mrs. Doubtfire” movie set, where, we are told, “Winston's idea of foreplay

¹⁰⁵ See “LDS Mormon Teen Polygamy” (found at http://www.i4m.com/think/polygamy/teen_polygamy.htm; accessed 10.24.2014.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Details found at <http://www.mum.org/menarage.htm>; accessed 10.24.2014.

¹⁰⁸ *Gynecology: A Clinical Atlas*, by J.L.H. Evers and M.J. Heineman, St. Louis (USA), 1990, p. 80.

was, ‘Brace yourself, Effie!’”¹⁰⁹ On more than one occasion, Smith introduced his intentions with this unapologetic command: “The Lord has given you to me.”

That there were women who actually fell for such a startling and appalling declamation leaves me breathless. What prevented them from saying, “Really? And since when was ‘I’ the Lord’s to give? Should not the Lord have consulted me first?” But not everyone succumbed to the spell of Smith’s charm. In late 1840 or early 1841, Sarah Pratt reported being propositioned twice by the libidinous prophet. As Richard Van Wagoner wrote in *Dialogue*, Sarah said that Smith told her the following:

Sister Pratt, **the Lord has given you to me** as one of my *spiritual wives* [somewhat like a concubine, or a wife for the night]. I have the blessings of Jacob granted me, as God granted holy men of old, and as I have long looked upon you with favor, and an earnest desire of connubial bliss, I hope you will not repulse or deny me.¹¹⁰

Palmer states the obvious: “This is not a marriage offer.”¹¹¹ Reflecting on her experiences with Smith in May 1886, Sarah Pratt described Smith’s modus operandi in these unflattering terms:

Joseph did not think of marriage or sealing ceremony for many years. He used to state to his intended victims, as he did to me: “*God does not care if we have a good time, if only other people do not know it.*” He only introduced a marriage ceremony when he found out that he could not get certain women without it. . . . If any woman, like me, opposed his wishes, he used to say: “**Be silent, or I shall ruin your character.**” . . . When he had assailed me and saw that he could not seal my lips, he sent word to me that he would *work my salvation, if I kept silent.*¹¹²

The need for secrecy is a common feature behind many of Smith’s clandestine liaisons. And yet, Smith could also be unabashedly obvious in communicating his intentions. Melissa Schindle (wife of Colonel George Schindle), for example, on July 2, 1842 swore in an affidavit that was published later that same month (in the *Sangamo Journal*) in which she stated: “in the fall of 1841 [Joseph asked] if he could have the privilege of sleeping with her. [That] **it was the will of the Lord that he should have illicit intercourse with her, and that he never proceeded to do any thing of that kind with any woman without first having the will of the Lord on the subject.**” After being spurned by Melissa, Smith warned her “that **she must never tell of his**

¹⁰⁹ “Mrs. Doubtfire” (Blue Wolf Productions & 20th Century Fox, 1993).

¹¹⁰ Richard S. Van Wagoner, “Sarah Pratt: The Shaping of an Apostate” *Dialogue* 19; emphasis added (Summer 1986): 71-72; John C. Bennett, “Bennett’s Second and Third Letters,” *Sangamo Journal* (Springfield, Illinois) July 15, 1842, emphasis in original, brackets provided by Grant H. Palmer (“Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo” by Grant H. Palmer; <http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

¹¹¹ “Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo” by Grant H. Palmer (<http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

¹¹² Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal, *Mormon Portraits: Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and His Friends*, 62; emphasis found in the original; bold added by present writer (SLC: Tribune Printing & Pub., 1886). Book may be found online at <http://olivercowdery.com/smithhome/1886WWyl.htm#pg053a>; accessed 10.30.2014.

propositions to her, for he had all influence in [Nauvoo], and **if she told he would ruin her character** ...”¹¹³ But no sooner does Mrs. Schindle tell Smith to take a hike and he crawls into bed with another married woman: Mrs. Catherine Fuller Warren!¹¹⁴ As the physician John C. Bennett reported, Smith would seduce women by telling them “that the Lord had granted the blessing of Jacob, and that there was no sin in it.”¹¹⁵

As Grant Palmer noted, “Improper sexual advances relating to the Stowell daughters, Eliza Winters, Marinda Nancy Johnson, Vienna Jacques, Miss Hill, Fanny Alger, Lucinda Harris, Sarah Pratt, Melissa Schindle, and Catherine Fuller Warren were made against the character of Joseph Smith from 1827-1841.”¹¹⁶ And, as I now intend to show, with Brigham Young – Joseph Smith’s successor – the trend continued.

Reflecting on his 1841 return from a mission to England and recalling how he felt after Joseph introduced him to the heavenly order of “celestial marriage,” Brigham Young offered these thoughts:

Some of my brethren know what my feelings were at the time Joseph revealed the doctrine ...[It] was the first time in my life that I had desired the grave, and I could hardly get over it for a long time and when I saw a funeral, I felt to envy the corpse
...¹¹⁷

Brother Brigham is nothing if not a quick and diligent learner, for he is credited with having accrued 55 plural wives of his own.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, and as he would later teach the subordinate Saints: “The *only* men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, *are those who enter into polygamy.*”¹¹⁹ But how does one go about establishing an order that while satisfying a so-called law of God as it simultaneously violates the law of the land? Carefully and in secret, I suppose.

There appeared to be a pattern that was routinely followed by Smith (and those invited to share in Joseph’s patriarchal order of marriage) that involved:

- Isolating the target (a form of intimidation)
- Authority figure (perpetrator) is recognized by victim as a “man of God”
- Tendering assurances plural marriage is an eternal law of God
- Promise of a celestial inheritance (to include extended family)
- Deadlines (in at least three propositions that I know of, the young women¹²⁰ had 24 hours or less to decide. If *no* was the answer, eternal damnation was their comeuppance).

¹¹³ John C. Bennett, “Bennett’s Second and Third Letters,” *Sangamo Journal* July 15, 1842; emphasis added. Citation found in “Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo” by Grant H. Palmer (<http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ “Sexual Allegations against Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Polygamy in Nauvoo” by Grant H. Palmer (<http://mormonthink.com/grant6.htm>; reconfirmed 11.10.2014).

¹¹⁷ *Journal of Discourses* 3:266.

¹¹⁸ George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 635 (Signature Books, 2008).

¹¹⁹ *Journal of Discourses* 11:269; emphasis added.

¹²⁰ Martha Brotherton, Lucy Walker, and Helen Mar Kimball are three such women, and I suspect there are more.

- The need for secrecy (to include *not* telling parents or living husband)

All of these elements may be found in the case of a “self-possessed eighteen-year-old English girl” by the name of Martha Brotherton. As published in 1842 by the *St. Louis Bulletin*, and as Brodie reports:

Brigham Young, who had not been lax in following his prophet’s lead, had set his heart on the high-spirited lass. He took her to the famous rendezvous over Joseph’s store, **locked the door**, and proceeded with the curious, bobtailed, hortatory courtship that was becoming so common in the city: “**Brother Joseph** has had a **revelation from God** that it is lawful and right for a man to have two wives.... If you will accept of me **I will take you straight to the celestial kingdom**, and if you will have me in this world, I will have you in that which is to come, and brother Joseph will marry us here today, and you can go home this evening, and **your parents will not know anything about it.**” When the girl demurred and begged for time, Brigham called in Joseph, who urged her to **make an immediate decision.** “Just go ahead, and do as Brigham wants you to,” he said, and added with a laugh: “He is the best man in the world, except me.” Then he went on more seriously: “**If you will accept of Brigham, you shall be blessed – God shall bless you, and my blessing shall rest upon you** ... and if you do not like it in a month or two, come to me, and I will make you free again; and if he turns you off, I will take you on.” “Sir, it will be too late to think in a month or two after,” Martha answered wryly. “I want time to think first.” To this the prophet replied: “But the old proverb is, ‘Nothing ventured, nothing gained.’” Finally and reluctantly they let her go home, where **she promised to pray in secret for guidance.** The moment she arrived, however, she wrote down the whole episode while it was still fresh in her memory, and showed it to her parents. The Brothertons ... took a steamboat to St. Louis, but not before they had given Martha’s recital enough circulation so that everyone in Nauvoo knew it within a week. Eventually Martha published her account in a St. Louis paper.¹²¹

Call me unreasonable, but I see nothing virtuous or praiseworthy in the underhanded and scheming techniques of men professing to be on an errand for the Lord. If anything, by hooking up with young developing brides it should be obvious that Joseph Smith et al. were shamelessly looking to enjoy a little bit of *heaven* while here on *earth*.

Conclusion

In all probability, most of the LDS faithful are familiar only with the “Sunday School Joseph” – the man they honor for having “communed with Jehovah.” But few Latter-day Saints are likely to be familiar with the “Nauvoo Joseph” – a convicted conman. In March 1826, Smith was charged with being a “disorderly person and an imposter.” As documentary film writer Jan Barnes explains,

¹²¹ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 306-307; emphasis added (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991). See also the *St. Louis Bulletin*, July 15, 1842, p. 2. Reference to this story also found in John C. Bennet’s *History of the Saints*. The prophet never replied directly to her charges, but (as Brodie noted) Heber Kimball and Brigham Young called her story a base falsehood.

According to the 1813 New York statute by which he'd been charged, "All jugglers, and all persons pretending to have skill in physiognomy, palmistry, or like crafty science, or pretending to tell fortunes, or to discover where lost goods may be found ... shall be deemed and adjudged disorderly persons." Once the statute had been passed, it might as well have stood as an unofficial boundary between the Age of Magic and the Age of Science.¹²²

The court in Bainbridge, New York found him guilty of "disturbing the peace," when Smith admitted to indulging in "magic arts and organizing hunts for buried gold."¹²³ In fact, it was because of Smith's reputation and treasure-seeking services that in the fall of 1825 he met and boarded with "Isaac Hale and his twenty-one year-old daughter Emma at Harmony ..."¹²⁴ Joseph took an immediate shining to Emma. How fortunate for the young Joseph that one of the requirements imposed by – you guessed it – an angel is that "he could not get the [golden] plates until he was married."¹²⁵ Joseph desired to make Emma his bride, but when he sought her father's approval, Mr. Hale refused, considering Joseph to be "a stranger [who] followed a business that [he] could not approve."¹²⁶ It was Hale's disapproval of Smith's spurious reputation and "treasure-seeking background"¹²⁷ that warranted his mistrust. After convincing Emma that she was to be his betrothed – after all, the angel Moroni required that there be a Mrs. Joseph Smith before releasing the plates to his care – the young "couple eloped on 18 January 1827."¹²⁸ Isaac Hale was incensed, accusing Joseph of "stealing" his daughter. As Barnes noted, "[Isaac] extracted a promise from Joseph never to engage in money digging again. Now according to Peter Ingersoll's recollection [Smith's confidant], Joseph cried in his turn as he promised and 'acknowledged he could not see in a stone, nor never could; and that his former pretensions in that respect, were all false.'"¹²⁹

As historian Michael Quinn noted, "Mormons typically speak of romance and Smith's love for Emma as the reason for their elopement ... It is more probable, however, that Smith risked alienating his parents-in-law from his new bride by eloping – not for love alone – but to fulfill the requirement of Moroni."¹³⁰ To what degree Joseph used the dreamy tale of the angel Moroni to convince Emma to marry him is unclear. But this much is certain: when it came to improvisational confabulating, nobody could spin a yarn like Mormonism's founding prophet.

¹²² "The Book of Mormon's foggy origins; Did Joseph Smith believe himself?" by Jane Barnes, SALON, August 12, 2012 (http://www.salon.com/2012/08/12/the_book_of_mormons_foggy_origins/; accessed 11.23.2014).

¹²³ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 16 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

¹²⁴ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 139 (Signature Books, 1987).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 53 (First Vintage Books Edition, 2007)

¹²⁷ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 140 (Signature Books, 1987).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹²⁹ "The Book of Mormon's foggy origins; Did Joseph Smith believe himself?" by Jane Barnes, SALON, August 12, 2012 (http://www.salon.com/2012/08/12/the_book_of_mormons_foggy_origins/; accessed 11.23.2014).

¹³⁰ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 141 (Signature Books, 1987).

Joseph was endowed with a formidable sense of self-importance; a persona Brodie described as “intoxicated with power and drunk with visions of empire and apocalyptic glory.”¹³¹ An editor from the *Pittsburg Gazette* said this of his visit with Joseph:

We spent about an hour conversing on various subjects, the prophet himself, with amazing volubility, occupying the most of the time, and his whole theme was himself. Let us give what turn we would to the conversation, he would adroitly bring it back to himself. . . . Running on in his voluble style, he said: “The world persecutes me, it has always persecuted me. . . . They thought to put me down, but they hav’nt [sic] succeeded, and they can’t do it. When I have proved that I am right, and get all the world subdued under me, I think I shall deserve something.”¹³²

In a letter to James Bennett dated November 13, 1843, Smith credited himself as having “heard the voice of God and communed with angels.”¹³³ Moreover, Smith stated that he held the

[Keys] of the last kingdom, in which is the dispensation of the fullness of all things spoken by the mouths of all the holy Prophets since the world began. . . . **I combat the errors of ages; I meet the violence of mobs; I cope with illegal proceedings from executive authority; I cut the Gordian knot of powers, and I solve mathematical problems of universities, with truth – diamond truth; and God is my “right hand man.”**¹³⁴

God is his “right hand man”? Joseph solves “mathematical problems of universities”? Right. Joseph was not a shrinking violet. When it came to exuding confidence, he had no equal. Just months before his death, he told an audience of the faithful that “God made Aaron to be the mouth piece for the children of Israel, and **He will make me be god to you in His stead** . . . and if you don’t like it, you must lump it.”¹³⁵ Just weeks before his death, he proclaimed:

I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor **Jesus** ever did it. **I boast that no man ever did such a work as I.** The followers of Jesus ran away from Him; but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me yet.¹³⁶

Who, but the most insecure, feel the need for such imperious bluster? And to the claim that the Saints “never ran away from [him]” – well, the remark is simply not true. There was a growing faction of disaffected Mormons who grew tired of Smith’s garrulous bravado and his rabid

¹³¹ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 354 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

¹³² *The New York spectator*, September 23, 1843. Cited in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism – Shadow or Reality*, 5th Ed., p. 255.

¹³³ *History of the Church*, Vol. 6:78 (Deseret Book, 1975).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

¹³⁵ *History of the Church*, Vol. 6:319-320; emphasis added (Deseret Book, 1975).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6:408-409; emphasis added.

theocratic ambitions. Smith came to see Nauvoo as a “state within a state.”¹³⁷ In remarks addressed to the city council in February 1843, Mayor Joseph Smith announced, “We stand in the same relation to the state as the state does to the union. . . . Shall we be such fools as to be governed by its [Illinois’] laws, which are unconstitutional?”¹³⁸ In other words, if Joseph disagrees with the law, by default it’s “unconstitutional.” As Brodie noted,

[Joseph] proceeded to run not only over the constitutions of Illinois and the United States but also over the ancient traditions of English common law. He had the city council pass an ordinance providing **that if any officer came to Nauvoo with a writ for his arrest based on the old Missouri difficulties, [the officer] should be arrested, tried, and if found guilty sentenced to life imprisonment in the city jail.** He could be pardoned by the governor **only with the consent of the Nauvoo mayor – that is, Joseph himself.** Another ordinance made it a criminal offense for any officer to issue a warrant in Nauvoo without first having it signed and approved by the mayor. An earlier one, designed to prevent Joseph’s creditors from exacting payment of debts in the form of property, had made gold and silver the only legal tender in Nauvoo. When these ordinances were published in the *Nauvoo Neighbor*, they convinced even tolerant non-Mormon observers that **the Mormon prophet held the law in complete contempt.**¹³⁹

Smith had fast become a law unto himself. His word *was* the law, and those inclined to challenge or disagree with his version of jurisprudence were traitors. By his inner circle (i.e., the Council of Fifty), Smith was ordained as “King of the Kingdom of God.”¹⁴⁰ The event was witnessed by William Marks, who said of the occasion that “Joseph suffered himself to be ordained king to reign over the house of Israel forever.”¹⁴¹ The Prophet’s unbridled ego left an indelible impress, one that would accompany the Saints on their westward trek to the Rock Mountains. Speaking to a gathering of the Saints on October 9, 1859, his successor Brigham Young made this bold proclamation: “No man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the **celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith.**”¹⁴²

By any reasonable standard, the Prophet Joseph was a self-absorbed autocrat. And because he was also recognized and revered as a prophet, governing the masses was only a revelation away – and the revelations, shall we say, were as plentiful as they were timely. As Mormons have come to unthinkingly accept: “whether by [God’s] voice or by the voice of [His] servants [think Joseph Smith here], *it is the same.*” (D&C 1:38; emphasis added.) In short: If Smith said it, God said it.

Mormons speak affectionately of the brave Joseph’s martyrdom (June 27, 1844). What they may not know are the circumstances that landed Joseph and his brother Hyrum (along with

¹³⁷ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 355 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

¹³⁸ *History of the Church*, Vol. 5:289.

¹³⁹ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 355; emphasis added (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 356.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 357 footnotes.

¹⁴² *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 7:289; emphasis added.

Willard Richards and John Taylor) in jail at Carthage in the first place. When editors William Law and Sylvester Emmons published the first issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor* on June 7, 1844, little did they realize the tumult their one and only edition would unleash. The four-page newsprint (of which there were 1,000 copies¹⁴³) included such mundane topics as marriage announcements and poetry, but it also included a statement from the “‘Seceders from the Church at Nauvoo’ and sworn statements from multiple individuals attesting to the teaching of the ‘plurality of wives.’”¹⁴⁴ While the seceders maintained their belief in the religion of the LDS Church, their criticisms were directed to many of the changing doctrines and practices of the inchoate and ever-developing religion. They accused Smith and other Mormon leaders of introducing “false and damnable doctrines into the Church, such as a plurality of Gods above the God of this universe, and his liability to fall with all his creations; the plurality of wives, for time and eternity, the doctrine of unconditional sealing up to eternal life, against all crimes except that of shedding [sic] innocent blood.”¹⁴⁵

While their editorial mentioned no names, it divulged some aspects of plural marriage that heretofore were obfuscated in a cloak of secrecy. Listed were three affidavits signed by William Law, Jane Law (his wife), and Austin Cowles testifying to what they had seen, read, and witnessed, to include granting “every man the privilege of marrying ten virgins and forgiving him all sins save the shedding of innocent blood.”¹⁴⁶ Moreover, it addressed Joseph’s intent to unite church and state in his campaign for supreme power and control. As Brodie described, “the *Expositor* was most eloquent: ‘We do not believe that God ever raised up a Prophet to Christianize a world by political schemes and intrigue. It is not the way God captivates the heart of the unbeliever; but on the contrary, by preaching truth in its own native simplicity. We will not,’ it said further in an unmistakable allusion to Joseph’s kingship, ‘acknowledge any man as king or lawgiver to the church: for Christ is our only king and law-giver.’”¹⁴⁷

Needless to say the editorial exposed Joseph, thus giving his clandestine and illegal marriage practices the attention he had gone to great pains to prevent. As mayor of Nauvoo, he issued the following edict:

To the Marshal of said City, greeting.

You are here commanded to destroy the printing press from whence issues the Nauvoo Expositor, and pi the type of said printing establishment in the street, and burn all the Expositors and libelous handbills found in said establishment; and if resistance be offered to your execution of this order by the owners or others, demolish the house; and if anyone threatens you or the Mayor or the officers of the city, arrest those who threaten you, and fail not to execute this order without delay, and make due return hereon.

¹⁴³ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 539 (First Vintage Books Edition, 2007).

¹⁴⁴ “Nauvoo Expositor” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nauvoo_Expositor; accessed 11.18.2014).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 375 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

By order of the City Council,
Joseph Smith, Mayor¹⁴⁸

As Oaks and Hill noted,

Joseph Smith, acting as mayor, ordered the city marshall [sic] to destroy the newspaper and press without delay and instructed the major general of the Nauvoo legion to have the militia assist. Shortly after eight o'clock that evening, citizens and legionnaires marched to the 'Expositor' office and smashed the press, scattering the type as they did so. This act infuriated the non-Mormons of Hancock County, who saw it as a final act of contempt for their laws.... To provide justification for a march on Nauvoo, charges of prompting a riot were made up against Smith and several Mormon leaders, and Constable David Bettisworth was sent to Nauvoo on June 12 [1844] to apprehend them.... Emissaries were sent to Governor Ford, charging that Smith had defied the law and asking Ford to bring the state militia.... Ford wrote Smith ... denouncing the city's proceedings as unlawful and demanding that those involved in the move against the 'Expositor' submit to the processes of the law at Carthage.¹⁴⁹

But as Joseph soon learned, destroying the *Nauvoo Expositor* did nothing to quell the ire or stem the tide of intolerance of an ever-growing chorus of dissenting voices. At best, razing the *Expositor* was a pyrrhic victory; a demolition that would inexorably lead to Smith's downfall. As Bushman noted, "Joseph failed to see that suppression of the paper was far more likely to arouse a mob than the libels. It was a fatal mistake."¹⁵⁰ Writing for the *Warsaw Signal*, Robert Foster "not only described the destruction of the press," writes Brodie, "but also accused Joseph of a long list of crimes, from the hiring of Porter Rockwell to kill Boggs to the seduction of innumerable Mormon women. 'History affords no parallel to the iniquities and enormities of this tyrant,' [Foster] concluded, 'who dressed in a little brief authority, perpetrates deeds at which Heaven weeps and human nature falls back ashamed of her own depravity.'"¹⁵¹

Foster's June 12, 1844 editorial expressed the views and resentment shared by non-Mormon and disgruntled Mormons alike; persons no longer willing to tolerate Smith's bloviating bluster and the thousands of mesmerized sheeple who followed him unthinkingly. Justice and redress is what the community demanded.

In sum: I never intended for this essay to devolve into a lesson in Church history and Joseph's final days at Carthage. My desire, at the outset, was to draw the reader's attention to lesser-known aspects of Church history that expose the Prophet Joseph for the man he was and *not* the

¹⁴⁸ *History of the Church*, Vol. 6:448 (Deseret Book, 1975). See also "Nauvoo Expositor" at <http://www.mormonismi.net/jamesdavid/nauvexpo.htm>;

¹⁴⁹ Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith*, 15-16 (University of Illinois Press, 1979).

¹⁵⁰ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 541 (First Vintage Books Edition, 2007).

¹⁵¹ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 377-378 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

man apologists are intending to design. You can grant Smith only so many mulligans before declaring that the jig is up. For the Prophet to insist just days before his death that he was “going like a lamb to the slaughter”¹⁵² is absolute rot. Joseph was no Pascal lamb.

LDS apologists are looking to redefine and defend a Joseph Smith of their own creation. But the Joseph Smith they describe and celebrate never existed. Members have a testimony of the “Sunday School Joseph” or, perhaps, the more adult “Sacrament Meeting Joseph.” But the “Nauvoo Joseph” known to historians is unlikely to be featured in priesthood lesson manuals or included in LDS General Conference addresses anytime soon. The Brethren want the world to celebrate the Church *as it is* and not the institution *that it once was*.

As an intolerant David Fitzgerald chided, “Like Muhammad, Smith received remarkably convenient divine revelations at short notice, especially – also like Muhammad – when he met a new girl and wanted to take her as another wife.”¹⁵³ Having revelations on cue was a convenient way for Joseph to reestablish control as he also looked, perhaps, to cover his tracks. God may work in mysterious ways, but I find it hard to believe that his methods include lies, cover-up, and deceit at grand scales. Call me daft, but I suspect that bedding nubile young women (in some cases, girls) was more Joseph’s idea than God’s command.

At some level, I suppose, Joseph wanted to emulate the marriage practices of such men as Abraham, David, and Solomon. But if following the lead of old Testament prophets was the intent, then he violated at least three of the terms established by Moses: (1) No adultery, (2) No marriage to sisters (Leviticus 18:17-18), and (3) No marriage to a mother/daughter pairing (Leviticus 20:14). Well, Smith married five pairs of sisters (Delcena and Almera Johnson, Eliza and Emily Partridge, Sarah and Maria Lawrence, Mary Ann and Olive Grey Frost, and Prescindia and Zina Huntington), and he married the mother and daughter Patty and Sylvia Sessions.¹⁵⁴ And as Emma confirmed, he certainly was an adulterer.

I don’t *need* to believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet and his promise of celestial glory and apotheosis is necessarily true to consider my life rich and complete, any more than I *need* to believe that Disneyland and the Magical Kingdom *is* the idyllic society. What I *need* and what I *desire* to understand is how the universe really is and what things are fundamentally true. In other words, show me what is true and you’ve satisfied, for me at least, a fundamental and basic desire. But such knowledge – wherever it exists – is acquired by the scientific method of inquiry and discovery, not by faith. And only as I proportion my beliefs and behaviors to the evidence am I then in harmony with what is ostensibly true. Only then may I say that mine has been a life well lived.

¹⁵² D&C 135:4.

¹⁵³ David Fitzgerald, *The Mormons*, 108 (Copyright © 2013 by David Fitzgerald).

¹⁵⁴ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd Ed., 336 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

Afterword

A Critical Analysis of the ‘Sword-Wielding Angels’ Claim

According to a 2009 Harris Poll, 72% of American adults believe in angels and 71% believe in the Afterlife.¹⁵⁵ Given the surprisingly high number of those who lay claim to supernatural and metaphysical phenomena, it is safe to assume that among religious communities those numbers will be even higher. (If you’re a believing Latter-day Saint, for example, nothing less than 100% is expected, given the prominent role angels played in the Restoration¹⁵⁶ and the frequency with which angels are referenced in LDS canonical narratives.¹⁵⁷ As to the Afterlife, Mormons believe that following death we have at least three kingdoms of glory awaiting us, namely: the celestial, telestial, and terrestrial kingdoms.¹⁵⁸)

And because Latter-day Saints believe in angels (the angel Moroni being, perhaps, the most famous) it may come as no surprise that when the LDS Church chose to acknowledge that the practice of plural marriage began with Joseph Smith, a discussion of angels (to include a nameless sword-wielding angel) would figure prominently in the defense of “the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.” In Smith’s world,

There are two kinds of beings in heaven, namely: Angels, who are resurrected personages, having bodies of flesh and bones ... Secondly: the spirits of just men made perfect, they who are not resurrected, but inherit the same glory. When a messenger comes saying he has a message from God, offer him your hand and request him to shake hands with you. If he be an angel he will do so, and you will feel his hand.¹⁵⁹

To which I say: nonsense. There are no known laws of physics that would explain how either physical (resurrected) or nonphysical (spirit) angelic beings could possibly exist, never mind that they concern themselves with human affairs. But this essay is not about physics, and nor do I wish to make it an at length discussion about angels. My intention is to limit myself to some of the reasons why Smith’s claim (and the LDS apology) is a non sequitur. Consider the following:

- **Resurrected Angels:** With death comes the inexorable decay and necrosis of “living” tissues and organ systems. Therefore, to expect nonliving and necrotic organic compounds to do an “about face” (thus spontaneously restoring brain, cellular, cardiovascular, and pulmonary function) is pure fantasy. For nonliving and decayed composites to trans-morph and once again become living systems would violate one of the most fundamental laws of physics: *entropy* (also known as the 2nd law of

¹⁵⁵ See http://www.harrisinteractive.com/vault/Harris_Poll_2009_12_15.pdf; reconfirmed 10.25.2014.

¹⁵⁶ Latter-day Saints believe that through his servant Joseph Smith, God restored the very church Jesus Christ established during his earthly ministry.

¹⁵⁷ Angelic visitations spoken of in LDS scripture are too numerous to mention. Those interested in learning more about the role angels’ play in LDS doctrine are referred to the Topical Guide contained within the Standard Works (Bible, Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine and Covenants; published by *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, SLC, 1979).

¹⁵⁸ See D&C 76 for details.

¹⁵⁹ D&C 129:1-5.

thermodynamics). Entropy increases with time – that is to say, systems devolve into states of increasingly higher *disorder* (i.e., *less* organized, not *more* organized). And just as scrambled eggs do not unscramble (thus returning to their pre-scrambled state), nor do dead bodies arise from their graves whole and restored! *Resurrections are faith-based claims, not empirical facts.* Those insisting that dead bodies *do* resurrect are required to advance the evidence to support the claim. (By the way, if Smith’s angel was indeed physical, someone also needs to explain how a physical being was able to negotiate vast distances without a visible means of transportation. Just how far away is Kolob? And how did Smith’s sword-wielding angel manage to travel extreme intergalactic distances *in the 1800s?*)

- **Spirit Angels:** Nonphysical systems cannot affect physical systems, if for no other reason that such systems are energy deprived. For nonphysical systems to acquire energy (with which to affect physical systems) would require that energy be created. But the creation or destruction of energy violates another fundamental law of physics, the *conservation of energy* (also known as the 1st law of thermodynamics). You can no more *think* the glass off the table than a nonphysical system (such as “spirit angels”) can *inflict* physical harm.¹⁶⁰

But rarely do empirical facts deter believers from holding to sacred religious traditions, to include a belief in the supernatural. People believe in angels, I suppose, because that is what they were taught and, perhaps, they never stopped to ponder the improbability for their existence. But because a majority of people believe in angels (for unscientific reasons), and because religious narratives often include a discussion of the metaphysical, we may safely assume that believing members will accept Smith’s foray with an angel as bona fide history (altogether indifferent to the fact that science repudiates such quixotic possibilities). But you cannot ignore the evidence and insist that you’ve prevailed. You cannot say that “the angel made me do it” and expect skeptical minds to believe that he did. In the timeless words of the late Carl Sagan, “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” And for angels, there is no evidence.

We know we’re in trouble when listed among the defense team’s pool of witnesses is a virtual agent whose being cannot be mapped onto reality. People are free to believe in whatever they want, angels included. But when it comes to actual “angel sightings,” well, let’s just say that the evidence is thin – nonexistent, actually. Therefore, when the LDS Church tells us that a menacing angel appeared to Joseph, it is not my burden to prove that it didn’t – it’s the defendant’s obligation to prove that it did. And until they do, the irrational and unreasonable remark lacks rational warrant and, for my money, is nothing short of barking mad.

The *principle of analogy* affirms that if angels exist and appeared in Joseph’s day, they should also exist and appear in our day. But, to date, no respectable “angel sightings” have been reported and independently confirmed by the scientific community. (As an aside: According to

¹⁶⁰ In 1842, the German physician Julius Robert Mayer advanced what is now known as the law of *conservation of energy* (also known as the *First Law of Thermodynamics*), where energy is neither created nor destroyed but is conserved over time. In Einstein’s famous equation $E = mc^2$ we are introduced to *mass-energy equivalence*; that energy and mass are fundamentally the same, and that the total amount of mass-energy in the universe is constant and remains unchanged.

the U.K. pollster Ipsos Mori's "Index of Ignorance," the USA ranks #2 of all nations on Earth as being the most ignorant.¹⁶¹ Well done, America.)

If I am correct that angels do not exist, how could I possibly prove that they don't? How do you prove a negative? How do you prove the nonexistence of something that doesn't exist? In the light of such sober reality, this I must insist: It's time for the defense to produce their witness. When it comes to establishing the facts, perhaps the late intellectual Christopher Hitchens (1949 – 2011) said it best: "*That which can be asserted without evidence can be rejected without evidence.*" If Smith can publicly lie about his plural marriages (he did¹⁶²), he can certainly lie about sword-bearing angels.

¹⁶¹ "Way to go, Americans: We're almost as Ignorant as Italians" by Tom Randall of Bloomberg News (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-10-31/way-to-go-americans-we-re-almost-as-ignorant-as-italians-.html>); accessed 11.10.2014.

¹⁶² See Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 2nd edition, 20 (Signature Books, 1989).