

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



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*The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure
of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Macmillan Publishing Company
New York

Maxwell Macmillan Canada
Toronto

Maxwell Macmillan International
New York Oxford Singapore Sydney



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“FUNDAMENTALISTS”

“Mormon Fundamentalism” denotes the beliefs and practices of contemporary SCHISMATIC GROUPS that claim to follow all the teachings of the Prophet Joseph SMITH. They often style themselves believers in the “fulness of the gospel,” which they assert must include PLURAL MARRIAGE and sometimes the UNITED ORDER.

The Fundamentalist movement began after the issuance of the MANIFESTO of 1890, which publicly declared an official end to plural marriage in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The period from 1890 to 1904 was one of confusion for some over the application and extent of the ban on new plural marriages in the Church. For example, since the Manifesto referred to “marriages violative of the law of the land,” some felt the prohibition did not apply outside the United States. In 1904 the Manifesto was therefore officially and publicly proclaimed to be worldwide in jurisdiction and overall scope.

Following this second pronouncement, unyielding Fundamentalists continued to hold that God requires all “true” believers to abide by the principle of polygamy, irrespective of Church mandate. This insistence has separated Fundamentalists from mainstream Mormonism. In the 1920s, Lorin C. Woolley of Centerville, Utah, claimed God had authorized him to perpetuate plural marriage, saying he received this commission while a young man in 1886 through the ministration of Jesus Christ, John TAYLOR, and Joseph Smith. His assertion further polarized the Fundamentalists and the Church.

Some Fundamentalists of the 1920s rejected Woolley’s claims to authority and went their separate ways. Charles Kingston settled in Bountiful, Utah, and set up a type of united order community that persists as a relatively closed society. Alma Dayer LeBaron moved to Mesa, Arizona, and eventually to Juarez, Mexico, laying the groundwork for the Church of the Firstborn of the Fullness of Times and offshoots such as the Church of the Lamb of God. Other Fundamentalists have

broken away through the years, making various religious claims.

Despite these defections, the majority of Fundamentalists remained an organized group, showing small but steady gains in adherents. In the mid-1930s, a united order colony was established in an isolated community near the Utah-Arizona border called Short Creek, now Colorado City, Arizona. Property was held in a trust called the United Effort. This colony has become a haven for many Fundamentalists, although a majority of their followers still reside in the Salt Lake City area.

In the mid-1940s, Utah and Arizona law officials raided the Short Creek community and broke up polygamous families, putting husbands in jail and children in foster homes. Fundamentalist leaders remained in state prison until September 24, 1945 (the fifty-fifth anniversary of the Woodruff Manifesto), when they issued a public statement indicating their intention to cease ignoring the law of the land. They returned to their families and refrained from violating the law for a time.

A few years later, a major schism in the Colorado City group occurred over the question of priesthood authority and the right to rule. Joseph Musser (the ostensible leader of the group), Rulon Allred, his brothers, and a few others broke away and started their own group, which has grown to about 2,000 members through conversion and births and is now known as the United Apostolic Brethren. In 1976, Rulon Allred, then leader of the group, was murdered, evidently by a plural wife of Ervil LeBaron, of the Church of the Lamb of God. Owen Allred replaced his brother as leader. The Colorado City group reorganized, with Leroy Johnson assuming leadership, and in 1990 was one of the largest fundamentalist groups, numbering in the thousands. Upon Johnson’s death (Nov. 25, 1986, at Hilldale, Utah) a power struggle ensued; schisms continue in the Colorado City group over authority and legal title to property.

Fundamentalists claim to believe in the four LDS STANDARD WORKS, the early history of the Church, and the prophets of the RESTORATION up to, and including, John Taylor. Fundamentalist doctrines of priesthood presidency are derived from a unique interpretation of Doctrine and Covenants section 84, which they claim refers to a priesthood council or hierarchy of seven men designated as “high priest” apostles. Various claims to succession have led to the current schisms in these

groups. Many independent Fundamentalists believe the claims to authority of the two main groups are flawed; they thus live and believe apart from those groups.

The thread that binds all Fundamentalists together is their belief that the LDS Church has improperly changed doctrines and practices. One independent Fundamentalist published a book listing ninety-five purported changes, thus mimicking Martin Luther's ninety-five theses. Prominent among these criticisms are the abrogation of plural marriage, cessation of living the united order, alleged loss of revelation to the Church since 1890, purported forfeiture of keys of the priesthood due to termination of the practice of plural marriage, supposed repudiation of "true"

knowledge of the GODHEAD, changes in the method of missionary work (failure to preach without purse or scrip), asserted corruption of temple garments and ordinances, cessation of the gathering of Israel to Utah, changing the method of priesthood conferral, and allowing all worthy male members of the Church to hold the priesthood, regardless of race.

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