STATEMENT DM570

The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins Of Power

This is arguably the most important new book to appear on Mormonism in the past quarter century, since Fawn Brodie's landmark biography of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History* (1971). Quinn's subject is the evolution and function of the Mormon ecclesiastical and theocratic hierarchy during the lifetime of its founder Joseph Smith (1805-1844) and through its transfer to Utah in 1847 following his assassination. Although not as overtly damaging as Brodie's work, it will be harder for Mormons to dismiss this book's deeply disturbing implications because of its more dispassionate style.

The author, D. Michael Quinn, is a deeply pious, seventh-generation Mormon and former Brigham Young University history professor, his peers hail him as a consummate scholar whose work reflects painstaking attention to detail. (The book's 1,296 endnotes and 7 appendices make up well over half its 685 pages.) Central to the credibility of Quinn's massive synthesis is the unprecedented access he enjoyed to the archives of the church of the Latter-day Saints (LDS) over a 15-year period. Furthermore, Quinn withholds judgment on the claimed supernatural experiences of Joseph Smith and other Mormon leaders, and lets their observed actions speak for themselves.

Mormonism has been described as "faith cast as history." This aptly describes the LDS church's claim that it was founded after Smith received two levels of priesthood authority directly from heavenly messengers in 1829 (the Aaronic priesthood from John the Baptist and the Melchizedek priesthood from Peter, James, and John). This authority is said to have been lost since the days of Jesus' apostles. Since only the LDS church has this restored priesthood authority, the Mormons allege themselves to be the one true church. Nevertheless. Quinn reveals the diaries and records of Smith and other Mormon leaders, which show that there was no claim to an angelic restoration of authority until 1834. In fact, Mormon priesthood concepts evolved over several years, and the accounts of ordination by heavenly messengers were later written back into Mormon scripture retrospectively (18-19). Of the Melchizedek priesthood in particular, Quinn concludes, "When retroactive changes are eliminated from original documents, evidence shows that the second angelic restoration of apostolic authority could not have occurred before the church's organization on April 6, 1830" (18). Mormon historians tend to avoid this evidence because it means the church was organized without proper priesthood authority (26).

Quinn also shows the logical relationship between Smith's unique authority claims, his increasing sense of "ethical independence" from civil government, his "enshrine[ment] of secrecy" (191), and ultimately the establishment of a functioning theocratic state in Nauvoo, Illinois, with himself ordained as king and lawgiver.

In 1835 Smith announced a doctrine Quinn calls "theocratic ethics." He used this initially to "justify his violation of Ohio's marriage laws by performing a marriage for Newel Knight and the undivorced Lydia Goldthwaite without legal authority to do so" (88). Smith declared, "I have done it by the authority of the holy Priesthood and the Gentile law has no power to call me to an account for it" (88). Other illegal marriages of legally undivorced spouses followed, resulting in bigamous, polygamous, and polyandrous marriages, and Smith's own secret sexual relationships with polygamous wives as young as 14 (89).

The theocratic nature of nineteenth century Mormonism was responsible for much of the conflict and persecution that dogged it. Mormons were largely centered in a succession of socially cohesive communities first in Kirtland, Ohio, then in Nauvoo, Illinois, and finally in the Utah territory. This communal nature was closely related to the group's authority claims: to accept Smith's religious authority was "to accept a social, political, economic, and cultural system" (79). Out of the frequent persecution that Mormons experienced during this period grew an indelible world view of Mormonism as the object of religious persecution. Mormons, however, were often the perpetrators as well as the victims of intimidation (92, 100). Indeed, "fear of being overwhelmed politically,

socially, culturally, economically by Mormon immigration was what fueled anti-Mormonism wherever the Latter-day Saints settled during Joseph Smith's lifetime" (91).

Smith's vision of the kingdom of God on earth reached its climax in Nauvoo, where the Mormons regrouped in 1838. The State legislature granted Smith a charter, allowing him to serve as mayor, chief justice of the municipal court, and commander of his own militia. By 1844 Nauvoo was the second most populous city in Illinois, and a member of the Mormon religious hierarchy virtually filled every post in its civil government, making it "the first ministerial theocracy in American history" (106). In fact, the Nauvoo Legion had nearly 3,000 troops at a time when there were only 8,500 soldiers in the entire U.S. army.

Beneath the surface of Nauvoo was a polygamous underground known only to select members of the Mormon hierarchy hand-picked by Smith. In 1842 he established an "Anointed Quorum." Sworn to secrecy, they were introduced to "the principle" — polygamy as a divinely revealed path to exaltation in eternity. In the spring of 1844, three months before his death, Smith also formed the ultrasecret "Council of Fifty," which ordained him "King, Priest, and Ruler over Israel on Earth" (128). Quinn estimates that 90-95 percent of Mormons at the time knew nothing of the secret things of Mormonism (170). Nevertheless, Smith was cautiously moving to show his hand to the uninitiated. A March 15, 1844 editorial in the LDS *Times and Seasons* newspaper criticized separation of church and state and concluded that "the church must not triumph over the state, but actually swallow it up" (122).

Smith had overstepped himself. Some members of the Council of Fifty, already uneasy about polygamy, "regarded Smith's kingly ordination as treasonous" (137), and they betrayed him. His declaration in a May 12, 1844 public sermon that "I calculate to be one of the instruments of setting up the Kingdom of Daniel by the word of the Lord, and I intend to lay a foundation to revolutionize the world" (137) provoked a strong negative reaction within the Mormon community. A dissident Mormon newspaper was formed *(Nauvoo Expositor)* to expose Smith's promotion of polygamy and the attempt to make himself theocratic king and lawgiver. By the authority of the Nauvoo City Council, over which he presided, Smith immediately ordered the press and papers destroyed. Within days, in response to these actions, Illinois Governor Thomas Ford ordered Smith to turn himself in to the Carthage, Illinois jail. While he was awaiting trial a mob stormed the jail and brutally murdered him.

Quinn leaves it to his readers to decide the lessons of this disturbing saga. Surely one lesson for Christian readers is that if Smith's opponents had allowed the judicial process to work its course (as Romans 13 dictates), both the prophet and his religious experiment would have been effectively exposed 150 years ago. Instead his martyrdom reenergized his movement. Mormon readers will have to decide whether their faith can survive with no genuine historical foundations for the restoration of priesthood authority. They will also be forced to come to grips with the essential role of secrecy and dishonesty within Mormon origins.

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