



The
**KING
FOLLETT**

*Discourse
Textual & History
Criticism*

VAN HALE

THE seventh of April, 1844, was a beautiful spring day in Nauvoo. The countryside was turning green; the blossoming peach trees attracted the season's first butterflies.¹ In this beautiful setting thousands of Latter-day Saints had gathered to celebrate the fourteenth anniversary of the restoration of the gospel.

Behind the temple, in a grove specially prepared for the occasion, Joseph Smith approached the stand at 3:15 P.M. He looked out over the largest congregation of Saints ever assembled during his life and delivered what was to be his most famous sermon, perhaps the most famous ever delivered in Mormondom. The discourse was given in honor of Elder King Follett who had been killed accidentally while digging a well. Although a number of topics were addressed, the most prominent doctrine, that for which the sermon is most remembered, was the plurality of gods. He declared: "Open your ears and hear, all ye ends of the earth. . . . God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man. . . . He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ. . . . you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you."²

These were new ideas to most members in that congregation although they had been discussed in private circles for several years.³ In fact, three weeks prior to the King Follett Discourse, the Saints had been counseled by Hyrum Smith to "let the matter of the grand councils of heaven, and the making of gods . . . entirely alone . . . until by and bye."⁴ It was not until after Joseph's presentation of these ideas at conference that the Saints considered them doctrine.

No one familiar with any era of Mormonism will be surprised to discover that there were widely varied reactions to the introduction of this major new doctrine. Thomas Ward, editor of the Church's *Millennial Star* in England, predicted two of them: "We feel greatly the importance of the principles upon which it [the King Follett Discourse] treats, and are convinced they will have a mighty effect, generally upon the Saints, for good or evil. The honest hearted will rejoice in the light of truth, and their minds will expand in the comprehension of principles so glorious; while it may be that some may turn away, being unable to endure the everlasting truth of heaven."⁵

Most members accepted the doctrine as a glorious new truth. Within a few months of the discourse, this doctrine, in part, was published by Orson Pratt under the heading "The Mormon Creed," and by John Taylor in an article entitled "The Living God." Taylor proclaimed that "it may be well enough to say at the out set that Mormonism embraces a plurality of Gods."⁶ Nearly fifty years later Wilford Woodruff referred to the King Follett Discourse at the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple and "testified that only on one previous occasion had he felt the spirit of God more powerfully manifest than during the dedication of this Temple—that was when the Prophet Joseph delivered his last address. The Prophet in that instance stood on his feet three hours, and the spirit of God was present like a flame of fire."⁷ Others who were present have left similar record of their positive impressions of that occasion.⁸

Not all members shared this attitude, however. Within eleven days of the conference, Joseph Smith's, second counselor, William Law, was excommunicated for his active opposition to the Prophet's politics and doctrine, including his teaching of the plurality of gods. By the end of April, William had rallied a number of Nauvoo citizens, some of considerable prominence, into his Reformed Church.⁹ On 7 June they published the first and only issue of their weekly paper, the *Nauvoo Expositor*, in which they denounced Joseph as a fallen prophet. Their reasons included his "introduc[tion of] false and damnable doctrines into the Church, such as a plurality of Gods above the God of this universe. . . . we therefore are constrained to denounce them as apostates. . . . among the many items of false doctrine that are taught the Church, is the doctrine of many Gods, one of the most direful in its effects that has characterized the world for many centuries."¹⁰ They also published statements exposing the practice of plural marriage, and called for the repeal of the Nauvoo Charter for alleged gross abuse of civil power by Joseph as mayor.

After two days of discussion, the mayor and the city council concluded that the *Expositor* threatened the future and the safety of the city, and could thus be abated as a public nuisance, a power they maintained was granted them in the Nauvoo Charter.¹¹ The press was destroyed by the Nauvoo Police on 10 June.

For this action, Joseph Smith and others were charged with inciting a riot, and finally surrendered themselves to the constable at Carthage on 25 June. They were murdered two days later.

Although the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum brought the demise of William Law's Reformed Church, the dissension and division continued. Many of its members and sympathizers became prominent in the several schismatic groups which were organized in succeeding years. A key element among most of the break-offs was that the Prophet had fallen into doctrinal error. While some of these groups ignored the plurality of gods, most totally rejected it, including the followers of William E. McLellin, David Whitmer, Sidney Rigdon, James J. Strang, Granville Hedrick, and William Bickerton.

Yet the King Follett Discourse was not an easy body of doctrine for even the most loyal of Joseph Smith's followers, both in the Utah Church and in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The difficulty for both groups was that the discourse contains doctrines which, over the passage of time, became unacceptable. Although the two churches questioned different portions of the doctrine presented in the speech, they both faced the problem of reconciling the Prophet's teachings with later Church doctrines.

The two churches seemed to find a similar solution to the problem: To question, even deny, the accuracy of the sermon as reported became more acceptable than to deal with the broader issue of doctrinal disharmony. A review of the history of the text of the discourse makes this evident.

Textual History of the King Follett Discourse

As Joseph Smith spoke on 7 April 1844, four men independently recorded his sermon. The reports of

Thomas Bullock and William Clayton, who had been assigned as clerks for the conference, each contain a version of the discourse. Another account was recorded by Willard Richards, who, in keeping the Prophet's diary for two years, had recorded a number of sermons. In addition to these three official reporters, Wilford Woodruff took notes at the time of the discourse and later entered his version into the comprehensive diary which he kept throughout his life. Although none of the four were trained in taking stenographic, or word for word, accounts, all had had significant prior experience at recording discourses, and were capable of recording Joseph Smith's teachings accurately on that occasion.¹²

Thomas Bullock was delegated the responsibility of preparing the conference minutes for publication. On 10 April 1844, the day after the close of the conference, he met "with the Twelve to arrange the minutes."¹³ He was

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provided with William Clayton's minutes, and from 23-28 April he combined, or amalgamated, the two reports into one, which was fuller and more complete than either separately.

Publication of the conference minutes in the *Times and Seasons* began on 1 May, with the Bullock-Clayton report of the discourse appearing on 15 August. This version served as text for three reprints of that sermon over the next two years.

In 1855, the manuscript of Joseph Smith's history, which eventually became the six-volume *History of the Church*, was being completed in Salt Lake City by the Historian's Office staff. A clerk in that office, Jonathan Grimshaw, who had been assigned to prepare Smith's sermons for the *History*, began work on a new text of the King Follett Discourse, combining the Richards and Woodruff reports with the 1844 Bullock-Clayton amalgamation from the *Times and Seasons*. Although the Richards and Woodruff versions contained no doctrines not found in the 1844 text, they did fill out phrases and ideas already in the first version, expanding it by about

fifty percent (see the included six column parallels for example). Although there were some minor problems with this process¹⁴ the combination of words and phrases was effective, often reproducing Joseph Smith's exact wording. In fact, in numerous instances the precise wording can be determined with considerable confidence. A comparison of the 1855 amalgamation with the four reports, and of the four reports, with each other, reveals a strict harmony of content and will not support a claim of any substantial alteration or discrepancy in doctrine.¹⁵

Jonathan Grimshaw began his work on the sermon on 3 October 1855 and completed it on the fifteenth of the same month. On 5 November, Thomas Bullock and Church historian George A. Smith read the completed text, which they "carefully revised and compared."¹⁶ It was "read in Council Sunday 18th Nov 1855, and carefully revised by President Brigham Young."¹⁷ Grimshaw's copy containing revisions in the handwriting of himself, Bullock, and Albert Carrington is filed in the Joseph Smith Collection in the LDS archives. With perhaps one exception, the revisions are minor in nature and do not add to, delete, or alter any of the basic doctrines of the discourse, but only improve its readability, fluency, and clarity.

By 5 April 1856 it was written into the manuscript of Joseph Smith's history. From this manuscript, the *Deseret News* printed for the first time the 1855 amalgamation in its 8 July 1857 edition. This printing has been made the basic source for all subsequent printings of the discourse by the LDS church.¹⁸

All reliable information supports the current version as being the result of a significant and a conscientious effort to produce a faithful and accurate report of the discourse. Considerable effort was expended to report the speech by four competent reporters. Through the process of amalgamation, the reports of the four were united to produce the fullest possible version, and to ensure its accuracy. It was compared with the originals, reviewed and revised several times by men who had heard the sermon, and who had been intimate associates of Joseph Smith. These men had firsthand knowledge of his theological beliefs and were thus qualified to recognize any of the doctrines in the reports that did not harmonize with those of the Prophet. Additionally, reports of the King Follett Discourse are consonant with Joseph Smith's teaching of the same doctrines on other occasions both public and private.¹⁹ Therefore, although it must be recognized that the current version is not, for the most part, a word-for-word report, to doubt that it accurately presents Joseph Smith's teachings on that occasion is unreasonable.

RLDS Criticisms

The difficulties posed by the King Follett Discourse for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have centered around the doctrine of the plurality of gods. As early as 1864, those who accepted the doctrine (Isaac Sheen, Zenos Gurley, and W. W. Blair among them) were charging those who rejected it (Joseph Smith III and Jason Briggs) with apostasy. By 1890, however, Briggs's position prevailed: The plurality

of gods was "the doctrine of men . . . and the doctrine of devils."²⁰

Rejecting the plurality of gods, however, meant rejecting a teaching of Joseph Smith, unless the report of the offending discourse could be shown to be faulty. In 1893 the RLDS church published their abstract of the "Temple Lot Case" which included this testimony from James Whitehead: "I heard what is known as the 'King Follett' sermon preached. That sermon was published. Joseph Smith did not in that sermon teach the plurality of gods."²¹ This was only a partial report of Whitehead's statement, however. The following significant lines in the original transcript were omitted in the abstract: "He did not that I know of. If he did I did not hear it, but I was not there all the time he was preaching for I was called out for a time."²² The RLDS church history published in 1896 presented four arguments suggesting "suspicion as to . . . [the] genuineness"²³ of the King Follett Discourse. These ideas have persisted to the present. In 1965 RLDS Apostle Aleah G. Koury restated them, contrasting LDS and RLDS claims in his book *Truth and Evidence*.²⁴ And in 1971 RLDS historian Richard P. Howard repeated yet again these same ideas, this time in question form, with the tone of inquiry, rather than polemic.²⁵

The first and most obvious of the charges that can be brought against the veracity of the discourse was that no verbatim report was made of its delivery; hence it must have been written from memory, or, at best, from notes. The question of the reliability of the reported sermon has been considered in detail above.

The second objection suggests that in style and diction, as well as doctrinal teachings, the discourse differs markedly from the body of Joseph Smith's work, thus making its genuineness suspect. Although only the most preliminary work has been completed to date on the question of diction, because the sermon was recorded by four witnesses, and because their reports have such a high degree of correspondence, it may be that this is one of the best-preserved examples of the Prophet's style.

Although a lengthy and complete response to the charge that "its doctrinal teachings differ . . . widely from the productions of Joseph Smith as found elsewhere"²⁶ is beyond the scope of this paper, it may be sufficient to state that some forty-nine references showing the development of the doctrine of the plurality of gods and Joseph's belief in it have been collected and published.²⁷

The third objection is to the brevity of the reported discourse. The address was said to have been a very long one, lasting two hours and fifteen minutes, yet the extract printed in *Times and Seasons* can be leisurely read in about twenty-five minutes. From so meager an extract, it is argued, one cannot get the true sense of the discourse.

A close examination of the four manuscript reports refutes this assumption. The close thought-for-thought parallel in the four reports suggests the probability that the 1855 amalgamation is a comprehensive report of the ideas Joseph Smith presented. An examination of parallel #1 on the plurality of gods (which is quite representative of the entire discourse) provides convincing evidence that the "true sense" of the sermon has been accurately preserved. In fact, so many of the

identical words are found in more than one report, that this version appears to present much of the Prophet's very wording. Of course there is no doubt that a stenographic report would vary from the 1855 version, but probably in wording only, not in doctrine.

If the 1855 version does indeed present the correct sense of the King Follett Discourse why did its presentation require two hours and fifteen minutes? What follows is admittedly speculative, but not unreasonably so.

The funeral sermon was deferred from 5 April to 7 April because Joseph Smith's voice had been under great strain, the result of his frequent public speeches without

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the benefit of a public address system.²⁸ As he began his address, he requested "Pray that the Lord may strengthen my lungs." The wind was blowing hard, and the congregation was the largest that he had ever addressed. The strain he experienced during this sermon is evident from his remarks of the following day: "It is just as impossible, for me to continue the subject of yesterday as to raise the dead. My lungs are worn out."²⁹ Perhaps these factors caused him to speak slowly, pause frequently, and possibly stop for a few minutes occasionally to rest his lungs. If so, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the 1855 version could be almost a full report, and yet be read aloud in less than one-half the time President Smith occupied the stand.

The final objection RLDS history brings against the veracity of the report of the King Follett Discourse is that because the text was not printed until after Joseph's death, its published version had not been inspected by him. This statement, of course, is correct. However, preparation of the minutes of the conference for

KING FOLLETT DISCOURSE EXTRACTS

PARALLEL NO.1 — PLURALITY OF GODS					
WILLIAM CLAYTON	THOMAS BULLOCK	TIMES AND SEASONS	WILLARD RICHARDS	WILFORD WOODRUFF	HISTORY OF THE CHURCH
<p>Going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity—</p> <p>he was once as one of us and was on a planet as Jesus was in the flesh—</p> <p>You have got to learn how to be a god yourself in order to save yourself—to be priests & kings as all Gods has done—by going from a small degree to another—from exaltation to ex—till they are able to sit in glory as with those who sit enthroned.</p>	<p>he was God from the begin of all Eternity & if I do not refute it—</p> <p>God himself the father of us all dwelt on a Earth same as Js. himself did & I will shew it from the Bible—</p> <p>you have got to learn how to be a God yourself & be K. & God Priest to God same as all have done by going from a small capy to anr. from grace to grace until the resn. of & sit in everlasting power as they who have gone before</p>	<p>I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity.</p> <p>God himself; the Father of us all dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did, and I will show it from the Bible.</p> <p>You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves; to be Kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done; by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as doth those who sit enthroned in everlasting power</p>	<p>refute the Idea that God was God from all eternity—</p> <p>you have got to learn how to make yourselves God, Kings, Priests, &c.—by going from a small to great capacity. Till they are able to dwell in everlasting burning & everlasting power.—</p>	<p>I want you to understand God and how he comes to be God. We suppose that God was God from eternity. I will refute that Idea, or I will do away or take away the veil so you may see.</p> <p>he once was a man like us, and the Father was once on an earth like us,</p> <p>And you have got to learn how to make yourselves God, king and priest, by going from a small capacity to a great capacity to the resurrection of the dead to dwelling in everlasting burnings,</p>	<p>I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see.</p> <p>He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible.</p> <p>you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.</p>
PARALLEL NO. 2 — STATURE OF CHILDREN IN RESURRECTION					
WILLIAM CLAYTON	THOMAS BULLOCK	TIMES AND SEASONS	WILLARD RICHARDS	WILFORD WOODRUFF	HISTORY OF THE CHURCH
<p>told of parents receiving their children</p> <p>Note-Columns 1 and 2 were amalgamated into column 3 in 1844. Columns 3, 4, and 5 were amalgamated into column 6 in 1855.</p>	<p>Mothers you shall have your Children for they shall have it—for their debt is paid there is no damn. awaits them for they are in the Spirits—as the Child dies so shall it rise from the ded & be living in the burng. of God.—it shall be the child as it was bef it died out of your arms Children dwell & exercise power in the same form as they laid them down</p>	<p>Mothers you shall have your children, for they shall have eternal life: for their debt is paid, there is no damnation awaits them, for they are in the spirit.—As the child dies, so shall it rise from the dead and be forever living in the learning of God, it shall be the child, the same as it was before it died out of your arms. Children dwell and exercise power in the same form as they laid them down.</p>	<p>Shall mothers have their Children? Yes. they shall have it without price. redemption is paid possessing all the intelligence of a god. the child as it was before it died out of your arms thrones upon thrones. Dominion upon dominion just as you—</p>	<p>A question will Mothers have their children in Eternity yes, yes, you will have the children But as it falls so it will rise, It will never grow, It will be in its precise form as it fell in its mothers arms. Eternity is full of thrones upon which children reigning on thrones of glory not one cubit added to their stature I will leave this subject here</p>	<p>A question may be asked—"Will mothers have their children in eternity?" Yes! Yes! Mothers, you shall have your children; for they shall have eternal life, for their debt is paid. There is no damnation awaiting them for they are in the spirit. But as the child dies, so shall it rise from the dead, and be for ever living in the learning of God. It will never grow; it will still be the child, in the same precise form as it appeared before it died out of its mother's arms, but possessing all the intelligence of a God. Children dwell in the mansions of glory and exercise power, but appear in the same form as when on earth.</p>

publication in the Church's *Times and Seasons* had been completed by 28 April, two months before the Martyrdom. Although there is no evidence that the Prophet inspected and approved the minutes, he certainly had the opportunity, and perhaps the inclination, since on several previous occasions he had listened to and revised minutes.³⁰

At any rate, it seems certain that the minutes received at least the approval of the Twelve, for they were prepared under their direction, and the publication supervised by two of their number, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff. Furthermore, thousands had heard the discourse, and considerable objection to its teaching of the plurality of gods had been festering for four months by the time it was first published. If the report were in error on this subject, it is almost inconceivable that no one would have attempted to set the record straight. Yet from the opponents and proponents of the doctrine there is no known record of any expressed dissatisfaction with the 1844 printings of the speech. It appears that of the thousands who heard it, not one challenged its accuracy at that time.³¹

Thus, for at least ninety years, the King Follett Discourse has been unwelcome in the RLDS profile of Joseph Smith, a profile which cannot be complete without it.

LDS Criticism

Although LDS authorities had less difficulty accepting the doctrine of plurality of gods, two other concepts contained in the King Follett Discourse became doctrinally uncomfortable for them after a number of years: the question of the stature of children in the resurrection and the matter of the independence of intelligences in the premortal existence. As the sermon was reprinted by leaders of the LDS church in ensuing years, their method of handling the apparent contradictions in doctrine proved to be essentially the same as that of their RLDS cousins: to delete the offending sections, blaming the inaccuracy of transcription of the discourse rather than to reject overtly a teaching of their founding prophet.

First let us examine the history of the conflict regarding resurrected children. Close scrutiny of early records and diaries reveals that few mothers of that era escaped the heart-rending experience of losing an infant child. Near the end of the King Follett Discourse, Joseph Smith sought to comfort those grieving parents with these remarks: "Mothers, you shall have your children. . . as the child dies, so shall it rise from the dead. . . *It will never grow, it will still be the child in its precise form as it was before it died out of your arms. Children dwell and exercise power, throne upon throne, dominion upon dominion, in the same form just as you laid them down. Eternity is full of thrones upon which dwell thousands of children, reigning on thrones of glory, with not one cubit added to their stature.*"³²

This was neither the first nor the last time he had taught this concept. Two years earlier, at the funeral of Windsor Lyons's child, the Prophet proclaimed that "all men will come from the grave as they lie down, whether old or young, there will not be 'added unto their stature one cubit.' . . . Children will be enthroned in the presence

of God, and the Lamb; with bodies of the same stature that they had on earth. . . they will there enjoy the fulness of that light, glory, and intelligence which is prepared in the Celestial kingdom."³³

Six weeks before his death, President Smith again affirmed this concept: "In order for you to receive your children to yourself, you must have a promise, some ordinance some blessing in order to ascend above principalities or else it may be an angel—they must rise just as they died—we can there hail our lovely infants with the same glory, the same loveliness in the celestial glory where they all enjoy alike—they differ in stature, in size—the same glorious spirit gives them the likeness of glory and bloom."³⁴

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The consistent thought runs through all these statements that in the resurrection those who died as infants will be of the same stature as when they died, but will not be denied any intelligence or glory. Further, no sources contemporary with Joseph Smith have been found which in any way contradict or modify this publicly and privately stated position. Of the reports of the King Follett Discourse, three of the four record this concept, with a harmony among them which does not support the argument later advanced that this part of the discourse was inaccurately reported.

After Joseph Smith's death, the subject of the stature of children in the resurrection continued to receive attention. In an 1854 discourse Brigham Young restated Joseph's teaching with some expansion:

Little children can, after death, increase in all the wisdom, power, glory, gifts, and blessings that pertain to the Celestial kingdom. . . . Suppose the inhabitants of the eternal world should range from two to fifteen feet what

matter of that. . . . This heavenly, beautiful, and glorious variety you discover in the works of God here below, will be seen in the resurrection. You will see the child of three, four, and five years old, possessing all the intelligence in them that makes them capable of enjoyment and duration. Resurrected bodies will be as diversified as the bodies of mortal flesh, for variety, beauty and extension. . . . The height of my body, or its extension in width will make no difference to my enjoyments and blessings in the eternal worlds.³⁵

Acknowledging that there had been considerable interest in the subject, President Young again addressed the subject at the funeral of the infant son of Jesse C. Little. This time he introduced a note of uncertainty as to Joseph Smith's final ideas on the subject:

The question has often been asked, how it is with little children; will they grow or not after; Joseph once said

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they would, and then he said they would not, he never had any revelation upon the subject. I have no doctrine to give upon this subject. I believe in the great variety in the vast Creation of God. I do not believe that the Lord ever made two worlds alike, or two things alike in any world, nor that the human family has been alike in stature in the various ages of this world. The Lord has power to give a soul or spirit in a tabernacle two or three ft. high, as in a giant 8 or 10 ft. in height. . . . My doctrine or belief is that we shall find all children and people at the resurrection of the same stature as when they died.³⁶

Again, in 1867, he said he had "heard Joseph Smith say that Children would not grow after death & at Another time that they would grow & he hardly know how to reconcile." Brigham continued to present a reconciliation of the alleged contradictory statements of Joseph Smith, stating "he would like a variety in

Eternity. Children might grow in intelligence & not in stature as well as a given person."³⁷ This seems consistent with Joseph Smith's teachings that infants who die will, in the resurrection, continue to grow in intelligence, in knowledge, in glory, and in power and dominion, but not in stature (see parallel #2).

There is no indication that Brigham Young ever questioned the accuracy of the report of the King Follett Discourse. All evidence is that he had full confidence in the 1855 version of the report. As has already been pointed out, it was upon President Young's final examination and approval 18 November 1855, that the 1855 version was incorporated into the manuscript of the History of Joseph Smith then being completed.

The Saints may have been consoled by the teaching that one who dies in infancy is an heir of celestial glory, but seemed to find the notion that an infant's growth and progress toward perfection will not be physical rather disconcerting. This idea caused "quite an anxiety," according to Orson Pratt in 1873.³⁸ What was one to do with this unacceptable teaching of Joseph Smith? Pratt suggested several possible solutions:

1. The report of the sermon did not give the Prophet's full idea on the subject.
2. Joseph Smith had not been fully instructed by revelation on that point.
3. Pratt had heard that shortly before his death, Joseph had obtained further light on the subject to the effect that there would be growth after the resurrection.³⁹

Here the same arguments reappear: Either the report was in error, or the Prophet changed his mind, or (quite frequently) both.

During the final quarter of the nineteenth century, the idea which won almost universal acceptance among the Latter-day Saints was that one who died in infancy would be resurrected as an infant, then nurtured to maturity by his mother from mortality. This allowed for an easy reinterpretation of Joseph Smith's reported statement: Yes, infants will be resurrected as infants; there is no growth in the grave, but they will then grow after the resurrection to their full stature.⁴⁰

In support of this belief several contemporaries of the Prophet wrote statements in later years to the effect that they had heard Joseph teach that infants would grow after the resurrection.⁴¹ But if Joseph Smith did reverse his position, no evidence of it from or near his era has yet been uncovered. Good sources establish the Prophet's doctrine on this point to have been consistent from March 1842 to May 1844, just six weeks before his death. It is not reasonable to discard the report of the King Follett Discourse on the basis of several reminiscences which emerged from a period of LDS history charged with sentiment contrary to the doctrine expressed in the discourse.

One of the interesting episodes in the history of the discourse was that of its exclusion from the first edition of B. H. Roberts's *History of the Church*. To Roberts, the sermon was the climax of Joseph Smith's teaching career. As he edited the first edition of the *History*, he did considerable work on the discourse, preparing extensive footnotes in which he revealed a great reverence for it, though he doubted the accuracy of some parts of the

text. The sermon was to fill pages 302-17 of volume six of the *History*. At the last minute, and without Roberts's knowledge or consent, those of higher authority decided to delete it, and the *History* appeared with sixteen pages missing.⁴²

The reason for the deletion was stated in a letter by George Albert Smith, 30 January 1912: "I have thought that the report of that sermon might not be authentic and I have feared that it contained some thing that might be contrary to the truth. . . . Some of the brethren felt as I did and thought that greater publicity should not be given to that particular sermon."⁴³

It is tempting to conclude that the subject responsible for its deletion from the *History* was the issue of the stature of children in the resurrection, for certainly neither the plurality of gods nor any other subject in the discourse had received any significant public criticism.

Disagreement over the doctrine of premortal intelligences apparently led to the discourse's deletion from the History of the Church.

The discourse had been published three years earlier in the *Improvement Era*, with Roberts's footnotes. The problem of the disputed statement on children in the resurrection had been resolved by omitting the paragraph and including this footnote by Roberts: "The omitted paragraph indicated by the asterisks refers to the exaltation and power that will be wielded by children in the resurrection before attaining to the development of stature of men and women; but which development will surely come to those who are raised from the dead as infants. It is quite evident that there was some imperfection in the report of the Prophet's remarks at this point, and hence the passage is omitted."⁴⁴

However, further investigation reveals that another doctrine of the discourse was probably the immediate reason for its deletion from the *History*. In August 1911,

B. H. Roberts had completed chapter 55 of the "History of the Mormon Church" which was being published in the *Americana*, a historical magazine published by the National Americana Society in New York. This chapter was entitled "The Prophet's Work—Mormonism a System of Philosophy," and was devoted to a discussion of Joseph Smith's philosophical and theological beliefs.⁴⁵ This chapter was reviewed and amended by President Joseph F. Smith's two counselors, Anthon H. Lund and Charles W. Penrose. In his diary entry of 25 August 1911 President Lund observed: "Today we had Bro. Roberts read his article on the Philosophy of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Bro. Penrose made a splendid speech on eternalism opposing the view of Bro. B. Roberts who holds that intelligences were self-existent entities before they entered into the organization of the spirit."⁴⁶ Again on 29 August he wrote:

I spent the forenoon in the H.O. where Bro. C. W. Penrose and I listened to Bro. Roberts read his concluding chapter on the prophet Joseph Smith. We got him to eliminate his theories in regard to intelligences as conscious self-existing beings or entities before being organized into Spirits. His doctrine has raised much discussion and the inference on which he builds his theory is very vague. The Prophets speech delivered as a funeral sermon over King Follett, is the basis of Bro. Roberts doctrine: namely where he speaks of mans eternity claim. Roberts wants to prove that man then is co-eval with God. He no doubt felt bad to have us eliminate his pet theory.⁴⁷

From President Lund's diary it appears that the issue current at the very time that the discourse was deleted from the *History of the Church* was that of intelligences existing as conscious entities before being organized into spirits. Thus, it seems probable that this issue was immediately responsible for its deletion from the *History*.⁴⁸ Again, an unacceptable doctrine led to criticism of the text of the discourse.

But the two issues here discussed are not isolated concepts of Joseph Smith's thought. To discard them diminishes our understanding of his thinking and of related doctrines. When he taught that those who die as infants will one day reign upon thrones as gods without one cubit added to their stature, was he saying that mortals' concepts of physical perfection will be meaningless in eternity? Was he stressing the nonphysical attributes as being immeasurably more important than the physical? Was he saying that physical variety is even more important than the mortal quest for physical perfection? Was he saying that physical perfection is not related to eternal happiness, glory, power, or ultimate perfection?

Whatever the answers to these questions, it is obvious that the King Follett Discourse has been an object of intense interest from the day of its delivery in April 1844 to the present. It has been described both as blasphemy and glorious truth. Whichever it is, the preservation of pertinent manuscripts has led to a reliable reconstruction of Joseph Smith's remarks on that occasion. Therefore, all portrayals of him which neglect the King Follett Discourse, in whole or in part, must continue to be needlessly incomplete or distorted.

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Notes

1. Diary of Thomas Bullock, Historian's Office Journal, 6 and 7 April 1844, Library-Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as Church Archives.
2. The version quoted here is the Jonathan Grimshaw amalgamation in Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932-51), 6:305-6; hereafter cited as *History of the Church*. Compare this version with its equivalent in Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *Brigham Young University Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 200-1; hereafter cited as "A Newly Amalgamated Text."
3. Van Hale, "The Doctrinal Impact of the King Follett Discourse," *BYU Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 209-25.
4. Letter of Hyrum Smith, 15 March 1844, in *Times and Seasons* 5 (March 1844): 474.
5. Editorial by Thomas Ward, *Millennial Star* 5 (September 1845): 95.
6. Orson Pratt, *The Prophetic Almanac for 1845* (New York: Prophet Office, 1845-46); John Taylor, "The Living God," *Times and Seasons* 6 (February 1845): 808.
7. Diary of L. John Nuttall, 20 April 1893, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. While the King Follett Discourse was not Joseph Smith's last sermon, it is clear that Wilford Woodruff was referring to this discourse from the fact that this was the last sermon he heard; Elder Woodruff left on a mission on 9 May 1844 and did not return until after the Martyrdom.
8. Donald Q. Cannon, "The King Follett Discourse: Joseph Smith's Greatest Sermon in Historical Perspective," *BYU Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 185-90.
9. One account numbers attendance at one of their meetings at about three hundred (*Warsaw Signal*, 15 May 1844).
10. *Nauvoo Expositor*, 7 June 1844.
11. *Nauvoo Neighbor*, 19 June 1844; *History of the Church*, 6:430-39.
12. These four reports, preserved in the Church Archives, have been published in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980), pp. 340-61. Background information regarding the reporters and their method of reporting is provided in Cannon, "Joseph Smith's Greatest Sermon," pp. 182-84 and "A Newly Amalgamated Text," pp. 193-94.
13. Diary of Thomas Bullock, 10 April 1844.
14. This process resulted in some awkwardness in several places where Grimshaw chose to include statements from two reports rather than fuse them into one. Thus in the final report it appears Joseph Smith made two similar statements, when in reality they are two reports of the same statement.
15. These are, however, general observations. There are numerous examples where word order, or even the placement of a comma is significant. Thus the examination of the four reports on any technical point may be critical.
16. Historian's Office Journal, 3, 10-15 October 1855; 5, 17 November 1855, Church Archives.
17. Manuscript History of Joseph Smith, note at the end of the entry for 7 April 1844, Church Archives.
18. Recently Stan Larson has produced a new amalgamation following methods more acceptable to contemporary standards of scholarship. Several new features were added to the process, resulting in an even clearer text. The new version is printed in the Winter 1978 issue of *BYU Studies* ("A Newly Amalgamated Text," pp. 193-208).
19. On the plurality of gods, see Hale, "Doctrinal Impact," pp. 212-20.
20. Briggs's comment is found in *The Messenger* 2 (November 1875): 4. That this position prevailed by 1890 is shown by the following sources, which present arguments on both sides of the issue: *Truth Teller* 1 (1864): 14, 32, 37, 38, 40, 41, 50, 51, 55, 60-62, 84, 92; William Cadman, *Faith and Doctrines* (West Elizabeth, Pa.: Committee, 1897), p. 17; William Cadman, *Faith and Doctrines*, 2d ser. (West Elizabeth: Roscoe Ledger Print, 1902), p. 16; *True Latter Day Saints* 1 (December 1860): 280-83.
21. *Complainant's Abstract of Pleading and Evidence* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1893), p. 37.
22. Transcript of the "Temple Lot Case," James Whitehead Testimony, p. 45, Church Archives.
23. Heman C. Smith, *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 4 vols. (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1951), 2:736.
24. Aleah G. Koury, *Truth and Evidence* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1965), pp. 16-28. This includes a discussion of Joseph's changes in the "New Translation" of the Bible, Doctrine and Covenants 121, the Book of Abraham, and the King Follett Discourse.
25. Richard P. Howard, "The 'King Follett Sermon' Teaches a Lesson in Church History," *Saints Herald* 118 (September 1971): 49.
26. See note 23.
27. Hale, "Doctrinal Impact," pp. 212-25.
28. *History of the Church*, 6:287.
29. *Ibid.*, 6:318.
30. *Ibid.*, 5:364, 368, 369, 380.
31. Only after the passing of some thirty years was the first doubt expressed of which anything is currently known (discourse by Orson Pratt, 28 December 1873, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saint's Depot, 1854-86; reprint ed., 1967], 16:335).
32. "A Newly Amalgamated Text," p. 207; cf. *History of the Church*, 6:316.
33. This discourse was published in the *Times and Seasons* (3 [15 April 1842]: 752) while Joseph Smith was its editor. It also appears in Wilford Woodruff's diary, 20 March 1842, Church Archives. Further record of the Prophet's teaching of this concept is found in William Clayton's diary for 18 May 1843: "I asked the Prest. wether children who die in infancy will grow. He answered 'No, we shall receive them precisely in the same state as they died ie no larger. They will have as much intelligence as we shall but shall always remain separate and single'" (as quoted in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, p. 136).
34. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, p. 369; cf. *History of the Church*, 6:366.
35. Discourse of Brigham Young, 19 February 1854, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.
36. Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 31 January 1861), Church Archives.
37. Wilford Woodruff Journal, 8 September 1867.
38. Discourse by Orson Pratt, p. 335. Forty-five years later Joseph F. Smith confessed that he never did believe that "those who died in infancy would remain as little children after the resurrection . . . yet . . . did not have the courage to say so" (Joseph F. Smith, "Status of Children in the Resurrection," *Improvement Era* 21 [May 1918]: 571).
39. Discourse by Orson Pratt, p. 335.
40. A few names from the long list of advocates of this concept include Orson Pratt, Franklin D. Richards, Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, B. H. Roberts, Joseph F. Smith, and more recently, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Bruce R. McConkie.
41. *History of the Church*, 4:556-57.
42. An interesting reminiscence of Roberts's displeasure and reaction was related to the Mormon History Association in 1973 by the late T. Edgar Lyon (see T. Edgar Lyon, "Church Historians I Have Known," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 11 [Winter 1978]: 14, 15).
43. George Albert Smith to Samuel O. Bennion, 30 January 1912, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, as quoted in Cannon, "Joseph Smith's Greatest Sermon," p. 192.
44. B. H. Roberts, ed., "The King Follett Discourse," *Improvement Era* 12 (January 1909): 189.
45. In 1930 this series of articles became the basis of Roberts's multivolume history of the Church (Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 6 vols. [Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1965]).
46. Diary of Anthon H. Lund, 25 August 1911, Church Archives.
47. *Ibid.*, 29 August 1911.
48. The section deleted from the *Americana* ([October 1911]: 1002) was reinstated by Roberts in his 1930 *Comprehensive History of the Church* (2:392). It contains quotations from the Book of Abraham, chapter 3, and from the King Follett Discourse.