

Chapter 16

Bennett's Polygamy Charges and the Saints' Responses

In order to grasp the full significance of Dr. John Bennett's attack on Joseph Smith and the Church, it is necessary to examine more of the details of his charges and the responses which the Saints made to them. General Bennett falsely declared in his infamous letters that Joseph introduced "a new degree of masonry [in the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge] called, 'Order Lodge'" (*Quincy Whig*, July 26, 1842), in which leading men of Nauvoo promoted their polygamous activities. In his third letter, written at Carthage on July 4, 1842, Bennett published:

JOE'S HOLY LODGE CALLED "ORDER." I alluded to this holy institution in one of my former letters. Joe says he has given them [members of the alleged lodge] the Master's word by revelation. In the preparation [to become members] they are stripped naked so as to see if they will pass the holy examination as required in Deuteronomy, 23d chapter and 1st verse. They are then clothed upon and the precious ointment poured upon the head, running down upon the beard, and the skirts of the garment. The ungodly oath, a part of which I gave you, is then administered in order to prepare them for SPIRITUAL WIFE operations, and save Joe from public disgrace and infamy. (*Sangamo Journal*, July 15, 1842; see also Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 275)

Such a claim by Bennett, a Mason, naturally caused many Masons to have great animosity against Joseph.

Joseph Likened to Matthias

Editor James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* read the above statement in Dr. Bennett's third letter and commented through his paper that perhaps Joseph Smith had "a secret lodge of women" too. This suggestion by the *Herald* editor gave Dr. Bennett a new field of thought—so he invented another story. In Bennett's fourth letter, which was published in the *Louisville Journal*, the doctor wrote:

"In the *New York Herald*, of the 26th inst., the editor says, 'This presents a strange and curious state of things for the centre of the nineteenth century; and the developments are the most remarkable we ever heard of. The initiatory proceedings at Joe's "Order Lodge" resemble those practised by Matthias at Pearson's house, only his members were females, and they danced around a stone, whilst Matthias anointed them. But, perhaps, after all, Joe Smith has a secret lodge of women! We shall see.' Yes [Dr. Bennett answered], Joe *has* a secret lodge of women! and the editor *will* see. Joe's female lodge (the Mormon inquisition, and seraglio) is the most singular thing of the age." (Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 217)

By republishing the response of the *Herald* editor to the "Order Lodge" claims, Dr. Bennett was likening Joseph to the highly publicized Matthias (see Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:499–500; Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 39). Some of the Saints at Nauvoo had met Matthias personally at Kirtland in 1835. Matthias went to Kirtland, where he used a fictitious name and tried to palm himself off on Joseph and the Church as a Jewish priest. Joseph recorded:

"Monday morning, 9th [November 1835]. . . .

"While sitting in my house, between ten and eleven this morning, a man came in and introduced himself to me by the name of 'Joshua, the Jewish Minister'. . . . We soon commenced talking on the subject of religion. . . . Curiosity to see a man that was reputed to be a Jew, caused many to

call during the day, and more particularly in the evening.

Suspensions were entertained that the said Joshua was the noted Matthias of New York, spoken so much of in the public prints, on account of the trials he endured in that place, before a court of justice, for murder. . . . After some equivocating, he confessed that he really was Matthias.

After supper I proposed that he should deliver a lecture to us. He did so. . . . After the congregation dispersed, he conversed freely upon the circumstances that transpired at New York. His name is Robert Matthias. He says that Joshua is his priestly name. . . .

Tuesday, 10th. I resumed conversation with Matthias I told him that his doctrine was of the devil. . . . He tarried until Wednesday, 11th, after breakfast, when I told him, that my God told me, that his god was the devil, and I could not keep him any longer, and he must depart. And so I, for once, cast out the devil in bodily shape, and I believe a murderer." (*Millennial Star* 15 [Saturday, June 18, 1853]: 396–397; *ibid.* 15 [Saturday, July 2, 1853]: 422; *RLDS History of the Church* 1:598–600; *LDS History of the Church* 2:304–307)

The reported activities of Matthias are another evidence that polygamy was practiced in early America.

Bennett Described the Fictitious Seraglio

In order to include women in his supposed "lodge," Bennett immediately began writing a story in which he charged that the Church's Ladies' Relief Society at Nauvoo, of which the Prophet's wife, Emma, was president, was a "seraglio." He stated that the Relief Society was composed of women who were practicing the doctrine of plural marriage for time and eternity with the high officials of the Church. In order to make his story sound more authentic, the shrewd doctor also published what he claimed was a copy of the plural marriage ceremony that was supposedly used in the lodge. Dr. Bennett declared:

The most extraordinary and infamous feature of the

social and religious system established by the Mormon Prophet, and one in which he closely resembles his master and model, Mahomet [Muhammad], is the secret regulations he has formed for directing the relations of the sexes. . . . The Mormon seraglio is very strictly and systematically organized. It forms a grand lodge, as it were, and is divided into three distinct orders, or degrees. The first and lowest of these is styled the "*Cyprian Saints*;" the second, the "*Chambered Sisters of Charity*;" and the third and highest degree is called the "*Cloistered Saints*," or "*Consecratees of the Cloister*." (Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 218, 220)

In the above, Bennett was comparing Joseph with the polygamist, Muhammad, founder of the Islamic religion.

The Cyprian Saints

Bennett declared that the lowest degree in the lodge was made up of "many young and beautiful females," for the "gratification of the vilest appetites of the brutal Priests and Elders of the Mormon Church." He declared that the Relief Society through "secret and select council" either found girls who were guilty of promiscuity or those to whom they could attach guilt by gossip, and that the Relief Society members then brought them before a council called the "Inquisition." He asserted that the young women were harangued and terrorized until they agreed to be prostitutes for the leading officials of the Church. According to Bennett, after a girl made this agreement, she was called "a Cyprian" of the "White Veil" (see *ibid.*, 220–221). According to the doctor, no marriage ceremonies occurred in the lower group. They were but concubines. Bennett then asked the question, "Was there ever known, in the history of the world, a more diabolical system than this?" (*ibid.*, 221).

The Chambered Sisters of Charity

Bennett stated that in this middle group there also were

no marriage ceremonies. He wrote:

This order comprises that class of females who indulge their sensual propensities, without restraint, whether married or single, by the express permission of the Prophet Provided the Holy Joe does not desire to monopolize any of them, they are at the service of each and all of the Apostles, High Priests, and Elders of Israel. (ibid., 221–222)

The Cloistered Saints

Bennett asserted that the highest degree in the seraglio consisted of women who actually married leading men of the Church for time and eternity—becoming plural wives. He wrote:

Its ranks are filled up in the following manner: When an Apostle, High Priest, Elder, or Scribe, conceives an affection for a female, and he has satisfactorily ascertained that she experiences a mutual flame, he communicates confidentially to the Prophet his *affaire du coeur*, and requests him to inquire of the Lord whether or not it would be right and proper for him to take unto himself the said woman for his spiritual wife. It is no obstacle whatever to this spiritual marriage if one or both of the parties should happen to have a husband or wife, already united to them according to the laws of the land.

The Prophet puts this queer question to the Lord, and, if he receives an answer in the affirmative, which is always the case where the parties are in favor with Joe, His Holiness, either in person or by a duly-authorized administrator, proceeds to consecrate the sacred sister in the following solemn manner . . . (ibid., 223)

After giving a purported marriage ceremony, Dr. Bennett assured his readers that,

The above is a faithful and unexaggerated account of the most enormous and detestable system of depravity that was ever concocted by the corrupt heart of a human being. . . . by the arch villain. . . . this brutally sensual

wretch. . . The imposture of Joseph Smith has never had its parallel. . . I can only say that I have not told the tenth part of the Prophet's licentiousness. (ibid., 225)

Bennett Published an Alleged Plural- Marriage-for-Time-and-Eternity Ceremony

After publishing what he claimed was the men's Order Lodge in which Church leaders allegedly prepared for spiritual wifery, and the story of the women's lodge, Bennett carried the whole matter of the seraglio one step further by publishing a plural marriage ceremony that was supposedly used within the Church. Bennett stated:

The parties [the man and woman] assemble in the lodge room, and place themselves kneeling before the altar; the administrator commences the ceremony by saying,—

“You, separately and jointly, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, do solemnly covenant and agree that you will not disclose any matter relating to the sacred act now in progress of consummation, whereby any Gentile shall come to a knowledge of the secret purposes of this order, or whereby the Saints may suffer persecution; your lives being the forfeit.”

After the bow of assent is given by each of the pair, the administrator then proceeds—

“In the name of Jesus Christ, and by the authority of the holy priesthood, I now consecrate you and set you apart by the imposition of my hands, as husband and wife, according to the laws of Zion, and the will of God our heavenly Father; for which especial favor you now agree to serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind, and to obey his Prophet in all things according to his divine will.”

Again the nod of assent is given by the man and woman, and the administrator continues in a solemn and impressive manner—

“I now anoint you with holy, consecrated oil, in the name of Jesus Christ, and by the authority of the holy

priesthood, that you may be fully and unreservedly consecrated to each other, and to the service of God, and that with affection and fidelity you may nourish and cherish each other, so long as you shall continue faithful and true in the fellowship of the Saints; and *I now pronounce upon you the blessings of Jacob*, whom God honored and protected in the enjoyment of like special favors; and may the peace of Heaven, which passeth all understanding, rest upon you in *time and in eternity!*”

The parties then rise and embrace each other, and the robe of investiture is placed upon and around them by the administrator, who says,—

“According to the prototype, I now pronounce you *one flesh*, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

The robe is then removed, and the parties leave the cloister, with generally a firm belief, at least on the part of the female, in the sacredness and validity of the ceremonial, and thereafter consider themselves as united in spiritual marriage, the duties and privileges of which are in no particular different from those of any other marriage covenant. (*ibid.*, 223–224; italics added)

The Significance of the Plural Marriage Ceremony

Perhaps members of the Mormon Church will see a resemblance between Bennett’s plural marriage ceremony published here, and that used in their temples. The second paragraph should be noted for the threat it carries, stating that the couple’s lives will be forfeited if they disclose the secret nature of the ceremonies. Since the days of Brigham Young, threats have been a part of the LDS Church’s temple ceremonies.

The middle paragraphs employ language found among the Saints, such as “according to the laws of Zion,” which could have only been written by one who had been closely associated with the Church, as Bennett had been. The fact that he had been a member of the Church made the doctor all

the more cunning and deceptive. The use of the term “the blessings of Jacob” is another example of the attempt by Bennett to make his marriage ceremony sound authentic, so it would appear that polygamy was practiced at Nauvoo under Joseph’s guidance. It was a cunning move by the doctor to make reference to the Bible account of Jacob who had two wives and two concubines. It is true that Jacob was a polygamist, but his polygamy was never divinely approved. In fact, the practicing of polygamy in Old Testament times (the period in which Jacob lived) is strongly condemned in the Book of Mormon (RLDS Jacob 2:32–37; LDS Jacob 2:23–28).

The Significance of the “Time and Eternity” Phrase

In making his concocted story of an alleged plural marriage ceremony more realistic to the public, Dr. Bennett’s evil mind made use of the phrase “time and eternity,” which was a term familiar to members of the Church. As early as 1831 the Lord used these words in a revelation in which He stated that they who received His words “shall be gathered unto me in time and in eternity” (RLDS DC 39:5c; LDS DC 39:22).

Bennett’s patriarchal blessing, pronounced upon his head by Hyrum Smith in 1840, states that if Bennett would be faithful, “Thou shalt have an inheritance among the Saints *in time and in eternity*, for this is the will of God” (Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 43; italics added). In order to make his plural marriage charges against Joseph sound more scriptural and convincing, Bennett maliciously wove the “in time and in eternity” phrase into them. His wordage gave the doctrine a “Latter Day Saint tone.” Bennett’s phraseology made it easier for Brigham Young and his associates to transfer plural marriage into the Church after Joseph’s death.

The real significance of the phrase “time and eternity” was that it not only made plural marriage sound pious, but also the word *eternity*, in this case, meant that the marriages so contracted were to continue after death—throughout

eternity. Here in one simple phrase was born a theology that has filled books, and has ruined the lives of many Saints and families in the LDS Church. From it came the idea of sex and childbearing in the hereafter—and the doctrine of endless dominions, exaltation, and godhood—which naturally spawned the doctrines of Adam-god and blood atonement.

Bennett's Charges Refuted by the Church

When Joseph, Hyrum, and other leading men and women of the Church read the seraglio story with its false marriage ceremony, they took action because they wanted the Saints and the world to know that no such marriage system existed within the Church. They knew that no such thing had ever been taught and practiced in Nauvoo with Joseph's consent. The Church's efforts at rebuttal included statements by Joseph and others which denied the doctor's accusations. In addition to the Prophet's efforts to stop the rumors, the Ladies' Relief Society came forth with a certificate which stated that Joseph was innocent. A group of prominent men also made affidavit denying the existence of the seraglio, and affirming that they knew of no marriage system in the Church other than the one found in the Doctrine and Covenants. And Joseph's brother, Apostle William Smith, editor of the *Nauvoo Wasp*, was quick to deny Bennett's charges and exonerate Joseph.

Editor Joseph Smith Answered the Plural Marriage Charges

It is surprising how much Joseph published to refute Bennett's evil stories when one considers that the Prophet was in hiding much of the time and was always burdened with Church affairs. As editor of the *Times and Seasons*, Joseph denounced polygamy over and over and printed affidavits declaring his innocence. When the July 8 and July 15 issues of the *Sangamo Journal* reached Nauvoo, containing some of Dr. Bennett's letters, Joseph published eleven

pages of statements and affidavits to prove Bennett's declarations false (see *Times and Seasons* 3 [August 1, 1842]: 868–878). William Smith responded likewise with lengthy rebuttals in the *Wasp*.

Joseph wrote of Bennett:

He professed to be virtuous and chaste, yet did he pierce the heart of the innocent, introduce misery and infamy into families, reveled in voluptuousness and crime, and led the youth that he had influence over to tread in his unhallowed steps;—he professed to fear God, yet did he desecrate his name, and prostitute his authority to the most unhallowed and diabolical purposes; even to the seduction of the virtuous, and the defiling of his neighbor's bed. . . . [H]e has published that the conduct of the Saints was bad—that Joseph Smith and many others were adulterers, murderers . . . *that we believed in and practiced polygamy.* (*Times and Seasons* 3 [August 1, 1842]: 868–869; italics added)

It is most important to note that Joseph stated that the devious doctor had accused him of practicing *polygamy*, and that Joseph devoted most of this issue of the *Times and Seasons* to prove that Bennett's charges in this regard were false. If Joseph had been guilty of polygamy and yet published all this evidence claiming that he was not, then he was the greatest liar in history. But there is ample evidence that he was innocent, just as he claimed to be.

Within the eleven pages which Joseph published he mentioned “a meeting of the citizens of the city of Nauvoo” which was held at the “meeting ground” on July 22, 1842. At this gathering “about a thousand men” voted that Joseph was innocent of Bennett's charges, which included polygamy. Another petition was also signed by many nonmembers who declared the same (*ibid.*, 869). Included in Joseph's eleven pages were affidavits and certificates (some of which have been previously quoted) made by Hyrum Smith, William Law, Daniel Wells, Elias and Francis Higbee, Pamela Michael, Sidney Rigdon, and William and Henry Marks—exposing Bennett's evil and upholding Joseph's innocence.

Of this list, all but Hyrum had been called upon by Bennett to “come out” and publish a statement against Joseph in the newspapers. Instead, they all wrote statements exonerating the Prophet.

On September 1, 1842, thirty days after Bennett’s seraglio story was published, Joseph wrote a letter “To All the Saints in Nauvoo.” In this letter (now a part of the Doctrine and Covenants), the Prophet assured the Saints that he was innocent of all the plural marriage charges against him by writing:

Forasmuch as the Lord has revealed unto me that my enemies, both in Missouri and this state, were again on the pursuit of me; and inasmuch as they pursue me without a cause, and have not the least shadow or coloring of justice or right on their side in the getting up of their prosecutions against me; and inasmuch as *their pretensions are all founded in falsehood of the blackest dye*, I have thought it expedient and wisdom in me to leave the place for a short season, for my own safety and the safety of this people. (RLDS DC 109:1a–b; LDS DC 127:1; italics added)

By stating that “their pretentions are all founded in falsehood,” the Prophet was once again declaring that the charges of polygamy against him were false. In order to make his denial of that doctrine more emphatic, Joseph also published the Church’s law of marriage which he had caused to be written in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835. (The concept of monogamy and the outlawing of polygamy were plainly written into the basic Scriptures of the Restoration long before the arrival of Dr. Bennett.) Therefore, in the September 1, 1842, issue of the *Times and Seasons*, Editor Joseph Smith republished the following from the Doctrine and Covenants:

Inasmuch as the public mind has been unjustly abused through the fallacy of Dr. Bennett’s letters, we make an extract on the subject of marriage, showing the rule of the church on this important matter. The extract is from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and is the *only* rule al-

lowed by the church. All legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into this church, should be held sacred and fulfilled. Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and *polygamy*: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again. (*Times and Seasons* 3:909; see also RLDS DC 111:4a–b; italics added)

(As previously explained, the article on Marriage was Section 101 in the 1835 Edition, but was removed from the Mormon Church’s Doctrine and Covenants in 1876 when Brigham Young inserted Section 132 on polygamy. This is a prime example of how Brigham and his associates changed basic doctrines of the Church—which made their church a different denomination than the original Restoration Movement.)

A month later, on October 1, 1842, to further emphasize the law against polygamy and the Church’s stand for monogamy, Joseph reprinted more of the law of the Church on Marriage in the *Times and Seasons*. He published:

From the Book of Doctrine & Covenants of the
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.
ON MARRIAGE.

According to the custom of all civilized nations, marriage is regulated by laws and ceremonies: therefore we believe, that *all* marriages in this church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, should be solemnized in a *public meeting*, or feast, prepared for that purpose: and that the solemnization should be performed by a presiding high priest, high priest, bishop, elder, or priest, not even prohibiting those persons who are desirous to get married, of being married by other authority.—We believe that it is not right to prohibit members of this church from marrying out of the church, if it be their determination so to do, but such persons will be considered weak in the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Marriage should be celebrated with prayer and thanks-

giving; and at the solemnization, the persons to be married, *standing together*, the man on the right, and the woman on the left, shall be addressed, by the person officiating, as he shall be directed by the holy Spirit; and if there be no legal objections, he shall say, calling each by their names: "You both mutually agree to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all *others*, during your lives." And when they have answered, "Yes," he shall pronounce them "husband and wife" in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the laws of the country and authority vested in him: "may God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever. Amen."

The clerk of every church [branch] should keep a record of all marriages, solemnized in his branch.

All legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into this church, should be held sacred and fulfilled.

Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again. . . .

We have given the above rule of marriage as the *only* one practiced in this church, to show that Dr. J. C. Bennett's "secret wife system" is a matter of his own manufacture; and further to disabuse the public ear, and shew that the said Bennett and his misanthropic friend Origen Bachelor [who lectured with Bennett], are perpetrating a foul and infamous slander upon an innocent people, and need but be known to be hated and despised. (*Times and Seasons* 3:939; italics added)

Note again that Joseph published that this marriage law was the *only* rule of marriage in the Church. If Joseph were truthful, then he was a monogamist and was honest in declaring polygamy a false doctrine. If he were lying, he was a sinner, a coward, and a fallen prophet. Section 101 (of the 1835 Edition of the Doctrine and Covenants) stated that

“this church of Christ has been reproached with the *crime of fornication, and polygamy*,” and that “one man should have one wife.” Joseph’s republishing of the Church’s marriage law twice is evidence that he did not believe, teach, nor countenance plural marriage in the Church, and that he went to great lengths to make that fact a matter of public record.

Other differences, between the Church’s official marriage law and Bennett’s fabrication, are that the marriage law states:

1. That “all marriages in this church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, should be solemnized in a *public meeting*.” According to Bennett’s alleged plural marriage ceremony, marriages were not conducted in a public meeting, but in the secret Order Lodge;

2. That the couple to be married should be “standing together,” while Bennett’s plural marriage document had them kneeling for the ceremony;

3. That the couple should keep “yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives.” This precludes any possibility of the husband being a polygamist, for he too vows to keep himself “from all others”;

4. That the clerk of every congregation should “keep a record of *all* marriages.” If Joseph had been married to twenty-seven wives (as declared by LDS Church authorities), then twenty-seven primary marriage records would still exist—and the Mormon Church would have published them far and wide. It is a fact that not one primary marriage record can be found for Joseph Smith, other than the record of his marriage to Emma Hale in 1827.

Joseph, as editor, concluded the article in the *Times and Seasons* by repeating that the above “rule of marriage” was “the only one practiced in this church” (ibid.). This was another definite statement by him which upholds monogamy and disproves polygamy.

In that same issue of the *Times and Seasons* Joseph published:

We have two presses doing as much as can be expected from the limited resources of a people twice plucked up by the roots, and plundered, even to their clothes, besides the loss of a good printing establishment. As far as truth can be spread and lies contradicted by two presses, against several thousand [presses], *it is done!* and we have the gratification of saying that things seem to work together for good to them that look for the second appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . [A]nd we do sincerely hope, that we as children of the kingdom, may keep the law of God, and the law of the land. (ibid. 937)

When “several thousand” presses throughout America, and major cities in England and France, published Bennett’s seraglio story and the supposed plural marriage ceremony, Joseph did not fight the battle alone. Leading men and women at Nauvoo promptly published certificates denying Bennett’s claims and upholding Joseph’s innocence.

Leading Men and Women Denounced Bennett’s Polygamy Story

In the same issue of the *Times and Seasons* in which he republished the marriage law the second time, Joseph also published two certificates to show that “Dr. J. C. Bennett’s ‘secret wife system’ is a matter of his own manufacture.” The certificate by leading men stated:

We the undersigned members of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and residents of the city of Nauvoo, persons of families do hereby certify and declare that we know of no other rule or system of marriage than the one published from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and we give this certificate to show that Dr. J. C. Bennett’s “secret wife system” is a creature of his own make as we know of no such society in this place nor never did.

S. Bennett,
George Miller,

N. K. Whitney,
Albert Pettey,

Alpheus Cutler,	Elias Higbee,
Reynolds Cahoon,	John Taylor,
Wilson Law,	E. Robinson,
W. Woodruff,	Aaron Johnson.

(*Times and Seasons* 3 [October 1, 1842]: 939–940)

These were men of prominence who were closely associated with Joseph, who knew whether or not there was such a doctrine as plural marriage being taught within the Church. The name of Brigham Young, who was enroute east on a mission, is missing from this list. In June of 1842, four months before this certificate was published, Brigham, who had a living wife, secretly married Mrs. Lucy Ann Decker Seely as his first plural wife (see Stewart, *Brigham Young and His Wives*, 85).

The signature of Judge Elias Higbee, stating that he knew of no such doctrine as plural marriage for time and eternity, is strong evidence in Joseph's behalf—for his sons, Francis and Chauncey, had practiced spiritual wifery with Bennett, as previously shown. Only truth could have caused this venerable brother to stand for the Prophet and against his two sons. The list includes the names of Bishop George Miller and Bishop Newel K. Whitney. The names of Aaron Johnson and Alpheus Cutler also appear—they were members of the Church's High Council. Apostle John Taylor and Apostle Wilford Woodruff, who both later became presidents of the Church in Utah, also signed the above. The signatures of these leaders are testimonies that the plural marriage charges were false—and that "Dr. J. C. Bennett's 'secret wife system' is a creature of his own make as we know of no such society in this place nor never did."

The Relief Society's Certificate against the Polygamy Charges

The Ladies' Relief Society was only a few months old, having had its first meeting on March 24, 1842 (*Times and Seasons* 3 [April 1, 1842]: 743). Imagine the extreme dis-

gust with which the ladies of Nauvoo viewed the story that Bennett had written about their being a part of a harem! The seraglio story incriminated them as much as it did the Prophet, since Bennett had claimed that the chief purpose of the Relief Society was to provide women for the plural marriage system. Accordingly, these women came forward to declare that plural marriage was not taught by Joseph, nor by the Church; neither was it a part of their organization, but that it was a falsehood invented by John Bennett. Their certificate read:

We the undersigned members of the ladies' relief society, and married females do certify and declare that we know of no system of marriage being practised in the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints save the one contained in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and we give this certificate to the public to show that J. C. Bennett's "secret wife system" is a disclosure of his own make.

Emma Smith, President,	
Elizabeth Ann Whitney, Counsellor,	
Sarah M. Cleveland, Counsellor,	
Eliza R. Snow, Secretary,	
Mary C. Miller,	Catharine Pettey,
Lois Cutler,	Sarah Higbee,
Thirza Cahoon,	Phebe Woodruff,
Ann Hunter,	Leonora Taylor,
Jane Law,	Sarah Hillman,
Sophia R. Marks,	Rosannah Marks,
Polly Z. Johnson,	Angeline Robinson,
Abigail Works.	

(*Times and Seasons* 3 [October 1, 1842]: 940)

These leaders of the Ladies' Relief Society were in most instances wives of the Church's most prominent men. They knew there was not a plural marriage system in the Church headed by Joseph. Their signatures included the names of Emma Smith, wife of the Prophet; Jane Law, wife of President William Law; Phebe Woodruff, wife of Apostle Wilford Woodruff; Leonora Taylor, wife of Apostle John Taylor;

Rosannah Marks, wife of Nauvoo Stake President William Marks; and Sarah Higbee, wife of Judge Elias Higbee and the mother of Francis and Chauncey Higbee. Also signing the certificate was Mary C. Miller, wife of Bishop George Miller; and Elizabeth Ann Whitney, wife of Bishop Newell K. Whitney. Of great importance is the name "Eliza R. Snow, Secretary," showing that the statement she made in later years (that she was married to Joseph Smith) was false. Eliza's signature attests to the fact that she knew of "no system of marriage being practised in the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints save the one contained in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants."

Conclusion

Joseph's frank and extensive sermons and writings against polygamy, and his publishing of the Church's law of Marriage twice in 1842, were positive evidences that he strongly opposed the doctrine of polygamy in all forms. The certificates of leading men and women, who associated daily with Emma and Joseph, are more proof that Joseph was a monogamist. Their testimonies, and the fact that Joseph fathered no children by any woman other than Emma, would have convinced even the Utah Saints and the world that Joseph was telling the truth, if Brigham had not secretly begun to put Bennett's plural marriage system into practice before Joseph's death, and made polygamy a cardinal doctrine following the martyrdom.