

is gospel, this tends to undermine the proposition of freedom of speech and thought. As members of the church we are bound to sustain and support the brethren in the positions they occupy so long as their conduct entitles them to that. But we also have only to defend those doctrines of the church contained in the four standard works—the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Anything beyond that by anyone is his or her own opinion and not scripture. Although there are certain statements that whatever the brethren say becomes the word of God, this is a dangerous practice to apply to all leaders and all cases. The only way I know of by which the teachings of any person or group may become binding upon the church is if the teachings have been reviewed by all the brethren, submitted to the highest councils of the church, and then approved by the whole body of the church.

I am afraid, however, that this is not as generally accepted or followed today as it ought to be. Some of the brethren have been willing to submit to the inference that what they have said was pronounced under the influence of the inspiration of the Lord and that it therefore was the will of the Lord. I do not doubt that the brethren have often spoken under inspiration and given new emphasis—perhaps even a new explanation or interpretation—of church doctrine, but that does not become binding upon the church unless and until it is submitted to the scrutiny of the rest of the brethren and later to the vote of the people. Again, we are only bound by the four standard works and are not required to defend what any man or woman says outside of them.

Official statements of the First Presidency that have not been submitted to the membership of the church for its approval are matters of temporary policy only. Under present conditions, for example, the First Presidency may say, “We recommend this or that.” But conditions may subsequently change, and when they do the First Presidency may wish to make a statement which may not be in complete harmony with a former statement. We have to keep our theology up to date by submitting everything that is intended to become a permanent part of the gospel to those whose right and privilege it is to so interpret and then by having it sustained by the people as a definite rule of the church so that

all things may be done by common consent.

There was a time when the Prophet Joseph Smith would ask the Lord, receive an answer, and then put the response into practice. But after the foundation of the church was laid, and its doctrinal policies established, it seemed that continued revelation of that kind would result in such a massive collection of records that nobody could tell what the law was. So we now stand upon those first, fundamental revelations. When a question arises today, we work over the details and come up with an idea. It is submitted to the First Presidency and Twelve, thrashed out, discussed and re-discussed until it seems right. Then, kneeling together in a circle in the temple, they seek divine guidance and the president says, “I feel to say this is the will of the Lord.” That becomes a revelation. It is usually not thought necessary to publish or proclaim it as such, but this is the way it happens.

The heads of the church, both in the Quorum of the Twelve and in the First Presidency, are careful to see to it that none of them should ever be guilty of actions which would require discipline if they were committed by men in lower positions. For example, if I go to a stake and find a stake president who does not use his counselors but who insists on having his own way in everything and if I cannot get him to reform, I release him, because the whole genius of Mormonism is cooperative action. Every man in a position of trust and authority in the church should treat his position with great care and realize that he is, after all, simply an agent—one of many—and that his personal conduct should warrant the same kind of disciplinary action that would be imposed on those working under him.

Those in high positions should guard against ever being deceived by the thought that because of their position they would be forgiven for doing things that they would not forgive others for doing. One man, who was a member of the Twelve, took it upon himself, ostensibly under the guise of polygamy, to have intimate relations with a woman other than his wife and was finally excommunicated for it. (Sometimes I think that the inspiration of many of today’s polygamists comes from below the waist.)

We cannot be too careful, after being appointed to an office, about feeling that we are now somehow above the law. The fun-

AN ABUNDANT LIFE

The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown

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Hugh B. Brown (ca. 1970).

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