

Of Pioneers and Prophets

LAWRENCE R. FLAKE

My brothers and sisters, I'm very grateful for the prayer, the introduction, and especially for the beautiful musical numbers. I agree with the late apostle Adam S. Bennion, who used to say, "What we need in this church is better music and more of it, and better speaking and less of it" (see Sterling W. Sill, *Leadership*, vol. 3 [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978], p. 288). "Come, Come, Ye Saints" is one of our most loved hymns, not only because of its pleasing music or even its poignant words but because of the feelings it evokes as we reflect on the nobility and courage of the first and second generations of valiant Latter-day Saint pioneers who laid the foundation of this mighty kingdom. Some of us are descended from these remarkable stalwarts. Like many others, my great grandfather, William Jordan Flake, answered the call of President Brigham Young to leave the Salt Lake Valley and lead a colonization effort into northern Arizona. The town he established under the apostolic leadership of Erastus Snow was named in honor of both of them—Snowflake, Arizona. I'm told that Snowflake once had a sheriff named Jack Frost. When he told people he was Jack Frost from Snowflake . . .

Over the years we've taken a lot of flack because of the name *Flake*. My missionary son found it hard enough to be known as Elder Flake, but it got even worse when he was assigned a companion named Elder Looney! People really had to be honest in heart to accept the gospel from Elder Flake and Elder Looney. Incidentally, Snowflake is just down the road from another little Mormon town called St. Johns, one of whose favorite sons is the president of this university.

It is a wonderful blessing to have been raised hearing stories of pioneer ancestors on both sides of my family and from many other families as well. Not all of these stories were of major trials and tribulations. Sometimes they concerned funny little incidents of everyday life. Listen to this entry from the journal of Henrietta Williams as she crossed the plains.

They knew that I was no cook, but left that job for me. I built a fire after gathering buffalo chips, and

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*getting it started, the wind playing with it as it pleased. I put the dutch oven on to heat with the cover by the side of it. I made a pie of dried apples, putting it into the oven, the lid still heating, and turned toward the wagon several yards away from the fire for safety. A nice cow sneaked up and helped herself to the pie and sneaked off, when a girl called to me to look at my rice. I had a hard time cooking the biscuits as I was jumping in and out of the wagon, climbing over the provision box, watching my baby girl and getting what [my husband] wanted as it was his misfortune never to find anything that he was looking for. The fire had its own way of burning. I thought, "Oh, Zion, will we ever reach thee?" [Quoted in Nancy Clement Williams, *After One Hundred Years* (Independence, Missouri: Zion's Printing and Publishing Company, 1951), p. 157]*

I enjoyed hearing my father and grandfather tell of one pioneer brother confessing his folly. He was leading two rather large calves with a rope in each hand. When he came to a gate, he needed both hands to open it. Not wanting to let the calves escape, he tied one rope around each of his legs. Here is this note from his journal: "Those calves had not dragged me fifty feet before I figured out what I'd done wrong."

A number of years ago I traveled by chartered bus to Palmyra, New York, with 150 wonderful young women from BYU and other Utah schools. These young ladies served as special missionaries to help put on the Hill Cumorah Pageant. On our return trip we visited several Church history sites along the pioneer trail. One of these sites was the Mormon cemetery at Winter Quarters near Omaha, Nebraska. As we walked quietly up the hill containing many graves of the Saints who died there, our spirits were subdued. Located at the top of the hill is that impressive Avard Fairbanks monument with which you are no doubt familiar. It is a statue of a pioneer mother and father, a shovel in his hand, standing before the open grave of

their baby. At the base of the monument in bronze are listed in alphabetical order most of the names of the 600 pioneers buried there. Those 600 are just a tithing of the 6,000 whose graves lie along the rest of the trail. Without a cue or suggestion from anyone, the girls began to sing "Come, Come, Ye Saints." At first they sang very strongly, but as the words and spirit of that great hymn sank deeper in their hearts, their singing turned more into sobbing. By the last verse I think I was the only one still singing. As I voiced the words "And should we die before our journey's through," I was scanning the list of names on the bronze plaque. In the F's two names caught my attention—Samuel Flake, age five months, and Frederick Flake, age one day. Then I stopped singing, too.

As the Church continues to expand, especially in foreign lands, the percentage of members who are literal descendants of the pioneers decreases, but I believe that those who bind themselves to this great work that the pioneers began are somehow spiritually adopted and become descendants of those noble forbears. This very real bond was touchingly displayed for me once when I listened to one of my students with tears running down his cheeks express love and gratitude for his heroic pioneer ancestors who crossed the plains. This would not have been so unusual except that his name was Doug Sakaguchi and he was a Japanese convert. In a very real way, I believe Brother Sakaguchi is just as much a descendent of the pioneers as I am.

Many years ago, Dr. Earl V. Pullius, a non-Mormon scholar, told a story on this campus that deeply impressed me with the connection between the first and second generations of pioneers and the present generation of young people and converts in the Church. Before World War II, the renowned musician Bruno Walter was the conductor of the Vienna Symphony. This symphony was a unique musical organization with a spirit and unity and synergism that produced glorious music,

powerful and unmatched by any other symphony. When the Nazis took over Austria, the conductor fled to America. It was not until 1947 that he was finally able to return to Austria. His first priority was to visit his beloved Vienna Symphony. As he approached the concert hall where they were practicing, he could hear the strains of their remarkable music. He said that if he had been anywhere on the face of the earth and heard that sound, he would have been able to identify it as coming only from the Vienna Symphony. When he entered the concert hall, to his amazement he discovered that although the exquisite musical quality was still there, not one of the musicians playing with the symphony had played with it when he was its conductor. All of them were new, but the powerful spirit remained. All of the first and second generations of pioneers are gone. Our challenge is to keep alive that great, valiant spirit of sacrifice and courage that characterized their lives and service.

A few weeks ago, Elder Jack H. Goaslind of the Seventy gave a moving address from this pulpit. It was the 151st anniversary of the assassination of the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum. As Elder Goaslind reflected on that tragic event, my mind was drawn to a copy of a newspaper clipping I have in my file containing an interesting, though somewhat garbled, account of the Martyrdom reported two weeks after the fact in the *New York Weekly Herald*. The headline reads: "Important News from Nauvoo: Death of Joe and Hyrum Smith: Terrible Excitement in the West." In part the article said, "We yesterday received by western mail the following particulars of the death of Joseph Smith the Prophet and his brother Hyrum. They were both shot. There was tremendous excitement in the west in consequence of their death" (8 July 1844). The article continued and then ended with this three-word conclusion and prediction: "Thus ends Mormonism."

This newspaper was not alone in that gloomy forecast. Many observers, both friendly and antagonistic, believed that with the death of its dynamic leader, the church Joseph founded would go the way of numerous other flash-in-the-pan religious movements. That prognostication likely would have come to pass had Joseph Smith in fact been the founder of the Church, but he was not. I bear my witness with yours that the establishment of this Church is the very fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy that in the last days "shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44). In Doctrine and Covenants 33:5, the Lord proclaims, "And verily, verily, I say unto you, that this church have I established and called forth out of the wilderness." Expectations that the Church would disintegrate had been voiced frequently before the Martyrdom and have been heard many times since. Even now, anti-Mormon writers engage in wishful thinking as they see what they believe are the foundations of Zion crumbling. When the authors of a book critical of the Church predicted, "The future of the Church is dim," President Gordon B. Hinckley responded with characteristic politeness:

Without wishing to seem impertinent, I should like to ask what they know about that future. They know nothing of the prophetic mission of this Church. The future must have looked extremely dim in the 1830s. It must have looked impossible back in those Ohio-Missouri days. But notwithstanding poverty, notwithstanding robbing, notwithstanding murders, notwithstanding confiscation and drivings and disfranchisement forced upon the Saints, the work moved steadily on. It has continued to go forward. Never before has it been so strong. Never before has it been so widespread. Never before have there been so many in whose hearts has burned an unquenchable knowledge of the truth. ["Counsel to Religious Educators," 14 September 1984 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1984), p. 7]

One of the early antagonists of Joseph Smith and the Saints was Thomas Ford, governor of Illinois. He was a willing facilitator, if not an active perpetrator, of the death of the Prophet. His view of Joseph Smith and the future of the Church is expressed in his *History of Illinois*:

Thus fell Joe Smith, the most successful impostor in modern times; a man who, though ignorant and coarse, had some great natural parts which fitted him for temporary success, but which were so obscured and counteracted by the inherent corruption and vices of his nature that he never could succeed in establishing a system of policy which looked to permanent success in the future. [Thomas Ford, A History of Illinois: From Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 249]

In an address given on this campus in January of 1988, President Hinckley detailed how after Thomas Ford's betrayal of Joseph Smith, the governor's fortunes declined until he died in obscurity and poverty six years later. President Hinckley observed:

It is a thing of interest to me that except for his connection with the death of the Prophet Joseph, Governor Ford is almost entirely forgotten today. The decline of his fortune and the sad end of his life, and that of his wife, together with the tragic experiences of their five orphan children, become a tale of defeat, bitterness, and misery.

While Thomas Ford has been largely forgotten, love and respect for the Prophet who was murdered at Carthage have grown across the world.

*"Great is his glory and endless his priesthood.
Ever and ever the keys he will hold.*

*Faithful and true, he will enter his kingdom,
Crowned in the midst of the prophets of old."*

("Praise to the Man," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 27)
[Gordon B. Hinckley, BYU fireside address, 10 January 1988, not published; but see Hinckley, "The Greatest Miracle in Human History," *Ensign*, May 1994, pp. 72–75]

May I share with you three short stories that may or may not be connected but that underscore this theme of maintaining the continuity of the pioneer spirit.

In 1900, Thomas J. Yates, a Mormon student attending Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, had an interesting conversation with the cofounder of that institution, Andrew Dixon White. Dr. White had served as U.S. foreign minister in Russia several years earlier and told Brother Yates of a visit he had had with the famous Count Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy, as you know, is considered by many to be the greatest Russian philosopher, social critic, and novelist of all time. His best-known work, the lengthy classic *War and Peace*, has been read and viewed in movie form by millions the world over. The Russian movie version is six and a half hours long. It was so long, I'm told, they charged three different admission prices: one for those under twelve, one for those over twelve, and one for those who turned twelve during the movie. I don't know if that's really true or not.

According to Brother Yates' recollection of what Dr. White told him concerning the exchange with Tolstoy, the great Russian scholar asked Dr. White to tell him about the American religion. Puzzled, Dr. White explained that we don't *have* an American religion, "that each person is free to belong to the particular church in which he is interested." Tolstoy is reported to have shown a little impatience in replying:

"I know all of this. . . . But the Church to which I refer originated in America, and is commonly known as the Mormon Church. What can you tell me of the teachings of the Mormons?"

"Well," said Dr. White, "I know very little concerning them. They have an unsavory reputation, they practice polygamy, and are very superstitious."

Then Count Leo Tolstoi . . . rebuked the ambassador. "Dr. White, I am greatly surprised and disappointed that a man of your great learning and

position should be so ignorant on this important subject. . . . If the people follow the teachings of this Church, nothing can stop their progress—it will be limitless. There have been great movements started in the past but they have died or been modified before they reached maturity.”

And then, according to Yates via White, Tolstoy made this powerful prediction:

“If Mormonism is able to endure, unmodified, until it reaches the third and fourth generation, it is destined to become the greatest power the world has ever known.” [Thomas J. Yates, “Count Tolstoy and the ‘American Religion,’” *Improvement Era*, February 1939, p. 94]

While some have questioned the accuracy of both White’s and Yates’ memories, it is clear that Tolstoy had an interest in Mormonism and referred to it in his journal, in print, and in conversation. One of Brigham Young’s daughters, Susa Young Gates, corresponded with him and sent him several books and pamphlets, including the Book of Mormon. It is also clear that this statement attributed to Tolstoy found its way into the speaking and writing of the Church in the early part of the century. After graduating from Cornell in 1902, Brother Yates returned to Utah, where he apparently shared the Tolstoy prophecy with various interested members of the Church, possibly including President Joseph F. Smith.

The second story, which as I say may or may not be related to the first, is told by President Spencer W. Kimball, then a member of the Twelve, in an October conference address in 1969:

When I was a youngster, a stirring challenge came to me that moved me not a little. I cannot remember who issued the challenge nor under what circumstances it came. I remember only that it struck me like a “bolt out of the blue heavens.” The unknown voice postulated:

“The ‘Mormon Church’ has stood its ground for the first two generations—but wait till the third and fourth and succeeding generations come along! The first generation fired with a new religion developed a great enthusiasm for it. Surrounded with bitterness, calumny of a hostile world, persecuted ‘from pillar to post,’ they were forced to huddle together for survival. There was good reason to expect they would live and die faithful to their espoused cause.

“The second generation came along born to enthusiasts, zealots, devotees. They were born to men and women who had developed great faith, were inured to hardships and sacrifices for their faith. They inherited from their parents and soaked up from religious homes the stuff of which the faithful are made. They had full reservoirs of strength and faith upon which to draw.

“But wait till the third and fourth generations come along,” said the cynical voice. “The fire will have gone out—the devotion will have been diluted—the sacrifice will have been nullified—the world will have hovered over them and surrounded them and eroded them—the faith will have been expended and the religious fervor leaked out.”

That day I realized that I was a member of the third generation. That day I clenched my growing fists. I gritted my teeth and made a firm commitment to myself that here was one “third generation” who would not fulfill that dire prediction. [CR, October 1969, pp. 18–19]

The third story may identify the source of the unknown voice that spoke to President Kimball of the dangers of the third and fourth generations.

Sometime in 1904 or 1905, when Spencer Kimball would have been nine or ten years old, the president of the Church, Joseph F. Smith, gave a powerful address entitled “The Third and Fourth Generations.” It is possible that this is where young Spencer heard the challenge that he said moved him “not a little.”

Another person who was moved by President Smith’s address was Evan Stephens.

When Evan Stephens was conductor of the Tabernacle Choir he was thrilled on one occasion by a sermon delivered by the late President Joseph F. Smith on the subject of "The Third and Fourth Generations."

At the close of the service Professor Stephens strolled alone up City Creek Canyon pondering the inspired words of the President. Suddenly the muse came upon him and seated upon a rock which was standing firm under the pressure of the rushing water and happily symbolic of his theme, he wrote with a pencil the words of "True to the Faith" and with roughly drawn staves composed the music.

[J. Spencer Cornwall, *Stories of Our Mormon Hymns* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1961), p. 174]

*Shall the youth of Zion falter
In defending truth and right?
While the enemy assaileth,
Shall we shrink or shun the fight?
No! True to the faith that our parents have
cherished,
True to the truth for which martyrs have perished,
To God's command,*

*Soul, heart and hand,
Faithful and true we will ever stand.
["True to the Faith," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 254]*

Whether these three incidents are closely related or not, I do not know, but I am intrigued by that possibility. I do know that Mormonism has and will endure unaltered not only to the third and fourth generations, but to all generations of time, for it is the very eternal gospel of Christ. Sister Vilate C. Raile penned these words regarding the pioneers:

*They cut desire into short lengths
And fed it to the hungry fires of tribulation.
Long after when the fires had died,
Molten gold gleamed in the ashes.
They gathered it in bruised palms
And handed it to their children
And their children's children forever.*

May we be true to the faith and true to the truth, that with our valiant pioneer ancestors we may ever stand, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.