

THE OUTSIDERS

Before his martyrdom the Prophet Joseph Smith had publicly declared the desire of the Mormons to be at peace with men of all faiths:

All I can offer the world is a good heart and a good hand. "The Saints can testify whether I am willing to lay down my life for my brethren. If it has been demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a "Mormon." I am bold to declare before heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of the Roman Catholic, or any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves.

It is a love of liberty which inspires my soul--civil and religious liberty to the whole of the human race. Love of liberty was diffused into my soul by my grandfathers while they dandled me on their knees; and shall I want friends? No.

The inquiry is frequently made of me, "Wherein do you differ from others in your religious views?" In reality and essence we do not differ so far in our religious views, but that we could all drink into one principle of love. One of the grand fundamental principles of "Mormonism" is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.

We believe in the Great Eloheim who sits enthroned in yonder heavens. So do the Presbyterians. If a skilful mechanic, in taking a welding heat, uses borax, alum, etc., and succeeds in welding together iron or steel more perfectly than any other mechanic, is he not deserving of praise? And if by the principles of truth I succeed in uniting men of all denominations in the bonds of love, shall I not have attained a good object?

If I esteem mankind to be in error, shall I bear them down? No. I will lift them up, and in their own way too, if I cannot persuade them my way is better; and I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning, for truth will cut its own way. Do you believe in Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation which He revealed? So do I. Christians should cease wrangling and contending with each other, and cultivate the principles of union and friendship in their midst, and they will do it before the millennium can be ushered in and Christ takes possession of His kingdom.

Nevertheless, however good his intentions and his profession of good-will towards fellow Christians and all mankind, this did not allay the fears and suspicions of other denominationalists. The tragic reaction to his teachings and the way of life of his followers constitutes one of history's black chapters of religious persecution.

After having been driven from Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, and after having suffered every possible indignity and atrocity imposed upon them by those not of their faith, but supposedly in the interest of God and Christian orthodoxy, it is not unreasonable that after settling away from the world in an unwanted place, they would be somewhat wary of the outsiders who came into their midst.

There were those of genuine purpose and good will who came in good faith, seeking only fair treatment. Others came, publicly avowing their contempt for things religious and sacred in general and for Mormonism in particular. For those of this breed together with the left-overs of gold seekers, railroad crews and camp followers it was difficult for the people of the settlement to show tolerance. The eventual presence of a very small minority of both the contemptuous and the earnest varieties of outsiders, or gentiles as they were often called, lent considerable color to the story of this society over the years.