
The Manifesto

Official Declaration 1

The Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act, the first US federal legislation against the practice of plural marriage, was signed into law on July 1, 1862, by President Abraham Lincoln. The act was intended to punish those practicing plural marriage, or what the US government called “polygamy.” Twenty years later, on March 14, 1882, the Edmunds Act, an amendment to the Morrill Act, was signed into law by President Chester Arthur. This act restricted the rights of those practicing plural marriage to vote, serve in public office, or serve on a jury. The Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 dis-incorporated The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Perpetual Emigrating Fund. It also authorized the seizure of Church property not used directly for religious purposes. In May 1890 the US Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Edmunds-Tucker Act.

The Supreme Court decision and the anti-polygamy laws exerted great pressure upon Church leaders to end the practice of plural marriage. In 1890 President Wilford Woodruff stated, “Inasmuch as laws have been enacted by Congress forbidding plural marriages, which laws have been pronounced constitutional by the court of last resort, I hereby declare my intention to submit to those laws, and to use my influence with the members of the Church over which I preside to have them do likewise.”¹

On September 25, 1890, Wilford Woodruff said,

I have arrived at a point in the history of my life as the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints where I am under the necessity of acting for the temporal salvation of the church. The United States government has taken a stand and passed laws to destroy the Latter-day Saints on the subject of polygamy, or patriarchal order of marriage; and after praying to the Lord and feeling inspired, I have

¹ “Official Declaration,” *Deseret Evening News*, September 25, 1890.

issued the following proclamation which is sustained by my counselors and the twelve apostles.²

The Plural Marriage Manifesto, now known as Official Declaration 1, was presented to Church membership for a sustaining vote at the October 1890 general conference. A sustaining vote was given. Of the Manifesto, President Woodruff said,

The Lord showed me by vision and revelation exactly what would take place if we did not stop this practice. ... All ordinances would be stopped throughout the land of Zion. Confusion would reign throughout Israel, and many men would be made prisoners. ... But I want to say this: I should have let all the temples go out of our hands; I should have gone to prison myself, and let every other man go there, had not the God of heaven commanded me to do what I did do; and when the hour came that I was commanded to do that, it was all clear to me. I went before the Lord, and I wrote what the Lord told me to write.³

The Manifesto that President Woodruff wrote, as revealed to him by God, constituted a dramatic turning point in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Plural marriage as officially authorized and practiced by Latter-day Saints ended.

² James R. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1965), 3:192.

³ *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1990), 214–16.