

Ezra Taft Benson

I. Earlier Events in His Life

A. Flora Amussen. Ezra Taft Benson's wife, Flora Amussen was only one year old when her father Carl died at age 77. As a polygamist, he married his last wife (Flora's mother) when she was a teenager and he was about sixty, 42 years her senior. (*Ensign*, March 1987, pp. 15-16.)

Early Education. Ezra Taft Benson, born in the small, southern Idaho town of Whitney, attended the Oneida Stake Academy in Preston to complete his education. It was there, at age 13, that he met a classmate by the name of Harold B. Lee. "This small, isolated academy had the distinction of educating two future presidents of the Church." (Leonard J. Arrington, *The Presidents of the Church*, 1986, p. 350.)

C. Had to Grow Up Fast. In 1912, the Church sent Ezra's father, George Taft Benson Jr. (1875-1934), to the Northern States Mission, leaving behind his pregnant wife, Sarah Dunkley Benson, and seven children. Ezra, the oldest, was only twelve. Benson's father's absence had been particularly difficult financially and emotion-ally. (Gary James Bergera, "Ezra Taft Benson's 1921-23 Mission to England," *Journal of Mormon History*, Fall 2009, pp. 86-7.)

D. Graduate of Iowa State College. "Ezra graduated with honors from Brigham Young University in the spring of 1926. His scholastic record earned him a research scholarship in agricultural economics at Iowa State College in Ames, Iowa." (Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God*, 1996, p. 71.)

E. Career in Washington. In January 1939, Ezra was hired as the executive secretary of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives. This important and lucrative assignment required a move to Washington, D. C. He was president of the Boise Idaho Stake at the time he left there, and soon after arriving in Washington, he was named president of the newly organized Washington, D. C. Stake, the first LDS stake east of Denver.

Belief in Homeopathic Medicine. Through most of his adult life, beginning in the early 1940s, Ezra Taft Benson was a strong believer in homeopathic medicine, a fact not made public until after his death. _When former LDS Church President Ezra Taft Benson made several clandestine trips to Las Vegas, Nevada, he was not gambling with his money but with his reputation. 'We were cautioned not to speak about this,' says a relative. 'There could be ridicule and criticism. The secret that President Benson's family and LDS Church media rela-tions were able to keep under wraps until after his death last month was his belief in homeopathic medicine. . . . At the [Las Vegas] clinic, Dr. F. Fuller Royal, a Mormon convert, uses an electronic device called an 'Electro-Dermal Instrument' that he says helps him diagnose and treat ailments ranging from allergies to multiple scler-osis. Treatments there involve homeopathic remedies, acupuncture or what Dr. Royal calls 'aquapuncture,' where homeopathic remedies are injected into the body. . . . 'Personally, we used homeopathy for years, way back when we lived in Virginia [in the 1940s],' Reed Benson says. . . . Homeopathy is based on the notion that a disease can be treated or cured by administering minute doses of a remedy, sometimes doses of the disease itself. 'Like cures like,' is the homeopathic slogan. . . . Most traditional physicians dismiss such practice as quackery._ (Lynn Packer, _Prescription for the Prophet: Ezra Taft Benson's Faith in Alternative Medicine and the Electro-Dermal Machine,_ *Private Eye Weekly*, July 13, 1994, p. 8.)

Used an Electro-Dermal Device. _Reed Benson described his own diagnosis by Dr. Royal on the electro-dermal device: 'They take readings from the nerve endings from your fingers and on your feet and then it will tell where your weaknesses are in certain areas of your body. And then homeopathic remedies help in those areas where you need strengthening. . . . You would ground yourself by holding in one hand a metal rod that was wrapped in wet gauze. Then another device was placed at particular juncture points on your fingers. And the machine would emit a whine, a sound, and the more intense and high-pitched the whine, the stronger the electrical current. The lower pitched or weaker sound was said to indicate weaknesses at that particular point that could be followed through nerve meridians to a particular point in the body._ (Ibid., p. 9.)

1. Opposed by Food and Drug Admin. _About the same time, the European manufacturer of the Dermatron reportedly ran afoul of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration because of the claim that the device could detect and cure cancer.” (Ibid., 9.)

2. Had to Fight Medical Profession. _Dr. Royal believes his success with other Benson family members helped promote their support for his treating Ezra Taft. . . . It was a belief that apparently translated into moral support from the Mormon prophet. 'I would not have persisted and gone up against some of the most powerful doctors that you can imagine who have tried to put me out of business or put me down,' he said. 'I would not have been able to sustain that kind of energy without the help of President Benson. By that, I'm talking about his spiritual help, his encouragement. It's actually more than that but I cannot go into it.' (Ibid., p. 10.)

3. Bensons Injected with Chemical EDTA to Clean Arteries. _[One] controversial treatment involves the introduction of the chemical EDTA into the bloodstream to remove toxic mineral deposits from the arteries. Family members say both Flora and Ezra Taft Benson eventually underwent the therapy along with their use of homeopathic remedies._ (Ibid., p. 10.)

4. Colleague Sentenced to One Year Probation. _Floyd Weston, 72, like Dr. Royal, is a proponent of homeopathy. Like Royal, he was also a health advisor to Ezra Taft Benson. . . . Weston reportedly told the church leader that the medical community in Utah is too closed-minded about alternative medical practices for homeo-pathy to succeed there. . . .[The FDA charged Weston with selling _a misbranded device._] _Weston was sen-tenced to one year probation, fined \$2,500 and ordered to perform 100 hours of community service._ (Ibid., 10.)

F. Called as an Apostle. _Early in 1943 Ezra received two job offers, both offering high salaries. One of them seemed particularly enticing but would require that he move from Washington. He stopped in SLC to discuss the matter with Elder David O. McKay. While there, President Heber J. Grant sent for him. 'President Grant took my right hand in both of his,' Ezra recalled, 'and looked into the depths of my very soul and said: 'Brother Benson, with all my heart I congratulate you and pray God's blessings to attend you. You have been chosen as the youngest apostle of the Church.' Elder Benson said, 'The whole world seemed to sink. I could hardly believe it was true.'_ (William G. Hartley, _Ezra Taft Benson,_ *The Presidents of the Church*, edited by Leonard Arrington, 1986, pp. 430-1.)

1. Gave Up \$50,000 Opportunity for \$6,000 as an Apostle. “When in 1943, he was invited to join another large cooperative association at nearly double his \$25,000-a-year salary, Benson again

sought the advice of Church officials. Informed instead that he was being called to join the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (at an annual salary of \$6,000), Benson quickly resigned his job and soon relocated his young family to Utah.” (“Ezra Taft Benson, Secretary of Agriculture,” Gary James Bergera, *Dialogue*, 41:3 [Fall 2008], p. 85.)

Financial Sacrifice to Serve. In 1943, Ezra Taft Benson was living in Washington, D. C. when he was called to the Quorum of the Twelve: “Questions of a practical nature prompted Ezra to consult the First Presidency. How soon should he move to Salt Lake City, and should he plan to assume the cost of moving? What was the housing situation in Utah? Should he plan to maintain outside interests to sustain his family financially? . . . The First Presidency responded, point by point. Ezra was responsible for his moving expenses, might consider renting a home until after the war, [and] would receive a modest living allowance . . .” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 179.)

Hard Times as an Apostle. “Being a General Authority sometimes exacted its price. Ezra worried about his finances, as the living allowance he now received was significantly less than his former salary. With two sons on missions, his savings were being rapidly depleted. ‘Since we . . . moved to Salt Lake,’ he recorded in his journal, ‘it has been necessary . . . to draw on our small savings each month at the rate of well over \$1,000 per year. If this continues for long we’ll not be able to help the children with their college.’ At year’s end, with the situation unresolved, the Bensons only sent Christmas cards to family and very close friends. After moving to Salt Lake City, the Benson children noticed fewer presents under the tree.” (*Ibid.*, p. 240.)

a. Friends Helped Out. “The dramatic decrease in salary was difficult for the Bensons. They regularly drew on personal savings to cover routine living costs and reluctantly but gratefully, accepted cash and other gifts from friends, notably restaurateur J. Willard Marriott. For a time, they also contemplated selling their Salt Lake City house.” (“Ezra Taft Benson, Secretary of Agriculture,” Gary James Bergera, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 41:3 [Fall 2008], p. 108, f25.)

G. Danger in Church Callings. Newly appointed apostle Ezra Taft Benson noted this danger in his journal in 1943: “Extensive travel on Church work will take me from my family to a great extent. Often this is the beginning of less interest in Church matters by families of Church leaders. I sincerely trust I may be true to my family, keep them close to the Church, and yet fulfil my obligations as one of the General Authorities. This I know will be no easy matter.” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 178.)

Rapid Rise in Seniority. At the October 1943 general conference, Elders Kimball and Benson were named to the Quorum of the Twelve. _The induction of this pair into the quorum began an astounding turnover in the makeup of the Twelve, unprecedented in the history of the Church. In the decade from 1943 to October 1953, ten vacancies were created in the Quorum of the Twelve, caused either by death, by calls to the First Presidency, or, in the case of Richard R. Lyman, by excommunication. . . . These departures and their replace-ments advanced Elder Lee in seniority in the quorum so that in October 1953 when Elder Richard L. Evans was called to the Twelve, Elder Lee was its second ranking member, junior only to President Joseph Fielding Smith. [Elder Kimball was third, and Elder Benson fourth.] The magnitude of the changes that occurred in the decade 1943 to 1953 is better understood by the fact

that for seven years from 1963 to 1970, Elder Thomas S. Monson was the junior member of the Twelve._ (Francis M. Gibbons, *Harold B. Lee: Man of Vision, Prophet of God*, 1993, 205.)

Secured Eastern States Mission Office. “Ezra [Taft Benson] traveled to New York City [in 1949] to complete negotiations on purchase of a mission home for the Eastern States Mission. When he had first been assigned to find property there, he had asked George Albert Smith, teasingly, ‘Where do you want it—on Fifth Avenue?’ But, in fact, that is where Elder Benson did locate property. At 973 Fifth Avenue, across from Central Park, stood an elegant, six-story mansion that the State of New York had considered making a historical site. The asking price was \$175,000. Ezra indicated that the Church couldn’t pay that price but might be interested at a lower figure. The property was finally offered at \$105,000 cash, which Ezra accepted. A subsequent appraisal valued the property at double that amount.” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p.

Visit with President Truman. “While in the East [May, 1949] the Bensons paid a courtesy call on President Harry S Truman, extending LDS President George Albert Smith’s greetings and talking about the importance of the family unit.” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 236.)

Took a Plural Wife for Eternity. On April 25, 1950, Elder Benson “was sealed in marriage to his recently deceased cousin, Eva Amanda Benson (July 6, 1882-August 10, 1946). Eva was the never-married daughter of Benson’s uncle Frank Andrus Benson. Flora had first suggested acting as proxy for Eva, then did so during the vicarious ordinance performed by Elder Joseph Fielding Smith in the Salt Lake Temple. ‘I have never witnessed a more unselfish act on the part of any person,’ Benson recorded, ‘and I love Flora all the more because of it. The Lord will richly bless her for this act of unselfish love for Eva and me and the Kingdom. Flora is one of the choicest daughters of our Heavenly Father’” (Ezra Taft Benson Diary, April 25, 1950; cited by Gary James Bergera, “Ezra Taft Benson, Secretary of Agriculture,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 41:4 [Winter 2008], p. 83.)

II. Service While Secretary of Agriculture

Approached by Gov. Dewey. “In 1948, Governor [Thomas E.] Dewey had been so confident that he would be the next President that he did not wait until after the election to sound out his friend Benson about becoming his Secretary of Agriculture.” (Merlo J. Pusey, *Eisenhower the President*, (New York: Macmillan, 1956, p. 67.)

Appointed to Eisenhower’s Cabinet. “In 1952, following the counsel of President David O. McKay, Ezra Taft Benson accepted the Cabinet position of secretary of agriculture in the Eisenhower administration. His selection was greeted with widespread approval. In his _General Statement on Agricultural Policy,_ he said, _The supreme test of any government policy, agricultural or other, should be 'How will it affect the character, morale, and well-being of our people?' ... A completely planned and subsidized economy weakens initiative, discourages industry, destroys character, and demoralizes the people_ (Encyclopedia of Mormonism, Vol.1, “Benson, Ezra Taft.”)

Support of President McKay. “At Benson’s request, McKay gave him a blessing that Benson would thereafter consider a mandate to fight Communism by whatever means he chose: “We seal upon you the blessings of . . . sound judgment, clear vision, that you might see afar the needs of this country;

vision that you might see, too, the enemies who would thwart the freedoms of the individual as vouchsafed by the Constitution, . . . and may you be fearless in the condemnation of these subversive influences, and strong in your defense of the rights and privileges of the Constitution.” (Gregory A. Prince, “David O. McKay and Communism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 2004, p. 43.)

C. Prayer in Cabinet Meetings. “Elder Benson believed that ‘except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it’ (Psalm 127:1). Therefore, at the first preinaugural Cabinet meeting, he felt impressed to ask Eisenhower if it might not be fitting to begin Cabinet meetings with prayer. Eisenhower called on Elder Benson for that first prayer. When there was no prayer at the next cabinet meeting, Secretary Benson wrote the president, pleading for prayer. Eisenhower considered the matter, and prayer was offered in every one of the more than two hundred Cabinet meetings held during the ensuing eight years.” (Reed A. Benson, “Ezra Taft Benson: The Eisenhower Years,” *Out of Obscurity: The LDS Church in the Twentieth Century*, papers given at the 29th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, BYU, 2000, pp. 54-55.)

Advice Given to Benson by Pres. J. Reuben Clark. On April 9, 1953, Pres. J. Reuben Clark met with important *Deseret News* leaders, including Mark E. Petersen, Preston Robinson, Ted Cannon, Bill Smart, and Theon Little. “I also talked with them about Brother Benson.. I said that some of his friends had come to see me and had urged me to speak with Brother Benson about the following matters, and I had done so.” He then listed several items, including the following:

1. Securing a Ghost writer, or writers, who could prepare his speeches so that he, Brother Benson, would not have to do so. . . .
2. Urged him to get better acquainted with Congressmen, and try to work it out so that they would believe, the Congressmen would think they were proposing things that he wanted . . .”
3. Urged him to submit everything to the White House, and to secure approval for all announcements of policy which he made, not in a general way, but specifically. . . . I told Brother Benson the following things which I did not mention to the Deseret News people.

a. That I thought he was travelling too much; that a good deal could happen in the Home Office while he was away.

b. That I thought he was talking too much.” (*The Diaries of J. Reuben Clark, 1933-1961, Abridged*. Privately published, 2010, 201-02.)

Impact on Others. In the fall of 1953, Elder Benson, then serving in Eisenhower's cabinet as Secretary of Agriculture, addressed a convention of agricultural leaders at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. His address focused on issues and trends facing agriculture across the country. _Near the close of his remarks, he paid tribute to a successful agribusiness leader from Chicago, lauding the man's contribution not only to the agriculture industry but to the country as well. A few days later, Secretary Benson received a letter from the man expressing appreciation for the compliments and honor._ There was a postscript penned at the bottom of the letter: _Secretary Benson, since I was with you in New York I have had the strangest feeling that I wanted to leave my nets and come follow you and be a fisher of men._ (Heidi S. Swinton, *In the Company of Prophets: Personal Experiences of D. Arthur Haycock*, 1993, p. 116.)

Luncheon for Wives. “Secretary Benson’s wife, Flora, hosted at her home a luncheon for the wives of the president, vice-president, and the members of the Cabinet. She and her daughters prepared the meal themselves. There were no cocktails, tea, coffee, or playing cards. ‘We’ll try to make it up to you in our way,’ she said. And she did. The family provided entertainment along with the BYU Madrigal Singers, a group in which daughter Barbara was a soloist. Afterwards, Mamie Eisenhower wrote of ‘the atmosphere of peace and love abiding’ in the home that ‘made all of us come away with a deep feeling of joy.’” (Reed A. Benson, “Ezra Taft Benson: The Eisenhower Years,” *Out of Obscurity: The LDS Church in the Twentieth Century*, papers given at the 29th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, BYU, 2000, p. 57.)

Decision About Visiting the Pope. In 1957, Benson was on a tour of several nations in his capacity as U. S. Secretary of Agriculture, and met with officials in Rome. “The American ambassador to Italy had suggested that Benson meet with the Pope. Benson raised the possibility with McKay, who asked that he avoid such an encounter. McKay worried about the image of a Mormon apostle paying his respects to the leader of the Catholic church. ‘Really they [Catholics] have everything to gain and nothing to lose,’ he told Benson, ‘and we have everything to lose and nothing to gain.’ ‘I am in fully [sic] harmony with that feeling,’ Benson replied.” (McKay Diary, October 1-2, 1957; cited in Gary James Bergera, “Ezra Taft Benson, Secretary of Agriculture,” *Dialogue*, 41:4 [Winter 2008], p. 86.)

Secretary Benson in Moscow. Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Quorum of Twelve served as the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture in the Eisenhower administration, from 1953-61. In 1959 he embarked on an official visit that took him to several European countries, including the Soviet Union. He wrote this account of that trip:

“On the way to the airport our last night in Moscow, I mentioned again to one of our guides my disappointment that we had had no opportunity to visit a church in Russia. He said a few words to the chauffeur, the car swung around in the middle of the avenue and we eventually pulled up before an old stucco building on a dark, narrow, cobblestone side street not far from Red Square. This was the Central Baptist Church. It was a rainy, disagree-able October night with a distinct chill in the air. But when we entered the church, we found it filled; people were standing in the hall, in the entry, even in the street. Every Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday, we learned, similar crowds turn out. I looked at the faces of the people. Many were middle-aged and older but a surprising number were young. About four out of every five were women, most of them with scarves about their heads. We were ushered into a place beside the pulpit.

“A newsman who was present described what happened: ‘Every face in the old sanctuary gaped incredulously as our obviously American group was led down the aisle. They grabbed for our hands as we proceeded to our pews which were gladly vacated for our unexpected visit. Their wrinkled, old faces looked at us pleadingly. They reached out to touch us almost as one would reach out for the last final caress of one’s most-beloved just before the casket is lowered. They were in misery and yet a light shone through the misery. They gripped our hands like frightened children.’ Elder Benson continued: The minister spoke a few words, and then the organ struck a chord or two and began a hymn in which the entire congregation joined as one. Hearing a thousand to 1,500 voices raised there became one of the most affecting experiences of my entire life. In our common faith as Christians, they reached out to us with a message of welcome that bridged all differences of language, of government, of history. And as I was trying to recover balance under this emotional impact, the minister asked me, through an interpreter who stood there, to address the congregation.

“It took me a moment of hard struggle to master my feelings sufficiently to agree. Then I said, in part, ‘It was very kind of you to ask me to greet you. I bring you greetings from the millions and millions of church people in America and around the world.’ And suddenly it was the most natural thing in the world to be talking to these fellow Christians about the most sacred truths known to man. ‘Our Heavenly Father is not far away. He can be very close to us. God lives, I know that He lives. He is our Father. Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world, watches over this earth. He will direct all things. Be unafraid, keep His commandments, love one another, pray for peace and all will be well.’

“As each sentence was translated for the congregation, I saw the women take their handkerchiefs and as one observer put it begin to ‘wave them like a mother bidding permanent goodbye to her only son.’ Their heads nodded vigorously as they moaned, ‘Ja, ja, ja_’ Then I noticed for the first time that even the gallery was filled and many persons were standing against the walls. I looked down on one old woman before me, head covered by a plain old scarf, a shawl about her shoulders, her aged, wrinkled face serene with faith. I spoke directly to her.

‘This life is only a part of eternity. We lived before we came here as spiritual children of God. We will live again after we leave this life. Christ broke the bonds of death and was resurrected. We will all be resurrected. I believe very firmly in prayer. I know it is possible to reach out and tap that Unseen Power which gives us strength and

such an anchor in time of need.’ With each sentence I uttered, the old head nodded assent. And old, feeble, wrinkled as she was, that woman was beautiful in her devotion. I don’t remember all that I said, but I recall feeling lifted up, inspired by the rapt faces of these men and women who were so steadfastly proving their faith in the God they served and loved. In closing I said, ‘I leave you my witness as a Church servant for many years that the truth will endure. Time is on the side of truth. God bless you and keep you all the days of your life, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.’

“With that I brought this broken little talk to an end, because I could say no more, and sat down. The whole congregation then broke into a favorite hymn of my childhood, ‘God Be with You Till We Meet Again.’ We left the church as they sang and as we walked down the aisle, they waved handkerchiefs in farewell— it seemed all 1,500 were waving at us as we left. It has been my privilege to speak before many church bodies in all parts of the world, but the impact of that experience is almost indescribable. I shall never forget that evening as long as I live. Seldom, if ever, have I felt the oneness of mankind and the unquenchable yearning of the human heart for freedom so keenly as at that moment. Ten members of the American press who were present felt it, too. Without exception they told me later what a moving experience it had been. One of them wrote in the next issue of his magazine: ‘The Communist plan is that when these “last believers” die off, religion will die with them. What the atheists don’t know is that God can’t be stamped out either by legislated atheism or firing squad. This Methodist backslider who occasionally grumbles about having to go to church, stood crying unashamedly, throat lumped, and chills running from spine to toes. It was the most heart-rending and most inspiring scene I’ve ever witnessed.’ On the drive to the airport one of the interpreters, a young Russian girl who had never known any life save that under communism, said, ‘I felt like crying.’ So did I.” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Crossfire: The Eight Years with Eisenhower*, pp. 485-88)

Tabernacle Choir at White House. Ezra Taft Benson “had suggested that the Tabernacle Choir perform for President Eisenhower in the White House, and on the evening of October 26 [1958], the choir gave an hour performance at a black-tie affair. Ezra and Flora, with their daughters, joined the Eisenhowers and selected guests. Repeatedly during the program, the president turned to Ezra and

expressed his pleasure, particularly after the choir sang, ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic.’ At the hour’s end, he asked the choir to sing on, which they did for another fifteen minutes. Afterwards the President and Mrs. Eisenhower mingled with the choir and other guests for about an hour.” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 333.)

Had Many Critics, Even in Church. Secretary Benson spent most of his eight years in the Cabinet in a swirl of controversy. He spoke boldly and without worrying about how others would respond. Many thought he would be the first Cabinet member to go, yet he remained all eight years of Eisenhower’s presidency. “By this time, Benson’s critics included at least one high-ranking LDS Church leader. J. Reuben Clark, first counselor to David O. McKay, opined privately in late 1959 that Benson ‘had done and was doing more to destroy the small farmer than anyone else had done.’” (Gary James Bergera, “Ezra Taft Benson, Secretary of Agriculture,” *Dialogue*, 41:4 [Winter 2008], p. 91.)

Ernest L. Wilkinson. _BYU President Ernest L. Wilkinson, a protege of J. Reuben Clark's who was eager to run for the U. S. Senate himself, complained in his diary: 'I do not think the decision of the brethren in advising people whether they should run or should not run are consistent. They have advised me not to run and yet at the same time they allowed Ezra Taft Benson, a General Authority, to be Secretary of Agriculture and espouse certain principles which are utterly inconsistent with the feeling of the brethren.'_ (Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, *America's Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power*, 1984, p. 76.)

Encounter With Forces of Evil. Apparently in 1960, Elder Ezra Taft Benson told his wife and teenaged daughter Beth about a series of encounters with evil forces he had had just as he was leaving government service as President Eisenhower’s Secretary of Agriculture. The family was vacationing at Priest River, Idaho. Beth described the experience: “That night Daddy went into town to get some medication for me. As he was driving home he had some experiences with evil forces_ He somehow lost power over the car and lost consciousness— and when he suddenly came to he was in the middle of a field just ready to hit some cattle. Another time he had gone off the road just before crossing a bridge over the river and got control just before the car was about to go over the edge into the river. That night Mother slept in a bedroom downstairs with me because of my [injured] leg and Daddy slept upstairs. In the middle of the night Daddy came down the stairs. I could see him from my bed. He was crying and shaking. He came into our room and sat on the edge of my bed still crying and shaking and very pale. He told us he had just had an experience that he wanted to tell us. Mother said are you sure Beth should hear this and Daddy said yes he wanted me to. He said that all of a sudden he felt like he was strongly restricted—that he was bound and couldn’t move or caged in a box and unable to move his muscles to free himself. It was a very dark and evil feeling. He seemed to fight with all his might to free himself but could not. Then he prayed for deliverance from this evil spirit and suddenly he was free—the box and bounds were lifted and the darkness was replaced with light. Then a very beautiful feeling came over him—he felt calm and peaceful and felt the explanation come to him: the Lord loves him very much and loves our entire family. But the devil is trying and will continue to try to destroy us—to do all he can to thwart us and stop us from doing good. The Lord wants us to know this to be on guard and aware of the devil’s desires so that we will recognize and protect ourselves. And if we remember the Lord he will help us and all will be fine and we will be able to overcome the evil one. I will never forget this experience or the look and feeling I got from my dear father.” (Taken from a letter dated June 1973; cited by Gary James Bergera, “Ezra Taft Benson, Secretary of Agriculture,” *Dialogue*, 41:4 [Winter 2008], pp. 77-8.)

III. Increasingly Controversial

Difficult Transition from Washington to Apostolic Duties. “Despite his genuine happiness at resuming his duties as a member of the Twelve, Elder Benson found the transition more difficult than he had expected. For eight years he had been at the seat of national—indeed, world—power, exercising administrative control over a vast army of USDA employees and grappling with complex problems of international scope. . . . Now at Church headquarters, he had to share secretaries with other General Authorities. This created a serious bottleneck, given his voluminous correspondence with former government associates, acquaintances around the world, and the numerous people who wrote to him seeking counsel or requesting favors. . . . For a while after his return, Elder Benson had a sense that he was underused in the fulfillment of Church duties. This did not imply a demeaning attitude toward them; it only reflected the difference between being one of twelve and being the main figure among thousands of subordinate. This was an inevitable reaction to his changed status.” (Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God*, 1996, pp. 236-7.)

Couldn't Give Up Political Message. Elder Benson served in President Eisenhower's cabinet until January 1961. In May 1961, he spoke at a BYU devotional. Pres. Ernest L. Wilkinson, a very conservative man, noted in his diary: “Presided at devotional, at which I introduced Elder Ezra Taft Benson. He gave a fine talk. It is apparent, however, it is very difficult for him to divorce himself from the active politics in which he has been engaged, and get into his work again as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. While I agreed with every word that he said, I suspect there were some Democrats who did not, and he took one-third of his time talking on current political problems.” (Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism*, 2005, p. 285.)

1. “Has Lost His Spiritual Tone.” Harold B. Lee was particularly distressed by Benson's actions and, according to L. Ralph Mechem, later said privately that “the brethren would never permit another member of the Twelve to serve in the Cabinet or in a high political position because, as he put it, ‘Elder Benson had lost his spiritual tone and would no longer accept counsel.’” (*Ibid.*, p. 294.)

2. Warning of Secret Combinations. At a session of the October 1961 general conference, Elder Benson said, “Concerning the United States, the Lord revealed to his prophets that its greatest threat would be a vast, world-wide ‘secret combination’ which would not only threaten the United States but also seek to ‘overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries’ (Ether 8:25). . . . Elder Benson then identified ‘the socialist-communist conspiracy’ as the primary danger threatening the United States, likening it to the Gadianton robbers told about in the Book of Mormon.” (Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God*, 1996, p. 239.)

Spoke of Threat in Nine of Thirteen General Conference Talks. “During the next nine years, thirteen of Elder Benson's eighteen general conference talks focused on one aspect or another of this subject.

Hundreds of Talks. “In addition, he gave hundreds of other talks, both inside and outside the Church, in which he dwelled on the perils of communism and the remedies to thwart it. During this period he also published three widely circulated books on the subject.” (*Ibid.*, p. 240.)

Opposition to United Nations. “We must expose to the light of public inquiry those forces which would destroy our country and our way of life. . . . We should refuse to follow their siren song of increasingly concentrating the powers of government in the chief executive, of delegating American sovereign authority to non-American institutions of the United Nations and pretending that it will bring peace to the world by turning our armed forces over to a United Nations worldwide police force.” (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, p. 681.)

1. U.N. Has Failed. “We are in the midst of continuing international crises. The outlook for world peace and security is dark indeed. The gravity of the world situation, it appears, is increasing almost daily. The United Nations seems unable to settle the troubles of the world. In truth we are faced with the hard fact that the United Nations, it seems, has largely failed in its purpose. Yes, the days ahead are sobering and challenging ones. We might well ask, America—what of the future?” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, April 1952, p. 58.)

Benson Outspoken. Apostle Ezra Taft Benson “repeatedly spoke out against the United Nations, though this outlook was not widely accepted in the early 1950s.” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 251.)

John Birch Society Dissension. Elder Ezra Taft Benson's strong advocacy of the John Birch Society led to many cautionary statements from the Brethren:

First Presidency Opposition. In January, 1963, the First Presidency announced: “The following statement is made to correct the false statements and unwarranted assumptions regarding the position allegedly taken by the leaders of the Church on political questions in general and the John Birch Society in particular. . . . We deplore the presumption of some politicians, especially officers, co-ordinators and members of the John Birch Society, who undertake to align the Church or its leadership with their partisan views. We encourage our members to exercise the right of citizenship, to vote according to their own convictions, but no one should seek or pretend to have our approval of their adherence to any extremist ideologies. We denounce communism as being anti-Christian, anti-American, and the enemy of freedom, but we think they who pretend to fight it by casting aspersions on our elected officers or other fellow citizens do the anti-Communist cause a great disservice.” (*Deseret News*, Jan. 3, 1963, p. B1.) At this time, Benson's son Reed was the Utah co-ordinator for the John Birch Society.

Pres. McKay Came Down Hard, But in Private. “In late January [1963], McKay finally met with Benson to discuss the First Presidency statement. It was one of the rare instances in which McKay came down hard on him—albeit in private—for his political activities. ‘Elder Benson said the statement seemed to be leveled against him and his son, Reed, and also Brother [W. Cleon] Skousen. I told Brother Benson that it was intended to apply to them. I said that the statement made by him (Elder Benson) in favor of the John Birch Society was made by him, one of the Twelve, who is an international character and received international publicity, and that that is one reason the Presidency had to make the announcement in the newspapers.’” (David O. McKay Diary; Jan. 23, 1964; cited in Gregory A. Prince, “David O. McKay and Communism,” *Dialogue*, Summer 2004, pp. 53-4.)

Plan for Spies at BYU. In 1960, “Benson proposed to BYU’s president that his son Reed Benson be used for ‘espionage’ on the church school campus. To Apostle Harold B. Lee, Reed explained that as a BYU faculty member, ‘he could soon find out who the orthodox teachers were and report to his father.’ After resist-ing Apostle Benson’s proposal for Reed’s employment, Ernest L. Wilkinson countered that ‘neither Brother Lee nor I want espionage of that character.’” (D. Michael Quinn, “Ezra Taft Benson and Mormon Political Conflicts,” *Dialogue*, Summer 1993, p. 8.)

Kennedy Soft on Communism. In December 1961, the *Church News* printed Ezra Taft Benson’s talk in which he affirmed that ‘the internal threat to the American way of life is in the secret alliance which exists between the more advanced Social Democrats and the hard-core Communist conspiracy.’ He claimed that there was an ‘insidious infiltration of communist agents and sympathizers into almost every segment of American life.’ Benson added that ‘Social Democrats’ in America were ‘in government, education, communications and policy- making bodies. There they remain today, occupying some of the highest offices in the land.’ Prior to the talk, Benson also told reporters that current U.S. president John F. Kennedy was ‘very soft in dealing with the Communist threat.’” (D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 1997,p. 69.)

1. Clare Middlemiss. President David O. McKay's personal secretary, Clare Middlemiss, was a staunch supporter of the Birch Society. As his health declined, she became more vocal in supporting the Birchers. In December, 1965, she wrote a church member: ‘President McKay has further instructed me to tell you that Elder Ezra Taft Benson has not been rebuked by the Church . . ., and since Communism is a definite threat to the eternal principle of free agency, it cannot be considered that he is 'out of line' when discussing it in talks.’_ (*Dialogue*, Summer 1993, p. 39.)

Idaho Congressman Harding. “On 25 September 1963, in a speech in the House of Representatives, [an LDS Congressman from Idaho, Ralph] Harding sharply criticized former Secretary of Agriculture and Apostle Ezra Taft Benson for his support of the ultra-conservative John Birch Society. In the controversy which followed, Harding received letters commending him from former Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was vilified by the Birch Society. In the fall of 1963 after Harding’s criticism of him, Benson continued to deliver controversial conservative political speeches and publicly endorsed the Birch Society.” (Robert A. King and Kay Atkinson King, “Mormons in Congress, 1851-2000,” *Journal of Mormon History*, Fall 2000, p. 43.)

1. Needs Blood Purified. _In 1963, Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith [then President of the Quorum of the Twelve] wrote a letter to an Idaho congressman [Ralph Harding] who had been attacked by Benson: 'I think it is time that Brother Benson forgot all about politics and settled down to his duties as a member of the Council of the Twelve.' Two months later, Smith again wrote to the congressman: 'I *am* glad to report to you that it will be some time before we hear anything from Brother Benson, who is now on his way to Great Britain where I suppose he will be, at least for the next two years. [He had been named mission president of the European Mission.] When he returns, I hope his blood will be purified._' (Wallace Turner, *The Mormon Establishment*, 1966, p. 286, and Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, *America's Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power*, 1984. p. 78.)

D. Averill Harriman’s Concerns. In 1963 The First Presidency decided to send Elder Benson on a mission to become the new Mission President of the European Mission. This was the first time an Apostle had been put in charge of a mission of the Church since the beginning of the 20th century. W.

Averill Harriman, then the U.S. Under-secretary of State for European Affairs, wrote to Hugh B. Brown; asking him how long Elder Benson was intending to stay in Europe (Elder Benson was the Secretary of Agriculture under U.S. President Eisenhower and the State Dept. was worried he would stir-up the Communists with his Birchism). President Brown wrote back: "If I had my way, he'll never come back_" (Brown statement to Harriman and Richard D. Poll in Salt Lake City, 25 Oct. 1963, quoted in Poll's letter to D. Michael Quinn, 13 Aug. 1992; "The Snubbing of Ezra Taft Benson," http://www.greaterthings.com/Topical/ETB_snubbing.htm; accessed August 23, 2010.)

E. Called on Mission to Europe. On Oct. 27, 1963, Elder Ezra Taft Benson spoke at the New Orleans Stake conference. He praised the John Birch Society, and attacked Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy for using federal troops to enforce school integration. In an apparent attempt to get him away from the political scene, the First Presidency called Benson as a mission president in Europe. "Just before departing for Europe, Benson told a Utah church audience [in Logan] that the civil rights movement was 'part of the pattern for the Communist take-over of America.'" (Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*, 1999, p. 110.)

F. Farewell Speech in Logan "On the eve of his departure for Europe, Benson stirred up yet more controversy. On December 13, he delivered a farewell speech in Logan, a third of which was either direct quotations or paraphrases from Robert Welch's manifesto, the *Blue Book*. Particularly inflammatory was a direct quotation from the *Blue Book* that was given wide publicity in a subsequent article by nationally syndicated columnist Drew Pearson. Benson charged that the United States government was so infiltrated with Communists that the American people 'can no longer resist the Communist conspiracy as free citizens, but can resist the Communist tyranny only by themselves becoming conspirators against established government.'" (Gregory A. Prince, "David O. McKay and Communism," *Dialogue*, Summer 2004, p. 64

1. Civil Rights Movement Part of Communist Take-Over. The *Deseret News* published this report from the same meeting in Logan: "Former agriculture secretary Ezra Taft Benson charged Friday night that the civil rights movement in the South had been 'fomented almost entirely by the Communists.' Elder Benson, a member of the Council of the Twelve of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, said in a speech at a public meeting here that the whole civil rights movement was 'phony.' . . . 'The whole slogan of _civil rights_ as used to make trouble in the South today, is an exact parallel to the slogan of _agrarian reform_ which they used in China,' he added. 'The pending _civil rights_ legislation is, I am convinced, about 10 per cent civil rights and 90 per cent a further extension of socialistic federal controls,' Elder Benson said. 'It is part of the pattern for the communist take-over of America.'_" (*Deseret News*, Dec. 14, 1963.)

Communist Dictatorship in U.S. Within Ten Years. At the same meeting, according to the *Deseret News*, "The apostle predicted that within ten years the United States would be ruled by a Communist dictatorship which 'will include military occupation, concentration camps, tortures, terror and all that is required to enable about 3% of the population to rule the other 97% as slaves.' He promised such dire consequences 'unless we join with those small but determined and knowledgeable patriots.' He added: 'Words will not stop communists.' Benson said that the U.S. government was becoming so infiltrated that American citizens 'can no longer resist the Communist conspiracy as free citizens, but can resist Communist tyranny only by themselves becoming conspirators against

established government.” (D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 1997, p. 79.)

2. Drew Pearson’s Reaction. “Nationally-syndicated newspaper columnist Drew Pearson quoted that breath-taking phrase and interpreted it as Benson’s invitation ‘for Americans to overthrow their government.’” (*Ibid.*, p. 79.)

3. Sent by Inspiration. Elder Benson left for the European Mission in Britain in early 1964. In response to a letter from an Idaho Church member, Clare Middlemiss, secretary to Church President David O. McKay, said that Benson was sent to Europe ‘by inspiration to preside over the European mission’ and said that ‘there is no truth whatever in the rumors you related in your letter’ that he had been sent to Europe to remove him from political activity in the United States. (Robert A. King and Kay Atkinson King, “Mormons in Congress, 1851-2000,” *Journal of Mormon History*, Fall 2000, p. 43.)

D. Gift of Tongues in Europe. Mid-1960s. Elder Benson’s daughter Beth recalled this incident from the time Elder Benson was serving as European Mission President in the mid-1960s: “One incident in Switzerland stands out: ‘Dad was speaking to the priesthood brethren. What I saw there is the closest thing to speaking in tongues I’ve seen. He didn’t actually speak in German, but it was such a flowing experience that you didn’t know where the English stopped and the translator began. I could tell the audience understood both languages. There were many experiences like that. Dad had to deal with challenges day after day. The First Presidency wasn’t close by. He couldn’t do anything but go to the Lord.’” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 381.)

E. Opposition to Civil Rights Movement. At the April 1965 general conference, Apostle Ezra Taft Benson said: “Before I left for Europe I warned how the Communists were using the civil rights movement to promote revolution and eventual takeover of the country. When are we going to wake up? What do you know about the dangerous civil rights agitation in Mississippi? Do you fear the destruction of all vestiges of state government? Now Brethren, the Lord never promised there would not be traitors in the church. We have the ignorant, the sleepy and the deceived who provide temptations and avenues of apostasy for the unwary and the unfaithful, but we have a prophet at our head and he has spoken. Now what are we going to do about it?” The *Salt Lake Tribune* printed the speech the following day. When it appeared in the June 1965 *Improvement Era*, this paragraph was deleted without any indication. (*Salt Lake Tribune*, April 7, 1965, p. A5; *The Improvement Era*, June 1965, p. 539.)

1. Civil Rights vs. Reds in “Mormon Rift.” The *Washington Post* printed the entire quotation with a headline announcing, “Benson Ties Rights Issue to Reds in Mormon Rift.” (*Washington Post*, April 13, 1965.)

Was Pres. Brown “the Traitor?” According to President Hugh B. Brown's grandson, Edwin B. Firmage, Brown thought Benson was referring to him as the “traitor in the church” for his liberal stance on civil rights.

F. Was Eisenhower a Communist Agent? “[Robert] Welch had just published his most controversial book, *The Politician*. It accused former U.S. president Dwight D. Eisenhower of being ‘sympathetic to ultimate Communist aims, realistically and even mercilessly willing to help them achieve their goals, knowingly receiving and abiding by Communist orders, and consciously serving the

Communist conspiracy, for all of his adult life.’ [Elder Ezra Taft] Benson publicly implied endorsement of the allegation. Privately, he had already sent copies of Welch's anti-Eisenhower book to general authorities like Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith.” (D. Michael Quinn, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol.26, No.2, p.21.)

Reed Benson: ‘Eisenhower a Communist Agent. “A few weeks after April 1965 general conference, Reed Benson publicly endorsed Robert Welch's accusation that U.S. president Eisenhower had been a Communist agent. Then the loyal son probably consulted Apostle Benson in advance about his apparent plan to use the Birch Society to disrupt the next general conference with rumors of a violent demonstration by African- Americans. Ezra Taft Benson's official biography is silent about Benson's and his son's devotion to the Birch Society but observes that in 1965-1966 Reed Benson ‘continued to be involved in the fight for freedom which his father supported . . .” (*Ibid.*, p. 34.)

Benson’s ‘Personal–Confidential’ Letter to FBI Chief. On May 17, 1965, Ezra Taft Benson wrote to J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with a plea. “Word has come to me, not yet fully confirmed, that some of our liberal ‘soft-on-communist’ groups are planning to put pressure on you to come out with a statement against the John Birch Society.” He urged Hoover not to do so. “It is my conviction that this organization is the most effective non-church group in America against creeping socialism and godless communism,” Benson wrote. Hoover, however, in response to a question at a news conference soon thereafter, said he had little respect for the society or its founder, Robert Welch. After Hoover’s disavowal of Welch, Benson decided to meet with Hoover to explain his support of the society and how Welch’s writings had convinced him that Eisenhower aided communism. Files show that Hoover’s aides twice told Benson that he was unavailable for such a meeting — as memos had advised them to do. So Benson wrote Hoover the sensitive “personal-confidential” letter of May 28, 1965, outlining his conclusions about Eisenhower. Benson also soon sent a book by Welch titled *The Politician*, noting it was what led him to his conclusions about Eisenhower. In the book, Welch argues that Eisenhower was either ignorant, a politician blinded by opportunism or was “consciously aiding the communist conspiracy” — and said it really didn’t matter because “they all come to the same end . . . namely tragedy.” (Lee Davidson, *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 14, 2010.)

a. Eisenhower ‘Served the Communist Conspiracy.’ Benson wrote Hoover that he inscribed the following words on the flyleaf of the book after he first read it: “Have just finished this shocking volume. . . . While I do not agree with all or the extent of some of the author’s conclusions, one must agree that the documented record makes the thesis of the book most convincing. “How can a man [Eisenhower] who seems to be so strong for Christian principles and base American concepts be so effectively used as a tool to serve the communist conspiracy? “I believe the answer is found in the fact that these godless communist conspirators and their fellow travelers are masters of deceit — who deceived the very elect. How our people need to be alerted and informed.” Benson added that he hoped the \$1 book would be made available widely. ““This story must be told even at the risk of destroying the influence of men who are widely respected and loved by the American people. The stakes are high. Freedom and survival are the issues,’ he had written in his copy of the book.” (*Ibid.*)

b. ‘Why Did Eisenhower Help the Conspiracy’? Benson also wrote of Eisenhower: “I presume I will never know in this life why he did some of the things he did which gave help to the [communist] conspiracy. It is not my divine prerogative to know the motives of men. It is easier, however, to judge the consequences of man’s actions.” (*Ibid.*)

Eisenhower's Actions 'Tragic.' "In my study of the [communist] conspiracy," Benson wrote to J. Edgar Hoover, "which I am sure is weak compared with your own, the consequences of Mr. Eisenhower's actions in dealing with the communists have been tragic," Benson wrote. He argued to Hoover, whom he viewed as a friend and fellow fighter of communism, that Eisenhower helped communism's spread more than he hurt it, perhaps because it had been the expedient thing to do for an ambitious politician. "What difference does it make if your house is burned down by an ignorant man, a person who wants to get warm fast, or an arsonist?" he wrote about the former president. "There is little difference." He said because freedom was threatened by soft stands against communism, he pondered making public such feelings "even at the risk of destroying the influence of men who are widely respected and loved" — including Eisenhower." (*Salt Lake Tribune*, November 14, 2010.)

c. FBI Response to Benson and Son. Benson became involved with the John Birch Society once he had left office. After Reed Benson lost a run for Congress in 1962, he said the society approached him, and they found they shared beliefs. "The John Birch Society believed in less government, more individual responsibility and a better world," Reed Benson told *The Tribune*. When the society offered Reed a job as its Utah coordinator, FBI logs show that his father made a phone call wanting to know what the bureau felt about the group. It was the beginning of Benson's defense of the society. An agent wrote, "I informed him off the record ... that to my knowledge the FBI has not investigated the John Birch Society." The agent added in summary of the conversation, "Benson has reached the conclusion the society is doing a lot of good in combating communism and feels that it is patriotic in its motives."

d. Efforts to Keep Benson from Seeing Hoover. Benson also told the agent that he hoped to soon meet with Hoover in Washington "to confer with him about the menace of communism and the role of the Birch Society." Because of that, officials at FBI headquarters wrote a briefing paper to prepare Hoover in case Benson called. Calling the society "probably the most publicized right-wing extremist group in the country," they recommended keeping Benson away from Hoover — including lying, if necessary, to say that Hoover was unavailable to talk to Benson.

2. Benson: U. S. Supreme Court Guilty of Treason; Government Filled with Communists. Speaking at a BYU devotional in May 1968, Ezra Taft Benson "accused the U.S. Supreme Court of treason and added that 'a prerequisite for appointment to high government office today is one's past affiliations with communist fronts or one's ability to follow the communist line.' Benson quoted three times from the Birch Society's official magazine, including references to 'black Marxists' and 'the Communists and their Black Power fanatics.'" (D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 1997, p. 100.)

3. Pres. Brown's Reply at BYU. "[President Hugh B.] Brown" then delivered a BYU commencement address that attacked Benson's sermon only ten days earlier. "Beware of those who feel obliged to prove their own patriotism by calling into question the loyalty of others," Brown began. As clear response to Benson's quotes about African-Americans, Brown concluded: "At a time when radicals of right or left would inflame race against race, avoid those who preach evil doctrines of racism." To many Mormons it was no doubt a disturbing situation for a First Presidency counselor to publicly advise Mormons to "beware" and "avoid" the unnamed Apostle Benson." (*Ibid.*, p. 101.)

4. Benson Later Expressed Regret Over Charge. Former-president Eisenhower died in 1968. “The public statement Elder Benson issued lauded President Eisenhower as a man of faith, deep spirituality, and courage. It implied regret that any statement or conduct on his part might have hinted that President Eisenhower was anything other than a loyal, patriotic American.” (Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God*, 1996, p. 261.)

D. Concern That Mormon Tabernacle Choir Was Pushing Communism. “The most interesting of the series [of new recordings by the Choir], though, was *This Land is Your Land* (1965), not so much for its content but for the effect that content had on one of the more obstreperous apostles, Ezra Benson, long departed from Washing-ton but tightly aligned with John Birch Society politics. After this quaint but stirring set of folk songs was released, Benson wrote to [Choir President Isaac] Stewart complaining about it because two of the songs, he said (including the title song), were written by ‘two hard-core Communists,’ Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, the latter of whom he called ‘the pied-piper’ of Communism. After describing both men’s ‘insidious’ influence on the United States and warning of the dangers of both communism and socialism, he opined that ‘The use of music by these Communist authors will be used to give aid and comfort for the Communists, their fellow-travelers and dupes, and can only bring difficulty to the Church.’ If difficulty ensued, one wouldn’t know it from the growth of the Church and the expanding fame of its official choir.” (Michael Hicks, *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir: A Biography*, 2015, 129.)

E. Reed Benson Starts Race War Whisper Campaign. Sept. 1965. Reed Benson, son of Ezra Taft Benson, and coordinator for the John Birch Society of Utah, sent the following memorandum to all Birch Society chapters in Utah on 2 September 1965: “It is common knowledge that the Civil Rights Movement is Communist controlled, influenced and dominated. . . . Our founder and guide, Mr. Robert Welch, has instructed us that when necessary we must adopt the communist technique in our ever present battle against Godless Communism. It is urged that in the coming weeks the Utah Chapters begin a whispering campaign and foster rumors that the Civil Rights groups are going to organize demonstrations in Salt Lake City in connection with the forthcoming LDS conference. . . . A few well placed comments will soon mushroom out of control and before the conference begins there will be such a feeling of unrest and distrust that the populace will hardly know who to believe. The news media will play it to the very hilt. No matter what the Civil Rights leaders may try to say to deny it the seed will have been sown and again the Civil Rights movement will suffer a telling blow.” (*Dialogue*, Summer 1993, p. 36.)

Riot Control Maneuvers. “The strategy of Reed Benson and the Birch Society succeeded in creating near-hysteria in Utah during September 1965. One study observes that ‘hysterical rumors swept the Utah community, concerning the imminence of demonstrations and riots’ at the upcoming LDS general conference. The biography of Harold B. Lee, then an apostle, notes that ‘there were rumors of blacks invading Salt Lake City to take vengeance upon the Saints and the Church.’ The Salt Lake police got caught up in the rumors and telephoned Hugh B. Brown that ‘four carloads of negroes armed with machine guns and bombs were reported coming to SLC for the purpose of inciting a riot and particularly to destroy properties on the temple block.’ . . . one rumor claimed that ‘2,000 professional demonstrators and Black Muslims will be imported to this area under NAACP sponsorship.’ Other widely circulated stories were that ‘all plane flights from Los Angeles to Salt Lake are chartered by ‘Watts Negroes,’ and that ‘3,500 transient Negroes have already arrived in Salt Lake.’ As a result, the Utah National Guard

began 'riot control' maneuvers._ (D. Michael Quinn, _Ezra Taft Benson and Mormon Political Conflicts,_ *Dialogue*, Summer 1993, p. 37.)

Near-Panic Prior to October 1965 Conference. _By late September 1965 the U. of U. *Chronicle* recorded that a 'surprising number of supposedly intelligent residents of Salt Lake City' believed that a 'Watts-like riot will take place . . . when the Mormon Church gathers for general conference' in Salt Lake City. The riots never came although some downtown businesses remodeled to eliminate street-level windows and the police department readied its canine patrol._ (Mary Lythgoe Bradford, *Lowell L. Bennion: Teacher—Counselor — Humanitarian*, 1996, pp. 251-2.)

Birch Society and the Church. _The schismatic threat to the Church probably reached its twentieth century apogee during the months of February-April 1966. The rental of the Assembly Hall in February to a Birch Society front group for five lectures (with paid admissions); Elder Benson's keynote speech in that series, defending the Birch Society in its fight against Communism; a 'Dear Brethren' letter during March to LDS bishops from the Utah coordinator of the Birch Society inviting them to hear Birch head, Robert Welch, during the week of April General Conference; and the last-minute substitution of President J. Reuben Clark's picture for that of President David O. McKay on the April cover of the Birch Society magazine, *American Opinion*, all created a climate of fear that the Church was on the verge of officially endorsing the Birch Society. That the Church stepped back from the abyss is to the credit of some courageous and far-sighted General Authorities._ (J. D. Williams, _Separation of Church and State in Mormon Theory and Practice,_ *Dialogue*, Summer 1966, p. 50.)

Special Announcement in *Deseret News*. When the John Birch Society appeared determined to exploit the ties of Elder Benson with that society, the *Deseret News* ran a special announcement: _In order to avoid any misunderstanding we wish to notify bishops, other church officers, and members of the church in general, that the church is not involved in this dinner in any way, and furthermore, that the church has no connection with the John Birch Society whatever._ (Cited in Wallace Turner, *The Mormon Establishment*, 1966, p. 321.)

Emergency Meeting at Pres. McKay's Home: Benson Not to Mention Birch Society. On March 3, 1966, _the entire First Presidency decided that 'Elder Benson to be told not to mention the Birch Society.' . . . By 15 March 1966, the First Presidency defined the situation as 'a crisis.' Second counselor Eldon Tanner, the Twelve's president Joseph Fielding Smith, and apostle Mark E. Petersen held an emergency meeting with David O. McKay at his home in Huntsville. . . . KSL, at the request of the Birch Society, was rebroadcasting the address given recently by Bro. Benson in the Assembly Hall, in which address he gave strong endorsement to the John Birch Society._ The Church President said that it was necessary to issue a statement disassociating the church from these activities. _Pres. McKay suggested that Elder Benson might not be assigned to stake conferences if he referred to the John Birch Society. . . . The President then said that Elder Benson should be instructed not to discuss the Birch Society in any meeting, and that he should not advocate this group._ (*Ibid.*)

Church News Editorial: LDS Members Must Avoid Extremists. _Then on the Saturday before the Welch banquet, the Church News Section carried a long editorial written by Mark E. Petersen, the apostle who ranks immediately behind Apostle Benson in seniority. The editorial noted that 'good citizens wonder what may be done to steady the ship of state.' Members of the LDS church must 'avoid extremes and extremists,' and 'the great men of our nation have never been extremists,' apostle Petersen

wrote. He also wrote: 'Some have wondered if the church is involved in such groups as the John Birch Society, but it is no more a part of that group than of any other political aggregation. The church has nothing to do with Communists, nothing to do with racists, nothing to do with Birchers, nothing to do with any slanted group.'_ (*Ibid.*, p. 322.)

1. Stiff Rebuke by Other Apostles. While Harold B. Lee was a counselor to Pres. Joseph Fielding Smith, a meeting was held in the Salt Lake Temple to give instructions to the Assistants to the Twelve. As reported by Henry D. Taylor, one of the new Assistants, individual apostles were delivering formal presentations on various subjects to the Assistants. Benson's assigned topic was the church's youth program, but he began presenting charts and quotes to show Communist influence in America and the need to teach anti-Communism to Mormon youth. Clearly upset, President Lee walked out while Benson was speaking, and was soon followed by all the other apostles. Taylor and the other Assistants to the Twelve, not quite sure what they were to do, were the only ones who remained during Benson's presentation. (D. Michael Quinn, *Dialogue*, Summer 1993, p. 72.)

F. Run for the Presidency? "McKay's attention was deflected momentarily from the John Birch Society by another of Benson's political initiatives: a run for the U.S. presidency. Months earlier, Benson had presented to McKay a rather nebulous plan whereby he and Senator Strom Thurmond would press the Republican Party for reforms, with the intention of forming a third party if the Republican Convention balked. That plan, however, had not included presidential aspirations. In mid-April 1966, Benson met with McKay and described 'The 1967 Committee,' which would be composed of 100 prominent men from throughout the country. This committee, a third party despite its name, would nominate him as president and Thurmond as vice president." McKay was initially uncomfortable about forming a third party. "Benson presented him with proposed statements that he and McKay might make if the committee proposed his nomination. McKay approved the statements. The statement drafted under his name concluded with: 'His doing so has my full approval.'" According to the *Wall Street Journal* [Aug. 8, 1966], 'about half of the [1967] Committee's 30 organizers are members of the Birch Society.' Benson's bid for the presidency ran out of momentum and was discontinued a year before the 1968 political conventions." (Gregory A. Prince, "David O. McKay and Communism," *Dialogue*, Summer 2004, pp. 84-5.)

G. Negroes Couldn't Win All-Out Race War. In October 1967, Ezra Taft Benson told a general conference crowd: _In China, in Cuba, and in Algeria, the segment of the population that the Communists used as the 'battering ram' of their revolution of force and violence was the majority segment. In America, though, the Negro represents only 10 percent of the population. In any all-out race war that might be triggered, there isn't a chance in the world that Communism-led Negro guerilla units could permanently hold on to the power centers of government even if they could capture them in the first place._ (Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, Oct. 1967, pp. 36-37.)

Communists Behind Civil Rights Agitation. Elder Benson continued: _First of all, we must not place the blame upon Negroes. They are merely the unfortunate group that has been selected by professional Communist agitators to be used as the primary source of cannon fodder. Not one in a thousand Americans— black or white— really understands the full implications of today's civil rights agitation. The planning, direction, and leadership come from the Communists, and most of those are white men who fully intend to destroy America by spilling Negro blood, rather than their own._ (*Ibid.*, p. 38.)

1. Communists Have Penetrated Civil Rights Movement. _We must insist that duly authorized legislative investigating committees launch an even more exhaustive study and expose the degree to which secret Communists have penetrated into the civil rights movement. The same needs to be done with militant anti-Negro groups. This is an effective way for the American people of both races to find out who are the false leaders among them._ (Ibid., p. 38.)

Published by Deseret Book. “The so-called civil rights movement as it exists today is a Commu-nist program for revolution in America.” (Elder Ezra Taft Benson, October general conference; this statement was quoted the next morning in the *New York Times*, October 2, 1967. An indication that Benson had many strong supporters in high places is seen in the fact that Deseret Book published the entire speech, together with much other related material in 1968. (Ezra Taft Benson, *Civil Rights: Tool of Communist Deception*, Deseret Book Co., 1968, p. 3.)

Black Hammer Article by Benson. “In 1967 Apostle Benson also approved the use of one of his talks as the forward to the overtly racist book *Black Hammer*, which featured the decapitated (and profusely bleeding) head of an African-American male on its cover. Subtitled *White Alternatives*, this book warned about the ‘well-defined plans for the establishment of a Negro Soviet dictatorship in the South.’” (D. Michael Quinn, *Dialogue*, Fall 2000, p. 35.)

Book Dedicated to LDS Missionaries. The dedication page of this book noted that Ezra Taft Benson “has generously offered this address as the basis for the introductory remarks to ‘The Black Hammer.’” The book was dedicated to “all the Elders of the California North Mission for their interest and prayers.” (Wes Andrews and Clyde Dalton, *The Black Hammer: A Study of Black Power, Red Influence and White Alternatives*, Oakland, Calif.: Desco Press, 1967.)

George Wallace Asked Benson to Be Vice-Presidential Running Mate. In 1968, George Wallace campaigned as a candidate for President of the United States. An avowed racist, he “stood in the schoolhouse door” to keep the University of Alabama from admitting a black student. His opposition ultimately led to federal troops being sent in to carry out the mandate of the Supreme Court that segregation of schools was unconstitutional. When he began his campaign, he phoned Elder Ezra Taft Benson and asked him to be his vice-presidential running mate. On Feb. 12, 1968, Benson and his son Reed met with Governor Wallace at the governor’s mansion in Montgomery for three hours of closed-door discussion. Upon returning to Salt Lake, Benson asked President McKay if he should accept Wallace’s offer. That evening he wrote in his journal: “The President again emphasized that this was going to be a very lively and controversial campaign, and he felt that my being on the ticket would cause me to be criticized and possibly the Church also. . . . Then President McKay said, ‘I think the answer should be no. . . . Now is not the time.’” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 397.)

Second Request to McKay: President Said No. September 12, 1968. “Wallace’s popularity increased during 1968, and he invited Elder Benson to reconsider the invitation to run as his vice-presidential candidate. Eventually the question was taken to President McKay a second time. But again, the president felt that his original counsel was wise.” (Ibid., p. 398.)

Statement Following King Assassination. After Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968, Elder Ezra Taft Benson distributed a statement: “. . . the Communists will use Mr. King’s death for as much yardage as possible. . . . Martin Luther King had been affiliated with at least the following officially organized Communist fronts.” He then listed three organizations. Asked about the statement, Pres. Hugh B. Brown replied that Benson’s “views do not coincide with the opinion of the majority of the General Authorities and we regret that they are sent out. The first counselor added, “However, in President McKay’s state of health we cannot get a retraction and must, I suppose, await a change in leadership before definite instructions can be given regulating such items of interest.” (D. Michael Quinn, *Dialogue*, Summer 1993, pp. 63-4.)

Cautioned Against Going to Vietnam. “Shortly after the November [1968] election, Elder Benson and Flora, accompanied by Elder McConkie and his wife, Amelia, left for the Orient, where they would remain for almost a month. So that necessary meetings could be held with missionaries, members, and local leaders throughout this vast area, it was decided to divide the work. Originally, it was planned that Elder Benson would include Vietnam in his itinerary. However, because of his high profile in American politics and his outspoken views on communism and the war in Southeast Asia, local observers strongly urged him not to go there at that time. Elder Benson acceded to this counsel, and Vietnam was included in Elder McConkie’s itinerary instead.” (Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God*, 1996, pp. 259-60.)

Impact of McKay’s Death. “Benson’s political activism diminished abruptly upon McKay’s death, for he lost his patron and protector. McKay was succeeded by Joseph Fielding Smith and, subsequently, Harold B. Lee, both of whom had strongly objected to Benson’s political activities during McKay’s presidency. A comparison of Benson’s general conference talks before and after McKay’s death attests to their effectiveness in curtailing his political extremism.” (Gregory A. Prince, “David O. McKay and Communism,” *Dialogue*, Summer 2004, p. 75.)

H. Conference Themes. “There was nothing half-hearted about Elder Benson’s defense of freedom, free enterprise, fiscal responsibility, the Constitution, and agency, or his opposition to the underlying premise of socialism and communism. From 1960 through 1969, fifteen of his twenty general conference addresses focused on one or more of these topics. The same themes dominated his talks at BYU and around the country. He spoke frequently, frankly, and forcefully. And his views were widely reported by the press.” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 367.)

I. Birch Society Reorganized as Freeman Institute. When the activities of the John Birch Society were widely criticized, many of the local leaders made the decision to reorganize and surface again as the Freeman Institute. Cleon Skousen opened the new Freeman Institute building in Provo on Sept. 18, 1971. _Ezra Taft Benson was the principal speaker, with other Church officials and apostles present._ (John Heinerman and Anson Shupe, *The Mormon Corporate Empire*, 1985, p. 153.)

Church Leaders and Birch Society. After Ernest L. Wilkinson gave the dedicatory prayer at the Freeman dedication, [D. Arthur] Haycock confided to him that _nearly all of them [the general authorities] believed in the concepts of the John Birch Society. ‘That may have been an overstatement, but more importantly it showed that the Birch Society and Benson in particular had a partisan friend in the First Presidency’s office. Haycock had been private secretary to Benson as Secretary of Agriculture

and was a confidant [and private secretary] and significant influence on President Kimball.'_ (*Ibid.*, p. 75.)

1. Lord Blesses Freeman Institute. At a rally in Scottsdale, Arizona, Elder Benson said, _The Lord blesses the work of the Freeman Institute._ (*Ibid.*, p. 156.)

Benson Endorses Conspiracy Book. _In April 1972 Benson told general conference listeners that 'I would highly recommend to you the book *None Dare Call it Conspiracy* by Gary Allen.' Allen was a member of the Birch Society and editor of its official magazine. Benson's advice appeared in the report of his conference address by the Mormon-Birch *Utah Independent*, but the First Presidency deleted that recommendation from the official report of Benson's sermon._ (*Ibid.* p. 72.)

Warning of President Lee About Those Using General Conference for Politics. At the priesthood session of the April 1973 general conference, Church President Harold B. Lee advised the brethren: "Now we have also had some who claim to be in good standing in order to take advantage of the gathering of the Saints at some of our general conferences, and who have gone so far as to program group meetings for their own interest, with the obvious hope that by doing so, many of our conference visitors may be urged to attend their meetings, even if it may have necessitated their absence from vitally important instructional sessions of the conference." While he didn't mention the Freeman Institute (the old John Birch Society), many assumed that was the target of his remarks. (*Ensign*, July 1973, p. 96.)

J. Can Members Be Liberal Democrats? _In February 1974 Apostle Ezra Taft Benson was asked during an interview if a good Mormon could also be a liberal Democrat. Benson pessimistically replied: 'I think it would be very hard if he was living the gospel and understood it._ (John Heinerman and Anson Shupe, *The Mormon Corporate Empire*, 1985, p. 142.)

Benson Called in by President Kimball. "When these remarks appeared in print, they caused a flood of calls and letters from Church members protesting his views. Spencer, who disapproved of public political statements by Church leaders as potentially divisive, discussed the matter with Elder Benson. Spencer understood his worthy motives and patriotic spirit, but reminded him that 'as President of the Council of Twelve' he should avoid involvement in politically sensitive issues. Elder Benson apologized and the interview closed on a cordial note." (Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball*, CD working copy, 2005, Chapter 16, p. 12.)

K. Named President of the Twelve; Endorses American Party. In December 1973, Ezra Taft Benson became President of the Quorum of the Twelve when Spencer W. Kimball became Church President. "But later the same year, at a November 1974 political rally just before the election, his passion prevailed and in a spontaneous expression he publicly endorsed the American Party. He noted that the Church was nonpartisan, but in his extemporaneous remarks he also said that he believed the American Party was established on divine, eternal principles. And he said: 'Never in decades have I read a set of principles of any party that come so close to the philosophy which I have and which I think my own Church people have.' He went on to assert that 'the real hope' of a nation in crisis lay with people such as those gathered at the rally." (*Ibid.*, p. 12.)

Kimball Corrects Statement. “Newspaper accounts of these statements caused great consternation, heightened when a radio report erroneously said the statements had President Kimball’s approval. Calls flooded the Church phone lines. Spencer hurried to his office to draft a statement reiterating, without direct reference to the incident, that ‘we take no partisan stand as to candidates or parties, and any person who makes representation to the contrary does so without authorization.’” (*Ibid.*, p. 12.)

Benson Called in Again by First Presidency. “The next day the full First Presidency asked Elder Benson to meet with them. Spencer’s journal notes that they ‘discussed at great length his unfortunate remarks,’ and counseled him that ‘all General Authorities must speak with one voice and . . . [not] take any partisan position in politics,’ either as to candidates or parties.” (*Ibid.*, p. 12.)

Rebuke by First Presidency. In February 1974, “Benson resumed partisan warfare by announcing that the church might officially support political candidates. Then on the eve of the November [1974] election he publicly endorsed the ultra-conservative American Party and spoke at its rally on the Saturday before the election. This required the First Presidency to issue an immediate statement that ‘we take no partisan stand as to candidates or parties, and any person who makes representations to the contrary does so without authorization.’” (D. Michael Quinn, *Dialogue*, Summer 1993, p. 73.)

L. Tabernacle Choir Tour in New England Cancelled; Benson Picketed at Airport. In the fall of 1974, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir had to cancel a New England appearance because of objections from civil rights activists. Later, when apostle Ezra Taft Benson arrived in Boston to address a stake conference, he was startled to be met with picketers at the airport. Shortly thereafter, the *Church News* section of the *Deseret News* quit publishing where each of the general authorities was scheduled to be the following week.

Strong Anti-Communism Conference Talk Censored in Non-English Church Magazines. “As late as October 1979, [Benson] gave a strongly anti-Communist talk at general conference. . . . The 1979 talk was not printed in the non-English Church magazines.” (Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball*, CD working copy, 2005, Chapter 14, p. 3.)

First Presidency: Political Statements Hurt Church Elsewhere. The following undated draft of a First Presidency statement addressed “To All General Authorities” appears in President Kimball’s papers: “It is not within our province to influence the kind of political system under which those of various nations live. . . . We are fearful that critical statements by General Authorities given with good intent here, could impede our efforts elsewhere.” (Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball*, CD working copy, 2005, Chapter 14, p. 3.)

M. Cautious Biography Never Mentions Communism or Birch Society. In 1987, Deseret Book published *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, by Sheri L. Dew. “Although otherwise detailed (565 pages in length), the biography skirts the issue of Benson and Communism to the point where the terms ‘Communism,’ ‘John Birch Society’ and ‘Robert Welch’ do not appear in its index.” (Gregory A. Prince, “David O. McKay and Communism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 2004, p. 41.)

II. Very Conservative Positions

A. Concerns About “Promised Valley.” “In commemoration of the 1947 centennial of the pioneers’ entry into the Salt Lake Valley, the church commissioned a play entitled ‘Promised Valley.’ In 1961 the church staged a revival of the play in Kingsbury Hall on the University of Utah campus.” President David O. McKay’s Office Journal notes: “Clare [President McKay’s secretary] called me at the apartment and said that Elder Ezra Taft Benson had called and left a message that he was greatly concerned over what had been reported to him about the MIA play, ‘Promised Valley.’ He said that he has heard that in one scene there is ‘too much kissing’ and the ‘sparkin’ on a Sunday afternoon’ scene is not what it should be. I told her that we would judge that after we have seen it this afternoon.

“5 p.m. Sister McKay and I attended the MIA’s production of the play ‘Promised Valley’ held in the Kingsbury Hall, U of U Campus. The original of this production was composed by Dr. Crawford Gates at the request of the Centennial Commission of which I was Chairman in 1947. I was, therefore, very interested in seeing this musical again after all these years. It received wide acclaim at the time. Sister McKay and I thought this production by amateurs was wonderful, and much credit should be given to the MIA drama directors for the excellence of the entire play. There was nothing in it that could be criticized.” (David O. McKay Office Journal, 9 June 1961; cited by Gregory A. Prince, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 2000, pp. 11-12.)

Rock Music. At the October 1970 general conference, Elder Ezra Taft Benson spoke concerning rock music: “Now what of the entertainment that is available to our young people today? Are you being undermined right in your home through your TV, radio, slick magazines, rock records? Much of the rock music is purposely designed to push immorality, narcotics, revolution, atheism, and nihilism, through language that often has a double meaning and with which many parents are not familiar. . . . Parents who are informed can warn their children of the demoralizing, loud, raucous beat of rock music, which deadens the senses and dulls the sensibilities—the jungle rhythm which inflames the savagery within.” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1970, pp.23-4.)

Conference Warning. At the October 1971 general conference, Elder Ezra Taft Benson spoke out forcefully against rock music: “The Spirit of the Lord blesses that which edifies and leads men to Christ. Would His Spirit bless with its presence these festering rock festivals of human degradation? Its music, crushing the sensibilities in a din of primitive idolatry, is in glorification of the physical to the debasement of the spirit. In the long panorama of man's history, these rock music festivals are among Satan's greatest successes. The legendary orgies of Greece and Rome cannot compare to the monumental obscenities found in these cesspools of drugs, immorality, rebellion, and pornophonic sound. The famed Woodstock festival was a gigantic manifestation of a sick nation. Yet the lurid movie and rock recordings of its unprecedented filth were big business in our own mountain home.” (*Conference Report*, October 1971, p. 24.)

1. Scathing Denunciation of Rock Music. “In the late 1960s [Ezra Taft Benson] became very concerned about the popularity and pervasive-ness of rock music. At the October 1971 general conference, he warned that the adversary was after the Church’s youth, and delivered a scathing denunciation of rock music in general and rock festivals in particular. He was the first of the Brethren to address this topic in general conference. ‘All is not well in Zion,’ he proclaimed. ‘If there are any doubts as to the insidious evils of rock music, you can judge by its fruits. The well publicized perversions of its practitioners alone is enough to condemn its influence. . . . The famed Woodstock

festival was a gigantic manifestation of a sick nation.’ Referring to ‘religious rock, such as the rock musical opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*,’ he labeled it ‘sacrilegious apostate deception.’ In May 1972 he told BYU students, ‘Rock [music] with its instant physical appeal, is an ideal doorcrasher, for the Devil knows that music has the power to ennoble or corrupt, to purify or pollute. He will not forget to use its subtle power against you. His sounds come from the dark world of drugs, immorality, obscenity, and anarchy.’” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, pp. 417-18.)

Untruths on Evolution. At the October 1970 general conference, Elder Benson stated: “If your children are taught untruths on evolution in the public schools or even in our Church schools, provide them with a copy of President Joseph Fielding Smith's excellent rebuttal in his book *Man, His Origin and Destiny*.” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1970, p. 23.)

Being Taught at BYU. Elder Ezra Taft Benson had been among the authorities opposing the teaching of evolution. He received a letter in 1979 stating that “organic evolutionary views . . . are taught and believed by many professors . . . and numerous students at the BYU. . . . the stench of apostasy is permeating many departments on campus.” Elder Benson forwarded the letter to Pres. Gordon B. Hinckley, adding a cover note, “The problem seems to be increasing, not diminishing. Some of the latest complaints which have come to me have been from individual students.” (Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*, 1985, p.167.)

Organic Evolution False. “We have not been using the Book of Mormon as we should. Our homes are not as strong unless we are using it to bring our children to Christ. Our families may be corrupted by worldly trends and teachings unless we know how to use the book to expose and combat the falsehoods in socialism, organic evolution, rationalism, humanism, and so forth.” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 1988, pp. 60-61.)

Benson Objects to Pres. Kimball re: Lowell Bennion. On December 6, 1974 Elder Benson sent to President Kimball an article from *Dialogue* written by Lowell Bennion, with a notation written by Benson: “You asked about Lowell Bennion. He is teaching in the High Priests Quorum in his ward. I would hate to have him teaching anything to anyone in my ward.” (“Ezra Taft Benson, memo to Spencer W. Kimball,” Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball*, CD working copy, 2005, Chapter 19, p. 12.)

B. Benson’s Wrath at BYU Zoology Professor. In 1976, Ezra Taft Benson, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve, lashed out at BYU assistant zoology professor Duane E. Jeffery, who had written an article in *Dialogue* in defense of evolution. Jeffery’s article documented the fact that the Church had carefully taken no position on whether evolution was true or false. Pres. Benson, speaking at a BYU fireside, said: “Most recently, one of our Church educators published what he purports to be a history of the Church’s stand on the question of organic evolution. His thesis challenges the integrity of a prophet of God. He suggests that Joseph Fielding Smith published his work, *Man: His Origin and Destiny*, against the counsel of the First Presidency and his own Brethren. This writer’s interpretation is not only inaccurate, but it also runs counter to the testimony of Elder Mark E. Petersen, who wrote [the] foreword to Elder Smith’s book, a book I would encourage all to read. . . . When one understands that the author to whom I alluded is an exponent of the theory of organic evolution, his motive in disparaging President Joseph Fielding Smith becomes apparent. To hold to a private opinion on such matters is one thing, but when one undertakes to publish his views to discredit the work of a prophet, it is a very serious matter.”

(Ezra Taft Benson, "God's Hand in Our Nation's History," fireside address delivered at BYU, 28 March 1976; published in *1976 Devotional Speeches of the Year*; BYU Press, 1977, pp. 312-13.)

It is easy to document the fact that Jeffery was correct that the Church had [and still has] no official position on evolution. However, as Pres. Benson was the highest ranking member of the Quorum of the Twelve, no one was going to oppose him. As Jeffery noted later: "I was informed that they knew that I had the data but that President Benson had the pulpit, and if I did not wish to get denounced at pulpits all over the Church to audiences which I had no possibility of reaching, it would be best to just remain silent." Jeffery remained silent, "and in retrospect, it was a wise move. Twenty-six years after being publicly criticized as disloyal by Apostle Benson, Jeffery continues to teach in the zoology department at BYU. . . . [and Jeffery's data] "can be credited also for the existence of evolution now being a required course for all zoology majors at BYU." In fact, Jeffery and Dr. Clayton White received approval from church headquarters for their own undergraduate course in evolution, and several excellent evolutionary biologists can now be numbered among the faculty at BYU." (Devery S. Anderson, "A History of Dialogue, Part II," *Dialogue*, Summer 2000, pp. 29, 32-3.)

Teachers Warned About Apostates. In 1976, Elder Ezra Taft Benson told a gathering of seminary and institute teachers: "It has come to our attention that some of our teachers, particularly in our university programs, are purchasing writings from known apostates, or other liberal sources, in an effort to become informed about certain points of view, or to glean from their research. You must realize that when you purchase their writings, or subscribe to their periodicals, you help sustain their cause. We would hope that their writings not be on your Seminary and Institute or personal bookshelves. We are entrusting you to represent the Lord and the First Presidency to your students, not the views of the Church's detractors." (Ezra Taft Benson, Address delivered Sept. 17, 1976. Typescript in Western Americana Dept., Marriott Library, University of Utah.)

C. Opposition to Church History Book. Leonard Arrington has left a revealing glimpse of the inner-workings of the top Church quorums. In 1976, several of the apostles expressed concerns about a new book, *Story of the Latter-day Saints*, which had been written by Arrington and James B. Allen. "After finishing his copy, [President] Kimball remarked that he thought *Story of the Latter-day Saints* was a great work and could not comprehend why anyone would think otherwise. . . . I was further reassured to learn about a week later that [Apostle Howard W.] Hunter was 'especially displeased' that [Mark E.] Petersen and [Ezra Taft] Benson had gone directly to the First Presidency instead of bowing to his authority as an advisor. . . . Hunter confined his support, however, to a privately expressed personal reassurance. Kimball, for all his pleasure with the book, was not willing to curb Benson and Petersen, either in their public disapproval of the book before audiences of church members or in their private instructions to entities at BYU and Deseret Book. . . . It would be interesting to know why Kimball did not make that approval public, at least within the Twelve. . . . Sometime later, Kimball's sister-in-law told me that Kimball had been alarmed about the scandalous way Jim Allen had been treated by some religion instructors at BYU for having been the principal author of *Story of the Latter-day Saints*. Kimball, she said, openly wept at this recital, and declared this was not a Christian way to treat someone who had honorably performed an approved assignment. A strong believer in free mortal agency, Kimball told his sister-in-law and her husband that Benson and Petersen did not have the authority or the right to interfere with the sale of this book." (Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 1998, pp. 148-9.)

1. Arrington's Reaction. "My observation recorded in my diary in November 1976 was that the prophet is not always a determining force in church government. What we really have is a form of collective leadership consisting of the three members of the First Presidency and the twelve members of the Quorum of Apostles. This collective leadership had determined that they must be essentially unanimous. Despite the inevitable wide-ranging diversity of views, the presiding quorums agreed early in church history to maintain a public posture of unanimity so as to minimize dissent and factionalization within the general membership. If any particular person expresses a strong feeling about a particular matter, his views will normally prevail through the courtesy of the others. Thus, although President Kimball indicated he liked very much [the book] and would approve it for the widespread distribution among and use by the Saints, strong negative feelings had already been expressed by Elders Benson and Petersen, and President Kimball did not wish to embarrass them or go against their wishes with the result that their wishes prevailed." (*Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.)

Benson's Objections to Book. In spite of considerable demand, Deseret Book did not reprint the book or allow it to be reprinted by any other publisher until eleven years later. Reportedly, several senior apostles objected to the book as being too _naturalistic,_ presenting doctrines in the context of the times in which they were adopted. Allen reportedly told one writer that Ezra Taft Benson asked that the book be shredded _primarily because he and Leonard had treated the Word of Wisdom in a historical as well as a spiritual manner, and also because they did not call the story of the crickets and the seagulls a miracle._ (Richard S. Marshall, *The New Mormon History*, 1977, p. 38.)

2. Critical of Historians. "Also of concern to President Benson were materials being published by some LDS historians, who he feared were incorrectly placing their emphasis on writing Church history from a perspective that downplayed the divine authorship and doctrines. In a BYU fireside in March 1976, he criticized historians whose emphasis was 'to underplay revelation and God's intervention in significant events, and to inordinately humanize the prophets of God so that their human frailties become more apparent than their spiritual qualities.' . . . Later in 1976, in an address to instructors in the Church Educational System he gave this caution: ". . . Avoid expressions and terminology which offend the Brethren and Church members. I refer to such expressions as 'he alleged' when a president of the Church described a revelation or manifestation; or other expressions such as 'experimental systems' and 'communal life' as they describe sacred revelations dealing with the united order. . . . A revelation of God is not an experiment. The Lord has already done his research.'" (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 455.)

B. Reputation on BYU Campus. _Despite the new tolerance for presidential candidates of varying life styles, other speakers were rejected during the 1970s on the basis of alleged sexual immorality. Among those disapproved for allegedly advocating or engaging in illicit sexual behavior were Moshe Dayan, Ben Bradley, Jerry Brown, Betty Ford and Allen Ginsburg. By the late 1970s, politics again emerged as a criterion in speaker selection. For example, both morality and politics were cited in disapproving liberal Democrat George McGovern in 1978. One university official stated that he was 'not about to let [McGovern] come and sit in front of the student body with his concubine,' while a second admitted, 'Ezra Taft Benson would hit the ceiling if [McGovern] spoke on this campus.' _ Consumer advocate Ralph Nader was rejected as a speaker the following year, because 'Most of his comment is simply carping, and we don't need to pay for that.' _ (BYU: *A House of Faith*, 199-202.)

Priesthood Revelation of June 1978. President Benson's biographer gave this account: "On June 1, following the monthly meeting of the General Authorities in a room on the fourth floor of the Salt Lake Temple, President Kimball invited his counselors and the Twelve to remain when the others were excused. The prophet then raised a subject they had discussed repeatedly in previous months—that of conferring the priesthood on worthy men of all races. President [of the Twelve] Benson knew the prophet had spent many hours alone in the temple, praying for an answer to this question. And he himself had done extensive research on the subject. This day President Kimball directed a lengthy discussion on the issue and then led in prayer. . . . The experience was electrifying, one of the most glorious occasions in President Benson's nearly 35 years as a member of the Council of the Twelve. In his journal he wrote: 'Following the prayer, we experienced the sweetest spirit of unity and conviction that I have ever experienced. . . . We took each other in our arms, we were so impressed with the sweet spirit that was in evidence. Our bosoms burned with the righteousness of the decision we had made. Thank God for the inspired leadership and the great and enduring principle of revelation. What a blessing it is to be associated with this, the greatest work in the world. May God grant that I . . . may measure up to the great responsibility which is mine as one of the watchmen on the tower of Zion.'" (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, pp. 456-7.)

1. _In the days that followed the receipt of the new revelation, President Kimball and President Ezra Taft Benson—the senior and most spiritually experienced ones among us—both said, expressing the feelings of us all, that neither of them had ever experienced anything of such spiritual magnitude and power as was poured out upon the Presidency and the Twelve that day in the upper room in the house of the Lord. And of it I say: It is true; I was there; I heard the voice; and the Lord be praised that it has come to pass in our day._ (Bruce R. McConkie, *Priesthood*, 1981, p. 128.)

Kicked by a Horse. On July 12, 1978, as Pres. Benson prepared to go horseback riding with a neighbor in Midway, a horse he was steadyding for his friend to mount "suddenly reared, knocking him fifteen feet across the yard onto the hard ground. X-rays at the hospital revealed a multiple break in four places between the ball- and-socket joint of the hip and above the right knee." He recuperated a full three months before being able to put weight on his leg. At a speaking assignment in Idaho Falls on Sept. 17, he was carried up the steps to the plat-form. Two weeks later, at the October general conference, he stood at the podium, leaning against the podium, and placing most of the weight on his left leg. "He improved substantially before year's end." However, Benson continued to have complications from the accident. (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, pp. 459-60.)

1. "The incident, of course, was no laughing matter, especially if someone said or suggested he had been thrown from the horse. It was an inexcusable affront to imply that one such as he could be thrown from any horse, he who had been raised on a farm and who had been around horses all his life. He took genuine pride in his horsemanship and wanted to scotch immediately any false rumors that he had been thrown from a horse, especially while it was in the corral." (Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God*, 1996, p. 255.)

Women and Priesthood Offices. On Aug. 19, 1979, by authorization of an apostle, Ann Kenny was set apart as stake Sunday School president of the University of Utah 2nd Stake. One month later, Ezra Taft Benson, then President of the Twelve, ruled that Sunday School presidents must hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, and Kenny was released. (D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 1997, p. 872.)

Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophets. On Feb. 26, 1980, Pres. Ezra Taft Benson, then president of the Twelve, addressed a BYU devotional forum with a speech he entitled, Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophets. His first several fundamentals were as follows: FIRST: The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything. SECOND: The living prophet is more vital to us than the Standard Works. THIRD: The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet. FOURTH: The prophet will never lead the Church astray. FIFTH: The prophet is not required to have any particular earthly training or credentials to speak on any subject or act on any matter at any time. SIXTH: The prophet does not have to say 'Thus saith the Lord' to give us scripture. SEVENTH: The prophet tells us what we need to know, not always what we want to know. EIGHTH: The prophet is not limited by men's reasoning. NINTH: The prophet may be involved in civic matters. . . . Those who would remove prophets from politics would take God out of government.” “This address, given when President Benson was President of the Quorum of the Twelve, caught considerable media attention, not only for its authoritarian tone and content but also for its assertion that the teachings of the current Church president took precedence over the accumulated revelations of his predecessors. Whether justifiably or not, this contention was widely interpreted as President Benson's attempt to set the stage for his own presidency. A close relative of President Kimball has since told me that Elder Benson was obliged by President Kimball to offer a formal apology to his colleagues in the First Presidency and the Twelve for such imprudent public remarks.” (Armand L. Mauss, Assimilation and Ambivalence: The Mormon Reaction to Americanization, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1989, p. 55.)

1. Prophets in Politics. In 1980, in a widely-reported speech at BYU, President Ezra Taft Benson (then president of the Twelve) said: Some so-called experts of political science want the prophet to keep still on politics. . . . But those who would remove prophets from politics would take God out of government. (Gary James Bergera and Ron Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*, 1985, p. 225.)
2. First Presidency Response. Following Benson’s “Fourteen Fundamentals” speech, “the First Presidency immediately issued a statement that Benson was misquoted. On March 5 the Presidency issued a statement that ‘we reaffirm that we take no partisan stand as to candidates or political parties, and exercise no constraint on the freedom of individuals to make their own choices in these matters.’” (D. Michael Quinn, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1993, p. 73.)
3. Called in About Talk. “[Kimball] was concerned about the talk. He wanted to prevent any misperception that the Church espoused ultraconservative politics and wanted to discourage an unthinking follow-the-leader mentality. The First Presidency again called in Elder Benson to discuss what he had said and asked him to make explanation to the full Quorum of the Twelve and other General Authorities. Elder Benson told them that he meant only to underscore President Kimball’s prophetic call.” (Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball*, CD working copy, 2005, Chapter 16, p. 13.)
4. Apologized? Benson’s biographer does not state that Elder Benson was asked to apologize for his speech, but her comments on the address indicate that something unusual occurred: “During the April 1980 monthly meeting of the General Authorities, President Benson explained that he had meant only to reaffirm the divine nature of the prophetic call. It was a faith-building, emotional experience.

His family were aware of his concerns and had been praying for him. When he returned to his office that day, he found a phone message from Reed and a brief letter from Mark: ‘All will be well—we’re praying for you and *know* all will be well. The Lord knows your heart.’ There was also a brief message from Elder Packer: ‘How I admire, respect and love you. How could anyone hesitate to follow a leader, an example such as you? What a privilege_’” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 469.)

5. Apology Not Accepted? “A general authority revealed that [President] Kimball asked Benson to apologize to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who ‘were dissatisfied with his response.’ Therefore, Kimball required him to explain himself to a combined meeting of all general authorities the following week.” (D. Michael Quinn, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1993, p. 73.)

B. Moving Historian’s Office. In August, 1980, the History Division of the Historical Department was abruptly transferred to BYU. Church Historian Leonard Arrington, who was not a part of the discussion leading to the move, wrote later: “This major restructuring, desired by the general authorities of the church and BYU, was orchestrated by [G. Homer] Durham and [Gordon B.] Hinckley to place the History Division under a university rubric. I was later informed that a prime consideration was timing. Kimball was in failing health and not expected to live long, and these arrangers wanted to keep our work alive by shifting us to BYU before Benson assumed control as president and eliminated our division and discontinued our functions. Durham and Hinckley were, as they believed, doing a favor to us, to BYU, and to the church. An added factor was an apparent agreement that access to archival material be more carefully restricted.” (Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 1998, p. 215.)

II. Service as Church President

A. Named President in 1985. President Benson was ordained and set apart as president of the Church on November 10, 1985, following the death of President Spencer W. Kimball. The two men were ordained apostles on the same day, October 7, 1943, but Kimball was ordained first, so he was the senior apostle of the two. Otherwise, Benson would have become President of the Church twelve years earlier, in 1973. (Richard Poll, *History and Faith: Reflections of a Mormon Historian*, 1989, p. 87.)

Visit to White House. “President Ezra Taft Benson met with President Ronald Reagan on January 6, 1986. They discussed the problems of world hunger and the Church’s multi-million dollar gift to the world hunger fund which was derived from special fasts conducted by members of the Church. It was during this trip to Washington, D. C. President Benson delivered his first major talk on the Book of Mormon.” (Francis M. Gibbons, *The Expanding Church: Three Decades of Remarkable Growth Among the Latter-day Saints, 1970-1999*, 1999, pp. 131-2.)

B. Benson Gift to Reagan. “On another occasion President Benson sent Ronald Reagan lengthy passages from the Book of Mormon about America’s divine destiny and concluded with his testimony: ‘This nation is the Lord’s base of operations in these latter days. Here the gospel of Jesus Christ was restored. Here God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to the young man Joseph Smith, which to me is the greatest event that has transpired in this world since the resurrection of the Master.’ Reagan agreed America was a ‘specially favored land,’ adding, that ‘as long as Americans have

respected spiritual leaders such as yourself, our nation will . . . do wonders in the world.” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, p. 470.)

Attention to Book of Mormon. “In March 1986 in a meeting of the general authorities, President Ezra Taft Benson told them that he had felt moved upon by the Holy Spirit in a manner similar to the way President Lorenzo Snow had felt when he declared to the Church the need to be more faithful in paying tithing. President Benson declared the Lord was inspiring him to preach the need to return to the Book of Mormon as ‘the keystone of our religion.’” (Brent L. Top, “A Lengthening Stride, 1951 Through 1999,” *Out of Obscurity: The LDS Church in the Twentieth Century*, papers given at the 29th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, BYU, 2000, pp. 36-7.)

“God Has Revealed to Me.” “God has revealed to me the absolute need for us to move the Book of Mormon forward now in a marvelous manner.” (General Conference, Oct. 1, 1988.)

1. Time for ‘a Massive Flooding of the Earth.’ “The time is long overdue for a massive flooding of the earth with the Book of Mormon for the many reasons which the Lord has given. In this age of electronic media and mass distribution of the printed word, God will hold us accountable if we do not now move the Book of Mormon in a monumental way. I have a vision of homes alerted, of classes alive, and of pulpits aflame with the spirit of Book of Mormon messages. . . . I have a vision of the whole Church getting nearer to God by abiding by the precepts of the Book of Mormon. Indeed, I have a vision of flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon. (General Conference, Oct. 1, 1988.)
2. Gave Away Thousands of Copies. “And wherever he went, he talked to people individually about it—to airline flight attendants, to hotel employees, to nonmember acquaintances, to strangers whom he met. And indeed to anyone who would listen. Frequently he would give away copies of the Book of Mormon to strangers from a supply he always carried with him. Over the years, through missionaries around the world, he gave away thousands of them that contained pictures of him and Flora and their written testimony.” (Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God*, 1996, p. 301.)
3. Twenty Major Addresses on Book of Mormon in First Year. “During the first year of his presidency, he delivered no less than twenty major addresses about the Book of Mormon.” (Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God*, 1996, p. 307.)
4. Almost an Obsession. “. . . he launched into an eloquent sermon about the Book of Mormon. He had studied this sacred record and had prayed and spoken often about it; The message of the book had woven itself into the fabric of his life. It had almost become an obsession with him.”

Already in Failing Health. “At 86, President Benson was the second oldest man to succeed to the Presidency. (Joseph Fielding Smith was 93 when he was ordained president in 1970). In recent years, partly due to two hip operations, he had started to slow down. At times his memory had momentarily failed him. Just a month earlier, during October general conference, he had labored while delivering his address and had appeared almost fragile. Friends had asked his children if their father was well. And he had suffered momentary dizzy spells, during which he had struggled to speak for a time. At least twice, as president of the Twelve he had been hospitalized briefly for these setbacks.” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 1987, p. 486.)

1. No Longer Led Anti-Communist Movement. “By the time Ezra Taft Benson himself became church president in 1985, he no longer acted as a standard-bearer of the anti-Communist movement. After all, at 86, Benson was the second oldest man to become LDS church president and already suffered dizzy spells, memory loss, and difficulty in public speaking. Besides, the widespread paranoia and political passion of the 1950s and 1960s had died.” (D. Michael Quinn, “Ezra Taft Benson and Mormon Political Conflicts,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1993, p. 79.)

“Gentle and Pastoral.” “Fifteen years after McKay died, Benson became Church president; and to the surprise of many Church members, whose memories of his earlier political activities were still vivid, he was a gentle, pastoral Church president whose consistent message was a plea for Mormons to become reacquainted with the book that gave them their nickname: the Book of Mormon. The controversy that high-lighted so many of his years as an apostle never returned.” (Gregory A. Prince, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 2004, p. 93.)

Limited Public Activity. “The *Deseret News 1991-1992 Church Almanac* lists one public activity for Benson in 1986, two in 1987, two in 1988, four in 1989, and four in 1990.” (D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 1997, p. 432.)

B. Pride. One of the most important talks attributed to President Benson was a masterful discourse on pride. _President Benson may have commissioned his speech on pride, but family members say a son wrote it._ (Sunstone, June 1996, p. 3.)

C. Views on Government Assistance Programs. In a speech at BYU on Sept. 16, 1986, President Benson spelled out his non-interventionist theories: _[Government] cannot claim the power to redistribute money or property nor to force reluctant citizens to perform acts of charity against their will. Government is created by the people. No individual possesses the power to take another's wealth and to force others to do good, so no government has the right to do such things either. The creature cannot exceed the creator._ (Deseret News, Sept. 16, 1986, p. 2B.)

“The sole object and only legitimate end of government is to protect the citizen in the enjoyment of life, liberty, and property, and when the government assumes other functions it is usurpation and oppression.”
(Ezra Taft Benson, *The Constitution: A Heavenly Banner*, 1986, pp. 9-10; cited by Stephen C. Clark and Richard A. Van Wagoner, *Dialogue*, Fall 1989, p. 56.)

a. “It requires neither ingenuity nor violence to semantics to argue that the ‘general welfare’ clause can be interpreted as empowering the federal government to lay and collect taxes for the purpose of providing for the needy. The contrary argument—that that particular interpretation of the general welfare clause is not a proper interpretation—cannot be derived solely from the language of the Constitution. Thus President Benson’s view that government can tax and spend to provide for defense but not to provide for the needy is not supported solely by the principles on which he purports to rely.” (Clark and Van Wagoner, *Dialogue*, Fall 1989, p. 58.)

Women Not to Work Outside Home. In a special satellite broadcast address in 1987, later distributed as a church pamphlet, President Ezra Taft Benson said: “Contrary to conventional wisdom, a mother’s calling is in the home, not in the marketplace. . . . It was never intended by the Lord that

married women should compete with men in employment. . . . Wives, come home from the typewriters, the laundry, the nursing; come home from the factory, the café.” (President Ezra Taft Benson, *To the Mothers in Zion*, 1987.)

Deteriorating Health. “On Saturday, January 11, 1986, after returning from Washington, D. C. President Benson had a fainting spell. He had stood up suddenly to answer the telephone and was talking with Reed when it occurred. Tests conducted at the hospital revealed no serious physical condition. It was merely a blip in the life of a man in his eighty-seventh year whose blood didn’t circulate as fast as it did when he was younger.” (Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God*, 1996, p. 303.)

1. “President Benson was hospitalized overnight on June 19 [1986] for a virus infection . . .” (*Ibid.*, p. 307.)

“Following the October 1986 general conference, President Benson suffered several episodes when his heartbeat slowed perceptibly. This created dizziness and feelings of ennui. To remedy this it was decided to implant a pacemaker, which was done during a three-hour surgery on November 6.” (*Ibid.*, p. 311.)

2. “A few days after this [April 1987] conference, President Benson experienced chest pains and was hospitalized. He remained in the hospital for several days, and for some time afterward recuperated in his apartment.” (*Ibid.*, p. 312.)

“The keynote address and the concluding address President Benson gave at the October 1988 general conference were the last sermons he delivered at the pulpit of the Salt Lake Tabernacle.” (*Ibid.*, p. 313.)

3. “Following this [October 1988] conference, President Benson suffered a stroke that made it impossible for him to speak in public, although it did not impair his mentality. Through the April 1991 general conference, he attended the sessions in person, but his talks were read by his counselors. Later, as his physical problems increased, he discontinued going to the Tabernacle, instead watching the sessions on television.” (*Ibid.*, p. 315.)

“The prophet now has great difficulty in expressing himself. It seems as if he may have suffered a mild stroke.” (Author’s personal diary, Oct. 8, 1989).” (*Ibid.*, p. 316.)

4. At a meeting of all General Authorities on Feb. 1, 1990: “President Benson was much stronger today and spoke more extensively than he has done in the last while. Instead of remaining behind the table which sits before the First Presidency, he walked alone out in front of it and spoke briefly but effectively. . . . It was quite touching and symbolic to see the way in which his counselors and the Twelve sat forward expectantly to catch him if he had fallen. Although he is aged and weak and no longer speaks with the verve and facility he once did, he is providing powerful, prophetic leadership.” (*Ibid.*, p. 317.)

5. “President Benson was operated on Sept. 19, 1990, for the removal of two subdural hematomas. . . . He is unable, of course, to be involved in the day-to-day operation of the

Church. But no new initiatives are taken without his knowledge and consent.” (Dec. 2, 1990; *Ibid.*, pp. 317-18.)

“Pretty Much a Vegetable”. “Many years ago I had a neighbor—let’s call him Mitch—who worked as a trauma nurse at LDS Hospital. He was a returned missionary, a husband and father, and an active member of our ward. One of his patients at the time was President Ezra Taft Benson, who had suffered a severe stroke. My memory of the specifics is somewhat cloudy after so many years, but a Church spokesperson had released a statement about President Benson’s condition that upset Mitch. The statement must have at least assured the public that President Benson was responding well to treatment and conversing with his wife, because Mitch’s response was: ‘When you’ve had two massive brain hemorrhages, you’re pretty much a vegetable. President Benson doesn’t recognize his wife. And he’s not talking with anybody.’ Why, he then asked me, was the Church telling lies? I really didn’t have a good answer for him at that time, but I think I could offer one today. This episode was probably not the only reason for Mitch’s eventual decisions—he left both the Church and his family—but it certainly didn’t help him any. He apparently never came to understand what I first began to comprehend only after years of Church employment. Still, Mitch’s question is worth considering. Why *did* the Church release a statement that was not truthful? Somebody, I would guess, failed to grasp the concept introduced above, that the Church doesn’t have to be perfect to be true. I can imagine someone reasoning, with that common combination of good intentions and faulty logic, that if the Church is true, then it *has to* be perfect, and in a perfect Church the prophet can’t be mentally incapacitated. Not only that, but this person (or perhaps committee) probably assumed that if the truth about President Benson’s condition were made public, the public would get the wrong impression. Members who are weak in their faith would certainly lose their testimonies if they found out the prophet was in a vegetative state, because that would mean ‘continuous revelation through a living prophet’ wasn’t really continuous.” (Roger Terry, “Why the True Church Cannot Be Perfect,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 2013, 95-96.)

B. Business Meeting in California. In July 1988, President Benson was to speak in Los Angeles at the annual meeting of Church-owned Beneficial Life. When he got to the podium he became disoriented; he didn’t know where he was, and asked: “Where am I, and why am I in front of all these people.” He was quietly led away by those conducting the meeting. (Private conversation with one who was present.)

Dan Quayle Visit. The *Deseret News* reported the visit of Vice-Presidential candidate Dan Quayle in September 1988 as follows: PRES. BENSON GIVES QUAYLE WARM, PERSONAL WELCOME: Smiling broadly, LDS Church President Ezra Taft Benson clasped hands with Republican vice-presidential candidate Dan Quayle after a fifteen minute meeting Friday and said the senator has many friends in Utah. Leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints met with Quayle at the Church Administration Building as they had earlier this year with Democratic candidates Michael Dukakis and Jesse Jackson. But while Dukakis and Jackson met with members of the church’s First Presidency, Quayle was the first national candidate this year to meet with President Benson. Church officials said President Benson was unavailable when the other candidates visited. []

Church officials, however, restated the church’s long-standing policy of not making political endorsements in the election. Friday’s brief meeting ended when President Benson entered the lobby of the LDS Church Administration Building with Quayle, (R-Ind) on his left and Quayle’s wife,

Marilyn, on his right. As reporters surrounded the trio, President Benson clasped Quayle's right hand. When asked if he felt he had secured the 'Mormon vote,' Quayle hesitated, then said, 'We think we have a lot of friends here.' That prompted President Benson to say, 'You do, you certainly do, and it goes back to Eisenhower.' . . . Quayle met with President Benson, his counselors Pres. Thomas S. Monson, and Pres. Gordon B. Hinckley, and with Elders Russell M. Nelson, David B. Haight, and M. Russell Ballard, all members of the Council of the Twelve._ (*Deseret News*, Sept. 1988, p. A2.)

Medal from President Bush. "On President Benson's ninetieth birthday, [August 4, 1989] the president of the United States [George Bush] honored him with the Presidential Citizens Medal, citing him as 'one of the most distinguished Americans of his time.' because of his 'lifetime of dedicated service to country, community, church and family.'" (Reed A. Benson, "Ezra Taft Benson: The Eisenhower Years," *Out of Obscurity: The LDS Church in the Twentieth Century*, papers given at the 29th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, BYU, 2000, p. 61.)

C. Benson Supporters Stymied. "By the fall of 1992 Mormon advocates of Benson's ultra-conservatism found themselves in a religious quandary. LDS church officers were suspicious of 'those obsessed with the early speeches of LDS Church President Ezra Taft Benson and who believe the ailing, 93-year-old leader has been silenced because his opinions no longer are politically popular,' Such ultra-conservative Mormons were being excommunicated or disciplined in Utah and surrounding states. One of them protested, 'We support President Benson 100%,' but 'there are some brethren who speak 180 degrees against him.' Such anti-Benson influence had characterized the Mormon hierarchy in the 1960s, but the scales had tipped in a dramatic way by 1992. Based on the instructions of a general authority in October 1992, stake presidents prepared a list of twenty warning signs of apostasy. Third on the list was 'John Birch membership or leanings.'" (D. Michael Quinn, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1993, p. 85.)

1. Warning Signs of Apostasy. In the early 1990s, Church leaders were alarmed at the growth of a Mormon splinter-group based in the Manti, Utah area. The group believes the second coming is imminent, and that followers must move to the Manti area and prepare for war. In October 1992, the Church circulated a profile sheet that listed _20 warning signs of apostasy_ that might identify sympathizers with the new cult. Third on this list was _John Birch membership or leanings._ According to one observer, _This 1992 Profile of Troublesome Ideologies was the ultimate evidence that the incapacitated Ezra Taft Benson had ceased to be the administrative leader of the LDS Church._ (*Ibid.* 85.)

Benson No Longer in Control. "Such an indictment against the Birch Society was not possible even while anti-Birch men like Hugh B. Brown, Nathan E. Tanner, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Harold B. Lee served in the First Presidency. During those years, Apostle Benson was embattled within the Mormon hierarchy, but his influence was too powerful to allow a linkage of Birchism with apostasy." (*Ibid.*)

Excommunicating. "Despite their dissent, the politically moderate general authorities allowed Ezra Taft Benson to become an enduring hero of ultra-conservatives. It now seems uncharitable for the LDS hierarchy to punish Mormon 'true believers' for emulating this apostle's thirty years of rejecting political moderation." (*Ibid.*, p. 87.)

Incapacity. On July 10, 1993, the *Salt Lake Tribune* printed an article headed, Benson's Not Competent, Grandson Says. The sub-heading added, LDS Leader Struggles With Growing Senility. The article said, in part: As Mormon Church President Ezra Taft Benson approaches his 94th birthday, the years have stilled his voice, clouded his mind and raised questions about the faith's rigid order of succession. Attired in a sweat suit and fed by others, Benson spends his days in supervised seclusion in an apartment overlooking Temple Square. . . . The incongruity struck a 13-year-old Benson great-grandson the other day as he poured his breakfast cereal: 'Dad, why do they call him prophet when he can't do anything?' The boy's father is Steve Benson [who said] 'I believe the church strives mightily to perpetuate the myth, the fable, the fantasy that Pres. Benson, if not operating on all cylinders, at least is functioning effectively enough, even with just a nod of his head, to be regarded by the saints as a living, functioning prophet,' he said. 'That is not the grandfather [Steve] Benson saw when he visited in March from Arizona, or whom he has seen struggle with encroaching senility during much of his seven-year administration. . . .' (*Salt Lake Tribune*, July 10, 1993, p. E1.)

Benson Not Legally in Charge. On Aug. 15, 1993, the *Salt Lake Tribune*, in a copyrighted article, reported as follows: Documents on file with the state of Utah are strong evidence that the parent corporation of the Mormon Church no longer is being directed by its president, Ezra Taft Benson. Two certificates of authority filed in May 1989 gave absolute control over the Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to counselors Gordon B. Hinckley and Thomas S. Monson. It is the first time since the corporation was founded seventy years ago that anyone other than the church president has obtained total authority over Utah's most powerful corporation. The documents, at the Utah Department of Commerce, were signed with a machine that duplicates the signature of 94-year-old President Benson. They were filed six months before President Benson—considered 'prophet, seer and revelator' by the 8.4 million members of the LDS church—made his last public speech. Church leaders said this week the filings and the use of a signature machine were routine, and done with President Benson's approval. 'This is a wise practice which provides contingency coverage when the president is traveling or when advanced age or failing health make it impossible for the president to carry out' his duties as corporation head, LDS church spokesman Don LeFevre said."

Each of the six church presidents since Grant delegated limited powers to other church officials, usually counselors to the president . . . But for the first time, the 1989 documents gave 'plenary'—or absolute—power to the two counselors. . . . [However,] the church made no announcement of the change. It has continued to portray President Benson as the ultimate power behind church affairs. Mr. LeFevre confirmed that a signature machine was used at President Benson's direction to execute the documents. . . . 'Pres. Benson's signature is affixed mechanically to thousands of documents and missionary assignments each year, Mr. LeFevre said. 'As it was during the time when President Spencer W. Kimball was ill, we have moved without hesitation when there is a well-established policy,' he said. 'Where there is not firmly established policy, we have talked with the president and received his approval.'

However, Steve Benson, grandson to President Benson and a Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist for the *Arizona Republic*, has said that his aging grandfather no longer possesses the mental faculties to handle church affairs. 'The church has misrepresented the condition of President Benson and stated flatly that his role as prophet has in no way been impeded,' Steven Benson said this week. 'My grandfather has become a storefront mannequin while the business of the store is conducted behind closed doors.' (*Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 15, 1993, p. C1.)

B. Grandson's Evaluation. Stephen Reed Benson, the oldest grandchild of Ezra and Flora Benson, was interviewed by Elbert Peck in the summer of 1993. At the time of the interview, Steve was a stake high councilor. Steve and his grandfather were apparently very close. Steve's concerns about the "lie" of President Benson's health, and what he considered a lie of Elder Dallin Oaks to protect the Church, led him and his wife Mary Ann to leave the Church about a year after this interview. Here are some of his observations:

President Benson's Health. _Contrary to the claims of high Church leaders, I knew that Grandpa's physical and mental infirmities were preventing him from participating in meaningful Church leadership and decision-making. I had seen him often enough in his last years to know that the cerebral hemorrhages he had suffered had severely impacted his ability to speak and reason. He had an increasingly difficult time carrying on conversations; his words were, more often than not, fragmented and few. Ultimately, he grew so weak and infirm that he spent his waking hours silently wrapped in a blanket in his reclining chair. My young son asked, 'Why do they call him _prophet_ when he can't do anything?' Many family members refused to face nature's reality; still others insisted on silence. I was commanded not to talk to the press about Grandpa's situation. The media, I was reminded, was 'an enemy of the Church'; besides, revealing too much might 'damage the faith of the members.' But lying for the Lord—or for the Bensons—was no longer an acceptable option to me. Breaking the code of silence prompted some family members to accuse me of betrayal and publicity-seeking. I was warned if I didn't keep quiet in the future, I would be excluded from seeing Grandpa again. It was an unhealthy and dysfunctional situation, created and abetted by a Mormon culture that seeks to control, manipulate, deny, and dominate." (Stephen Reed Benson, *Sunstone*, December 1994, p. 35.)

1. Martin Luther King. "He branded Martin Luther King as a 'notorious liar' (quoting his hero, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover), telling me King was a tool of a Red conspiracy to sow civil strife and destroy America from within." (*Ibid.*)

3. George Wallace's American Party. "During the 1968 presidential campaign, he sent me George Wallace's American Party platform, praising it as being more in harmony with the principles of the Constitution than either the Republican's or Democrat's." (*Ibid.*, p. 30.)

Opinion of Richard Nixon. "He told me that Richard Nixon was 'the most dishonest man I ever met,' an amoral politician more concerned with what would help his party than with what was right for the country." (31)

2. Evolution. Stephen and his grandfather carried on a lengthy dialogue/correspondence on this subject. "I eventually concluded—contrary to the claims of some individual general authorities and BYU religion professors—that the Church did not have an official position opposing organic evolution. I told Grandpa of my findings. He listened carefully, then surprised me by acknowledging that the scriptures contained evidence 'on both sides' of the question. He even acknowledged that 'the Lord may not have revealed enough to create unanimity among the Brethren,' admitting, in fact, 'there may very well be disagreements among the Brethren of the Twelve' concerning it. . . . After months of speculation that the Church might make some new pronounce-ment on evolution (much of it fed to me by Grandpa), he finally told me in the summer of 1980, 'I can say with confidence that the Church will not issue an official statement on the theory of organic evolution,' Any such statement would, he said, be 'unwise,' 'not accomplish much,' and serve only to 'widen differences or divergences.' It wasn't

everything I hoped for or even believed, but I was impressed with his apparent shift to the middle.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 31-2.)

Gov. Evan Mecham. “When I began lampooning Arizona’s blunderbuss Mormon Governor Evan Mecham, . . . Mecham himself phoned me at home to tell me my salvation was in jeopardy. Claiming he kept the commandments, he also said that Grandpa had given him a blessing promising him he would prevail against his political enemies. If the blessing occurred, Mecham must have misunderstood it; he was kicked out of office.” (*Ibid.*, p. 33.)

Steve printed a scathing cartoon on Mecham. “Grandpa’s personal secretary, Gary Gillespie, phoned from Salt Lake and asked, ‘What’s going on down there with those Arizona Mormons? Don’t they realize they’re making fools out of us?’ He was laughing, but my stake president apparently didn’t see the joke. He released me from the high council, saying the cartoon mocked Mormonism’s sacred symbols [it showed Gov. Mecham as the Angel Moroni, blowing a trumpet on top of the Salt Lake Temple] and constituted a misuse of God-given talent. He later told me that Elder H. Burke Peterson of our Area Presidency had called to express ‘interest’ in the situation, but denied that it influenced his decision to dispense with my services. Meanwhile, my father [Reed Benson] phoned to chastise me and let me know that the cartoon had become a subject of discussion at the weekly temple meeting of the Council of the Twelve.” (*Ibid.*, p. 33.)

Leaving the Church. “Eventually, because of fundamental disagreements over doctrine, history, academic freedom, and the treatment of women, Mary Ann and I chose to leave the Church. That decision added immeasurably to the family’s—and our own—pain, knowing how much Grandpa loved the kingdom.” (*Ibid.* 36)

President Benson Counsels Donny Osmond. Duane Cardall, whose assignment at KSL includes covering the activities of Church Presidents, has many memories of his assignment. “There were light moments along the way. He was standing near President Benson at a high-brow reception in England to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the church in that nation. The president was in a receiving line greeting well-wishers when Donny Osmond came along. ‘Young man, you need a haircut,’ he told him.” (*Deseret News*, March 28, 2006.)

Accomplishments. “During his administration President Benson also permitted worthy persons married to unendowed spouses to enter the temple to receive their endowments; discontinued stake seventies quorums; changed stake conferences to enable stake presidents to preside over one of the two conferences in their stakes each year; dedicated a new temple in Denver and broke ground for a new temple in San Diego, while authorizing his counselors to dedicate temples in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Lima, Peru. . . . President Benson also created the Second Quorum of Seventy on April 1, 1989.” (Francis M. Gibbons, *An Expanding Church: Three Decades of Remarkable Growth Among the Latter-day Saints, 1970-1999*, 1999, pp. 71-2.)

C. Death. “. . . throughout May 1994 the prophet's condition deteriorated further. On Saturday, May 28, President Hinckley [learned] . . . President Benson had slipped into a coma. . . . Two days later, on Memorial Day, at 2:40 p.m., President Benson had died. _ He was 94. (Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward With Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 1996, p. 495.)

Respect Shown Along Cortège Route to Whitney, Idaho. “It is doubtful anyone had foreseen the extraordinary show of love and admiration for President Benson that was exhibited along the [cortège] route to Whitney. At practically every overpass there were people waiting to pay their respects, waving their hands or handkerchiefs or small American flags, people of both sexes and of every age. There were Scouts in uniform. Some adults were seated in camp chairs and some in wheel-chairs. As the cortège left the highway and entered the farming areas, workers left their machines and approached the dirt road, removing their hats in respect. Here and there were yellow ribbons attached to fence posts, welcoming home their friend and neighbor whom old-timers affectionately called ‘T.’ He belonged to them and they to him.” (Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God*, 1996, p. 321.)

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