

David O. McKay

1. Background. David Oman McKay was born Sept. 8, 1873, in Huntsville, Utah. At age twenty he became principal of the Huntsville schools. He enrolled at the University of Utah and played guard on the school's first football team. He was studentbody president and valedictorian of his class. He graduated in 1897 and left on a mission to Scotland. He married Emma Ray Riggs (a former student), and they had seven children. He was called as an apostle at age 32. His life spanned the presidencies of every president of the church except Joseph Smith. He was the tallest president (6'1", and the first since Joseph Smith not to wear a beard. When he was born, the transcontinental railroad had recently been completed, and just before his death, man landed on the moon. He traveled more than two million miles, making him the most-traveled general authority in the history of the Church to that point. Asked to describe his greatest accomplishment in life when he was nearly eighty years old, he responded: "Making the church a worldwide organization." He did in 1970 at the age of 96. (Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, *A Book of Mormons*, 1982, pp. 188-190.)

2. Parents. Unlike all the previous presidents, David O. McKay was not born into a prominent family in the Church. Nevertheless, he was blessed with choice parentage. He considered his father to be "the greatest man he had ever known." Of his mother, he wrote to his children: "Never to this day have you heard your mother say a cross or disrespectful word. This can be said truthfully, I think, of but few women in the world. Under all conditions and circumstances, she has been the perfect lady." *Mighty Men of Zion*, p. 50, and *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1970, p. 14.)

3. Patriarchal Blessing. At age thirteen, David O. McKay was given an inspired promise in his patriarchal blessing: "The eye of the Lord is upon thee. . . . The Lord has a work for thee to do, in which thou shalt see much of the world, assist in gathering scattered Israel and also labor in the ministry. It shall be thy lot to sit in council with thy brethren and preside among the people . . ." (Jeanette McKay Morrell, *Highlights in the Life of President David O. McKay*, 1966, p. 26.)

A. "After the blessing the patriarch told him: 'My boy, you have something to do besides playing marbles.'" (Editors' introduction, in preface to *What-E'er-Thou-Art-Act-Well-Thy Part: The Missionary Diaries of David O. McKay*, edited by Stan Larson and Patricia Larson, 1999, p. xxxii.)

4. Education. President McKay, who held a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Utah, was the first college graduate to head the Church. (Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*, 1985, p. 348.)

5. Act Well Thy Part. David was called as a missionary while in college, and left right after graduating. After being in Scotland for a short time, he was discouraged and homesick. Then one day in Stirling he noticed an inscription on an unfinished building: "Whate'er thou art, act well thy part." He accepted this message "as if it came from One in whose service we were engaged," and he resolved to act well his part as a Latter-day Saint missionary. (Richard O. Cowan, *The Church in the Twentieth Century*, 1985, p. 234.)

6. Missionary Promise. While serving a mission in Great Britain, he recorded in his journal a special meeting held in Glasgow, Scotland. A very distinct and marvelous spirit pervaded the room and many of the missionaries were weeping. His mission president, James L. McMurrin, revealed to them that there were angels in the room. He pointed out two elders specifically and stated that their guardian angels were there. Then he turned to Elder McKay and declared: "Satan has desired you that he may sift you as wheat, but God is mindful of you, and if you will keep the faith, you will yet sit in the councils of the Church." (McKay Diary, May 29, 1899, as quoted in Lawrence R. Flake, *Mighty Men of Zion: General Authorities of the Last Dispensation*, 1974, p. 50.)

7. Broken Jaw. In 1916, after he had been an apostle about ten years, David O. McKay was involved in a serious accident. While driving down Ogden Canyon during spring runoff, he missed seeing a rope strung across a bridge where the road had washed out. He drove into the rope. "The rope smashed through the window, catching him on the chin and gashing his lip, knocking out his lower teeth, and breaking his upper jaw. Doctors anticipated he would carry serious scars the rest of his life. Following an administration, his injuries healed miraculously, and he had no visible scars whatsoever. (James B. Allen, "David O. McKay," *The Presidents of the Church*, 1986, p. 294.)

a. Details of Accident. April 13, 1916. Meeting of the Twelve in the Salt Lake Temple. "We all felt to sincerely thank the Lord that Brother McKay was able to be with us today. Three weeks ago today he was very seriously injured in an automobile accident in Ogden canyon. A rope stretched across the canyon caught him in the mouth and tore nearly all of his teeth out by the roots and very badly lacerated his face. His head was thrown back so that the rope struck him in the mouth. Had the rope caught him in the chin it would undoubtedly have meant death and if it had caught him in the eyes he would have been blinded for life. As it is his face will be scarred for life undoubtedly." (*The Diaries of Heber J. Grant, 1880-1945, Abridged*, 2010, [published privately], 307.)

8. Apostolic Journey. In 1920, Elder McKay was assigned by the First Presidency to tour the missions of the Church around the world. Accompanied by Hugh J. Cannon, a former European Mission president, he left home on Dec. 4, 1920, and returned on Dec. 24, 1921. They traveled 56,000 miles, visiting Japan, China, the islands of the South Seas, Australia., Egypt, Jerusalem, Europe and Great Britain. At Laie, Hawaii, after an impressive flag-raising ceremony by a group of small children, he was inspired by the Spirit to prophesy that this spot would someday become an important religious and educational center for the Church. The Hawaiian Temple, Church College of Hawaii, and Polynesian Cultural Center were all later established at that site. While in New Zealand, he told an audience, "Oh, how I wish I had the power to speak to you in your own tongue, but since I have not the gift, I pray, and I ask you to pray, that you might have the spirit of interpretation, of discernment, that you may understand at least the spirit while I am speaking." His sermon went on for forty minutes, and as it proceeded, he recognized, from the tears in many eyes, that many, if not most, were actually receiving the gift of interpretation. When, at the end, Brother Meha began to translate the address, some of the Maori Saints even corrected him on a few points. "The gift so longed for by Elder McKay had been given, for the benefit of the Saints. The same gift would come to him again on this trip, and at least once more later in his life." (James Allen, "David O. McKay," *The Presidents of the Church*, edited by Leonard Arrington, 1986, pp. 295-6.)

9. Named President. With the death of President George Albert Smith, David O. McKay became Church President April 9, 1951. He moved President J. Reuben Clark from first counselor to second counselor, and named Stephen L Richards, his closest friend among the general authorities, as first counselor. He stated to the Twelve that he made the change because Richards had been an apostle much longer than Clark. But the seeming "demotion" of President Clark shocked the others. Elder Spencer W. Kimball recorded in his journal: "'I was stunned when he explained that he had chosen Elder Richards first, Pres. Clark having served as first counselor for long years to President Grant and Pres. Smith. I looked around and found the other brethren stunned. It was hard to understand. I knew Elder Richards had been a close and lifelong friend but I was not prepared for this. . . All the others of the Twelve seemed to be alike stunned. We had been wholly unprepared for this shock.'" Elder Kimball recorded that the rest of the Apostles left their room in the temple in unaccustomed silence and "walked back to the office building numb. The other brethren from Bro. Lee down came together at the corner of the building and commiserated together. . . . Our hearts were breaking for that elder stalwart who for two regimes had carried the major load." (Spencer W. Kimball Journal, 8 April 1951; quoted in Michael Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years*, 1983, p. 122.)

10. Poet-Philosopher. President Marion G. Romney characterized President McKay as "a gentle poet-philosopher." He had been a liberal arts teacher before his 1906 apostolic call, and reflected that background

in his talks. He "often quoted his own poetry, as well as the writings of Robert Burns, Lord Byron, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, John Dryden, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Johann Goethe, Oliver Goldsmith, Thomas Gray, Heinrich Heine, William James, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Joaquin Miller, John Milton, Alexander Pope, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Ruskin, Sir Walter Scott, William Shakespeare, Herbert Spencer, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Leo Tolstoy, William Makepeace Thackeray, John Greenleaf Whittier, and William Wordsworth. Everyone acknowledged Reuben's administrative skills; but another tough administrator, Ernest L. Wilkinson, observed with special emphasis that 'President McKay is a great spiritual leader.'" (D. Michael Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years*, 1983, p. 115.)

10. Charismatic Leader. Dr. Sterling McMurrin recorded this encounter with President McKay: "I had occasion to take Walter Reuther, the great labor leader, to meet President McKay in the 1950s. We had a long and pleasant discussion with him in the president's conference room. As we left the building, Walter said to me, 'I have met with major leaders all over the world, including kings and presidents; but I have never in my life met a person who made such an impression on me as this man has.'" (*Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin in Philosophy, Education, and Religion*, L. Jackson Newell and McMurrin, 1996, p. 186.)

11. Building Program. "The shortage of critical materials had brought the Church building program almost to a complete halt during the war. With the return of peace, Latter-day Saints looked forward to the construction of meetinghouses and other badly needed facilities. As materials became available, the Church embarked on an ambitious chapel-building program. By 1949 some 200 local meetinghouses had been completed, and the total reached 900 only three years later. As early as the mid-1950s, more than half of all LDS buildings in use had been constructed since the close of World War II." (*The Church in the Twentieth Century*, p. 217.)

12. Explosive Growth. "'A new year in the financial history of the Church began in 1950-51!' stated a new financial secretary [William F. Edwards] to the First Presidency. He reported that tithing revenues paralleled state and national personal income for eleven years. But starting with 1951, Church income commenced to rise independently. With the Presidency of David O. McKay, Church membership grew at a dizzying pace. Corresponding increases in tithing revenues required either increased investment of the Church's reserve income or greatly increased Church expenditures to keep the reserves in control. President McKay chose to do both, and ushered in an era in which the Church's investment portfolio expanded and diversified at the same time the Church spent tens of millions of dollars on expanding Brigham Young University and other educational facilities, on building new temples and chapels throughout the world, on microfilming genealogical records, on caring for increased welfare needs of a membership that was doubling every twenty years, on developing public relations exhibits and media, and on related expenditures. Although the momentum for this change in Church finances had been developing for years, it seemed to explode at the time of David O. McKay's Presidency. His optimistic, expansive personality was equal to the new financial circumstances that confronted the Church as it accelerated into becoming a world religion." (D. Michael Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years*, 1983, pp. 276-7.)

13. Tea With the Queen. In 1952, while touring Europe, President McKay was invited to visit with Queen Julianna of the Netherlands. "She had scheduled a half hour for the visit, and President McKay carefully watched the time. When the half hour was up, he politely thanked the queen and began to leave. 'Mr. McKay,' she said, 'sit down! I have enjoyed this thirty minutes more than I have enjoyed any thirty minutes in a long time. I just wish you would extend your visit a little longer.'" A coffee table was wheeled in, and the queen poured three cups of tea, pushing one each to President and Mrs. McKay. When neither of the McKays began to stir their tea, the queen asked, "Won't you have a little tea with the queen?" When they declined, she said, "I am the queen of the Netherlands. Do you mean to tell me you won't have a little drink of tea, even with the queen of the Netherlands?" "Would the queen of the Netherlands ask the leader of one million, three hundred thousand people to do something that he teaches his people not to do?" he asked in return. "You are a great man, President McKay," she replied. "I wouldn't ask you to do that." (James B. Allen, in *The Presidents of the Church*, 1986, pp.

303-4.)

14. Initial Support for Senator Joseph McCarthy. “McKay initially had been in favor of McCarthy’s extremism. Referring to what he termed ‘the farce that is going on now in Washington between McCarthy and the Army,’ he told his counselors and the Quorum of the Twelve, that ‘the Communistic influence is being exerted there to lessen the influence of men who would ferret out the enemies in the high places of government.’ As the summer of 1954 wore on, however, and the extent of McCarthy’s improprieties became evident, McKay switched sides on the issue. . . . While McKay backed away from the extremism of McCarthy, he was no less fervent in his own opposition to Communism.” (Gregory A. Prince, “David O. McKay and Communism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 2004, p. 44.)

15. Sterling McMurrin. In 1954, the stake president of University of Utah philosophy professor Sterling McMurrin initiated an effort to have him excommunicated for heresy. He admitted he did not believe the story of the First Vision, and he thought the Book of Mormon was a product of the nineteenth century. Upon hearing of the incident, President David O. McKay called the stake president, enquired about the time and location of the trial, and said he would like to appear as the first witness for the *defense* of McMurrin. The stake president decided to cancel the trial, and until his death in April, 1996, McMurrin remained “a fierce defender of the LDS church, its leaders and members, except on matters of doctrine and practice where he differs in principle.” (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1995, p. 6.)

16. Love and Home. Mormons remember President McKay most for his emphasis on family. In a 1964 conference he declared: ‘No other success can compensate for failure in the home. . . . I know of no other place where happiness abides more securely than in the home. It is possible to make home a bit of heaven. Indeed, I picture heaven as a continuation of the ideal home.’ His ‘love affair’ with Emma became legendary. To David O. McKay love was as ‘tender flower, the roots of which are in the human heart. It thrives in the element of confidence and trust, as the rose thrives in the sunshine and morning dew. . . . Fidelity and constancy are to that little flower of the soul what the sun is to the rose.’” (Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, *A Book of Mormons*, 1982, p. 190.)

17. President McKay’s Father-in-Law. “President David O. McKay’s father-in-law, Obadiah Higbee Riggs, Utah’s Superintendent of Public Instruction, left Mormonism and joined the RLDS Church.” (Newell G. Bringhurst, “Telling Latter-day Saint Lives: The Craft and Continuing Challenge of Mormon Biography,” *The Journal of Mormon History*, Spring 2001, p. 37.)

18. Tribute to Emma Ray. In 1934, newly appointed First Presidency member David O. McKay wrote to his children: “. . . Always prompt with meals, she has never said an unpleasant word or even shown a frown when I have kept her waiting, sometimes for hours. . . . Sometimes I have come home tired and irritable and have made remarks provocative of retaliating replies, but never to this day have you heard your mother say a cross or disrespectful word. This can be said truthfully, I think, of but few women in the world. Under all conditions and circumstances, she has been the perfect lady.” (Larry E. Morris, *A Treasury of Latter-day Letters*, 2001, pp. 63-64.)

19. Nibley’s Priesthood Manual. Hugh Nibley related this story to an interviewer: “I wrote the priesthood manual for 1957, you know, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*. Well, there was a reading committee on it. Adam S. Bennion was the head of the committee. . . . The reading committee wiped out every lesson in that book. Now this is one thing which I’m greatly obliged to President McKay. They kicked out every lesson in the book. They said it was over people’s heads. And every time, President McKay overruled them. The book is exactly as I wrote it. They wanted to make hundreds of changes and get rid of the whole thing entirely, and President McKay said, ‘No. If it’s beyond their reach, let them reach for it’ Adam S. Bennion said, ‘It’s over

their heads.’ And President McKay said, ‘Let them reach for it.’ Now there’s a great man. I liked that.” (Gregory A. Prince, “David O. McKay and the ‘Twin Sisters,’ Free Agency and Tolerance.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 2000, 11.)

20. Decision About Visiting the Pope. In 1957, Ezra Taft 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, “‘Weak-Kneed Republicans and Socialist Democrats’: Ezra Taft Benson as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, 1953-61, Part 2.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 41:4 [Winter 2008], p. 86.)

21. O. C. Tanner’s Manual. “At one time a teacher and author in the Church Education System, O. C. Tanner had long since parted company philosophically with the conservative faculty who came to dominate the system, when to his surprise a request came, in 1955, from the General Sunday School Superintendency that he author a Sunday school manual. Initially, he turned down the request not knowing that it had originated at a higher level. He later recounted: ‘After my negative reply, I had my hand on the door knob and I was about to leave, aware that when I opened the door, I would have turned down an opportunity, which I might later wish I had accepted. At that moment, Superintendent Hill asked his associates: “Should we tell him?” They replied affirmatively. He said, “We have been to President McKay and asked him to give us the name of someone who could write the best text for our college-age Sunday school classes on the subject of Christ’s teachings. Without hesitation he mentioned you as the one who could do this.” I must say this surprised me. I loved President McKay. I had seen him in many circumstances and I thought he always came through with intelligence, perception, and compassion. He had spoken at my [son] Steven’s funeral in 1949. I was not about to turn him down on anything he might ask me to do. I went back to where I had been sitting in front of them, and replied that if President McKay asked me to do this, then I certainly would comply with his request.’ As he set about the task, however, doubts came to his mind. His wife described the episode: ‘President McKay requested that Obert write *Christ’s Ideals for Living*. But he didn’t think he could, for he said, “President McKay, I don’t think I could pass the reading committee, because I’m quite a liberal Mormon.” And what do you think President McKay said? “Then we’ll change the reading committee!” And they did!’ The Sunday school manual that Tanner authored, *Christ’s Ideals for Living*, became the most widely-distributed and, arguably, finest manual ever written for the Sunday school.” (Gregory A. “David O. McKay and the ‘Twin Sisters,’ Free Agency and Tolerance.” Prince, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 2000, pp. 7-8.)

22. Sense of Humor. A student stake was created at Utah State University in 1958, and land was found east of the campus that was ideal for a student stake center. “The site was dedicated in August 1959 by David O. McKay. On that dry-as-dust day, the 86-year old president was assisted up a plank to an observation platform by [stake president Reed] Bullen and the president of the university, Daryl Chase. When McKay began his talk he said he was ‘fit as a fiddle’ but had experienced some difficulty getting on the platform because he had to drag two others up with him.” (Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 1998, p. 46.)

23. Accomplishments. Two mottos became the hallmark of the McKay administration: “Every Member a Missionary,” and, “No other success can compensate for failure in the home.” He traveled over two million miles while visiting members all over the world. He was the first President to visit South Africa and Latin America. Some 4,000 church buildings were constructed, including eight temples—three of them on foreign soil. In 1952 he approved the Church’s official adoption of the Cub Scout program. The correlation program, under the direction of Harold B. Lee, began. Films and recordings were approved to enhance the temple ceremony.

Microfilming began on a worldwide basis, and the granite vaults were constructed in Little Cottonwood Canyon. Members of the First Council of Seventy were ordained high priests. The Translation Department was established. He established the position of Regional Representatives. Members in South Africa and Brazil were allowed the priesthood even when they could not formally trace their genealogy outside those countries. Male members in Fiji were made eligible for the priesthood. The Church truly became an international church. (James B. Allen, in *The Presidents of the Church*, 1986, 305-312.)

24. Appointment of N. Elder Tanner to Replace Pres. Moyle. 1963. Leonard Arrington recorded in his personal journal on Aug. 28, 1972: "A person in a position to know, but who does not wish to be identified told me a story Friday afternoon related to the appointment of Elder [N. Eldon] Tanner as a member of the First Presidency. This person said that after the death of President [Henry D.] Moyle, President McKay had thought about various persons to take his (President Moyle's) place as a suitable person to direct the temporal affairs of the Church. He had also consulted with the Quorum of the Twelve as to a suitable person. According to my informant, a number of persons had recommended Ezra Taft Benson for this position and the Quorum of Twelve concurred in this action and formally approved his name for submission to the conference. According to the informant, President McKay expected to submit his (Elder Benson's) name in the conference the next morning. During the night, however, President McKay had a dream which he considered to be of divine origin which told him that he should appoint Eldon Tanner and submit his name. President McKay heeded this impression and when the names were proposed for sustaining vote, he inserted the name of N. Eldon Tanner to be his second counselor. The Quorum of the Twelve were reportedly as surprised as anyone else at this action." (Leonard J. Arrington, *Confessions of a Mormon Historian: The Diaries of Leonard J. Arrington, 1971-1997, Vol. 1: Church Historian, 1971-75*, edited by Gary James Bergera, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2018, 251.)

25. Infirmities. "By the 1960s there was a growing sense within the church that things were out of control. As McKay grew older tensions among the Apostles increased. 'It's a time of lack of top leadership in the Church which causes no end of problems,' wrote Brigham Young University President Ernest L. Wilkinson in his diary." (Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, *America's Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power*, 1984, p. 58.)

A. "The period when President McKay's health began to decline was another matter. This was a difficult time in church government, but it also marked one of Grandfather's [Hugh B. Brown's] greatest periods of service. As President McKay became increasingly impaired by age, some church functionaries, with allegiances to the radical political right, tried to influence the president in ways that Grandfather, President Tanner, and Elder Harold B. Lee thought unwise and improper. These three men—Grandfather in particular—were often but not always successful in blocking those efforts to influence church policy. This effort took a fearful toll on Grandfather, both physically and in his personal relationships." (*An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown*, edited by Edwin B. Firmage, 1988, 141-42.)

B. Senility. "McKay's mental condition declined in the last five years of his presidency. In July 1965 his secretary Clare Middlemiss confided that he was 'slowly deteriorating' and 'does not remember anything after conferences had with him unless he has a written memorandum on it.' Two months later she commented that McKay's 'partial disability' was the cause of 'unfortunate cross-currents going on among the General Authorities.' In February 1966 several general authorities informed Utah's Mormon senator that 'President McKay is senile.'" (D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 1997, p. 54.)

C. President Losing Control of His Faculties. "Brown and Tanner had become increasingly frustrated with McKay's erratic mental functioning. They knew that the president did not always remember making decisions, sometimes reversed himself for no apparent good reason, and could be too easily swayed to change his mind, much to the detriment, they felt, of the Church's best interests. But they also understood that McKay did not fully appreciate his limitations and resented even the slightest information that he was not always in complete

control of his faculties. In early November 1967, Brown commented during a meeting of the Twelve that 'President McKay is in a weakened condition. His bodily strength is waning. He is not as alert as he was.' Predictably, McKay found the remarks hurtful and asked that they be stricken from the official minutes. 'I am alert,' he said, 'and I know what I am doing.' When he learned that McKay wanted his comments removed, Brown told [Clare] Middlemiss that he believed she had influenced the president to make the objection; but the next day, Brown apologized to her and agreed to the deletion." (Gary James Bergera, "Tensions in David O. McKay's First Presidencies," *Journal of Mormon History*, 33:1 (Spring 2007, 218.)

26. Presidential Access. Clare Middlemiss was President McKay's private secretary from 1935 until his death. As he grew older, she had considerable power in determining who would have access to the President, and she used that authority to the dismay of many. In late 1960, BYU president Ernest L. Wilkinson called on President McKay without a formal appointment. "McKay's secretary, Clare Middlemiss, told Wilkinson that his wife had telephoned and that he was to return her call immediately. Middlemiss suggested that he use the telephone in the hall. 'By the time I got this telephone call through,' Wilkinson remembered, Middlemiss 'had locked the door on me. There was no question that it was purposeful.'" (Wilkinson Journal, 14 Sept. 1960; quoted in Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*, 1985, 381.)

27. Shortcomings. In reviewing *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism*, by Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, Gary James Bergera concludes: "While stressing his admiration for and love of his subject, he nonetheless does not shy away from pointing out and scrutinizing McKay's many 'warts.' From my reading of the book, these include, among others, McKay's cultivation of an attractive, charismatic persona that encouraged near cult-like adoration; his tendency to succumb to the fawning appeals of sycophants; his sometimes basing decisions more on personal relationships than on the informed advice of his own counselors; his tacit encouragement of administrative end-runs; his racial (and occasionally religious) bigotry; and his reluctance to publicly and explicitly condemn—or at least temper—the anti-science rhetoric of Joseph Fielding Smith, the religious dogmatism of Bruce R. McConkie, and the political extremism of Ezra Taft Benson." (Gary James Bergera, "A Book of Revelations," *Sunstone*, September 2005, p. 65.)

A. Church Historian's Concerns. Leonard Arrington, who would be named Church historian in 1972, wrote in 1971, one year after McKay's death: "Nevertheless, President McKay was not without faults. His personal charisma—greater than that of any president since Joseph Smith—led to the development of what might be called a personality cult. . . . The unquestioned adoration of the hundreds and thousands of members, plus his own susceptibility to vanity, reinforced and strengthened the personality cult in the Church. His statements were scripture to almost every member. He was subject to flattery, and there was a tendency during his last years for a group of sycophants to surround him. Some of his appointments would seem to have been influenced by his susceptibility to vanity and flattery. President McKay was also a stubborn person in insisting upon his own way. For many years he had been a second counselor when J. Reuben Clark, Jr. was first counselor—under Presidents Grant and George Albert Smith. President Clark was himself a forceful personality, and tended to 'run the church' during the last years of President Grant's administration and during the George Albert Smith administration. President McKay gave the impression of one who had been frustrated by his relative impotence under President Clark, and, therefore, sought to exhibit his own authority when he became president. Even during his last years when he was infirm and not in a position to be well acquainted with conditions, he often gave the impression of stubbornly insisting upon his prerogatives. . . . President McKay seems to have developed great admiration for other men who 'made it on their own.' He admired fighters, and he admired people who had acquired wealth. He himself had been plagued with financial troubles during his earlier years, and found it difficult to occupy the status he thought he deserved on the allowances which he received as an apostle. He was often in debt, and often humiliated by the necessity of asking the Church to come to his financial rescue. Most of his appointments consisted of men who had acquired large sums of money. He perhaps had unjustified admiration for financiers." (Leonard J. Arrington, *Confessions of a Mormon Historian: The Diaries of Leonard J. Arrington, 1971-1997*, Vol.

1: *Church Historian, 1971-75*, edited by Gary James Bergera, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2018, 90-91.)

B. Major Accomplishments, and Two Unsolved Problems. “Among his most important accomplishments were the following: the building of Brigham Young University to be a great university, the inauguration of student wards and student stakes, the modification of a[n] MIA program to make it more practical in an era when most of the young people went to college. Two problems he failed to solve at a time when they might have been solved as minor problems. One of these was the so-called Negro problem, which threatens to divide the church regardless of the solution eventually worked out. The second is what might be called the problem of John Bircherism in the Church. President McKay would seem to have been capable of avoiding both of these problems, and yet failure to resolve them will make it more difficult for future church leaders to handle them. Considering the universal adoration of President McKay it would seem that he was the right person to have resolved these problems.” (*Ibid.*, 92.)

28. Final Tributes. President McKay died in 1970, at the age of 96. At the time of his death, *Time Magazine* wrote: “He used his power with clear authority, but he was even better known for his gentleness and good humor. Tall and strong-voiced, his amiable face framed by a shock of flowing white hair, McKay was an affable new image of Mormonism to a world that had previously seen the Mormon leaders as dour, dark-suited figures. He was perhaps the first Mormon president to treat non-Mormons as generously as members of his own faith. . . . In his own generous, enthusiastic way, McKay had expanded his church's horizons and involvement far beyond the abilities of any successor to contract them. If he had not completely destroyed Mormon exclusivism, he had certainly tempered it with his own remarkable vision of a much wider, friendlier world.” (*Time Magazine*, Feb. 2, 1970, 49-50.)

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