

tion to civil affairs. Unless that is true I myself object to going into the religious opinions of these people. I do not think Congress has anything to do with that unless their religion connects itself in some way with their civil or political affairs. . . .

Mr. Tayler. . . . Mr. Smith, in what different ways did Joseph Smith, jr., receive revelations?

Mr. Smith. I do not know, sir; I was not there.

Mr. Tayler. Do you place any faith at all in the account of Joseph Smith, jr., as to how he received those revelations?

Mr. Smith. Yes, sir; I do.

Mr. Tayler. How does he say he got them?

Mr. Smith. He does not say.

Mr. Tayler. He does not?

Mr. Smith. Only by the spirit of God.

Mr. Tayler. Only by the spirit of God?

Mr. Smith. Yes, sir.

Mr. Tayler. Did Joseph Smith ever say that God or an angel appeared to him in fact?

Mr. Smith. He did.

Mr. Tayler. That is what I asked you a moment ago.

Mr. Smith. He did.

Mr. Tayler. Did Joseph Smith contend that always there was a visible appearance of the Almighty or of an angel?

Mr. Smith. No sir; he did not.

Mr. Tayler. How otherwise did he claim to receive revelations?

Mr. Smith. By the spirit of the Lord.

Mr. Tayler. And in that way, such revelations as you have received, you have had them?

Mr. Smith. Yes, sir. . . .

\* \* \*

Despite Joseph F. Smith's claim that he was "pleased to have another opportunity of presenting the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ before the world," as this testimony shows, he was actually vague and cursory, sometimes misunderstanding questions—apparently deliberately—and passing up numerous opportunities to deliver short sermons on Mormon doctrine, the First Vision, the nature of revelation, and prophetic authority. And despite the *New York Sun*'s comment on his flashes of "temper," hindsight makes it obvious that Smith was surprisingly equitable, not a trait he was particularly known

for in his early life.<sup>40</sup> The fact that he did not vary from impeccably genteel deportment is some measure of his control during this ordeal. Clearly, this testimony required his most concentrated effort and rigorously gentlemanly etiquette.

Significantly, rather than perceiving this line of theological questioning to be a missionary opportunity, Smith made little extra effort to clarify the misunderstandings that would have been inevitable in any case as the attorney and witness tried to communicate the philosophical underpinnings of their differing religious assumptions. This line of questioning was of great interest to Latter-day Saints back home in Utah but probably less so to average Americans, many of whom doubtless considered the possibility of conversing with God an absurdity, whether in the physical or spiritual realm. Subsequent witnesses questioned on theological points—among them future apostle James E. Talmage—were also uncooperative with the committee.<sup>41</sup> They seem to have been offended by prying and somewhat voyeuristic questions into Church teachings, apparently feeling, like Bailey, that these matters had no business in a senatorial hearing.<sup>42</sup>

Whether by instinct or design, Smith's approach acted to Smoot's benefit. Smith had called the Provo businessman to the Quorum of the Twelve in part because of Smoot's business acumen and political activism—not because of his Church experience.<sup>43</sup> When discussions turned to theology, Smoot was in over his head, a fact rather painfully evident from Smoot's confused testimony toward the end of

---

<sup>40</sup>Bruce A. Van Orden, "Joseph F. Smith," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1350. Scott Kenney, "The Trials of Young Joseph F. Smith," Sunstone Symposium address, <http://www.saintswithouthalos.html.jfstrials1.phtml> (accessed July 17, 2005).

<sup>41</sup>For Talmage's lengthy testimony, see *Smoot Hearings*, 3:4–129; 400–436.

<sup>42</sup>After the Smoot hearings, Smoot's friend Senator Albert Jeremiah Beveridge (R-Indiana) expressed a similar negative reaction on the Senate floor: The hearings, he said, had been held "at enormous expense to the American people . . . over \$26,000 of the people's money has been spent on the attempt to ruin this man." *Congressional Record*, February 20, 1907, 3410.

<sup>43</sup>Heath, "Reed Smoot," 70–73.