



Lesson Twelve: Crisis in the Ranks

Inquiry Questions:

- Have you and a friend ever disagreed about something that you both felt strongly about?
- How did the two of you handle the disagreement?
- How did it affect your friendship?

Historical Context: Brief Bios of Jason W. Briggs and Zenos H. Gurley Jr.

Jason W. Briggs was an elder in the church during Joseph Smith Jr.'s life. He assisted in founding the Beloit, Wisconsin congregation and led it during the crisis of leadership after Joseph Smith's death, affiliating briefly with Brigham Young, James Strang, and William Smith, before waiting for Joseph Smith III. He was ordained one of the first Apostles of the Reorganization and served until 1886, when he withdrew from the church. He lived several more years after, passing away in Colorado in 1899.

Zenos H. Gurley Jr. was the son and namesake of one of the Reorganization's early founders. Destined to make a name in his own right, Gurley was ordained an Apostle in 1873 completing multiple missions to Utah. His view on some church issues differed from Joseph III and conflict arose. He resigned from the church in 1879, but was reinstated soon thereafter. It was to be short-lived, he withdrew permanently in 1886 for "refusing to accept the revelations of Joseph Smith as a rule of faith and practice." In 1910 Gurley joined the Christian Church, but two years later he passed away at the age of 70.

Pre-Class Reading:

Joseph Smith III: A Pragmatic Prophet by Roger Launius, Chapter Twelve: Crisis in the Ranks

Discussion Questions:

The chapter opens with an explanation of the tests which Briggs and Gurley put scripture through.

- What were the questions they asked of the different scriptures to ensure validity?
- Was it positively accepted by the church at the time? Why or why not?
- Do you think this is a good approach to scripture?

As you consider conflict in the congregation and dissension within church leadership:

- What is the role of dissent?
- How acceptable are dissenting viewpoints in the Reorganization?
- What is a benefit to allowing dissenting viewpoints? Is it purely situational?



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Zenos Gurley demanded that after a series of open discussions, the Reorganization issue definitive statements on all positions, and that the members adhere to those statements from that point on.

- How did the church respond?
- In what ways does a church benefit from having standard beliefs in which all believe the same?
- How does it hurt a church?
- What do you perceive are the pros and cons of not having a formal statement of beliefs?

Class Activity:

Look up the word “dissent” in a dictionary, if available. Discuss a time when each of you has dissented from the majority. It can be in a church, work, recreational, or family setting. How did you feel being in the minority? Did the situation end the way you wished? Did it end the way you expected?

(If you cannot find a dictionary use the following definition from dictionary.com: “to differ in sentiment or opinion, esp. from the majority; withhold assent; disagree (often fol. by *from*): *Two of the justices dissented from the majority decision.*”)

Reading Assignment:

Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet, Chapter Thirteen: The Golden Years

Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet by Roger Launius and a variety of historical reprints are available at www.redbrickstore.com. All Red Brick Store purchases help preserve Community of Christ historic sites.

Additional information and opportunities to help preserve and share Community of Christ history may be found on the Historic Sites Foundation’s website: www.HistoricSitesFoundation.org