

Newel K. Young

Some Thoughts by Robert N. Reynolds

Several tributes have been recorded to recognize the extraordinary life of grandfather Newel K. Young. Of the many that have been given none is more on point and meaningful than that of his educational colleague and official superior Dr. M. Lynn Bennion. As one who experienced another -- academically, spiritually, philosophically, and perhaps even politically within their church hierarchy, Bennion keenly understood and appreciated his "brother," the man Newel K. Young. He was honored to speak at his funeral and would have been disappointed if not asked.¹



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At the time of Bennion's eulogy on 20 August 1956, only a few of Newel's descendents were in a position to understand or comprehend and appreciate the full dimension of his character or his academic mind. Newel's life had been almost that of an itinerant preacher and many of his children could only say, as did Kimball, his fourth son from the second wife, that recalling his Dad was difficult "*because I really didn't see much of my father growing up.*"² Likewise, daughter Josephine remarked "*We never did get very close to Dad as we didn't see much of him. When he did come to visit, it seemed like he was always going somewhere to give a talk.*"³

As a practicing Mormon polygamist Newel had to maintain the lowest of low profiles after the church's second manifesto of 1904 and his return to the states in 1911 -- for grandpa was truly an anomaly of sorts, being a church educator and a sometimes critical and outspoken one at that.

1 Two of Newel's close personal friends and academic colleagues went on to accomplish public achievements and prominent careers in the education field. One was M. Lynn Bennion who received his Ed. D in 1936 from the University of California, Berkeley. He was Supervisor of LDS Church Seminaries from 1935-1945 and after became the Superintendent of the Salt Lake City School District until 1969. From then he was the Executive Secretary for the Society of Utah School Superintendents until 1981. The other colleague was Sterling M. McMurrin. As a young man McMurrin was interested in religion and philosophy. He earned a bachelor's degree in history and political science in 1936 and a master's in philosophy in 1937 from the University of Utah. For the next seven years, he taught in the church's seminary and institute program. In 1939, McMurrin became the director of the LDS Institute of Religion across the street from the University of Arizona. For more than fifty years, Sterling M. McMurrin served as one of the preeminent intellectual voices of the LDS community. From his beginnings as an Institute of Religion instructor in Arizona to his position as U.S. Commissioner of Education in the Kennedy administration, and from a professor of philosophy at the University of Utah to U.S. Envoy to Iran, he showed by example how educational, religious, and government institutions can maintain high ideals. <http://www.lds-mormon.com/moc.shtml>

From Newel's teaching career and friendship with Bennion and McMurrin we have tangible records that provide valuable insight into his life. From Bennion it is in the form of his 1956 Eulogy or funeral sermon. From Sterling M. McMurrin we have a lengthy written composition constructed by Newel's granddaughter Evelyn Young Jimerson from memories recorded on a 1994 cassette tape by McMurrin in response to her request for information concerning his friendship with her grandfather, Newel Knight Young.

2 From a tape made by Kimball L. Young, August 24, 1991 for his niece, Bobbi Foster Railsback Chaffin.

3 As referenced in an email from Bobbie Chaffin to Robert N. Reynolds, August 03, 2004.

During the period of his teaching career from 1911, when he brought his two families from Mexico until he retired in 1942, Newel K. Young was assigned to at least fourteen different teaching locations. Moreover, summers were spent attending seminars and schools to improve his educational skills. Moving as frequently as he was compelled to do and maintaining two households in separate locations, this loving but mostly "absent father" of nineteen children, was spread very thin during his academic years. Not long after his retirement he began losing his memory. His death certificate in 1956 noted that his death at age 78 was caused in part by a cerebral vascular hemorrhage, and senile brain disease with chronic brain syndrome.

Of his many academic friends Dr. M. Lynn Bennion knew "what made him tick" probably better than most. In his Eulogy of Newel he referred to the Brigham Young University "Summer Session" held at Aspen Grove in 1937 (8), and then from memories tape recorded by Sterling M. McMurrin in 1994, we get this insightful story of the group being instructed by a General Authority of the church:

It was then that J. Reuben Clark made a very famous address; I think he read all of it, but at least he read, most of it; It was printed in the Improvement Era and may have been printed also in the Deseret News. It showed up in the Improvement Era as quite a famous statement because in it he really laid down the law about believing one hundred percent of the church doctrine; that there were no exceptions to be allowed; that if there was: anyone in the employ of the church as a religion teacher (and these were all religion teachers present) who didn't believe the church doctrine one hundred percent, he should get out now rather than wait to be kicked out. Those aren't his exact words, of course, but nevertheless, that was the whole idea. So after this session that evening, there was a big confab around the campfire, and quite a number of people showed up. In the course of the evening Newel K. said, "I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm going over right now to see Lynn (He was referring to Lynn Bennion, the seminary boss) and I'm going to resign !" When he returned he told us that he had resigned.

Now this is quite interesting because Lynn has told me on any number of occasions that whenever Newel K. got upset with things like that, he would come in and resign. And of course, Lynn wouldn't accept his resignation. In the latter part of the forties, when Lynn took the position of Superintendent of Schools of Salt Lake and was no longer to be head of the seminaries, he said he called Newel K. into his office and told him, "Now Newel, I am leaving this job and there will be somebody else appointed to take my place, and you're not to resign anymore because the next time you resign, they'll accept your resignation. You're not to resign anymore!"

This is a great story and one grandpa would enjoy. The only problem with it is that Newel retired from teaching on July 1, 1942 and M. Lynn Bennion did not leave his Seminary position to become Superintendent of Salt Lake City Schools until 1945.⁴ Sterling M. McMurrin was 80

4 <http://www.archives.state.ut.us/research/agencyhistories/1089.html>

years old when he recorded his tape referenced here in 1994. He died in 1996.

Bennion's thoughtful remarks delivered on Newel's behalf in 1956 became an important record for Newel's descendents (including some of his children) to use as a measurement of his life and stature. So credible was Bennion, as a professional superior and friend, that several of his observations have become established references of praise in the family. These kind words denoted unusual moral courage, a wonderful sense of humor, a constant cheerful attitude, and a critical but helpful mind, and much, much more. Some of Bennions remarks, while not well understood, have served as a stimulus for some of us to research and learn more about this beloved grandparent. We have found that it is possible to add to a more comprehensive picture of the man by carefully studying his thoughts, expressions and the love he poured into his writings and letters together with the testimonials of his friends. This grandson feels a combination of joy, humility, wonderment and hope by what I see.

-- Robert N. Reynolds, Littleton, Colorado, 2010