



Type: Book Chapter

---

## Modern Temple Worship through the Eyes of John A. Widtsoe, a Twentieth-Century Apostle

Author(s): Alan K. Parrish

Source: *The Temple in Time and Eternity*

Editor(s): Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks

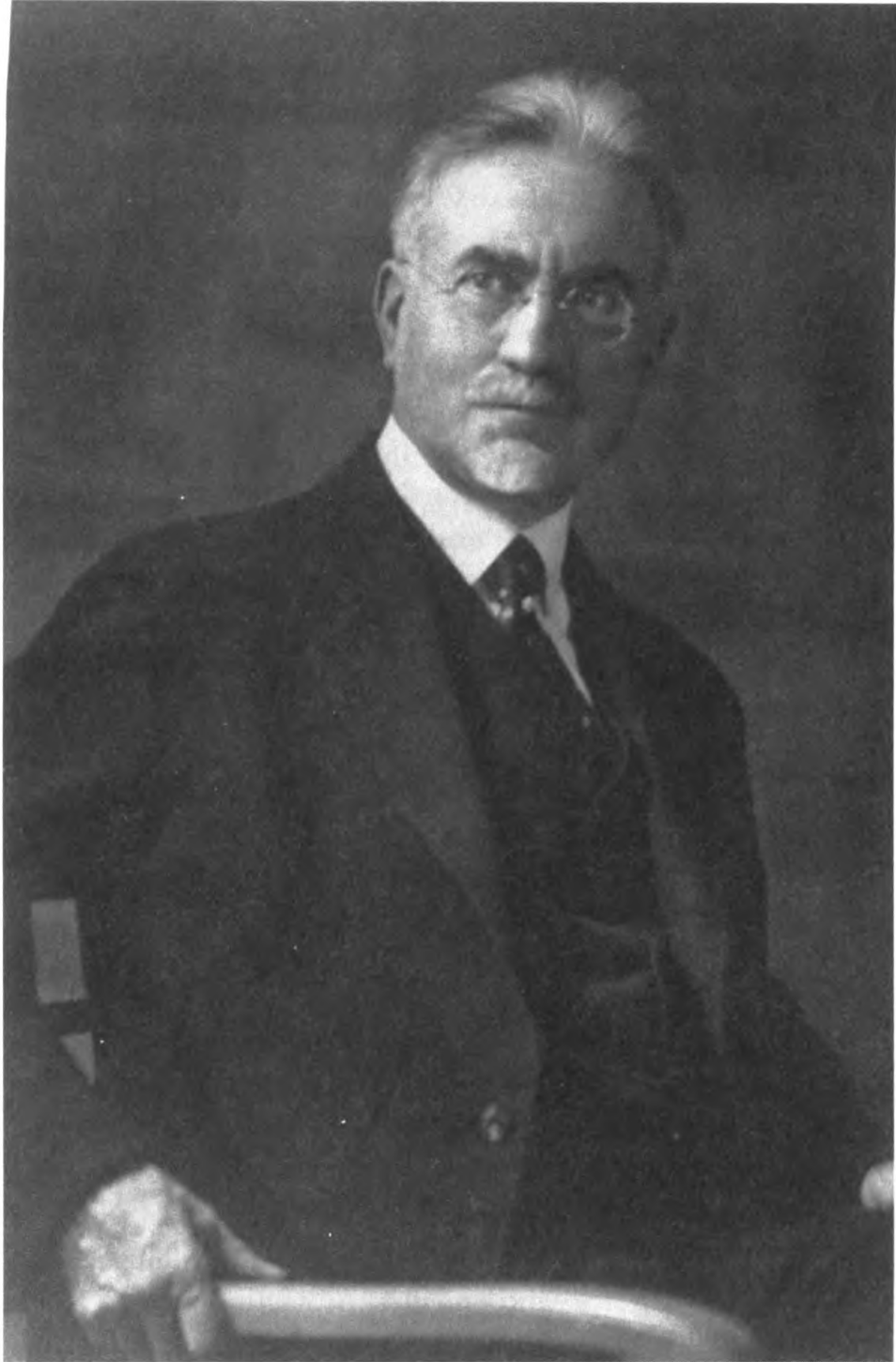
Published: Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Brigham Young University, 1999

Page(s): 142–182

---



The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) existed as a California non-profit corporation from 1979 until about 2006, when it was allowed to go into involuntary liquidation, at which time copyrights held by FARMS and its authors and/or editors reverted or may have reverted back to their original author and/or editors. This chapter is archived by permission of editors Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks.



*Figure 7. John A. Widtsoe's testimony of temple work began at Harvard in 1892. Sixty years of hallowed service generated immeasurable contributions to the work performed in LDS temples today. Photo used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, all rights reserved. Photo no. C-92 Box 1 Folder 1.*

---

CHAPTER 7

---

MODERN TEMPLE WORSHIP THROUGH  
THE EYES OF JOHN A. WIDTSOE,  
A TWENTIETH-CENTURY APOSTLE

*Alan K. Parrish*

**John A. Widtsoe's Temple Conversion**

Since the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was restored in 1835 nearly one hundred exemplary men have been called to the office of apostle. From that noble group, John A. Widtsoe and Joseph Fielding Smith have been the most deeply involved in the developments of genealogy, family history, and modern temple work. Their contributions are well documented in the many lessons, addresses, books, and articles that detail the developments of that branch of the church's mission. They also dominate the recent centennial history of the Genealogical Society of the Church.<sup>1</sup> Widtsoe's attachment to modern temple work steadily deepened throughout his life, even though he was one of Utah's foremost citizens with unusually heavy demands on his time and abilities. Building on his distinguished training at Harvard and Göttingen (Germany), he became a teacher and scientist of international renown. While still a young man, he became president first of the Utah Agricultural College, 1907–1916, and then of the

University of Utah, 1916–1921, before being ordained an apostle of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That modern temple work rose to such prominence amid the strains of his demanding life is compelling evidence of his conversion to it. This chapter reviews his teachings about modern temple worship and his activities associated with facilitating its efficient accomplishment.

In an address to the Genealogical Society, following a historic six-year mission to Europe, Widtsoe reminisced over an early acquaintance that kindled his interest in temple service. He was a student at Harvard in 1892 when Susa Young Gates visited Boston on a genealogical research trip. Her remarks, public and private, gave an emphasis to temple work that profoundly shaped his life. Five years later Widtsoe married Gates's daughter Leah after finding more common interests that grew out of that same research trip. Widtsoe recalled of Susa Young Gates:

I first met Sister Gates in 1893 [1892], in Boston, Massachusetts. She was there then to gather genealogy for the Young family, and she discovered a number of things with respect to that genealogy which has made the extension of that family record possible. Ten years or more after that time, illness overtook Sister Gates. She was ready to die, or at least we thought so. A servant of the Lord, later the President of the Council of the Twelve, declared that her time to go had come, and then, under the power of inspiration, he said in substance, "No, the edict of death had been revoked, on the condition that you dedicate the remainder of your life to the cause of salvation for the dead." She accepted life and the challenge, and as far as I know, and as Brother Smith has expressed himself, she never faltered in helping to establish this work. She was the one who turned my interest in the direction of genealogy. Her fiery faith lighted my faith and gave me courage to undertake the work.<sup>2</sup>

Widtsoe developed strong feelings that the most vital element in modern temple work was expressed in the words of Moroni and Malachi when they spoke of turning the hearts of children and fathers to each other. Mutual concern for the ultimate happiness of each family member was the divine intent behind gathering family data and performing sacred temple ordinances. It was so in Widtsoe's own family, and in his early years he had a rich conversion experience to temple work. His mother, Anna, and his Aunt Petroline spent almost a year in Norway collecting their family genealogy. After finishing the essential temple ordinances for almost one hundred ancestors with whom they had established a direct link, some discouragement set in and interest waned because they were unable to establish further adequate relationships. That disappointment, however, was soon overcome by a remarkable spiritual experience that Widtsoe remembered to the end of his life. He wrote:

One Sunday morning when I awoke I had a distinct impulse to examine the book the sisters had brought with them, containing the list of blood relatives that they had collected. Obedient as I have always been to spiritual messages, I sought out the book, and studied it for five hours. I found that morning the key which has enabled me to secure thousands of desired names.<sup>3</sup>

Widtsoe became an ardent believer in divine assistance that comes to diligent temple workers: "I feel so strongly that the work of the dead must be done in the very best manner possible, but I have no fear about ultimately finding means of any nature whatsoever with which to accomplish the work."<sup>4</sup> Despite the work he had done for his family, Widtsoe shared with a fellow officer in the Genealogical Society his fear of inadequacy: "The limitations in my life [were] such as to make it difficult for me to do the

amount of temple work that my long list of dead required of me.”<sup>5</sup> Because Widtsoe was not able to do all the work for his deceased ancestors, he enlisted the service of others to help him. To one of them, he wrote: “I have been so caught by circumstance[s] the last few years as to make it very difficult to do the temple work that is really required of me, and this generous action of yours has done much to make amends for that which I myself have failed to do.”<sup>6</sup>

A shared love between ancestors and descendants is the heartbeat in binding the entire human family to eternal life in the kingdom of the Father. To obtain it will take more time than this life for most. Agency and opposition, the elements that guide man’s progression, require time to master and perfect. The opportunity of perfection extends beyond mortality; thereby, the doctrine of universal salvation became the foundation of modern temple emphasis.

### **The Doctrine of Universal Salvation**

Widtsoe understood the intimate connection between the powers of heaven and modern temple work. It was his testimony that temple work is the very center of the plan God devised for the happiness and progression of all his children. Although there are many intricacies in God’s plan, underlying it all is the doctrine of universal salvation. This doctrine extends the blessings of eternal life to all mankind if they choose to accept it, but that choice, assured by the doctrine of agency, remains with the individual. To Widtsoe, this doctrine was the root out of which the work of ancient and modern temples grew and the effectual core of the restoration of gospel doctrines through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Work for the salvation of the dead is of supreme importance in the Prophet’s teachings. Widtsoe relied on the assurances of Joseph Smith that without

turning our hearts to temple ordinances in redeeming our dead kinsmen, we cannot be made perfect (see D&C 128:18). The Prophet further said, "The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead."<sup>7</sup> He also warned that, "Those Saints who neglect it in behalf of their deceased relatives, do it at the peril of their own salvation."<sup>8</sup> Widtsoe himself emphasized the significance of work for the dead:

The basic reason for the importance of the work for the dead, is that the Lord would save all his children. The plan of salvation is absolutely universal. The work of the Lord will not be completed until all who come on earth have had a full and fair chance to accept or reject the gospel. The power to do so remains with the dead in the spirit world, where the gospel will be preached to them.

However, the possible blessings of salvation are conditioned upon obedience to the principles and ordinances of the plan. The dead as well as the living must comply with the requirements for salvation. These requirements are of a two-fold nature. Those that can be met in the life after this, in heaven, and those that must be performed on earth. Faith and repentance may be developed in the spirit world. Baptism with water (strictly an element of earth), a necessary ordinance of the gospel, can be performed only on earth.

This makes the dead dependent on us, the living, for help. Since the dead cannot themselves submit to ordinances, which are specifically of the earth, yet by divine edict are requisite for entrance into the kingdom of heaven, the only thing that can be done, since the law must not be broken, is for someone living on earth to perform these ordinances in behalf of the dead. Such vicarious work, of course, becomes effective only when the dead accept the work thus done for them. This provides

a way, by which, with the help of the living, the faithful dead can attain their full destiny.<sup>9</sup>

Continual progression after death and vicarious ordinance work, the nature of most of the work performed in modern temples, were addressed by Widtsoe:

Temple work rests on the principle of the Great Plan that all must be saved, or at least given the opportunity of salvation. Those who have been unable to accept the Gospel ordinances on earth, are not necessarily denied the privileges of membership in the Church or refused the blessings which come to those who accept the truth. For such dead persons vicarious work must be done in all the essential ordinances of the Church. Vicarious work is not new, for it has been practiced in various forms from the first day. . . . The work of Jesus Christ was essentially vicarious, for he atoned for the act of Adam.<sup>10</sup>

The scriptural passage “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39) echoes through all of Widtsoe’s teachings on temple work. Because that work extends through all eternity, temples are universally the shrines of God’s plan for the eternal life of man and the workstations for bringing about his work and glory. Widtsoe taught that salvation for the dead is the great keystone in the gospel arch that holds all other parts of the gospel together: “We shall not progress very far here or hereafter, until we are tied to our fathers back through our natural family lines to Father Adam. We cannot move on to our full exaltation until this is done. Let everyone help in this work.”<sup>11</sup> Widtsoe further spoke about the worth of redeeming the souls of the dead in furthering one’s own eternal development and advancement. A seldom-considered, yet impassioned viewpoint concerning their worth was revealed when he wrote:



The foundation of this work is love, born and nurtured and developed in sacrifice. The worth of a soul now becomes great to me. I go into the temple, and give a half day to opening the doors of salvation for a dead person; or I spend many precious hours searching for, planning, gathering genealogy in order that he and his brothers—my brothers—may have those saving ordinances done for them by my fellow-workers who have access to the Temples of the Lord. I only know him by name, and never shall know him nearer on this earth; but out of my own understanding love of the cause, no matter how humble it may be, and out of my willingness to sacrifice to prove that love, I take a step toward the likeness of my Father in heaven. It is a tremendous thing—this soul for whom I labour. Without that soul I might not find the same opportunity of approaching the likeness of my Father. That soul is of immense worth to me. . . .

. . . A soul becomes of indescribable value, since it offers a means of service by which we ourselves may rise to the position and power of godhood.

The worth of a soul can best be measured in its effect upon man's realization of his highest ideal. Without my brother I cannot attain my highest. Without loving him I cannot look forward to the highest place. Without sacrificing for him I cannot hope to win the fullest recognition. Without him I cannot achieve my likeness to the Lord. We are bound together, one great human family, moving on to a glorious destiny.<sup>12</sup>

Encompassed in God's plan of universal salvation is every man's upward progression toward eternal life. The divine desire of a loving Heavenly Father for the eternal life of every child is unquestioned. That very desire underscores the divine worth of every soul born into mortality, for each is bound up in the love of an infinite Redeemer who fulfilled the sacred atonement. Further, when men

and women accepted the great plan of God in the grand council in the premortal world, they became parties to the salvation of every person under that plan. Thus the immortality and eternal life of every man and woman became the work and glory of each mortal brother and sister.

Because temples are a vital link between the here and the hereafter, Widtsoe taught that they are places for cementing eternal relationships in the world to come and in allowing every soul to receive the great blessings associated with his or her highest hopes in eternity. Through temple work, the great mysteries of eternity are laid open to the minds of men and women who prepare themselves for the revelations of God given there. Anyone who has the opportunity to participate in the divine work performed in modern temples and refrains from doing so deprives him- or herself of some of God's greatest blessings. Widtsoe emphasized the missed opportunities of not performing temple work when he explained:

The instructions and all other parts of the endowment ceremonies are of such a nature as to exalt the spirit of man. The sealing powers of the priesthood, exercised in the temples, uniting parents and children, and husband and wife, for time and eternity, give indescribable satisfaction to the soul. The vast meaning of the temple ordinances opens the human understanding to the mysteries of eternity. . . .

Those who fail to receive their endowments and sealings, who enter into marriage outside of the temple, are losers beyond expression. Those who have had their endowments but who do not work for the dead fail to receive the refreshing of their souls that comes by repeated communion with the Spirit of God so abundantly manifested in the temple.<sup>13</sup>

In a 1921 address in the Assembly Hall on Temple

Square, while serving as president of the University of Utah, Widtsoe described man's voluntary choice to place himself under the plan, to fulfill part of the plan by performing temple work, and to participate in the onward and upward progression encompassing the universal salvation of mankind. He taught that through modern temple work both man's premortal and mortal existences are connected to his future potential for exaltation:

To understand the meaning of temple worship, it is necessary to understand the plan of salvation and its relation to temple worship. The human race were "in the beginning with God," and were created spiritual beings in a day before the[ir] arrival upon this earth. Mankind is here because of its acceptance of the Plan of Salvation, and satisfactory pre-existent lives. We have won the right to be here; we have not been forced to come here; we have won our place upon the earth. We shall pass into another sphere of existence, and shall continue upward and onward forever and forever, if we obey the high laws of eternal existence.

The plan of salvation for eternal beings involves the principle that God's work with respect to this earth will not be complete until every soul has been taught the Gospel and has been offered the privilege of accepting salvation and the accompanying great blessings which the Lord has in store for his children. Until that is done the work is unfinished.<sup>14</sup>

Behind the various beliefs surrounding eternal life and universal salvation of mankind lay some of the greatest religious battles. Such beliefs were at the heart of the religious excitement that Joseph Smith encountered around Palmyra, New York, the very spark that led him into the Sacred Grove. Widtsoe described the tension over this doctrine as it festered in Joseph's youth:

The vicious doctrine had been preached for generations that only a few men and women were destined to be saved in the presence of God. In that battle, questions were asked. *Is there power of repentance beyond the grave? At death does nothing remain of the old life? Is memory blotted out? Is the power of free will then a thing of the past?* Around such questions, asked by intelligent men, a great battle was waged. That was after the Lord had turned the key, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, and laid bare the doctrine of universal salvation, which declares that all who repent, either here or in the hereafter, may achieve salvation in one or the other of the great glories that the Lord has prepared for His children.<sup>15</sup>

Widtsoe also taught: “The fact that such corruptions of ordinances and ceremonies have always existed is a strong evidence of the continuity of temple worship, under the Priesthood, from the days of Adam.”<sup>16</sup> He made further reference to this in his Assembly Hall address:

Let me suggest that the reason why temple building and temple worship have been found in every age, on every hand, and among every people, is because the Gospel in its fullness was revealed to Adam, and that all religions and religious practices are therefore derived from the remnants of the truth given to Adam and transmitted by him to the patriarchs. The ordinances of the temple in so far as then necessary, were given, no doubt, in those early days, and very naturally corruptions of them have been handed down [through] the ages. Those who understand the eternal nature of the gospel—planned before the foundations of the earth—understand clearly why all history seems to revolve about the building and use of temples.<sup>17</sup>

The mysteries that lie behind the means of man’s attaining eternal life make up the mystique of the world’s temples, a fascination that has intrigued mankind for centuries.

The work of temples centers on the duties of men and women in this world and the influence of their labors on the degrees of glory to be attained in the worlds beyond. Thus temples are an undisputed intersection between the mortal world and the worlds of glory that extend even to God's own habitation. The varied views of man's immortal salvation are evident in the work of the world's temples. Such temples, from whatever century or sect of religious thought, were raised in acknowledgment of God and his plan for the eternal life of mankind. The great shrines built by men throughout the ages connect ancient and modern temple work and provide evidence that obtaining eternal life is the shared duty of mortal kinsmen. Over the ages, men have tried to maintain the correct form and meaning of revealed temple ordinances, even at times when God had withdrawn the necessary power and guidance for correct performance. These attempts in all ages gave rise to the corruption of temple ordinances. Awareness of this corruption sheds important light on the history of revealed temple work and is essential to any consideration of modern temple work.

### **Some Historical Developments in Modern Temple Work**

The seeds Susa Young Gates planted in Widtsoe developed early roots. Throughout his busy academic career, many years prior to his apostolic appointment, Widtsoe maintained a constant vigilance in matters of modern temple work. The Utah Genealogical Society was organized a few months after his graduation from Harvard in 1894. He followed the society closely for many years and was an active participant by 1910, when their publication, the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, began. At that time he was on the Committee on Preparation of Genealogical and

Historical Papers, Lectures, etc., chaired by his brother, Osbourne.<sup>18</sup> On 6 October 1910, a paper written by Widtsoe for the quarterly meeting of the society was read by his brother while John was in Washington, D.C., on business for the Agricultural College. In the address, John described some key theological elements embodied in the work of the society that culminated in vicarious temple ordinances. He lucidly described God's plan for the exaltation of man as an ongoing, upward spiral. He also described the restoration of priesthood keys that ushered in the sacred temple ordinances to be administered before the sons of Levi could make their offering as prophesied by John the Baptist (see D&C 13:1). Widtsoe taught that their offering was based on the restoration of modern temple work:

Dr. Widtsoe declared that the life of man began with loving sacrifice, and received its crowning mission in the work of redemption for his dead kindred. The mystic allusion in the Doctrine and Covenants which refers to the time when the sons of Levi will offer an offering in righteousness would be clear and beautiful in the light of the principle of vicarious salvation; for the sons of Levi would offer upon the altar, which the Prophet Joseph Smith declared was the acceptable offering in righteousness—the books containing the records of their dead, who had received vicarious salvation at their hands. Man's endeavor throughout the history of the world has been a constant search for joy. Whatever his work, however diligently he pursues one line of endeavor or another, the purpose is always the same—the circular line of upward progress leading him ever back to the quest for joy. As all other activities in the great and grand plan of the world work by upward evolution, so the course of God is an eternal round of love.<sup>19</sup>

In 1915, at the request of David O. McKay, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, Widtsoe wrote a lesson manual that became the Melchizedek Priesthood quorum textbook for that year. In a lesson on temple work, he wrote of temple ordinances and symbols performed on earth in tandem with ordinances and realities accomplished in heaven:

The earthly ordinances of the Gospel are themselves only reflections of heavenly ordinances. For instance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost and temple work are merely earthly symbols of realities that prevail throughout the universe; but, they are symbols of truths that must be recognized if the Great Plan is to be fulfilled. The acceptance of these earthly symbols is part and parcel of correct earth life, but being earthly symbols they are distinctly of the earth, and cannot be accepted elsewhere than on earth.<sup>20</sup>

In several addresses Widtsoe discussed the instrumental role of the Prophet Joseph Smith in restoring modern temple work and the thoroughgoing importance he attached to it. Almost the first and last interests in the administrative ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith centered on the building of temples. From the dedication of the temple site in Independence shortly after the church was organized to the preparations for the temple in Nauvoo just before his death, Joseph held a constant vision of the importance of building temples and getting temple work underway. Joseph's attention to the dedication of temple sites and his many revelations about temples all point to his deep understanding of the necessity of temple work and the redemption of the dead.<sup>21</sup>

The main concern of the Prophet Joseph Smith in the restoration of the Gospel in these latter days was the

founding, building, and completion of temples in which the ordinances “hid from before the foundation of the world” might be given. In fact, the Lord declared repeatedly to the Prophet that unless temples were built and used, the plan of salvation could neither be in full operation nor fully accomplished.<sup>22</sup>

Widtsoe taught that the revelations Joseph received and the work he caused to be performed in early temples indicate the hand of the Lord in restoring temple work to his children.

Widtsoe studied the inspired teachings of Joseph Smith throughout his lifetime and became the church’s leading scholar on the revelations of the Prophet as recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants. In addition to the first extensive concordance on the Doctrine and Covenants, Widtsoe wrote two books and many articles about the Prophet; through it all he shared the Prophet’s enthusiasm for the fundamental role of temple work. In an address to the Genealogical Society nearly a year before his call to the Twelve, he declared:

For myself, I can simply say that I doubt whether association with any other organization would give me greater joy than this one, because it seems to me that the work in charge of the Genealogical Society is the very keystone of the Gospel arch. If the work entrusted to us in this organization is well done, the Lord’s work is safe, and will go onward, according to the will of the Lord; but if it be poorly done or slighted, the work of the Lord to that degree will be hindered.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the necessity of the sacred ordinances performed in the temples, Widtsoe had a strong testimony of personal revelations received there. He learned this firsthand numerous times. One particularly valuable insight illustrates the kind of revelation available. “For seven-



ral years, under a Federal grant with my staff of workers we had gathered thousands of data in the field of soil moisture; but I could not extract any general law running through them. I gave up at last. My wife and I went to the temple that day to forget the failure. In the third endowment room, out of the unseen, came the solution, which has long since gone into print."<sup>24</sup> Such revelations were answers to the greatest problems that vexed the lives of righteous men and women. Another statement illustrates the depth of this belief:

I have spent my life in endeavoring to save souls, chiefly the souls of young people. As a school teacher, that has been my responsibility. My own children were nearly all taken from me, and that made it important that I devote myself to the children of other people. I have had many experiences in life, having been in public service all my life since I was a lad. And I want to tell you, as my individual testimony, that I know no sweeter joy, I know of nothing that has given me more assistance of spirit, more courage to go on in life, than to try to make use of my fellow men in saving my own soul, by helping them save theirs. It is the sweetest work one can be engaged in. . . . I have had so many experiences, both in and out of the temple, in seeking the names of my own dead, in gathering books for the genealogical library, that I know that the powers of heaven follow the person who unselfishly gives himself to this work, as perhaps no other class of workers within the Church.<sup>25</sup>

Those who enter the temple to perform a service for the dead may be the recipients of blessings and revelations as a consequence of that service. "That is the gift that comes to those who enter the temple properly, because it is a place where revelations may be expected. I bear you my personal testimony that this is so."<sup>26</sup> Further,

Does it mean that once in a while God may come into the temples, and that once in a while the pure in heart may see God there; or does it mean the larger thing, that the pure in heart who go into the temples, may, there, by the Spirit of God, always have a wonderfully rich communion with God? I think that is what it means to me and to you and to most of us.<sup>27</sup>

### **Apostolic Leadership and Teachings**

Though he had been a stalwart and able contributor to the Genealogical Society for many years before his call to the Twelve, Widtsoe was able to devote more time and attention to it as one of the duties of his apostolic appointment. Bearing the apostolic mantle, his spiritual conviction of modern temple work grew even deeper. Soon after his call to the Twelve, he was made a director of the Genealogical Society. As an apostle he carried a stronger driving influence on the policies and directions the society would take. After a few months as one of the Twelve, Widtsoe shared with his longtime friend Maude May Babcock a glimpse of the significance he attached to the restoration of temple work begun with the Prophet Joseph Smith:

I haven't the slightest doubt that unseen forces all about us are guiding us into the proper performance of the important work for the dead. In fact, the longer I study the Gospel of Jesus Christ the more convinced I am that salvation for the dead is the cementing principal which holds together all the other doctrinal divisions of the Church. . . .

. . . It seems to me that [the] spirit of temple work is growing by leaps and bounds among the people.<sup>28</sup>

Widtsoe's experience in the state college and university set him apart as an unusually adroit administrator. As an

apostle this had a substantial impact. In 1995, in commemoration of the one-hundred-year anniversary of the Utah Genealogical Society, a detailed history was published by three reputable historians. Of Widtsoe's appointment, they noted: "A respected scholar and academician, Widtsoe brought broad perspective and foresight into guiding the direction of the society for the thirty years he served on the board."<sup>29</sup>

### **Origin of the Temple Index Bureau**

In 1921 a substantial and divisive problem arose because of duplication in research efforts and ordinance work. Harry H. Russell, an energetic servant in the library of the Genealogical Society, became the leading voice in the urgency of the duplication problem. An incident from his own temple activity illustrates the magnitude of the problem. Being one of the most ardent research and ordinance workers in the church, Russell was progressing well with work on one of his family lines. After spending 360 days in performing the proxy ordinances for those ancestors, he discovered that other members of his family were doing work on that same family line in St. George. Elated by the discovery of further family involvement, he quickly arranged a trip to St. George to celebrate and compare notes: "To his dismay, he discovered that they had the same book and had been doing work for the same names he had done in the Salt Lake Temple. His training as an accountant and businessman led him to quickly calculate the hours lost if such duplications were taking place in all the Church's temples."<sup>30</sup> Though Russell was one of the church's most conscientious genealogists, he refused, at least for a significant time, to perform further endowments for his own ancestors, though he continued his work as a temple officiator.

Widtsoe reported similar aggravations among other diligent church members:

I heard of a sister recently who said she had quit doing Temple work because she had just expended \$500 in Temple work only to find afterward that someone had preceded her in doing it. She became discouraged. Another sister expressed herself along the same lines for the same reasons. This should not be, but we should strive to overcome such possibilities. . . . I may say also in this connection that a plan is being devised, in connection with the Genealogical Society, to reduce the possibility of duplication by a card index system containing the names of those whose work has been done, and which will be valuable, and available to everyone who is interested.<sup>31</sup>

Attempts to resolve this problem began in the 1890s, but it wasn't until Widtsoe chaired the society's Activities and Programs Committee that the problem was solved.<sup>32</sup> In 1921 Widtsoe and his committee set their sights on finding a solution. Russell devised a plan for an index bureau to act as a clearinghouse to approve all names before essential temple ordinances could be performed.<sup>33</sup> Widtsoe approved Russell's plan and brought it to the attention of Anthon H. Lund, president of the Genealogical Society, and Joseph Fielding Smith, then church historian and recorder.<sup>34</sup> The idea was endorsed, and Widtsoe was left to work out the details with Elders Joseph Fielding Smith and Joseph Christenson. A meeting with temple presidents and recorders was held during the October 1921 general conference to refine the plan. On 3 November 1921 Widtsoe explained the system and outlined the steps to the board of directors of the Utah Genealogical Society who, after some discussion, instructed Widtsoe and his committee to finish their plans and bring their final recommendations with an

estimate of the costs of operation before members of the board and the First Presidency. Later in November Widtsoe outlined the proposal in a letter to President Heber J. Grant. His eloquent justification gives a clearer view of the problem and why they diligently sought to resolve it:

The work in our temples has grown to such proportions that a knowledge of the work done in the temples is called for by very many people to avoid duplication, and to guide in the preparation of family records. The financial loss due to duplication is large; the discouragement that follows duplication is larger, but the fewer spirits provided with the blessings of the endowment when duplication occurs is the most serious consequence. To make the records furnish this protection, an index is necessary. . . . The Directors of the Society, the presidents and recorders of the temples, and the committee on classwork and activities are unanimous in the opinion that the time has come when the index should be made.<sup>35</sup>

Widtsoe stressed the urgency of forming the index and recommended that young people familiar with the typewriter be called on short-time missions to get the project in place. The cost of the cards—which he estimated at \$1,500–2,000—was about all that was required. Two months later Widtsoe wrote to the First Presidency suggesting that stakes in temple districts call qualified women to serve six-month missions to complete the cards and establish a central filing office where work could be checked to avoid duplication. He also recommended that Harry H. Russell be called to supervise and oversee the work.<sup>36</sup> The recommendations were approved, and Russell was made director of the Temple Index Bureau.

## Fundamental Principles behind Temple Work

In major addresses to the Genealogical Society, Widtsoe frequently spoke of fundamental principles of Mormon doctrine that are firmly established by temple and genealogical work. The following excerpts briefly capture his view of the most important principles of church doctrine around which temple work centers.

### The Eternal Existence of Man

Every person who goes into the temple tacitly admits his belief in the principle of the eternal existence of man. This is the first thought that must possess any intelligent worker in the temple, otherwise why spend time on the work.

### The Eternal Life of Man

Man is not only indestructible, but is subject to growth. . . . Every time we go into the temple we accept the doctrine that not only shall man live forever, but he shall either grow or retrograde.

### The Free Agency of Man

The eternal spirit of man is characterized by its free agency. . . . Certainly we could not conceive of the true meaning of temple work, unless we accept the eternal principle of man's free agency; and that the dead as well as the living may receive or reject the opportunities of the Gospel.

### Judgment of Man according to Works

The spirits sent to this earth will be judged by their works. . . . Moreover our punishment stands, at least measurably, throughout the endless ages, because, as we go onward, those above us go onward also, and the relative positions remain the same. . . . Temple work . . . assumes this principle of eternal justice.

### The Love of God for Man

My spirit and yours, and the spirit of every man or woman are guided and will be guided by a loving Father. . . . In the presence of His love we grew and developed in our spiritual existence, as today we live out our physical existence, and as in the hereafter we shall continue our eternal life. Temple work best represents the quality of the infinite love of God for his children. . . . Unless we know the eternal love of our Father for His children we gather only a partial meaning of temple work. God's plan is to save His children.

### The Authority of God and the Great Plan

Then, also, to perform these ordinances of the earth officially, and to make them valid, God has delegated authority to His servants on earth, whereby the work of the Great Plan, as pertaining to the earth, can be consummated. . . . Hence, living men and women may act for and in behalf of the dead under the direction of the Priesthood. Those who die in unbelief, but who later obtain belief, must have the chance to go on, otherwise justice is not satisfied.<sup>37</sup>

Guided by these fundamental gospel principles, Widtsoe often spoke of the accountability all men share for their dead. In general conference, 3 April 1927, he taught: "We have been told by the Prophet Joseph Smith that without our dead we cannot be saved; or, as he stated it, 'Their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation.'"<sup>38</sup> In remarks he was invited to make in a meeting of the Roberts Family Organization, he stressed that family members currently on the earth cannot progress to eternal life until their family lines are tied back to Adam. Guided by this conviction, Widtsoe wrote:

I believe the Lord requires of us that we all set our houses in order in this respect, that each man and

woman, every family, set about to secure just as completely as may be possible a record of their dead, so that thereby the genealogies of the human family may be gathered and increased in number, and we may have ample material with which to labour in the Temples of the Lord.<sup>39</sup>

All these fundamental principles underscore the larger ideas of man's universal salvation and obtaining eternal life. They are the core truths around which modern temple work has developed.

### **Popularizing Modern Temple Work**

To help place all organizations in close touch with the Genealogical Society and to educate members about genealogy and modern temple work, Widtsoe headed a committee that included representatives from the Sunday School, the Young Men's and Young Women's Mutual Improvement Associations, the Primary, Church Education, and Brigham Young University.<sup>40</sup> He wrote to Adam S. Bennion, superintendent of Brigham Young University, to inquire about having instruction in genealogy and temple work added to some of the curriculum.<sup>41</sup> In a letter to the general Primary president, he wrote, "I feel that you are sowing seed on very fertile soil. If our children can be taught some of the elements of Temple work, however small, it will mean much to the Temple workers of a generation hence when these little boys and girls shall be grown men and women."<sup>42</sup>

The *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* had carried some brief outlines for lessons on genealogy. Topics centered on record keeping, the Genealogical Society, the doctrine behind genealogy, and the history of genealogy. With his educational background and his reputation as a



gifted teacher, it is little wonder that Widtsoe was almost constantly on the committees that were assigned to formulate genealogical lessons. In February 1923, in a letter to George D. Kirby, Widtsoe shared some personal wishes regarding the lessons: "Some day I hope that the central office will have complete study courses for the genealogical societies of the Church."<sup>43</sup> Some lessons on genealogy were being taught throughout the church at the time, but no universal system was followed. His wish for a study course from the central office was fulfilled in 1925 when a three-year course on genealogy and temple work was begun. The lessons, published in the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, were designed for weekly study classes. The foreword explained the intent behind the lessons:

The lesson work presented herewith is the beginning of a three years' course in genealogical and temple work, based upon the new genealogical handbook, published by the Genealogical Society of Utah.

Each lesson is grouped into four parts, designed for weekly class study for genealogical workers, and others interested in the work of redemption of the dead.

The outlines and lesson-statements have been purposely left brief to enable the class to work out its own details and otherwise delve into the work in a manner best suited to the conditions at hand. With the handbook of easy access and an abundance of material in the Scriptures to supplement its teachings, there is now at the disposal of all Latter-day Saints sufficient material to give them a working knowledge of genealogical procedure, if they will but devote the necessary time to master the intricacies of this wonderful art. Even those who do not desire to become practical genealogists will find much satisfaction in a careful study of the doctrine presented.<sup>44</sup>

The signature beneath the foreword reads: "Genealogical Society of Utah, Lesson Committee, Dr. John A. Widtsoe, Chairman. Salt Lake City, Utah. Dec. 1, 1924."<sup>45</sup> These lessons focused on the fundamental doctrine behind genealogical and temple work. They included frequent examples from scripture and an emphasis on world history and world society. A notable difference between these lesson outlines and previous ones was that about every third lesson was devoted to genealogical procedures. This allowed every student to gain an appreciation for and understanding of genealogy and the skills needed to perform his or her own genealogy in the process of redeeming their dead. Lesson topics included indexing, the Temple Index Bureau, filming, and record keeping. Students also learned how to use various sources of genealogical information and how the Genealogical Society functioned. Widtsoe was determined to teach every church member about the importance of temple work and how to proceed with that work for his or her own family.

### **Building a Central Genealogical Library**

While traveling through Europe with Senator Reed Smoot in 1923, Widtsoe assessed the work required by each country to maintain accurate genealogical records and surveyed their sources and repositories. As Widtsoe visited Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, France, Belgium, and Holland, he found out how to obtain genealogical information from them. He carefully observed what procedures they followed and tried to secure as much information as he could for the Utah Genealogical Society's library.<sup>46</sup> At the conclusion of his trip he submitted his observations and recommendations:

It is very clear that in all the countries visited there has been for some time an active interest in genealogical research. Our missionaries, following the suggestion of Brother Morton, could help greatly in locating such collections. Selections of books and other materials should be made, however, only by some one who is experienced with books and who has a deep interest in genealogy. My Frankfurt [Germany] experience was confirmation of this view.

Clearly also there is quite as much genealogical material in Scandinavia as in any other country, if it only may be made available. The Society should proceed vigorously to supply its library with all valuable printed material on genealogy. The collections made on this trip will make a good foundation. Such library facilities will do much for the cause here at home, and will furnish leads for more detailed work abroad.

Our genealogical work abroad is done in a very haphazard manner. I fear that some of it is inaccurate. It seems to me that steps must be taken to organize for this work. Competent men should be placed in Scandinavia for genealogical purposes. There is work enough to support them. It may be the wisest plan to form some organization at home, a genealogical bureau, which will undertake to act as a medium between the person seeking the names of his dead and the expert worker who will collect the names. The system as now practiced is not commensurate with the cause, or with the provision made for temple work.<sup>47</sup>

Subsequent visits brought significant improvements in genealogical work in all European countries.

Whenever Widtsoe was on assignment in Europe, he conscientiously sought to purchase worthy genealogical books and already published family histories. In the 1931 Genealogical Convention, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith

announced that the purchases made by Widtsoe had kept the society nearly broke. President Widtsoe responded, "I regret that, of course, but I am not very sorry. Nearly every book will be of value to us in the course of time."<sup>48</sup> In many of his endeavors to obtain important books, he had felt the direction of the Holy Spirit. He shared one of his most memorable experiences:

I know of no work that I have done in the Church which has been so filled with testimonies of the divinity of this work as the little I have done in behalf of the salvation of our dead. I could tell you a number of experiences, but the one that impressed me most happened a few years ago when I accompanied Brother Reed Smoot to Europe. We came to Stockholm; he had his work to do; I decided to see what I could do in the way of finding books on Swedish genealogy. I knew the names of the two big bookstores in Stockholm. I went to the one, made my selections, and then started across the city to the other bookstore in the hope that I might find some more suitable books. As I hurried along the street filled with people, I was stopped suddenly by some voice which said to me: "Go across the street and down that narrow side street." I looked across the street and saw a little narrow street. I had not been in Stockholm before. I thought: This is all nonsense, . . . I have to do my work, and I walked on. Almost at once the voice came again, as distinctly as any voice I have ever heard. Then I asked myself: What is your business in this city? Are you not on the Lord's errand? And I crossed over; went down the little narrow street, and there, half-way down, found a little bookstore that I had known nothing about. When I asked for books on genealogy the lady said: "No, we do not carry books on genealogy. When we get such books we send them to the bookstore"—naming the store for which I was headed. Then, just as I was leaving in disap-

pointment, she said: "Stop a minute. A leading book collector, a genealogist, died about a month ago, and we bought his library. Many of his genealogical books are in the back room ready to be sent to the bookstore, but if you want to buy them you may have them." Thus we secured the foundation of Swedish genealogy in our library.<sup>49</sup>

From these inspired beginnings, the Genealogical Library of the church has become the largest and most useful repository of genealogical information in the world.

### **A Program for Genealogical Exchange**

The European trip with Senator Smoot deepened Widtsoe's conviction of the need of church members and interested genealogists to coordinate and share their research. Travel to distant lands to research ancestral lines was too costly for most to consider, but in almost all of those distant lands were fellow church members or interested professionals who could exchange research information for work on their lines in yet another part of the world.

The emphasis given temple work from the beginning of the restoration of the gospel to the Prophet Joseph Smith underscores the importance of making genealogical information and temple ordinances available to everyone as expeditiously as possible.<sup>50</sup> This was the underlying message of an address on the beginnings of modern temple work by Widtsoe.<sup>51</sup> In 1928 he published the names of key workers and the addresses of the significant archives and libraries of genealogical information in the Scandinavian countries. From each library or archive he requested information on local researchers who could be employed on an individual basis to do research for church members who wished to obtain their information but could not travel to these

countries. The information was most helpful in furthering the work.<sup>52</sup> Yet this was not enough; the need for greater success drove Widtsoe to find more successful ways of accomplishing the work.

From 1928 to 1934 Widtsoe was the president of the European Mission, which consisted of ten to eleven missions across the various capitals of Europe. He became starkly aware of the feelings of deprivation among European church members who were without a temple in which they could receive their own endowments and sealings or in which they could do the work for their dead ancestors. Under the leadership of President Widtsoe, the mission presidents in Europe established a program for genealogical research and exchange. Each branch of members organized a genealogical class in which they studied the best-known manuals on genealogy in the church. A mission genealogical agent was called to coordinate the classes and the research results. Within each country, church members could aid each other; for example, a member in Liverpool, England, could do research for someone in Glasgow, Scotland, and thereby eliminate travel and lodging costs for the Saint from Scotland. In exchange, someone from Glasgow could do local research for the Liverpool member or someone else from their branch with family roots in Glasgow. Global exchanges were even more intriguing. Without a temple, the only work European Saints could participate in was gathering genealogical data. On the other hand, they had an advantage that those in Utah did not have—they were in the very lands from which the Utah members or their ancestors had come and could readily research the family records. The following excerpt is from a reprint of one of Widtsoe's *Millennial Star* editorials:

It is further proposed that Latter-day Saints of European descent, living in temple districts, may be willing to do

work in the temples for the dead of those who live in Europe, in exchange for genealogical help. Such valuable mutual assistance could be arranged with profit through the mission genealogical agent. A definite basis for exchange will probably be suggested, as, for example, three new names in a given family line or four hours of actual research work done by someone in Europe would pay for the endowment of one person in one of the temples.<sup>53</sup>

This editorial includes an excerpt from a letter President Widtsoe wrote to the Genealogical Society to report the success of the exchange program in missions that had undertaken it. This same editorial, later reprinted in the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, instructed Saints in the United States to send their research requests to President Widtsoe's office. The mission genealogical agent would then process the requests and forward them to someone who could assist the American Saints. Widtsoe's mailing address in Liverpool was included as well as a description of the information needed from all who wished to obtain research help in Europe. To assure fairness in the program, the editorial included a standard basis on which the users could plan:

Members living in Temple Districts will do ordinance work for names of those living in Missions at the standard rate of 50c for a female and 75c for a male.

Members living in Missions will copy information from parish or probate registers at the rate of 25c per hour.

Thus two hours research will pay for the endowment of one woman and three for that of a man.<sup>54</sup>

In April 1931 Widtsoe, though still living in Europe, spent time in Salt Lake City to attend general conference. His attendance was requested by the First Presidency because he had not attended for three years while residing in

Europe. Held in connection with the conference was a convention of the Genealogical Society. Responding to their request, he gave a moving report of genealogical interest among the Saints in the missions of Europe. He reported that it was a matter of great lament to many Saints in Europe, especially those of second- or third-generation church membership, that they must live their lives without the benefit and blessings of temple ordinances. Moreover, they lamented that they didn't have the privilege of enjoying the blessings of regular temple attendance. He spoke of their concern about the thousands of Saints who had faithfully lived the principles set forth in the restoration and who had gone on to a splendid reward beyond the grave but who most often were required to wait substantial periods for their temple work to be done. They waited in the spirit world with those who had rejected the gospel or never had it. The living descendants of these faithful Saints were, of course, anxious that temple ordinance work become more efficient with unnecessary delays eliminated. Widtsoe requested that the society take this matter up and, through the Index Bureau, get the temple work of deceased members efficiently accomplished. He reported disappointment that the work of the Exchange Bureau had developed very slowly, yet he spoke with confidence and urged patience and greater effort to make it successful. As a result of this interest and at his recommendation, the Research Bureau of the Genealogical Society was established. Despite his sincerity and the intrinsic merit of the idea, it did not flourish.

The Society did not adopt the worldwide supervisory program Elder Widtsoe had in mind, but it did establish the Research Bureau, which supervised all research done at the library, hired researchers, made contacts with for-



eign researchers, transferred money to foreign countries when needed, conducted classes in genealogical research, assisted in obtaining information not available in the library, and acted as a general clearinghouse in coordinating research activities.<sup>55</sup>

### **An Apostle for Modern Temple Work to the End**

In 1923 Widtsoe was asked to attend the dedication services of the Alberta Temple. The experience seemed to invigorate him further and intensify his advocacy of temple work. He was particularly moved by the spiritual impact temple work had on the rest of the gospel work in the latter days:

The Alberta Temple . . . is an architectural gem, beautiful inside and out. The architects have produced an exquisite harmony such as I think I have never known before in any structure whether in the new or old world. The dedicatory exercises were very impressive. There were eleven sessions and the spirit which actuates the great latter-day work known as "Mormonism" was present abundantly so that every person present was touched by it.<sup>56</sup>

Widtsoe continually strove to deepen the appreciation and understanding of church members regarding temple work. He was convinced of the "need to lay out with great care a general plan for the future development of this work, having in mind the tremendous importance of it according to our faith."<sup>57</sup> Additional concern arose over those in the mission field who did not have the knowledge to do their own genealogical work:

I do think that the Saints residing in the mission field would be greatly benefited if some definite help could be tendered them. They need to know something about the sources of genealogical information, often lying near at

hand, and the methods of building their genealogy for Temple work.<sup>58</sup>

Through the remainder of his life, Widtsoe participated in the developments and decision making that guided the society and the church in matters of temple and genealogical work and salvation of the dead. In 1935 he taught that of all the gospel principles, probably none contributed more toward developing one's spiritual power and strength than work associated with salvation of the dead. From his own experience and the experiences of his friends, he assured church members that "those who give themselves in wisdom and with propriety to this work will round out their spiritual experiences, enrich their lives, and find a new and abiding joy in all duties pertaining to life under the Gospel of Jesus Christ."<sup>59</sup> During Leadership Week at BYU in 1935, he spoke of the doctrine of universal salvation again: "If the Gospel is not for all men—if God has a few chosen spirits whom He loves and who, irrespective of their labors in the past, in mortality, and in the hereafter, shall be brought into His presence—then the whole latter day work falls to the ground as a set of separate and distinct unorganized principles."<sup>60</sup>

In 1937 he described the urgency with which the church must proceed with temple work: "The dead are so many that we cannot hope, unless we use the utmost expedition, to keep pace with the gathering of names made available in our genealogical research."<sup>61</sup> In 1939 and 1940 he prepared outlines for lessons that were carried in the society's magazine. From 1940, when the church ceased publication of the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, through 1954, a genealogical section was included in the *Improvement Era*.<sup>62</sup> From 1935 to 1952 Widtsoe was editor of the *Improvement Era*. In 1943 an editorial in the *Improvement Era* carried Widtsoe's ideas further:

To give glory to the Lord, members of the Church must seek the blessings offered by the temples. To build with a flaming faith, and then, when the building is completed, to fail to use it, is folly and unacceptable to the Lord. The flame of faith must not burn low. Every member of the Church should so conduct himself as to be worthy of receiving the ordinances offered within temple walls. Further, he should seek opportunities to labor there for the dead, so that they, if the work is accepted by them, may also win membership in the kingdom of God. Then we do honor to the Lord, and win blessings for ourselves and our ancestry.<sup>63</sup>

In moving remarks growing out of the worldwide horrors of the Great War, especially its devastation among beloved European countries, Widtsoe gave a sobering challenge to church members. His address in general conference of April 1943 was given in recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple:

These are trying days, in which Satan rages, at home and abroad, hard days, evil and ugly days. We stand helpless as it seems before them. We need help. We need strength. We need guidance. Perhaps if we would do our work in behalf of those of the unseen world who hunger and pray for the work we can do for them, the unseen world would in return give us help in the day of our urgent need. There are more in that other world than there are here. There is more power and strength there than we have here upon this earth. We have but a trifle, and that trifle is taken from the immeasurable power of God. We shall make no mistake in becoming collaborators in the Lord's mighty work for human redemption.<sup>64</sup>

The great emphasis Widtsoe and other society officials put on gathering family names and performing temple work in time created a serious dilemma. Inflexible policies of proving familial relationships in the clearance process

for names submitted to the temple, combined with increases in temple attendance, led to a shortage of names for temple work. Elders Joseph Fielding Smith and John A. Widtsoe were the main advocates for processing names regardless of family connections to members of the church. Their views gave rise to the current name extraction program.

In September 1943, Elder Widtsoe anticipated the policy that eventually developed when he declared that the Society ought to obtain all published manuscript and microfilm records as fast as possible and use the names for temple work. "Why don't we use the names for temple work which cannot be tied to any Church families? . . . The Lord has provided these names by inspiring genealogists to compile and publish them. In an extremity like the present, why not use the names from such records? . . . For what purpose have these books been compiled, if not to make the names available for temple work?"<sup>65</sup>

The urgency Widtsoe had always expressed for this sacred work did not diminish as he neared the end of his life. Addressing the general conference in April 1950, he urged once again that the Saints turn their hearts steadily and forcefully toward the duty of laboring for the dead. He said: "We cannot be saved without doing so. The earth cannot continue to its destined end unless we so do."<sup>66</sup> As always, he pointed to the outstanding spiritual benefit that flows to all those who actively participate in the work:

Let us do our duty for ourselves and for the future of this earth upon which we live and which we hold so dear. And let us remember always that the spiritual forces centering in our temples are more powerful than atom rays or any earthly force discovered by man.<sup>67</sup>

In the last year of his life, he summarized his lifelong

view of temple work: “Temple work is the cement that holds together all gospel principles. Genealogy is the first step in universal salvation, as far as we on earth can contribute to this great human destiny.”<sup>68</sup> The *Improvement Era* published excerpts from an article on the temples that Widtsoe was working on at the time of his death. Illustrating his article are color photographs of the interior and exterior of the St. George Temple. The essay reviewed many of the teachings about temple work Widtsoe had expounded over his lifetime. These final comments returned to the fundamental essence of the doctrine of modern temple work—the work and glory of God. Lifelong devotion to the salvation of the dead draws each one closer to those so served and to God whose work it is. Reminding readers that a person is not expected to comprehend the details of the temple in a single visit, he declared:

Therefore, the Lord has provided means of repetition. Temple work must be done first by each person for himself or herself; then it may be done for one’s dead ancestors or friends as frequently as circumstances will allow. This service will open the doors of salvation for the dead and will also help fix upon the mind of the living the nature, meaning, and obligations of the endowment. By keeping the endowment fresh in mind, we shall be better able to perform our duties in life under the influence of eternal blessings.<sup>69</sup>

Wherever one turns in the revealed gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and particularly in the temple, the conviction grows that the work of God is re-established for his specific purposes in the latter days. Temple service is to aid and to help us in qualifying for this mighty work: “. . . to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” (Moses 1:39)<sup>70</sup>

A strong testimony of an intimate connection between the powers of heaven and modern temple work illuminated the life and teachings of John A. Widtsoe. It began to burn its way into his heart while he was a young student at Harvard, and in those early years he developed unusually poignant feelings for temple work. Those feelings grew ever stronger until the day he himself passed through death's portal. His study of scripture and the revealed teachings of latter-day prophets brought conversion to the doctrine behind temple work, while personal experiences in gathering genealogical data and participating in vicarious temple ordinances brought conversion to the divinity of the work. Widtsoe's testimony deepened throughout his life, and he became one of the church's foremost spokesmen for modern temple work.

## Notes

1. See James B. Allen, Jesse L. Embry, and Kahlile B. Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers: A History of the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1894–1994* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995).

2. John A. Widtsoe, "The Opening of Our New Home," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* (hereafter UGHM) 25 (April 1934): 56.

3. *In a Sunlit Land: The Autobiography of John A. Widtsoe* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1952), 176–77.

4. John A. Widtsoe to Nellie T. Taylor, 9 November 1921, John A. Widtsoe Collection, Archives Division, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter LDS Church Archives).

5. John A. Widtsoe to Harry H. Russell, 28 March 1923, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.

6. John A. Widtsoe to Nellie T. Taylor, 27 March 1923, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.

7. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 356.

8. *Ibid.*, 193.

9. John A. Widtsoe, "What Is Our Personal Obligation for the Salvation of the Dead?" in *Gospel Interpretations: More Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1947), 98–99.

10. John A. Widtsoe, "Work for the Dead," *UGHM* 6 (January 1915): 33.

11. John A. Widtsoe, "Purpose of the Family Organization," *UGHM* 14 (June 1923): 81.

12. John A. Widtsoe, "The Worth of Souls," *Millennial Star* 96 (1 March 1934): 132–34.

13. John A. Widtsoe, "The Beginnings of Modern Temple Work," *Improvement Era*, October 1927, 1076, 1079.

14. John A. Widtsoe, "Temple Worship," *UGHM* 12 (April 1921): 54.

15. John A. Widtsoe, "Genealogical Activities in Europe," *UGHM* 22 (July 1931): 105.

16. Widtsoe, "Temple Worship," 62. A similar reference to temples in earlier ages and other cultures suggests an important connection to modern temple work:

All people of all ages have had temples in one form or another. When the history of human thought shall be written from the point of view of temple worship, it may well be found that temples and the work done in them have been the dominating influence in shaping human thought from the beginning of the race. Even today political controversies are as nothing in determining the temper of a people, as compared with religious sentiments and convictions, especially as practiced in the temples of the people.

In every land and in every age temples have been built and used. In China, age old with four thousand years of written history; in India; on the islands of the sea; in South America; in North America; in Africa and in Australia; everywhere there are evidences of the existence and use of temples. (*Ibid.*, 52)

17. Ibid., 53–54.

18. See “The Biennial Meeting of the Genealogical Society of Utah,” *UGHM* 1 (July 1910): 140.

19. John A. Widtsoe, “The Genealogical Society’s Quarterly Meeting,” *UGHM* 2 (January 1911): 46.

20. Widtsoe, “Work for the Dead,” 33.

21. See Widtsoe, “Temple Worship,” 54: “Those who understand the eternal nature of the gospel—planned before the foundation of the earth—understand clearly why all history seems to revolve about the building and use of temples.”

22. Ibid., 53. The critical emphasis the Prophet Joseph Smith put on temple and genealogical work is further attested in an address by Widtsoe to the Liberty Stake Genealogical Convention, 24 May 1922: “It is sufficient for us to remember that temple work for the living and for the dead was the burden of the thought and labors of the Prophet Joseph Smith from the day when the Angel Moroni first stood before him and told him of the things that were to be, up to the last day of the Prophet’s life. The principle of salvation for the dead received foremost consideration by the prophet because of its close and intertwining relationship to all other principles.” John A. Widtsoe, “Fundamentals of Temple Doctrine,” *UGHM* 13 (July 1922): 129.

An outstanding essay by Widtsoe reviewing Joseph’s involvement in the beginnings of modern temple work was published in October 1927; see Widtsoe, “Beginnings of Modern Temple Work,” 1073–79.

23. John A. Widtsoe, “The Meaning and Importance of Records,” *UGHM* 11 (July 1920): 97.

24. *Sunlit Land*, 177.

25. Widtsoe, “Worth of Souls,” 131.

26. Widtsoe, “Temple Worship,” 64.

27. Ibid., 56.

28. John A. Widtsoe to Maude May Babcock, 14 December 1921, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.

29. Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 95.

30. Ibid., 97.



31. Widtsoe, "Purpose of the Family Organization," 81.
32. See Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 98.
33. See *ibid.*, 97–98.
34. See Archibald F. Bennett, "The Growth of the Temple Index Bureau: World-Wide Clearing-house," *Improvement Era*, April 1936, 218.
35. John A. Widtsoe to President Heber J. Grant, 15 November 1921, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.
36. See Widtsoe to the First Presidency, 13 January 1922, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.
37. Widtsoe, "Fundamentals of Temple Doctrine," 130–34. A powerful editorial by Widtsoe summarizing these same fundamental principles was published in the *Millennial Star* in 1929. "Salvation for the Dead," *Millennial Star* 91 (19 September 1929): 600–601.
38. John A. Widtsoe, "Serving Our Dead," *Millennial Star* 89 (4 August 1927): 483.
39. *Ibid.*, 484.
40. See Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 112.
41. See John A. Widtsoe to Superintendent Adam Bennion, 13 May 1921, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.
42. John A. Widtsoe to Louie B. Felt, 26 July 1922, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.
43. John A. Widtsoe to George D. Kirby, 24 February 1923, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.
44. John A. Widtsoe, "Lessons In Genealogy," *UGHM* 16 (January 1925): 33.
45. *Ibid.*
46. See John A. Widtsoe, "Report of Dr. John A. Widtsoe's Visit to Scandinavia," *UGHM* 15 (January 1924): 11–16.
47. *Ibid.*, 15.
48. Widtsoe, "Genealogical Activities in Europe," 100.
49. *Ibid.*, 101.
50. The church's recent move toward constructing many

smaller temples, in order to make the temple more accessible to all church members, is further evidence of this need.

51. See Widtsoe, "Beginnings of Modern Temple Work," 1079.

52. See John A. Widtsoe, "Obtaining Scandinavian Genealogies," *UGHM* 19 (January 1928): 1–8.

53. Editorial from the *Millennial Star*, "European Program for Genealogical Study, Research and Exchange," *UGHM* 21 (January 1930): 34.

54. *Ibid.*, 35.

55. Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 105.

56. John A. Widtsoe to F. W. Smith, 13 September 1923, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.

57. John A. Widtsoe to Susa Young Gates, 25 June 1925, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.

58. John A. Widtsoe to Susa Young Gates, 8 August 1927, Widtsoe Collection, LDS Church Archives.

59. "Lesson Course: Methods of Genealogical Research," *UGHM* 26 (July 1935): 139.

60. John A. Widtsoe, "Elijah, the Tishbite," *UGHM* 27 (April 1936): 54.

61. John A. Widtsoe, "The Urgency of Temple Service," *UGHM* 28 (January 1937): 5.

62. See Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 133.

63. John A. Widtsoe, "The Temple Calls," *Improvement Era*, April 1943, 224.

64. John A. Widtsoe, "The Way of Salvation," *Improvement Era*, May 1943, 278–79.

65. Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 177.

66. John A. Widtsoe, "Universal Brotherhood Will Save the World," *Improvement Era*, May 1950, 429.

67. *Ibid.*, 430.

68. *Sunlit Land*, 176.

69. John A. Widtsoe, "Looking toward the Temple," *Improvement Era*, October 1962, 710.

70. *Ibid.*, 765.