

The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844

The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844

D. Michael Quinn

As President of The Church of Jesus of Latter-day Saints since its establishment in 1830, Joseph Smith, Jr., had been the apex of a pyramid of ecclesiastical leadership, but to many people he was viewed as though he were the keystone of the existence of Mormonism. In this view, as the removal of the keystone from an arch causes the arch to collapse, it was assumed that the entire LDS Church would collapse if at Smith's death the role of the president were not filled properly and to the satisfaction of the general membership. A small group of men, most notably the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, had received private instruction from Joseph Smith in the spring of 1844 concerning the proper mode of succession. These private instructions, however, were unknown to the general membership of the LDS Church. In fact, by the summer of 1844 there was no explicit outline of presidential succession in print.

This laid the foundation for a succession crisis among the Latter-day Saints when Joseph Smith was murdered by a mob on 27 June 1844. Not only did most Mormons have only the haziest concept of what should transpire in the leadership of the LDS Church if the founding prophet were to die, but between 1834 and 1844 Joseph Smith had by word or action established precedents or authority for eight possible methods of succession: 1) by a counselor in the First Presidency, 2) by a special appointment, 3) through the office of Associate President, 4) by the Presiding Patriarch, 5) by the Council of Fifty, 6) by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 7) by three priesthood councils, 8) by a descendant of Joseph Smith, Jr. In time, all but one of the major claimants were invalidated by their personal circumstances or the insufficiency of their personal circumstances or the insufficiency of their claims.

For those few to whom Joseph had given definite instructions relating to succession, their course following the martyrdom was clear once the shock of that event passed, but for the average Mormon the death of Joseph Smith, Jr., created a sometimes prolonged crisis in which it was necessary to decide which of conflicting succession claimants was authorized of God. The schismatic fragmentation of the LDS Church that followed the martyrdom resulted from a multiplicity of succession precedents and a general lack of uniform understanding of what Joseph Smith's provisions for succession actually were. Tracing the history and significance of these eight precedents is the work of this article.

Succession by a Counselor

The earliest mode of presidential succession mentioned by Joseph Smith concerned the right of his first or second counselor to preside in his absence. On 17 February 1834, at the organization of the Kirtland Council, the Prophet spoke of the role of counselors in the ancient church: “He had two men appointed as counsellors with him, and in case Peter was absent, his counselors could transact business alone.”¹ An 1833 revelation stated that the counselors in the First Presidency “are accounted as equal with thee in holding the keys of this last kingdom” (D&C 90:6). Moreover, on 19 April 1834, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and Zebedee Coltrin “laid hands upon bro. Sidney [Rigdon], and confirmed upon him the blessings of wisdom and knowledge to preside over the church in the absence of brother Joseph.” Although idiomatic English would not normally equate “absence” with “death” in such statements, the lack of a publicly acknowledged method of succession caused many Mormons in 1844 to make such an equation in Rigdon’s favor. This interpretation was aided by the fact that the Prophet had never specifically denied the possibility of presidential succession by a surviving counselor of the First Presidency in the event of his own death.²

After Joseph Smith’s murder in June 1844, Sidney Rigdon indeed did claim the right as first counselor to preside over the Church as “guardian,” but his previous unstable Church service did not inspire confidence in his claim. Less than four months after he had been appointed as a counselor to Joseph Smith on 8 March 1832,³ Rigdon attempted to seize control of the Church, as described in the diary of Reynolds Cahoon, under the date of 5–6 July 1832:

Thursday 4 O’clock Met with some of the Br for Meting and at the meting Br Sidney remarked that he had a revelation from the Lord & said that the kingdom was taken from the Church and left with him fryday Br Hiram went after Joseph. When he came he affirmed that the kingdom was ours & never should be taking from the faithful. . . .⁴

The Prophet disfellowshipped Rigdon (“took his license”), but after a period of about three weeks he restored Rigdon to the position of counselor.⁵ Moreover, after the expulsion of the Mormons from Missouri in 1839, Rigdon became disaffected, claiming that “he would never follow any revelation again that did not tend to his comfort and interest, let it come from Joseph Smith, God Almighty, or any body else.”⁶ Rigdon apparently also urged the Saints to scatter after their expulsion, “for the work seems as though it had come to an end.”⁷ When Joseph Smith escaped from prison in Missouri, however, he had the Saints gather at a settlement on the Mississippi he later named Nauvoo.

At Nauvoo, Joseph Smith sought to displace Rigdon from the Presidency of the Church. In 1841 Joseph appointed John C. Bennett as Assistant President to assume Rigdon's duties, and on 13 August 1843, a conference of the Church at Nauvoo temporarily disfellowshipped Rigdon for allegedly aiding anti-Mormons. Nevertheless, a general conference on 7 October 1843, voted to retain Rigdon as first counselor even though Joseph Smith proposed that Rigdon be deposed and excommunicated. Forced to have a counselor he didn't want, the Prophet remarked: "I have thrown him off my shoulders, and you have again put him on me. You may carry him, but I will not."⁸ Although Sidney Rigdon briefly regained the confidence of the Prophet in the spring of 1844, on the eve of his assassination Joseph expressed gratitude that Rigdon would not lead the Church.⁹

After the martyrdom of the Prophet, Sidney Rigdon returned to Nauvoo from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, claiming that he was the man to lead the Church as its "guardian." He presented his claim of succession by reminding the Mormons of his long association with the deceased prophet and by referring to a revelation he had allegedly received in Pittsburgh confirming his right to lead. Moreover, Rigdon claimed that the death of Joseph Smith had not disorganized any quorum of the Church, and therefore Rigdon claimed he still functioned as first counselor. But many of the Saints at Nauvoo were well aware of his previous instability, and at a public meeting on 8 August 1844, rejected Rigdon's claim to succession and voted to accept the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as the presiding authority.¹⁰

Bitterly disappointed, Rigdon refused the offer of the apostles to continue functioning under their direction. The seriousness of Rigdon's position and the threat he represented in 1844 was indicated in the journal of one of the apostles, George A. Smith:

Tuesday Sept 3 I Learned Elder Rigdon was Making a Division in the Church ordaining Prophets Priests & Kings contrary to the Say of God The Twelve visited him he Said his Authority was Greater than ours Seemed Determined to Scatter the Church and Led up A Party he Claimed to have many visions and Revelation and at varance with those Given Prest Joseph Smith We Labored With him till 9 o'clock at Night and after Deliberation desfellowshipped him & Sent Elders P P Pratt O Hide A Lyman to Demand his Licenc he was angry he Said he Would Expose the Counsels of the Church and Publish all he knew against us he knew the Church had not Been Led By the Spirit to God for Long time.¹¹

Unable to tolerate Rigdon's schismatic activities, the Quorum of the Twelve prepared to excommunicate him. In doing so, they took pains to assemble a special council designated in one of the Revelations as the proper body to try a president of the High Priesthood for misconduct.¹² The care of the apostles in adhering to this provision may have been intended to show

Rigdon's supporters that his case had been handled in a manner appropriate to his pretensions.

Like John C. Bennett and William Law before him, Sidney Rigdon, in October 1844, established a periodical in which he and his supporters attacked the Church at Nauvoo, charging the Saints with various crimes, including polygamy. Rigdon was sustained as "first president of the church" at a conference of his supporters in Pittsburgh on 12 October 1844, which was followed by the establishment of a "Church of Christ" on 6 April 1845, that included a Quorum of Twelve Apostles and Council of Seventy at its inception.¹³ From the outset Rigdon's supporters wrote articles insisting that Joseph Smith had been "cut off by the Lord" as early as 1841, when he appointed Rigdon as a prophet, seer, and revelator.¹⁴ Writing to his own spokesman, Stephen Post, in 1866, Rigdon made it clear that Joseph being a fallen prophet was the *sine qua non* of his own claims: "Hence all must see that the state of things which now exists could not exist only through the transgression and fall of J.S." Rigdon's ultimate claim as a successor to Joseph Smith rested on that assumption.¹⁵

Sidney Rigdon's followers began deserting him in 1846, when his rash prophecies failed and when he introduced a form of polygamy. As his movement was collapsing, Rigdon made a desperate bid to recapture the millenarian vision of Mormonism by colonizing his remaining adherents, but this also shortly failed.¹⁶ Having been humiliated at Nauvoo and again in Pennsylvania, Rigdon withdrew to the seclusion of his home in Friendship, New York. His appointment of Stephen Post as his spokesman in 1856 was so literal that it was Post who provided the only effective proselyting and leadership for Rigdon's group. Aside from publicly preaching at Centerville, Pennsylvania, in December 1859, Rigdon apparently refused to have personal contact with a movement that had disheartened and disgraced him so many times. Instead, he instructed Post to proselyte and organize, wrote lengthy Revelation and "sermons" for Post to read at conferences of "the Children of Zion," yet exercised such restraint on the movement that proselyting was allowed only among pre-1845 members of the LDS Church and a Quorum of apostles was not organized until 4 July 1868. Although Sidney Rigdon continued to write Revelation and intricate religious treatises to his spokesman until Rigdon died in 1876, he wrote a non-Mormon inquirer on 25 May 1873:

The church of Latter day saints had three books that they acknowledge as Canonical The Bible the book of Morman and the commandments. For the existence of that church there had to be a Revelator one who received the word of the Lord [and] A Spokesman one inspired of God to expound all revelation so that the church might all be of one faith With out these two men the Church of Latter day Saints could not exist This order ceased to exist, being overcome by the violence of armed men. . . .

All societies and assemblages of men collected together since then is not the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints nor never can there be such a church till the Lord movest by his own power as he did the first.¹⁷

The instability Sidney Rigdon manifested during the lifetime of Joseph Smith had by this time apparently come full circle in this private denial of the existence of a church that Rigdon was privately fostering through correspondence.¹⁸ When Rigdon's indefatigable spokesman died in 1879, the Rigdon movement disintegrated.

Succession by Special or Secret Appointment

A second possible method of presidential succession involved a special appointment of a successor without prior public confirmation or public announcement. Revelation to Joseph Smith specified that "all things," including ordination, were to be done in the Church by the common consent shown by a vote of the Church (D&C 20:65–67; 26:2). Nevertheless, due to peculiar circumstances or exigencies, Joseph Smith had often suspended the prior approval of common consent. At Nauvoo, the Prophet secretly introduced special endowment ceremonies, the practice of plural marriage, and the organization and conduct of a parapolitical Council of Fifty without the ratifying vote of the Church in common consent. Moreover, the following important ordinations of General Authorities had not only occurred without a prior vote of the Church, but had also continued in force for weeks, months, or years before being officially presented for a public vote of common consent: Sidney Rigdon and Jesse Gause as Counselors to the president on 8 March 1832; Oliver Cowdery as Assistant (or Associate) President on 5 December 1834; Joseph Smith, Sr., and Hyrum Smith as assistant presidents on 6 December 1834; Hyrum Smith as Presiding Patriarch on 14 September 1840; and several apostles, including Amasa M. Lyman, who was ordained an apostles on 20 August 1842 and made a special counselor to the president the following February. Common consent had followed, rather than preceded, all these ordinations, and these precedents therefore accustomed the Saints to voting for the highest officers in the Church in public long after the ordination or appointment had occurred in private.

The possibility of such a practice affecting succession to the presidency of the Church was given precedent when Joseph Smith specially ordained David Whitmer, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, as his Successor on 8 July 1834:

President Joseph Smith, Jr. gave a history of the ordination of David Whitmer, which took place in July 1834, to be a leader or a prophet to this church, which [ordination] was on condition that he [J. Smith, Jr.] did not live to God himself.¹⁹

Whitmer's ordination as successor was known to only a few in Missouri, and news of this most important appointment was not published in the Church periodical at the headquarters in Kirtland, Ohio. The fact that Whitmer was excommunicated from the Church in 1838 for apostasy removed his name as a possible successor, but did not alter an important development in the succession question. Joseph Smith had established precedent for ordaining men to the highest offices of the Church without prior common consent and without immediate public knowledge. The mere lack of public knowledge or absence of common content did not invalidate any appointment or actual ordination made by the President of the Church who held the keys of the priesthood. Only the personal action of one so designated, or the authoritative action of a proper tribunal could cancel the validity of such an appointment or ordination.

In the confusion following Joseph Smith's death, it was inevitable that a claim of secret ordination as successor would be advanced by someone who wanted to lead the Saints. As it turned out, three men claimed they had received secret ordinations or appointments which gave them authority for the divergent paths they took after the martyrdom. James J. Strang, Lyman Wight, and Alpheus Culter advanced such claims, each attracting fewer adherents than his predecessor.

James J. Strang had been baptized into the Church on 25 February 1844, and had left Nauvoo shortly thereafter to explore a possible location for the Mormons in Wisconsin. He claimed that while there he received a revelation in a letter from Joseph Smith dated 18 June 1844, which appointed him as Joseph's successor:

& now behold my servant James J Strang hath come to thee from far truth when he knew it not & hath not rejected it but hath had faith in thee the shepherd and stone of israel & to him shall the gathering of the people be fore he shall plant a stake of Zion in Wisconsin & I will establish it & there shall my people have peace & rest & shall not be mooved. . . .²⁰

Even at face value, the letter seemed to be no more than a local appointment, but Strang insisted the document designated him as Joseph's successor. Rather than presenting his claims to the Church in Nauvoo, Strang announced his position at a conference of the Church at Florence, Michigan, on 5 August 1844. The presiding elder of that branch, Crandall Dunn, denounced the claim as an imposture and observed that the postmark on the envelope of Strang's letter proved it to have been a forgery.²¹ Brigham Young in 1846 denounced the entire letter as a forgery: "Every person acquainted with Joseph Smith, and his style of dictation and writing might readily know that he never wrote nor caused to be written that letter to Strang."²² Modern analysts of the document have not only agreed with that verdict, but have also judged the signature of Joseph Smith on the letter to

be a forgery.²³ In addition to the letter, Strang also claimed that he had been ordained successor by an angel. Persisting in his claims, he was excommunicated by the branch at Florence, Michigan, on 5 August 1844, an action that was repeated by the apostles at Nauvoo.

Despite his excommunication and in rebellion against a revelation published by Orson Hyde condemning Strang,²⁴ hundreds of Saints immediately rallied to the self-proclaimed new prophet. Eventually, Strang gave up his commission to establish a stake in Wisconsin, and instead built a theocratic community on Beaver Island, Michigan, where more than two thousand followers assembled. Strang alienated many of his own followers, however, by advancing to the highest leadership in his organization such as avowed enemies of the Prophet Joseph Smith as William E. McLellin and John C. Bennett, by introducing a form of endowment ritual and the practice of polygamy, and by his public coronation as king in 1850. Strang was murdered by disgruntled followers and non-Mormons in 1856. Although he survived his assassination long enough to appoint a successor, he steadfastly refused to do so, and his erstwhile dynamic following disintegrated after his death. In 1897, one of Strang's apostles ordained a man to be a presiding high priest, and subsequent ordinations have continued to provide leadership to a devoted band of approximately 200 Strangites.²⁵

Unlike Strang, Lyman Wight had an impressive record of service in the Church and Kingdom of God that extended back to his baptism in 1830. He was the first man ordained by Joseph Smith to the office of high priest in June 1831, and not quite ten years later he was ordained an apostle. As a member of the Council of Fifty in 1844, Wight had been commissioned by Joseph Smith to establish a colony in Texas, which mission he was allowed by the Council of Fifty to commence after the martyrdom. Wight never departed from that mission, and his refusal to rejoin the Quorum of the Twelve in Utah or to recognize its authority over him resulted in his being dropped from that quorum and excommunicated on 3 December 1848.²⁶

Leading his little colony of followers in Texas, Wight gave varying support to several possible modes of succession (to be discussed later in this essay): he supported the Quorum of Twelve Apostles until he was asked to depart from his original mission; he maintained that the Council of Fifty had the right to reorganize the Church and appoint a successor to Joseph Smith; he accepted in November 1849 the position of counselor to William Smith as the Patriarchal successor to Joseph Smith; and he repeatedly affirmed that it was the patrilineal right of Joseph Smith III to be the Prophet's successor.²⁷

Nevertheless, Lyman Wight firmly believed he had authority by secret ordination superior to that of anyone else on earth. In a letter written in July 1855, Wight said that Joseph Smith in 1834 had ordained him to the

office of “Benamey” in the presence of an angel, and that when Joseph Smith commissioned Wight to establish the Texas colony in 1844, the Prophet gave to Wight a lifelong mission:

This revolation of the Lord was given by the angel of the seventh dispensation and was to continue during my life it was given by the highest authority that then was and I can not see any use or benefit it could be to alter it especially as their is no power on earth that can do it. . . . my mission was to continue during my life and as Joseph never found fault with me and no other man has authority to do so I think my case will lay over till the Lord takes me to himself.²⁸

Thus, the “Wild Ram of the Mountains” had adopted an attitude of ecclesiastical solipsism based on a secret ordination. His attitude made the succession question irrelevant: Wight was able to acknowledge individually or collectively the prerogatives of the Quorum of the Twelve, of the Council of Fifty, of William Smith, and Joseph Smith III, as long as those claimants did not presume to infringe upon his view of his own appointment and mission. From 1845 until his death in 1858, Lyman Wight led his devoted followers on a series of exoduses, explorations, and colonizations in Texas. Wearing by their perpetual pioneering and unable to share Wight’s solipsism, following his death most of Wight’s colony espoused either the patrilineal succession he had approved, at least in theory, or the apostolic succession that he had rebelled against.

Alpheus Cutler was the last man who claimed a right of succession on the basis of a secret ordination by the Prophet. Born in 1784, and called “Father Cutler” by Joseph Smith, Alpheus had been a member of the Church since 1833. He rose to special prominence at Nauvoo, becoming a member of the high council, of the temple committee, of Joseph Smith’s bodyguard, and in 1844, of the Council of Fifty. It was from the latter body that Cutler derived his own claim of special authority. In a letter of 29 January 1856, Alpheus Cutler described the Church as the lesser stream which flows from the greater fountain of the Kingdom of God.²⁹ For Cutler, however, the right of succession came through a special ordination, as described in the official history of Cutler’s Church of Jesus Christ:

Joseph Smith, sometimes prior to his death, organized a Quorum of Seven, all of whom were ordained under his hand to the prophetic office; with all the rights, keys, powers, privileges, and blessings belonging to that condition. The only difference in the ordinations of the seven, was in the case of Alpheus Cutler, whose right to act as prophet, seer and revelator was to be in force upon the whole world from that very hour. Under this ordination, he claimed an undisputed right to organize and build up the kingdom the same as Joseph had done.³⁰

Declining to go to Utah with the Quorum of Twelve Apostles and Council of Fifty, Alpheus Cutler withdrew from Winter Quarters in 1848, and

established a colony of followers in Iowa. He ordained a patriarch on 1 February 1849, and, having been excommunicated from the LDS Church on 20 April 1851, Culter performed the first baptism of a separate organization on 8 September 1853. On 19 September 1853, Alpheus Culter was sustained by his followers as “our head or chief Councilor” while (consistent with Cutler’s view of the superiority of Kingdom over the Church) another man was sustained president of the Church of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, on 13 March 1863, Alpheus Cutler stated “that the Quorum of 7 ord[ained] by Joseph had no control over Spiritual affairs.”³¹ At its apex in 1859, Cutler’s organization comprised only 183 persons, and following his death on 10 August 1864, the movement gradually disintegrated until as of 1973 only five persons maintained his testimony.³²

Although contrary to the published Revelation concerning the necessity for common consent in ordinations, these claims of secret ordination were consistent with the precedents Joseph Smith had frequently established in which he asked the Saints to ratify ordinations that had occurred previously without public knowledge. Strang’s claim of secret appointment was based on apparently falsified evidence. Wight’s was a manifestation of his religious solipsism, and Cutler’s was an aberrant of the political Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, none of these claims could be dismissed as contrary to precedent, and each of them acted as a siren call during the succession crisis of 1844.

Succession through the Office of Associate President

During the same year that precedent for the first two methods of presidential succession was established, Joseph Smith added a third when on 5 December 1834, he ordained Oliver Cowdery to the office of Assistant President of the High Priesthood to “assist in presiding over the Church, and bearing the keys of this kingdom.” Cowdery’s minutes of his ordination indicate that he was not merely made an assistant whose role was subordinate to the first and second counselors in the First Presidency:

The office of Assistant President is to assist in presiding over the whole church, and to officiate in the absence of the President, according to ~~their~~ his rank and appointment, viz: President Cowdery, first; President Rigdon Second, and President Williams Third, as they were severally called. The office of this Priesthood is also to act as Spokesman-taking Aaron for an ensample.³³

Although introduced as a member of the First Presidency after Rigdon and Williams, Cowdery was given supremacy over them. In fact, the definition of his powers gave Cowdery joint control with the Prophet. In the absence of Joseph Smith, Cowdery was president and the first and second counselors were *his* counselors. Recent LDS historians have been unanimous in the judgment that Oliver Cowdery’s position gave him automatic right to

the presidency of the Church in the event of the Prophet's death, and therefore some have asserted that Cowdery should be called "Associate President" rather than assistant president, an office given to several men.³⁴

However, had Joseph Smith "not lived to God," David Whitmer had also been ordained to succeed him as president. Thus, following 5 December 1834, both Whitmer and Cowdery had been given an indisputable right to succeed Joseph Smith. A succession impasse could have resulted had the Prophet died or been deposed while these two appointments were still in force. As it turned out, both Cowdery and Whitmer fell from grace. At a conference on 3 September 1837, Joseph Smith announced Cowdery had been in transgression, and thereafter Cowdery was demoted to serve with the assistant presidents who were ranked beneath the first and second counselor in authority. Whitmer also became disaffected and rebellious. Both he and Cowdery were excommunicated from the Church for apostasy in 1838.

Following their excommunications, Cowdery and Whitmer followed quite different paths with respect to their former rights of succession. Cowdery asserted no schismatic claims on the basis of his former ordinations. He established a law practice at Tiffin, Ohio, where in 1844 he was a charter member of the Methodist congregation. Oliver Cowdery never fully lost his interest in Mormonism, however, and on 12 November 1848, he was baptized again into the Church over which Brigham Young now presided.³⁵ In contrast, David Whitmer was drawn into schismatic activities. Appointed by excommunication William E. McLellin as president of the "Church of Christ" on 10 February 1847, Whitmer supported McLellin's actions until it was apparent that the organization was stillborn. For the next thirty years Whitmer seemed embarrassed by the 1847 effort, affirming that he had not arrived to put the Church in order. Nevertheless in 1876 David Whitmer ordained his nephew to "organize a new church according to the original pattern," thus reviving the 1847 "Church of Christ." Although Whitmer himself denied that he was claiming to be Joseph Smith's successor, his supporters did not fail to use the fact of Whitmer's 1834 ordination as a supporting argument for the movement. Moreover, Whitmer regarded Joseph Smith as a fallen prophet. Although Whitmer's organization produced some important historical documents, it never advanced beyond a struggle for existence.³⁶

After Oliver Cowdery lost the privilege of joint leadership with Joseph, that position was conferred upon the Prophet's brother, Hyrum Smith, in 1841. In the revelation Joseph announced on 19 January of that year, Hyrum Smith was appointed to Oliver Cowdery's former station. Having been given this position, Hyrum Smith was the first in line of succession should Joseph Smith die. In October 1844, Brigham Young remarked: "Did Joseph ordain any man to take his place? He did. Who was it? It was

Hyrum, but Hyrum fell a martyr before Joseph did. If Hyrum had lived he would have acted for Joseph. . . .”³⁷ Although Joseph had established a special office in the hierarchy which had automatic right of succession in the event of the death of the Church President, the only men who had been ordained to that office had been removed by apostasy or death.

Succession by the Presiding Patriarch

Deriving from Hyrum Smith, however, came a fourth claim for the right of succession. In addition to being the successor of Oliver Cowdery as Associate President, Hyrum Smith was also his father’s successor as Presiding Patriarch of the Church. On his deathbed, 14 September 1840, Joseph Smith, Sr., Presiding Patriarch since 1833, conferred that office upon his son Hyrum.³⁸ With reference to this event, Joseph Smith, Jr., commented to his associates on 27 May 1843: “The patriarchal office is the highest office in the church, and father Smith conferred this office, on Hyrum Smith, on his deathbed.”³⁹ Determining what Joseph meant by his description of this office as the highest in the Church is problematical, because the documents and history of the LDS Church from 1833 to 1844 unquestionably refute the concept that the Presiding Patriarch’s office was superior in authority either to the President of the Church or to the Quorum of the Twelve. The Presiding Patriarch directed the administration of prophetic blessings in the Church, and presided over regional patriarchs who performed that task. Patriarchs Joseph Smith, Sr., and Hyrum Smith had acted as subordinates to Joseph Smith, Jr. Perhaps the Prophet described that office as the “highest” in honor, rather than in priesthood keys, due to the completely revelatory nature of its operation. In any event, when Joseph Smith publicly declared on 16 July 1843, that Hyrum Smith should “hold the office of prophet to the Church, as it was his birthright,”⁴⁰ he obviously referred to Hyrum’s lineal role as successor to his father in the office of Presiding Patriarch, and thus established a method of presidential succession separate from that of Hyrum’s simultaneous role as Associate President.

When their brother William Smith, an apostle, was ordained by the other apostles to the office of Presiding Patriarch on 24 May 1845, he seized upon this succession precedent and claimed that as Hyrum Smith’s patriarchal successor he had the right to preside over the entire Church as Hyrum would have done. However, he did not make this claim when he first petitioned Brigham Young in August 1844 to be ordained to the office of Presiding Patriarch:

. . . will the Brethren remember me & my claims in the Smith family I do not mean as to a Succession as a prophet in Joseph, place for no man on Earth can fill his place he is our prophet sear revelalter Priest & King in time & in Eternity & hence the 12 come next to him on Earth or in heaven concequently

they must act in Joseph place on Earth as presiding officers & govern the Church in all things Temporally & Spiritually receiving revelation from Joseph as the ancient apostles did from Christ through the President of the Corum for the instruction & government of the Church.⁴¹

In actuality, the apostles could not confer upon William Smith the primary office of the patriarchal order held by Joseph Smith, Jr., for that was a position that transcended the ecclesiastical organization of the Church. It belonged alone to Joseph Smith, Jr.⁴²

Brigham Young acknowledged William Smith's right to be the Presiding Patriarch of the Church at the October conference of the Church in 1844, and the apostles ordained William Presiding Patriarch to the Church on 24 May 1845.⁴³ Within a few days, he started making such expansive claims about his powers as Presiding Patriarch that his fellow apostles wrote an article in *Times and Seasons*, explaining that since patriarchs were ordained by the apostles, a patriarch could not have authority superior to that of the apostles, and specifically that William Smith did not preside over the Church in any sense by virtue of his being the Presiding Patriarch.⁴⁴

Even though William himself had concurred in those same sentiments the previous August, by 27 June 1845, he was insisting that he was President of the Church by virtue of his patriarchal office. He was supported in this by his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, who related three visions she had received indicating that he was already President of the Church.⁴⁵ Joseph Smith's statement about the Presiding Patriarch being the highest office in the Church could provide precedent for such a claim, but William Smith's 1845 ordination by the other apostles could not be the basis for such a claim. Earlier the office of patriarch to the Church had been conferred only through patrilineal ordination: Joseph had ordained his father, who in turn ordained Hyrum, who had died without ordaining a patriarchal successor. As the apostles reminded William Smith almost immediately after his ordination as Presiding Patriarch, they could not give him an authority or keys higher than they held as apostles. William Smith was already an apostle, and the other apostles simply ordained him to be patriarch to preside over the administration of blessings to the Saints. In their view, the role of Joseph Smith, Jr., as president and patriarch of the entire latter-day dispensation belonged alone to him.

Even if William Smith's claim had validity, he, like Rigdon, was not a person whose former conduct gave credence to his claims. He had frequently demonstrated insubordination to the presidency of the church. Angered at an ecclesiastical decision by his brother Joseph, William had resigned his apostleship on 31 October 1835. William later physically assaulted his brother, for which he was tried by the Quorum of the Twelve on 17 December 1835, and dropped from office. Through the earnest intercession of the Prophet and his family, William confessed his wrongs at the Church tribunal which

would have excommunicated him on 2 January 1836, and was immediately restored to the fellowship of the Church and to his position in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.⁴⁶ A year and a half later, David W. Patten, a senior member of the Quorum or Twelve, questioned whether William Smith should be continued as an apostle because of unfavorable reports about his “faith in the work.”⁴⁷ Moreover, when Joseph Smith was imprisoned and threatened with execution in Missouri, William is reported to have exulted: “Dam him Joseph Smith ought to have been hung up by the neck years ago and Dam him he will get it now anyhow.”⁴⁸ For such disaffection, he was temporarily disfellowshipped from the Church and again suspended from office in 1839.

William Smith’s opposition to the authority of the Twelve Apostles in 1845 was one more manifestation of the insubordination which had characterized his ministry during the previous decade. He was dropped from office on 6 October and excommunication on 19 October 1845, for publishing a pamphlet against the authority of the Twelve Apostles to govern the Church.⁴⁹ Following his excommunication, William Smith became a leader in the Strang group in 1846, from which he was excommunicated in 1847 for moral infractions. Subsequently, he made a series of unsuccessful efforts to organize a church under his leadership, aligning himself with anyone who would accept his role as patriarchal successor to Joseph Smith.⁵⁰

Despite his frequent fulminations against Brigham Young and the Mormons of Utah, William longed to rejoin the councils of the Church there. In June 1847, he wrote two letters to Apostle Orson Hyde, pleading that he might be rebaptized into the Church by the apostles and be restored to his former standing in the Quorum of the Twelve. Concerning Brigham Young’s rule of the Church, Smith said:

I hope Brother Brigham will forgive me for I have said many hard things concerning him and yet I know him to be a man of God he shall never complain of me hereafter for I have decreed that my tounge shall no more speak evile of the ruler of my people. . . .⁵¹

Seven years later he made an even more obeisant plea directly to Brigham Young. William asked Brigham to restore him to his former apostleship and thereby give to the entire Smith family not in Utah an honor they deserved.⁵² Although William Smith repeated his request in 1855, we have found no record that Brigham Young responded to the letters. Apparently becoming irritated at the silence, William wrote a letter in 1856 consigning President young to hell.⁵³ That would seem to have ended the matter, but the ever unpredictable William Smith made a final, unilateral effort at reconciliation with the Church in Utah. In 1860 Brigham Young received letters from William Smith and J. J. Butler indicating that Butler had baptized William Smith into the LDS Church, and that Smith would come to Utah.⁵⁴

About the time of William Smith's baptism into the Church headquartered at Salt Lake City, his nephew, Joseph Smith III, became president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which repudiated the claims of Brigham Young and the other apostles. Lacking a promise from Brigham Young of restoration to the apostleship, William Smith deferred going to Utah in the apparent hope that with the rise of the Reorganization either Brigham Young or Joseph Smith III would make him an offer of high office in return for his support of their particular claim of succession. By the time Brigham Young died in August 1877, William had apparently given up hope of being restored to the hierarchy of the Church in Utah. In January 1878, he wrote his nephew Joseph Smith III and offered to add his prestigious membership to the RLDS Church in exchange for the position of counselor to Joseph Smith III or the thus-far vacant position of Presiding Patriarch in the RLDS Church. To give his request added impact William Smith threatened to launch a campaign against the succession claims of Joseph Smith III if he did not grant William's request for office. With greater interest and restraint than Brigham Young ever gave William's mercurial outbursts, Joseph Smith III responded on 12 January 1878 by offering to accept William Smith into the Reorganization as a high priest, dismissing as ineffectual his threats, but "leaving the question of apostleship and the patriarchate, to be settled subsequently, as the necessity of the case may demand, wisdom direct, or the spirit command."⁵⁵ For William Smith this glimpse of success was enough, and he entered the RLDS Church as a high priest on 9 April 1878. Although William repeatedly petitioned his nephew to appoint him Presiding Patriarch, and Joseph Smith III continued to leave that possibility vaguely open, the aged Tantalus died on 13 November 1893 without obtaining either of the offices he had sought since 1845. On 9 April 1897, a brother of Joseph Smith III was appointed as the first Patriarch of the RLDS Church.⁵⁶

Succession by the Council of Fifty

A fifth possible mode of succession was suggested when Joseph Smith established the Council of Fifty in the spring of 1844. This was a parapolitical body organized on 10 March 1844, to advance the Kingdom of God in a political sense. During Joseph's last months of life, this organization directed his political campaign for the presidency of the United States, commissioned ambassadors to represent the Church in "foreign" capitals, and continued the preparations for an intended move west which had been initiated by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Following the Prophet's death the Council of Fifty influenced the economic and political life of the Mormons of the Great Basin.⁵⁷

In the meeting with the Council of Fifty (on 23 March 1844 by one account) the Prophet Joseph made a statement which became the shibboleth of succession for the majority of Mormons after Smith's death. In later years Benjamin F. Johnson, a member of the Council of Fifty, recalled the event:

At one of the last meetings of the Council of Fifty after all had been completed and the keys of power committed, and in the presence of the Quorum of the Twelve and others who were encircled around him, he arose, gave a review of his life and sufferings, and of the testimonies he had borne, and said that the Lord had now accepted his labors and sacrifices, and did not require him any longer to carry the responsibilities and burden and bearing off of this kingdom, and turning to those around him, including the 12, he said, "And in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I now place it upon you my brethren of the council and I shake my skirts clear of all responsibility from this time forth," springing from the floor and shaking his skirt at the same time.⁵⁸

Following the death of Joseph Smith, the apostles almost immediately referred to his remarks on this occasion as indicating the right of the Quorum of the Twelve to govern the Church in his absence.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the Kingdom of God in Mormonism was both ecclesiastical and temporal. The "Keys to the Kingdom" rested upon the shoulders of the Council of Fifty, which included the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. In 1846, Brigham Young stated: "Wherever the 12 & Council are there will the Keys be also."⁶⁰ Thus, it is not strange that some members of the Council of Fifty regarded that body as having a right of succession to lead and organize the Church.

As early as 30 July 1844, two members of the council tried to persuade three of the apostles that such was the proper role of the Council of Fifty.

Elders W. Richards and Geo. A. Smith met in Council with Elder Taylor at his house. Bishop Geo. Miller and Alexander Badlam wanted them to call together the Council of Fifty and organize the Church. They were told that the Council of Fifty was not a Church organization . . . and that the organization of the Church belonged to the Priesthood alone.⁶¹

Even Lyman Wight, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles since 1841, concluded that the "grand council of fifty persons" was the highest governing body of the church, rather than being the political arm of the Mormon kingdom.

. . . I will here state the first thing to have been done [following the death of Joseph Smith] would have been to have called the fifties together from the four quarters of the earth, which contained all the highest authorities of the church. As you will readily see, that had not the fifty constituted the highest authorities, it would have been a species of weakness to have ordained all the highest authorities into that number.

Wight concluded by saying that, having assembled together, the Council of fifty should have appointed the successor to Joseph Smith.⁶²

Despite the arguments of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that it was the prerogative of that body to govern the ecclesiastical kingdom, several members of the Council of Fifty broke with them and proceeded to form their own theocratic commonwealths, Lyman Wight establishing his colony in Texas; Alpheus Cutler and Peter Haws organizing a little colony in Iowa; and George Miller, John E. Page, and George J. Adams aligning themselves with Strang, who was crowned king in 1850.⁶³ The claims of these renegade members of the Council of Fifty could be derived from the statements of Joseph Smith to the Council of Fifty, but it was a specious argument by which they asserted that the Council of Fifty outranked the Quorum of the Twelve. The apostles had been directing the economic and political life of the Mormon kingdom since 1841. They, with the president of the Church, had organized the Council of Fifty in the spring of 1844. The Council of Fifty was the creature of the ecclesiastical hierarchy; it merely gave a quasi-democratization to the rule of the Mormon theocracy. The schismatic members of the Council of Fifty ignored the reality of the powers that Joseph Smith had conferred upon the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles by 1844.

Succession by the Quorum of Twelve Apostles

It was, in fact, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles which exerted the sixth and most successful claim of succession. A published revelation of 28 March 1835, had stated that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was equal in “authority and power” to the organized First Presidency (D&C 107:23–24). This provided a scriptural basis for the succession claim of the apostles, but the 1835 revelation was far less important as a proof-text of succession than the actuality of the ecclesiastical, economic, and political powers that Joseph Smith had conferred upon the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles from 1841 to 1844. Under the direction of Joseph Smith, the Quorum of the Twelve had directed the emigration of Mormons to Nauvoo, had been responsible for their settlement in and around Nauvoo, had administered the finances of the Church in concert with Joseph Smith as Trustee-in-Trust, had overseen the baptisms for the dead, and had presided over the secret developments of Nauvoo: the administration of the endowment, the performances of plural marriages, the initial preparations for the movement into the American West, the organization of the Council of Fifty. As the Nauvoo Mormons knew too well, next to Joseph and Hyrum Smith there was no ecclesiastical power in the Church to compare with that of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the right of the apostles to continue the spiritual authority once possessed by Joseph Smith was not automatically assumed. Brigham Young himself, though President of the Quorum of the Twelve,

had for a moment wondered whether all the spiritual authority and priesthood had died with the martyred prophet:

While at brother Bemant's house at Peterboro', I heard a letter read which brother Livingstone had received from Mr. Joseph Powers, of Nauvoo, giving particulars of the murder of Joseph Smith and Hyrum. The first thing which I thought of was, whether Joseph had taken the keys of the kingdom with him from the earth. . . .

Although he was thus dazed by the news of the martyrdom, Brigham Young suddenly brought his hand down on his knee and exclaimed: "The keys of the kingdom are right here with the Church."⁶⁵ Henceforth he never faltered in asserting that the spiritual authority and ecclesiastical prerogatives of Joseph Smith were to be perpetuated through the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

If the president of the Twelve wondered even for a moment whether that body or any other body retained the priesthood keys once possessed by the dead prophet, it is understandable that many Mormons who knew infinitely less about Church government were more vulnerable to differing claims of succession. By the time Brigham Young arrived in Nauvoo on 6 August 1844, the situation in the Church was at crisis proportions. James J. Strang, Sidney Rigdon, and members of the Council of Fifty were already making divergent claims of authority, and it was possible that additional claims would be advanced. Had that trend not been decisively reversed, the Church could have disintegrated within the year of Joseph Smith's death.

At this juncture a general meeting of all the quorums and local members was held at Nauvoo on 8 August 1844. Rigdon, who for several days had publicly advanced his claims, now presented his case to the assembled multitudes from 10:00 to 11:30 A.M. Rather than follow Rigdon's remarks with an immediate rebuttal, Brigham Young adjourned the meeting for two-and-a-half hours. Some of the apostles had voiced criticism of Rigdon's claims prior to the 2:00 P.M. meeting, but it was Brigham Young who spearheaded the opposition to him and all other claimants in the afternoon meeting:

Here is President Rigdon, who was counselor to Joseph. I ask, where are Joseph and Hyrum? They are gone beyond the veil; and if Elder Rigdon wants to act as his counselor, he must go beyond the veil where he is. . . .

If the people want President Rigdon to lead them they may have him: but I say unto you that the Quorum of the Twelve have the keys of the kingdom of God in all the world.

The Twelve are appointed by the finger of God. Here is Brigham, have his knees ever faltered? Have his lips ever quivered? Here is Heber and the rest of the Twelve, an independent body who have the keys of the priesthood—the keys of the kingdom of God to deliver to all the world: this is true, so help me God. They stand next to Joseph, and are as the First Presidency of the Church.⁶⁶

Brigham Young's remarks were a masterful mixture of indirect references to Rigdon's exile and former instability, affirmations of the acknowledged authority given by Joseph Smith to the Quorum of the Twelve, appeals to the Mormons to retain stability in the Church by relying on established authorities rather than appointing new ones, and warnings about the consequences of not following the Twelve Apostles. Young had set the tenor for the rest of the speakers.

Appalled by the effect of the various apostles' words upon the audience, Rigdon declined to speak again when given the opportunity. Instead, he asked William W. Phelps to speak in his behalf. Rigdon could not have chosen a worse advocate, for Phelps exclaimed at one point during his discourse: "If you want to do right, uphold the Twelve." When the question was put to a vote whether to sustain the Twelve Apostles as the head of the Church, the vote of the assembled multitude was nearly unanimous in the affirmative.⁶⁷

For many people in the audience, the issue had been supernaturally resolved when Brigham Young stood to make his opening remarks. To their eyes he seemed transfigured into the form of Joseph Smith; some in the audience later said that even Brigham's voice sounded identical to that of the dead prophet. Apparently no explicit accounts of this manifestation were written at the time of its occurrence, even though many journals recorded reminiscent descriptions of it. Nevertheless, some contemporary references have survived. On 15 November 1844, Henry and Catharine Brooke wrote from Nauvoo that Brigham Young "favours Br Joseph, both in person, & manner of speaking more than any person ever you saw, looks like another."⁶⁸ This could be construed as only a casual comparison, but the entry for May 1845, in the diary of William Burton related more directly to the problem of succession: "But their [Joseph and Hyrum Smith's] places were filled by others much better than I once supposed they could have been, the spirit of Joseph appeared to rest upon Brigham."⁶⁹ For those whose eyes and ears were attuned to this manifestation, it was a compelling sign that the Twelve Apostles should lead the Church.

Succession by Three Priesthood Councils

Parenthetically, it is necessary to recognize that the apostles had good reason for not stressing the 1835 revelation (D&C 107:23–24) as the basis for the apostolic claim of succession, because the Quorum of the Twelve was not the only ecclesiastical body cited therein as having authority equal to that of the First Presidency. The First Quorum of Seventy, a group of the seventy men ordained to the proselyting office of Seventy, was also designed in that revelation as forming "a quorum, equal in authority to

that of the Twelve” (D&C 107:25–26). Moreover, the 1835 revelation also specified that:

The standing high councils, at the stakes of Zion, form a quorum equal in authority in the affairs of the church, in all their decisions, to the quorum of the presidency, or to the traveling high council [Quorum of the Twelve Apostles].

The high council in Zion form a quorum equal in authority in the affairs of the church, in all their decisions, to the councils of the Twelve at the stakes of Zion. (D&C 107:36–37)

This latter provision was further complicated by the fact that on 3 July 1834, Joseph Smith implied that the central high council of the Church could lead the Church in the event of his, and in a revelation of 19 January 1841 the Nauvoo High Council was called “the corner-stone of Zion.”⁷⁰ The provisions of the 1835 revelation established a thinly defined equilibrium between the three priesthood councils under the jurisdiction of the organized First Presidency, but did not specify if or how that equilibrium would be altered once the First Presidency no longer existed. The sudden removal of the organized First Presidency (an event not specifically provided for in the 1835 or 1841 revelations) on 27 June 1844, thus made possible a three-way struggle for power among the Quorum of the Twelve, the full First Quorum of Seventy, and the President of the central high council of the Church at Nauvoo. This ill-defined potential of tripartite leadership by these ecclesiastical bodies constituted a seventh avenue of succession that could legitimately be derived from Joseph Smith. Although no strident claims of succession were advanced on this basis, there were undercurrents at Nauvoo in response to this possibility.

In April 1845, Joseph Smith’s widow, Emma, quoted the 1835 revelation to argue that William Marks, president of the Nauvoo High Council and president of the Nauvoo Stake since 1839, should have succeeded Joseph Smith in the leadership of the Church.⁷¹ By the time Sidney Rigdon was excommunicated on 8 September 1844, it was apparent that Marks did not support the claim of the apostles, and therefore on 10 September 1844, Marks was dropped from the high council, and on 7 October 1844 a conference of the Church dropped Marks from his position as president of the Nauvoo Stake, a position he had held since 1839.⁷² Despite his disaffection from the rule of the apostles, William Marks apparently never gave much energy to promoting himself as a successor to Joseph Smith. Instead he followed the frustrating road of those who sought alternatives to the Church over which Brigham Young presided. After joining with Rigdon, Strang, and other groups of dissidents, William Marks finally joined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1859. Marks assisted in the 1860 ordination of Joseph Smith III as president of that Church, and

from 1863 to his death in 1872 served as a counselor in the RLDS presidency. Despite Emma Smith's preferences in 1845, Brigham Young received little schismatic challenge from Marks, and none from any subsequent president of the central stake of the Church.

There is no evidence that any of the seventy members of the First Quorum of Seventy in 1844 challenged the already firmly established rule of the Quorum of the Twelve. Nevertheless, on 29 September 1844, Brigham Young vacated the full First Quorum of Seventy by appointing the sixty-three lesser members of that quorum as presidents over local quorums of seventy, leaving only the first seven presidents of the First Quorum in the original quorum. Although these seven men continued to function as General Authorities of the Church, known as the First Council of Seventy they no longer had their own quorum over which to preside.⁷³

This action eliminated the First Quorum of Seventy spoken of in the 1835 revelation, and thus dispensed with its potential threat to the prerogatives of the numerically smaller Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The Nature of Apostolic Succession

The Quorum of the Twelve was a known and trusted entity to the Mormons. As early as 27 March 1836, the apostles had been sustained with the First Presidency as "Prophets and Seers."⁷⁴ With their prophet dead and mobs menacing Nauvoo, the Quorum of the Twelve seemed to be the only stability upon which Mormons could depend. After 8 August 1844, the Church emerged from its crisis. An unsettled mode of succession could have destroyed it; the Quorum of the Twelve was determined that such a crisis should never be repeated. The apostles were careful, however, to specify that the place of Joseph Smith would never be filled by another. In an epistle of the Quorum of the Twelve to the Church, on 15 August 1844 they stated: "Let no man presume for a moment that his [Joseph Smith's] place will be filled by another; for, *remember he stands in his own place*, and always will."⁷⁵ When the membership of the Church voted on 8 August to accept to Twelve Apostles as the First Presidency of the Church, they were not voting for a successor to Joseph Smith. The Mormons were simply acknowledging the fact that the Quorum of the Twelve presided over the Church by virtue of known Revelation and by the recognized ascendance given to them by the founding Prophet.

Nevertheless, by virtue of his being president and senior member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Brigham Young was already acting as President of the LDS Church. As early as 5 December 1844, Brigham Young signed himself in a letter as "Prest of the Church of L.D.S."⁷⁶ Moreover, the manuscript minutes of the general conference on 7 April 1845, show that

Brigham Young was unanimously voted upon and sustained “as the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to this Church and nation, and all nations, and also as the President of the whole Church of Latter Day Saints.”⁷⁷ In pursuance of this mandate, Brigham Young on 8 May 1845 wrote Wilford Woodruff, then in England, to obtain foreign copyrights to Church publications “in the name of Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” and on 15 August 1845, he gave identical instructions to others for the securing of U.S. copyrights to Church publications.⁷⁸

As he returned from the new Mormon refuge in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young suggested forming a separate First Presidency. Wilford Woodruff, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve since 1838, recorded on 12 October 1847 his feelings about the suggestion:

I had a question put to me by President Young what my opinion was concerning one of the Twelve Apostles being appointed as the President of the Church with his two Councillors. I answered that a quorum like the Twelve who have been appointed by revelation—confirmed by revelation from time to time I thought it would require a revelation to change the order of that quorum.⁷⁹

Although there was biblical precedent for the quorum of apostles to lead the Church (with Peter at the head anciently) there was neither precedent nor specific authorization for the Quorum of the Twelve to *appoint* a separate First Presidency.

When the matter was first proposed in a meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve on 15 November 1847, it became apparent that others questioned the advisability of the proposal. Woodruff recorded:

I returned to Winter Quarters with Br Potter & met in Council with the Twelve O Pratt introduced the subject of the standing & rights of the President & also of the quorum, O Pratt was followed by G. A. Smith W. Woodruff & A Lyman & council adjourned until tomorrow.⁸⁰

The above entry alludes to the fact that members of the Quorum of the Twelve, led by Orson Pratt, were concerned about the effect a separate apostolic presidency would have on the jurisdiction of the rest of the Quorum of the Twelve. Brigham Young subsequently acknowledge that Elder Pratt had led the opposition to organizing the 1847 First Presidency.⁸¹ In 1873, T. B. H. Stenhouse (an apostate, but former confidant and associate of the General Authorities), not only correctly identified Woodruff and Pratt as questioning the organization of the First Presidency in 1847, but also said that John Taylor and Parley P. Pratt had opposed its initial proposal.⁸²

The crux of the controversy was not whether Brigham Young should be appointed President of the Church. He had already been publicly sustained to that position on 7 April 1845, and by 1846 rank-and-file Mormons

were referring to Brigham Young as President of the Church.⁸³ At issue in 1847 was his proposal to establish a First Presidency that would be administratively autonomous with respect to the rest of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, thus diminishing the administrative role of the remaining quorum members. The extent of apostolic opposition to this proposal is indicated by the number of meetings convened to discuss the matter. The meeting of 15 November was reconvened the following day, at which the question was again discussed, “& A vote was taken that the President shall at all times have the privilege of reproof, rebuking, exhorting & teaching at all times as he shall be led by the Holy Ghost. Council dismissed was unsatisfactory to Brigham Young who felt that it still required the majority of the apostles to remain at the headquarters of the Church instead of preaching the gospel among the nations of the earth. On 30 November 1847 the question was again discussed, and the meeting again ended inconclusively.⁸⁴

A final meeting of nine of the apostles on this proposal occurred 5 December 1847. On this occasion Brigham Young said: “I have been stirred up to do this by the spirit of the Lord.” by this time, resistance to the proposal had been reduced to two men: George A. Smith, whose opposition was tentative, and Orson Pratt, whose argument was more pronounced. Nevertheless, after a five hour meeting, the apostles voted unanimously that Brigham Young and two other apostles comprise a separate First Presidency. The apostles did so on the basis of President Young’s emphasis that the Spirit of God testified that there was a need for a complete organization of the Church.⁸⁵ In 1860, Apostle Orson Hyde stated that this action received explicitly divine confirmation in February 1848 when the voice of God declared to a private meeting of the apostles: “Let my servant Brigham step forth and receive the full power of the presiding Priesthood in my Church and kingdom.”⁸⁶

The general membership of the Church required no special manifestation or protracted consultation to approve the formation of the new First Presidency. At conferences of the Church membership on 27 December 1847 and subsequently, the Mormons who had followed the Twelve voted to sustain the action of the Quorum of the Twelve in forming a First Presidency. To the general membership of the Church, this development must have appeared as a natural consequence to Brigham Young’s vigorous leadership during the difficult times following the death of Joseph Smith.

Nevertheless, the First Presidency established in 1847 and subsequently by the apostles was significantly different from that of Joseph Smith’s presidency. Joseph’s was based upon appointment by fiat. From the world’s millions, God chose Joseph Smith, Jr., to lead His church. When Joseph Smith contemplated a successor, he made an appointment without seeking

prior approval of the governing bodies of the Church. He did this in 1834 with David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery, and in 1843 with Hyrum Smith. Although the Prophet had given the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles jurisdiction over the Church equal only to his own, he had retained the arbitrary right to appoint his successor to the office of President of the High Priesthood and President of the Church. Lacking his one-man privilege of arbitrary appointment, the rule of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles remained within the basic structure of that body.

Brigham Young demonstrated that this was his view during his thirty-three year presidency over the Church. Throughout his life he denied that he was successor of Joseph Smith as prophet, repeatedly affirming that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ and of Joseph Smith.⁸⁷ Brigham Young maintained that he was President of the Church by virtue of his position as senior apostle, and that in reality he had never left the Quorum of the Twelve.

Now it is no more my duty to live so as to know the mind and will of the Lord than it is the duty of *my brethren, the rest of the Twelve*. I say the rest of the Twelve, because I am the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on the earth.⁸⁸

Although the organized First Presidency was administratively autonomous with respect to the body known as the Quorum of the Twelve, the presidency after 1847 was an extension of that quorum. For this reason President Brigham Young in 1865 could assert that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had led the Church for twenty-one years.⁸⁹

It has been customary to refer to the periods after 1844 in which the apostles had not organized a First Presidency as the “apostolic interregnum” or “apostolic presidency.”⁹⁰ In reality, there has never been a time since 1844 that the apostolic presidency has not existed. Since 1844 the senior apostle in rank within the Quorum of the Twelve has been the President of the Church, whether or not he established himself in a First Presidency with separate counselors. As Wilford Woodruff stated in a letter of 28 March 1887: “The President of the Twelve is really the President of the Church by virtue of his office as much while presiding over the Twelve Apostles as while presiding over his two counselors.”⁹¹ Nevertheless, on occasion it has been seriously advocated that someone other than the senior member of the Quorum of the Twelve become the President of the Church: in 1880 Apostle Orson Pratt proposed that “a young man” be appointed President of the Church instead of any of the elderly senior apostles, and Joseph F. Smith was specifically proposed to be such a choice in 1877 by Counselor Daniel H. Wells and again in 1887 by Apostle Heber J. Grant. These proposals were disapproved by the rest of the Quorum of the Twelve.⁹² When Joseph F. Smith did become President of the Church in 1901, he had previously been ranked as the senior apostle of the Quorum.

The automatic nature of the senior apostle becoming the next President of the Church was vital to apostolic succession. President Harold B. Lee has stated that this automatic process “avoids, as Elder [Spencer W.] Kimball has said, the possibility of using political devices or revolutionary methods” in establishing presidential succession.⁹³ This automatic succession of the senior apostle was fundamental to the concept that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, without appointing a successor, has presided over the Church since 1844. Down to the present, the apostles have affirmed that although succession of the senior apostle is automatic, it would require direct revelation for any another person, including another member of the Quorum of the Twelve, to become President of the Church.⁹⁴ Appointing anyone as President of the Church who was not already the senior apostle could conceivably end the automatic apostolic succession established in 1844 and reestablish the former prerogative of the living president to designate or actually ordain intended successors as Joseph Smith once did.

As part of apostolic succession, however, the Quorum of the Twelve and apostolic First Presidency have clearly outlined the pattern of succession implied in the 1835 and 1841 Revelation. The succession of the senior apostle of the Quorum is automatic, but in the event that some catastrophe eliminated all but one member of the Quorum of the Twelve, then that surviving apostle (having all the keys of the priesthood) would be President of the Church and would then ordain others to fill up the Quorum of the Twelve. If the case were that the President of the Church and entire Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were to be removed, then the seven men comprising the First Council of Seventy would call sixty-three other seventies to fill up the full First Quorum of Seventy, which body in such circumstances would have the keys of authority to direct the Church and priesthood until the Quorum of Seventy ordained men to comprise a new Quorum of Twelve Apostles. If at the extreme, the President of the Church, the entire Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the entire Quorum of Seventy were removed by death or church discipline, then even in such an extremity the succession would be unclouded, for the presidents of all the ecclesiastical stakes of the Church would then hold as a body the keys of the priesthood sufficient to govern the Church and ordain men to the Quorum of the Twelve, who then would govern and organize the Church according to the clearly established pattern of apostolic succession.⁹⁵ When the reestablishment of the full First Quorum of Seventy was begun on 3 October 1975 (after an absence of 131 years), it thereby made virtually impossible the need to turn to the latter option of automatic succession. Thus the automatic nature of apostolic succession established in 1844 has protected the Church membership from a repeated crisis by clarifying the pattern of succession in all exigencies.

Succession by a Descendant of the Prophet Joseph Smith

Although the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, holding the keys of the priesthood, legitimately presided over the Church by virtue of established directives and authorization of Joseph Smith, Jr., there remained an eighth method of succession which may have been established by the Prophet. That method involved the right of his sons to succeed him as President of the Church. These claims were not advanced by his sons until fifteen years after the martyrdom, a fact which Utah Mormon polemicists used for the next century to repudiate Joseph Smith III's claims that he was designated to be the successor of his father.⁹⁶ Apologetics aside, there is evidence that Joseph Smith, Jr., hoped that his sons might eventually preside over the Church. To this end he may have designed his eldest living son, Joseph Smith III, to be his successor.

That Joseph Smith intended his descendants to have prominence in the leadership of the Church is apparent from several sources. In an 1841 revelation there was a direct statement concerning Joseph Smith's descendants: "In thee and in thy seed shall the kindred of the earth be blessed" (D&C 124:58).⁹⁷ Between 1833 and 1843 Joseph Smith called the following members of his family to be General Authorities: his father, his brothers Hyrum and William, his uncle John, his aunt's first cousin, Amasa M. Lyman, his own first cousin, George A. Smith, and several distant cousins.⁹⁸ In view of revelatory comments about Joseph Smith's descendants and his own efforts to make the hierarchy an extended family, it would be difficult to deny that Joseph Smith may have had plans for elevating his own sons to the highest leadership of the Church.

Whether, in fact, Joseph Smith officially designated his son Joseph III to be his successor has been debated for more than a century. Apostle Lyman Wight, already excommunicated by Brigham Young, wrote a letter to the Strangites in which he said that after Joseph Smith escaped from Liberty Jail in 1839, the Prophet designated "a youth" (possibly Joseph Smith III) to be his successor.⁹⁹ In 1892 James Whitehead, a member of the RLDS Church, testified that as a private secretary to Joseph Smith, Jr., in Nauvoo, he had personal knowledge of the rights of Joseph Smith III:

I recollect a meeting that was held in the winter of 1843, at Nauvoo, Illinois, prior to Joseph Smith's death, at which the appointment was made by him, Joseph Smith, of his successor. His son Joseph was selected as his successor. . . . He was ordained and anointed at that meeting. Hyrum Smith, the Patriarch, anointed him, and Joseph his father blessed him and ordained him, and Newel K. Whitney poured the oil on his head, and he was set apart to be his father's successor in office, holding all the powers his father held.

Whitehead also stated that this secret ceremony was later ratified by a general meeting at Nauvoo, attended by 3,000 Mormons.¹⁰⁰

There are certain problems with Whitehead's testimony that bear consideration. First, no contemporary minutes of the 1843 ceremony or ratifying meeting are extant. Moreover, no reference to either the 1839 ceremony or the 1843 ceremony has been located in the diaries of the principal men involved, or in the available journals of Joseph Smith's private secretaries. In addition, Whitehead's memory about his own role in Nauvoo seems to have been faulty. Rather than being the only private secretary to Joseph Smith, from 1842 to 1844, Whitehead was a clerk on the Nauvoo Temple building committee and also a clerk in the office of the Trustee-in-Trust. Despite Whitehead's claim that he alone kept Joseph Smith's private journals, letterbooks and correspondence, the journals are in the handwriting of Willard Richards, and the correspondence and letterbooks are in the handwriting primarily of William Clayton, who in fact did serve as the Prophet's private secretary from 1842 to 1844.¹⁰¹ Moreover, in June 1874, Whitehead privately admitted that he did not witness the 1843 ordination of Joseph Smith III, but instead had heard it discussed by others.¹⁰²

Nevertheless, there is circumstantial evidence from the Nauvoo period indicating that Joseph Smith III was designated to be the successor of his father. Rumors about the matter were widespread enough to be included in an 1844 published history of Illinois:

"The Prophet," it is said, has left a will or revelation, appointing a successor; and, among other things, it is stated that his son, a lad of twelve years, is named therein as his successor. Of this, however, there is no certainty.¹⁰³

One of the source for this vague rumor may have been the patriarchal blessing given to Joseph Smith III by his grandfather, which stated in part: "You shall have power to carry out all that your Father left undone when you become of age."¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, these Nauvoo rumors may have derived from the kind of ordination ceremony described by Whitehead. Although there is thus far no conclusive evidence verifying that Joseph Smith III was ordained and anointed as successor in 1843, a letter of 14 June 1845 by George J. Adams seems to refer to such an event:

i have suffered much persecution since i left Boston and much abuse because i cant support the twelve as the first presidency i cant do it when i know that it belongs to Josephs Son-Young Joseph who was ordained by his father before his Death.¹⁰⁵

For his opposition to the Quorum of the Twelve (and particularly for his advocating polygamy in New England), George J. Adams had been excommunicated on 10 April 1845.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, when William Smith began rebelling against the rule of the Quorum of the Twelve, it was partly because he felt young Joseph was being supplanted by Brigham Young. As early as 20 August 1845, he wrote letters asserting that Joseph Smith III was the Prophet's successor.¹⁰⁷ When he was

removed as Presiding Patriarch and Apostle by action of a general conference of the Church on 6 October 1845, he retaliated by publishing a pamphlet that stated in part:

... this Brigham Young was pampering the church with the idea that although little Joseph was the rightful heir to the priesthood and office of his father as a prophet, seer, and revelator, that it was not prudent to mention this for fear of the little child's life.¹⁰⁸

As noted earlier, the Twelve Apostles excommunicated William Smith on 19 October for publishing this tract.

If, in fact, an actual ordinance was performed by Joseph Smith, Jr., ordaining his eldest son as successor, the attitudes of those allegedly familiar with the ceremony are curious. James Whitehead, who later claimed personal knowledge of the ordination of Joseph Smith III as successor, followed Brigham Young even after Brigham was sustained as President of the Church. As late as April 1848, Whitehead accepted a mission from President Young to act as an agent in gathering the Saints from the eastern United States for the journey to Utah. Although Whitehead said: "I withdrew from the Church there [Winter Quarters] on account of its wickedness," he actually remained on this mission until he was disfellowshipped on 5 November 1848 for moral misconduct.¹⁰⁹ While George J. Adams in June 1845 referred to the ordination of Joseph Smith III, he was able a year later to write the following concerning James J. Strang:

I now testify to all the world, that he is a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, appointed and chosen of God, to stand in the place of brother Joseph; to give the word of God and hold the keys and power that is to bear off this last dispensation.¹¹⁰

William Smith's frequently expressed assertions about Joseph Smith III's rights of succession never mentioned any ordination, but argued the lineal rights of the young boy from scripture and precedent. Moreover, William Smith supported James J. Strang's appointment as Joseph Smith, Jr.'s, successor,¹¹¹ and his periodic willingness to accept Brigham Young's leadership in Utah has been mentioned. When Strang suggested that William Smith be appointed chief patriarch and Joseph Smith III be appointed counselor and patriarch, William Smith not only objected, but virtually denied that Joseph Smith III had a claim of presidential succession: "Joseph is but a boy and will not defend his rights whatever they are (if he has any)."¹¹² As far as Joseph Smith, Jr., the Prophet, is concerned, on 16 July 1843 he publicly proclaimed Hyrum, not his son, as successor.¹¹³ Moreover, if the ordination of Joseph Smith III occurred, then his mother's attitude is curious. In April 1845, Emma Smith told her son's tutor that William Marks should succeed Joseph Smith, Jr., because Marks was the "individual contemplated by him for his successor."¹¹⁴ It is evident that in

the crisis of succession that began in 1844, none of these sometime advocates of Joseph Smith III maintained a consistent position with reference to his unilateral right of succession. If Joseph Smith III had indeed been ordained or anointed to be a successor, the significance of that event was at times ambivalent even to his most knowledgeable supporters.

Even for Joseph Smith III, the ordinances described by Lyman Wight and James Whitehead had less than conclusive significance with reference to succession. In 1846, William Smith wrote that Joseph Smith III had related a childhood vision that supported the claims of James J. Strang.¹¹⁵ Even after becoming president of the RLDS Church, Joseph Smith III repeatedly maintained that he had not been officially “ordained” by his father as the successor, but rather was “blessed” by his father in 1839 and in 1843 to hold that office at some future date. His objection to the word “ordination” in regard to the events of 1839 and 1843 was based on his conviction that a person could not be “ordained” President of the Church at the same time someone else occupied that position. Young Joseph nevertheless solemnly affirmed that he had received such priesthood in 1839 and 1843, and that those prophetic designations were dependent upon worthiness and required eventual ordination by those properly qualified.¹¹⁶

Although automatic succession did not apply to Joseph Smith III, there is evidence to indicate that Brigham Young acknowledged a future role of the sons of Joseph Smith, Jr., in the Church. When asked about young Joseph on 28 February 1860, he said that “blessings will rest upon the posterity of Joseph Smith the Prophet.”¹¹⁷ Brigham Young is also alleged to have acknowledged privately and publicly prior to 1860 that Joseph Smith III had a right to preside in the Church.¹¹⁸ Not only Brigham Young, but many Mormons in the Great Basin seem to have anticipated that one day Joseph Smith III would become a leader in the Church perpetuated by the apostles.¹¹⁹ It was with wonderment that they learned he had become the president, on 6 April 1860, of a church formed by dissidents from numerous sects established after the death of Joseph Smith, Jr., Joseph Smith III was ordained president of the RLDS Church by four men: two had never belonged to the Church prior to his father’s death, one had been out of favor with his father in 1844, and was dropped from office for supporting Rigdon’s claims, and the last had followed the Twelve Apostles until they led the main body of the Church to Utah.¹²⁰ The immediate reaction of the Mormons of Utah was indicated in the letter of William H. Folsom, informing Brigham Young of the ordination: “A strange affair indeed, the Lesser has ordained the greater.”¹²¹

Despite the action of Joseph Smith III, Brigham Young continued to hope that the young man or one of his brothers would reconsider and return to the church he had led in apostolic succession for sixteen years.

Three months after Joseph Smith III had become president of the RLDS Church, Brigham Young stated in public meetings:

What of Joseph Smith's family? What of his boys? I have prayed from the beginning for sister Emma and for the whole family. There is not a man in this Church that has entertained better feelings towards them. Joseph said to me, "God will take care of my children when I am taken." They are in the hands of God, and when they make their appearance before this people, full of his power, there are none but what will say—"Amen! we are ready to receive you."¹²²

As Joseph Smith III demonstrated increasing hostility to the church in Utah, Brigham Young expressed hope that the martyred Prophet's youngest son, David Hyrum Smith, would one day merit his rightful place as president of the LDS Church. On 1 September 1861, the wife of Lucien Woodworth (a member of the Council of Fifty) reported to the LDS Church Historian that Joseph Smith had pronounced special promises on his unborn son, David H., and she also stated that President Young "announced the fact that in Joseph's posterity the keys of the Priesthood should rest and that upon young David the blessing should descend."¹²³ At October conference 1863, President Young publicly stated that Joseph Smith III would never preside over the LDS Church, but affirmed:

Long before his death Joseph [the Prophet] had told said to me, ~~all about this son he should~~ I shall have a son born to ~~him~~ me, and his name should shall be called David; and on him, in some future time, will rest the responsibility that now rests upon me." This is Joseph's declaration to me and others, sometime before his death. I can produce plenty of witnesses to the truth of this, if necessary.¹²⁴

On that occasion President Young further indicated that he would welcome a lineal heir to be president of the LDS Church, if that person conformed to the revelation of God and received that office humbly through the constituted apostolic authority that directed it at present. Brigham Young reaffirmed that view more explicitly during the general conference of 7 October 1866:

I am looking for the time when the Lord will speak to David [H. Smith]; but let him pursue the course he is now pursuing, and he will never preside over the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in time or in eternity. . . . It would be his right to preside over this Church, if he would only walk in the true path of duty.¹²⁵

President Young's hopes that the sons of Joseph would enter the Church and assume their anticipated role were never fulfilled. All of Joseph Smith's living sons, including David H. Smith, repudiated the Church in Utah and became leaders of the Reorganized Church.

The difficulty concerning the sons of Joseph Smith centered in the years of their estrangement from the Church after 1844. After the Prophet's

death, Emma Smith became suspicious of the ascendancy of the apostles and fearful that her sons would not receive their proper status in the Church led by the apostles.¹²⁶ By the time William Smith had been excommunicated, Emma had resolved no longer to unite her life with the Church. In November 1844 it was rumored in the non-Mormon press that “Mrs. Joe Smith, it is said, has lost all confidence (if she ever had any) in the Mormon faith.”¹²⁷ That charge may have been anti-Mormon invective, but as early as December 1846, William Smith wrote that Emma Smith “would not let him [Joseph Smith III] have anything to do with Mormonism at present.”¹²⁸ A year later Emma married a non-Mormon, and in January 1848 she applied for membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church.¹²⁹ She remained in Nauvoo, and did not teach her children the doctrines and practices of her late husband. As one RLDS historian has noted, Joseph Smith III sought to preside over the church his father founded, “ignorant of much of its earlier history and its doctrines.”¹³⁰

For Joseph Smith III a compelling reason for not uniting with the Mormons in the Great Basin was his revulsion at the practice of polygamy.¹³¹ The official policy of the RLDS Church which he developed not only repudiated polygamy, the temple ordinances, the political-economic role of the Church, and many of Joseph Smith’s doctrinal developments during the Nauvoo period, but he also denied that these had ever been part of Mormonism. As RLDS historian Robert Bruce Flanders has noted concerning these developments fostered by Joseph Smith during the last four years of his life:

Members of the Reorganized Church, for example, have always had difficulty interpreting the Nauvoo experience, because its meaning is ambivalent to them. . . . Many of the details, such as celestial marriage, the politicizing of the church, Smith’s temporal roles in Nauvoo, Mormonism as a vehicle for the immediate revolutionizing of society, and the real meaning of the Nauvoo temple, they have tended to reject or deny.¹³²

Joseph Smith III and his brothers could not accept the doctrines, practices, and world view developed by their father, nor would they allow themselves to believe that these Nauvoo developments occurred by their father’s direction.

The sons of Joseph Smith, Jr., had priesthood opportunities in the Church by virtue of his acknowledged intentions for his posterity and perhaps also by actual priesthood ordinance (whether called ordination, blessing, or designation). The Presidency of the Church, however, had never been restricted to the family of Joseph Smith. The Prophet himself had ordained David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery, both removed from partri-lineal succession, to be his successors. Each of them had rebelled against him and the directions in which he was leading the Church and thereby

lost the right of successorship he had conferred upon them. The sons of Joseph Smith, Jr., forfeited their rights in a similar manner.

The LDS Church headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, was the ecclesiastical, political, economic, theological, and philosophical legacy of Joseph Smith, Jr. No less an opponent of Brigham Young and an authority on early Mormonism than Sidney Rigdon affirmed this in a letter of 1858:

That society like all others, in its organization and progress developed a history, and it is those developments, only, which constitute its history. From 1830 to 1840 those developments created an unbroken chain of history. In 1840 it culminated and its history tended in a different direction and found its level in the order of things which now exist in Utah.¹³³

In a sense the Church had been held in trust by the apostles for the sons of Joseph eventually to preside over, but his sons rejected Mormonism and established themselves as the leaders of a church that repudiated much that their father had instituted as divine during the last five years of his prophetic office. As Joseph Fielding Smith has stated, if the posterity of the Prophet Joseph Smith are to receive their lineal rights of succession, they must conform to the full order he established.¹³⁴

The Succession of 1844: A Watershed

Joseph Smith had at different times by precept or precedent established eight possible routes of legitimate succession to his place as President of the Church and of the High Priesthood on earth. As two recent analysts of LDS succession have observed: "In the first years of church government, the law of succession was in embryo stage. It seems that even in the Prophet Joseph Smith's mind, just who would succeed him at any given moment was not always clear. There was a gradual evolution of succession principles."¹³⁵ Whether through oversight or as a means to test the faithful, Joseph Smith's neglect to make explicit to the general membership an undisputed mode of succession caused thousands¹³⁶ of his followers to falter, wander, and ultimately to reject the Church headquartered in Utah, which was the continuation of all that Joseph Smith, Jr., had finalized at Nauvoo, albeit often in secret or private counsels. In areas such as Philadelphia, where the cross-currents of the succession crisis were severe, as many as forty percent of the members of the Church rejected the apostolic succession.¹³⁷

Those who knew most accurately the directions in which Joseph Smith was leading the Church were persons who gained that knowledge in the privacy of upper rooms or isolated retreats. In fact there was a pathetic quality to the apologetical arguments published by Strang, Rigdon, William Smith, and others who focused almost entirely upon the published Revelation of the Doctrine and Covenants to assert their various claims of succession. During the life of Joseph Smith, Jr., the published Revelation were

selections for general information from a larger corpus of written Revelation and inspired utterances. The publication process was often years behind the flow of his Revelation and the exercise of his priesthood keys. The schismatics defended themselves from an ignorance or a defiance of what Joseph Smith had entrusted by word and action to close associates in the leadership of the Church.

Ultimately it was Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, and their associates, who knew the directions in which Joseph Smith had led the LDS Church and the future he anticipated for it. They were loyal to Joseph Smith and to his prophetic office, but their success in continuing his work required the support of the ninety-nine percent of the Latter-day Saints who knew nothing of the crucial instructions Joseph Smith gave at Nauvoo regarding succession, priesthood, the endowment, marriage, the political kingdom of God, and numerous other doctrines and practices. It is hardly less than miraculous that the general membership of the Church were persuaded that what had transpired without publicity under the direction and action of Joseph Smith was to be perpetuated by the only ones holding the priesthood keys: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The LDS succession crisis of 1844 therefore was resolved at the price of requiring the acceptance of authority conferred upon a select group of individuals without previous public announcement or approval. The heritage of the crisis of 1844 is found in the LDS schisms that used and continue to use the precedents of the succession crisis of 1844 as pretexts for their own claims.

D. Michael Quinn is a doctoral candidate in history at Yale University.

1. Kirtland Council Minute Book, 17 February 1834, Archives Division, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Hereafter cited as Church Archives. See also Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B.H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 2:25, 28–31. Hereafter cited as *HC*. All manuscript excerpts in this article are quoted by permission of the respective repositories.

2. Journal of Joseph Smith, Jr., 1832–1834, pp. 78–79, Church Archives; *HC*, 2:251. In the *History of the Church* there are minutes of a meeting of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, part of which reads: “. . . also the Twelve are not subject to any other than the first Presidency, viz., ‘myself,’ said the Prophet, ‘Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams, *who are now my counselors; and where I am not, there is no First Presidency over the Twelve*’.” “The Prophet also stated to the Twelve that he did not countenance the harsh language of President Cowdery to them. . . .” See *HC*, 2:374. Italics added.

The italicized words certainly would have removed the implication that at the death of the President of the Church, his counselors would be able to succeed him in the leadership of the Church. The italicized words, however, were not in the original

minutes which constituted Roberts' source. The passage in the original reads: ". . . also the 12 are not subject to any other than the first Presidency, viz. myself S. Rigdon and F. D. Williams—I also stated to the 12, that I do not countenance the harsh language of President Cowdery to them. . . ." (See *Journal of Joseph Smith, Jr.*, 16 January 1836.) This important addition to the text appeared in the printed edition of these minutes in "History of Joseph Smith," *Deseret News* (biweekly) 21 August 1852. I have been unable to find any original records of a statement by Joseph Smith specifically nullifying the right of presidential succession by his counselors implied in his 1834 remarks.

3. Kirtland Revelation Book, 8 March 1832, pp. 10–11, Church Archives. See also D. Michael Quinn, "Evolution of the Presiding Quorums of the LDS Church," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974):23–24.

4. Diary of Reynolds Cahoon, 5–6 July 1832, Church Archives.

5. In a letter to W. W. Phelps on 31 July 1832, Joseph Smith said that Rigdon had already been restored to his position. See Joseph Smith papers, Church Archives; *Times and Seasons* 5 (1 October 1844):660; Jedediah M. Grant, *A Collection of Facts Relative to the Course Taken by Elder Sidney Rigdon*. . . (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking & Guilbert, 1844), p. 6; Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1853), pp. 194–96.

6. Orson Hyde, *Speech of Elder Orson Hyde, Delivered before the High Priests' Quorum in Nauvoo, April 27th, 1845* (City of Joseph, Ill.: John Taylor, 1845), p.7; Grant, *A Collection of Facts*, p. 13; Brigham Young's statement in *Times and Seasons* 5 (1 October 1844):666.

7. Brigham Young and John Taylor in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1855–1886), 11:25, 17. Hereafter cited as *JD*.

8. *HC*, 6:49. A variant quotation of Joseph Smith's words concerning the action of the conference in 1843 is as follows: "I do therefore reject and cast him off as a man unworthy of the high office to which he has been ordained and appointed, I can no longer sustain him; if the church is disposed to take the responsibility upon itself of sustaining him, it may, but I shall do it no longer." See Grant, *A Collection of Facts*, p. 15.

9. For a summary of Rigdon's pre-1844 decline, see F. Mark McKiernan, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer, 1793–1876* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1971), pp. 106–10, 114–25. Hereafter cited as *Sidney Rigdon*.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

11. *Journal of George A. Smith*, 3 September 1844, Church Archives.

12. *HC*, 7:268–69; *D&C* 107:82–84.

13. *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pa.), 1 (15 October 1844):11–12; *Messenger and Advocate of the Church of Christ* (Pittsburgh, Pa.), 1 (15 April 1845):168.

14. *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh, Pa), 1 (15 October 1844):5; 1 (1 November 1844):11; 1 (16 December 1844):54; 1 (1 February 1845):105.

15. Rigdon to Post, [19] June 1866, Box 1, folder 12, Stephen Post Papers, Church Archives. After Rigdon broke with the apostles, John C. Bennett circulated a revelation purportedly given through Joseph Smith in 1841, designating Rigdon as successor at the Prophet's death. This revelation was published in a special issue of Rigdon's periodical. (See reprint in *The Prophet* [New York, 10 May 1845.]) To one acquainted with Bennett's literary style and flourishes, however, the document was obviously Bennett's own creation. Orson Hyde characterized it in 1845 as having Bennett's identity "stamped upon every sentence." (Hyde, *Speech*, p. 29.) Rigdon himself distrusted the document. He professed total ignorance of it in 1845. See *Messenger and Advocate of the*

Church of Christ 1 (15 July 1845), p. 266. Moreover, in 1856 Rigdon wrote a lengthy treatise in support of his right of succession, but made no mention of the alleged 1841 revelation. See Rigdon to Post, 22 February 1856, Box 1, Folder 3, Stephen Post Papers.

16. For a contemporary description of the 1846 collapse of Rigdon's church, see the following letters: Benjamin Chapman to James J. Strang, 24 March 1846; James Smith to Strang, 16 May 1846; and Peter Hess to Stang, 14 December 1846; which are documents 16, 22, and 45 in the James J. Strang Manuscripts, Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Hereafter cited as Yale University.

17. Rigdon to Charles L. Woodward, 25 May 1873, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, New York City.

18. His son, John W. Rigdon, interpreted this instability of his very lucid and articulate father as mental derangement (see letter of John W. Rigdon to Stephen Post, 5 December 1859, Stephen Post Papers). For details of Rigdon's followers and organization from 1856 to 1879, see the diaries, letters, and documents in the Stephen Post Collection, Church Archives.

19. Far West Record, typescript, 15 March 1838, Church Archives; *HC*, 3:32, note; Reed C. Durham, Jr., and Stephen H. Heath, *Succession in the Church* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), pp. 9–10.

20. Milo Quaipe, *The Kingdom of Saint James, A Narrative of the Mormons* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), p.236. The original document is in the Stang manuscripts at Yale University.

21. Journal of Crandall Dunn, 5 August 1844, Church Archives, and Dunn's letter concerning the Florence, Michigan, conference in *Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, 8 (15 October 1846):93.

22. Brigham Young to "Beloved Brethren," 24 January 1846, document 11, Strang Manuscripts, Yale University.

23. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 70; Robert P. Weeks, "For His Was the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory . . . Briefly," *American Heritage* 21 (June 1970):78; Dale L. Morgan, "Calendar of the Strang Manuscripts," pp. 25–28, Strang Manuscripts, Yale University; interview with Dean C. Jessee, Salt Lake City, who has extensively studied the handwriting, signatures, and prose style of Joseph Smith, Jr.

24. Orson Hyde, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches*," broadside (Nauvoo: n.p., 14 March 1846). Copy at Church Archives.

25. See also Quaipe, *The Kingdom of Saint James*; William D. Russell, "King James Strang: Joseph Smith's Successor?" in *Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History*, ed. F. Mark McKiernan, Alma R. Blair, and Paul M. Edwards (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973), pp. 231–56.

26. Philip C. Wightman, "The Life and Contributions of Lyman Wight," (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1971); Lyman Wight, *An Address By Way of an Abridged Account and Journal of My Life from February 1844 up to April 1848* (n. p., 1848). Publication of this pamphlet was the specific cause for Wight's excommunication.

27. *Ibid.*; Heman C. Smith, "The Lyman Wight Colony in Texas," typescript, Church Archives; Letterbook of Lyman Wight, p. 24, Research Library and Archives, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Auditorium, Independence, Missouri. Hereafter cited as RLDS Archives.

28. Wight Letterbook, p. 25.

29. Cutler to Zenas H. Gurley, 29 January 1856, RLDS Archives.

30. Rupert J. and Daisy Whiting Fletcher, *Alpheus Cutler and Church of Jesus Christ* (Independence, Missouri: The Church of Jesus Christ, 1974), p. 53.

31. Diary of William W. Blair, 1863–1864, 13 March 1863, RLDS Archives. Moreover, in a meeting of the Nauvoo High Council on 30 November 1844: “Elder [Alpheus] Cutler also remarked that he felt bound to sustain the Twelve, and all the Quorums in the Church with its presents organization, for on that his salvation depended. . . .” (Minutes of Nauvoo High Council, 30 November 1844, p. 8, Church Archives.)

32. Fletcher, *Alpheus Cutler*; Rupert J. Fletcher, *The Scattered Children of Zion* (Independence, Missouri: Rupert J. Fletcher, 1959); Patriarchal Blessing Book of Pliny Fisher, p. 2, RLDS Archives; Beloine W. Young, “Minnesota Mormons: The Cutlerites,” *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought and Action* 2 (Winter/Spring 1973):117–37.

33. Manuscript History of the Church, Book A–1, 5 December 1834, Church Archives.

34. Joseph Fielding Smith, “The Divine Law of Witnesses,” Church Section, *Deseret News*, 8 April 1939, pp. 6, 8; Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), p. 53; Joseph Fielding Smith, “Foreword” in Pearson H. Corbett, *Hyrum Smith, Patriarch* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), pp. xiv–xv; Robert Glen Mouritsen, “The Office of Associate President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972), pp. 33–112; Durham and Heath, *Succession*, p. 3. Elders Smith and McConkie seem to have been the first to adopt the term “Associate President.”

35. Stanley R. Gunn, *Oliver Cowdery, Second Elder and Scribe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), pp. 181–82. Cowdery wrote a letter to Whitmer which seemed to support Whitmer’s schismatic movement, and the letter was printed in *Ensign of Liberty* (Kirtland, Ohio) 1 (May 1848):91–93. When he applied for baptism into the LDS Church, Cowdery explained that the letter was published without his knowledge and that he wrote it prior to learning of the revelation (D&C 124) that conferred upon Hyrum Smith the keys and authority previously held by Cowdery. Having come to this realization, Cowdery accepted apostolic succession.

36. Ebbie L. V. Richardson, “David Whitmer, A Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1952), pp. 77–82, 128–34; Letter of Hiram Page to William [E. McLellin], 6 June 1848, and letter of McLellin to Bond family, February 1870, both at RLDS Archives; David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Missouri: n. p., 1887); *The Ensign of Liberty, of the Church of Christ* (Kirtland, Ohio), 1847–1849; *The Return* (Davis City, Iowa; Richmond, Missouri; Denver, Colorado; Independence, Missouri, Jan. 1889–Oct. 1900).

37. *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 October 1844):683; D&C 124:94–95; HC, 6:546; Mouritsen, “Associate President,” pp. 124–40; Edward Tullidge, *Life of Joseph the Prophet* (Plano, Ill.: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1880), p. 491.

38. Journal of Joseph Fielding, 9 December 1840, Church Archives; Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 266–67; Corbett, *Hyrum Smith*, pp. 240, 241, 243.

39. Minutes of meeting of Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, James Adams, Newel K. Whitney et al, at Nauvoo, 27 May 1843, in Miscellaneous Minutes, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

40. HC, 5:510. Joseph Smith’s remarks on this occasion caused some to think he was resigning as president of the Church, a misapprehension he corrected the following Sunday. See HC, 5:517–18. The Prophet’s private secretary simply wrote that Joseph

“constituted Hyrum prophet.” See Journal of Willard Richards, 16 July 1843, Church Archives.

41. William Smith to Brigham Young, 27 August 1844, Brigham Young Papers, Church Archives.

42. The most thorough discussion of this question is found in Hyrum L. Andrus, *Doctrines of the Kingdom*, vol. 3 of *Foundations of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), pp. 537–43.

43. There was a delay in his ordination resulting from William’s advocating polygamy in the eastern states. See T. Edgar Lyon, “Nauvoo and the Council of the Twelve,” *Restoration Movement*, p.203; *Journal History*, 24 May 1845, p. 2; *HC*, 7:395, 418; Brigham Young to Orson Pratt, 26 May 1845, Newel K. Whitney Family Papers, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. Hereafter cited as Brigham Young University.

44. *Times and Seasons* 6 (1 June 1845):920–22.

45. Journal of John Taylor, 27 and 30 June 1845, quoted in B. H. Roberts, *Succession in the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1894), pp. 19–23; Brigham Young to Wilford Woodruff, 27 June 1845, Wilford Woodruff Collection, Church Archives; statement of Lucy Mack Smith, 27 June 1845, Affidavits Collection, Church Archives.

46. Journal of Joseph Smith, Jr., 31 October, 16 and 18 December 1835; 2 and 3 January 1836; *HC*, 2:295–96, 334, 338–44, 346–47, 352–55.

47. *Far West Record*, 7 April 1838.

48. Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 13 February 1859, Church Archives.

49. *HC*, 7:483.

50. Calvin P. Rudd, “William Smith: Brother of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1973), pp. 136–49.

51. William Smith to Orson Hyde, 22 June 1847; also 2 June 1847, Orson Hyde Collection, Church Archives.

52. William Smith to Brigham Young, 8 August 1854; also 7 May 1855, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

53. Rudd, “William Smith,” pp. 149–52.

54. Brigham Young Office Journal, 14 May 1860, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives. The letters by Smith and Butler cannot be located at present.

55. Joseph Smith III to William B. Smith, 12 January 1878 in Joseph Smith III Letterbook, 1876–1878, pp. 275–79, RLDS Archives, gives the former’s answer to the presently unlocated letter of William Smith. The content of William Smith’s letter is clearly revealed in the response.

56. Rudd, “William Smith,” pp. 153, 155–57; letter of Joseph Smith III to William B. Smith, 20 February 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbook, 1878–1880, pp. 115–16, RLDS Archives; Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith, *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 6 vols. (Independence, Missouri: Board of Publication of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1951–1970), 4:212, 5:394.

57. Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire, The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (Lansing, Michigan: State University Press, 1967), pp. 45–89, 105ff.

58. Autobiography of Benjamin F. Johnson, “A Life Review,” p. 96, Church Archives. In the published version of this autobiography, the references to the Council of Fifty were eliminated, giving the impression that the instructions were given exclusively to the Quorum of the Twelve. See Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life’s Review* (Independence,

Missouri: Zion Printing & Publishing Co., 1947), p. 99. On 30 November 1844, "Elder Hyde then made some very appropriate and pointed remarks relative to the organization of the church; the course of Elder Rigdon and others; and also of the appointment of the Twelve by Brother Joseph on the 23d of March last, to stand in their present office, that on them the responsibility of bearing of the Kingdom rested, and tho' they had many difficulties to encounter, they must, 'Round up their shoulders and bear it, like men of God and not be bluffed off by any man,' which statements were sanctioned by Councillor A. Culter [a member of the Council of fifty]." (Minutes of Nauvoo High Council, 30 November 1844, p. 7.)

59. *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 September 1844): 651; 5 (1 November 1844):698.

60. Diary of John D. Lee, 3 May 1846, Church Archives. Lee was also one of the early members of the Council of Fifty. In his diary the references to "council" applied to that body, as can be determined by comparing his meeting notations with those of other members of the Council of Fifty.

61. Manuscript History of the Church, Book F-1, Addenda, p. 9; *HC*, 7:213. This account in the Manuscript History was written in 1856. See Dean C. Jessee, "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," *BYU Studies* 11 (Summer 1971):441. Of the five participants in this meeting, only Richards and Smith kept diaries that are presently available, and these contain no reference to the meeting. In 1855 Miller wrote a series of autobiographical letters for publication in the official Strangite organ. In *Northern Islander*, (Saint James, Lake Michigan), 5 (6 September 1855):4, his letter makes specific reference to this meeting, but he does not mention his urging that the Council of Fifty organize the Church. The original account of this meeting may be in the presently unavailable diary of John Taylor, to which Roberts had access when he was Assistant Church Historian.

62. Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church*, 2:790–91. Wight said that the successor should have been Joseph Smith III. See discussion of Joseph Smith III below, under the heading, "Succession by a Descendant of the Prophet Joseph Smith."

63. Smith, "The Lyman Wight Colony"; Hansen, *Quest for Empire*, pp. 92–96; Davis Bitton, "Mormons in Texas, the Ill-fated Lyman Wight Colony, 1844–1858," *Arizona and the West*, 2 (Spring 1969):17–18; Wightman, "The Life and Contributions of Lyman Wight," pp. 97–115; Fletcher, *Alpheus Culter*, pp. 31–44; Young, "Minnesota Mormons," pp. 117–37; Quaipe, *Kingdom of Saints James*, pp. 93–94.

64. Lyon, "Nauvoo and the Council of Twelve," pp. 167–205; Quinn, "Evolution of the Presiding Quorums," pp. 26–31. D&C 112:15, 30 was not published until after the martyrdom of Joseph Smith. Although this crucial revelation about Joseph Smith and the apostles both holding the keys of the priesthood had been circulated in manuscript form since 1837, it still left ambiguous what would happen if Joseph Smith should die. D&C 112:15 specified that the priesthood keys would not be taken from Joseph Smith until the Second Coming of Christ. This verse of the revelation may have contributed to Brigham Young's initial fear that Joseph Smith's death removed the priesthood keys from the earth.

65. "History of Brigham Young," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, 26 (4 June 1864):359. Brigham Young, on 12 February 1849, commented that the shock of the martyrdom had caused such mental turmoil that he forgot himself and thus expressed the momentary doubt. See Miscellaneous Minutes, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

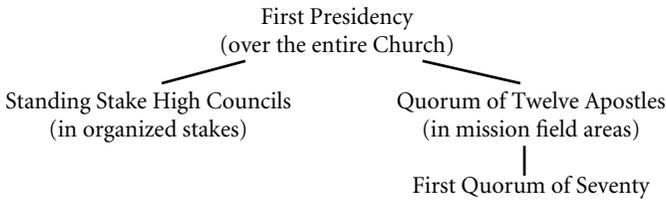
66. *HC*, 7:233. The report of this meeting by the Twelve Apostles in *Times and Seasons* 5 (2 September 1844): 637–38 was an abbreviated summary. *HC*, 7:231–42 gives the longer stenographic account.

67. *HC*, 7:237–38. On page 240, Roberts states that the vote was “universal” with no negative votes. The footnote on page 236 quotes the William C. Staines’ journal as saying there were “a few dissenting voices.” On page 15 of “History of William Adams, Wrote by himself January 1894,” Brigham Young University, it states: “out of that vast multitude about twenty voted for Rigdon to be Gardian. . . .”

68. Henry and Catharine Brooke to Leonard and Mary Pickel, 15 November 1844, Leonard Pickel Papers, Yale University. The effect of this manifestation was not permanent, however, for Henry Brooke joined the splinter group, Jehovah’s Presbytery of Zion, led by Charles B. Thompson.

69. Diary of William Burton, entry for May 1845, Church Archives. Further evidence of the proximity of this entry to the events is the fact that Burton died in 1851. The entry after 20 November 1844 in the diary of Arza Hinckley at Brigham Young University states: “. . . and Brigham Young on hom the mantle of the prophet Joseph has falen is a men of god and he ceeps all things in good order.”

70. *HC*, 2:124; Andrus, *Doctrines of the Kingdom*, pp. 192–131. For members of the LDS Church, it is difficult to read D&C 107 without unconsciously interpolating circumstances and priesthood developments that did not exist when the revelation was recorded on 28 March 1835. At that time, the jurisdiction of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was limited to areas where no stake high councils were formed. Where high councils existed in 1835, the Prophet specified that the Quorum of the Twelve had no jurisdiction. It was in the mission field of small branches, therefore, that the First Quorum of Seventy “are to act in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Twelve or the traveling high council . . .” (D&C 107:34). As regards the Church as a whole, the jurisdiction of the priesthood councils in 1835 was as follows:



Beginning in 1841, the Prophet gave ever-increasing jurisdiction and responsibility to the Quorum of the Twelve at the headquarters of the Church, ultimately making that body second governing body of the entire Church. (This development is analyzed from contemporary sources in Quinn, “Evolution of the Presiding Quorums,” pp. 26–31.) Thus, the provisions of the 1835 revelation could be confusing in the following ways if strictly applied to the altered ecclesiastical conditions of 1844 when the President of the Church was dead: 1) If his death disorganized the First Presidency (a question not discussed in the 1835 revelation), should the respective jurisdiction of the Quorum of Twelve and stake high councils return to the status of the written revelation of 1835, thus allowing autonomous rule by these respective bodies over organized stakes and isolated branches? 2) If the altered jurisdiction of the Quorum of the Twelve over the entire Church was to be continued, did the First Quorum of Seventy likewise gain an ascendancy over matters within organized stakes? These questions were resolved after the recognition of apostolic succession enabled the Quorum of Twelve Apostles to apply the provisions of D & C 107 to the altered ecclesiastical situation.

71. Journal of James M. Monroe, 24 April 1845, Yale University.

72. Minutes of Nauvoo High Council, 10 September 1844. Church Archives. Despite William Marks’ rebellion against the authority of the Twelve Apostles, there is

no evidence that he was ever disfellowshipped or excommunicated. He was tried by the Nauvoo High Council on 30 November 1844 and unanimously retained in fellowship, because he affirmed his support of the Twelve Apostles despite being “in an unsettled state respecting how the church should be organized.” On 7 December 1844, he was cited for trial again because he had refused to sign a statement repudiating Sidney Rigdon’s claims. On 9 December 1844, Marks appeared before the Nauvoo High Council and signed statement repudiating Rigdon and voluntarily adding a clause acknowledging the authority of the Quorum of the Twelve. See minutes of Nauvoo High Council, 30 November 1844, p. 6, 7 December 1844, pp. 9–10, and 9 December 1844, pp. 10–11; and *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 December 1844):742. Perhaps Marks’ public statement of support for the Quorum of Twelve Apostles was considered sufficient repudiation of his later schismatic career, for no record of his being excommunicated is found in the following sources at Church Archives: Journals of Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, Nauvoo High Council Minutes, or in the “Excommunication Record, 1845–1878.”

73. *HC*, 7:279; James N. Baumgarten, “The Role and Function of the Seventies in L.D.S. Church History” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960), pp. 31–32.

74. Journal of Joseph Smith, Jr., 1835–1836, pp. 175–76. The published version of the original minutes added the word “Revelators” to the designation. See *HC*, 2:417.

75. *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 August 1844):618. Italics in original.

76. Brigham Young to David Rogers, 5 December 1844, Yale University. Brigham Young’s role in presiding over the LDS Church has traditionally been regarded as a fulfillment of a prophecy given by Joseph Smith in 1832, when the two men first met. The first published account (1858) of that meeting noted that Brigham Young spoke in tongues on that occasion, and that Joseph Smith stated beyond the hearing of Brigham Young: “. . . the time will come when bro. Brigham Young will preside over this church.” See “History of Brigham Young,” *Deseret News* (weekly), 10 February 1858, p. 358. However, the first handwritten version of the “History of Brigham Young” makes no reference to the prophecy, although it gives a detailed account of the speaking in tongues incident. In the second and third handwritten versions of this event, the details of the speaking in tongues incident were reduced and reference to the prophecy was added. See handwritten drafts of “Manuscript History of Brigham Young,” September 1832, Church Archives. The Church Historian and clerks who prepared the first version of Brigham Young’s history seem not to have known about the prophecy. Considering the additional evidence that none of the tracts written before 1858 defending the position of the Quorum of the Twelve as the presiding body of the Church mentioned that 1832 prophecy, we must conclude it had no bearing on anyone’s deciding to follow the leadership of Brigham Young.

77. Manuscript Minutes of Conference, 7 April 1845, in the handwriting of Thomas Bullock, Miscellaneous Meeting Minutes, d 4358, Church Archives. These minutes were altered to correspond with the report of the conference published in *Times and Seasons* 6 (15 April 1845):870. The fact that Brigham Young was sustained President of the Church in 1845 was therefore public knowledge among those who witnessed it, but unknown to those who depended upon the published account of the conference. The official history of the LDS Church omits entirely the reference to Brigham Young being sustained to any position in April 1845; see *HC*, 7:392.

78. Brigham Young to Wilford Woodruff, 8 May 1845, Wilford Woodruff papers, Church Archives; Journal of Willard Richards, 1844–1845 Book, 15 August 1845. Moreover, one of the causes for the excommunication of William Pomeroy on 9 August 1845 was “for cursing the President of the Church.” (Minutes of Nauvoo High Council, 9 August 1845).

79. Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 12 October 1847. At the end of the 12 October entry in the journal there is the added phrase “whatever the Lord inspires you to do in this matter I am with you.” This phrase is in a different penmanship than the rest of the entry and apparently was added subsequently by Woodruff.

80. *Ibid.*, 15 November 1847.

81. Meeting of 12 February 1849, Miscellaneous Minutes, Brigham Young Collection.

82. T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1873), pp. 263–64. Although Stenhouse was an apostate Mormon at the time he wrote this book, his account agrees in significant respects with Woodruff’s journal. Moreover, his former associations with the apostles gave Stenhouse ample opportunity to gain knowledge of the internal relationships of the Church. As late as 1867, for example, he had joined John Taylor’s prayer circle, wherein he and other men met weekly to pray and to receive counsel and instruction from John Taylor. Attendance Record of John Taylor’s Prayer Circle, Church Archives.

83. Letter of Ursulia B. Hascall to Colonel Wilson Andrews, 19 September 1846, in Hascall Family Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri.

84. Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 16 November, 30 November 1847.

85. Minutes of Public and Private Meetings, 3–7 December 1847, in Miscellaneous Minutes, Brigham Young Papers, Church Archives; Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 5 December 1847.

86. *JD*, 8:234 (discourse delivered on 7 October 1860). No contemporary record of this event has yet been discovered. In 1894, Wilford Woodruff specifically denied that the events Hyde described had occurred at the time the First Presidency was organized. (Journal of Abraham H. Cannon, 30 August 1894, Brigham Young University.) Woodruff’s denial does not impugn Hyde’s testimony, however, because Hyde specifically stated that the event he described occurred in February 1848, two months after the organization of the First Presidency. Corroboration of Hyde’s account is provided by Brigham Young himself in a statement made on 4 April 1860 with reference to a doctrinal dispute: “At O. Hyde’s the power came upon us, a shock that alarmed the neighborhood. . . Bro. Pratt had the spirit of God like us all in Pottawatomie & believed when the Revel was given to us.” (Miscellaneous Minutes, Brigham Young Papers.)

87. *JD*, 6:320 (discourse delivered 7 April 1852); 8:69 (discourse delivered 3 June 1860); 3:212 (discourse delivered 17 February 1856); 5:296 (discourse delivered 6 October 1857).

88. *JD*, 18:70–71 (discourse delivered 31 August 1875). Italics added.

89. *JD*, 11:155 (discourse delivered 26 June 1865). Not until 12 February 1849 were three men ordained apostles to fill the administrative vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve caused by the creation of the new apostolic First Presidency.

90. *HC*, Volume 7, “Apostolic Interregnum”; Durham and Heath, *Succession*, pp. 59, 78, 103.

91. Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909, reprinted 1965), p. 651; original in Church Archives. Also Durham and Heath, *Succession*, pp. 58, 92. The basis by which the apostles are ranked in seniority has varied. For a discussion of this matter, see Durham and Heath, *Succession*.

92. Journal of Moses Thatcher, 1880, October 1877, p. 117, Brigham Young University; Diary of Franklin D. Richards, 3 October 1877, Church Archives, and Journals of Heber J. Grant, 24 and 25 June 1887 and 4 October 1898, Church Archives. T. B. H. Stenhouse wrote in 1873 that President Young was grooming his son Brigham Jr. to succeed him. (See Stenhouse, *Rocky Mountain Saints*, pp. 662–63.) I have found no

evidence to suggest that President Young intended his son to be his immediate successor to the presidency of the Church. On the other hand, he undoubtedly anticipated that eventually one of his sons would become the president by virtue of being the senior apostle in the Church. Ordaining John W. Young an apostle at the age of eleven may have been a step in that direction. See Andrew Jenson, *Church Chronology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1899), p. xxviii. Until 5 April 1900, apostles in the Quorum of the Twelve were ranked in seniority to date of ordination, even if the apostle entered the quorum years afterward.

93. *Improvement Era* 73 (June 1970):28; see also Bruce R. McConkie, "Succession in the Presidency," *Speeches of the Year, BYU Devotional and Ten-Stake Fireside Addresses*, 1974 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), pp. 19, 25. In 1904, President Joseph F. Smith publicly referred to the automatic succession of the senior apostle as "merely a custom." See *Proceedings Before the Committee on Privileges and Elections of the United States Senate in the Matter of the Protests Against the Right of Hon. Reed Smoot, A Senator from the State of Utah, to Hold his Seat*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904–1907), 1:93. This was apparently President Smith's way of countering the objection to Apostle Reed Smoot's being a U. S. Senator on the basis of Smoot's being a member of a "self-perpetuating" body of twelve men who had control of ecclesiastical, political, and economic policies of the Church. Because President Smith was testifying before men who did not believe in revelation (in fact the final conclusion of the attorney seeking to unseat Smoot was that Smoot was ineligible because he believed God could answer prayer with revelation), Joseph F. Smith apparently chose not to indicate that the "custom" of apostolic succession could be changed only by revelation.

94. Wilford Woodruff to Heber J. Grant, 28 March 1887, Church Archives, quoted in *Improvement Era* 73 (June 1970):29; and statement by Harold B. Lee in *Ibid.*, p. 28.

95. Brigham Young in *JD*, 9:87–87 (discourse of 7 May 1861); George Q. Cannon in *JD*, 19:235 (discourse delivered 8 October 1877); Anthon H. Lund in *Conference Report 1901* (Salt Lake City, 1901), p.75; B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1930), 2:369–370; Joseph Fielding Smith, "The Twelve Apostles," *Improvement Era* 59 (November 1956):788.

96. B. H. Roberts, *Succession in the Presidency*; Charles W. Penrose, *Priesthood and Presidency; Claims of the "Josephite" or "Reorganized Church," Examined and Compared with Reason and Revelation* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1898); Joseph Fielding Smith, *Origin of the "Reorganized" Church and Question of Succession* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909); O. A. Murdock, *Succession of Joseph III* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1913) (which was copyrighted and endorsed by the LDS First Presidency); Alvin R. Dyer, *The Fallacy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964); Russell Rich, *Those Who Would be Leaders (Offshoots of Mormonism)* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1967). Invaluable and unbiased surveys of the various churches deriving from Joseph Smith, Jr., are to be found in the works of two historians of Utah Mormon background: Dale L. Morgan, "A Bibliography of the Churches of the Dispersion," *Western Humanities Review* 7 (Summer 1953):107–81; and Kate B. Carter, *Denominations That Base Their Beliefs on the Teachings of Joseph Smith, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1962).

97. See also D&C 86:10 and 110:12.

98. For a discussion of dynasticism in the Mormon hierarchy, see D. Michael Quinn, "Organizational Development and Social Origins of the Mormon Hierarchy, 1832–1932: A Prosopographical Study" (Master's thesis, University of Utah, 1973), pp. 125–245.

99. Letterbook of Lyman Wight, July 1855, RLDS Archives. Although this letter was written to the *Northern Islander*, it was apparently not published in that periodical. Differing from Wight, Joseph Smith III remembered this experience as having occurred while Joseph Smith, Jr., was still in prison. Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church*, 3:506.

100. *Complainant's Abstract of Pleading and Evidence, In the Circuit Court of the United States, Western District of Missouri, Western Division, at Kansas City. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Complainant, vs. The Church of Christ at Independence, Missouri.* . . . (Lamoni, Iowa, 1893), pp. 28, 33, 37. Another witness, John H. Carter, gave similar testimony on pp. 180–81 concerning the public meeting.

101. Journal of William Clayton, 1840–1845, pp. 35, 90, and journals and letterbooks of Joseph Smith, Jr., 1842–1844, Church Archives. See also the records of Trustee-in-Trust land transactions, 1842–1844, taken from civil and ecclesiastical records of Nauvoo, Hancock Country, Illinois, in the files of Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., Salt Lake City, Utah. Had Whitehead actually functioned in the inner circle of Joseph Smith's activities, it is remarkable that until after 1844 hardly any reference is made to him by those who were unquestionably involved in the lesser-known developments of Nauvoo: Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, William Clayton, and the apostles.

102. Diary of William W. Blair, 17 June 1873, RLDS Archives.

103. Henry Brown, *History of Illinois* (New York: J. Winchester, 1844), p. 489

104. Blessing of Joseph Smith III, given by Joseph Smith, Sr., in Kirtland, written by Lucy Mack Smith from memory in 1845, Church Archives; also in *Saints' Herald* (Lamoni, Iowa), 65 (28 July 1909):702.

105. Adams to A. R. Tewkesbury, 14 June 1845, Church Archives. A possible acknowledgment of this alleged ordination appears in a letter of Samuel H. B. Smith to George A. Smith, 10 July 1860: "We visited Nauvoo and saw the young Prophet, for I suppose that is the name he goes by, having been ordained by his Father previous to his death and called by the Spirit (of late), he steps forth to do a work. . . ." Photocopy of original, Brigham Young University.

106. *The Prophet* (New York), 10 May 1845.

107. Rudd, "William Smith," p. 123; see also his letters to Lewis Robbins, 5 October, 7 November 1845, and 27 January 1846, Church Archives.

108. *Warsaw Signal* (Warsaw, Illinois) 29 October 1845, pp. 1,4. No copy of the original pamphlet can be located at present, but it was reprinted in full in this issue of the *Warsaw Signal*.

109. Recommend and Appointment of James Whitehead, Winter Quarters, Camp of Israel, 17 April 1848, James Whitehead Papers, Church Archives; Pottawattamie High Council Record. 5 November 1848, Church Archives; Letter of Orson Hyde to Orson Pratt in *Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, 11 (1 January 1849):27. Cf. *Complainant's Abstract*, p. 35.

110. *Voree Herald* (Voree, Wisconsin), 1 (July 1846). The original letter is document 195 in the Strang Manuscripts, Yale University.

111. Ibid. "Documents: William Smith's Acknowledgement of James J. Strang's Claims," *Courage* 2 (Summer 1972):539–40.

112. William Smith to James J. Strang, 25 December 1846, document 27b in Strang Manuscripts, Yale University.

113. Journal of Willard Richards, 16 July 1843.

114. Journal of James Monroe, 24 April 1845.

115. Statement of William Smith in *Voree Herald* 1 (July 1846).

116. Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church*, 3:506–07, 5:361; and *Complainant's*

Abstract, pp. 79–80.

117. Brigham Young Office Journal, 28 February 1860.

118. John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled; or the Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee* (St. Louis, Missouri: Bryan, Brand & Co., 1877), pp. 155, 161–62, 164; statement of John H. Cater, *Complainant's Abstract*, p. 181.

119. *Ibid.* Also, letter of George Miller in *Northern Islander* 5 (September 1855):4.

120. The men were William W. Blair, Samuel Powers, William Marks, and Zenas H. Gurley. For discussion of the history of these men, see Smith, *Origin of the "Reorganized" Church*, pp. 86–93, and Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church*, 3:721–31, 737–48. For examples of William Marks' disaffection from Joseph Smith and sympathy with William Law's 1844 reformation of the Church, see Nauvoo City Council Minutes, 3 and 4 January 1844, Nauvoo Collection, Church Archives; and Journal of Joseph Fielding, April 1844, p.27.

121. William H. Folsom to Brigham Young, 20 April 1860, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

122. *JD*, 8:69 (discourse delivered 3 June 1860). Italics added.

123. Historian's Office Journal, 1 September 1861, Church Archives. Italics added. John D. Lee also said Brigham Young claimed that David H. Smith would be the President of the Church one day. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled*, p. 162.

124. Manuscript minutes of sermon, 7 October 1863, recorded by George D. Watt, Brigham Young Collection, and Journal of Robert McQuarrie, 6 [sic] October 1863, both at Church Archives.

125. Manuscript minutes of sermon, 7 October 1866, recorded by George D. Watt, Brigham Young Collection.

126. Emma M. Phillips, *33 Women of the Restoration* (Independence, Mo.: Herald House, 1960), p. 24; Margaret Wilson Gibson, *Emma Hale, the Elect Lady* (Independence, Mo.: Herald House, 1954), pp. 212–15, 218–26.

127. *Upper Mississippian* (Rock Island, Illinois), 2 November 1844.

128. William Smith to James J. Strang, 25 December 1846, document 27b, Strang Manuscripts, Yale University.

129. Letter of Almon W. Babbitt to Heber C. Kimball, Nauvoo, 31 January 1848 Heber C. Kimball Papers, Church Archives.

130. Alma R. Blair, "The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: Moderate Mormonism," in *Restoration Movement*, p. 218.

131. The feelings of Joseph Smith III against polygamy were so intense that on one occasion, while in company with one of his polygamous cousins in Utah, he became physically ill when observing one of the plural wives in the household. On another occasion, he remarked that if he learned that his father had actually been a polygamist, it would make no difference to his personal campaign against the practice, but would be one more burden he would carry with him to the grave. Inez Smith Davis, *The Story of the Church* (Independence, Mo.: Herald House, 1938), p. 367.

132. Robert Bruce Flanders, "Dream and Nightmare: Nauvoo Revisited," in *Restoration Movement*, p. 156.

133. Rigdon to William H. Payne, 9 July 1858, Sidney Rigdon Papers, Church Archives.

134. Smith, *Origin of the "Reorganized" Church*, pp. 56–57.

135. Durham and Heath, *Succession*, p. 117.

136. The statement "thousands" is not extreme in view of the fact that two thousand followers supported Strang at his zenith in the 1850s. At the same time other schismatic leaders (Alpheus Cutler, William Smith, Lyman Wight, James C. Brewster,

Charles B. Thompson, and even Sidney Rigdon and David Whitmer), each had followers numbering from 100 to several hundreds. Added to this likely estimate of more than 3,000 schismatics in the early 1850s, were an inestimable number of Mormons who had become disaffected altogether because of the conflicting claims.

137. The membership records of Philadelphia, the largest branch of the LDS Church in the eastern states from 1841 to 1844, indicate that 95% of the excommunications that can be dated occurred between September 1844 and 1847, virtually all of them for rebellion against the authority of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. If that proportion is applied to the excommunications where no date or cause is specified, then it appears that of the 334 Mormons who were listed as members of the Philadelphia Branch on 31 August 1844, 40% were excommunicated for rejecting apostolic succession. See Records of the Philadelphia Branch, 1839–1854, RLDS Archives.