

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY LATTER-DAY SAINT MARRIAGE RITES, 1831–53

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IT IS AXIOMATIC TO SAY that antebellum Americans felt they had created something very new in a “new world.” This sense of newness can obscure for us, as it did for them, what was traditional in the religious movements that developed during this period. In particular, Joseph Smith’s innovations on Christianity are radical enough that it is always tempting to consider the result unique. But even the most extraordinary imagination is dependent on ordinary forms. The historian’s task is, in large part, to identify the interplay of old and new to demonstrate both continuity and change. This article attempts to do so with respect to Mormonism’s early marital forms and meanings.

Such an analysis is made difficult by the Saints’ eventually placing their marriage rite within a complex temple liturgy, whose content is unknowable, except from unauthorized sources or elliptical references in personal writings. At three key moments in its historical development, however, the rite was described authoritatively. First, in

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1835, Warren Parrish recorded Joseph Smith's performance of the marriage of Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey and Newel Knight. The first known instance of Smith's officiating at a wedding, the account reveals his early thoughts on the religious significance of marriage.<sup>1</sup> Second, Newel K. Whitney left a copy of the rite he used to marry his daughter Sarah and Joseph Smith in the summer of 1842. This rite shows the high sacramental and priestly significance given marriage in Nauvoo.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in 1853, Mormon apostle Orson Pratt published a description of the marriage ceremony presumably employed in the recently completed Council House in Salt Lake City.<sup>3</sup> In this iteration of marriage, the ideology and practices instantiated in the Whitney rite, as informed by Smith's 1843 revelation on plural marriage, were distilled and adapted for a temple setting.

In sum, these records show early Mormonism rejecting, over a remarkably short period of time, Christian marriage's traditional role as a defense against carnality. When the medieval Christian church systematized the sacraments, it created a fork in the road of salvation, requiring the faithful to choose either ordination or marriage. During the Reformation, Protestantism's denunciation of celibacy celebrated marriage within another dichotomy: the created, earthly world and the uncreated, heavenly one. Marriage was divinely instituted but meant for this world, not the world to come. In contrast,

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<sup>1</sup>The account exists in two versions, which differ slightly: Joseph Smith journal, November 24, 1835; and Joseph Smith history, 1834–1836 (November 24, 1835), both in the LDS Church History Library. Unless otherwise noted, all Joseph Smith documents cited in this article are digitized at josephsmithpapers.org.

<sup>2</sup>Revelation, July 27, 1842, LDS Church History Library. The location of the original holograph of Whitney's ritual is unknown. Two nineteenth-century copies are found at MS 4583, f. 104, LDS Church History Library, and are available in Richard E. Turley, ed., *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2 vols., DVD (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, [December 2002], Vol. 1, DVD #19. A transcription is available in H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text & Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 315–16.

<sup>3</sup>[Orson Pratt,] "Celestial Marriage," *The Seer* 1, no. 2 (February 1853): 31–32. Completed in 1852, the Council House served as headquarters for the recently relocated Saints. Its upper floor was used for administration of the temple rites, including marriages.

Mormonism made marriage a locus of its priesthood restorationism and its marriage rite gave men and women rights to access heavenly powers to accomplish divine purposes here and in the hereafter. Thus, marriage was eternal in both senses of the word. It was a means of inculcating the divine nature and of creating ties that transcended the limits of time and mortality. It was not only the pattern for this world, but the world to come. This was new, an extraordinary recalculation of centuries of tradition.

### THE BAILEY-KNIGHT WEDDING, 1835

Joseph Smith first considered the significance of marriage through a question posed by Lemam Copley, a recent Mormon convert from Shakerism who “retained ideas that the Shakers were right in some particulars.”<sup>4</sup> Asserting his prophetic authority, Smith denounced Shaker celibacy: “Whoso forbiddeth to marry, is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man: Wherefore it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh.”<sup>5</sup> This statement was hardly remarkable and its biblical phrasing gave it a particularly familiar and authoritative resonance. Christians had long paired man and woman as an expression of God’s intentions for the temporal order of creation, though the churches had debated whether it was a lesser choice than priestly or monastic celibacy.

Typical of most things he said, however, Smith’s words both challenged and confirmed mainstream consensus. Marriage was “ordained of God,” the revelation continued, “that the earth might answer the end of its creation; and that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made” (BofC, 52:17). For Smith, not only God’s purposes in creation but also “the measure” or ultimate potential of humanity and God’s eternal purposes for human existence were fulfilled through marriage. Thus, Smith’s early rejection of Shaker celibacy relied on two ideas that would ever after frame the existential significance of marriage in Mormonism: human-

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<sup>4</sup>Joseph Smith History A-1, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>5</sup>Revelation, March 1831, in *A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to Law, on the 6th of April, 1830* (Zion, Mo.: W. W. Phelps, 1833), 52:16–17; hereafter parenthetically in the text as BofC by section and pages.

ity existed prior to its creation in the world; and marriage had eternal, not just temporal significance. Inchoate versions of these two ideas were expressed in the Saints' early marriage ceremonies.

On November 24, 1835, "a respectable company" assembled on a Tuesday evening in Kirtland to witness the marriage of Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey and Newel Knight.<sup>6</sup> Joseph Smith officiated as a friend of the couple, not in his official capacity as Church president. According to the Church's rules on "Marriage," authority to perform a wedding was widely held, including anyone with the rank of priest or higher.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, "being married by other authority" was equally valid (D&C 1835 101:1). Civil marriages were common in American Protestant practice, especially among New Eng-

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<sup>6</sup>Joseph Smith, History, 1834–36, November 24, 1835. The version in Joseph Smith's journal (same date) reads "a considerable company." "Respectable" may have been the preferred word because Lydia Bailey was still legally married to Calvin Bailey, who had abandoned her in 1832 and was nowhere to be found. See William G. Hartley, "Newel and Lydia Bailey Knight's Kirtland Love Story and Historic Wedding," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000): 6–22. Such marriages were "fairly commonplace" during this period and "courts saw little reason to challenge the order they had reestablished in [people's] lives." Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 90–91. See also Beverly J. Schwartzberg, "Grass Widows, Barbarians, and Bigamists: Fluid Marriage in Late Nineteenth-Century America" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2001), 51–52.

<sup>7</sup>Regulations governing church weddings first appeared in *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints: Carefully Selected from the Revelations of God* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams, 1835), 101:1–4; hereafter cited as D&C 1835. In this and the other ritual dimensions of the nuptial, Smith likely comported with the regulations published in the 1835 Book of Doctrine and Covenants. First, the officiator was instructed to make such comments "as he shall be directed by the holy Spirit" and ascertain whether there were legal impediments to the marriage. If none, he addressed the couple: "You both mutually agree to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives." Once the bride and groom answered in the affirmative, the officiator was to "pronounce them 'husband and wife' in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the laws of the country." Then he would conclude: "May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from

land Separatists who had provided Mormonism with its first and most influential converts.<sup>8</sup> Puritans were, in fact, notorious for viewing marriage as a civil matter.<sup>9</sup> They preferred the biblical pattern: familial, not clerical marriage.

For Puritans, the only part of the rite reserved to the minister was the reading of the banns to ensure there were no legal impediments to the marriage.<sup>10</sup> If the Puritan minister performed the wedding also, he was merely to announce the marriage accomplished after the exchange of vows and then bless the couple extemporaneously. All nuptial formulas were otherwise resisted. Puritans took especial umbrage at the idolatrous phrase “with my body I thee worship,” used in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. The giving of rings, too, was opposed as non-scriptural and further tainted by Catholic use to signify the sacramentality of the union. In sum, Puritan marriage was accomplished in the simplest of private ceremonies “in the Fear of God and the presence of such Witnesses as were thought fit to be present.”<sup>11</sup>

The Bailey-Knight wedding fit neatly within the Puritan pattern. Held at Hyrum and Jerusha Smith’s home, the event began with “singing & prayer.” Joseph Smith then invited the couple to “arise & join hands” and, calling them by name, asked if “you covenant to be each others companions during your lives, and discharge the duties of husband & wife in all respects.” The record says they “gave their assent” and Smith “pronounced them hus-

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henceforth and forever. Amen.” (D&C, 1835, 101:2). See generally, M. Scott Bradshaw, “Joseph Smith’s Performance of Marriages in Ohio,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000): 23–69.

<sup>8</sup>For Mormonism’s roots in radical Protestantism, see Val D. Rust, *Radical Origins: Early Mormon Converts and Their Colonial Ancestors* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup>Chilton L. Powell, “Marriage in Early New England,” *New England Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (July 1928): 323–34; Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 63.

<sup>10</sup>Chilton, “Marriage in Early New England,” 326. Publicity was the ultimate test of whether there were any impediments to the marriage, especially preexisting relationships.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Barrow, *Brief Discovery of False Churches* (1590), quoted in Chilton, “Marriage in Early New England,” 324.

band & wife in the name of God with many blessings.” With assent given and the couple wed, the audience was then dismissed into the cold November night.<sup>12</sup> The lack of liturgical complexity, especially the exclusion of a ring and simplicity of the vows, was decidedly Puritan. Smith’s obligatory instruction to the couple was, just as decidedly, not. Marriage, he said, “was an institution of heaven first solemnized in the garden of Eden by God himself, by the authority of everlasting Priesthood.”<sup>13</sup>

Marriage had always been a social institution in its own right, one long predating the Christian church and thus perpetuated by strong social imperatives unrelated to religion. It was this ancient social pedigree that created uncertainty about the Church’s claim to involvement in marriage and added to the ambiguity of marriage in the Church’s economy of salvation.<sup>14</sup> More significantly, by the first years of the second century, virginity was on its way to becoming the Christian ideal and marriage “no more than a defense against desire,”<sup>15</sup> even a “solution of last resort.”<sup>16</sup> While it was better to follow St. Paul’s advice and marry rather than burn, marriage was still a spiritually dangerous undertaking, an inferior choice that needed the Church’s blessing as safeguard against sin. Thomas Aquinas provided the rule for medieval Christians: “Grace is conferred through the sacrament on the spouses whereby they might belong to the union of Christ and the Church. And this is very necessary to them so that as they concern themselves with carnal and earthly matters they do not

<sup>12</sup>Joseph Smith, History, November 24, 1835.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Not until the twelfth century did the Catholic Church seek to be the sole arbiter of matrimony. Even then, ecclesiastical marriage was largely a means to accomplish social goals, especially ecclesiastical supremacy by aggregating to itself the power to grant or deny to feudal nobility the freedom to transfer wealth by means of marital combination. See Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Boston: Brill Academic, 2001).

<sup>15</sup>Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 55.

<sup>16</sup>Duby, *Medieval Marriage*, 16.

become detached from Christ and the Church.”<sup>17</sup> The blessing of the bride and groom ensured that the carnal nature of their relationship and its temporal preoccupations did not cause them *ipso facto* to sin. In effect, traditional Christian marital liturgies legitimized the sexual union, until it could be overcome either by later choice to vow continence or inevitably by death.

In the sixteenth century, Protestants rejected the spiritual primacy of celibacy and found in marriage the foundation of Christian community. As Luther said with characteristic bluntness, “For although it is a worldly estate, nevertheless it [marriage] has God’s Word on its side and it is not a human invention or institution, like the estate of monks and nuns. Therefore it should easily be reckoned a hundred times more spiritual than the monastic estate.”<sup>18</sup> Since God had ordained marriage in Eden, it was a divine institution. But, as part of creation, marriage was meant for this world, not the next. Marriage may have been better than monastic celibacy, but it was still wholly temporal in its sphere of action. Two things followed from this theology of the two worlds. First, civil marriages were as legitimate as church marriages. Second, what the Christian couple needed was instruction in God’s word, not priestly intervention to protect them from the supposed spiritual dangers inherent in sex.

Therefore, Luther simplified the marriage rite to consist of an exchange of rings before entering the church (while still in the world) followed by a short service at the church altar: namely, a reading from the Bible, a sermon, and a prayer. Protestant churches hosted the nuptials not to sanctify, but “to honor this divine estate and gloriously bless and embellish it and pray for it,” as well as to teach the bride and groom to do likewise.<sup>19</sup> Calvin, too, embraced the Lutheran view that marriage was a divinely instituted, earthly oriented institution—“a good and holy ordinance of God, just like farming, building, cob-

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<sup>17</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, bk. 4, chap. 78, quoted in John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 28.

<sup>18</sup>Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and James Schaffer, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 368.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

bling, and barbering.”<sup>20</sup> His innovation was to emphasize the role of covenant between the parties, which put them in right relation to God and the church. Thus, for Calvin, too, what the bride and groom needed from the church—and all the church could bestow upon them—was instruction in the marital covenant.

As we have seen, the Bailey-Knight wedding followed both the ritual pattern and didactic emphasis most common to contemporary Protestant practice. But the substance of Smith’s instruction to the bride and groom deviated in subtle but significant ways, consistent with his scribe’s observation that “the ceremony was original.”<sup>21</sup> Smith began his remarks with the traditional point that God had ordained marriage by joining Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was an unremarkable sermon text, except for his use of the word “solemnize,” which signaled something other than the natural order. By itself the word was only mildly ambiguous and not uncommon in Protestant references to ecclesiastical marriage. When, however, Smith told the bride and groom that the marriage in Eden was “an institution of heaven” accomplished “by the authority of the everlasting priesthood,” the Protestant ground began to shift under their feet. The extent to which Mormon marriage would become defined as the basis of heaven’s order would have been impossible to appreciate that evening in 1835. Even the link made to priesthood was probably heard as a general reference to the Church’s restorationist ideal: priesthood at work in Eden was on the earth again.

#### THE WHITNEY-SMITH WEDDING, NAUVOO, 1842

The growing connection between Latter-day Saint marriage and priesthood was evidenced in a wedding conducted seven years later in Nauvoo. It was not a public but a very private nuptial: the only witness present, besides the officiator, was the bride’s mother, Elizabeth Ann Whitney, who was also counselor to Emma Smith, president of the Nauvoo Female Relief Society and the groom’s first wife. The officiator was the bride’s father, the Mormon

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<sup>20</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV (1559), Ford Lewis Battles, trans., LCC, XXI, 1480, quoted in James F. White, *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources* (New York: Continuum International, 1992), 227.

<sup>21</sup>Joseph Smith, Journal, November 24, 1835.

bishop Newel K. Whitney, who claimed both parental and priesthood authority to perform the wedding of his daughter Sarah to Joseph Smith.<sup>22</sup> Like other marriages among social elites, Smith's marriages to members of Mormonism's officialdom have been seen as political couplings that inured to the social benefit of those aligning themselves to him.<sup>23</sup> I do not intend to contradict this insight, though I sometimes think it is based more on historical analogy than historical evidence. I do contend, however, that the Saints' theology of priesthood is more informative of their marital choices and actions than their desire for sociopolitical connection. Though it was certainly the case that the Saints' ideals conflated priestly and kingly authority among the men, that conflation is not of itself evidence of a desire for social power as an end in itself. Most importantly, however, such explanations tend to erase women's ecclesiastical roles, which were enacted and constructed in these marriage rites.

Newel K. Whitney left a handwritten account of the marriage ritual he employed and described it as a revelation, most likely through Joseph Smith.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the first words in Whitney's account are the formula "Verily thus saith the Lord." This is followed by God's assurance that "the thing that my servant Joseph Smith has made known unto you and your fam[i]ly and which you have agreed upon is right in mine eyes." Given that Whitney was marrying his seventeen-year-old daughter to an already much-married man twenty years her senior, both he and his wife must have relied heavily on this revelatory asser-

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<sup>22</sup>The pattern of male relatives officiating at "plural" marriages had first appeared in the historical record when Smith married Louisa Beaman on April 5, 1841, the ceremony being performed by Beaman's brother-in-law, Joseph Bates Noble. The particulars of the rite are not known; only that Joseph Smith "gave the form of the ceremony, Elder Noble repeating the words after him." Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), 1:233.

<sup>23</sup>Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 342; Rex Eugene Cooper, *Promises Made to the Fathers: Mormon Covenant Organization* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 140–41.

<sup>24</sup>The account of the Beaman-Smith marriage suggests that Joseph Smith was the source of the rite Whitney used a year later.

tion and, it appears, their own experience of such.<sup>25</sup> The bride's mother later reported that the rightness of their course of action was confirmed by separate revelation to her and her husband. "Our prayers were unceasing that the Lord would grant us some special manifestation concerning this new and strange doctrine. The Lord was very merciful to us; He revealed unto us His power and glory . . . [L]aying aside all our traditions and former notions in regard to marriage, we gave her with our mutual consent."<sup>26</sup>

Whitney did not explain his role as officiator in terms of ecclesiastical office. Instead, he claimed a priestly authority that was both personal to him as a father and broadly held by his family, living and dead. The role of families, especially fathers, in either giving permission for or actively arranging marriages had roots in biblical custom, as well as Roman and medieval Catholic usage. Robert Barrow, the English Puritan, was far from alone in believing "it [was] the Parents Office to provide Marriages for their Children . . . in their Parents or other private Houses."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, with respect to Whitney's marital authority, given his ecclesiastical office as bishop, there was nothing remarkable about his conducting his daughter's wedding. Nevertheless, the ceremony itself was remarkable for many reasons—not least its articulation and instantiation of Smith's doctrine of familial or patriarchal priesthood.

In the Whitney-Smith wedding, we see explicitly stated what was only hinted at in the Bailey-Knight nuptials: The pattern established by God in Eden was according to an "everlasting priesthood." Whitney began by saying he performed the marriage "in my own name and in the name of my wife your mother and in the name of my 'Holy Progenitors.'" "Name" is used here as a synecdoche or token for authority, specifically "the right of birth which is of Priest Hood." Furthermore, this authority was, he added, "vested in me by revelation and commandment and promise of the liveing God obtained by . . .

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<sup>25</sup>Estimates vary, but Compton's authoritative accounting lists Sarah Whitney as Smith's fifteenth plural wife. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 6.

<sup>26</sup>[Elizabeth Ann Whitney,] "A Leaf from an Autobiography," *Woman's Exponent* 7 (December 15, 1878): 105.

<sup>27</sup>Powell, "Marriage in Early New England," 324; Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 64.

the Holy Fathers.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, Father Whitney explicitly claimed priestly authority independent of his ecclesiastical office as bishop and through a familial order of the priesthood equally independent of Church office. This familial priesthood was his by right of birth and became operative or “vested” by divine revelation, commandment, and promise, presumably by one deemed to have supervening authority.<sup>29</sup> In this case, Smith was the authorizing agent; hence, the assurance given that “the thing that my servant Joseph Smith has made known unto you and your Family and which you have agreed upon is right in mine eyes.”<sup>30</sup>

“Priest Hood” was not only the means of this marriage, however. Priesthood was also its object. After the exchange of vows by the couple, Whitney states, in the imperative, the bride and groom were “to observe all the rights between you both that belong to that condition.”<sup>31</sup> In this command, “rights” was used where one would expect “duties.” But these vows were otherwise devoid, like the Bailey-Knight wedding, of any reference to duty except “to be each others companion.”<sup>32</sup> Instead the rite focused on blessing.

The ultimate blessing took the form of a command, not to the couple but to those earlier identified as the source of Whitney’s au-

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<sup>28</sup>Revelation, July 27, 1842; punctuation added.

<sup>29</sup>This would be explained and established as Church law the following year, in the revelation codified as LDS Doctrine and Covenants (1981 ed.) 132:19. The original revelation no longer survives. For a digital reproduction of the earliest known scribal copy, see Turley, *Selected Collections*, DVD #19.

<sup>30</sup>Revelation, July 27, 1842.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>The only difference in the vows preserved Smith’s relation to his other wives and denied Sarah other husbands by “preserving” her for Joseph. Thus, the Whitney-Smith nuptials maintained the loyalties of the larger marital organization at the expense of romantic exclusivity. As a polygamous marriage, the bride’s promise of companionship was unqualified; the groom’s was not. The duty to be a “companion” was defined by the rite as “preserving your selves for each other and from all others.” Since the groom was already the husband to other women, he was in no position to make this promise. Neither was he restricted from taking subsequent wives. Thus, Smith’s vow to Sarah Whitney was limited explicitly by “those rights which have been given to my servant Joseph [Smith] by revelation and com-

thority to perform the marriage. "Commanding in the name of the Lord," Whitney directed, "all those Powers to concentrate in you and through to your posterity."<sup>33</sup> The referent to "all those powers" was in the previous sentence; namely, "Priest Hood . . . obtained by . . . the Holy Fathers." With these words, the priestly authority of parents and "Holy Progenitors" was bestowed upon or, in the language of the rite, "concentrated in" or "vested in" the bride and groom. Thus, Whitney not only claimed priestly authority to marry them; he conveyed that authority to them. In this iteration, Mormon marriage was designed to make a matriarch and patriarch with priestly rights equivalent to the Israelites' covenant status as physical bearers of the right and capacity to constitute a "kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (KJV Gen. 19:6).

The Whitney-Smith ceremony included two other blessings that also rejected the traditional limitation of marriage to its social function or "as a remedy against sin." The couple was blessed with no less than "immortality and eternal life" and given "part in the first resurrection [sic]." In Mormonism, there was no other rite unrelated to marriage that conveyed these blessings, demonstrating the centrality of marriage to Latter-day Saint eschatology, even soteriology. It is also worth noting that the blessing of "immortality and eternal life" was, like the rights of marriage, given in the imperative: "immortality and eternal life henceforth be sealed upon your heads."<sup>34</sup>

The Whitney-Smith rite's emphasis on bestowing rights is in stark contrast with the traditional focus on marital duties. In the Methodist liturgy of 1845, for example, the groom made the traditional promise to love, comfort, honor, and keep the bride. The bride was to obey, serve, love, honor, and keep the groom. Additional duties could be inferred from the rite's definition of the purpose of marriage: "the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to praise of his holy name."<sup>35</sup> But nowhere was there mention of rights obtained by the parties by virtue of their marriage. To the

mandment and by legal Authority in times passed." Revelation, July 27, 1842.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Revelation, July 27, 1842.

<sup>35</sup>All quotations from the Methodist rite are from Robert Emory, Section III: The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony," *History of the Discipline*

contrary, the Methodist officiator was to remind the couple that marriage was “ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication: that such persons as have not the gift of continency, might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ’s body.” None of the duties imposed on the couple had a sacramental dimension, even in a denomination that contemplated sanctification after baptism. The Methodist ceremony ended by invoking God’s favor upon the couple that “ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting.” The union was a temporal and, thus, temporary estate. The contrast between these two marriage rituals—Methodist and Mormon—could not have been more extreme.

Finally, any discussion of Mormon marital innovation must note the Whitney-Smith rite’s inclusion of mothers and wives in its “Priest Hood.” Elizabeth Ann Whitney’s name, too, was invoked as legitimating the performance of and, thus, the conveyance of “Priest Hood” in the nuptials. “I do it,” said Father Whitney, “in my own name and in the name of my wife your mother and in the name of my Holy Progenitors.” Moreover, the rite’s gender-neutral reference to “Holy Progenitors” conveyed the sense of a parental, not merely fatherly, authority. To paraphrase the New Testament ideal, in early Mormonism the fathers were not without the mothers in the “Priest Hood” (cf. 1 Cor. 11:11).

A matriarchal dimension of patriarchal priesthood was evidenced elsewhere in the Nauvoo historical record.<sup>36</sup> Two months earlier, Bishop Whitney had addressed the Relief Society, whose purpose was *inter alia* to prepare women to receive the ordinances of the yet-to-be completed Nauvoo Temple. He told them: “Without the female all things cannot be restor’d to the earth—it takes all to restore the Priesthood.”<sup>37</sup> Smith soon began to teach publicly that marriage was an or-

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*of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: G. Lane & C. B. Tippet, 1845), n.p.

<sup>36</sup>Smith had identified patriarchal or Abrahamic priesthood as one of three types; the other being variously described as higher or Melchizedek and lesser or Aaronic. Joseph Smith, Sermon, August 27, 1843, in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), 244–45.

<sup>37</sup>Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, Minutes, May 27, 1842, LDS

der of the priesthood and without it heaven was unattainable.<sup>38</sup>

In all these ways, Latter-day Saint marriage of the mid-1840s was a peculiar hybrid of sacramental and domestic forms traditionally separated by Catholic and Protestant scruples. More radically, the Whitney-Smith nuptials reveal a type of ecclesiastical authority invested in and structured by kinship. The family, broadly construed, was made a source of divine blessing and more specifically priesthood rights to its members. By “vesting” these rights in the bride and groom, marriage made them “holy progenitors.” Thus, the Whitney-Smith nuptials were a far cry from Calvin’s likening of marriage to “farming, building, cobbling, and barbering.”<sup>39</sup> It reversed as well Scholastic concern that marriages not “detach” individuals from “Christ and the Church.”<sup>40</sup> Eden’s ordinance was not meant for time only, but to bring eternity or God into time. The marital union was not part of the created order but an endowment of divine right to be exercised in the temporal sphere. For Latter-day Saints, marriage was an order of “everlasting priesthood” present but not limited to Eden. It was “an institution of heaven.” The full significance of these phrases, spoken at the Bailey-Knight wedding and enacted in the Whitney-Smith rite, were finally explained by Smith in 1843.

### MORMON MARITAL THEOLOGY AS OF 1843

In Mormonism’s first decade, Smith was largely silent on the sub-

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Church History Library, also digitized in josephsmithpapers.org; punctuation added; hereafter cited as Female Relief Society by date. For the relationship between the Relief Society and the temple, see Carol Cornwall Madsen, “Mormon Women and the Temple: Toward a New Understanding,” in Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1987), 80–110. For the purposes of the Relief Society and their evolution over time, see Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

<sup>38</sup>George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1995), 102; this passage from Clayton’s journal of May 16, 1843, was later canonized as LDS Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–3.

<sup>39</sup>White, *Documents of Christian Worship*, 227.

<sup>40</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, bk. 4, chap. 78, quoted in Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 28.

ject of marriage—publicly, at least. There is some evidence of private conversations among his closest associates, however. The summer before the Knight-Bailey wedding, Mormon editor William W. Phelps declared in the Church’s newspaper: “We may prepare ourselves for a kingdom of glory where the man is neither without the woman, nor the woman without the man in the Lord.”<sup>41</sup> In a letter to his wife that same year, Phelps expressed another distinctive aspect of Mormonism’s new doctrine of marriage when he referred to the “right” to be husband and wife “in the world to come, according to the law of the celestial kingdom.”<sup>42</sup> Parley P. Pratt, also one of Smith’s close associates, later remembered learning from Smith in 1840 “that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity.”<sup>43</sup> Like Smith’s earlier allusion to “rights of the everlasting priesthood” during the Bailey-Knight wedding and to a concentration of “all those Powers” in the Whitney-Smith rite, these ideas presumably shared conversationally with Phelps and Pratt remained obscure until Smith issued a lengthy summation of his theology of marital “sealing.”

In 1843, Smith addressed the subject of marriage in detail and

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<sup>41</sup>[William W. Phelps,] “Letter No. 8,” *Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 9 (June 1835): 130. Consistent with the increasing import given sentiment, some of the Saints’ contemporaries also had begun to imagine a heavenly future for human affections. Domestic ties “have been loosened” in death, said a Methodist periodical, “only to be resumed . . . in the region of everlasting love.” “Re-Union in Heaven,” *Western Christian Advocate* 7 (January 8, 1841): 152. On the reconceptualization of heaven around sentiment, see Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History*, 2d ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 228–75. Holiness leader Phoebe Palmer’s anniversary poem to her husband promised “Our earth cemented love, / Shall reunite in worlds of bliss.” Phoebe Palmer, “Love’s Vicissitudes” in *Phoebe Palmer: Selected Writings*, edited by Thomas C. Oden (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 70. But these expressions were neither part of a systematic theology nor constituted doctrine in any official sense. They were logical extensions of a romantic confidence in the goodness both of God and humanity.

<sup>42</sup>W. W. Phelps, Letter to Sally Phelps, September 16, 1835, in Bruce A. Van Orden, ed., “Writing to Zion: The William W. Phelps Kirtland Letters (1835–1836)” *BYU Studies* 33, no. 3 (1993): 564.

<sup>43</sup>Terry L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow, *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 174.

with all the revelatory authority of his office. Eventually canonized in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants as Section 132, the statement is believed by historians to summarize more than a decade of Smith's thoughts and experience and also to respond to contemporary conflicts with his wife Emma and others over his practice of plural marriage. The section's rhetorical stance was divine command and promise to those who marry "by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise" (LDS D&C 1981 132:19).

Among Smith's evangelical contemporaries, being sealed by the Spirit referred to an assurance of salvation and was based upon interpretations of Ephesians 1:13 and 2 Corinthians 1:22. Though interpretations varied widely, there is no question that Smith was on the far extreme of those who preached not only justification from sin but sanctification or regeneration through Spirit baptism to attain a state of holiness. The extremity of Smith's position was evidenced by both the extent of the holiness he imagined and deeming it mediated by Church ordinance. For Smith, sealing was not only a change of heart by act of divine grace but participation in the divine nature by covenant, a "new and everlasting covenant" situated in marriage as a sealing. According to Section 132:19, persons who kept this covenant of marriage would become holy. They would "come forth in the first resurrection . . . to their exaltation and glory in all things, . . . which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever."

The connection of "a continuation of seeds" to the covenant rights of the biblical patriarchs was explicit: "Abraham received promises concerning his seed . . . This promise is yours also . . . and by this law is the continuation of the works of my Father, wherein he glorifieth himself" (LDS D&C 1981 132:28-32). As with the 1842 rite's reference to "Holy Progenitors," so also in this discourse's reference to Abraham, the biblical patriarchs' marriages served as the prototype for early Mormon marriage. Indeed, among themselves, the Saints' preferred denominator for their marriage practice was "patriarchal marriage" because it was believed to confer the blessings of "royal priesthood," illustrated by the biblical account of ancient Israel and claimed by the New Testament church (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:19). Thus, in Section 132, marriage was deemed both a "new and everlasting covenant," new to the Latter-day Saints, but always present in the various iterations of the gospel in history.

Ultimately, these assurances of progeny in and out of the world

were an endowment (or “vesting,” in the language of the 1842 rite) of the capacity for heavenly and not merely earthly procreativity. Consequently, Smith’s new marriage rite both expressed and effected Mormonism’s most controversial belief: that humanity had divine potential. As we have seen, by the time he performed the Bailey-Knight wedding in 1835, Smith was speaking of and performing marriage as a sacrament whose origins lay in a pre-mortal plan designed to realize humanity’s full potential. Seven years later, as shown by the Whitney-Smith rite, human potential was being defined in terms of procreation and its fullness that were “to concentrate in you and through to your posterity forever.” Section 132 added a layer of explanation to the ritual and articulated the connection between divine capacity and human potential.

From its earliest days, Mormonism had deemed creativity, especially procreativity, God’s most definitive attribute. In one of Smith’s earliest revelations, later canonized as the Book of Moses, the ancient leader of Israel is portrayed as asking God why He had brought the worlds and their inhabitants into being. “There is no end to my works, neither to my words,” God answered. “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).<sup>44</sup> This exchange defined God in terms of a capacity to “bring to pass” or engender in His children the quality of life He possesses, namely “immortality and eternal life.” Father Whitney said as much as he completed the wedding of his daughter to Joseph Smith: “These things I do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that through this order he may be *glorified*,” and pronounced upon them the final blessing: “Let immortality and eternal life henceforth be sealed upon your heads forever and ever.”<sup>45</sup>

As suggested by Smith’s first statement on marriage in 1831, not only God’s purposes in creation but also “the measure” or ultimate potential of and God’s eternal purposes for human existence were deemed accomplished through marriage as a sealing (BofC 52:17) that, as Phelps and Pratt stated the principle, secured the right of spousal connection into the next life. But several years later, when

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<sup>44</sup>For reproduction and discussion of the earliest manuscripts, see Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004).

<sup>45</sup>Revelation, July 27, 1842; emphasis mine.

Smith undertook to explain the eternal significance of marital sealings, his emphasis was not on enabling spousal continuity but on inculcating divine, life-engendering capacity; the latter was essential, the former accidental to it.<sup>46</sup> Humanity's potential, according to Section 132:19–20, was to “have a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end.” In other words, these marriages achieved an ontological status characteristic of the divine by having no end to their procreative capacity. They were “eternal” marriages: not only timeless, but also holy. In sum, what had been suggested by the Bailey-Knight rite became explicit in the Whitney-Smith nuptial blessing and was, the following year, doctrinally established by Section 132.

Joseph Smith did not live long enough to see this marriage (or, more accurately, sealing rite) performed in a temple, as he had intended. Premonitions of death and resistance to polygamy caused him to begin performing it in homes or other private spaces.<sup>47</sup> To Brigham Young, Smith's successor in the Utah church, fell the task of integrating these extraordinary ideas and their ritual expressions into a coherent temple ordinance. Young had had the benefit of observing and participating in the rites Smith had designed and given to his closest associates in the final two years of his life. Nevertheless, when the temple in Nauvoo was finally ready for use in December 1845, it must have been a demanding task to reshape the rite for its new setting and for the participation of the general membership. Analyzing the development of this iteration of the rite is presently impossible because there is no published record of it. It was too sacred for publication or so it was thought.

### TEMPLE MARRIAGE, SALT LAKE CITY, 1853

In an article entitled “Celestial Marriage,” published concurrently in Washington, D.C., and Liverpool, England, Mormon apostle Orson Pratt publicly described the sealing rite in a serial publication

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<sup>46</sup>Cf. M.Guy Bishop, “Eternal Marriage in Early Mormon Marital Beliefs,” *Historian* 53, no. 1 (1990): 77–88.

<sup>47</sup>Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were murdered by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, in June 1844. For a general treatment of the period, see Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 341–550.

whose purpose was to defend Mormonism. Pratt promised his readers that “the doctrine of *Celestial Marriage, or Marriage for all Eternity*, as believed and practised [sic] by the Saints in Utah Territory, will be clearly explained. The views of the Saints in regard to the *ancient Patriarchal Order of Matrimony, or Plurality of Wives . . .* will be fully published.”<sup>48</sup> Each of these titles for Latter-day Saint marriage expressed the basic elements implicit in the Whitney-Smith wedding. Mormonism’s marriage was a “celestial” or divine union that lasted “for all Eternity”: it was both holy and timeless. Moreover, it was a “patriarchal order.” In the language of the Whitney-Smith ritual, its promises involved the “Priest Hood” of “Holy Progenitors.” Finally, modeled on biblical Israel’s nation-building tribalism, it was polygamous or “plural” marriage. Pratt undertook to explain each of these dimensions in a description of the marriage rite as it existed in 1853. By then, the Whitney-Smith formula had been refined to make it suitable for performance in a temple and responsive to the regulations and meanings articulated in Smith’s last and most complete public statement on marriage, later canonized as Section 132 in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants.

Given his apologetic purposes, Orson Pratt’s account was necessarily focused on the version of the marriage rite that licensed plural marriage, but later unofficial accounts show it to be identical in relevant part to the monogamous marriage rite.<sup>49</sup> He began by insisting that permission of the first wife was required before any additional wives could be invited into the existing union. Though often evi-

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<sup>48</sup>[Orson Pratt,] “Celestial Marriage,” *The Seer* 1, no. 1 (February 1853): 1; emphasis his.

<sup>49</sup>Ann Eliza Webb Young, *Wife No. 19, or, The Story of a Life in Bondage* (Hartford, Conn.: Dustin, Gilman & Co., 1876), 388–89. Young may have relied on Pratt’s account for details of a rite she experienced only twice, first as a monogamous wife and later as a plural wife. Nevertheless, having experienced both, she was in a position to know, as she says, that the only difference in the second case was the inclusion of the first wife in the marriage rite. There is no question, however, that for most of the Utah territorial period monogamy was considered only “fulfillment of the celestial law of marriage in part—and is good so far as it goes . . . . But this is only the beginning of the law, not the whole of it.” Joseph F. Smith, July 7, 1878, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: Franklin D. Richards, 1855–86), 20:28–29; See also Brigham Young, August 19, 1866, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:268–69.

denced by its breach, this rule had been established in Section 132, which had replaced the 1835 rules on “Marriage.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the 1853 rite required that the Church president, the bride, and her parents must assent to the marriage. First right of refusal was given to the first wife: “Before any man takes the least step towards getting another wife, it is his duty to consult the feelings of the wife which he already has, and obtain her consent.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, in Mormon marriage, the socially common investigation for impediments to the union included a spouse. Pratt does not state whether other plural wives, if any, had to be consulted.

The first wife’s role shows more than concern for impediments to the marriage, however. She was included in the marriage rite itself, standing before the officiator with the bride and groom on either side: her husband on her right and the bride on her left. The officiator began by asking if she assented to the marriage and, if answered in the affirmative, instructed her: “You will manifest it by placing [the bride’s] right hand within the right hand of your husband.”<sup>52</sup> In doing so, the first wife manifested not only assent but also assumed the traditional patriarchal function of giving the bride to the groom.<sup>53</sup>

Even more remarkable, the first wife did not remove herself from the ceremony after joining the hands of the bride and groom. She took “her husband by the left arm, as if in the attitude of walking” and remained in that position throughout the rite, as vows were ex-

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<sup>50</sup>Smith’s 1843 revelation on marriage was first published in the Church’s *Deseret News* as an extra edition on September 14, 1852, coincident with its public acknowledgement of plural marriage as a doctrine. It replaced the 1835 rules on “Marriage” in the scriptural canon in the 1876 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Robert J. Woodford, “The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants” (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1974), 1736, 1836.

<sup>51</sup>[Pratt,] “Celestial Marriage,” 31. Pratt was, no doubt, accurate in his representation of the rule, though he may “protest too much” with the emphasis “the least step.” Not all men obtained the consent of the first wife. Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 53–58.

<sup>52</sup>[Pratt,] “Celestial Marriage,” 31.

<sup>53</sup>See, for example, Bathsheba W. Smith’s statement that she “had given” her husband five wives. Bathsheba W. Smith, *Autobiography, 1875–1906*, 12, LDS Church History Library.

changed and blessings pronounced.<sup>54</sup> The doctrinal significance of the first wife's remaining literally connected with her husband was not explained to the parties; neither does Pratt give an interpretation of its symbolism. Logically, it appears to enact the notion that the first union was a root marriage onto which subsequent ones were grafted: the husband and first wife constituted a unit to which the new wife was joined. Such conceptualizations raise the issue of the relative status of these marriages. Do they reiterate the marriage of Abraham and Sarah and, later, his unions with Hagar and Keturah? Section 132:37 had referred to Abraham's "concubines," not his plural wives. The diversity of the historical record doubtless makes generalization difficult. Still, in territorial Utah, concubinage did not exist, and all wives enjoyed equal rights and protections under ecclesiastical law. Church law did not assign a different status to monogamous unions but deemed them equally "celestial" or holy in their grant of privileges and rights.<sup>55</sup>

With the first wife's consent to and continuing role in the plural marriage established, the focus of the ceremony turned to the couple and their vows. As one might expect, given the 1853 rite's temple setting, its wording was more formal and elaborate than earlier iterations. Phrases such as "lawful and wedded" and "in the presence of God, angels, and these witnesses" placed the ceremony in its social and sacred setting.<sup>56</sup> The former phrase may convey as well concern for the law, and not just the civic law's rejection of such marriages but also Section 132's preoccupation with the divine law that governed them. In Doctrine and Covenants 132, "law" is used thirty-three times, including in each of its first four sentences. Regardless, the substance of the obligation undertaken in the 1853 rite was virtually identical to that of the Bailey-Knight and Whitney-Smith rites. Except for the legalistic formula "to be your lawful and wedded [spouse]" in the newest iteration of the rite, all three simply required the couple to agree to be companions, foregoing the Protestant formula to love, honor, and obey. The Whitney-Smith vow to extend the

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<sup>54</sup>[Pratt,] "Celestial Marriage," 31.

<sup>55</sup>Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 55–66, 141–69.

<sup>56</sup>[Pratt,] "Celestial Marriage," 31.

companionship after death was also preserved in the 1853 rite in the phrase “for time and for all eternity,” a phrase taken directly from Section 132:7.

Like the vows, the blessings in the 1853 rite show greater solemnity commensurate with the rite’s temple setting. The officiator explicitly repeats the phrase “I seal upon you” or “your heads” before pronouncing each blessing. In substance, these phrases are the equivalent of Father Whitney’s “commanding in the name of the Lord” when he pronounced upon the bride and groom “all those Powers [or rights obtained by the Holy Progenitors] to concentrate in you.”<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the use of “seal” shows a formalizing of doctrine between 1842 and 1853 and, again, largely in terms of Section 132 at verses 1, 18, 19, 26, 46, and 49. In these verses, “seal” takes on a second meaning related to an assurance of salvation while equating it with the authority to give earthly actions heavenly effect. Smith’s use of “seal” is indebted to the New Testament allusion to the Church’s possession of the “keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven.”<sup>58</sup> For Smith, however, the power to bind included authority to join individuals into saving collectives comprised of husband and wife, child and parent, across generations and with assurances of participation in the divine nature.

In the 1853 rite, two blessings are sealed upon the couple. Each blessing was expressed in terms rich with biblical allusion and informed by Smith’s theological categories. The first blessing was: “I seal upon you the blessings of the holy resurrection, with power to come forth in the morning of the first resurrection, clothed with glory, immortality, and eternal lives.”<sup>59</sup> The last phrase borrows a metaphor from the psalmist who praised God as “clothed with honour and majesty” and added to it Section 132’s concept of “eternal lives” or “crowns of eternal lives.”<sup>60</sup> God’s procreative capacity, as described above, was substituted for the Psalmist’s indicia of imperial sovereignty. Thus, the 1853 rite could be said to have invested Section 132’s doctrinal specificity in the Whitney-Smith’s promise

<sup>57</sup>Revelation, July 27, 1842.

<sup>58</sup>KJV Matt. 16:19; cf. D&C [1981 ed.] 128:8–10, 18.

<sup>59</sup>[Pratt,] “Celestial Marriage,” 31.

<sup>60</sup>KJV Psalm 104:1; D&C 132:24, 55.

of “part in the first resurrection.”

The second blessing in the 1853 rite likewise shows the doctrinal influence of Smith’s teachings. There are two parts to the blessing but each expressed what we have already seen in earlier rites as a concern for earthly and heavenly dominion: “I seal upon you [a] the blessings of thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers, and exaltations, [b] together with the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”<sup>61</sup> Here, dominion was defined in terms borrowed from the New Testament (Col. 1:16) and not the Whitney-Smith rite’s oblique reference to David’s “reign” as “king over Israel.”<sup>62</sup> This substitution may be explained by the more poetic and, hence, elevated rhetoric of the King James Version, as well as the status of Joseph Smith as the groom in the earlier marriage. The effect was to orient the promise of dominion to heavenly spheres, too, as well as making it applicable to the membership at large.

The promise of dominion was no less concrete for its orientation to eternity, as evidenced by its immediately subsequent invocation of “the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” As discussed above in connection with the Whitney-Smith nuptial, this second blessing assured the couple of a capacity to bestow the birthright of priesthood. While the invocation of “the blessings of” the ancients lacked the drama of the Whitney-Smith rite’s “command[ing] . . . all those Powers to concentrate in you,” the point was the same.<sup>63</sup>

The promise of dominion in the 1853 rite concluded with the familiar biblical exhortation to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.”<sup>64</sup> But this allusion, too, was given a heavenly dimension by adding the clause “that you may have joy and rejoicing in your poster-

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<sup>61</sup>[Pratt,] “Celestial Marriage,” 31–32.

<sup>62</sup>Revelation, July 27, 1842.

<sup>63</sup>D&C, 1981, 132:1, 30–37. The Book of Abraham 2:11 may have also provided content for the 1853 rite, with its restatement of the Abrahamic covenant in terms of a “promise that this right [i.e., the Priesthood] shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee . . . shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.”

<sup>64</sup>[Pratt,] “Celestial Marriage,” 32; KJV Gen. 1:28.

ity in the day of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>65</sup> As with the earlier reference to thrones and dominions, “the day of the Lord Jesus” elevated what could otherwise have been understood as merely a temporal good, by giving procreation salvific significance (see 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:14).

Thus, the basic elements of the Whitney-Smith blessings—priestly dominion, rights, and progeny—were present in the 1853 temple rite. One of these elements was not present to the same degree, however.

### CONCLUSION: OF RITES AND RIGHTS

In Pratt’s iteration of the rite, the couple agreed to “fulfil all the laws, *rites*, and ordinances, pertaining to this holy matrimony.”<sup>66</sup> This language deviated from the Whitney-Smith agreement to “observe all the *rights* between you both that belong to” their marriage.<sup>67</sup> The substitution of *rites* for *rights* is all the more curious for its having no relation to Section 132, which provided so much of the 1853 rite’s new material. Moreover, simply as a matter of common sense, one expects to hear “rights” in relation to law, especially after reading Father Whitney’s words and observing the legalism of Section 132.

Even at a grammatical level, the substitution invites scrutiny. Placing *rites* in sequence with *ordinances* creates redundancy in an otherwise very self-consciously literate document. While repetition can emphasize a point, the effect here is the reverse: Former meanings are obscured. Finally, although the 1853 marital blessings could be interpreted as rights, they are not identified as such and are only obliquely related to priesthood. Thus, the question remains: At what point and why did early Mormon rites begin to obscure the relation of marital sealings to priesthood?

Currently, for lack of historical data, this question cannot be an-

<sup>65</sup>[Pratt,] “Celestial Marriage, 32.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 31; emphasis mine. In an 1891 version of the marriage rite, the couple agree to “observe and keep all the laws, rites, and ordinances appertaining to this holy order of matrimony.” The change suggests editorial choice, not clerical error. Wilford Woodruff, Letter to John Henry Smith, n.d., in John Henry Smith, Journal, September 21, 1891, in Jean Bickmore White, ed., *Church, State, and Politics: The Diaries of John Henry Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1990), 259.

<sup>67</sup>Revelation, July 27, 1842; emphasis mine.

swered with any confidence. If official copies exist of marriage rites employed between 1842 and 1852, they are not accessible. Considering only historical context, it is plausible, but by no means certain, that the marriage rite, because of its significance to priesthood right, was implicated in the conflict over authority that characterized this decade. It was a period of intense internal strife, not only over the practice of plural marriage, but also over women's authority by virtue of having participated in the rites that created those marriages. In the spring of 1844, Emma Smith, ordained president of the Relief Society and recently sealed in marriage with her husband, believed she had plenary authority. "If their ever was any authority on the Earth she had it—and had yet," she told the Relief Society.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, to the extent that the sealing rite created a family-centered priesthood, which Smith considered "Abrahams Patriarchal power which is the greatest yet experienced in this church," the contest over who should succeed Smith was only exacerbated.<sup>69</sup> Was it to be Brigham Young's ecclesiastical or the Smith family's patriarchal authority? This crisis, too, could have caused Smith's doctrine of patriarchal priesthood with its matriarchal reciprocity to be obscured in the later sealing rite.

The testing of this hypothesis must wait for additional documents to surface. What can be known, however, is that the forms and meanings of Mormon marriage evolved between 1831 and 1843 in response to particular historical circumstance and revelatory experience. Experience with Shakers led to the revelation that marriage was "ordained of God" and not only for temporal but also for eternal purposes (D&C 1835 65:3). The definition of those eternal purposes expanded as Smith's scriptural corpus expanded. By 1835, marriage was seen as part of a premortal plan to fulfill the measure of human creation and as capable of extending spousal ties into the postmortal world. Marriage was instituted in the Garden of Eden through an "everlasting priesthood" and conveyed a "right" to be husband and wife "in the world to come, according to the law of the celestial kingdom."<sup>70</sup>

In the 1842 rite, the growing connection between marriage and

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<sup>68</sup>Female Relief Society, March 16, 1844.

<sup>69</sup>Joseph Smith, Discourse, August 27, 1843, in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 245.

<sup>70</sup>Joseph Smith, History, November 24, 1835; W. W. Phelps, Letter to

priesthood was demonstrated by an invocation of the patriarchal promise made to “Holy Progenitors” and an investment of those rights in the bride and groom.<sup>71</sup> Broadly construed, this development made kinship a source of divine blessing, even priesthood birth-right. In this period, as suggested by allusions to priesthood order and bonds that transcended time, marriage for eternity assumed an increasingly salvific, even sanctifying character. The Mormon marriage rite was understood not only to create timeless bonds between humans but also to cultivate the most essential characteristic of divinity within them: spiritually procreative capacity or, as Joseph Smith defined it, “a fulness and continuation of the seeds for ever and ever. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue” (D&C 1981 132:19–20).

With this declaration of marital sealings as “*the* new and everlasting covenant,” Mormon marriage became the locus of Smith’s most distinctive teachings on the nature of God and of God’s purposes for humanity. In the next ten years, with the benefit of Section 132, earlier rites were refined and given doctrinal coherence in a temple rite that continued to reject historic Christianity’s preoccupation with the spiritual dangers or mere social benefit of connubial relations. Though its roots in Smith’s priesthood restorationism might have escaped conscious recognition by subsequent generations, the 1853 marital sealing continued to impress them with the salvific necessity, even perfecting potential of their family ties, assured for eternity “by the law of my Holy Priesthood, as was ordained by me and my Father before the world was” (LDS D&C 1981, 132:28).

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Sally Phelps, September 16, 1835, in Van Orden, “The William W. Phelps Kirtland Letters,” 564.

<sup>71</sup>Revelation, July 27, 1842.