

## Ordering Antinomy: An Analysis of Early Mormonism's Priestly Offices, Councils, and Kinship

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Where "two or three are gathered together in my name," God is present, the Christian faithful are promised.<sup>1</sup> Where many more are gathered, it seems less of a sure thing. Large numbers appear to inspire the presence of an earthly, not heavenly hierarchy. This is the predicament faced by all would-be holy assemblies. How does one properly govern a human community dedicated to divine purposes? The American answer, from its earliest Pilgrim beginnings, was that *one* does not; rather, all do. American Protestant ecclesiology was largely a creation of the various types of congregational revolt against England's religious establishment, as well as Reformation opposition to Rome's assertion of priestly prerogatives. The ideal brought to British North America was that of a distinctly local church. Though it may have shared purposes and loose affiliations with other congregations, the church was subject to the will of its own congregants. Even among the state-established Anglicans in the southern colonies, the wildness and breadth of the land, together with the scarcity of ministers, made episcopal oversight tenuous at best. Time and political revolution would only increase this democratic tendency. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, Enlightenment principles and revivalist practice had come together to create a radically populist and anti-authoritarian pattern of church government. This final assertion is Nathan Hatch's widely accepted explanation of religion in antebellum America. American religion was populist in its structure, as well as its spirit.<sup>2</sup>

"Democratization" is, however, only one of several available organizing narratives for America's religious history. This article does not deny its interpretive value, much less argue for the superiority of another. We all know, however, that metanarratives occlude even as they illuminate. In this case, the rubric of political action or democratization has tended to baptize all of American religion into evangelicalism, broadly defined but denominationally suited to the Reformed

tradition and American Republic. Other religious motivations and aspirations have been overlooked. This is not a new complaint, though it has gone largely unheeded. More than thirty years ago, Timothy Smith made the case that theological perfectionism animated the revivals and reforms of antebellum Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Methodists, such as Finney and the Beechers.<sup>3</sup> More obviously, John Wesley's promise that believers could be graced, even "filled with the fullness of God," has produced an enduring holiness movement in America.<sup>4</sup> Taking up the thread of Timothy Smith's argument regarding the import of perfectionism to the story of American religion, this essay attempts to demonstrate the conceptual limits of the democratization thesis by calling into question one of its more commonly cited examples: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).

Specifically, I invite reconsideration of Nathan Hatch's use of Mormonism to evidence American democratization as populist and anti-authoritarian.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, if populism is defined in terms of the desire to turn paupers into princely priests, then Smith was a populist. He merged civil and religious spheres and governed the whole by an ordained priesthood of all believers, eventually including women. But, for Smith and his followers, the power by which paupers became priests was not derived from the community of believers: it was not, strictly speaking, populist. Moreover, Smith's design for his church and several city-states included theocrats and not merely priests, but high priests. Thus, Mormonism cannot rightly be numbered among those antebellum movements that, according to Hatch, sounded "the death knell for corporate and hierarchic conceptions of the social order."<sup>6</sup> More specifically, Hatch's conclusion that Smith himself was "violently anticlerical but confident that God will constitute the church according to popular norms" begs for reconsideration in light of the LDS church's practice and thought between Smith's organization of it in 1830 and his death in 1844.<sup>7</sup>

Second, as you might expect, given what I have said about perfectionism, this article responds also to a more recent characterization of the content and context of American theology. Mark Noll has argued that antebellum America's god was republican or, more specifically, constructed from a theological synthesis of public virtue and philosophical commonsense realism.<sup>8</sup> The effect of this synthesis was, he writes, to cede earlier preoccupation with divine science to political science, making concern for the nation's social and political order—race and region especially—superior to, even dispositive of classic theological concerns. I posit here that the Latter-day Saints provide a useful counterpoint to this conclusion. They remind us that evangelical Protestantism's religio-political synthesis was not absolute. Neither

were the Saints alone. Many differing theologies of church existed prior to and later competed effectively with the evangelical vision of America, albeit increasingly from the margins of cultural authority. As David Brion Davis observed fifty years ago, "The forgotten fact about Mormonism is that the New England settlers in York State had a tradition which held that a church is something more than a social group, that theology has concerns other than the nature of man."<sup>9</sup> Today, this is a fact more often forgotten about New England and American Protestantism itself. Here, too, Timothy Smith deserves to be remembered for his complaint, two years after publication of Hatch's *The Sacred Cause of Liberty* and ten years prior to the publication of *Democratization*: "Millennial expectation, which Nathan Hatch finds central in Republican political rhetoric, was more religious than ideological in character, I believe, and preoccupied as much with the future of all mankind as with the special role of the United States in securing it."<sup>10</sup>

Acknowledging my indebtedness to Davis and Timothy Smith's trenchant observations, I argue more broadly for the historiographic necessity of attending to the unambiguously religious preoccupation of American religion and its ambiguous relation to the Republic, manifest in perfectionism especially and put in high relief by Mormonism.<sup>11</sup> Doing so, I wager, will lead to a more nuanced understanding of both America and its religions. I pursue my historiographic goal with an argument that takes me beyond the immediate question of whether nineteenth-century Mormonism was or was not populist and republican to take up an admittedly religious studies question. How does perfectionism in the form of Mormonism, at least, mediate American democratic culture and the felt demands of divine immediacy? If Mormonism was, as Emerson quipped, the "after-clap of Puritanism," its particular sound was undoubtedly John Winthrop's worst, antinomian nightmare.<sup>12</sup> Descended from the American progeny of England and New England's radical sectarians, Smith preached the necessity of revelation as a direct encounter with God, and not as a conversion experience but rather as a deifying one.<sup>13</sup> Smith was the Henry Ford of theophany: everyone could and should have one. Thus, out of these historiographic arguments about whether and how to fit Mormonism within the regnant forms of antebellum religious polity arises another, more substantive question: how did Mormonism survive its own antinomian aspirations and practices? How did a movement that purposefully set about making every member a prophet/prophetess, priest/priestess, and king/queen sustain any order, much less secure the obedience of thousands to one man in an increasingly democratic political order?

I argue that Smith organized power within his movement by creating three parallel sites of authority: priestly office, council, and

kinship.<sup>14</sup> These were not in the pattern of American constitutionalism or a “separation of powers,” executive, legislative, and judicial and with individuals limited to a role in one or the other power. Rather, all believers held degrees of authority in every site simultaneously as officers of the church, members of governing councils and kin within sacramentalized families, but with varying positions and thus, shifting status vis-à-vis each other according to context: office, council or kinship. The practical effect of these overlapping power structures was to ensure that no individual had ultimate authority in every circumstance, including Smith himself. These shifting status relationships and reciprocities of power stabilized Mormonism’s potentially self-destructive antinomianism and, as a historiographical matter, have been mistaken for populism.

In sum, this analysis of antebellum LDS church order is an effort to provide a perfectionist example of an alternative to the democratizing and republican narratives of American religion, even in their most erudite and persuasive expression by Professors Hatch and Noll. My hope is that this example of a third motif will contribute to a better understanding or at least invite greater scrutiny of the continuing presence and appeal of America’s radical religions.

### **Office: Democratic Polity Meets Priestly Authority**

The organization of Joseph Smith’s followers into a church was not the result of an unintentional evolution into a structured, ecclesiastical identity or an intentional adaptation of a previously shared denominational order. Rather, on April 6, 1830, Smith, his extended family, and several others in upstate New York who had participated in the publication of the Book of Mormon met expressly to incorporate a church for themselves “agreeable to the laws of our country by the will and commandments of God.”<sup>15</sup> In addition to the six designated as the official incorporators of “the Church of Christ” under New York law, there were approximately twenty others present.<sup>16</sup> Most were already baptized into their new faith and some were already ordained to church office. Significantly for Mormonism, priestly ordination preceded church formation. Ultimately, what these first members had in common was a belief that God was, through Joseph Smith, restoring a sacramental “fullness” of the Christian gospel, not merely correcting wrongs in other churches.<sup>17</sup>

Its claim to originality notwithstanding, early Mormonism fit the regnant forms of religious New England, adjusted to frontier exigencies and norms. Like their early nineteenth-century Protestant

neighbors, the Latter-day Saints met on Sundays and held periodic conferences to discuss and conduct the business of the church. Their local meetings were comprised of gospel teaching and observance of the Lord's Supper. Consistent with Hatch's depiction of them, their conferences were a combination of delegated representation and democratic attendance. But, in the summer of 1829, Smith ordained some to the office of elder and gave authority to ordain others to offices of lesser jurisdiction: teacher and priest.<sup>18</sup> The duties of these offices were as familiar as their names. For example, elders were evangelists of the restoration, organizing house churches and ordaining teachers and priests to administer to the needs of their proselytes.<sup>19</sup>

Inevitably, subsequent incorporation of geographically scattered believers provided the occasion for creating a more complex administrative structure that included conferences. Two months after the church's incorporation, members were instructed, "It shall be the duty of the several churches, composing the church of Christ, to send one or more of their teachers to attend the several conferences held by the elders of the church."<sup>20</sup> Elders and teachers were licensed by these conferences, by vote of their local churches, and through ordination. At the direction of the conference, presiding elders also were ordained. Nonordained members were in attendance, voted on appointments, and participated in communion. In addition, sermons were preached, spiritual gifts tested, social problems disposed of, and the financial business of the growing church settled. The record of the June 1830 conference noted that thirty members were in attendance, "besides whom, many assembled with us, who were either believers or anxious to learn."<sup>21</sup> Thus, equally important to those present was the experience of spiritual manifestations that confirmed the biblical consistency and holiness of Smith's enterprise. The official report of the conference observed, "To find ourselves engaged in the very same order of things as observed by the holy Apostles of old . . . to witness and feel with our own natural senses . . . combined to create within us sensations of rapturous gratitude, and inspire us with fresh zeal and energy in the cause of truth."<sup>22</sup>

Parallels for each of these organizing elements and religious sentiments are found among the Saints' neighbors. Methodist quarterly conferences provide the most obvious, though not the only point of comparison. An early nineteenth-century gathering of the Western Methodist Conference, for example, began with discussion of church policy, made a number of financial decisions, formed committees to warn the world of calamities to come, examined the worthiness of those nominated for ordination, and listened to elders preach the gospel. Of the last evening, the record notes, "The Conference spent a few hours,

this evening, in speaking of the work of God in their souls and Circuits."<sup>23</sup> A now famous excerpt from an earlier record speaks of such conferences as a "moving, melting time. . . . God manifested himself in his Spirit's power. . . . The lively exercises continued until near sundown."<sup>24</sup> What has been said of the Methodists is equally true of the first Mormons: their conferences "were intensely introspective and communal affairs punctuated by formal religious observances and by more routine business."<sup>25</sup>

Burgeoning membership challenged the egalitarian impulses of all American churches, however. By 1808, church growth led to the reintroduction of a modest hierarchy to Methodism when its General Conference was reconstituted as a representative body limited to one in five preachers from each Annual Conference of the local churches. The General Conference became "a delegated body of ministers . . . vested with full legislative authority."<sup>26</sup> Democratic sentiments caused a second reformation of American Methodism in 1824, when equal access was sought for laity to Annual and General Conferences. This led to schism and the creation of the Methodist Protestant Church, which had no bishops or presiding elders and permitted lay representation. But, even for those remaining in the Methodist Episcopal Church, the rule of bishop was deemed "simply a convenient and effective form of superintendency, similar to Wesley's own oversight over his preachers and societies."<sup>27</sup> Thus, in the early nineteenth century, American Methodism reacted to growth by delegating local authority to democratically elected representatives or by providing equal representation for laity at conferences.

The Methodist response to growth was typical of the period. Even Episcopalians began sharing the traditional power of the episcopacy. By 1840, missionary efforts had resulted in Episcopalians ranking sixth in denominational population figures. In western New York, for example, their parishes had doubled in number, no small feat for England's state religion in post-Revolutionary America. If anywhere, it is among these stewards of British episcopal tradition that one would expect to find antirepublican tendencies. But, taking a distinctly egalitarian turn after the Revolution, the remaining parishes "empowered" representatives to enact a new national charter in 1789.<sup>28</sup> Over the next forty years, procedures for altering the church's liturgy were made contingent upon majority vote by state conventions that included lay representatives of the several churches.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the role of bishops was explicitly curtailed. As stated by one of the state conventions, "According to what we conceive to be true Apostolic Institution, the duty and office of a bishop differs in nothing from that of other priests, except in the power of ordination and confirmation and right of presidency in ecclesiastical synods."<sup>30</sup> Thus, although the

bishops constituted a separate house of the General Convention, they were denied absolute right of veto on the lower house, one-half of which was comprised of laity. Moreover, parishes merely notified bishops of their choice of clergy and were under no obligation to follow the bishops' counsel on any given matter. Lay vestries independently administered the temporal affairs of the parishes. State conventions and their standing committees settled all major policy questions and had jurisdiction to try even bishops. Not until 1844 did "the almost hysterical fear of episcopal usurpation that existed among some professed Episcopalians" subside enough to allow, for example, the bishops to judge their own.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, denominations such as the Congregationalists, Baptists, Disciples of Christ, and Quakers had additional theological commitments against episcopal or other forms of hierarchical leadership. The power to govern was explicitly invested in the congregation whose only high priest was Jesus and who delegated to the minister jurisdiction to administer to the needs of believers. The position taken by Congregationalist minister John Starkwell in 1833 is representative: "The members of these churches have adopted, and are constantly acting upon the principle, that no man, or body of men, has any right to preside over or govern them, unless they have unanimously delegated that right. They claim and exercise the right of choosing their own officers, and regulating their own concerns, responsible to none but Jesus Christ, the sovereign Head of the Church."<sup>32</sup> Thus, church polity reflected the nation's revolutionary commitment to reevaluating and offering improvements on this most basic of social institutions. This was so for a number of reasons. Not least, the greatest affect of the American Revolution had not been on politics but, as Gordon Wood has shown, on "the relationships that bound people to each other." Not just kings, but bishops were included in the renunciation of "kinship, patriarchy, and patronage."<sup>33</sup>

Whatever they shared with their neighbors in terms of worship practices and organizational nomenclature, the Latter-day Saints did not reject patriarchy. They were shaped by different religious aspirations and organizational principles and, most dramatically, had a very different experience with hierarchy. An early convert to Mormonism remembered, "It was with a joy almost unspeakable that I realized that I was living in a day when God had a prophet upon the earth."<sup>34</sup> The faithful believed God had chosen their leader and they experienced God's commands as coming from the mouth of a man—first in the ancient scripture he produced, and then by revelatory answers to contemporary questions. Their *Book of Commandments* proclaimed, "Wherefore I the Lord . . . called upon my servant Joseph Smith jr. and spake unto

him from heaven, and gave him commandments . . . that mine everlasting covenant might be established."<sup>35</sup> Such pronouncements fueled the public's concern that Mormonism was "popish." The historical record shows a more complex phenomenon. Smith's prophetic claims were defined as the power to beget prophetic authority in others. Quoted more fully, the above canonical statement provided, "I the Lord . . . gave him commandments [or revelations] . . . that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh, but that every man might speak in the name of God."<sup>36</sup> Thus, in principle, the various church offices created by Smith were not only delegations of administrative authority, but ordinations to divine authority to "speak in the name of God," as Smith himself spoke.<sup>37</sup>

The formal institution of the office of apostle in 1835 provided the occasion for articulating the most direct link between Mormonism's priestly offices and personal power to mediate the divine. New apostle Parley Pratt, one of twelve so designated, was told, "The veil of the heavens shall be rolled up, thou shalt be permitted to gaze within it, and receive instructions from on high. No arm that is formed and lifted against thee shall prosper, no power shall prevail, for thou shalt have power with God."<sup>38</sup> Smith's ultimate theological intention was to create in his followers the same power and identity they found so compelling in him, as one with special gnosis received through immediate experience of the divine. Thus, as the type and number of priestly offices expanded in relation to the demands created by an expanding membership, Smith was not inclined to monopolize authority. Rather, based on his understanding of the nature of God and the explicit terms of Smith's own perceived grant of authority, he set about creating a community of prophets.<sup>39</sup> Like the biblical prototype, he wished "that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!"<sup>40</sup>

Initially, Smith's wish for a congregation of prophets was conceived of as an ordained priesthood of all worthy male believers. Their authority was atypically not deemed authorized by covenant history or baptismal rite, but legally instituted by angelic visitors from previous eras. This is its own story, but the short of it is that Smith claimed a commission to ordain others based on his own ordination by angelic visits from John the Baptist and St. Peter, each of whom represented for Smith the last authorized administrator of divine authority for their respective people, making Smith their legal successor after a long apostasy.<sup>41</sup> Justified by this commission, Smith ordained others to offices within an expanding priestly order. Thus, the Latter-day Saints believed themselves bound to God by an "everlasting covenant" brought into being by God's immediate word, not biblical word, and mediated

by priestly authority, not a believing community. Their congregational bond to each other was filial, not republican, and eventually confirmed by kinship structures.<sup>42</sup>

As a consequence, for Latter-day Saints, church covenants were not based on populist authority and did not signify democratic consensus. Theirs was primarily a sacramental, not a social compact. Or, in Timothy Smith's terms the Mormons illustrated perfectionist concern for the salvific "future of all mankind," not merely a desire for an idealized social order. Even when voting on matters of church business, the action signified willingness or unwillingness to receive an authoritative determination or appointment, not popular decision making. Voting among the Mormons was a covenant-making process (as we shall see in the discussion of priesthood councils), meant to negotiate unanimity where, by uplifted hands, it was demonstrated lacking.

There was no doubt, however, Smith was the earthly head of this heavenly priesthood and covenant. From the beginning, his production of new canon established his authority independent of any concept of church order and office, and it made him more than first among equals—he was something else entirely. His followers believed that God "gave unto him commandments which inspired him and . . . power from on high . . . to translate the Book of Mormon." He was "a seer, a translator, a prophet." Smith's gift for writing sacred texts resulted inevitably in an informal but powerful leadership status that overshadowed all others, even as the membership growth brought more educated and mature men to the movement. "A seer is greater than a prophet," taught the Book of Mormon, because "a seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have, except he should possess the power of God, which no man can." Thus, the church was told at its organization in 1830 to "give heed unto all his words and commandments. . . . For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine [God's] own mouth, in all patience and faith."<sup>43</sup>

Not surprisingly, this instruction was necessitated by a contest of revelators among early converts. Within five months of its incorporation, competition for authority had begun among Mormonism's many priestly prophets.<sup>44</sup> Though claimants not infrequently arose to criticize the rightness of his revelation, none ever demonstrated Smith's scripture writing capacity or, for that matter, his oracular charisma and, hence, never achieved authority among the majority.<sup>45</sup> Still, Smith's intention to create a literal priesthood, not of common inspiration but of prophetic individuals, continued to create tension among the members, especially as their numbers and officers grew. For example, David Whitmer, one of the Smith's earliest benefactors and believers, unsuccessfully objected to the extension of priestly office

beyond the Christian types and pastoral functions depicted in the Book of Mormon.<sup>46</sup> Notwithstanding these objections, church offices continued to evolve beyond New Testament and Book of Mormon formulas.

As with much else in Mormonism, the conception of office began with the familiar and evolved into the unfamiliar and sacerdotal. Between 1829 and early 1831, the common titles of teacher, priest, and elder were followed by equally familiar deacon and bishop. By 1835, however, high priests, patriarchs, seventies, and apostles were being ordained. Assigning titles and organizational functions was not enough to establish the authority of these offices, of course. The Latter-day Saints had to believe that God could, and indeed needed to, speak through others besides Smith for the proper functioning of the church. Theology and necessity each played a role in this extension of and submission to the authority of others.

Moreover, as with neighboring denominations, growth necessitated the changing shape of Mormonism's administrative apparatus. In June 1831, fifteen months after the church's organization, two thousand attended its quarterly conference at Kirtland, Ohio. In August, the number of members in central Missouri was sufficient to hold an independent conference. In the first two weeks of November 1831, four conferences were held.<sup>47</sup> With growth and distance, immediate access to Smith's revelatory leadership to judge error or arbitrate among competing options was attenuated. Additional persons were needed to develop authoritative policy, execute plans, adjudicate disputes, and respond to the general needs associated with establishing townships and sanctifying souls. Within eighteen months of the church's founding, the office of "bishop" was created with presiding authority over standing congregations.<sup>48</sup> During this same period, definitions of various church offices—deacon, teacher, priest, and elder—evolved to match the experience of a gathered church with settled congregations, but which had not given up its proselytizing *raison d'être*.

During the reorganization of male priesthood in the 1830s, the definitions of existing offices were amended and new offices created to fill the ranks of the two priestly orders: one having a "lesser" and the other a "higher" authority. The former (later called "Aaronic") had authority over rites of justification, such as baptism. The latter (named for the prophet-king Melchizedek) had authority over the sanctifying rites, such as the gift of the Holy Spirit. Within each of these two orders, offices were given a specific jurisdiction and were set in hierarchical relation to another office. For example, an 1832 revelation provided that "the office of Elder and Bishop are necessary appendages belonging unto the high Priesthood, and again the offices of Teacher and Deacon are

necessary appendages belonging to the lesser Priesthood."<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the elders were to "render an account of their stewardship unto the Bishop." Similarly, the deacons served in support of the teachers. In 1833, the offices of "patriarch" and "apostle" were created, the former being the first hint of the role of kinship in Smith's priestly ordering of the church. Notwithstanding the practical functions assigned these offices, they retained a mystical, hieratic character. For example, those ordained apostles were charged to "never cease striving till you have seen God face to face."<sup>50</sup> Each office was granted real world jurisdiction and other worldly powers. As distinctions were established so also were the boundaries of office and the formalities for graduating from one office to another. Eventually, all worthy male members received priestly office within an increasingly complex order of priests and were progressively advanced through the ranks. Ultimately, advancement was directed toward Smith's own priestly identity and such progression in spiritual capacity and authority quickly became a defining element of church membership.

Others have recovered in detail the historical origins and evolution of the phenomenon of Latter-day Saint priesthood.<sup>51</sup> I have only summarized it here to set up the question of substantive interest to this analysis of antebellum church order. Namely, given the nature of the authority granted and the numbers ordained to it, how did Smith maintain order in such an overtly antinomian enterprise? I have argued that Smith's first method of regulating expression of prophetic power among his followers was by ordaining them to priestly office within overarching authority structures (Melchizedek and Aaronic), oriented to perfectionist ends but with real world effect. Second, each office not only defined the scope of an individual's authority but also made that authority subject to other offices and often in a reversal of status. For example, seventeen-year-old William Cahoon was a "teacher" assigned to visit, among others, Joseph Smith's home to "see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other; neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking."<sup>52</sup> He recalled his trepidation at asking the president of the church to account for himself. "I stood there trembling and said to him; 'Brother Joseph, I have come to visit you in the capacity of a ward teacher, if it is convenient for you.' He said, 'Brother William, come right in. I am glad to see you. Sit down in that chair there and I will go and call my family in.' They soon came in and took seats. The Prophet said, 'Brother William, I submit myself and family into your hands,' and took his seat. . . . By this time my fears and trembling had ceased and I said, 'Brother Joseph, are you trying to live your religion?'"<sup>53</sup> In this case, "your" must have had a peculiar valence to the young interrogator.

In sum, each office in Mormonism's ordained priesthood of all believers had its privileges over against and duties subordinate to other offices. All offices were attainable, but all officers were accountable. Thus, notwithstanding the divine gifts he possessed in virtue of his office, no man was ungoverned by priestly office—his own and another's. The growing structural complexity and idealism of the LDS church between 1830 and Smith's death in 1844 was not limited to priesthood office, however. Another source of authority was created that also began in forms familiar to antebellum Protestantism, but reoriented to Smith's perfectionist aspirations.

### **Councils: Extending and Regulating Male Priestly Power**

As the number of offices and the degree of their charismatic aspirations grew, so too did the need to regulate the assertion of authority vis-à-vis each other and the church as a whole. Consequently, the early pattern of general conferences was soon abetted by a number of smaller gatherings with specific duties, including the duty to preside over persons of lesser priestly office. Initially, these smaller, more focused gatherings of persons by rank were also denominated "conferences." Gradually, however, they were distinguished from "general conferences," or those gatherings attended by all members, by calling them "councils" or "quorums." For example, in April 1833, a "conference of High Priests" was called to consider ways to pay for a meetinghouse and to govern a congregation in another county. Three months later, however, a "council of Elders" gathered to hear Brigham Young's report of his mission to Canada.<sup>54</sup> This informal denomination of leadership meetings as "councils" was formalized when, six months later, in February of 1834, Smith instructed "a council of the High Priests and Elders... in all the order in which [it] ought to be conducted."<sup>55</sup> Five days later, Smith appointed twelve from this group to be a "High Council," thereby establishing a new layer of plenary authority over church affairs. In addition, certain authority formerly exercised in offices was transferred to councils during this period. For example, elders who had had the right to adjudicate charges of transgression were now subordinated to councils that oversaw the general spiritual (the high council) and temporal (the bishops and their courts) affairs of the church. A letter from Smith was unambiguous: "Elders [judicial] acts are null and void."<sup>56</sup> The final priesthood offices ("Seventy" and "Apostle") were created in this same year and their jurisdictions were immediately and explicitly situated in councils.

Chief among the church's governing councils were the First Presidency, the High Council, and the Council of the Twelve Apostles. The First Presidency, comprised of Smith and two others who assisted him as "first" and "second counselor," shared executive authority. The other two councils held juridical authority to determine disputes among the members in given geographical areas: the High Council constituting a local governing body over LDS population centers and the apostolic quorum being a traveling council to adjudicate disputes among the scattered branches of the church. As indicated by Smith's reference to these councils having a unique "order" and "dignity," this evolution in church structure was not understood as merely an administrative necessity, but also a spiritual one. Indeed, the delay in properly ordering them, he observed, "perhaps, has deprived the councils of some or many blessings."<sup>57</sup> The "dignity" of Smith's office, and by implication that of the council itself, derived from its being in the pattern of "ancient days," he said. Thus, these councils were to be governed by "strict propriety, that no one was allowed to whisper, be weary, leave the room, or get uneasy in the least, until the voice of the Lord, by revelation, or by the voice of the council by the spirit was obtained."<sup>58</sup>

The manner in which the High Council in Kirtland, Ohio, was organized in February, 1834, illustrates the means by which Smith effected the transfer of what had been exclusively his authority to others: not only by ordaining individuals to prophetic and priestly office, but also by placing them in councils that extended and regulated their authority. As suggested by Smith's description of "ancient councils" in terms of their discipline, the rules of the council governed the personal deportment of the councilors. Rules were also applied to the council's deliberations. As with earlier conferences, these and other procedures took familiar forms common to antebellum Protestantism: taking and reading minutes, assigning reports, obtaining acceptance of appointments to office, and establishing parliamentary procedures. As such, the rules reflected the practice and language of a republican political culture. They expressed majoritarian and democratic values and employed practices of legislative bodies, such as providing a definition of a quorum, procedures for substituting for absent councilors, rules for internal discipline and debate, and safeguards for fair trials and appeals from judgments.

Like the conventions of LDS conferences, however, the High Council's republican procedures were molded by charismatic and autocratic premises. The general council from whom the twelve high councilors were chosen was later considered "assembled . . . by revelation" and the "High Council was appointed by revelation."<sup>59</sup> Yet, the High Council neither elected its own members, nor the First

Presidency who presided over it. Rather, the High Council “acknowledge[d]” such appointments by unanimous vote. Moreover, voting was not dispositive of any given result, but rather functioned as the means by which the required “common consent” or unanimity was to be achieved.<sup>60</sup> “The President of the Church, who is also the President of the Council, is appointed by revelation, and acknowledged in his administration, by the vote of the Church,” stated the minutes. These minutes were “unanimously adopted and received for a form and constitution . . . with this provision, thas [*sic*] if the President should hereafter discover anything lacking in the same, he should be privileged to supply it.” For all its republican references to “vote,” attention to the representative nature of those who are voting, and enactment of legalistic rules ensuring fair procedures, the High Council operated in the mode of hierarchical covenant-making. Participant votes were characterized as an acknowledgment or reception of a particular initiative. In other words, the final ballot expressed the consensus of the council or commitment to uphold determinations made by higher councils, all of which were believed to have received their office from God.<sup>61</sup>

In this fashion, the exercise of individual priestly office was regulated by ordering individuals within councils and quorums and by drawing from among them superordinate councils. The latter had authority to adjudicate claims made against those holding priestly office and, later, any church member as well. For example, on the same evening that Smith formed and instructed the High Council, it heard charges against “Bro. [Leonard] Rich for transgressing the word of wisdom [against alcohol and tobacco use] and for selling the [written copies of] revelations at an extortionary [*sic*] price while he was gone East.”<sup>62</sup> Even the church president was subject to the discipline of councils. Six months after being created by him, the High Council heard charges against Smith by one of its own who “accus[ed] brother Joseph Smith Junr. with criminal conduct during his journey to and from Missouri this Spring & Summer.”<sup>63</sup>

After selecting the High Council through this mixture of republican style and hieratic substance, Smith set apart each member by the laying on of hands. He personally performed this rite for each of his “assistant Presidents” in the new church presidency and for each of the twelve members of the High Council. In doing so, he further linked himself to them as the medium by which their authority was received. The ritual setting apart of the council consisted of Smith giving “such instruction as the Spirit dictated.” Then, laying his hands upon the head of each man, he “blessed them, that they might have wisdom to magnify their office and power to prevail over the adversary.” Whereas in the

first stage of constituting the council Smith had acted the part of president of the church by imposing the rules that would govern it, in the second stage he enacted the role of priestly mediator and prophetic communicator of heavenly powers by imposing his hands, or authority, upon them.

In the final stage of constituting a new authoritative body within the church, Smith gave the High Council a "solemn charge to do their duty in righteousness" and, according to the minutes, all responded with an oath. The solemnity of the oath was, according to one participant, signaled by "rais[ing] our hands to heaven in token of the everlasting covenant." This act incorporated by reference the ritual greeting and definition of covenant relationship from the Kirtland School of the Prophets, memorialized in the church's canon as, "Art thou a brother or brethren? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to [be] your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless, in thanksgiving forever and ever."<sup>64</sup> These are the idealistic ties—a "fixed determination" to love and "walk blameless"—that bound LDS governing councils. They contributed also to the ritual means by which priesthood councils were sacralized or made "independent of every incumbrance [*sic*] beneath the celestial kingdom, by bonds and covenants of mutual friendship, and mutual love."<sup>65</sup> This was, of course, an ideal often challenged by the real difficulties of using the power created by the priestly and councilor structure.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, this paradoxical belief that "independence" was obtained through "bonds . . . of mutual friendship and love" was enacted in this penultimate right of the constitution of the High Council. Between his priestly blessing and their responsive exchange of covenant, the Council participated in a ritual construction of another and competing bond of fealty. It was, however, not the last such bond ritualized in the course of constituting the High Council.

After ordaining members of the High Council, among whom were his father and brother, Smith called his father from among the ranks of the Council to bless Smith himself and his brother Samuel. These blessings were performed in the same fashion as Smith had blessed his father and brother and made them members of the High Council. The substance of the father's blessing was to promise additional powers to his sons. Just as the son had done in making his father a member of the Council, the father placed his hands on his son and said, "Joseph, I lay my hands upon thy head, and pronounce the blessings of thy progenitors upon thee, and that thou mayest hold the keys

of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven until the coming of the Lord. Amen." In the same fashion, to his other son he said, "Samuel, I lay my hands upon thy head, and pronounce the blessings of thy progenitors upon thee, that thou mayest remain a Priest of the Most High God, and like Samuel of old, hear His voice, saying, Samuel, Samuel." In this final stage of the ritual, Joseph Smith placed himself on equal footing with his brother and in subordinate relation to his father within minutes of having exercised his presiding authority over them both. This status reversal was also enacted by the only other father and son present. John Johnson was invited to bless his son Luke, who had been called to the High Council by Smith.<sup>67</sup>

Though the record does not state Smith's purpose in including these patriarchal blessings in the rites that conferred ecclesiastical authority, the effect was to place in high relief and legitimize the existence of overlapping status relationships among these new leaders and the general members of the church. Smith's reversing his own status and treating it as one with that of his brother Samuel and Luke Johnson demonstrated to the High Council that their status was not absolute—it varied according to their relation to others. This overlapping of status relationships set implicit limits on the power of the High Council. The assertion of patriarchal authority reminded each hierarch that he was always somebody's son and subordinated to him regardless of ecclesiastical authority. The rite mitigated the supremacy of the First Presidency and High Council by subordinating them to other authority (namely, their fathers), even though the sons, as high councilors, were ecclesiastically superordinate to their fathers.

In sum, between 1831 and 1839, Smith not only empowered men to perform many of his charismatic duties, but simultaneously set limits by office and council on the exercise of their power. As illustrated by the priestly and patriarchal liturgies which created it, the High Council was first limited by the rules which it received by covenant and which placed its members in certain roles vis-à-vis each other, for example, who had seniority and who might speak in what order at any given time. Secondly, the priestly rites of instructing and setting them apart enacted their relation to Smith as the source of their own prophetic delegation. Even the order of the settings apart illustrated the hierarchy between the Assistant Presidents and the High Council, as well as the internal hierarchy among the members of the council. Finally, all the new hierarchs witnessed the fact that they were not in all cases superordinate to the members of the church when they observed Smith's subordination to his father and the generalization of that subordination by the priestly blessings by Father Johnson and, later,

Father Whitmer.<sup>68</sup> In this fashion, overlapping status relationships, together with rulemaking and priestly ties, operated to effect boundaries to the authority granted the High Council and its members. In the next decade, what was implicit in this display of patriarchal priesthood in relation to sons was made explicit: patriarchs became such only in relation to matriarchs. Women were integrated into the shifting status relationships of Mormonism's priestly order.

### **Councils Stage Two: Creating and Regulating Female Priestly Power**

The first indication that ecclesiastical authority would be extended to Latter-day Saint women came in the form of a revelation via Smith to his wife, Emma Hale Smith, in July 1830, three months after the organization of the church. After addressing her as an "elect lady, whom I [God] have called," the revelation informed her, "the office of thy calling shall be for a comfort unto my servant Joseph."<sup>69</sup> Further defined as providing Smith with consolation in his afflictions, company in his travels, and a scribe for his words, these initial elements of Emma Smith's calling must have seemed as unremarkable to her as they do to us. None of these functions were unique, either in terms of early nineteenth-century wifely duties generally or Emma's experience specifically. She had, for example, already served as a scribe for the Book of Mormon. While she could not have imagined the travails that awaited her in the remaining fourteen years of her husband's life, she would have expected to share his fate as a consequence of her marriage vows three years earlier. Nevertheless, the integration of her church office with her marital status is worth noting because of its importance to future doctrinal developments.

Other elements in this revelation did, however, innovate on contemporary women's religious roles. Emma was informed that she would be "ordained" by her prophet-husband "to expound scriptures, and to exhort the church." The revelation further instructed her that "thy time . . . shall be given to writing, and to learning much and . . . thou shalt lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better." Thus, Emma Smith's calling was not the more typical self-generated call to female preaching based on personal conversion and inspiration. Neither did it arise in the context of religious enthusiasm or explicit millenarian expectations, as was common among contemporary female exhorters.<sup>70</sup> Rather, Emma was promised a consecration by the chief ecclesiastical officer and a setting apart to a public function within a standing church. Her new status was to be manifest in spoken and

written word and to be maintained by a dedication to and study of heavenly things. As such, it was distinguishable from her calling to sustain and comfort her husband in his duties to the church.

That Emma was being treated as an independent spiritual agent and given ecclesiastical authority is further illustrated by comparing the revelatory instructions she received to that given Joseph Smith and two others on the same day, and likewise recorded in the *Book of Commandments*. The three men were exhorted to "let your time be devoted to the studying of the scriptures, and to preaching, and to co[n]firming the church."<sup>71</sup> Thus, Emma's call was in relevant part indistinguishable from that of her coreligionists during these early months and, lest that be lost on any, the revelation to her concluded with the prescription "this is my voice unto all. Amen." Even a concluding reference to "delight in thy husband, and the glory which shall come to him" need not be narrowly construed as a particular requirement for Emma.<sup>72</sup> It is at least as probable that it referred to the universal requirement that Smith be recognized as the head of the church, as indicated above. Unfortunately, virtually nothing is known of how Emma Smith expressed her authority or acted pursuant to this calling until, twelve years later, her husband began to order the women, as he had the men, by priestly office, council and kinship ties.<sup>73</sup>

By the spring of 1842, the Latter-day Saints had gathered to the western border of Illinois and were again attempting to build a temple-centered city. This one they optimistically called "Nauvoo," a neologism signifying heavenly peace and restating their intent to build Zion on the American frontier.<sup>74</sup> The demands associated with this endeavor occupied the attention and energy of all, whether seasoned exiles from Missouri or newly converted emigrants from England. While the men worked their appointed rounds on construction, the women sought to raise much-needed cash for nails and other necessities. Certain women felt the need to organize their efforts in the pattern of women's benevolent societies and asked Smith for his approval of their plans. Smith responded that he had "something better for them than a written Constitution."<sup>75</sup> That something was to shape the original group of women's intentions into a priestly order and turn their modest aspirations into ritually constructed sources of spiritual power and ecclesiastical authority.

On March 17, 1842, Smith met as promised with the women who wished to organize a benevolent society. He brought with him two apostles responsible for recording the church's official business: John Taylor, editor of *Times and Seasons*, and Willard Richards, church historian. In addition, several women were present who had not been part of the group whose "written Constitution" was deemed inadequate. It is

impossible to identify with certainty the newcomers, since there is no list of attendees to the original meeting of “neighbors” living in the north end of town.<sup>76</sup> Neither can we assume that only Joseph Smith invited the new faces. Given her status and her husband’s intentions for the society, Emma Smith probably had a say in the invitations. Several in the room that day were not only close neighbors to the Smith’s at the south edge of town; they were also Emma’s closest associates. Moreover, of the twenty women present, at least half were the kin—spouses, daughters, cousins—of men in the church’s highest priesthood offices and councils.<sup>77</sup> The opening hymn for the meeting was the final notice that this was both an official and significant occasion. From an anthem written for the dedication of the Kirtland temple, they sang, “We call in our solemn assemblies, in spirit, . . . That we through our faith may begin to inherit the visions, and blessings, and glories of God.”<sup>78</sup>

The location, attendees, and liturgical elements of the meeting lent solemnity to what was ultimately a plan to change the women’s benevolent society into a church council of limited membership, presided over by ordained female leadership, and entitled to receive revelation in order to save souls. Thus, Smith began the meeting by seeking the women’s commitment to the unity and righteousness required of all other quorums he had organized. He asked the women to determine if they could accept each other in “full fellowship, and . . . to the privileges of the Institution about to be formed.”<sup>79</sup> He and his male associates left the room while the women discussed the motion. Whatever standard the women used to make this determination, the question itself implied a sense of exclusivity and authority or “privileges” common to priesthood councils.<sup>80</sup> Most significantly, the women, like the men, were to be led not by a directorate, but by a three-person presidency comprised of Emma Smith and counselors of her own choosing. This triumvirate was, Joseph Smith said, to “preside just as the Presidency preside over the church.” As such, they were to “serve as a constitution—all their decisions be considered law; and acted upon as such.” This revelatory presidency was the promised “something better” than a written constitution.

Not surprisingly, the emphasis throughout the meeting was on the manner in which such a presidency should preside. The substance of the direction they received mirrored what we have already seen in other organizational meetings: instruction in republican procedural devices, ordination to a role in a particular office, and emphasis on the charism of revelation. Smith instructed the women that they should speak in order, use procedural motions, and keep minutes. As for the ordination of the presidency, co-founder Sarah Kimball remembered that, while Emma’s counselors were ordained by the laying on of hands,

the same ritual action simply “confirmed on Emma Smith her former ordination and blessed her to be a mother in Israel, a pattern of virtue and to possess all the qualifications necessary to enable her to preside with dignity and give such instruction, as may be requisite in her calling as an elect lady.”<sup>81</sup> As with the High Council, the women’s presidency was received unanimously by vote signifying the willingness of the women to accept its leadership. With respect to other offices, Joseph Smith left that prerogative to Emma Smith and her counselors. “If any Officers are wanted to carry out the designs of the Institution,” he said, “let them be appointed and set apart, as Deacons, Teachers &c. are among us.” Later he would emphasize the point: “Those ordain’d to lead the Society are authoriz’d to appoint to different offices as the circumstances shall require.”<sup>82</sup>

Once the new presidency was constituted, Emma Smith assumed the role of chair and turned to the first order of business: naming their enterprise, a task required by the fact that the women did not hold a specific priesthood office that would define their quorum. Neither could it be defined in term of its hierarchical relation to others, like the High Council. The women’s quorum had stewardship for all women in the church and there probably would have been less confusion if they had simply named it the “Women’s Council.” The initial impulse toward benevolence and the influence of cultural patterns dominated the imagination of most gathered that day, however. There were several suggestions for a name and no little debate. In opposition to several, including her husband and his male associates, Emma argued that her society not employ the common denominator “benevolent” in order to avoid the inference of moral laxity associated with certain contemporary women’s societies.<sup>83</sup> It was a demand consistent with her personal scrupulousness and the first hint in the historical record of a moral temper that would sustain her battle against her husband over polygamy. At the moment, however, all that was apparent was that Emma did not want her society identified with “public Institutions” or “call’d after other Societies in the world.”<sup>84</sup> “We are going to do something extraordinary,” she insisted. Hers was an ecclesiastical institution, not a social one, and its name should indicate as much. The men conceded in the face of an “argument . . . so potent,” and all agreed the name should be “The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo.” In practice, however, the Relief Society would struggle to define its extraordinariness or difference from other benevolent societies and eventually be overwhelmed by an internal battle over polygamy.

No doubt, for most of the women present at these early meetings, the Society’s desired extraordinariness was understood in terms

of the demand for personal holiness, not merely social reform. Like his wife, however, Joseph Smith had a larger goal for the Relief Society and stipulated that it was “not only to relieve the poor but to save souls.”<sup>85</sup> He explicitly rooted the Society in his biblical restorationism and modeled it after the priesthood order, stating, “the Society should move according to the ancient Priesthood . . . mak[ing] of this Society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch’s day—as in Paul’s day.”<sup>86</sup> Moreover, Smith made Jesus the type for their new identity, instructing the women that “you must enlarge your souls toward others if you [w]ould do like Jesus, and carry your fellow creatures to Abram’s bosom.”<sup>87</sup> Later he added, “Jesus designs to save the people out of their sins. Said Jesus ye shall do the work which ye see me do. These are the grand key words for the Society to act upon.”<sup>88</sup> Most dramatically, Smith announced that, given the possibility that the Missourians who still sought to execute him might succeed, the members of the Society must be prepared to lead the church without him. Therefore, he told them, “The keys of the kingdom are about to be given to them, that they may be able to detect every thing false—as well as to the Elders.”<sup>89</sup> This allusion to keys to esoteric knowledge signaled the women’s later inclusion in new temple ordinances. But first, the society had to prepare itself by becoming a “select society, separate from all the evils of the world, choice, virtuous and holy.”

Smith gave the Relief Society two duties: “looking to the wants of the poor” and “correcting the morals and strengthening the virtues of the female community.”<sup>90</sup> These were the classic activities of antebellum women’s benevolence and reform associations, but the objects of Nauvoo women’s ministrations were members of the church. This gave the women certain rights with respect to church matters that had been heretofore men’s exclusive prerogative, especially those men holding the priesthood offices recommended to the women by Smith: the Aaronic titles “Deacons, Teachers &c.” His choice of titles appears not to have been without intention. The defining elements of the offices of deacon and teacher among the men did not differ materially from Smith’s description of the women’s rights and duties. Deacons assisted teachers, who were “to watch over the Church always & be with them & strengthen them & see that there is no iniquity in the church, . . . & see that the Church meet to gether often & also see that all the members do their duty & . . . take the lead of Meetings in the absence of [one of higher office] . . . but neither the Teacher nor Deacons have authority to Baptize nor administer the Sacrement [*sic*] But are to warn expound exhort & teach & invite all to come unto Christ.”<sup>91</sup> The women, too, were not authorized to perform church sacraments, but were unlimited with respect to the privilege of “expound[ing] the scriptures to all.”<sup>92</sup>

The women's Aaronic-like privileges were, however, couched in terms of "sav[ing] the Elders the trouble of rebuking" and "provok[ing] the brethren to good works." Thus, the men unquestionably retained primary responsibility for the "preparatory gospel of repentance" (or reform and its attendant ordinances), as well as the responsibility for the temporal affairs of the church, including the economic needs of the poor. Nevertheless, Smith's charge to the women was indistinguishable from that given male deacons and may be another instance of Smith's restorationism.<sup>93</sup> However much these early Mormon women resembled biblical "deaconesses," it is important to note that Smith did not limit their potential titles as such, and he explicitly included them in his priesthood schema, not merely as beneficiaries of it. Finally, as with every other church council, the women's privileges were charismatic, even revelatory. Smith promised, "If you live up to your privileges, the angels cannot be restrain'd from being your associates," a definitive component of the Aaronic Priesthood, as described above.<sup>94</sup> Or, in other words, the charismatic dimension of the women's privileges were to have temporal effect. Emma's counselor Elizabeth Ann Whitney remembered being ordained "under the hand of Joseph Smith the Prophet to administer to the sick and comfort the sorrowful. Several other sisters were also ordained and set apart to administer in these holy ordinances."<sup>95</sup> Thus, women of the Relief Society gave blessings by the laying on of hands, the classic sign of religious authority.

Not surprisingly, some felt these privileges transgressed the authority of the men. On April 28, 1842, just six weeks after the women were organized, Smith met again with the society "to make observations respecting the Priesthood, and give instructions for the benefit of the Society." He had heard that "some little thing was circulating in the Society, that some persons were not going right in laying hands on the sick &c." He probably heard of this "little thing" from his wife who was among the "some persons" laying on hands. The minutes of the April 19 meeting recorded that a "Mrs. Durfee" thanked Emma Smith and her counselors for the "great blessing she received when administered to after the close of the last meeting." Mrs. Durfee went so far as to say that "she never realized more benefit thro' any administration—that she was heal'd, and thought the sisters had more faith than the brethren."<sup>96</sup> If this or similar conviction were expressed outside the Relief Society, it is likely that some men felt insulted, if not threatened.

The more immediate problem, however, was that the women themselves were uncomfortable with their privileges. Consequently, Joseph Smith met with them again and lent his personal authority to the practice by "offer[ing] instruction respecting the propriety of females administering to the sick by the laying on of hands—said it

was according to revelation &c."<sup>97</sup> He asked the women, "If they could not see by this sweeping stroke, that wherein they are ordained, it is the privilege of those set apart to administer in that authority which is confer'd on them—and if the sisters should have faith to heal the sick, let all hold their tongues, and let every thing roll on." The problem did not abate, however, neither among the women nor the men. The following year, a visiting speaker "chided the [Relief Society] Committee who had expressed fears of acting out of their place." He told them, without the women's new authority, "there would be a lack in the Church [—] the Order of the Priesthood is not complete without it [the Relief Society]; let every one act in their place, then all will move on most gloriously [—] The Purposes of God will be accomplished."<sup>98</sup>

It was not simply anxiety about shared authority that caused the men and women's councils in Nauvoo to operate independent of one another, however. Their jurisdictions differed. But, interestingly, these gendered differences were not identical to popular notions of public and private spheres. When structuring the Relief Society, Smith used the "elect lady" revelation of twelve years earlier both to broaden and limit the public expression of women's authority within the church. On the one hand, he pronounced the revelation fulfilled in Emma Smith's new office "to preside" and extended its promise of ecclesiastical authority to all women of the Society. Just as Emma "was ordain'd at the time the Revelation was given, to expound the scriptures to all," so also "others, may attain to the same blessings." On the other hand, the women were ordained, he said, "to teach the female part of community." Thus, while broadening the revelation's application to others, he narrowed their teaching authority to their own gender. He left unrestricted women's license to "expound the scriptures to all."<sup>99</sup>

This compromise between broad preaching authority and narrow presiding authority possessed by the women of the Relief Society revealed the limits of the Latter-day Saint's radical restorationism: it did not adopt a genderless view of the world or the church. In Smith's cosmology, both men and women participated with power in effecting God's plan for human salvation. Both sexes were commissioned to "save souls," but the jurisdictional reach of their authority differed. During the March 17 meeting, Smith had limited the women's privileges to minister to the poor and "strengthen virtue" to only "the female community." Six weeks later, he repeated these jurisdictional boundaries when counseling the Society regarding priesthood: "Let your labors be confin'd mostly to those around you in your own circle; as far as knowledge is concerned, it may extend to all the world, but your administrations, should be confin'd to the circle of your immediate acquaintance,

and more especially to the members of the Society." Here, too, one sees the unlimited authority "as far as knowledge is concerned": women were not to "keep silent" in the church, but "administration" of such divine rites as laying on of hands was "confin'd" to their select society.

Thus, as in all the other priestly councils, the Relief Society's duties and rights were exercised within an ecclesiastical bureaucracy of offices and councils within which individuals were both granted authority and limited vis-à-vis others in the exercise of it. With the introduction of the women into this structure, limitations included gender distinctions from the beginning. These gender distinctions were defined not in terms of the nature of the authority, but rather its jurisdictional scope. Or, in canonical terms, men held the "keys" to (or presided over) the Aaronic and Melchizedek orders. Women, however, participated in the powers associated with these two orders (ministering to the poor, rebuking the sinful, teaching, healing and blessing by the laying on of hands), but did not preside, that is, except those deemed an "Elect Lady," who presided over the "female community." The women's authority over the women of the church was, nonetheless, real. The Society, not the church's male leadership, was to identify its own organizational needs and set apart persons to fill those needs.<sup>100</sup> When one such leader addressed the Seventh Ward Relief Society at its invitation, he admitted "a delicacy in rising to address the Society." While such language was a politeness of the times, Reynolds Cahoon seemed to be expressing a particular sensitivity since he immediately turned his attention to a comment on the Society's identity and authority. There were, he said, "many Benevolent Societies abroad designd [*sic*] to do good but not as this . . . according to the order of God connected with the priesthood."<sup>101</sup>

As with men's councils and quorums, the structure of the Relief Society and the relationships it created among the women held the possibility of training individuals in advancing degrees of charismatic and ecclesiastical authority: preaching, healing, presiding at meetings, calling others to offices, and in other ways administering to the spiritual needs of those within the church. Ultimately, however, we cannot know the limits of the authority granted the Society because they were not tested. Notwithstanding Smith's commission "to make of this Society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day—as in Paul's day," the women reverted to the familiar forms of women's benevolent societies.<sup>102</sup> In actual practice, the only office maintained by the Society was "teacher," based on Smith's original charge to create "Deacons, Teachers &c."<sup>103</sup> Instead of acting by individual appointment and setting apart to specific office, the Society created ad hoc committees to perform its duties. Group assessments of welfare needs and

committee reports of investigations of misconduct were the common practice. For example, on April 19, 1842, a “committee was appointed” to investigate the concerns behind a failed vote to admit a woman to membership. The following week, Joseph Smith visited again and reminded the women “those ordain’d to lead the Society, are authoriz’d to appoint to different offices as the circumstances shall require.”<sup>104</sup>

His remarks seem to have made no lasting impression. Immediately afterward, “the Committee appointed to investigate into the cases of individuals” was asked to report and “Councillor Whitney call’d on those who *could* represent the poor, to do so.”<sup>105</sup> As late as 1843, a member of the Relief Society “suggested the necessity of having a committee to [be] appointed to search out the poor and suffering—To call on the rich for aid and thus as far as possible relieve the wants of all.”<sup>106</sup> From the minutes of their meetings, it does not appear that the women formally ordered themselves in priestly office beyond that of president and counselors. Later Eliza Snow said as much when she became president of the Relief Society in Utah. Snow frequently exhorted LDS women not to forget “Pres Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society by revelation and after the pattern of the priesthood.” She was, however, “afraid we did not appreciate this, or many would be more alive to their duties. Woman was not only created as a help meet for man but to be one with him in the priesthood.”<sup>107</sup>

Such oneness was the ultimate goal of Smith’s new temple rites and the Relief Society was intended to prepare the women for them. After chiding the sisters for their passivity and fear in exercising their priestly privileges, Reynolds Cahoon, a member of the triumvirate in charge of temple construction, said, “You knew no doubt but this Society is raised [*sic*] by the Lord to prepare us for the great blessings which are for us in the House of the Lord in the Temple.”<sup>108</sup> There he would complete the perfectionist and hierarchal ordering of his church and do so by enlarging the scope of his third and final form of authority.

### Family: Constructing Priestly Kinship

The new “great blessings” of the Nauvoo temple were available to all, male and female alike. The men’s earlier “endowment from on high” in the Kirtland temple was deemed incomplete, not merely in terms of liturgical content, but also in its exclusion of women. “Without the female all things cannot be restor’d to the earth—it takes all to restore the Priesthood,” the sisters were assured.<sup>109</sup> Especially telling was Smith’s instruction that the Society’s work was salvific: “You must

enlarge your souls toward others if you [w]ould do like Jesus, and carry your fellow creatures to Abram's bosom."<sup>110</sup> But Smith's sacramental intentions for the women were also implicit in his exhortation to limit Relief Society membership to the worthy and in his promise that "the keys of the kingdom are about to be given to them." The most obvious proof of this promise was in a new rite of marriage that made women's temple participation not only welcome, but necessary. This rite, properly called a "sealing," initiated the couple into yet another order of priesthood. As with Mormonism's other degrees of priesthood—Aaronic (lesser) or Melchizedek (higher)—this third order was conceptualized within a biblical narrative and was denominated either "Patriarchal" or "Abrahamic Priesthood."

Two weeks prior to his organizing the Relief Society, Smith had published a revision of the biblical account of the origins of the Abrahamic covenant titled "A Translation of ancient Records that have fallen into our hands from the Catecombs [*sic*] of Egypt, purporting to be the writings of Abraham." The new scripture elaborated on the meaning of Israel's covenant birthright, as defined in the Hebrew and Christian canon, to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6) and "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" (I Peter 2:9). In Smith's version of Abraham's theophany, priesthood and birthright are equated with particular emphasis, when God stipulates "in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) 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>111</sup>

Thus, the Nauvoo temple made explicit the necessary connection of fathers to wives and mothers, at the same time as Smith was organizing women into a priestly society preparatory to their temple "endowment." The endowment stage of the temple rite preceded marital sealing and ritually placed women within Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood, though without bestowing ecclesiastical office. As a consequence of this ordering, both the bride and the groom came to the sealing with status to receive this additional, Abrahamic covenant whereby their progeny would be deemed "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6) and "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" (I Peter 2:9). Invoking these biblical themes, the Nauvoo temple's marital sealings created unions like those of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, and Keturah that bestowed divine rights upon their offspring.<sup>112</sup> Again, it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss this theology except to note that it included the model of Israel's

matriarchs. The implicit significance of matriarchs who made possible the patriarchs, who had blessed sons in the earlier high councils, was now express and even routinized.

As early as 1835, Smith had opined that God established marriage according to a pattern of “everlasting priesthood.”<sup>113</sup> By 1842, men and women were being joined or “sealed” by temple rites that constituted a new locus of priesthood. The majority of these “sealings” were marriages; some were adoptions.<sup>114</sup> All were designed to bestow priestly authority through ritually constructed kinship. Thus, not surprisingly given Smith’s tendency to shifting status and roles, those initiated into this priesthood of Abraham and implicitly Sarah, during Smith’s lifetime comprised a council informally denominated a mixed-gender “anointed quorum” or “quorum of the anointed,” a reference to the Nauvoo’s temple rites.<sup>115</sup> The performance of these rites for the benefit of new initiates, male and female, was the Anointed Quorum’s primary function.

Meeting in regular Sunday prayer meetings and at other times as necessary, the Quorum’s governmental function was to obtain divine intervention in specific matters of particular need or crisis and to detect false revelation through the keys given in the endowment.<sup>116</sup> Women participated fully in the sacramental business of the quorum.<sup>117</sup> A half-century later, a member of the Nauvoo Relief Society and the Anointed Quorum presided over the Society in Utah. She instructed this second generation that Joseph Smith “wanted to make us, as the women were in Paul’s day, a ‘kingdom of priestesses.’ We have the ceremony in our [temple] endowments as Joseph taught.”<sup>118</sup> As with the decision to mix patriarchal and ecclesiastical status in associating a father’s blessings with the ordination of the church’s first High Councils, Smith’s motives for mixing marital and ecclesial status are not obvious from the existing literature. Neither do they matter for the present analysis of the manner in which power was extended and regulated within LDS church order. The fact that creating such relational webs—either monogamously or polygamously—was considered necessary to obtain ecclesiastical and sacramental authority to administer salvation, as well as church order, is the point of the present study.

Nauvoo’s ritually constructed, highly gendered and mutually reciprocal priestly marriages delimited the operation of male ecclesiastical privilege among the Mormons. While the early history of women’s enactment of their privileges in the Utah Territory illustrates this, chief proof lies in the fact that Joseph Smith, notwithstanding his ecclesiastical presidency, was not made president of the Anointed Quorum until his wife agreed to join it on September 28, 1843.<sup>119</sup> Thus, a year prior to his death, Smith succeeded in creating a priestly order

of women in a similar fashion as he had for men. Where he would have taken it, had he lived, cannot be known. But just as the definition of male authority within the LDS church was largely a trope on Joseph Smith's self-understanding and experience, so also the definition of female authority was centered on the person of Emma Hale Smith. She was the priestess, prophetess, and queen to his own claim to priestly, prophetic, and kingly powers. For Smith, all these roles and offices for both genders were most fully defined in the union of female and male that combined and applied their rights in the matriarchal and patriarchal order expressed in celestial or plural marriages.

Early in his tenure as church president, Smith explained, "It was my endeavor, to so organize the Church, that the brethren might eventually be independent of every incumbrance [*sic*] beneath the celestial kingdom, by bonds and covenants of mutual friendship, and mutual love."<sup>120</sup> He spent the first dozen years ordering and training the brethren that "all might speak in the name of God." In 1842, the "all" included the sisters albeit restricted as to jurisdiction, but not type of authority. Then, in the two years remaining to him, Smith officiated in complex rituals that created a dense network of "bonds and covenants" within church, temple, and home.<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusion

Ultimately, for Smith, the saving power of the Christian gospel was invested in and through relationships of all kinds but typified in shifting statuses and reciprocities of power, not republican separations of power. While the Latter-day Saints continued to share a religious and republican vocabulary with their Protestant neighbors—bishop, deacon, elder, conference, common consent, universal or lay priesthood—these terms acquired new and different content as the Latter-day Saints had new and different experiences with once familiar forms, especially as modeled in the person of their prophet and his narrative theology. This experience enabled most of these sons and daughters of the American Revolution to make a surprisingly quick passage from congregational to hierarchical ecclesiology and from commonsense to sacramental ideology. Observing this, most nineteenth-century commentators concluded that Mormonism was inclined to popish, if not Moorish excesses adverse to a Protestant nation.<sup>122</sup> As discussed above, today's scholarship typically takes the opposite view: Mormonism was "constitute[d] . . . according to popular norms."<sup>123</sup>

These contrary conclusions aptly convey Mormonism's capacity to evoke simultaneously a sense of the familiar and the strange.

Neither conclusion illuminates the whole, however. Constituted as a universal, but hierarchical priesthood of all believers, Mormonism claimed holy or sacramental, not populist, power and consequently fielded a different set of organizational strategies not only to produce that effect, but also to order it among masses of devotees. These forms were as imaginative and complex as the biblical narratives and ecclesiastical types from which they were drawn. Moreover, they have succeeded in propagating and stabilizing a surprisingly resilient social organization and religious ethos. To ignore these strategies by conflating them with broader cultural norms, such as populism and evangelical republicanism, occludes one of the more interesting innovations on those norms. It could even be said it obscures significant alternatives to regnant tropes on American religion and does so at the cost of better understanding the persistence and appeal of radically perfectionist religion in America.

Thus, this article is not a claim for Mormon exceptionalism. To the contrary, it is offered as an invitation to consider whether social histories and culture studies, as they have come to dominate the study of American religion generally, have at times elided the complexities of their subject. At their best, such as in Hatch's rich interpretation of early American Methodists, Noll's masterful interpretation of *America's God*, George Marsden's analysis of fundamentalism, and Grant Wacker's attractive thesis on Pentecostalism's evolution toward evangelicalism, they provide formidable arguments for the inexorable evolution of American Christianity toward a particular kind of public ethic. I have argued elsewhere that such conformity was demanded of any who would obtain First Amendment protection.<sup>124</sup> But, like most arguments, these can be carried too far. It would, for example, be "too far" to conclude that the nation obtained the degree of conformity it demanded in exchange for Constitutional protection. Nevertheless, in America and even in its academies, the belief abides that real religion is democratic in spirit, congregational in organization, and primarily ethical in its commitments.

Let me conclude, then, with one last observation regarding Hatch's application of his thesis to American religion generally. In the final pages of *Democratization*, several "firebrands of democracy" among early Baptists, Methodists, Campbellites, and Mormons are identified as attempting to keep the fires of conversion burning against the dampening effects of oppressive social convention. He asserts these figures had two, dichotomous choices: "authentic servanthood and exploitive demagoguery." They could either submit to the power of the people or exercise power over them. The one a virtue, the other a vice, these alternatives for the exercise of religious authority are "two

realities about the character of popular religion" or of groups led by "magnetic figures, often at the periphery of denominational traditions."<sup>125</sup>

Such concern is at least as old as Anabaptist Muenster and subtly reprises Protestant anxiety about revelation, whether explicit, as in Joseph Smith's case, or implicit in virtually all "magnetic figures" who mobilize others to nonnormative religious action. Recent work has begun to explore the limits of that anxiety as early as the seventeenth century and into the mid-nineteenth century, showing that it was not uniform or as widely shared as the historiography has led us to believe.<sup>126</sup> This article is a plea for more such deepening and disruption: work that includes a greater variety of American religious belief and practice and is confident enough to return to those hoary subjects of ecclesiastical polity, doctrinal statement, and ethical commitment in order to understand American religion(s).

## Notes

I am indebted to Bradley Kime and Jared Halvorson for their critical reading of and very able editorial contribution to this article. I am indebted also to Brigham Young University's Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for a 1997 student research grant that resulted in the initial articulation of some of the ideas basic to this essay and collected in *Archive of Restoration Culture: Summer Fellows' Papers, 1997-1999* (Provo, Utah: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 2000), 1-8.

1. Matthew 18:20 (KJV).

2. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

3. Timothy L. Smith, "Righteousness and Hope: Christian Holiness and the Millennial Vision in America, 1800-1900," *American Quarterly* 31, (Spring 1979): 21-45. While this "multi-faceted perfectionism" was often overtaken by more realistic visions of institutional change and even exploited to serve economic interests, it remained a characteristic force in certain elements of mainline Protestantism into the twentieth century. See Grant Wacker, "The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of the Age in American Protestantism, 1880-1910," *Journal of American History* 72, (June 1985): 45-62.

4. Sermon 62, "The End of Christ's Coming," in John Wesley, *The Essential Works of John Wesley*, ed. Alice Russie (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Books, 2011). Of course, to the list of perfectionists must be added such communal movements as the Shakers, Oneidans, and several Pietistic groups of the mid-Atlantic region.

5. Others have countered Hatch's characterization of Mormonism without displacing its interpretive dominance, most substantively, Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), and most recently, Benjamin E. Park, "Early Mormon Patriarchy and the Paradoxes of Democratic Religiosity in Jacksonian America," *American Nineteenth-Century History* 14, (2013): 183–208. Hill believes Mormonism was perhaps the most fundamental chiliastic repudiation of democratic society in antebellum America. Park believes Mormonism was an embodiment of rather than an escape from democratic society, but that neither Hatch nor Hill captures the egalitarian and patriarchal cross-pressures inherent in democratization and inflected by Mormonism. In both descriptions, theocratic authority prevails, whether before Smith's death (Hill) or after (Park). But how theocratic authority brokered its own antinomian dispersal without breaking apart remains to be analyzed.

6. Hatch, *Democratization*, 186.

7. *Ibid.*, 121. Originally titled the "Church of Christ," the church's name was changed in 1838 to "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" and today prefers that the entire title be used in reference to it. This strong preference appears to be in response to internecine debates about its status as Christian. <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/style-guide> With no intention of participating in that debate and for convenience sake only, this paper will use the short "LDS Church" to refer to the organizational expression of dominant institution within the nineteenth-century Mormon movement.

8. Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

9. David Brion Davis, "The New England Origins of Mormonism," *New England Quarterly* 26, (June 1953): 154.

10. Smith, "Righteousness and Hope," 21, regarding Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

11. Such are not the historiographical concerns animating more recent responses to Hatch and Noll. Amanda Porterfield and John Lardas Modern interrogate, instead, antebellum agency as a discursive illusion and antebellum religion as a dependent variable in various arrangements of power—pulling up the roots rather than reappraising the branches (as I do) of democratization and republicanism. Their respective selections of

Hatch and Noll for sustained engagement signal the continuing interpretive influence of those senior scholars, but this article does not join their inquisition into the constructions and coercions of the religious and the secular. Rather, reaching beyond the same historiography of antebellum American religion, the primary goal of this article is to consider a different religious studies question that arises from the nonpopulist and noncommonsensical nature of the Mormon movement. Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), and John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America: with reference to ghosts, Protestant subcultures, machines, and their metaphors: featuring discussions of mass media, Moby-Dick, spirituality, phrenology, anthropology, Sing Sing State Penitentiary, and sex with the new motive power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

12. Ralph Waldo Emerson, as quoted in James Bradley Thayer, *A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1884), reprinted in William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 384.

13. More recently, Davis's conclusion has been supported with data showing actual relationships between radical Puritans and the early converts to Mormonism. See Val D. Rust, *Radical Origins: Early Mormon Converts and Their Colonial Ancestors* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). Based on the genealogies of early converts to Mormonism baptized between 1830 and 1835, Rust demonstrates that Mormonism's original population was to a statistically significant degree descended from persons who had either been expelled from Massachusetts Bay for heresy, belonged to radical religious groups, or lived in regions of New England characterized by unorthodox belief.

14. I am aware that "kinship" has been a contested term of art, especially among anthropologists, for more than a century. I do not pretend to contribute anything to that debate and confess to a purely vernacular use of the term in this study. For an introduction to the general parameters and history of the debate concerning kinship as a cultural construct, see, for example, Maurice Godelier, Thomas R. Trautmann, and Franklin E. Tjon Sie Fat, eds, *Transformations of Kinship* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998) and, for a proposal to solve the dilemma, see Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is—And Is Not*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013).

15. Joseph Smith, Jr., comp., *A Book of Commandments, For the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to the Law, on the 6th of*

*April, 1830* (Zion [Independence], MO: W. W. Phelps, 1833), 24: 2–3 (hereafter referred to as *Commandments* [1833]). The most accessible version of the original is available in facsimile reprints in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Manuscript Revelation Books*, facsimile ed. Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, vol. 1, ed. by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009), 74–87 (hereafter referred to as *Manuscript Revelation Books*). The modern, standardized version of this text is Section 20 of Joseph Smith, Jr., comp., *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, with Some Additions by His Successors in the Presidency of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), <http://scriptures.lds.org/en/dc/contents> (hereafter referred to as D&C).

16. Not until 1838 did the church successfully distinguish itself from other similarly named churches by adopting the name “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” In 1830, the six persons designated for purposes of legal incorporation were Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery (his scribe for the Book of Mormon), Joseph Smith’s brothers Hyrum and Samuel H. Smith, and David and Peter Whitmer, Jr., whose father’s log cabin provided the site for official incorporation proceedings.

17. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 225; *Commandments* (1833), 1:4; Joseph Smith Jr., trans., *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi* (Palmyra, N.Y.: E. B. Grandin, 1830), 36–37, 485–88, 498 (hereafter referred to as *Book of Mormon*). In the contemporary version of the *Book of Mormon* (which will be used hereafter), the cited references to “fullness” are found at 1 Nephi 15:13; 2 Nephi 16:10; 20:28.

18. *Commandments* (1833), 15:35.

19. The most thorough analysis of the historical origins and evolution of these offices is found in Gregory A. Prince, *Power from on High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 47–62.

20. *Commandments* (1833), 24:61.

21. “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons* 4 (December 1, 1842): 22.

22. *Ibid.*, 1:85–86.

23. The summary of conference proceedings and quotations from its minutes are from Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 78; quoting William Warrant Sweet, ed., *The Rise of Methodism in the West: Being the Journal of the Western Conference, 1800–1811* (New York and Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern; Nashville and Dallas: Smith and Lamar, 1920), 100–109.

24. *Ibid.*, 76.

25. *Ibid.*, 7. The emphasis here on the commonalities between Methodist and LDS conferences is not meant to deny obvious differences experienced by the early practitioners of these religions. See, for example, the comments of Mosiah Hancock, a young Latter-day Saint who attended Methodist meetings in Missouri in the mid-1830s: “Once I was permitted to go to a Methodist Camp Meeting, and I used to think it funny to see them pass the hat to get money. I could not help contrasting the way they had of conducting their meeting to that of the Latter-day Saints. While our meetings are conducted with singing and prayer and intellectual talks, theirs were conducted, ‘Come to the Anxious Seat,’ ‘Come to Jesus.’ . . . I did go four nights in succession. I used to think that if the Saints ranted and howled like these people, what a host of people we might have in our Church someday.” Mosiah Lyman Hancock, *Autobiography (1834–1865)*, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/MHancock.html>. Cf. Christopher C. Jones, “‘We Latter-Day Saints Are Methodists’: The Influence of Methodism on Early Mormon Religiosity” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2009).

26. Richey, *Early American Methodism*, 149.

27. Abel Stevens, *Supplemental History of American Methodism: A Continuation of the Author’s Abridged History of American Methodism* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1899), 149.

28. William Stevens Perry, *The General Ecclesiastical Constitution of the American Church: Its History and Rationale* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1891), 285.

29. *Ibid.*, 282.

30. Horace Wemyss Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Reverend William Smith, D.D.* (Philadelphia: Ferguson Bros., 1880), quoted in William Wilson Manross, *The Episcopal Church in the United States: 1800–1840; A Study in Church Life* (1938; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1967), 41.

31. Manross, *Episcopal Church*, 42.

32. John Starkweather, *The Object and Importance of a Church Covenant: A Sermon* (Providence: Philanthropic Press, 1833), 11. Admittedly, this single reference is a wholly inadequate treatment of antebellum Protestant debates on the nature of the church and their relation to a rising “disdain for the ‘metaphysical.’” E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 156. For the history of American ecclesiastical covenants themselves, see David A. Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2005). See, especially, his discussion in chapters 4-6, which confirms Holifield’s conclusion that “the history of theology in seventeenth-century New England [is properly depicted] as a troubled progression marked by continual dispute, often grounded in disagreements about the covenant.” Holifield, *Theology in America*, 42, and more generally, 127–56.

33. Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

34. Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life’s Review* (Independence, Mo.: Zion’s Printing and Publishing Co., 1947), 17.

35. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 225; *Commandments* (1833), 1:4 (D&C 1:17, 22).

36. *Commandments* (1833), 1:4 D&C 1:19–20. While my emphasis here is on ecclesiastical structure, it is important to remember that the prophetic ideal to “speak in the name of God” was not merely a matter of status vis-à-vis other persons, but a degree of holiness or increased capacity to be in relation to God. It offered the promise “to commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn [or the saints in heaven], and to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.” See *Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856*, vol. C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842] <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842?p=559>.

37. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 27; *Book of Mormon*, Mosiah 8:15–16; *Commandments* (1833), 22:4–5 (D&C 21:4–5).

38. Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor, eds., *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 146.

39. This and other antinomian invitations were normed and, more, valorized by their incorporation into LDS understanding of divine essence

and human potential. New scripture declared it was God's "work and . . . glory to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." In other words, for Mormonism, God's objective and capacity was to endow humans with the glorified nature that was his own. "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons* 4 (January 16, 1843): 73. Modern and standardized reference in *The Pearl of Great Price: A Selection from the Revelations, Translations, and Narrations of Joseph Smith, First Prophet, Seer, and Revelator to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), Moses 1:39, <http://scriptures.lds.org/en/pgp/contents>. As early as 1833, Smith had been teaching that humans were to proceed "from grace to grace" until they "receive of [God's] fulness." *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 333–35 (D&C 93:13, 20). Though echoing Wesleyan perfectionism, Smith's belief in human capacity to receive the divine nature through sanctifying grace was much more concretely imagined and given its own liturgical structure in Smith's temple rites.

40. Numbers 11:29 (KJV).

41. In LDS usage, "ordain" was eventually limited in its application to rites associated with male priestly office. During the church's early period, "ordain" had a broader meaning and included the appointment of women to specific ecclesiastical positions and duties. The chief example was Emma Hale Smith's ordination as "elect lady" discussed below. For analysis of Smith's claims to ordination by heavenly messengers, see Prince, *Power from on High*, 4–10, and D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1994), 14–26.

42. "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons* 5 (September 2, 1844): 625. Here, again, one sees the influence of what Wood identified as the most radical impulse of the American Revolution, namely, the conviction that society was to function according to the more personal and individualistic virtues of "love, respect and consent," not patronage or birthright. Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 92. This insight, however true, must be balanced by the awareness that for antebellum Bible-reading Christians, these values would be seen as ageless imperatives. Smith in particular had more transcendent intentions than socio-political equality, as discussed below.

43. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 27; *Book of Mormon*, Mosiah 8:15–16; *Commandments* (1833), 22:4–5 (D&C 21:4–5).

44. For example, Hiram Page claimed to have received revelation regarding the church's proper order. The substance of his revelation

challenged both New Testament rule and Smith's revelations. Resolution of the conflict came by way of another revelation to Smith that further legitimated his position as sole prophetic voice vis-à-vis the community at large. While others may teach, only Smith was "appointed to receive commandments and revelations." It was improper to "command him who is at thy head, and at the head of the church; for I have given him the keys." *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 51–53 (D&C 28).

45. For an analysis of a failed attempt to duplicate Smith's scripture-writing prowess and its significance to Smith's status, see Mark R. Grandstaff, "Having More Learning Than Sense: William E. McLellin and the Book of Commandments Revisited," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, (Winter 1993): 42–43.

46. See David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Mo.: the author, 1887), for a retrospective account of his differences with Smith and reasons for founding his own church. Available at <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/address1.htm>.

47. See *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 275–89 (D&C 84).

48. See Dean L. May, "A Demographic Portrait of the Mormons, 1830–1980," in D. Michael Quinn, *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* (Salt Lake: Signature Books, 1992).

49. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 277; D&C (1835): 4:5 (D&C 84:29–30).

50. Proctor and Proctor, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 150.

51. See Prince, *Power from on High*, and D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994). Of particular significance to the argument in this essay is Prince's observation that "historical irregularities, . . . not inclusion in the Bible" provided the basis for the definition and evolution of LDS office. "Therefore, one is left," he concludes, "with a circular and not entirely satisfactory definition of 'office' as a calling with a biblical precedent to which men were ordained and which gradually became accepted in the church as an office. In other words, offices became such by convention." Prince, *Power from on High*, 49–50.

52. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 83; *Commandments* (1833), 24:38; D&C (1835) 2:11 (D&C 20:54).

53. William F. Cahoon, "A Humble Ward Teacher," *Juvenile Instructor* 27 (August 15, 1892): 492, <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/WFCahoon.html>.

54. B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* 1:388 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974) 2d ed. Rev.

55. "Kirtland Council Minute Book," February 12, 17, 19, 1834, digital copy of holograph available in Richard E. Turley, Jr., ed., *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Ut.: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), vol. 1, DVD 19:7.

56. "Presiding Authorities" to John M. Burk (Liberty, Mo.), June 1, 1835, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter referred to as Church History Library). Typescript available in Journal History of the Church, in Turley, *Selected Collections*, vol. 2, DVD 1:7. "The Elders in Zion or in her immediate region have no authority nor right to meddle with her affairs, to regulate or *even hold any courts*. The high council has been organized expressly to minister in all her spiritual affairs; and the Bishop and his council are set over her temporal matters; so thus Elders acts are null and void" (emphasis original).

57. "Kirtland Council Minute Book," February 12, 1834.

58. *Ibid.*

59. "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons* 6 (August 15, 1845): 992.

60. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 39, 53; *Commandments* (1833), 27:3 and 30:13 (D&C 26:2; 28:13).

61. "Kirtland Council Minute Book," February 19, 1834; <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/minutes-19-february-1834>.

62. "Kirtland Council Minute Book," February 12, 1834.

63. *Ibid.*, August 11, 1834, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/minutes-11-august-1834>. From May to June of 1834, Smith led a rescue party from Ohio to defend members in Missouri from attack by mobs. Sylvester Smith (no relation) accused Smith of "prophesying lies in the name of the Lord and . . . abusing . . . his (Sylvester's) character, before the brethern [*sic*]." *Ibid.*

64. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 309, punctuation standardized (D&C 88:133).

65. "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons* 5 (September 2, 1844): 625; *History of the Church*, 1:269.

66. For an extended discussion of a contest within and between the church's ruling councils that extended into the administration of Smith's successor, Brigham Young, see Gary James Bergera, *Conflict in the Quorum: Orson Pratt, Brigham Young, Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002).

67. "Kirtland Council Minute Book," September 24, 1834, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/minutes-24-september-1834#2>. Eight months later, when Joseph Smith's brother stepped into a vacancy in the High Council, Hyrum was blessed by his father after being set apart by his brother, in the fashion described above.

68. *History of the Church* 2:124–26.

69. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 39; *Commandments* (1833), 26:2, 4 (D&C 25:3, 5). "Elect lady" is the addressee in 2 John 1:1 ("The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth"). Unless otherwise indicated all references to Emma's blessing are from this source.

70. For a discussion of female exhorters and their sources of authority, see Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740–1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 23–24, 52–56.

71. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 39; *Commandments* (1833), 27:1 (D&C 26:1). For a textual history of these two sections, see Robert J. Woodford, "The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants," 3 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1974), 373–92.

72. The entire conclusion reads as follows: "Wherefore lift up thy heart and rejoice, and cleave unto the covenants which thou hast made. Continue in the spirit of meekness, and beware of pride. Let thy soul delight in thy husband, and the glory which shall come unto him. Keep my commandments continually and a crown of righteousness thou shalt receive. And except thou do this, where I am you cannot come. And verily, verily I say unto you, that this is my voice unto all. Amen." *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 41 (D&C 25:13–16).

73. During the intervening years, little is written about Emma Smith in official church documents or subsequent church histories. This can be explained in terms of both the church's and the Smith family's privations. Note that even the revelation's direct command that she compile a hymn book for the new church is not complied with until 1835, five years

after the fact. The lack of interest in Emma Smith's story by later LDS Church historians was probably caused by lingering consternation that Emma refused, after the death of her husband, to join the Latter-day Saint exodus under Brigham Young. Linda K. Newell and Valeen T. Avery in *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe, 1804–1879* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984) were the first to write Emma Smith's biography for the general reader.

74. Smith derived the name from his Hebrew studies. Where others saw a swamp, Smith saw Zion and chose a name that "'signifies a beautiful situation, or place, carrying with it, also, the idea of rest; and is truly descriptive of this most delightful situation.'" *Times and Seasons* 2 (January 15, 1841): 273–74, quoted in Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 59.

75. 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, Ut.: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 110.

76. Sarah Kimball, at whose home the women had first gathered, later referred to them merely as "some of our neighbors." Sarah M. Granger Kimball, in Augusta Joyce Crocheron, *Representative Women of Deseret: A Book of Biographical Sketches* (Salt Lake City: J. C. Graham, 1884), 27.

77. For details on the identity of the attendants, see Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "The 'Leading Sisters': A Female Hierarchy in Nineteenth-Century Mormon Society," *Journal of Mormon History* 9 (1982): 25–39.

78. The hymn, "The Spirit of God like a Fire Is Burning," written by William W. Phelps, was Hymn 90 in the hymnal (the Saints' first) compiled by Emma Smith, *Sacred Hymns, for the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, Oh.: F. G. Williams, 1835), 120–21, and appeared as "Hosanna to God and the Lamb," in *The Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (January 1836): 256.

79. "A Record of the Organization, and Proceedings of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo," March 17, 1842, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book#3> (hereafter "Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, Minutes").

80. Two weeks later, when the group had grown to eighty-eight members, Smith would make this dimension of their society explicit by

cautioning them that they “were going too fast” and “should grow up by degrees . . . commenc[ing] with a few individuals—thus have a select Society of the virtuous and those who will walk circumspectly.” *Ibid.*, March 30, 1842.

81. *Ibid.*, March 17, 1842. See also “The Relief Society Jubilee,” *Deseret Weekly* 44 (March 26, 1892): 433.

82. “Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, Minutes,” April 28, 1842.

83. Joseph Smith had argued “benevolence” was the more popular and, therefore, better understood term. “Relief,” he feared, might give the wrong impression of an intention to do such things as exculpating wrongdoers or “reliev[ing] criminals from punishment.” Emma responded that popularity was the very problem, since “benevolence” didn’t capture the exceptional intentions of the society. Besides, she added, “benevolence” had earned a reputation for corruption because of the activities of such groups as the Washingtonian Benevolent Society. She had chosen her example well. The Washingtonian’s meetings had been criticized for their “vulgar tone” and “spicy narratives of drunken orgies” that, as Sean Wilentz has shown, catalyzed “an all-out war over the importance of religion and the efficacy of moral suasion.” Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 312.

84. “Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, Minutes,” March 17, 1842.

85. *Ibid.*, June 9, 1842.

86. *Ibid.*, March 30, 1842.

87. *Ibid.*, April 28, 1842.

88. *Ibid.*, May 26, 1842.

89. *Ibid.*, April 28, 1842. Smith was murdered two years later on June 27, 1844.

90. *Ibid.*, March 17, 1842.

91. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 83; *Commandments* (1833), 24:38–41; D&C (1835), 2:11 (D&C 20:53–59).

92. “Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, Minutes,” March 17, 1842.

93. See, for example, Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8–13.

94. "Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, Minutes," April 28, 1842.
95. Elizabeth Ann Whitney, "A Leaf from an Autobiography," *Woman's Exponent* 7 (November 15, 1878): 91.
96. "Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, Minutes," April 19, 1842.
97. *Ibid.*, April 28, 1842.
98. *Ibid.*, August 13, 1843, quoting Reynolds Cahoon (1790–1861) one of three men who oversaw the construction of the Nauvoo temple.
99. *Ibid.*, March 17, 1842.
100. *Ibid.*, March 17, 1842, and April 28, 1842.
101. *Ibid.*, August 13, 1843.
102. *Ibid.*, March 30, 1842.
103. See, for example, Utah "Relief Societies copied the priesthood organization in several respects. They called women to be teachers, like the block teachers, to visit the sisters in the ward. They called a few sisters to be deaconesses, doing the work ward deacons did." William G. Hartley, "Common People: Church Activity during the Brigham Young Era," in *Nearly Everything Imaginable: The Everyday Life of Utah's Mormon Pioneers*, ed. Ronald W. Walker (Provo, Ut.: BYU Studies and Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 1999), 263.
104. "Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, Minutes," April 28, 1842.
105. *Ibid.* (emphasis added).
106. *Ibid.*, July 28, 1843.
107. Eliza R. Snow, unpublished sermon to the Annual Meeting of the Relief Society and Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association, October 27, 1880, "Utah Stake Relief Society Minutes, 1878–1882," vol. 2, Church History Library.
108. "Female Relief Society Minutes," August 13, 1843 (Reynolds Cahoon). For Cahoon's status in relation to these rites, see Gary James Bergera, "Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-44," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38 (2005): 1, 6.

109. Ibid., May 27, 1842 (Newel K. Whitney). It is outside the scope of this article to discuss LDS temples beyond their relation to the ritual creation and definition of ecclesiastical authority. As for the more theologically significant aspects of LDS temple theology, it must suffice to say that they relate ultimately to promises of sanctifying theophany or, as defined by Bishop Whitney, “blessings” of “intelligence and instruction” that enable participants to “get testimony for ourselves” like that obtained by “the ancient saints.” Ibid.

110. Ibid., April 28, 1842.

111. “A Fac-Simile from the Book of Abraham,” *Times and Seasons*, 3 (March 1, 1842) 703–6. First published serially in three parts by the church’s newspaper, all were later collated and formally adopted as canon. See “Introduction to the Book of Abraham Manuscripts, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/intro/introduction-to-book-of-abraham-manuscripts>. For a digital version of the text, see “The Book of Abraham, Early 1842,” Joseph Smith Papers Project <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/book-of-abraham-early-1842#!/paperSummary/book-of-abraham-early-1842&p=2>.

112. In Smith’s day, as in our own, a “sealing” meant “fixing a seal; fastening with a seal; confirming; closing; keeping secret.” Webster, Noah, and John Walker. *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (Harper & Brothers, 1846) *s.v.* sealing. More significantly, the word adopts the New Testament’s metaphorical sense of being “sealed by the Holy Spirit” or a guarantee of future sanctification. See 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; and Ephesians 1:13–14; 4:30.

113. Joseph Smith, Journal, November 24, 1835, accessed January 1, 2016, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/journal-1835-1836?p=50&highlight=%22everlasting%20priesthood%22#!/paperSummary/journal-1835-1836&p=50>.

114. Gordon Irving, “The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830–1900,” *BYU Studies* 14:3 (Spring 1974): 291–314. See also David J. Whittaker, “An Introduction to Mormon Administrative History,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, (Winter 1982): 17.

115. See generally, “Editors’ Introduction,” in Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, eds., *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed, 1842–1845: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005).

116. For a discussion of temple rites related to prayer, see D. Michael Quinn, "Latter-day Saint Prayer Circles," *BYU Studies* 19, (Fall 1978): 79–105.

117. Quinn, *Origins of Power*, 118, 120. As the work of the quorum became increasingly devoted to political matters related to Smith's efforts to establish a theocratic government and to his 1844 campaign for the U.S. presidency, however, women's role in the quorum diminished.

118. General Relief Society President Bathsheba W. Smith, quoted in "Relief Society Reports, Pioneer Stake Relief Society Conference," *Woman's Exponent* 34, (July-August 1904): 14. I am indebted to Carol Cornwall Madsen for this reference.

119. Anderson and Bergera, *Joseph Smith's Quorum of the Anointed*, 25.

120. "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons* 5 (September 2, 1844): 625.

121. The aspect of LDS order denoted "tribal" is more frequently characterized as "familial." "Tribal" is preferred here for its connoting greater complexity of public government and personal relationship. The distinction becomes more apparent with Brigham Young's adaptation of Smith's marital practices, particularly the development of a "law of adoption" where adults were ritually joined or "sealed" to the church's most prominent leaders. See Irving, "The Law of Adoption."

122. See, for example, Philip Schaff's observation in the 1857 *Mercersburg Review* that Mormonism was "more unpopular than Romanism . . . and has much more affinity with Mohammedanism than with Christianity," quoted in Stephen R. Graham, *Cosmos in the Chaos: Philip Schaff's Interpretation of Nineteenth-Century American Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 224.

123. Hatch, *Democratization*, 121.

124. Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

125. *Ibid.*, 208.

126. David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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**ABSTRACT** Mormonism's founder Joseph Smith created a complex and hieratic priestly structure within a radically democratizing nation. His stated goal was to convey to all the faithful what he believed to be his own powers of prophecy and priestly mediation of divine presence. Thus, out of historiographic arguments about where to place Mormonism within the narrative of antebellum religious polity there arises a potentially more essential question: how did early Mormonism sustain any structural coherence, much less the order it was famous for? This essay argues that Smith avoided the atomization of his movement by creating three power structures and assigning every believer a status in each. Thus, status was not absolute or static: it shifted as the person moved among the three sites of power. Or, in other words, the degree and nature of the authority held by anyone at any give time was particular to the locus of the power – office, council, or kinship – not the person. These shifting status relationships stabilized Mormonism's potentially self-destructive antinomianism and, as a historiographical matter, have been mistaken for populism. The power struggles this occasioned within his movement, particularly over Smith's inclusion of women in his priestly hierarchy, weakened his vision of reciprocal authority and shifting jurisdiction. Compromised by romanticized gender norms, but not abandoned, this power structure continues to constitute the governing structure of Mormonism, leaving it still republican in style, not substance. Historiographically, it is hoped that this closer analysis of Mormonism's polity illuminates the existence of alternatives to regnant tropes on the nature of antebellum religion and contributes to better understanding of the means by which at least one perfectionist religion has survived notwithstanding its radically antinomian tendencies.

*Keywords:* Mormonism, power, gender, Democratization, polygamy