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The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830-1900

Gordon Irving*

As established in 1830, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was hardly a finished product. Although the new faith possessed distinctive characteristics, many significant aspects of Mormon thought and practice were revealed and developed in the years that followed. Among these was the law of adoption, which lay at the heart of the Mormon conception of salvation, and which grew out of theological principles taught by the founding prophet, Joseph Smith. These principles were given a special interpretation by Brigham Young and his generation and were finally refined by a revelation announced by Wilford Woodruff in the 1890s which broadened and universalized the concept of salvation which had been preached in the Church for fifty years.

THE MORMON CONCEPT OF SALVATION, 1830-1844

After Joseph Smith founded the then-named Church of Christ in April 1830, early members appear to have accepted the traditional Christian view of a heaven for the righteous and a hell for the wicked. Salvation, which was defined as being attainable through faith in Christ and baptism by immersion, meant going to dwell with God after this life.¹

In February, 1832, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon proclaimed to the world a revelation declaring that "every man

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¹The Book of Mormon (Palmyra, 1830), pp. 118-20, 150, 160, 188, 191-92, 478, 510, 512, 535, 547, 584.

shall receive according to his own works, his own dominion in the mansions which are prepared." There were three heavens or "kingdoms of glory," admission into any of which constituted salvation. Only those few "sons of perdition," who had committed the "unpardonable sin," would forfeit salvation entirely. The revelation reaffirmed the existing position that baptism, followed by faithfulness, would qualify one to dwell with God and angels in the "celestial kingdom."²

Mormon respect for divine authority and the importance of doing things in the Lord's way early led them to conclude that mankind was acting without authority in religious matters and had been since the apostolic age. This concern led to the idea of adoption as a means of bringing contemporary humanity into the kingdom of God. The first written exposition of the doctrine of adoption by baptism of the living appeared in Parley P. Pratt's *A Voice of Warning*, published in 1837. "Aliens" might become citizens of the kingdom of God, Elder Pratt declared, through the process of adoption which could be accomplished through baptism, preceded by faith and repentance and accompanied by the Holy Ghost.³

But if entrance into the kingdom depended on baptism, only a small portion of mankind could be saved since most of the human family had lived and died at a time when the gospel and the priesthood were not on the earth. This was an untenable position to Mormons because they believed that God is no respecter of persons. The Prophet Joseph had taught in early 1832 that the gospel was taught to the dead (D&C 76:73), but did not discuss the question of whether the dead needed to be baptized. However, this left unsolved the question of how one baptizes the dead if baptism is necessary for salvation.⁴

²Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints (Kirtland, 1835), pp. 225-31; see D&C 76 in modern LDS editions.

³Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning and Instruction to all People, containing a declaration of the faith and doctrine of the church of the Latter Day Saints, commonly called Mormons* (New York, 1837), pp. 103-04. Also Orson Pratt, "The Kingdom of God," part II, pp. 1-2, in *A Series of Pamphlets* (Liverpool, 1851); Thomas Ward, "The Law of Adoption," *Millennial Star* 4 (1843):17-19. See also Joseph Smith as cited in *The History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, B. H. Roberts, ed., 7 vols., 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City, 1969), 6:58 (cited hereafter as H.C.); and David H. Kimball, "Reflections on the Economy and Ordinances of the Kingdom of God," *Millennial Star* 8 (1846):23.

⁴Warren A. Cowdery discusses the question of salvation for the dead in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 3 (1837):471, 523. Joseph Smith reiterates the D&C 76:73 point in much less detail in *The Elders' Journal of the Church of Latter Day Saints* 1 (1838):42-43.

In 1836, he announced as revelation that "All who have died without a knowledge of this Gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom."⁵ But again he said nothing about baptism. He offered a solution to the problem of whether the dead need baptism in an 1840 letter to the Twelve: "The Saints have the privilege of being baptized for those of their relatives who are dead, whom they believe would have embraced the Gospel."⁶ The impartiality of God, the necessity of baptism, the opportunity of the departed to accept the gospel, and the principle that those who would have accepted the gospel in life should be heirs to the celestial kingdom were all woven into a generally applicable synthesis much broader than the individual ideas themselves.

In the early 1840s this concept of salvation through adoption by baptism was supplemented with a whole new level of doctrine relating to a patriarchal order made possible by adoption through sealing. When the concept of sealing first emerged in the late 1830s, Joseph Smith identified sealing with election into the House of Israel. In September of 1842 he wrote of the need to link all the generations of the human family through baptism for the dead.⁷ Then in 1843 the Prophet announced that "in the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees."⁸ Salvation in the highest degree, soon known as exaltation, was explained in terms of family ties. Orson Spencer, writing in the 1850s, asserted that God's own family in heaven was the pattern by which he had organized his children on earth. Parley P. Pratt saw the family not only as the basis for the organization of God's children here on earth and in the premortal existence but also in the celestial kingdom as well.⁹

Joseph Smith, already teaching as early as 1840 that families were in some way to be transformed into eternal units, sought to find what the "welding link" might be. Within a

⁵H.C., 2:380-81, under date of 21 January 1836.

⁶Letter dated 19 October 1840 in H.C. 4:231.

⁷H.C. 5:151.

⁸H.C. 5:392, see also D&C 131.

⁹Orson Spencer, *Patriarchal Order, or Plurality of Wives!* (Liverpool, [1853?]) pp. 1-2. See also Spencer's comments in *Letters Exhibiting the Most Prominent Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints . . .* (Liverpool, 1848), p. 168. Also Parley P. Pratt, "Celestial Family Organization," *The Prophet* 1 (1844-45), unpagged [pp. 1-2 of no. 51]; reprinted in *Millennial Star* 5 (1845):189-94.

year after announcing in 1842 that the tie was baptism for the dead, the Prophet presented a more adequate way of joining families together. A man could be "sealed" to his wife and after death God would recognize the validity of their union. In the same way parents and children could also be bound together in an eternal family unit through special sealing ordinances soon to be made available to faithful Mormons in the temple being built in Nauvoo.¹⁰

God, according to Mormon belief, had joined Adam and Eve for eternity as husband and wife and placed them at the head of the human family. Since their union was effected by the authority of God, their children were natural "heirs of the priesthood" and were "born in the covenant" and recognized by God as legitimate members of his family and legal heirs to his kingdom.¹¹ As each new family came into being, it became another link in the chain of families stretching back to Adam, who was linked to God. Thus the "family of God" became more than metaphor.

Exaltation depended on being part of that chain. While one could reach the celestial kingdom by being baptized and enduring to the end, one had to be sealed to enter the highest level of heaven. Still, though the Prophet taught his followers that he had received power to seal men and women and parents and children, the newly sealed families would not automatically be part of the priesthood-joined chain of families extending back to Father Adam since no new links had been added to the chain for more than a thousand years. Inasmuch as the priesthood had been lost through apostasy, a new and higher law of adoption was presented whereby Mormons could be "grafted" into the patriarchal order, thus becoming "legal heirs," and acquiring the "fathers in the priesthood" necessary to link each one to the chain of families built up in the days of the patriarchs.¹² Adoption in this sense

¹⁰Parley P. Pratt recalls Smith's conversing with him on the subject of the eternal family in the winter of 1839-40 in *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (New York, 1874), p. 329. H.C. 5:501-07.

¹¹Orson Pratt sermon, *Journal of Discourses* 1:58; H.C. 3:386-87.

¹²Wilford Woodruff reports that Brigham Young taught in a sermon in 1847 that as all the gospel ordinances administered since the apostasy were illegal, so also were all the marriages performed without force, and that all men had to be "adopted into the Priesthood in order to become sons and legal heirs of Salvation." Wilford Woodruff diary, 15 August 1847, holograph, Wilford Woodruff Collection, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, cited hereafter as C.A. See D.H. Wells sermon in *Millennial Star* 34 (1872):417 and Brigham

can be seen as an important part of the enlarged vision of the Kingdom of God on earth that came to Joseph Smith during the Nauvoo period.

But while sealing was accepted doctrine by 1844, the Saints in general had little chance to become practically acquainted with the sealing doctrine prior to the death of Joseph Smith. Experience with the practice as well as clarification of doctrine and procedure came only in the post-Joseph Smith period of Mormon history.

THE LAW OF ADOPTION AT NAUVOO, 1842-1846

No consensus exists with regard to the date when the first adoptions were performed; any conclusions as to whether the ordinance was practiced during Joseph Smith's lifetime must be viewed as tentative.¹³ It is certainly possible, perhaps probable, that Joseph Smith did initiate certain trusted leaders into the adoptionary order as early as 1842.

The history of adoption following Joseph Smith's death is less a mystery. In late 1845 it was decided that the temple then under construction in Nauvoo was sufficiently complete to permit the administration of its ordinances to as many of the faithful as time would permit. Although adoptions were performed there for nearly a month, the forced departure of the Church leaders from Nauvoo prevented the general membership from being adopted or having their own children sealed to them.

It would appear that while some prominent older men in the Church were allowed to have persons adopted to them, adoption was mainly restricted to those holding the apostleship. Seventy-four percent of those adopted, excluding natural children and relatives, were linked to Apostles Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, John Taylor, or Brigham Young. The

Young discourse in *Journal of Discourses* 16:186-87, as well as sermon by Heber C. Kimball, reported in *The Journals of John D. Lee*, Charles Kelly, ed. (Salt Lake City, 1938), pp. 90-91. Also of interest is a Brigham Young sermon reported in *Journals of John D. Lee*, p. 81, and in the Woodruff diary, 16 February 1847. See also Lee's reminiscences in his *Mormonism Unveiled: or the Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee*. . . . (St. Louis, 1878), p. 165, and a Joseph Smith sermon in H.C. 6:249-54.

¹³See Juanita Brooks, *John Doyle Lee: Zealot, Pioneer, Builder, Scapegoat*, 2nd ed. (Glendale, 1972), p. 73; *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout*, Juanita Brooks, ed. ([Salt Lake City], 1964): 1:178 note 50; T.B.H. Stenhouse, *Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York, 1873), p. 503; Edward Tullidge, *History of Salt Lake City* (Salt Lake City, 1886), p. 637.

majority were young couples in their twenties and thirties although there was also a significant number of persons in their forties. Some of the adopted would become well-known Saints, but only one or two ever occupied positions of the first rank in the Church. The rest were apparently ordinary members of the Church.¹⁴

ADOPTION AS SOCIAL EXPERIMENT, 1846-1848

Although adoption was meant to secure one's eternal future, in the first years after the departure from Nauvoo the doctrine was given a temporal interpretation as well. Mormons saw adoption as making men not only "fathers in the priesthood" but also fathers in fact. Some adopted Saints took the surname of their new fathers. John D. Lee, for example, at times signed his name "John D. Lee Young" inasmuch as he considered himself to now be Brigham Young's son. Lee in turn added his surname to the names of some of his adopted children and even referred to their offspring as his grandchildren.¹⁵

As interesting as what Mormons called each other may be, the social significance of adoption lay in what fathers and children did for each other. John D. Lee, looking back after thirty years, characterized the adoptionary system as follows:

. . . I was adopted by Brigham Young, and was to seek his *temporal* interests here, and in return he was to seek my *spiritual* salvation, I being an heir of his family, and was to share his *blessings* in common with his other heirs.¹⁶

The sons were to give the fathers the benefit of their labor while the fathers offered their children not only some measure of security in the next world but counsel and direction in this world as well.

¹⁴Nauvoo Sealings and Adoptions, 1846-1857, Bk A, microfilm of holograph, Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. This document is apparently a compilation made from the original manuscripts about 1870. There are apparently some omissions inasmuch as no adoptions to John D. Lee are listed while Lee's journals and those of others clearly show that persons were sealed to him. Very possibly there are other omissions as well. The discussion here is based upon what information was included in this copy.

¹⁵Title page of John D. Lee's journal, February to August, 1846, holograph C.A. Also entries for 10 January 1846, 7, 8, 19, and 26 April 1846, etc; *Journals of John D. Lee*, pp. 65-66; *On the Mormon Frontier*, 1:178, note 50. Brigham Young didn't like his family to address him as "Father Brigham" as he felt "Father" was a title more properly belonging to Adam, the father of all. He preferred to be addressed as "Brother Brigham."

¹⁶Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled*, p. 197. Lee's italics.

The circumstances of 1846 made such a practical application of the adoption doctrine particularly appealing to the Church leadership. Apart from problems of member loyalty left over from the succession crisis which had followed the murder of Joseph Smith, the Church was also faced with the confusion inherent in breaking up homes and moving *en masse* to an unsettled wilderness. People had to be moved; supplies had to be found; camps and temporary cities had to be located and established; morale, not to mention faith, had to be maintained; and always present was the uncertainty of the Church's future course. In the midst of turmoil, uncertainty and weariness, Mormon leaders were sufficiently impressed with the potential of adoption, already part of the Mormon doctrinal system, as a unifying force to take seriously its this-worldly implications. So in what can be viewed as an experiment, the organization of Mormon society along family lines was tried out on a small scale within the families of the leaders. Part of this experiment was the expansion of the adoptionary system to include a larger number of people. As there was no temple in the wilderness, there could be no further formal adoptions. This difficulty was overcome by treating persons desiring to join one's family as though they had already received the temple sealing. Later, when a temple could be built, they would go through the formal ceremony.¹⁷

Church leaders were not averse to accepting prospective children into their families. Some actually encouraged the Saints to join with them. Hosea Stout recorded on 13 July 1846, that Apostle Orson Hyde "desired all who felt willing to do so to give him a pledge to come into his kingdom when the ordinance could be attended to." Apostle George A. Smith admitted in February, 1847, that he had "lectioered" with all his might to get people to join him.¹⁸

¹⁷John D. Lee journal, 9 August 1846. Lee reports Brigham Young as saying "With reference to sealing there will be no such thing done untill we build another Temple. I have understood that some of the 12 has held fourth an Idea that such things would be attended to in the wilderness. But I Say Let no man hint such things from this time fourth for we will not attend to Sealings till an other Temple is built." An example of such postponed sealings as described in the text is found in Brigham Young's official diary entry for 6 January 1847: "Thomas Alvord had made covenant to be sealed to bro Sam'l Bent and attached to his kingdom. Advised him, when a Temple should be built, to have himself sealed to Bent." *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1846-1847*, Elden J. Watson, ed. (Salt Lake City, c1971), p. 493. Letters of application for 275 persons to be members of Young family appear in *Nauvoo Sealings and Adoptions, 1846-1857, Bk A*, pp. 787-94.

¹⁸*On the Mormon Frontier* 1:178; *Journals of John D. Lee*, pp. 93-94.

Wilford Woodruff describes in his journal the creation of several "families":

President Brigham Young met with his company or family organization of those who had been adopted unto him or were to be, and organized them into a company out of which may grow a people that may yet be called the tribe of Brigham . . . And they did enter into a covenant with uplifted Hands to Heaven with President Young and each other to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord our God

President Heber C. Kimball organized his family company this night at the Council House consisting of about 200 persons. I, Wilford Woodruff, organized my family company this night at my own House consisting of 40 men, mostly Head men of families. Those that joined me entered into a covenant with uplifted Hands to Heaven to keep all the commandments and Statutes of the Lord our God and to sustain me in my office.¹⁹

Once such families were organized, family meetings were held in which children were given practical instruction as well as exhorted to live better lives. Brigham Young, for example, called a two-day family meeting in February, 1847, during which time he chastened his children because some were jealous of others and because trouble had arisen over the practice of plural marriage. The president then explained to the group how his family organization was intended to function. Between sessions of the family conference a dinner was served. On the second day there was a dance in the evening.²⁰

The Kimball family meetings as a general rule were held on Sundays, and following Apostle Kimball's sermons the sacrament was administered to the group. His family also held several parties and dances.²¹

The family system was not only tested as a means of regulating community behavior at Winter Quarters, but Church leaders also sought to take advantage of relationships established by adoption to make the trek westward more orderly. Brigham Young's announcement in January, 1847, that companies crossing the Great Plains should be divided into hun-

¹⁹Woodruff diary, 18, 19 January 1847.

²⁰*Journals of John D. Lee*, pp. 75-95; Woodruff diary, 16, 17 February 1847.

²¹Biography of Joseph Grafton Hovey, 1812-68, p. 95; Helen Mar Whitney, "Our Travels Beyond the Mississippi," *Women's Exponent* 12 (1883-84):102; Whitney, "Scenes and Incidents at Winter Quarters," *Women's Exponent* 14 (1885-86):66.

dreds, fifties, and tens, all with their respective captains, followed by almost a year the organization of his own "family" into four companies of ten.²² In the first company of 1847 more than a dozen men can be identified as members of Brigham Young's adopted family, about the same number belonging to Heber C. Kimball's group, with a handful of others in the families of Apostles Willard Richards, Amasa Lyman, and Wilford Woodruff. Counting fathers and sons, a minimum of one-fourth the men in that company were bound by ties of adoption.²³

Because of lack of supplies and equipment, very few of the Saints made the trip across the plains in 1847. Among those who remained behind that first year, adoption also had a part to play in terms of social organization. Before going west, Brigham Young, disgusted by the lack of preparation of most Mormons for the trip, had announced that he was going to leave his adopted children on a farm where they could support themselves and leave "others to do as they pleased with their selfishness. . . ." The site selected for the farm lay about eighteen miles north of Winter Quarters and was referred to as "Summer Quarters" or "Brother Brigham's Farm." Isaac Morley, the eldest of Young's adopted children, was in charge, with orders to raise crops which could provision overland companies in 1848. Heber C. Kimball followed Brigham's example by leaving a number of his children in charge of a Kimball family farm.²⁴

Although Mormon leaders had faith enough in the family relationships set up through adoption to begin to organize settlements and emigration in terms of family groupings, a large-scale adoptionary order encompassing the whole membership of the Church was not to be established, since problems soon arose which resulted in the abandonment of adoption as a social experiment.

Difficulties began when it became apparent that adoption gave one a special status and that not all the adopted enjoyed

²²John D. Lee journal, 17 February 1846.

²³Based on the writer's comparison of the list of those in the pioneer company with lists of adopted persons in Nauvoo Sealing and Adoptions, Howard Egan's *Pioneering the West* (Richmond, Utah, 1917), and the journals of Wilford Woodruff and John D. Lee. See the account of the Kimball family meeting upon arriving in the Salt Lake Valley in Egan, pp. 107, 116, and a briefer version in Heber C. Kimball diary, 25 July 1847, holograph, C.A.

²⁴*Journals of John D. Lee*, pp. 130, 132-36. See map following p. 160. *On the Mormon Frontier* 1:189 note 56, 270 note 50, 273, 242-43 note 35.

the same status. Albert P. Rockwood, for example, as the first son adopted to Brigham Young was given special responsibilities as described by Norton Jacob in a September 1846 journal entry:

I have come to the conclusion that it is the policy and intention to put down every spirit in the Camp of Israel that would seek to establish a selfish independence, and that Brother Rockwood is to be made an instrument to accomplish that thing as he is Brother Brigham's eldest son by adoption. Well, I say, "Amen," for there must be less of that spirit before a proper union can prevail among the Saints.

But others were less pleased than Jacob with the authority vested in Rockwood.²⁵

An example of bad feelings in a "family" is the quarrel between John D. Lee and Andrew Lytle, both adopted sons of Brigham Young:

. . . Andrew Little [Lytle] was in the battalion, and at the request of Brigham Young I let his family have \$258 worth of goods, and Brigham said I should have my money when Little returned, but I never got any of it. Little was also an adopted son of Brigham Young, and consequently did about as he pleased.

After Lytle returned to Winter Quarters, Lee took him before the bishop's court, where each accused the other of improper behavior.²⁶

Friction between parents and children was also apparent at the Summer Quarters farm soon after the Young family took up residence there early in April of 1847. John D. Lee, acting as assistant to Morley, was a stern taskmaster and hard words were soon traded within his family. George Laub, one of Lee's adopted sons, describes in his journal some of the problems that arose. After a trip to Missouri to buy grain Thomas S. Johnson, another son, refused to turn over the corn purchased there to Lee, swearing that he was not "agoing to be a Negrow for John D. Lee any longer and that he was going to work for himself." Laub himself and Lee quarreled

²⁵Norton Jacob, *Record of Norton Jacob*, C. Edward Jacob and Ruth S. Jacob, eds. (Salt Lake City, 1949), p. 25; *On the Mormon Frontier*, 1:129, 149, 152; Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled*, pp. 169-70.

²⁶Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled*, p. 198; *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848-1876*, Robert G. Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds., 2 vols. (San Marino, California, 1955) 1:5-7.

several times over Lee's keeping what seemed to Laub too large a portion of the fruits of his son's labors.²⁷

Problems within the Lee group were soon matched by problems between Lee and other members of Brigham Young's family at Summer Quarters. Young gave Lee's children a special status when he "told them that he wanted me and those that belonged to my family to have what land I wanted to till."²⁸ Members of the family also resented Lee's efforts to make them work harder. Ill feelings were climaxed by a fight after Charles Kennedy lured one of Lee's young plural wives away from him. Kennedy brought charges against Lee and a trial was held before the council in Winter Quarters. The court decided that Lee was in the wrong and that he should apologize not only to Kennedy but to the entire Summer Quarters settlement. Part of the council's decision was that any of Lee's wives or adopted children who desired to could leave him. Brigham Young later upheld the verdict and several individuals then "desolved covenants" with Lee.²⁹

Adoption as a system of social organization was troubled not only by fathers who demanded too much of their sons, but also by some of the children who in turn expected too much from their fathers. Brigham Young noted in February, 1847, that he hoped the day would come when his adopted children would "have to provide temporal blessings for me instead of my boarding from 40 to 50 persons as I now do. . . ." A year earlier John D. Lee had had to leave almost thirty of his family at Mount Pisgah for lack of means to take them further west.³⁰ Whatever their feelings about their children's demands, even the leading members of Mormon society were in no position to support them.

Problems also arose because some of the brethren supposed that adoption to one of the apostles would block the building

²⁷*Journals of John D. Lee*. Read the entries for the spring of 1847. *A Mormon Chronicle* 1:46. George Laub journal, pp. 168, 180-81, typescript, Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁸*Journals of John D. Lee*, p. 145 and note.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 183ff; *On the Mormon Frontier* 1:277-78; Woodruff diary, 9 December 1847; Laub journal, p. 194; Nauvoo Sealings and Adoptions, 1846-1857, Bk A, p. 803. Kelly and Brooks view this as the end of the law of adoption, which is accurate only if adoption is viewed merely in terms of the social experiment of the 1840s.

³⁰*Journals of John D. Lee*, p. 83; Woodruff diary, 16 February 1847; Lee journal, 31 May 1846. Lee in 1848 was financially unable to help all his families emigrate to Utah. *A Mormon Chronicle* 1:25.

of their own kingdoms. In theory the importance of adoption lay in the validation of one's sonship in the family of God. But some were more interested in being fathers and exercising authority over others than they were in being sons of God. Kingdom-building, or the gathering together of a large number of people over whom one could rule in eternity, enjoyed a good deal of popularity. Brigham Young complained:

were I to say to the elders you now have the liberty to build up your kingdoms, one half of them would lie, swear, steal and fight like the very devil to get men and women sealed to them. They would even try to pass right by me and go to Jos[eph]

Young countered such potential challenges to his authority by warning that the best way to advance was by "boosting up . . . instead of trying to pass."³¹

One actual challenge to constituted authority was presented by the case of James Emmett, who was in charge of a Church colony in Iowa and South Dakota. Trouble there in 1846 resulted in Emmett's being "striped of his kingdom and him and all his followers put under Bishop Miller." It was brought out a year and a half later at the trial of Emmett that he had tried to imitate the adoptionary order by binding to him by covenant those over whom he presided.³²

Besides rebuking those who were overly eager to be rulers, Brigham Young also had to reassure those who were to be ruled that adoption to the apostles would not block their own progress. In January, 1847, for example, he explained:

I said some men were afraid they would lose some glory if they were sealed to one of the Twelve, and did not stand alone and have others sealed to them. A Saint's kingdom consisted of his own posterity, and to be sealed to one of the Twelve did not diminish him, but only connected him according to the law of God by that perfect chain and order of Heaven, that will bind the righteous from Adam to the last Saint.³³

Brigham Young reported in February, 1847, that Joseph Smith had appeared to him in a dream and told him with regard to adoption to "tell the people to be humble and faithful, and be sure to keep the spirit of the Lord and it will lead

³¹*Journals of John D. Lee*, pp. 80, 88-89.

³²*On the Mormon Frontier* 1:168-69, 294-95.

³³*Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, p. 505.

them right.”³⁴ Adoption might have worked among the strong-willed men who had joined the Church had they submitted to the “quiet spirit of Jesus.” However, the decision of the saints to assert their “selfish independence” destroyed any possibility that an authoritarian, hierarchical system such as adoption could function successfully among them. They were not ready for adoption any more than they had been ready for the law of consecration in the 1830s or would be for the United Order in the 1870s.

Mormon leaders must have hoped that family life in adoption would bring their people together and enhance the Church’s efforts to make a new life for the Mormon community in the West. But while the experiment with adoption was certainly not responsible for all the problems the Church was undergoing, it could clearly be seen by the spring of 1848 that it had failed to produce the anticipated benefits. Confused and unauthorized attempts to practice adoption had even spread to Great Britain, where *Millennial Star* editor Orson Spencer felt the need to warn the English saints that the advocacy of adoption was “ill-timed and uncalled for in the present state of the British Churches. . . [and] actually peril[s] indirectly the salvation of those who are taught [it].”³⁵

Adoption might be good doctrine, but it had failed to work as a principle of social organization. With confusion at home and abroad, Church leaders saw fit to discontinue the effort to make the ties of adoption the basis of organization for the Mormon community.

ADOPTION IN ABEYANCE, 1848-1877

Once Mormon leaders abandoned adoption as a social experiment, their publicly expressed interest both in the doctrine and the practice appears to have fallen off sharply for some time. Even so there are indications that adoption was not altogether forgotten by the general membership of the Church.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 529; *On the Mormon Frontier* 1:238-39. Stout quotes Joseph in the dream as instructing the people to “keep the quiet spirit of Jesus.” See also a report of the dream in *Millennial Star* 35 (1873):597-98.

³⁵Orson Spencer, editorial in *Millennial Star* 10 (1848):138. Mormon splinter groups were also having problems with adoption. The Strangites had to discipline John C. Bennett for trying to gain influence through adoption while there were also problems between the followers of Lyman Wight and George Miller in Texas. S. S. Ivins research notebooks, 2:234-37; 15:48-49, holograph, Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. The index to the Ivins notebooks proved most helpful in locating many of the sources which were used in preparing this paper.

Between 1849 and 1854 the "waiting list" of those desiring to join Brigham Young's family increased by 175 names.³⁶ In his short autobiography, Albert K. Thurber recalled that in 1850 Benjamin F. Johnson approached him and "in a round about way proposed for me to be adopted to him." Thurber put him off by telling him, "I thought it would be as well for him to be adopted by me."³⁷

Others were curious about what duties the doctrine might impose upon them. Andrew Siler wrote to Apostle Parley P. Pratt in 1851 to inquire if he, coming to Zion without parents or relatives, should be adopted to some Church family. Pratt, who so often speculated about other aspects of Mormon theology, chose to answer the question in the *Deseret News* with an abrupt "I do not know." In printing Pratt's response the editor added that too much attention paid to the "mysteries" would lead the Saints to neglect more pressing duties.³⁸

The adoption experiment of the late 1840s continued to affect Mormon society in the 1850s to some degree. Historian Edward Tullidge concluded in 1886 that adoption "explain[s] certain things which were done by the pioneers, in relation to the 'land question,' when they took possession of these valleys, and also many other affairs and features noticeable in the community, especially during the first ten years after the entrance of the pioneers, in 1847."³⁹ Such legal and economic after-effects remain to be examined. Personal relations also continued to be influenced by the adoption experience. John D. Lee's, journals for example, show that cordial relationships were again established in the late 1850s and the 1860s between Lee and some of the "sons" with whom he had so much trouble in the late 1840s, bad feelings apparently cooling with the passage of time.⁴⁰

As time went on, Mormon leaders began again to preach adoption from the pulpit. Adoption into the family of God that one might be a legal heir to exaltation was still very much

³⁶Nauvoo Sealings and Adoptions, 1846-1857, Bk A, pp. 794-800. Aside from the 83 persons listed in 1852 only about two families per year entered their names in the record. No names appear after 1854.

³⁷*Treasures of Pioneer History*, Kate B. Carter, ed. (Salt Lake City, 1956) 3:288.

³⁸*Deseret News*, 11 January 1851, p. 187.

³⁹*History of Salt Lake City*, p. 638.

⁴⁰*A Mormon Chronicle* 1:157, 326 note 54; 2:11, 18, 35, 136. See also Biography of Joseph Grafton Hovey, 1812-68, for description of relations within the Kimball family.

a part of Mormon doctrine. As unpleasant memories of the experiences of the 1840s faded, Brigham Young and others increasingly stressed the importance of adoption in Mormon theology. For example, in general conference in 1862, President Young made reference to the "principle that has not been named by me in years." As he would continue to do, Brigham stressed the need to complete the "chain of the Priesthood from Adam to the latest generation . . . in one unbroken continuance." Still, although adoption was necessary, he did not feel his people were ready for it:

It is a great and glorious doctrine, but the reason I have not preached it in the midst of this people, is, I could not do it without turning so many of them to the Devil. Some of them would go to hell for the sake of getting the Devil sealed to them.

I have had visions and revelations instructing me how to organize this people so that they can live like the family of heaven, but I cannot do it while so much selfishness and wickedness reign in the Elders of Israel.⁴¹

Brigham Young's sermons about adoption in later years were somewhat more positive as he began to approach the subject more in terms of spiritual and theoretical considerations and less in terms of past failures.

A point frequently made in sermons during the 1860s was that the Church had no place where adoptions could be performed. Although the Endowment House had functioned in Salt Lake City since 1855 for the performance of certain ordinances, President Young was firm on the point that adoptions and sealings of children to parents could not be solemnized there. They were "advanced ordinances" of the priesthood which could be performed only in a temple.⁴²

Once construction began on a temple in St. George in 1871, Church leaders again and again stressed the necessity of the saints' being adopted into the chain of the priesthood in order to reach the highest glory of the celestial kingdom so they would take advantage of the opportunity to be adopted and have their children sealed to them once the temple was completed.⁴³

⁴¹Brigham Young sermon in *Journal of Discourses* 9:269; also *Millennial Star* 24 (1862):466.

⁴²Brigham Young sermons in *Journal of Discourses* 10:254, 12:161-67, 16:186-89; *Millennial Star* 27 (1865):771, 31 (1869):203-04.

⁴³D. H. Wells sermon in *Millennial Star* 34 (1872):417; Brigham Young sermon in *Journal of Discourses* 16:185-89. Young in his sermons refers to

ADOPTION IN FULL FLOWER, 1877-1894

The sealing rooms of the St. George Temple were dedicated in January, 1877; and Wilford Woodruff, president of the temple, then recorded on March 22 that he had that day adopted two couples to President Brigham Young.⁴⁴ Thousands of persons were thereafter adopted at St. George as well as in temples subsequently constructed. With the beginning of adoption on such a scale, it became necessary to establish policies to govern the practice. The principal rules under which adoptions were performed are here summarized.

1. *Sealing or Adoption.* Church policy directed that children of faithful members of the Church not "born in the covenant" be *sealed* to their natural parents, whether any or all of those involved were living or not. If natural parents had not been baptized Mormons during life or had apostatized from the Church, their children were to be *adopted* to someone else. The sealing of a person to a dead non-Mormon was seen as being risky since the departed parent might not accept the gospel in the spirit world. Such uncertainty about one's position in the next life was unacceptable, especially to converts whose parents had been strongly opposed to Mormonism during life.

The same ruling applied in part to sealings of husbands and wives. If both were dead, the sealing could be performed whether the two had been members of the Church in life or not. But if the widow of a non-Mormon came to Utah, as so many did, she was to be sealed to some good brother in the Church rather than to her late husband. Again the reasoning was that the ladies risked their exaltation by being sealed to those who might not accept the gospel. In many cases this meant that women become plural wives. Had the Church permitted widowed converts to be sealed to dead husbands who never joined the Church, there might have been a good many fewer women participating in polygamy. Children of such widows were to be sealed, rather than adopted, to their mother and her new husband. The dead husband was often adopted to his wife's second husband to keep him in the family.⁴⁵

adoption as the sealing of "men to men." This should be understood as the linking of generations in the chain of the priesthood. Women and children, inasmuch as they are sealed to men, are also part of the chain.

⁴⁴Woodruff diary, 22 March 1877.

⁴⁵J.D.T. McAllister to John Watson, 27 May 1887, St. George Temple Letterbook, pp. 255-56, holograph, C.A.; McAllister to J. L. Dalton, 15 January

2. *Free Choice in Selecting a New Father.* Those to be adopted were allowed to choose whomever they liked as their new fathers. Church leaders were emphatic that one's freedom of choice was not to be abridged, going so far in a few cases as to cancel adoptions because the person adopted had not been advised of his rights. Not only was the choice to be freely made, but the initiative was also to be left with the person seeking adoption.⁴⁶ A man could be adopted either to a living or dead person. If he chose a living father he would then write or speak to the man. If he chose to be adopted to someone who had died, he would apply to that person's heir.

3. *Heirship.* Members of families in the Church were to agree on a worthy male member of the family to be designated "heir" who would then manage the family temple work for dead ancestors.⁴⁷ In families of deceased general authorities of the Church, where so many applied for adoption, the heir had a special importance as at first he had to approve such applications. With the opening of new temples and the increase in applications, heirs were later permitted to delegate such authority to the temple presidents.⁴⁸

4. *Presidential Control and Approval.* Joseph Smith's basic revelation regarding the sealing power vests full control of temple work in the president of the Church. Inasmuch as the first three temples built in Utah were at some distance from

1889, St. George Temple Letterbook, pp. 211-12; Wilford Woodruff sermon, "The Law of Adoption," *The Deseret Weekly* 48 (1894):542-43; Wilford Woodruff to Lorenzo Snow, 24 April 1894, Wilford Woodruff Letterbook, p. 347, holograph, C.A.; Woodruff to Marriner W. Merrill, 15 May 1894, Woodruff Letterbook, p. 406. Some were even uneasy about being sealed to their parents who *were* in the Church whose way of life would not qualify them for the celestial kingdom. J.D.T. McAllister to Franklin Spencer, 17 December 1883, St. George Temple Letterbook, p. 115; D. H. Cannon to Wilford Woodruff, 19 August 1892, St. George Temple Letterbook, p. 23.

⁴⁶James G. Bleak to L. John Nuttall, 5 July 1893; St. George Temple Letterbook, pp. 156-57. John Taylor wrote the following to J. S. Morris, 15 February 1887: "You ask me to recommend you to some good Man to whom you can be Adopted. The better way will be for you to select some one for yourself, and if he be a man in full fellowship it will be agreeable to me." Manuscript copy of letter in Samuel Roskelley Genealogical and Temple Record, p. 121, microfilm of holograph, C.A.

⁴⁷J.D.T. McAllister to Abraham Kimball, 17 January 1882, St. George Temple Letterbook, pp. 14-15; Kimball to McAllister, 20 April 1882, pasted to p. 15 of St. George Temple Letterbook.

⁴⁸See the following letters in St. George Temple Letterbook: McAllister to Brigham Young, Jr., 19 January 1882, pp. 15-17; McAllister to Wilford Woodruff, 20 January 1882, pp. 18-19; McAllister to Joseph F. Smith, 16 February 1882, pp. 29-30; Brigham Young, Jr. to McAllister, 22 February 1882, pasted to p. 17; statement of H. J. Richards, 24 October 1882 and statement of A. A. Kimball, 30 September 1882, both on p. 57.

Church headquarters, Presidents Young, Taylor, and Woodruff had to delegate a certain amount of this authority, although they attempted to maintain a close supervision and control of temple work by selecting apostles as temple presidents. President John Taylor further tightened presidential control by ruling that recommends for adoptions and some other ordinances were not acceptable unless countersigned by him.⁴⁹

5. *Adoptions of Dead Relatives.* Once the Saints had their own temple work taken care of, they were eager to bring loved ones into God's family as well. But a Mormon could have adoptions performed back only one generation beyond the first member of the family to join the Church. Thus a convert could have only his dead parents, brothers, and sisters adopted to some family in the Church while the son of convert Mormons could go back one generation further to grandparents, uncles and aunts,⁵⁰ had his parents not done the work. Many adopted Mormons chose to have dead relatives adopted into the same family into which they had been adopted so all could be together in the celestial kingdom.

6. *Adoptionary Practice.* An understanding of adoption after 1877 is to be sought not only in the consideration of policies but also in the study of statistics.⁵¹ Over the period more persons, both living and dead, were sealed to their own parents than were adopted, although there were important differences between the sealing patterns for the living and for the dead. Through 1893 there were approximately 19,000 living persons sealed to their own parents while only 1,200 were adopted. Many of those sealed were young children, the rest being the adult children of Church members. Living persons adopted were in almost all cases adults whose parents had never joined the Church. While it is possible that a significant number of Mormons after 1877 were second generation in the Church, it is also possible that many who under Church

⁴⁹J.D.T. McAllister to L. John Nuttall, 24 January 1882, St. George Temple Letterbook, p. 22; John Taylor to McAllister and David H. Cannon, 13 September 1884, John Taylor Letterbook, pp. 633-34, holograph, C.A.

⁵⁰See the following in St. George Temple Letterbook: J. D. T. McAllister to John Rowley, 21 February 1882, p. 88; McAllister to Wilford Woodruff, 27 February 1889, pp. 229-30; D. H. Cannon to the First Presidency, 15 May 1894, p. 284.

⁵¹The data upon which this discussion is based are found in annual statistical summaries of temple work on file in the Church Archives. Data relating to numbers of persons adopted to general authorities were collected through examination of temple records on film at the Genealogical Society Library, Salt Lake City.

policy should have been adopted to someone failed to have the ordinance performed for some reason.

With regard to work for the dead, about 16,000 sealings were performed through 1893 as compared with slightly over 13,000 adoptions. This sharp divergence from the pattern of sealing work for the living can largely be accounted for by the nature of the groups for whom the work was done. The dead who were sealed were generally those who had died during infancy or childhood while the dead who were adopted were usually the parents, brothers and sisters, and other relatives of Church members, of whom there would be large numbers.

A pattern of sealing work within each temple district is apparent. When a new temple opened the faithful saints in the area would eagerly take their children and the names of their dead to the temple and have the necessary ordinances performed. Less diligent Mormons and new immigrants arriving in Utah brought their children and names in after the initial surge of enthusiasm had subsided. This is not to say that some did not make the trip to St. George, Logan, or Manti seeking temple work, but the data suggests that most people were satisfied or obligated by economic considerations to wait until a temple opened fairly close to home.

Because of the great mass of data only the simplest statistical aspects of adoption will be examined here. The records show that 66 percent of the living and 77 percent of the dead who were adopted were adopted to general authorities. Roughly half of those who were not adopted to general authorities were adopted either to temple officials who were not general authorities or to other prominent Church officials living in the area.

Most of the general authorities to whom considerable numbers of persons were adopted were apostles, many having also served in the First Presidency. Of the seventeen apostles who died in the faith prior to 1894, fourteen had persons adopted to them. Of sixteen (including the First Presidency) living in 1894, only nine were so favored, while none of the four chosen between 1894 and 1900 had people adopted to them. Related to this is the fact that of those adopted to general authorities 60 percent of the living and 68 percent of the dead persons were adopted to deceased general authorities. Partly this reflects the respect of Church members for the heroes of

the Mormon past, but also it results from temple procedures. If a person were to be adopted to a living general authority, that Church leader would have to be present for the ceremony, which was often difficult, especially when none of the temples was particularly close to Salt Lake City. If no general authority were living or visiting in the area of the temple, it was much easier to choose a dead apostle or member of the First Presidency since someone else could stand proxy for him. Convenience also partially explains why so many were adopted to temple officials.

Of course other considerations besides convenience motivated the saints in their choice of fathers in the priesthood. Local popularity and devotion had a part to play, as evidenced by the large number of adoptions to Apostle Erastus Snow at St. George, where he was the area's spiritual leader, and at Manti, where so many Scandinavians honored him as the man who opened their homelands to proselyting. In several cases large numbers were adopted to dead general authorities in the first year or two following their deaths, reflecting a special expression of devotion evoked by their passing. More timeless and general was the feeling for Joseph Smith, the Church's greatest hero, who led all others in the number of persons choosing to be adopted themselves or to have their dead adopted to him.

ADOPTION TRANSFORMED, 1894-1900

With the passage of time, it became apparent that not everyone was pleased with the policies governing adoption and sealing. One example of dissatisfaction is Edward Bunker's statement regarding adoption in the early 1880s:

I believe it is a correct principle and when it runs in the lineage it looks consistent, but the adoption of one man to another out of the lineage, I do not understand and for that reason I would not enter into it. And adopting the dead to the living is as adopting the father to the son. I don't believe there is a man on earth that thoroughly understands the principle. If there is I have never heard it taught so that I could understand it. I believe it is permitted more to satisfy the minds of the people for the present until the Lord reveals more fully the principle.⁵²

⁵²Biography of Edward Bunker, holograph, C.A. Section including Bunker's remarks on adoption follows the biography proper.

Others had been able to trace their ancestry back several generations and must have felt that all their ancestors should be able to be sealed or adopted to someone. Multitudes of good people who had no chance to hear the gospel of Christ in life were, they felt, left out of the family of God.

Even the general authorities were troubled, as is indicated by their desire to modify policies governing sealings to non-Mormon parents and work for distant ancestors.⁵³ Their feeling in this regard led to authorization for several members of the Church to be sealed to parents who had not been Mormons. In other cases adoptions already performed were canceled so that those involved could be sealed to their parents. Apostle Marriner W. Merrill noted in his journal in July, 1893, that it had been decided that temple presidents were to use their own judgment with regard to some of the policies governing sealing work. In essence this meant the Church was hesitating midway between two positions.⁵⁴

The problem was solved for the Church by President Wilford Woodruff's announcement in the April general conference of 1894 that he had received a revelation on adoption. Rather than proclaiming the change in policy as a new departure, he was careful to point out that the revelation was based on the foundation laid by Joseph Smith. He began his discourse by having George Q. Cannon read Section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants, in which the Prophet teaches the need for a "welding link" between the generations of the human family. Having so prepared the people to receive what he might say, the president went on:

You have acted up to all the light and knowledge that you have had; but you have now something more to do than what you have done. We have not fully carried out those principles in fulfillment of the revelations of God to us, in sealing the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. I have not felt satisfied, neither did President Taylor, neither has any man since the Prophet Joseph who has attended to the ordinance of adoption in the temples of our God. We have felt that there was more to

⁵³Abraham H. Cannon journal, 18 December 1890, photocopy of holograph, C.A.; also J.D.T. McAllister to J. L. Dalton, 15 January 1889, St. George Temple Letterbook, pp. 211-12.

⁵⁴J.D.T. McAllister to Erastus Snow, 3 February 1888, St. George Temple Letterbook, p. 87; Wilford Woodruff to M. W. Merrill, 4 April 1894, Woodruff Letterbook, p. 293; Nauvoo Sealings and Adoptions, 1846-1857, Bk A, pp. 517-18, 535-38; Marriner W. Merrill diary, 12 July 1893, holograph, C.A.

be revealed upon this subject than we had received. . . and the duty that I want every man who presides over a Temple to see performed from this day henceforth and forever, unless the Lord Almighty commands otherwise, is, let every man be adopted to his father. . . . That is the will of God to this people. . . . I say let every man be adopted to his father; and then you will do exactly what God said when he declared He would send Elijah the prophet in the last days. . . . We want the Latter-day Saints from this time to trace their genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to their fathers and mothers. Have children sealed to their parents, and run their chain through as far as you can get it. When you get to the end, let the last man be adopted to Joseph Smith, who stands at the head of this dispensation. This is the will of the Lord to this people, and I think when you come to reflect upon it you will find it to be true.⁵⁵

President Woodruff was declaring publicly that not only *should* the Saints be sealed to their own parents but that henceforth they *had* to be sealed to them if they were to be sealed at all. Inasmuch as previous Church policy had been based on the fear that many of the dead would not accept the gospel, President Woodruff in announcing his revelation also broadened the Latter-day Saint conception of the preaching of the gospel in the spirit world. Referring to Joseph Smith's teaching that all who would have received the gospel had they heard it would go to the celestial kingdom, he added, "So will it be with your fathers. There will be very few, if any, who will not accept the Gospel."⁵⁶

The president went to some pains to assure the people that being sealed to one's parents rather than to one of the apostles did not lower one at all. Indeed, as President George Q. Cannon said when he spoke following President Woodruff, the new revelation was seen as protecting the Church from being "divided into tribes and clans, each man having his own following. . . ."⁵⁷

The immediate response of the general Church membership appears to have been strongly favorable. The only real problem was what to do about the more than 13,000 souls, most of them dead, who had already been adopted to persons other

⁵⁵Woodruff's sermon was published in several places. Text quoted taken from *The Deseret Weekly* 48 (1894) 541-44. See also *The Deseret Evening News*, 14 April 1894.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷The text of President Cannon's sermon is found in *The Deseret Weekly* 48 (1894) 544-45.

than their natural parents. After some consideration the First Presidency and the Twelve ruled that these people should be sealed to their own parents but that the old records should be left standing. Any possible problems would be straightened out in the hereafter.⁵⁸

There was a great increase in the number of living and dead sealings to parents in 1894 and 1895. This suggests that the saints almost immediately had great numbers of their dead who had been previously adopted sealed to their own parents in accord with President Woodruff's directions. Perhaps some of the living who had resisted adoption also now came forward gladly to be sealed to their parents. And some part of the increase is due to temple work for distant ancestors whose names had already been collected by families interested in genealogy.⁵⁹ The revelation on adoption also opened the way for the organization of the Church-sponsored Genealogical Society of Utah in November, 1894—since Mormons could now do sealing work for distant ancestors, new interest was awakened in genealogical research and the Society was then set up to make available to members records which would enable them to seek out their ancestors.⁶⁰

SUMMARY

Consistent with the Later-day Saint belief that the Lord gives revelation "line upon line and precept upon precept" as needed and as the Church is ready to accept it, the Mormon concept of salvation was continually broadened and deepened throughout the nineteenth century. From a simple picture of an afterlife divided into a heaven and a hell, the saints went on to learn of varying degrees of glory and finally of the god-like status of those who win exaltation. Originally seen as at-

⁵⁸Wilford Woodruff and Joseph F. Smith to David H. Cannon, 4 May 1894, Woodruff Letterbook, p. 383; Abraham H. Cannon journal, 14 June 1894; copy of notes made by J.D.T. McAllister in connection with interview with First Presidency, 30 July 1894, St. George Temple Letterbook, p. 312.

⁵⁹Of interest in this regard is Joseph Christenson's statement in *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 28 (1937):149. "At the General Conference in 1894, when President Woodruff gave instructions concerning the sealing of family groups, I got to thinking of our records and family. With my father I went over the records we had, and as he knew most of the people recorded, we were able to tabulate all names in family groups with the exception of about twenty names."

⁶⁰See entries in the following journals for 1 November 1894: Abraham H. Cannon, Wilford Woodruff, Franklin D. Richards, holograph, C.A. Richard's journal, 13 November 1894, describes the organization of the Society.

tainable through baptism, which was eventually extended to the unbaptized dead as well as the living, salvation in its highest sense was later defined as available to those who were sealed and adopted into the family of God. With the 1894 revelation the doctrine of sealing was broadened to include all the saints' ancestors who had ever lived. For fifty years the policies governing adoption had meant that exaltation was limited to the small patriarchal society that the Church then was and to a few thousand dead relatives of the saints. Now, with the new light received by President Woodruff, exaltation was made available to millions of persons, provided they accept the gospel, and Woodruff told his people that very few would reject it. Living Mormons were now important not so much as fathers and heads of kingdoms but as agents acting for the rest of the human family. George Q. Cannon recognized the implications of the expansion of the law of adoption as he spoke the following:

How wide-spread and far-reaching is the ordinance to which allusion has been made, by which children will be sealed to their parents, one generation connected with another, and the whole human family be brought within the family of God, to be His recognized and acknowledged sons and daughters, bound together by the power of the everlasting Priesthood and in the new system of salvation spread out before us in the contemplation of that which the Lord has revealed! What a feeling of tenderness and love wells up in our hearts in thinking that we are the children of God, and that we shall be bound together by ties that can never be broken.⁶¹

The chain of the priesthood so often referred to by Brigham Young could now better be viewed as a network into which all men and women can be brought as members of the family of God. While the limited view of salvation held before 1894 was possibly appropriate for a church confined to the limits of the Great Basin, the new understanding better prepared the Church to fulfill its mission to spread into all the world in the new century.

⁶¹George Q. Cannon sermon in *The Deseret Evening News*, 19 May 1894, p. 10.