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*Lost Legacy: The Mormon Office of Presiding Patriarch Irene M. Bates and E. Gary Smith*

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IRENE M. BATES and E. GARY SMITH. *Lost Legacy: The Mormon Office of Presiding Patriarch*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996. viii; 258 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$32.50.

Reviewed by Richard Lyman Bushman, Professor of History, Columbia University.

At the October 1979 general conference, President Nathan E. Tanner, counselor in the First Presidency, announced the retirement of Eldred G. Smith as Patriarch to the Church. No successor was mentioned, thus leaving an office vacant that in Joseph Smith's time was considered to be second in preeminence to the President of the Church. President Tanner explained that the wide availability of stake patriarchs eliminated the need for a Patriarch to the Church.

This action concluded a troubled history that went back to William Smith, the Prophet's younger brother, and continued through Church administrations from the times of Brigham Young to Spencer W. Kimball. Eldred G. Smith, the heir to the office by presumed hereditary right, had waited fifteen years after his father died in 1932, before receiving his appointment as Church Patriarch in 1947, while the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve decided on the right person and the right combination of duties. Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff had earlier questioned the worthiness of the Church Patriarch and made adjustments that reduced his authority. The office was inherently unstable almost from the beginning, as is obvious from this account by Irene Bates and Gary Smith, based on a host of manuscript sources.

The problems date back to the January 1841 revelation that called Hyrum Smith to succeed his father, Joseph Smith Sr., as Patriarch (D&C 124:91-96). The revelation said that Joseph Smith Sr., the first Patriarch, who died in September 1840, had appointed Hyrum to "the office of Priesthood and Patriarch, which was appointed unto him [Hyrum] by his father, by blessing and also by right," implying a chain of Smith family authority over patriarchal blessings, going from the departing Patriarch to his eldest son. In keeping with those words, when Brigham Young ordained John Smith, Hyrum's son, President Young said he acted in the stead of the martyred Hyrum, who had the authority to appoint and ordain the next Patriarch. The tradition of fathers ordaining sons



persisted down to 1932, when death prevented Hyrum G. Smith from ordaining his son Eldred as Patriarch.

The 1841 revelation, besides setting up a seemingly independent line of authority over patriarchal blessings, appointed Joseph's brother Hyrum as "prophet, and a seer, and a revelator unto my church, as well as my servant Joseph," and authorized him to act in "concert also with my servant Joseph" (D&C 124:94-95). The revelation also gave Hyrum, the Second Counselor in the First Presidency since 1837, the keys, blessings, priesthood, and gifts of the priesthood of Oliver Cowdery, who was once the Second Elder of the Church. How these powers and gifts were divided between the Patriarch's office and the calling of counselors in the First Presidency is not clear, but the 1841 revelation could be said to have established a partially independent line of Smith family officers parallel to the President of the Church and the Twelve. None of the Patriarchs save William Smith (who asserted his right to lead the Church as Patriarch) pushed the limits of the independent, hereditary appointment powers of this office, but the uncertain implications of some parts of the 1841 revelation raised questions whenever the Patriarch's role and authority had to be defined.

John Smith, Hyrum Smith's eldest son and Patriarch from 1855 to 1911, though never troublesome like William Smith, stirred doubts about the wisdom of hereditary authority. A good-hearted and believing man, he failed to keep up with the intensifying demand to keep the Word of Wisdom. He was said to have sometimes smoked in his office when people came for blessings, though in later life he may have reformed. Before he did, Wilford Woodruff openly scolded him in general conference and told him to shape up or resign.

That record of delinquency did not dispose the Quorum of the Twelve to bestow greater authority on the Patriarch when President Joseph F. Smith, a son of Hyrum Smith, proposed a change in the order of sustainings at general conference. President Smith wanted to present John Smith, his half-brother, as Presiding Patriarch after the First Presidency but before the Twelve, with the implication that he stood second in the line of authority. The two brothers, John and Joseph F. Smith, were inevitably compared to Hyrum and Joseph. But when the Twelve objected to the Patriarch

coming second after the Presidency, President Smith did not press the point, and the sustaining order went unchanged.

In 1918, Joseph F. Smith's successor, Heber J. Grant, wished to remove any question about the direct line from the First Presidency to the Quorum of the Twelve and to reduce the authority of the Patriarchal office even more than the Twelve did. For fifteen years, disagreements over the qualifications of the Patriarch, his standing in the ranks of the General Authorities, and the passage of the office from father to the eldest son delayed the appointment of Eldred Smith to the position of his father.

Irene Bates, a writer and historian, and Gary Smith, an attorney in Irvine, California, tell this fascinating story. The biographical paragraph in the back of the book identifies Gary Smith as the eldest son of Eldred G. Smith and thus (readers will know) heir to the office of Patriarch had it continued. But the book is written without bitterness or regret; no one could interpret it as a salvo in a campaign for the lost legacy. Only sadness for the plight of Eldred Smith colors the pages: sympathy for his suffering from self-doubt when he was not called in 1932 and understanding of his confusion about the definition and redefinition of his duties following his appointment in 1947. President Kimball seemed to be reviving the office just on the eve of its elimination in 1979. In fact, little changed after the emeritus status was announced. By that time, Eldred Smith did little more than give blessings—he did not preside over stake patriarchs or join the General Authorities for their deliberations.

For Latter-day Saints who revere Church authorities as inspired prophets, the book will undoubtedly read a little like an exposé. We do not often hear of disagreements among the Apostles and First Presidency and wonder if reports of these disagreements or of personal shortcomings should be made public. Are stories of personal weaknesses better left untold? In actuality, nothing in these pages seemed scandalous to me. As a stake patriarch myself, I believe nothing here was meant to undermine faith. Bates and Smith do not mar their crisp, vigorous retelling with implicit criticisms of Church inspiration. We see General Authorities tackling organizational problems, patiently weighing one another's opinions, working with real people, waiting for consensus.



Considering the incongruity of an independent line of family authority in a prophet-centered Church, the only marvel is that the office of Patriarch to the Church was not eliminated earlier. Concern for the passage on Hyrum's appointment in Doctrine and Covenants 124 and regard for the Smith family slowed the process, until, by common agreement of the Church councils, the office of Patriarch to the Church was left vacant. Far from demeaning the authorities, this illuminating history can reassure readers that difficult problems are sensitively handled in the upper councils of the Church and that needed change can occur when directed by the Lord's prophet.