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Joseph Smith III: Moderate Mormon

Robert Duane Hutchins
Brigham Young University - Provo

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JOSEPH SMITH III: MODERATE MORMON

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of History
Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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by
Robert D. Hutchins
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Marvin S. Hill, Committee Chairman

Thomas G. Alexander, Committee Member

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Ted J. Warner, Department Chairman
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CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING OF DISSENT WITHIN

THE MORMON KINGDOM

Although in the 1840s American religion was characterized by almost infinite variety, with perhaps as many as 300 different sects all claiming to represent Christ's true Church, most American denominations could be classified as what Robert Baird called "Evangelical Protestant." Baird said that with the exception of Roman Catholics, Unitarians and Mormons, most Protestant churches in America believed in one true invisible church, of which all truly converted Christians were a part. Baird said that Evangelicals believed in the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, that they believed in the doctrine of the Trinity, and that they accepted revivals as the work of God, an effective way to spread the gospel in America and abroad. Baird's Evangelical Protestantism was the product of a compromise between various contending sects, an attempt to provide justification for multiplicity, provided that the particular sects paid honor to


2 Ibid., pp. 153-155, 173-175, 183-201.
the basic tenets of Protestantism and the basic tenets of the American way of life.\textsuperscript{3}

From the start, as Baird perceived, Mormonism was different. To some degree it was a rebellion against the Evangelical consensus, for the Mormons repudiated religious pluralism, denying the reality of an invisible church, and insisting that all true believers must be baptized into their church by priesthood holders having proper authority. The Mormons believed in the Bible, but added additional scripture, including their Book of Mormon and their Book of Commandments, and maintained that the word of their prophet, Joseph Smith, when inspired, was the word of the Lord at times taking precedent over any written word. Rather than seeking salvation by individual means through individual conversion, the Mormons sought it collectively, through ordinances and priesthood, and through communal living that at times nearly repudiated American capitalism.\textsuperscript{4}

In 1815 America had just experienced her second great religious awakening with the mushrooming of new sects. Evangelical Protestantism now experienced religious pluralism, the likes of which America had never seen. The sermons of Protestant revivalists called for personal decisions and personal commitment. Men were seeking earnestly to find God.\textsuperscript{5} The point of departure came in

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid.


the variety of the application of these doctrines. The task of the Reformation had been to restore and reinstitute the primitive New Testament community in the form it held before the fall. Likewise the birth of the evangelical movement was to restore and reinstitute the primitive New Testament community which had been perverted by the Protestant reformation.

Protestantism then developed relatively homogeneous views of the importance of Christian community and it invoked widely accepted New Testament sanctions for the course taken. "But in the matter of organizing and governing the churches there was less agreement." The evangelicals felt the same--they, no less than their ancestors--revealed their hungers for community and displayed a variety of attempts to satisfy these hungers. According to Robert Baird there was an insistence upon a second spiritual birth in the crisis situation of a revival which became characteristic of evangelical groups. This second spiritual birth reflected a conviction derived from personal encounter with God. Again Baird said that the Evangelical churches, in addition to believing in

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6 Ibid., p. 137.
7 Ibid., p. 138.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 141.
10 Baird, Religion in America, p. xx.
11 Ibid., p. xix.
revivals and individual conversion, believed in the Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible.\footnote{Ibid., p. 268.}

That early Mormonism was oriented toward the primitive gospel has long been recognized and in fact was pointed out as early as 1831 by Alexander Campbell.\footnote{Alexander Campbell, "The Book of Mormon Reviewed and It's Divine Pretentions Exposed," Painesville Telegraph, 15 March 1831, p. 102, as cited in Marvin S. Hill, "The Shaping of the Mormon Mind in New England and New York," Brigham Young University Studies (Spring 1969), p. 353.} The Mormons believed the "old" churches were corrupt, apostate, and in need of a restoration of "the primitive faith and order." Man's free will was affirmed while Calvanistic determination was rejected. All shared a millennialist perspective in the way they viewed the developing events of the day.

Recent studies have shown us how anxiety-ridden the American people of the 1820s and 1830s were. In an age of rapid economic and social change, the growth of cheap transportation, industrialization, technological innovation, changing social mobility, and the coming of mass politics altered social and political relationships which made reappraisal of American society necessary.\footnote{Marvin S. Hill, "Quest for Refuge: An Hypothesis as to the Social Origins and Nature of the Mormon Political Kingdom," Journal of Mormon History vol. 2 (Provo, Utah, 1975), p. 4.} As Marvin Hill's study points out, there were many varieties of reform which were reactionary in nature--one of which was designed to establish conservative control during an era of rapid change.\footnote{Ibid.}
Hill's study suggests that the Mormon political kingdom was Joseph Smith's answer to the disintegration of the rural, socially harmonious village community which had been dominated by religious orientation and which several of the early Mormon leaders had enjoyed in New England. The evils they combated had supposedly multiplied because community cohesiveness and family authority had disintegrated at an alarming rate. The early Mormons were fugitives from social and political change; they sought to establish order and stability in their own lives by establishing their kingdom of God as a refuge. Hill cites a great deal of evidence that many of these converts to Mormonism were considerably less than middle-class economically, were religiously alienated and had little formal education. They had common origins in trying to escape the old-line churches which they felt were Babylon reincarnate. The Book of Mormon, their new scripture, denounced the kind of rapid social change, the hautiness of the nouveau riche which at least in part contributed to the depressing plight of these new converts. In short, Americans must reject their worldliness, accept the true gospel of Jesus Christ or reap His vengeance.

Mormonism embodied the dreams and hopes of a people who had not shared in the growing prosperity and secularization of the

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16 Ibid. See footnote #6 for a list of these men.


early nineteenth century; "a people who had become increasingly disinherit from their own cultural roots."\textsuperscript{19} The goal of the millennialist dream of the Mormons was the creation of a seamless society with one true church and one true doctrine in which all would share in spiritual and material wealth. In an effort to conform with an early revelation which had commanded them to be one, they rejected American political pluralism which they were convinced, could not possibly survive because of its inherent corruptness. It was to be replaced by the prophet's organization with political power centered in Mormon hands.\textsuperscript{20}

The Mormon movement began in New York in the late 1820s among dissenters from the Evangelical churches, and many who belonged to no church but sought to find the one, true church of Christ.\textsuperscript{21} Its prophet, Joseph Smith, was the son of an itinerant farmer and part time school teacher and barrel maker of the same name, who had left Vermont in 1816 to settle in Palmyra, New York. Having a large family and no professional training, the elder Smith struggled to make ends meet. Meanwhile the family drifted in and out of several churches, never fully satisfied with the offering of the old line churches. Lucy Mack Smith, the prophet's mother, was converted to Presbyterianism at a revival, but the

\textsuperscript{19}Bailyn, The Great Republic, p. 537.

\textsuperscript{20}Hill, "Quest for Refuge," p. 14. See footnote #68.

father and young Joseph would not join. Joseph Jr. said that he wanted to feel as others did at the revival but could not.

Seeking divine counsel, he went to the woods and prayed vocally to know what he should do, and which if any church he should join.\(^{22}\)

Smith records that he experienced a remarkable vision. A personage appeared to him, announcing himself as the Lord, and telling him that he should join none of the existing churches, that they were all corrupt, that he would be instrumental in restoring the true church to the earth. Subsequent revelations informed him of an ancient record buried in a hill near his home, which was a history of ancient America, the religious writings of the ancestors of the American Indian, which depicted the Christian gospel in all its

\(^{22}\)Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1973), 1:4-6 (hereafter cited as History of the Church). There are three manuscript texts of the First Vision as it is called by the Mormons. However, there are four official accounts. For further and more precise knowledge of these accounts see Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," Brigham Young University Studies IX (Spring 1969), pp. 275-294. For background into the circumstances surrounding Smith's claim to the First Vision see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision Through Reminiscences," Brigham Young University Studies IX (Spring 1969), pp. 373-404. For a full text of the 1831-32 manuscript history concerning Joseph Smith see Paul Chessman, "An Analysis of the Accounts Relating Joseph Smith's Early Visions," (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1965). Another account of the First Vision is given in Alexander Neibaur's journal under the date of 24 May 1844 which confirms the 1838 account found in Smith's History of the Church, in reference to two personages appearing, one the Father the other the Son, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah. By this time, Joseph has in his theology given to the church that the Trinity is not one but three separate beings. See The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1974), 115:7, p. 209 (hereafter cited as Doctrine and Covenants).
simplicity and purity. By 1830 Smith had translated the golden plates upon which this record was kept, and published it as the Book of Mormon.\textsuperscript{23}

Soon new converts were made and a religious movement underway. In April of 1830 a church was organized, and male members of the church were ordained with a restored priesthood, by which they were empowered to preach and baptize new members. The Mormons found that they had only limited success in New York, where their religion was viewed as a money making venture, but when missionaries reached Kirtland, Ohio, near Lake Erie, they came upon a community of dissident Campbellites who were experimenting with communitarianism. The Mormons had already begun practicing a form of this economic system, and had received instructions by revelation that they were to build a city of refuge, the New Jerusalem, somewhere in the west. Their millennialist preaching converted these Campbellites, and led ultimately to the conversion of one of the main leaders of the Campbellite movement, Sidney Rigdon, who had only recently quarreled with Campbell over the place of miracles and property sharing in the true Christian community. Rigdon was moved powerfully by the message of the Book of Mormon, and went to New York to meet the Mormon prophet.\textsuperscript{24}

Shortly afterward, Smith announced in a new revelation that his people should flee New York and seek refuge in Ohio.

\textsuperscript{23}Joseph Smith, \textit{History of the Church}, 1:71-76.  
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 1:28.
Meanwhile, other missionaries were sent to the western limits of the United States, a settlement in Independence, Missouri, to preach to the Indians, who were thought to be descendants of Israel and ready for the Christian message. A revelation promised that the New Jerusalem [Zion] would be established on this western frontier. In August of 1831, Smith and Rigdon dedicated the land around Independence for the general gathering of the Saints, and laid a cornerstone for a temple to be built there in preparation for the coming millennium.²⁵ Smith and Rigdon returned to Kirtland, but left Bishop Edward Partridge in charge in Zion, where he was to purchase land for the gathering. Under divine imperative, Partridge supervised a simple form of communitarianism.²⁶

For the first year or so the Mormons got along well enough with their neighbors. But as the Mormon numbers increased through the gathering, native Missourians became apprehensive and tensions mounted. Most of the Mormons were from New England, while many of the Missourians were Southerners. Squatters on the public domain were chagrined when the Mormons sought title to the land at the federal land office, while many Mormons affirmed blatantly that this was the promised land and all of western Missouri would one day belong to them. The natives feared that the Mormons might seek political influence and dominate local

²⁵Ibid., 1:188-203.

government. Missourians also feared that the Mormons might prove to be hostile toward slavery. When the Mormons established a printing press and published a newspaper, some of their editorials seemed to be menacing toward the "peculiar institution." In 1833 Missourians resorted to violence to destroy the press and drive the Mormons out. Mormon refugees moved northward into Clay County and attempted a new settlement there. 27

In Ohio meanwhile, the Mormon population gradually increased and church leaders also began to purchase land in the surrounding area. The Mormons tended to think of Kirtland as a temporary stopping place, since they all ultimately expected to settle in Missouri. Nonetheless, they soon established deep roots in Ohio. By 1833 there may have been as many as 1200 Saints in the area, sufficient that the Mormons were increasingly involved in local politics, identifying themselves with the Democratic Party in that state. About this time they commenced building a temple. 28

When the Mormon leaders in Ohio learned of the violent acts of the Missourians at Independence, they feared that their hopes for a final place of refuge were threatened. Joseph Smith received a revelation that the young men of Zion were to march to Missouri to redeem the promised land "with power." The governor of the state pledged that he would support the Mormon effort to reclaim their land in Independence, but backed down when feeling in the

28Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 1:349-354.
state ran strongly against the Mormons. Reaching Missouri, the prophet and his army of 200 men found they were greatly outnumbered and that state officials would render no help. "Zion's Camp" as it was called was dismantled, but seeds of great discontent were planted among the elders. Smith tried to assuage this feeling by calling new administrative officers, Seventies and Twelve Apostles to direct the missionary program. He vigorously promoted the building of the temple, and said that Kirtland would become a temporary stronghold of the Saints until they could raise sufficient number to return to Missouri in force.

At this point a group of dissenters emerged in Kirtland and Missouri who threatened to split the Mormons in two. Led by former members of Zion's Camp who said that Smith's revelation that Zion would be redeemed had been unfulfilled, that Smith had "prophesied lies in the name of the Lord," and by some Apostles and others like Oliver Cowdery and David and John Whitmer who had been special witnesses of the Book of Mormon, the dissenters levied criticism at many developing tendencies within the church. During the Kirtland era the church had undergone rapid expansion and change, with a growing degree of authority seeming to control

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30 Ibid., p. 4.

31 Ibid., p. 6.
every aspect of the lives of his followers.\textsuperscript{32} It was here at Kirtland that the theocratic tendencies which had their roots in New York, began to manifest themselves. The dissenters felt that a result of this ever increasing control was that the prophet and his church were becoming too worldly.

Oliver Cowdery was typical of most of the dissenters in his opposition to church control over economic matters. In the fall of 1836 the prophet had organized a bank, seeking a charter from the state to establish an institution at Kirtland which he hoped would transform landed assets into liquid capital he could use to develop the city. When the Mormons were unable to get a charter from the state legislature they organized an anti-banking society, a business firm with note issuing powers, which they hoped would be a suitable substitute for a bank that would accomplish much the same ends. Smith said that if the Saints would support the new institution it would thrive, and many Saints took this as a guarantee that God favored the bank and that they would prosper.\textsuperscript{33}

Few Mormons were willing to take the notes of the society, however, and non-Mormons universally opposed their circulation. When the bank failed Cowdery and others heaped scorn upon the prophet. Cowdery's anger was multiplied when polygamy in its early stages was initiated at Kirtland, and the prophet said it was the Lord's will and he would do as he pleased. Cowdery fled Kirtland and went

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p. 5.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid.
to Missouri while other dissenters like Joseph Smith's secretary, Warren Parrish, headed the dissenters at Kirtland. These men became open critics of Mormon banking, land speculation, and theocratic control. Some of them denied Smith's prophetic calling altogether, and repudiated the Book of Mormon. Calling themselves the "Old Standard" most of them adhered to the principles of the Book of Mormon and Bible, but repudiated theocratic tendencies.34

Law suits multiplied in Kirtland initiated by dissenters and anti-Mormons, and Smith and Rigdon finally fled the city in January 1838, journeying to Missouri where the Saints had established another gathering place at Far West.35

The brief hiatus in Clay County, Missouri, had come to an end when the friendly Clay Countians had asked the Mormons to leave mostly because of their increasing numbers. Through the efforts of one of their attorneys who had aided them in their Jackson County difficulties, Alexander Doniphan, a bill was sponsored in the state legislature which set aside Daviess, Ray and Caldwell Counties for Mormon settlement, a sanctuary as it were. This had become law in late 1836.

After Smith's arrival in March 1838, Far West gained in importance as it became the center of Mormon influence. By the end of April, Smith gave a revelation which further enhanced Far West as the gathering site.36 This revelation provided for another

35Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 3:1.
temple to be built at Far West "according to the pattern I will show them." 37

By the fall of 1838 there were over 3,000 Mormons living in Far West. This large population gave the Mormons political control over Caldwell County, a situation which was bound to upset the Gentile inhabitants. This painful lesson would yet be learned when in Illinois, politics again led to the failure of their settlement.

Internal dissention again became a problem as several of the most prominent men in the church began to speak out against Smith, Rigdon and church policies that they felt were less than the Lord demanded. Both Rigdon and Smith were determined not to allow apostasy to gain a foothold in Far West as it had in Kirtland. They both felt the key to success was to drive out dissenters. 38 Because of Rigdon's speaking ability, he became Mormonism's chief spokesman.

By July dissention had reached epidemic proportions. In response to this Rigdon delivered his famous "Salt Sermon" which left no doubt that the church intended to deal in severe terms with those members who seemed to labor against the First Presidency and the Kingdom. 39 The purging of suspected apostates was to be

37 Ibid., 115:14, p. 209.


39 James H. Hunt, A History of the Mormon War: With a Prefix, Embracing the Rise, Progress, and Peculiar Tenets of Mormon Doctrine; With an Examination of the Book of Mormon. Also, The
accomplished by the organization of what was in fact a secret military society known as the Danites. The members swore to stand by each other and their church leaders in any emergency to support church leaders "right or wrong," and adhered to secret signs and passwords by which they might identify each other. These they promised, on pain of death, never to divulge.

The Danites at their greatest strength numbered about 300 and were led by Dr. Sampson Avard. This small army was organized into companies of fifties and tens, with a captain for each company to insure smooth operation. Smith and Rigdon according to one contemporary, attended a few meetings and sanctioned some of these activities.

The Danites soon became an embarrassment to the church as they failed to prevent apostasy or to stop the Missouri mobs which formed to demand that the church abandon Far West. After a brief warfare between Saint and Gentile which led to depredations and some deaths, Smith, Rigdon and several others were arrested and placed

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Trial of the Prophet Joe Smith, and his Brother for High Treason, Murder, Etc., with the Motions of the Counsel and Decisions of the Court in Each Case: Together with an Account of the Attempted Assassination of Ex-Governor Boggs (St. Louis: Printed by Ustiek and Davies, corner Main and Olive Streets, 1844), pp. 164-274.


41 Ibid.

42 McKiernan, Far West, p. 128.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.
on trial for treason against the state of Missouri. None other than Dr. Avard testified against Smith so that he might absolve himself of any responsibility or blame for the Danites or the so-called "Mormon War" which had torn apart the whole of western Missouri.

By 28 November, Lyman Wight, Caleb Baldwin, Hyrum Smith, Alexander McRae, Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith were sent to Liberty, Clay County to stand trial for murder and treason. Most of the Mormons were soon released from custody but Smith and Rigdon were incarcerated in the jail at Liberty without ever being brought to trial.

On 15 April 1839, the panic and hostility in the western part of the state had subsided somewhat, and many newspapers expressed doubt that the Mormons were entirely at fault. On 15 April 1839 Smith and others were allowed to escape from their captors. When Smith arrived in Commerce, Illinois on April 22nd the Saints had already established a new gathering place. They had been welcomed and favorably treated by the citizens of Quincy, on the upper Mississippi River. Missouri's treatment of the Mormons was viewed as a disgrace. Yet it would only take the Mormons with their collectivist social and political inclinations a few short years to turn this friendly attitude into one of scorn and hatred, and precipitated a new crisis within the Church and without.

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46 Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 3:320.

Harassment and persecutions in Missouri had its effect upon the Mormons and their leader, and caused them to seek political power more openly. As Americans the Mormons had strong ties to the Constitution, which each believed was the result of divine inspiration, and to the ideal of freedom, but they became increasingly disenchanted with the existing political situation in the nation when Congress and the President refused to intervene in Missouri to reclaim their lands there and offer them protection from mob violence.

At Nauvoo the Mormons through political influence secured a state charter for their community which they believed gave them considerable political and legal independence. The prophet organized a militia called the Nauvoo Legion, which was designed to protect the Mormons but which was feared by many non-Mormons in the state.

One of the major developments encouraged by the ever increasing population of Nauvoo was the growing political power held by the Mormons. By 1841 Smith was attempting to court political favors from local and state politicians and he was also busy encouraging more and more Mormons throughout the world to gather at Nauvoo, there to carry out the purposes of God.

One of the men who rose to prominence in the period was Dr. John C. Bennett, quartermaster general of Illinois, who with


49 Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 4:271.

50 Ibid., 4:270. Bennett was born in Massachusetts in 1804, he practiced as a physician in Ohio, and later in Illinois, holding
political know-how had helped to get the Nauvoo Charter passed by the state legislature. 51

By 1 February 1841, Bennett had been elected mayor of Nauvoo, and held high office in the Church itself. 52 Bennett was soon to cause untold grief for Joseph Smith as he was charged with adultery and retaliated publicly, denouncing the Mormons for the practice of polygamy. Bennett was excommunicated, but the polygamy issue and political differences soon divided the church, and set the Saints at odds with themselves and their surrounding neighbors.

Although the prophet had informed a trusted few of his followers about the doctrine of plural marriage before this time, the doctrine was not generally taught, and in fact, church leaders publicly expressed or took exception to it. Privately committed to the doctrine, the prophet began to take on a few additional wives, and urged his wife Emma to support him in this move. Emma vacillated, at times accepting the doctrine, at others violently

a professorship in Willoughby University, Ohio, and taking with him to Illinois testimonials as to his professional skill. In Illinois he showed a taste for military affairs, and after being elected brigadier general of the Invincible Dragoons, he was appointed quartermaster general of the state in 1840, and held that position at the state capitol when the Mormons applied to the legislature for a charter for Nauvoo. He was a talented man, who achieved prominence wherever he went. He did however, prove to be a greater liability to the Mormons than an asset in spite of his many efforts on their behalf. See Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 4:169. See Kenneth Godfrey, Causes of Mormon Non-Mormon Conflict in Hancock County, Illinois 1839-1844 (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1967), pp. 113-114.


52Ibid., 4:287.
opposing it. Thinking that a formal revelation might clarify the situation, Hyrum, the Prophet's brother, encouraged the prophet to commit the concept of the principle to writing. Shown the revelation, Emma repudiated it, and cast the manuscript into the fire. A month later a copy of the revelation was read to the high council by Hyrum Smith, hoping to win their support. Some accepted the doctrine, while others opposed, and a new movement of dissent began to take shape in Nauvoo.

Internal problems were soon multiplied by outside opposition. Thomas Sharp and the anti-Mormon party at Warsaw and Carthage were outraged when the city council passed a law that allowed for judicial review of any legal process initiated under processes which seemed to the Mormons to be of a doubtful and persecuting nature. The anti-Mormons charged that the Mormons were above the

54 Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 5:500-507.
55 Journal of Discourses by President Brigham Young, His Counselors, and the Twelve Apostles. Reported by D.W. Evans, George F. Gibbs and Others. And Respectfully Dedicated to the Latter-day Saints in all the word [sic]. (Liverpool: Printed and Published by Joseph F. Smith, 42 Islington, London 1877), 26 vols, 17:159 (hereafter cited as Journal of Discourses).
57 Robert Bruce Flanders, Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 97. This charter contained "an unusual feature empowering the municipal court to grant writs of habeas corpus 'in all cases arising under the ordinances of the City Council.'" The court was in the future to
law, that the prophet, serving as mayor of the city since Bennett's excommunication, and as head of the Nauvoo Legion, as well as political boss of the county due to the concentration of the Mormon vote in all county elections, had become a political dictator, a man whose power was too great in a supposedly pluralistic and democratic state. Editing an anti-Mormon newspaper, the Warsaw Signal, Sharp denounced the Mormons at every turn, and precipitated general alarm throughout the state at the growing power of the Mormons.

Moving in the direction of a thoroughly theocratic state, Joseph Smith organized the Council of Fifty, a secret legislative and executive branch of government that was to preside over civil and world government on the eve of the millennium. Dissatisfied with the course of state politics, the Council encouraged Smith to run for President in 1844, and the Mormons organized a national issue such writs to free arrested persons, in particular Joseph Smith, regardless of the jurisdiction under which they were arrested. The City Council of Nauvoo could and did define the jurisdiction of the municipal court in any way it wished; the council was limited only by the provision that such definitions be 'not repugnant to the constitution of the United States or of this State' (Nauvoo Charter Section 8; Springfield Charter Article V, Section 36). . . . The frequent inability of county and state law enforcement officers to arrest accused persons in Nauvoo aroused the opposition of the gentile citizens around the city." Also see Kenneth Godfrey, Causes of Mormon Non-Mormon Conflict in Hancock County, Illinois 1839-1846 (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1967), pp. 43-72, 133-153.

58Klaus J. Hansen, The Political Kingdom of God and The Council of Fifty in Mormon History: Quest for Empire (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), passim.
political campaign which they hoped would give them some influence in the 1844 Presidential election.  

What friends the Mormons had in the Democratic Party in Illinois were alienated by this move. And Mormon involvement in politics to this extent was opposed by the growing number of dissenters who denounced the attempt to bring the Kingdom of God by political means.  

May 1844 the dissenters, who had been holding secret meetings in Nauvoo, published a newspaper called the Nauvoo Expositor which denounced the theocratic trends in Mormonism. The dissenters led by William Law, a counselor in the Church Presidency, declared their opposition to polygamy, to the Council of Fifty and political Mormonism, and to certain new trends in Mormon doctrine, including the idea of a plurality of Gods.

William Marks, the president of the Nauvoo Stake, wrote afterwards that "When the doctrine of polygamy was introduced into the Church as a principle of exaltation, I took a decided stand against it." Marks said he also "was a witness to the introduction (secretly) of a kingly form of government, in which Joseph suffered himself to be ordained a king, to reign over the house of Israel forever, which I could not conceive to be in accordance with

59 Ibid., p. 59.

60 Nauvoo Expositor, vol. 1, no. 1, Nauvoo, Illinois (Friday 7 June 1844), p. 2. (There was only one issue published before the Nauvoo City Council ordered the press destroyed.)

61 Ibid., passim.

62 Ibid., p. 2.

63 Zion's Harbinger and Baneemy's Organ, vol. 3, no. 7 (St. Louis, 7 July 1853), p. 53.
the laws of the church. Yet Marks did not openly join the
dissenters at first, remaining reluctant to break openly with the
prophet. Some of those who made open opposition were, in addition
to William Law, members of the high council like Austin Cowles
and Leonard Soby, Robert Foster and Francis Higbee, and others.
In the Expositor these men said that, "Many of us have sought a
reformation in the Church, without a public exposition of the
enormities of the crimes practiced by its leaders, thinking that
they would harken to counsel . . . but our petitions were treated
with contempt." In their newspaper the dissenters said, "We do not believe
that God ever raised up a prophet to Christianize the world by
political schemes and intrigue." They maintained that they still
believed in the primitive Mormon faith, that they were true to
those portions of Mormonism which they considered to be of divine
origin. They believed that the prophet had fallen from grace, and
had violated the basic tenets of Christianity as they knew it.
Many of these leading rebels became members of the
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, with its
eventual headquarters in Independence, Missouri. Their protest

64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Nauvoo Expositor, pp. 2-3.
67 Ibid., p. 1.
68 Ibid., p. 2.
69 Ibid.
received impetus after they attracted Joseph Smith III, the oldest son of the Mormon prophet, to take the leadership of their movement. The direction Joseph III led the church over which he presided, was a direction which repudiated the militancy and the theocratic tendencies of his father's church. Joseph III attempted to move the Reorganization toward a more acceptable middle ground, where his brand of Mormonism could flourish without openly challenging or threatening mainstream American values.
CHAPTER II

A FAMILY AFFAIR

In the beginning Mormonism had been a family affair. Joseph's dilemma in 1820 which led him to the experience of the first vision, was caused by the religious conflict within his own family. The answer he received he hoped would bring harmony to his troubled family, and with the publication of the Book of Mormon, money to relieve their financial difficulties. Some of the witnesses to his early divine claims were members of his immediate family. Further, from the start, all the male members held high offices in the church after it was formally organized on 6 April 1830. The family from the beginning had expectations that they would have a primary role of leadership in the church. These expectations caused Lucy Smith, mother of the prophet, William, a brother of the prophet, and later Joseph III, the oldest living son of the prophet, each to try to have a decisive influence upon the choice of a successor to Joseph Smith, after his death in 1844.

70 "Interview with Lorenzo Saunders," E.L. Kelley Papers, 12 November 1884, RLDS Library-Archives, Box 1, fd 1884-November and December, p. 5.


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The Smiths were a large family and had suffered much, due to a number of failures in both business and agricultural endeavors. Until about the year 1820, the family remained largely aloof from organized religion although they were believers in Jesus Christ as the son of God. Under the tutelage of Joseph Smith Sr., they studied the scriptures and held family prayer, so that all members would be well instructed in the rudiments of Christianity. A heavy New England heritage steeped in the Puritan ethic of thrift, industry, faith in God, and a belief that America was a land of divine destiny, provided what Allen and Leonard have called "the seeds of teachings that later became part of Mormon doctrine." They indicate that more importantly than the rest, the belief that one day the restoration of the "ancient order of things" as depicted in the New Testament was to take place had a monumental effect upon Joseph Smith and the future of the church.

Joseph Smith Jr.'s family was greatly affected by the revivals and spiritual awakenings which manifested themselves throughout New England and New York. The area of western New York state was so alive with constant revivalism during the first thirty-five years of the 19th century that it has been labeled "the burned-over district." Individuals seemed to be in a constant

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73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
state of agitation and indecision on the subject of religion due to revivalism and sectarian conflict resulting from it. 76

Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the prophet, detailed in her personal history the problems encountered within the family as each member wrestled with the question— which is the true church? The prophet's mother had affiliated with several religious groups, but after constant frustration decided to stand aloof from the existing churches as she felt they could not give her life and salvation. 77

Joseph Sr., father of the prophet, had arrived at a similar conclusion many years before, 78 although earlier he had been a Universalist. When Lucy and some of her children joined the Presbyterians in Palmyra, Joseph Sr. and Jr. would not. It is little wonder with all the sectarian distress within the family that Joseph Smith Jr. was undecided on a personal commitment to any of the churches of the day. Joseph however, experienced in his youth, a time of serious reflection over the course his life was taking,

76 Ibid., p. 142. Also see Milton V. Bachman Jr., "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision," Brigham Young University Studies IX (Spring 1969), pp. 301-320. This article is in response to charges that Joseph Smith's accounts of his first vision being stimulated by the great religious excitement of the day were manufactured by Smith for the sake of a smooth narrative. There can be little question just as Dr. Bachman concludes, that Joseph Smith gave a fairly reliable account of the religious controversies which existed in his youth in the midst of the Burned-Over District at the time he launched his personal quest for religious truth.


78 Ibid., p. 46.
and in this reflective hour he believed himself woefully short of the mark which would qualify him for salvation.

Donna Hill, one of Joseph's latest biographers (1977), points out that Joseph's distress was not at all unusual when considered in the context of his background and times. 79 She says that children of New England Puritanism often were tormented by a conviction of their own wickedness which led them to fear eternal damnation. Like these children, Joseph experienced a period of anxiety and doubt, followed by one of relief and conversion. 80 During this experience Joseph one day went to a grove of trees on his farm to seek his answer as to whether there was a God and if so which of the many denominations was the true church. 81

According to his own account, Joseph was encouraged to take this action by a biblical passage:

I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse which reads:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given.

Never did any passage come with more power to the heart of man than did this at this time to mine. . . . It was on the morning of a beautiful clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hunred and twenty. . . . After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked

79 Donna Hill, Joseph Smith, p. 47.

80 Sandford Fleming, Children and Puritanism, the Place of Children in the Life and Thought of New England Churches 1620-1847 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), as cited in Donna Hill, Joseph Smith, p. 47.

81 Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 1:4-6.
around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and, had such astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me . . . I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name, and said--pointing to the other--

"This is my beloved Son, Hear Him."

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which to join. . . . I was answered that I must join none of them.82

Some years later, in 1827, Smith received another heavenly visitation in which he was told of an ancient record buried in a hill near his home, which it was his calling to translate. Smith published this work in 1830 calling it the Book of Mormon. The main portion of the Book of Mormon recounted the history of refugees from ancient Jerusalem who in 600 B.C. were warned by the Lord to flee from the destruction that was about to fall on a wicked generation of Jews. Lehi, a prophet not mentioned in the Bible, was directed to a new promised land in America, where his people learned by revelation the true gospel of Christ and awaited his coming to earth. A theocratic form of church government was established where the church head was also the head of the civil state. The Book of Mormon revealed the true forms of Christian

82See footnote #22 above, also Doctrine and Covenants, 130:22-23, p. 238.
baptism, the proper name for Christ's church, and prayers to be used in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.  

The Book of Mormon revealed that America was a promised land, and the American Indian part of the House of Israel. Not long after Christ came the people fell into unbelief and apostasy, so that soon their civilization deteriorated and was destroyed. The scripture promised that a new prophet named Joseph would be raised up in America to lead the people back to Christianity.  

While there was much in the Book of Mormon which American Protestants might readily have accepted, they rejected the idea of new revelation, believing that the Bible was sufficient unto itself. Mormon doctrine of a new revelation and a new priesthood, and that only Mormons had authority to administer Christian ordinances, ran counter to prevailing Protestant thinking and contributed to a rising opposition to Mormonism. By the end of 1830 the Mormons suffered violent persecution, and were told in a revelation that they should flee to Ohio.  

Their new gathering place was to be at Kirtland, although certain missionaries had already been sent to the "borders of the Lamanites" in Missouri to search out a permanent gathering place for the whole church. The Mormon sojourn in Kirtland was encouraged by the fact that Sidney Rigdon and some other dissenters from the Campbellites were converted there. Within a short time the size of the church was more than doubled.
One of Smith's first major steps was to establish himself as the sole recipient of revelations for the church. After this, he was quick to call his father and his brothers into leadership positions. His father was ordained "Patriarch and President of the High Priesthood" on 18 December 1833, a member of the First High Council organized 17 February 1834, and Assistant President in the First Presidency on 6 December 1834. Joseph's older brother, Hyrum, also held high offices being called to be a member of the Kirtland High Council 24 September 1834, and on the 3rd of September 1837 to be an assistant counselor to the First Presidency of the church.

When the church moved to Far West, Hyrum was sustained a counselor to the president of the church, replacing Frederick G. Williams who had been excommunicated 7 November 1837. Hyrum was imprisoned with Joseph in the Liberty jail until they finally escaped together in early 1839. In Nauvoo he was named a prophet

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83 Doctrine and Covenants, 43:3-4.
86 Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 2:165.
87 Ibid., 2:185.
88 Ibid., 2:522.
89 Ibid., 3:320-334.
and revelator,\textsuperscript{90} and following the death of his father was called to be Patriarch to the entire church.\textsuperscript{91}

As Joseph's political kingdom developed, so did Hyrum's role in it. He was elected to the city council in Nauvoo's first election of municipal officers.\textsuperscript{92} Shortly thereafter he was elected vice-mayor, in the same election that saw Joseph become mayor of Nauvoo.\textsuperscript{93} When Joseph formed the Council of Fifty in March of 1844, Hyrum was among those chosen.\textsuperscript{94}

Samuel Harrison Smith was a younger brother of the prophet, was the third person baptized "in this last dispensation,"\textsuperscript{95} and an active missionary all his lifetime.\textsuperscript{96} He had suffered the depredations of the Saints in Missouri and was driven out of the state with the rest of the Smith family. Samuel purchased a farm near Nauvoo and pursued his vocation, interrupting his farming in April of 1841 only to serve a mission for the church. The day his brothers were murdered a mob also pursued him. In his escape attempt he suffered injuries which caused his untimely death on

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{90}\textit{Ibid.}, 4:286.  \\
\textsuperscript{91}\textit{Ibid.}, 4:229.  \\
\textsuperscript{92}\textit{Ibid.}, 4:287.  \\
\textsuperscript{93}\textit{Ibid.}, 5:12.  \\
\textsuperscript{94}\textit{Hansen, Quest for Empire}, p. 223.  \\
\textsuperscript{95}\textit{Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith}, p. 337.  \\
\textsuperscript{96}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 338.
\end{flushleft}
30 July 1844, only one month after Joseph and Hyrum had been shot in the Carthage Jail.97

The career of Joseph's younger brother, William, is worthy of a book on his own behalf. He joined the church and was ordained a High Priest in 1833 at age twenty-two.98 He had been a member of Zion's Camp and upon the return to Kirtland, William figured prominently in the power structure of the church. William was ordained one of the Twelve Apostles in Kirtland 15 February 1835 and immediately served a mission to the Eastern States following his ordination.99 William was a large man physically, as were all the Smith brothers, but had a violent temper he could not control.100 Possessing a certain stubbornness, William very often went against the wishes of his prophet-brother which caused a great deal of friction within the family. Because of William's waywardness, he was suspended from the church while in Missouri, and only the interventions of his brothers Joseph and Hyrum prevented his excommunication.101

After settling near Nauvoo where he ran a tavern, William was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives in the winter of 1842-1843.102 He labored with considerable vigor in defending

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97 Ibid., p. 341.
98 Ibid., p. 342.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., pp. 325-343.
101 Ibid., p. 343.
the Nauvoo Charter from the anti-Mormon legislators who would have rescinded it because they felt the Mormons were abusing it.  

Also during this time William had become involved with John C. Bennett during the spiritual wife controversy, however, no formal action was ever taken against him.

After the death of his brothers, William remained in the East where he had been serving a mission. On the 4th of May 1845, William and his family returned to Nauvoo. At a meeting of the Twelve held 5 May 1845 at the home of Brigham Young, William "expressed his satisfaction with the organization of the church." William on 24 May 1845, was ordained Patriarch to the church, an ordination which precipitated conflict between himself and Brigham Young.

William based his claim to preeminence among church leaders on Joseph Smith's statement on 27 May 1843 that "The Patriarchal office is the highest office in the church." As Michael Quinn

103 Ibid.
104 Testimony of Catherine Fuller Warren, before the Nauvoo High Council 25 May 1842. There are five documents with the assignation "Testimony of Catherine Fuller" or "Testimony of Catherine Warren" in this file. The one dated 25 May 1842 names William Smith twice as being involved with John C. Bennett in his numerous seductions which included the Widow Fuller. See "Nauvoo Miscellaneous Papers," LDS Church Archives, Ms/d/2375, Box 8, Folder Nauvoo, n.p.
105 Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 7:405.
106 Ibid., 7:406.
107 Ibid., 7:418.
has pointed out however, what Joseph meant and what he said were two entirely different things.  

Determining what Joseph meant by his description of this office as the highest in the Church is problematical, because the documents and history of the LDS Church from 1833 to 1844 unquestionably refute the concept that the Presiding Patriarch's office was superior in authority either to the President of the Church or to the Quorum of the Twelve. The Presiding Patriarch directed the administration of prophetic blessings in the Church, and presided over regional patriarchs who performed that task. Patriarchs Joseph Smith Sr., and Hyrum Smith had acted as subordinates to Joseph Smith Jr.

When William was ordained to that office on 24 May 1845, he said that as the successor to Patriarch Hyrum Smith, he had a right to preside over the whole church, as Hyrum would have done had he lived. Yet William's claim to the succession rights seems to have been an afterthought since William had written to Brigham Young nearly a year before that he acknowledged the rights of the Twelve:

will the Brethren remember me & my claims in the Smith family I do not mean as to a Succession as a prophet in Joseph, place for no man on Earth cal feill his place he is our prophet sear revealer Priest & King in time and Eternity & hence the 12 come next to him on Earth or in heaven consequently they must act in Joseph place on Earth as presiding officers & govern the Church in all things temporally & spiritually.

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109 Ibid., p. 203.
111 Ibid.
When William made his claim as rightful President of the church he was supported by his mother, Lucy Smith, who related three visions which she experienced confirming it.113

Because of his continuing criticism of the Twelve, and the advancement of his other claims, he was finally suspended from the office of patriarch on 6 October 1845, and was excommunicated 19 October 1845 after he had published a pamphlet designed to discredit the Twelve and undermining the authority of Brigham Young.114

Following his excommunication William negotiated with Emma Smith to advance the claims of Joseph III, provided he himself could be named the church guardian.115 Emma agreed to this after her attempts to support the claims of Sidney Rigdon and William Marks failed to gain wide acceptance.116 Later, Emma had second

113 Ibid., p. 203.
114 Ibid., p. 204.
115 William Smith to Emma Smith, 21 November 1845, William Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives.
116 Sidney Rigdon was the sole surviving member of the First President since Joseph was dead and William Law had been excommunicated. Emma at first supported Rigdon's claim that he should be President of the church by virtue of his position. He claimed that he had received a vision which instructed him to be "guardian" of the church for the purpose of "building up the church to Joseph." It seems here that Rigdon was being less than honest with his listeners for upon his return to Pittsburgh in 1845, Rigdon published this comment about Joseph and his involvement with plural marriage: "If Joseph sinned which he did, the Lord has cut him off from his stewardship... he contracted a whoring spirit and that the Lord smote him for this thing..." Messenger and Advocate, I (Pittsburgh, January 1845), p. 75.
William Marks, who as president of the High Council, had at first accepted plural marriage [in spite of his later denials] renounced the doctrine some time between 12 August 1843 and 1 January
thoughts about the reliability of William Smith and finally withdrew her support from him. 117

Shortly after Emma withdrew her support, William contacted the Strang group which was located in Wisconsin. 118 He soon became a leader in that faction, but in 1847 was excommunicated for adultery. 119 After this he formed his own church in northern 1844. Having come down firmly on the negative side of the issue, Marks became very close to Emma Smith who was experiencing great difficulty in accepting the doctrine and her husband's other wives. After the death of Smith, Emma and William Marks decided together to write Sidney Rigdon in Pittsburgh and urge him to come to Nauvoo immediately. Several letters were written [Messenger and Advocate I (15 February 1845), p. 114] and Rigdon came to Nauvoo. Marks met Rigdon on the dock and told him that God had revealed to him [Marks] that he [Rigdon] was to lead the church. Marks knew that Rigdon, like himself, considered that Smith had been a fallen prophet and that's why "God had removed him." There can be little question that Rigdon's claims did have the support of Emma Smith, for she feared the Twelve Apostles and Brigham Young, as they would surely continue the plurality of wives, and other doctrines she could not reconcile in her own religious experience.

Rigdon's bid for power was firmly rejected by the church on 8 August 1844. On 7 April 1845, Brigham Young was unanimously voted upon and sustained as President of the church. Emma was not to endorse William Marks as the proper successor to her husband. See Journal of James M. Monroe, 24 April 1845, Yale University. Marks was at this time living in Fulton City, Illinois. Emma cited the 1835 revelation to argue that Marks as president of the stake and the High Council should have succeeded her husband as the rightful leader of the church.

117 William Smith to Emma Smith, 21 November 1845, LDS Church Archives.


Illinois, complete with plural marriage, but this too failed. William was far too open in his practice of plural wives, which was seen as little more than a coverup for promiscuity. These problems coupled with his heavy drinking led to the demise of his group.

Despite his protests against the Twelve and Brigham Young in particular, William wrote two letters to Apostle Ordon Hyde in June 1847 in which he pled to be rebaptized and restored to his former calling as an apostle. Several years later he tried again to be reinstated, writing directly to Brigham Young and asking to be reordained an apostle and to have the Smith family be given the honor and status he believed they deserved. Like the other requests, these remained unanswered, which prompted William to write Brigham in 1856 telling him he could go to hell. Four years later in 1860, William, a man of contradictions and surprises,

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121 Joseph Smith III to Mr. Joseph Davis, 13 October 1899, LDS Church Archives.

122 "Interview with Lorenzo Saunders," p. 13. Saunders claimed that all the Smiths used alcoholic beverages.

123 William Smith to Orson Hyde, 2 June 1847. Also 22 June 1847, William Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives.


was baptized into the Utah church by J.J. Butler,\textsuperscript{126} in hopes of regaining his former apostolic office and prestige.

Since William soon learned that Brigham was not willing to restore him to any high position of power or authority, he decided to write to Joseph Smith III to see what his nephew might offer him.\textsuperscript{127} In a series of letters over a number of years, Joseph III replied that he, not William, was the leader of the church and would make all necessary appointments, however, he would consider his uncle's merits.\textsuperscript{128} After an extended meeting in Plano, Illinois on 8 April 1878, they reached a compromise satisfactory to both parties.\textsuperscript{129} William was received upon his original baptism on 9 April 1878 and was acknowledged as a high priest the following

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{126}Ibid., and William Smith to Orson Hyde, June 2, 1847 and June 22, 1847.
  \item \textsuperscript{127}Ibid., pp. 205-206. Joseph III, in the year 1856, was visited by two missionaries from the Reorganized Church. These two gentlemen, E.C. Briggs and Samuel H. Gurley, came to present the leadership of the Reorganized Church to Joseph III. Among several items presented, were several documents concerning William Smith's activities in his short-lived church organizations and his experiments with plurality of wives. It caused William great distress when he learned that Joseph III would not relinquish these items upon request, and caused William for several years to remain apart from the Reorganization. See Joseph III, Memoirs, p. 280.
  \item \textsuperscript{128}Joseph III to William Smith, 1 October 1876, Joseph Smith III Letterbook VII, p. 305. Joseph III to William Smith, 12 January 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook I, pp. 275-279. Both letterbooks are located in the RLDS Library-Archives. There are at present no letterbooks of Joseph III before the year 1876. When asked about the possible location of any earlier letterbooks and other earlier correspondence of Joseph III, Grant McMurray of the RLDS History Commission stated that in all probability these earlier items were destroyed in the Herald House fire which occurred in Lamoni, Iowa on 5 January 1907.
  \item \textsuperscript{129}Joseph III, Memoirs, pp. 278-282.
\end{itemize}
day, the only calling or office he was ever to receive from the Reorganization. William remained associated with this church until his death in 1894.131

Joseph's youngest brother, Don Carlos, was ordained to the priesthood when he was only fourteen years of age.132 He was a printer by trade, having received his training from Oliver Cowdery while in Kirtland, Ohio in the year 1833.133 On 15 January 1836, Don Carlos was ordained President of the High Priests Quorum, at the tender age of nineteen.134 In Kirtland he was in charge of the press which published the Elder's Journal.135 While his brothers were in jail in Liberty, Missouri, Don Carlos visited them several times and took charge of his father's family when they made the exodus from Missouri to Illinois.136 After his arrival in Nauvoo, he took over the editorial duties of the Times and Seasons and edited thirty-one numbers.137 Don Carlos was a lieutenant-colonel in the Hancock County militia, a brigadier general in the


131 Ibid., 5:225.

132 Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 4:393.

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid., 4:398.

137 Ibid., 4:399.
Nauvoo Legion, and was also elected to the City Council of Nauvoo.138 Don Carlos died prematurely at age twenty-five on 7 August 1841, leaving a wife and three daughters. His untimely death eliminated him from any subsequent role in the succession controversy.139

With but one of her sons still living in 1844 at the time of the succession crisis, and that one of questionable leadership ability, Lucy Smith, the prophet's mother, seems initially to have lent her support to the Twelve Apostles as heir to the prophet's mantle. At a meeting held at Bishop Hale's home 23 January 1845, Lucy spoke to a small gathering of Church leaders about the trials of her family and "exorted the brethren and sisters to bring up their children in the way they should go."140

Six months later, however, when the church held a day of fasting and prayer in remembrance of the martyrdom,141 Lucy said she had three visions which supported the succession claims of William.142 One of her visions said:

Thy son William, president over all the Church. They cannot take his apostleship away from him. The Presidency of the church belongs to William, he being the

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138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid., 7:375.
141 Ibid., 7:432.
last of the heads of the Church, according to the
lineage. The burden of the Church rests upon William."143

The next day Brigham Young sent William's uncle, John Smith and
his cousin George Albert Smith to investigate these visions, and
to report on William's "bitter spirit."144 His uncle reasoned
with him, explaining the position of the Twelve and the error of
William's claims from their viewpoint. While they had little
success with William, they experienced some success with Mother
Smith.145 Two days afterward Brigham Young, accompanied by
Bishops Miller and Whitney, visited Mother Smith, who expressed
her satisfaction with the Twelve and their efforts.146

On 3 August 1845 the church trustees purchased two lots in
Nauvoo from Emma Smith for $550 and immediately took Mother Smith
out in a new carriage purchased for her use, so she might choose
which lot she would prefer.147 Having done so, the Trustees
deeded her the lot, and gave her to understand that she was to
enjoy the use of the carriage until her death.148

Two days after William was dropped as Patriarch of the
church and as a member of the Twelve Apostles, 8 October 1845,
Mother Smith was in attendance at the semi-annual conference of

143 McGavin, p. 199.
144 Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 7:433.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid., 7:434.
148 Ibid.
the church and asked to address the congregation. At this time she seemed to be in harmony with Brigham Young and the Twelve.

I feel as though God was vexing this nation a little, here and there, and I feel that the Lord will let Brother Brigham take the people away. Here, in this city, lay my dead; my husband and children; and if so be the rest of my children go with you (and I would to God they all may go), they will not go without me; and if I go, I want my bones brought back in case I die away, and deposited with my husband and children.

At this time Lucy Mack Smith received an offer from the Twelve for the copyright of her History which she had compiled with her amaneunsis Martha Jane Coray. The Twelve made further efforts to take care of the old lady who was aware of their concern for she wrote a letter to Bishop Whitney on 12 November 1845 which reveals both her attitude and the attitude of the brethren. Her letter and an acknowledgement read as follows:

Beloved Brother:

You have had the kindness to urge me to make known my wants more than once; as you wished me to have all that I needed as to temporal comforts. Now for this I do esteem you a most dutiful and affectionate son and with this feeling I apply to you in perfect confidence at this time that you may, if you can conveniently do so, furnish me with about three dollars or in the neighborhood of that sum as I am in need of this timely help.

Affectionately,
Lucy Smith
Mother in Israel

Sent $5 by J.C. Kingsbury the evening I received this order.

149 Ibid., 7:470.
150 Ibid., 7:471.
151 Ibid., 7:519.
152 McGavin, p. 201-203.
It is obvious the church was at least taking care of her minor wants and needs. 153

Lucy remained active in the church as evidenced by her attendance at the temple for her endowments on 10 December 1845 along with the other Smith widows 154—that is except for Emma, who by this time had totally withdrawn along with her children. Lucy even went through a temple session with Mercy R. Thompson, a plural wife of Hyrum Smith, 155 though she might not have realized the relationship of Mercy to Hyrum at the time.

In the spring of 1846, Lucy Smith was given by the trustees of the church the house and lot of Joseph B. Noble who had only lived there a short while before the exodus westward. 156 The property was valued at $1200 and she took possession of it immediately. 157 She was at that time allowing her son William to live with her which caused some discontent among the Twelve who were giving Lucy $200 per year for her support. 158 It seemed to Orson Hyde, agent for the Twelve, that William Smith was simply taking advantage of a good thing. 159

153 Ibid.
154 Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 7:542-543.
155 Ibid.
156 McGavin, p. 204.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
After William, her son, was excommunicated, Lucy seems to have had second thoughts about going west, and did not go with the main body of the Mormons in 1846. After the exodus, Brigham Young wrote Lucy expressing his concern for her well being and offered her the opportunity to come west, but to no avail. 160

Another of the "Smiths" to have some say in the matter of church leadership was Emma Smith, the wife of the prophet. Emma was among the dissenters from the day Brigham Young returned to Nauvoo in the fall of 1844 following her husband's murder. Emma may have feared that if Brigham was successfully sustained as president of the church, she would from that point on serve a minor role in church affairs since she would no longer be the wife of the prophet.

Immediately following the death of her husband, Emma and William Marks, president of the Nauvoo Stake and the Nauvoo High Council, became very close. Marks had fallen out of favor with the prophet when he [Marks] had rejected the principle of plural marriage sometime between 12 August 1843 and the end of that year. Their common dislike for plural marriage prompted Marks to write Sidney Rigdon in Pittsburgh immediately after the death of the prophet, urging him to come to Nauvoo to claim the leadership of the church before Brigham Young did so. Marks feared the continuance of plural marriage and other principles and doctrines

160 Brigham Young to Lucy Mack Smith, 4 April 1847, "Journal History," 4 April 1847.
neither Emma, Marks nor Rigdon could accept. It seems likely, considering Mark's very close relationship with Emma, that Emma gave some support to the plan of bringing Rigdon to Nauvoo in an attempt to thwart the ascension of Brigham Young and the Twelve to the position of leaders of the church.

Rigdon, on the day of his arrival in Nauvoo 3 August 1844 accompanied by William Marks, had been actively engaged in enlisting support for his cause. Rigdon had promised Marks that he would be made "head patriarch over the whole church." Available documents do not reveal Emma's specific role in Rigdon's quest for power, but shortly after the failure of Rigdon's quest Emma switched her allegiance briefly to William Smith and then to Marks himself before she completely withdrew from the church. Marks moved to Fulton City, Illinois in 1846, and Emma took her family and went with him for a time until her return to Nauvoo in February 1847.

When Marks became a follower of James J. Strang in 1846 and a powerful leader in that organization, Emma did not make a similar move because she had by that time resigned herself to the fact that her position as "Elect Lady" seemed to be forever gone, and she resolved from that time on to remain aloof from all factions of Mormonism.

161 Messenger and Advocate I (Pittsburgh, 15 February 1847), p. 114.


After Emma returned to Nauvoo she was thoroughly disenchanted with Mormonism and entertained grave doubts that her children would ever receive the proper status within the Mormon Church she felt they deserved.\(^{164}\) By late 1846 she refused to let her son Joseph III have anything to do with "Mormonism."\(^{165}\) Her dissatisfaction and disillusionment reached its peak when she married Lewis Crum Bidamon in a Methodist ceremony on 27 December 1847,\(^{166}\) and in January 1848 applied for membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church.\(^{167}\)

As pointed out by Robert Flanders in his master's thesis, Emma did not teach her children Mormon doctrine:

> While it seems evident that Emma taught her children Christian principles and virtues, she never talked much to them of the old church and its affairs. There is no indication that she prejudiced them in any way, although


\(^{166}\) Joseph III, Memoirs, p. 95.

\(^{167}\) Quinn, "The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844," p. 230. In the autumn of 1849 Dr. John M. Bernhisel visited Nauvoo and in a letter to the Twelve in Utah he commented on the rumor that Emma had joined the Methodist Church, saying emphatically, "She has not united with the Methodist Church." See "Journal History," 10 September 1849.
she did maintain in them respect for their father. The ignorance later shown by Joseph and Alexander about church history evidenced that their mother had been for the most part silent on the subject.\textsuperscript{168}

She had fallen in love with Major Bidamon, and his general disregard for religion may have influenced her to some degree.

Although Emma, as the wife of their prophet-father, had an intimate knowledge of Mormonism's most controversial points with regard to the political kingdom, plural marriage, temple ordinances and many other aspects, she chose to keep to herself rather than impart that knowledge to her children. Thus when Joseph III finally assumed leadership of one of the factions of Mormonism, he confessed his lack of understanding of much of Mormon doctrine due to his mother's decided stand against it.\textsuperscript{169}

Meanwhile, although the members of the Smith family listed above all had prominent roles to play in the early Mormon church, none could make undeniable claim to the mantle of the prophet. Yet there was a strong feeling within the Smith family, and especially with Lucy Mack Smith and perhaps Emma, that lineage ought to have its due in the selection of the church leader. Seeing possibly a last chance for the continuance of the royal family disintegrating with the erratic behavior of her son William, Lucy Smith remembered in the summer of 1845, a blessing her husband


had given Joseph III while they yet resided in Kirtland. Lucy dictated the blessing to her amanuensis, Martha Jane Coray as follows:

I lay my hands upon your head to bless you. Your name is after the name of your father you are Joseph the third you shall live long upon the Earth and after you are grown up you shall wisdom knowledge and understanding and shall search into the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Your heart shall be open to all men. And your hand shall be open to relieve the wants of the poor. You shall be admired by all who shall behold you. You shall be an honor to your Father and Mother. And a comfort to your Mother. You shall be a help to your brothers and you shall have power to carry out all that your Father shall leave undone when you become of age. And you shall have power to wield the Sword of Laban. 170

Joseph III was too young in 1845 to reap the benefits of his grandmother's recollection. But in time the claims of the royal family would rest upon his shoulders, and others would lend their support to the idea of lineal dissent in the Presidency of the church.

170 "Blessing of Joseph Smith III by Joseph Smith Sr.," as remembered by Lucy Smith, summer of 1845, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.
CHAPTER III

JOSEPH SMITH III's EARLY LIFE

Joseph Smith III was born in the northwest corner of the second story of the Newell K. Whitney store in Kirtland, Ohio on 6 November 1832. He was the first child of Joseph and Emma to survive to adulthood along with three brothers and an adopted sister. Very little is known about the childhood of this man who became the prophet-leader of the Reorganized Church for over fifty-four years, for the details of his early life are sketchy. Joseph III loved his father, but understood very little about him or his teachings. As a result, the children learned their knowledge of Mormonism from its canonized scriptures, and were deprived of any knowledge of more esoteric principles. Joseph III, after his acceptance of the presidency of the Reorganized Church, sought to uphold the good name of his father, and to give the term Mormonism respectability by molding his brand of the movement to mainstream American values. This became his \textit{raison d'etre}.

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As a young boy of only six years, Joseph III saw his father taken from the family and placed under arrest by the Missouri state militia, to be shot by a firing squad the next day. 173 After that harrowing experience, and the imprisonment of his father in the Liberty jail for several months, Joseph III was allowed to visit his father twice in the jail. It was on one of these visits that according to some, Joseph was blessed by his father to be his successor. 174 Meanwhile, the Mormons made their exodus from Missouri to Illinois. The Smith family left with them in February 1839 in the company of Stephen Markam. 175 Emma and the children found shelter in the home of Judge Cleveland of Quincy, Illinois, as they waited hopefully for the return of Joseph. 176

The prophet escaped from his captors in April, and on the 22nd was reunited with his family. 177 Shortly after his reunion, the family moved to Commerce, Illinois, and purchased the home of Hugh White. 178 Commerce, renamed Nauvoo, was to be the next gathering place of the Saints. 179 Joseph III vividly remembered

174 Lyman Wight Letterbook, July 1855, RLDS Library-Archives, pp. 21-26.
176 Ibid., p. 44.
177 Ibid., p. 45.
the hardships of those first few years in Nauvoo as "swamp fever" struck down several of the saints. 180

As the community grew, Joseph III became involved in the boys corps, an appendage of the Nauvoo Legion. 181 The spirit of militarism flourished in Nauvoo as the prophet sought to solidify his political kingdom and guarantee its survival. 182 Young Joseph thought that a military spirit was wrong for the church as it "took possession of the people." 183 Other than this, Joseph III seemed to pursue the normal course of most boys his age. Along with his brothers and other Mormon children, Joseph received private tutorship from several Mormon educators. He seemed to have a great many friends with whom he shared a rich sense of humor.

One of the most significant aspects of Joseph III's early life was his association with and increasing dislike for Brigham Young. As a precaution against harm to the families of general authorities in Nauvoo, Brigham Young ordered guards to watch the residences of the Smith family. 184 These guards would not allow any strangers to enter the household without being carefully scrutinized. The Smith family viewed this as oppressive, part of Brigham Young's attempt by surveillance to prevent any anti-Mormon activity being initiated.

180Journal of History III, April 1910, p. 133.
181Donna Hill, Joseph Smith, p. 284.
183Journal of History III, April 1910, p. 133.
184Ibid., p. 338. Also Joseph III, Memoirs, p. 87.
In 1846, as the anti-Mormon mobs became more violent in their efforts to oust the Mormons from Nauvoo, and Emma Smith became increasingly alienated from Brigham Young, she took her family and followed William Marks to Fulton City, Illinois where Emma's relatives lived.\textsuperscript{185} While away she leased the Mansion House to a Mr. Van Tuyl, one of the new citizens of Nauvoo, and unknown to Emma, an anti-Mormon spy. Upon the exodus of the main body of Mormons, Emma returned to Nauvoo, only to be cheated by Van Tuyl out of rents due her.\textsuperscript{186}

By this time Emma had decided to divorce herself completely from all association with any of the Mormon splinter groups. Her decision to do so seems to have been determined by her inability to assume a significant role in church leadership, and by her desire to stay in Illinois and gain acceptance among her non-Mormon neighbors. Following the death of Joseph Smith, Emma had obtained an appointment as administratrix of his estate.\textsuperscript{187} The prophet was considerably in debt when he died, and to complicate matters, it was extremely difficult to separate his personal property from the property of the church over which he had presided as trustee-in-trust.\textsuperscript{188} The legal complications which ensued prevented Emma from obtaining clear title to many thousands of dollars worth of

\textsuperscript{185}Baily, "Emma Hale," p. 146.

\textsuperscript{186}Joseph III, Memoirs, pp. 91-93.


\textsuperscript{188}Ibid., pp. 735-782.
property. This major financial setback, along with the burden of raising five orphans and supplying them with their needs, made these years ones of hardship for Emma. During this time Emma was courted by two gentlemen, James Mulholland and Major Lewis Crum Bidamon, who wished to marry her. The major, a diest who often stated, "I believe in one God who has neither partners nor clerks," was a widower who had buried his wife and only son in Canton, Illinois, and had come to Nauvoo to make his fortune buying land and homes from the exiled Mormons. After a brief courtship, Emma married Major Bidamon on 27 December 1847.

Joseph was fifteen at the time of his mother's second marriage and stated that the coming of Major Bidamon to the family circle necessitated changes for all concerned.

He was a man of strong likes and dislikes, passionate, easily moved to anger, but withal ordinarily affable in manner, decidedly hospitable, and generous in disposition. He made friends easily, but, unfortunately for him, lost them quite as easily. His love for intoxicating liquors and his lack of religious convictions were the two most serious drawbacks to the happiness of our home, and tended to color materially the afterevents of our lives.

Not long after their marriage, the major convinced Emma to invest $1000 of her money to reopen the Brick Store which had once

189 Joseph III, Memoirs, p. 93.
190 Ibid., p. 94.
191 Ibid., p. 93.
192 Ibid., p. 95.
193 Ibid., p. 96.
belonged to the prophet. Lacking the charisma of the prophet, and the Mormon clientele which had supported the business located in the river bottoms, the enterprise failed, despite the fact that young Joseph worked some of the time at the store trying to revive his father's business. As Joseph reached adulthood, he and his brother Frederick turned to farming but failed to make it pay.

Religiously young Joseph embraced spiritualism for a time, a movement which had attracted some Mormons before this. During this same period, a splinter group located in Wisconsin contacted him as a possible successor to his father. This group which called themselves "The New Organization," had at first followed James J. Strang and William Smith, but left them in opposition to Strang's and Smith's experimenting with plural marriage.

One of the leaders of "The New Organization" was Jason W. Briggs who had up to the time of his first revelation, November 1851, been an apostle in William Smith's church. Briggs's revelation

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194 Ibid., p. 97.  
195 Ibid., p. 97-98.  
196 Joseph III to Mary B. Smith, 4 December 1876, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, RLDS Library-Archives, p. 39.  
198 History of the Reorganized Church, 3:200.
affirmed that the "law of lineage, by which the holy priesthood is transmitted, in all generations . . . was a true and correct principle that should be incorporated into their organization." 199 The revelation continued, "in mine own due time I will call upon the seed of Joseph, and he shall be one mighty and strong, and he shall preside over the high priesthood of my church," thus leaving it open for Joseph III to accept the leadership. 200

The organization numbered about thirty members at this time; these men claimed that they were not actually starting a new church, but were only "acting as members and officers of the original church, regulating and setting in order the church according to the law as they understood it." 201 However, they acknowledged that they were "unacquainted with the order of the priesthood" and were only hopeful that they were doing the right thing. 202

These dissenters felt that many of Joseph Smith's esoteric doctrines should be rejected by the church. Plural marriage, the Council of Fifty and temple endowments were among those items rejected by these dissenters as speculative. The leaders considered Smith to have been a fallen prophet whose ventures into militarism, politics, and especially plural marriage, had "worked a rejection upon the church" by the Lord. To restore the church to

199 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
201 Ibid., 3:211.
202 Ibid., 3:207.
its proper position as the true Church of Christ, it was necessary to "reorganize the quorums" in order to allow the church to function with heavenly authority. Nonetheless, they received as full members those who had been baptized or ordained before the death of the prophet, with few exceptions.

In 1853 William Walker, an elder in the Utah church, visited Joseph III concerning his future role in that organization. Joseph was well enough aware of the more controversial aspects of the Mormon doctrine, especially plural marriage, as he was in constant correspondence with several of his Utah relatives who had followed Brigham Young to the Great Basin. But he made no final decision with regard to the Utah Mormons until this time when he received a revelation which informed him to reject the Utah church as sinful. From this time on he determined to oppose the spread of plural marriage, and therefore rejected Walker's offer from the Utah church.

By 1855 Joseph, who had been unsuccessful in his pursuit of an agricultural vocation as well as that of a businessman,


206 Ibid., Also Joseph III to John Smith, 28 December 1876, Joseph Smith III Letterbook 1a, RLDS Library-Archives, pp. 11-17.
determined to pursue a course of study in the field of law. On 15 June Joseph wrote his mother from Canton where he was staying with Major Bidamon's brother. "I am studying hard as I can, and will try hard to acquire the mysteries of the Law." While a resident of Canton, Joseph served the city as deputy postmaster and clerk of the city council. His period of study was of short duration by today's standards; less than six months. There is reason to believe that his mother strongly discouraged his pursuit of law as a vocation, which may have caused him to return to Nauvoo in late 1855 with his training incomplete. Joseph respected his mother and felt a fierce loyalty to her. Throughout his life his mother was to exert this extraordinary influence in Joseph's major decision making.

In the meantime, the embryonic Reorganization movement by means of new revelations through Jason Briggs and Henry H. Deam continued to develop. Revelations given through Deam gave them the necessary authority to choose seven members of the Quorum of Twelve, twenty members of the Seventies, and a high council along

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207 Joseph III to Emma Bidamon, Emma Smith Bidamon Papers, 15 June 1855, RLDS Library-Archives.


209 Emma Bidamon to Joseph III, 11 October 1866, Emma Smith Bidamon Papers, RLDS Library-Archives. "I know very well if your Father had been a little acquainted with the laws of the country he might have avoided a great deal of trouble and yet I have a horror of one of my children being entirely dependent upon being a lawyer for a living."

with several other officers. A president pro-tempore of the church was to serve until Joseph III realized his responsibilities and came forward to claim the position.

By late 1855 Joseph III had begun to question the merits of spiritualism which he had previously considered of divine origin. He wrote to Emma Knight, a young lady whom he was courting, "I feel it is not a part of the divine plan to allow such spirits to communicate with mortals and I can scarcely see how we can have real tangible intercourse with departed spirits." Joseph was concerned about his friend's faith in such doctrine, but after raising the question of the validity of spiritualism he reassured her, "I have said this much not with any intention of endeavoring to weaken your belief in regard to the matter." That next spring Joseph moved back to Nauvoo to live in his mother's home. Here he met an Emma Griswold whom he promptly decided to marry. Later that spring he proposed to her letting her know that it was possible he might yet assume a role of leadership in the Reorganized Church. He wrote to her:

211 For a biography of Henry Harrison Deam, see Journal of History XVIII (Independence, Missouri, July 1924), pp. 331-345.


213 Joseph III to Emma Knight, 4 December 1855, Joseph Smith III Papers, RLDS Library-Archives, p. 2. Joseph III to Emma Knight, 4 May 1856, Joseph Smith III Papers, RLDS Library-Archives, p. 1.


215 Ibid.

216 Joseph III to John Henry Smith, 20 January 1886, George Albert Smith Collection, University of Utah Library, Special Collections-Manuscripts, pp. 1-25.
Should I ever feel it to be my duty to join the Mormon Church; or should I be called of God, as we conceded was possible, I was to be at full liberty to do so, she to abide with me."  

He further reassured her that if he did unite with the movement he would have nothing to do with "plural marriage as I regarded the doctrine as utterly false and repulsive." She accepted his proposal after a time, and they were married on 22 October 1856 despite some opposition from her mother.

It was about this time, 1 November 1856, that Joseph received a visit from two of his Utah Mormon relatives, who were on a mission for the church. One cousin, George A. Smith, as a "Delegate from Utah to ask for the admission of this Territory [Utah] into the Union as a state," the other his father's brother-in-law, Erastus Snow who came to visit with Emma Bidamon and her children. The topics of discussion were for the most part general in nature, except for some pointed questions by Snow to Joseph about the Book of Mormon and the divine mission of his father.

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217 Ibid., p. 4.
219 Ibid., pp. 108-110.
221 George A. Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 17 July 1872, LDS Church Archives.
222 Ibid.
223 Ibid.
The meeting was cordial, and these men stayed at the Mansion House and visited other Nauvoo sites. However, both Utah visitors concluded that Joseph at that time did not believe in the divine mission of his father, nor in the Book of Mormon.\textsuperscript{224} The relationship between George A. and Joseph would remain friendly throughout their lifetimes, but would at times be strained by disagreement regarding the involvement of the Prophet in controversial Mormon doctrine and practice.

Meanwhile Joseph and his new bride resided for a time at a farm just outside Nauvoo where he and his brother Frederick had earlier worked.\textsuperscript{225} While at this location, two Elders from the Reorganized Church paid them a visit.\textsuperscript{226} Edmund C. Briggs and Samuel H. Gurley came to convince Joseph that he must come forward to take his place at the head of the Reorganization. They delivered to him a message from the Reorganization which read in part:

> Our faith is not unknown to you, neither our hope in the regathering of the pure in heart enthralled in darkness, together with the means, to the accomplishment of the same, viz: that the seed of him, to whom the work was first committed should stand forth and bear the responsibility (as well as wear the crown) of a wise master builder--to close up the breach, and to combine in one a host, who, though in captivity and sorely tired, still refuse to strengthen the hands of usurpers. As that seed, to whom pertains this right, and Heaven appointed duty, you can not be unmindful nor indifferent. . . . And the Holy Spirit that searcheth the deep things of God, hath signified to us that the time has come. For through fasting and prayer, hath the answer from God come; unto us saying, Communicate with my servant Joseph Smith, son of Joseph the Prophet. Arise, call

\textsuperscript{224}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{225}Joseph III, Memoirs, p. 110.

\textsuperscript{226}Ibid.
upon God and be strong, for a deliverer art thou to the Latter Day Saints. . . . For this have our prayers been offered up without ceasing for the last five years. We are assured that the same Spirit that has testified to us, has signified the same things to you. 227

Joseph listened to their pleas but told them he could not accept their message as they had hoped. 228 Edmund C. Briggs became vehement in his insistence that Joseph heed the message, telling him that if he did not accept it would be at his own peril. 229 Joseph reacted strongly and "almost turned these messengers out of doors" but the calmer efforts of Samuel Gurley and Joseph's wife helped bring about a reconciliation and they remained for the night, with the understanding that after they met Emma Bidamon and the Major in the morning, Joseph would give them a final answer. 230

The next day Joseph gave them his answer, which he recalled as follows:

What they came to bring might be the word of the Lord; I could not say that it was not. I had, however, no testimony that it was. That I was prepared to do what God required of me, if he would make it known to me what it was. That I believed that he could reveal himself if he would. That I believed my father was called of God to do a work: and that I was satisfied that that work was true, whether I ever had anything to do with it or not. That I did not then know whether I should even be called to take any part in that work; but that if I were, I was ready, and that it would


228 Ibid., p. 767.

229 Ibid.

230 Ibid., pp. 767-768.
have to be made clear to me in person, as well as to others what that work was; that I could not move upon the evidence given to others only. That they might be assured that I should not go to Salt Lake to affiliate with them there. And finally that if it should be made clear to me that it was my duty to cast the fortunes of my life and my labor with the work and the people that they were representing, I should without hesitation do it, but that I could not then do so.  

Briggs and Gurley were satisfied with his sincerity and Gurley decided to return to Wisconsin with the news, while Briggs opted to remain in Nauvoo, hiring himself out to Joseph on the farm, where he worked for Joseph for about one year.

The farm failed after disastrous crop failures in 1856 and 1857. Frederick Smith married in 1856 and replaced Joseph as the resident of the farm, after which Joseph, Emma, and their daughter Emma Josepha moved into the Mansion House during the winter of 1857-1858. On 12 December 1857, Joseph received a visit from another Salt Lake Mormon, Horace S. Eldredge who related in his journal that Joseph "seemed friendly but quite reserved." Having already decided that he would not unite with the Utah church, Joseph was perhaps wary of Eldredge's motives for the visit.

In the spring of 1858 Joseph moved from his mother's home to the old homestead and in that same spring was chosen one of the

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231 Ibid., p. 768.

232 Ibid., pp. 768-769.

233 Ibid., p. 769.

234 Joseph III, Memoirs, p. 111.

235 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 769.
justices of the peace for Nauvoo township, thereby being able to benefit from his limited legal training. 236 Financially, however, Joseph was barely able to survive. He had to hire out as a laborer to supplement his income as justice of the peace. 237

In January a new little daughter put further strains upon Joseph's limited budget. 238 Joseph felt considerable concern for his future, both financially and otherwise, and was unsure of his life's calling. He was constantly haunted by recollections of his father's mission and the role that he should assume within that movement. 239 Joseph engaged in considerable soul-searching and prayer in an effort to determine what he should do. 240

As his economic future continued to hold little if any promise, Joseph became more inclined to feel that perhaps his life's calling did indeed lie with the church and not in any other field. It was during the fall of 1859 that the first of many heart rendering tragedies occurred. The illness and death of his second daughter, Eva, on 30 September 1859 left him disconsolate. 241 He wrote in his journal on September 30:


237 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 769.

238 Joseph III, Memoirs, p. 113.

239 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 772.


241 Ibid., 30 September 1859, n.p.
At home, all day
evening little Eva dying
Oh, how sorrowful
9 o'clock Eva dead. 242

This sad event, coupled with growing economic insecurity moved
Joseph to more careful consideration of the Reorganization's
offer. 243 By Christmas 1859 he met the apostles of the
Reorganization, and then determined to write their leaders.

Mr. William Marks, Sir: I am soon going to take my father's
place at the head of the Mormon Church, and I wish that you,
and some others, those you may consider the most trust-
worthy, the nearest to you, to come and see me; that is,
if you can and will. I am somewhat undecided as to the
best course for me to pursue, and if your views are, upon
a comparison, in unison with mine, and we can agree as to
the best course, I would be pleased to have your cooperation.
I would rather you would come previous to your conference
in April at Amboy. I do not wish to attend the conference,
but would like to know if they, as a body would endorse my
opinions. You will say nothing of this to any but those
who may wish to accompany you here. 244

In reply William Marks, Israel Rogers and W.W. Blair came
to Nauvoo to meet with Joseph III in person and discuss the situ-
tation. 245 Marks then told Joseph:

We have had enough of man-made prophets, and we don't
want any more of that sort. If God has called you, we
want to know it. If he has, the Church is ready to sustain
you; if not, we want nothing to do with you. 246

After a pleasant exchange between all the parties involved, it

242 Ibid.
243 Ibid., 3 November 1859, n.p.
244 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 773.
245 W.W. Blair Journal #2, 19 March 1860, RLDS Library-
Archives, n.p.
246 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 774.
was discovered that there was "little or no difference of sentiment." It was then determined that Joseph and his mother would attend the Reorganized conference which was to be held at Amboy, Illinois over the 6th of April weekend. Emma Bidamon was pleased with his decision and offered her support in the hopes that the Smith family would regain its prominence within the Mormon movement. Joseph's wife was a non-believer but as such did not object to his decision as per their agreement.

Joseph and his mother left Nauvoo on 4 April 1860 and journeyed by boat and train to Amboy where they arrived on the evening of the 5th. In the early afternoon of the 6th, Zenus Gurley Sr. stepped forward and said, "I present to you, my brethren Joseph Smith." There were about one hundred and fifty people assembled in the Mechanics Hall anxiously awaiting the address of their long awaited leader. Joseph stepped forward and in an emotionally charged atmosphere and tearfully delivered a

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248 Ibid.
249 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 773.
251 Ibid., p. 115.
252 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 608.
discourse which outlined the position he would take on issues dividing his group from the Utah Mormons. 254

... I came not here of myself, but by the influence of the Spirit. For some time past I have received manifestations pointing to the position I am about to assume. I wish to say that I have come here not to be dictated by any men, or set of men. I have come in obedience to a power not of my own, and shall be dictated by the power that sent me. ... I did not wish to trifle with the faith of the people. ... I do not propose to assume this position in order to amass wealth out of it; neither have I sought it as a profit. There is but one principle taught by the leaders of any faction of this people that I hold in utter abhorrence. That is a principle taught by Brigham Young and those believing in him. I have been told that my father taught such doctrines. I have never believed it, and never can believe it. If such things were done, then I believe they never were of Divine authority. I believe my father was a good man, and a good man never could have promulgated such doctrines. ... Should you take me as a leader, I propose that all should be dealt by in mercy. ... I believe that we owe duties to our country and society, and are amenable to the laws of the land, and have always considered it my duty to act upon this principle ... if the same Spirit which prompts my coming, prompts also my acception, I am with you. 255

At the conclusion of this deeply moving address, Isaac Sheen forwarded a motion "that Brother Joseph Smith be chosen Prophet, Seer, and Revelator of the Church of Jesus Christ and the successor of his father." 256 This and a motion to receive Emma Bidamon, widow of the prophet Joseph Smith, as a member was passed unanimously. 257 Joseph was then ordained "President of the Church" and "President of the High Priesthood" by Zenus Gurley, Samuel

254 Ibid.
255 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, pp. 608-611.
256 History of the Reorganized Church, 3:250.
257 Ibid., 3:250-251.
Powers, W.W. Blair, and William Marks. Zenus Gurley then said to him, "Brother Joseph, I present this Church to you in the name of Jesus Christ." Smith replied: "May God grant in his infinite mercy that I may never do anything to forfeit the high trust confided in me. I pray that he may grant us power to recall the scattered ones of Israel, and I ask your prayers."


The ordination of Joseph III by these men has long been attacked theologically and emotionally by the Utah Mormon Church. Joseph was aware of this of course, and in several publications attempted to explain his position by declaring that holders of a lesser priesthood can ordain someone to a higher priesthood by stating: "the objector [the Utah Mormons] sometimes uses the argument that a stream cannot rise higher than its fountain. It is answered, that to locate the fountain of the priesthood in the man ordaining, is a mistake. . . . The fountain is God. . . . Hence as God is higher than the President of the Church, the objector does not prove by this analogy what he seeks to prove."

The Utah church did not then understand the unique doctrine of rejection which the Reorganization promulgated. Likewise, the Reorganization did not understand the Utah church's claim that Joseph the prophet gave the priesthood "keys" or authority to the Twelve Apostles which they felt granted them sufficient authority to denounce any challenger to that authority as a pretender to the true church.

See Joseph III to Joseph Luff, 12 February 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, RLDS Library-Archives, p. 308.

259 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 611.

260 Ibid., p. 612.
CHAPTER IV

JOSEPH SMITH III's DISSENT: HIS APEX OF POWER

After Joseph's ordination he was immediately faced with a number of difficult decisions. Joseph was well aware of a number of leaders in the movement who openly admitted that his father had been a polygamist. Believing that his family name was at stake, and also the reputation and public image of the fledgling reorganization, Joseph decided to uphold his father's innocence despite opposition from within. Joseph commented on this decision some years later:

I have been ambitious of but one thing, so far as human ambition is concerned, and that was to prove by the logic of conduct that my father was not a bad man. When my duty was made plain, and I was directed to the Reorganization already begun, I found its policy in some things, I thought at fault—notably the admission that my father taught polygamy. I found no proofs sufficiently alias [sic] to prove it to me. I adopted a different theory, and was at first much decried for it. It was charged as being the result of pride in family name. I think, however, I have disproved that statement. If not it will be proved [sic] by and by.261

While Joseph was deeply concerned with his father's reputation, he had to be concerned too with the more immediate task at hand, the central gathering place for the church.

261Joseph III to E.L. Kelley, 10 July 1883, E.L. Kelley Papers, RLDS Library-Archives, p. 4.
Shortly after he took office, an attorney from Quincy, Illinois, a man by the name of Godfrey, learning of Joseph's affiliation with the Reorganization, contacted him claiming he could regain title to the Missouri lands forfeited and abandoned by the Mormons in the 1830s. Godfrey aroused Joseph's interest by telling him that there were lands to which his mother, his brothers, and himself were entitled. At the urging of Major Bidamon, who envisioned easy profits, Joseph and Godfrey entered an agreement to pursue the possibility of procuring the lands in question. Bidamon, Emma, and Joseph discussed the possibility of using these lands for a new location for the gathering of the saints in an attempt to build yet another holy city. The Major set out for Jackson County to advance these claims, but upon his arrival learned that there was no valid claim upon the lands by the family. The Major, without Joseph's authority, traveled to Weston, Missouri, Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Florence, Nebraska, in hopes of discovering a place where the Josephite Mormons could settle. At Florence, he was well received and was promised the cooperation of the leading businessmen of that community if the Josephite Mormons would settle there. Upon his return to Nauvoo however, his proposal was rejected by both Joseph and Emma Smith Bidamon.

262 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 675.
263 Ibid., p. 676.
They had decided that Nauvoo would be the best gathering place for the Reorganization. The reasons for this decision were simple and practical. Joseph and his mother had lived there since 1839. All of his father's sisters, Sophonia, Catherine, and Lucy lived nearby as did his own brothers, Frederick, Alexander, David, and his stepsister Julia. Many of the old Mormon homes on the flat were still standing and were available for occupancy. Also, since the success of the Reorganization was not guaranteed, Joseph was reluctant to gamble everything on the hopes that this fledgling movement could provide a liveable income for himself and his family.

The decision to regather in Nauvoo was met with mixed emotions by the old settlers of Hancock County. There were some who felt it would be good for the financial welfare of the area if the Mormons would return. Joseph entered into an agreement with George Edmunds Jr., of Nauvoo, not to move from that town for at least five years. It was hoped that a promise of a somewhat permanent settlement would be viewed favorably by the old citizens. It was made clear to these old citizens that the Reorganized Church would refrain from politics and would repudiate plural marriage, but the idea of a regathering met with outspoken resistance from many of the old citizens. Meetings were held in Carthage, Montebello, and Basco where the Mormon return was viewed

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264 History of the Reorganized Church, 3:267. Also Joseph III to George Edmunds Jr., 1 July 1860, Joseph Smith III Papers, RLDS Library-Archives.

265 Ibid.
as menacing. Inflammatory speeches were made about the dreadful consequences which would occur. Each community drafted resolutions opposing the resettlement and the Carthage group sent the minutes of their meeting to Joseph in hopes that it would discourage the gathering. The resolution read as follows:

Whereas, a report is in circulation that the Mormons have an idea of returning to Nauvoo, in Hancock County, Illinois, for the purpose of resettling at that place, which resettlement in the unanimous opinion of this community would be a great calamity to the future prospects of said county; therefore

Resolved, by this mass meeting assembled, without respect to political parties, that we earnestly protest against the return of the Mormons to Nauvoo; that they will not be allowed by the people of Hancock County to return and make such settlement.

Resolved, that the secretary of this meeting be directed to forward without delay a copy of the proceedings of this meeting to Joseph Smith Jr., and also one copy for each of the newspapers in Hancock County, with request to publish the same.266

Similar resolutions were passed by the other communities and even in Nauvoo a major meeting was held with the same result. Nauvoo passed an additional resolution which recommended that Joseph "go to other parts to preach, pray and practice his religion."267

The Carthage Republican published a series of articles against the resettlement and against Joseph personally and he was repeatedly warned that his life was in danger, but nothing ever occurred to cause him to fear for his physical well-being.268 As the time passed it became clear to the people of Hancock County that Joseph's church was actually a middleground between Mormonism

266 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 778.

267 Ibid.

268 Ibid., p. 781.
and Protestantism, and as such posed no immediate threat to the political security of the county. Cooler heads prevailed and moderation was urged. The Carthage Gazette, edited by Thomas Sharp, published the following after Joseph's moderate course was recognized:

The Nauvoo Independent says that a petition signed by some 400 persons, has been forwarded to Joseph, Junior, requesting him to make Nauvoo the headquarters of his reformed church of L.D.S. Some of our old anti-Mormon citizens are a little nervous over this matter--we are not. Young Jo is a different man from Old Jo, and don't [sic] seek to gather all the faith-ful together, that he may use them politically and financially, as the Brighamites do. There is nothing objectionable in Young Joe's church, that we have hard of.269

Joseph began to preach in and around Nauvoo as well as in the communities and counties adjoining in Illinois and Iowa. He traveled without fear and made many friends. Many citizens of prominence assured him that mob violence would not be tolerated to any extent. "Many of the citizens of Nauvoo and near vicinity expressed their opinion that the driving out of the Mormons had left a curse upon the county that would not be removed until they should be permitted to return."270

Joseph's activities in Nauvoo after the turmoil over the regathering had subsided were essentially the same as they had been previous to his ordination.271 Joseph's main opposition came from his mother-in-law, who strongly opposed his connection with

269 McGavin, p. 240.

270 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 781.

271 Joseph III Diary, 1 January 1861-13 February 1861, RLDS Library-Archives.
"Mormonism." 272 In the fall of 1861 he was re-elected justice of the peace which both helped to supplement his limited income and reflected growing acceptance by his peers. 273

Joseph was generally successful in converting members of his own family into the Reorganization. David, his youngest brother, was baptized on 27 October 1861 at Montrose, Iowa. 274 His brother, Frederick, died on 13 April 1862, which caused a major dilemma for Alexander, another brother, who refused to be comforted because Frederick had died without benefit of baptism. 275 It was only after Alexander was promised in a spiritual experience that special provision would be made for Frederick, that he consented to join the church. 276 Alexander was told by "testimony of the spirit," that he should "grieve not; Frederick's condition is pleasant; and the time shall come when baptism can be secured to him." 277 On 25 May 1862, Joseph baptized Alexander in the Mississippi River and in July Alexander's wife was also baptized by Joseph. 278

By 1864 the membership of the church in Nauvoo was only seventy-five and Joseph was becoming discouraged at the lack of

273 Ibid., p. 118.
274 History of the Reorganized Church, 4:670.
275 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 782.
277 History of the Reorganized Church, 4:673.
278 Ibid.
growth, and lack of zeal in seeking new converts. A year
previously, the press for the Saint's Herald had been relocated
in Plano, Illinois, and soon a significant number of Reorganites
were gathering to that place.

By the spring of 1865, the church's theology was beginning
to take shape in a direction which was decidedly opposite to that
of the Utah Mormon Church. The spring conference of 1865 resolved:

That the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve,
declare to the church that the doctrine of sealing, as relat-
ing to marriage for eternity, is a heresy, and hence, not
taught or sanctioned by the law of God.

At the same conference, Joseph received a revelation in
answer to the question of whether blacks should be ordained to the
priesthood in his church. Brigham Young had moved by this time
to a restriction of blacks from the priesthood even though Joseph
Smith had ordained a few black men in the 1830s. The answer to
Joseph's inquiry came as follows:

Be not hasty in ordaining men of the negro race to offices
in my church, for verily I say unto you, All are not accepta-
ble unto me as servants, but every man in his own order, and
there are some who are chosen instruments to be ministers
to their own race. Be ye content, I the Lord have spoken
it.

Joseph began to exert his influence even more during the
fall conference as the conference passed a resolution that Joseph

279 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 782.
281 History of the Reorganized Church, 3:414.
282 Ibid., 3:416.
take over the position of editor of the Saint's Herald. In this way Joseph could control the official voice of the church and help to create a separate identity in the mind of the public between the Reorganization and the Utah Mormons. He believed that if his church was to grow, it would be necessary for it to become recognizable as separate and apart from the Utah Church. Since the office of the Herald was located in Plano, Illinois, just a few miles from the home of William Marks, Joseph's only counselor in the First Presidency, it became necessary for Joseph to move from Nauvoo to Plano. In that way also, he was able to leave behind the taint of Nauvoo with its ghosts of plural marriage, political intrigue and failure.

In late 1865 Joseph resigned his offices of justice of the peace and school director, both positions he had held for over seven and one half years. Prior to leaving Nauvoo, Joseph published in the Herald an account of the blessing he received from his father, upon which his claim to succession mainly rested. It was the first official mention of that event by the Reorganized Church.

In January 1866 Joseph and his family moved to Plano, where a home was purchased for his use by the bishop of the church,

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283Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 783.
284Ibid.
Israel Rogers. 286 Within two weeks however, his wife Emma, became homesick and he sent her and his little boy Joseph Arthur to Nauvoo to visit his mother-in-law. 287 One week later his little boy took sick and died: Joseph rushed to Nauvoo to console his wife and share their sorrow. 288 The death of their boy led his wife to reconsider the possibility of baptism. Previous to this tragedy she had been an unbeliever. 289 In early 1869, just before her premature death, she was baptized by David Smith. 290 Shortly afterward Joseph married Bertha Madison, a lady who had taken care of his children during the long and fatal illness of his first wife. 291 This action was taken only after Joseph had prayed and sought divine guidance concerning his future mate. 292

Throughout Joseph's lifetime he claimed special spiritual manifestations. He said that he had "seen visions, dreamed dreams, seen angels, [and] had revelations to guide me." 293 Later questioned about his visitations by angels, he said:

I have seen personages that I believe have been angels. . . . I would not say whether this was an angel, as the word angel

286 Tullidge, Joseph the Prophet, p. 783.
287 Ibid.
289 Ibid., p. 119.
290 Ibid.
291 Ibid., p. 122.
292 Ibid., p. 123.
293 Joseph III to A.V. Gibbons, 1 June 1893, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #4, RLDS Library-Archives, p. 396.
is sometimes used; but it was certainly a messenger, and not a human personage [sic], such as a living man in the flesh, like you and me. 294

These peculiar manifestations exercised great influence upon Joseph as he struggled to establish an identity for himself and his church.

The young church struggled to assume a positive identity but was forced to assume a negative anti-Utah identity in order to attract converts and court social favor. This forced the church at times to assume rigid, emotionally charged attitudes on issues dealing with Joseph Smith's role in the introduction of controversial doctrines. 295 Joseph III, in regard to his father, could not bring himself to ever admit that he was involved in plural marriage and political imperialism. His optimistic view influenced the church to reconsider the view that his father had been a fallen prophet. 296

Joseph III saw plural marriage as a means for gratification of illicit sexual desires. When visiting Salt Lake for the first time in November and December of 1876, he became physically ill when several of his cousin Joseph F. Smith's wives entered the dining area of their home. 297 These feelings proved to be almost an obsession as he sought to absolve his father from any

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297 Joseph III, Memoirs, p. 258.
responsibility. Within two decades of his assuming leadership of the Reorganization, he had pretty well convinced himself and the rank and file of the church that his father had never been a polygamist.298

The point was critical to Joseph III's way of thinking. He believed his father had to be a good man since the revelation of 1833 had promised him that the "keys of the kingdom would never be taken from him." It then followed that his father would never be guilty of such a heinous sin as plural marriage. If his father were guilty of the practice of plural marriage, then he would indeed have been a fallen prophet. If Joseph had been a fallen prophet, then his blessing of his son was not valid. Without a valid blessing and ordination, Joseph III would have no legitimate authority to lead the Reorganized Church. This fear forced Joseph to ignore weighty evidence that not only had his father introduced plural marriage to the church, but that he had also practiced it.

As early as January 1861, William McLellin, a former apostle in Kirtland, had written Young Joseph with regard to his father's connection with the doctrine:

I do not wish to say hard things to You of your Father, but Joseph, if you will only go to your own dear mother, she can tell You that he believed in Polygamy and practiced it long before his violent death! That he delivered a revelation sanctioning, regulating, and establishing it--and that he finally burned the awful document before her eyes. Elder Marks [stake president in Kirtland, Far West and Nauvoo, later counselor to Joseph III in the First Presidency of the Reorganization from 1863 to 1872--Elder Marks was a friend and confidant of Emma Smith's before and after the death of her prophet husband] can tell you that (before its conflageration)

298Alma Blair, "Joseph Smith III," p. 11.
it was read in the High Council of Nauvoo, over which he presided. Your Mother (if she feels disposed) can give You a rather black catalogue reaching back as far as your birth. Then, Sir, if you are honest before the Heavens yourself, never, no never proclaim again publickly [sic] or privately that "I believe my father was a good man", whilst the means to know his real character lies so near You--even in the bosom and memory of your Mother. I write this to you because you are now in a responsible, public position. Now Sir, if your Father was a "good man", and You are his legal successor, then you are legally and morally bound to carry out his measures. 299

McLellin wrote another letter in July 1872 which was even stronger in its insistence that Joseph should question his mother on plural marriage. McLellin said he had visited Emma in 1847 and she had made some revealing admissions to him. 300

Now Joseph I will relate to you some history, and refer you to your own dear Mother for the truth. You will probably remember that I visited your Mother and family in 1847, and held a lengthy conversation with her, retired in the Mansion House in Nauvoo. I did not ask her to tell, but I told her some stories I had heard. And she told me whether I was properly informed. Dr. F.G. Williams practiced with me in Clay Co. Mo. during the latter part of 1838. And he told me that at your birth your father committed an act with a Miss Hill--a hired girl. Emma saw him, and spoke to him. He desisted, but Mrs. Smith refused to be satisfied. He called

299 William E. McLellin to Joseph III, 10 January 1861, RLDS Library-Archives. Since Young Joseph was born 6 November 1832 I assume McLellin is referring to the practice being extant in the year 1832.

McLellin was a member of the original Quorum of Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church which quorum Smith restored along with other New Testament offices as his church began its continuing metamorphosis. McLellin apostatized in 1836 and became a bitter enemy of Smiths and one of the reasons he cited was Smith's continued sexual laxity. Also see Max Parkin, "Conflict at Kirtland " (master's thesis, BYU, 1966), pp. 127-144. For the most current and exhaustive study of Mormon plural marriage practices before the death of Smith see Danel Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith" (master's thesis, Purdue University, 1976), passim.

300 William McLellin to Joseph III, July 1872, RLDS Library-Archives, passim.
in Dr. Williams, O. Cowdery, and S. Rigdon to reconcile Emma. But she told them just as the circumstances took place. He found he was caught. He confessed humbly, and begged forgiveness. Emma and all forgave him. She told me this story was true!! Again I told her I heard that one night she missed Joseph and Fanny Alger. She went to the barn and saw him and Fanny in the barn together alone. She looked through a crack and saw the transaction!!! She told me this story too was verily true. Now I would not have told you this had it not been for one thing. You said in your speech at Amboy April 6th, 1860, "I believe my Father was a good man, and a good man never could have promulaged such doctrines." You referred to Polygamy. Now let me tell you my dear Sir. I asked your Mother particularly upon this point. She said, one night after she and Joseph had retired for the night, he told her that the doctrine and practice of Polygamy was going to ruin the church. He wished her to get up and burn the revelation. She refused to touch it even with tongues [sic]. He rose from his bed and pulled open the fire with his fingers, and put the revealment in and burned it up. But copies of it were extant, so it was preserved. You say, "I have never believed it and never can believe it." Can you dispute your dear Mother? She related this to me, and will if you ask her tell you the same thing. It made a powerful impression on my mind at the time, and I've often reflected on it since. Now Sir suppose you could be convinced that your father not only believed in Polygamy but actually practiced it his individual self, then what would you say—and then do about it? Was he an adulterer so long ago, and still a "good man." You say, "I believe in the doctrines of honesty and truth." So do I. But I can't believe your father continued to be a religiously honest man. No sir. I can't for if I should I would have to believe your Mother a liar, and that would be hard for me to do, considering my acquaintance with her.301

301Ibid. McLellin is writing to Joseph III after he has accepted the Presidency of the Reorganization for the second time since 1861. McLellin as stated in footnote 300 above was an apostate, but also a man whom Emma Smith (Bidamon), the prophet's first wife, had a great respect for even though he was excommunicated during the Kirtland period, 1863 (see Emma Bidamon to Joseph Smith III, 2 February 1866, RLDS Library-Archives, p. 2). The two letters of McLellin do establish that Joseph was involved, that others knew of it including Emma Smith, who according to McLellin bore the burden with the courage of a martyr. Joseph III to whom the letters are addressed is requested to ask his mother for verification of the facts as cited in the 1861 and 1872 letters. If Joseph III ever wrote an answer to either of those letters, or ever asked his mother for verification, no record yet uncovered has revealed the results that either the letters elicited from
But Joseph waited until his mother was literally on her deathbed in February 1879 before he finally asked her about his father's connection with plural marriage. The account of that interview was not published until some months after her death, and according to Joseph, Emma denied his father had anything to do with the practice. She said she had never seen the revelation on the subject till long after her husband's death.302

In the meantime, Joseph placed great reliance upon the testimony of his Uncle William who wrote him:

Neither your father nor any member of the Quorum of the Twelve ever said any thing to me about [the] Plural marriage Revelation either before or since your fathers [sic] death--up to the time of my Seperation [sic] from that Quorum which took place in September 1845 up to the time I was driven out of Nauvoo by the Bloody Danites.303

Joseph did not altogether trust his uncle, yet accepted his testimony on this matter.

Joseph's stand against plural marriage was complicated in the 1870s by the gradual alienation of his young brother, David. He along with another brother, Alexander, served several missions in Utah in an attempt to convert Utahns to the Reorganized Church. They met with only limited success, but much to Joseph's consternation, David began to entertain grave questions about his father's

Joseph III or what response Emma made to McLellin's comments. Since McLellin in both letters tells Joseph to ask his mother for the truth, it must be assumed that McLellin is certain of his facts and that Emma knows and has acknowledged the same to McLellin himself.

302 History of the Reorganized Church, 3:353-358.

involvement with the practice of plural marriage. David became involved for a time in the Godbeite movement in Salt Lake and became an intimate of Amasa Lyman, a former apostle in the Utah Mormon Church and a relative by marriage. David became convinced that his father had taken plural wives and wrote to a friend affirming this in July 1872.

David was a very popular figure within the Reorganization, being a very sensitive and intelligent man, and unlike Joseph who stood only 5' 8 1/2" and weighed 225 lbs, David more closely resembled his father, standing over six feet tall and weighing 240 lbs. There may have been a move to replace Joseph with David as president of the church, but if so the move was quashed by David's ordination to the First Presidency as his brother's second counselor on 10 April 1873.

Despite this, the strain of his discoveries about his father alienated David from his mother and brothers. David's discoveries in Utah particularly alienated him from his mother to

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304 David Hyrum Smith to Joseph III, 19 November 1872, David Smith Papers, RLDS Library-Archives.
305 David Hyrum Smith to Brother Sherman, 27 July 1872, David Smith Papers, RLDS Library-Archives.
306 "Notes on Joseph III by Frederick M. Smith," RLDS Library-Archives.
308 Joseph Baily Smith Sr. to Joseph Baily Smith Jr. 5 January 1923, LDS Church Archives.
309 History of the Reorganized Church, 6:6.
310 Ibid., 6:69.
whom he had been extraordinarily close. This caused him to write her saying:

... it is gone Mother that unity which existed between you and Joseph [the prophet]... you were in an extremity and Clara [David's wife] and I were in an extremity... I never say grace attend you any longer mother. The time may come when I overcome circumstances but until then. ... 311

David had a history of mental disturbances and the strain of his discoveries in Utah plus the alienation from his family perhaps triggered the reoccurrence of those problems. Also, after his return from Utah, his church responsibilities increased heavily. David became distraught and began to act quite strangely; at times being perfectly normal yet at other times "he fancied himself Pres. of the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad" 312 and manifested other bizarre traits. On the 19th of December 1876, Joseph returned to Plano from a five month tour of Utah and other western states, bringing David with him. 313 In less than a month on 17 January 1877, Joseph committed David to the Asylum for the Insane at Elgrin, Illinois. 314 This decision to commit David caused Joseph much

311 David Hyrum Smith to Emma Bidamon, n.d., Buddy Youngreen Collection, p. 2.
313 History of the Reorganized Church, 6:164.
314 Probate Court Records for Kendall County, Illinois, 17 January 1877, LDS Church Archives.
heartache and anguish. 315 David remained in that institution until his death in 1904, a tragic and forgotten figure. 316

Meanwhile, in October 1881, Joseph and the church removed to Lamoni, Decatur County, Iowa. Within three years two of Joseph and Bertha's children had died and they were soon to lose two more at childbirth. 317 After these personal setbacks, Joseph submerged himself even more within the labors of his church.

By the mid-1880s Joseph had eradicated most of "Mormonism" from the Reorganization. Plurality of gods, the Book of Abraham and the King Follett principles fell by the wayside as those concepts were repudiated by the church. 318 Baptism for the dead, temple building and the concept of the gathering were in Joseph's words "not rejected, and 'are' what you may deem laying on the shelf." 319 No longer would he allow the taint of plural marriage to attach itself to his father's name. Although his friend and counselor, W.W. Blair, had talked to James Whitehead, an old Nauvoo Mormon, who told Blair that Joseph Smith had taught and practiced plural marriage and that Emma had put the hands of the other women

315 Joseph III to G.C. Tomlinson, 3 September 1910, Joseph Smith III Papers, RLDS Library-Archives.
316 Death Record Book, Kendall County, Illinois, 29 August 1904, LDS Church Archives.
317 Mary Audentia Smith Anderson, "The Seed of Joseph the Martyr," LDS Church Archives.
into Joseph's to be his plural wives, Joseph chose not to consider such accounts.320

After the church had moved its headquarters to Lamoni, Iowa in 1881, Joseph labored very hard in behalf of the anti-plural marriage legislation then being discussed in Washington, D.C.321 The zeal of his crusade led him to Washington, D.C. in 1883 where he met with Secretary of State Frederick T. Frelinghuysen in order to promote his own solution to the Utah questions.322 The brief meeting proved to be unsatisfactory as Secretary Frelinghuysen stated that he could not proceed with the program suggested by Smith.323

During the mid and late 1880s, Joseph made three trips to Utah, in 1885, 1888, and 1889.324 Unlike his brief visit of 1876, when he had been in ill health and claimed hardly anyone had the courage to speak to him in public for fear of resprisal from "the brethren," his second, third and fourth visits accorded him the time and opportunity to pursue converts to his cause. These visits were made at the height of federal campaign to eliminate plural marriage by the enforcement of the Edmunds-Tucker Act. Federal

322Ibid., pp. 298-299.
323Ibid., pp. 301-302.
324Ibid., pp. 319-408.
activities forced a great many of the Mormon Church leaders to go "underground" to avoid arrest and imprisonment.

Joseph was afforded ample opportunity to talk with several people in Utah, many of whom expressed negative feelings about the practice of plurality. When he first arrived in 1885, Joseph granted an interview with the anti-Mormon newspaper, The Salt Lake Tribune. But upon publication Joseph protested violently to the publisher, Colonel William Nelson, that the Tribune's version of the interview was full of misstatements and misrepresentations. Joseph received an apology, and a "correction" was published. He felt this was not entirely satisfactory but decided to let the matter rest. Joseph felt the incident was extremely harmful to his mission, which was to denounce plural marriage and gain converts to his church.

It was during the visit of 1885 that a great deal of controversy arose concerning Joseph's interviews with the purported "wives" of his father. In 1879 Joseph F. Smith, cousin to Joseph III, published affidavits he had been collecting since 1869, which directly contradicted the denial made by Emma Bidamon and published in 1879. Joseph F. Smith interviewed several of the old Nauvoo residents, some of whom said they had been married to the prophet Joseph Smith during his lifetime.

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325 Ibid., pp. 332-33. Also History of the Reorganized Church, 4:491-493.
326 Ibid.
327 Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Book, LDS Church Archives, vault.
After his return to the Midwest, Joseph III published his own interviews in which he claimed the women who had declared themselves to be plural wives of the prophet had denied to him that they had been married to his father if the term "married" referred to the sharing of the marital bed. Joseph III expressed the opinion that the use of the terms "married" or "sealed" in those previous interviews with Joseph F. Smith had been a deliberate attempt to mislead the public. The Utah Mormons now retaliated by issuing sworn statements and letters by these same women, stating that Joseph III had not given a full and accurate account of his interviews. Afterwards both churches became adament about their positions. In spite of all this, Joseph maintained a friendly personal relationship with most of his Utah cousins, and especially sought the good will of Joseph F. Smith despite their public differences.

Joseph's visit of 1888 came during the Christmas holidays. At this time he discretely avoided mention of the delicate issues as federal pressure upon the pluralists had become quite intense, and a disavowel of the doctrine seemed near at hand. He spent time renewing friendships and creating new ones, as well as visiting with the leading politicians including the Governor. This visit was the most pleasant of the three he had made up to that time. On his next visit in July of 1889, a visit which lasted six months as Joseph traveled widely throughout the West and Northwest, he

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328 Joseph III, Memoirs, p. 408.
expounded his cause and made many new friends with his Mormon counterparts.\footnote{329}{Ibid., pp. 419-463.}

Other matters which confronted the Reorganization in the 1880s were expansion and dissent. By the mid-1880s the church had just over 18,000 members\footnote{330}{History of the Reorganized Church, 4:522.} and leaders felt a need to accommodate the growth of the church through expansion of their hierarchy. As this growth continued, dissent arose in the Quorum of Twelve. Jason W. Briggs, President of the Twelve, had been at odds with Joseph III since the conference of 1877 when formal charges had been brought against Briggs as follows:

\ldots denied the preexistence of man; and, in doing this, has also denied the preexistence of Christ, as a personal entity; and, thereby, not only denied the testimony of the sacred books, which God has given for the instruction of faith, to govern his church \ldots he has assailed the veracity of the Spirit's utterances \ldots he has assailed the prophecies and historical testimony of the Bible, with a ruthless hand, making, or seemingly seeking to make them, subjects of contempt and ridicule, instead of subjects of faith, and has thereby written as an enemy rather than as an advocate of the world of God \ldots he has denied the faith of the church, and the testimony of the world of God [and] he has denied, in effect, the reliability of the testimony of God's Spirit, and sought to make that testimony appear as of no greater value than the utterances through modern spiritualists mediums.\footnote{331}{Ibid., 4:196.}

Briggs was a student of higher criticism at a time in the church when hardly anyone was familiar with the term or its implications. Briggs had begun to doubt the validity of Joseph the prophet's personal revelations to the church and admitted he did not really consider his own revelation of 1851, which had actually
begun the Reorganization, to be from God.  

Briggs along with Zenus H. Gurley, Jr., another apostle, agreed on several issues, including whether the prophetic office was indeed necessary for ones' salvation as it was contained nowhere in the New Testament. 

Gurley felt that Joseph the prophet had perverted the office and "had actually succeeded in making himself 'God' to the church when they accepted Doctrine and Covenants 19:2 enjoining Smith's commandments unconditionally upon his followers." 

Gurley strongly condemned this action and stated:

When the church adopted this, they became bound to accept all subsequent revelations without question, so long as Joseph Smith retained his office and position in the church. Thus we see the doctrine of infallibility set up. . . . Such a law makes Joseph Smith's power in the church omnipotent. It places him instead of God to us. . . . If this be law, . . . then in that case our salvation depends upon belief in Joseph Smith.

This position Gurley felt was a fatal error because it gave a blanket endorsement to the absolute office Joseph had created for himself, an office which still persisted in the Reorganization. 

Joseph III saw the situation differently. "Rather than providing license to the prophet, the standard of the three books [Bible, 

332Joseph Fielding Smith, Origin of the "Reorganized" Church: The Question of Succession (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Press, 1951), p. 29. "You know we learn by experience. I would not like to claim it to be a revelation now, but it is just as good as any revelation that was given to Joseph Smith."


334Ibid.
Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants] in Smith's opinion served as protection against a narrow, binding dogma.  

The issue for Gurley was that "the Reorganized Church clearly defined its seat of power within the prophetic office." This supremacy of office he felt, could only serve to injure the church as it had done under Joseph's father. Only a restriction upon the office so as to prevent limitless authority, could save the church. He urged that there be a relocation of actual power and responsibility to other quorums in the church in order to save the church from demagogy.  

The church leaders felt they could not accept Gurley's position because they had made the decision in 1860 to abide by a prophet when they ordained Joseph III. The church had been willing to trust Joseph's integrity when they seemingly gave him limitless power as their prophet; a faith Joseph had never betrayed. Gurley was not able to convince enough of the Twelve or the church that the potential for an abuse of power was a relevant issue. Also his fear that the Reorganization's gospel message would ultimately be prostituted by acceptance of speculative doctrines and practices was gradually removed as Joseph III continually guided the movement toward mainstream Protestantism.  

By 1880 Briggs had talked his way back into the good graces of "the brethren" and they resolved "that he be now released.

335 Ibid., p. 148.
336 Ibid., p. 154.
337 Ibid.
from all disability placed upon him by acts of former conferences." Some trouble with Briggs and Gurley continued, however, as they both refused to attend conference in 1885.

Joseph had been extremely sensitive to the right of dissent and the freedom of expression within the church since he felt the Utah church allowed no such liberties. When these apostles protested against the direction Joseph was leading the church, he tried for several years to accommodate them in the hope of converting them to his point of view. Joseph sought especially to pacify Briggs and Gurley who disagreed with his stand on the gathering, baptism for the dead, plurality of gods and other doctrinal matters which they could not reconcile. When Briggs and Gurley began to undermine the Quorum of the Twelve and tear the church apart, Joseph felt he had no choice but to refuse publication of their quarrelsome tirades and pressure them to conform to his leadership.

Briggs and Gurley were important people in the movement and had been instrumental in the founding of the Reorganization. However, they felt they must leave the church rather than endorse the direction Joseph was giving to the movement. Gurley had especially protested Joseph's insistence that his father had not been involved with plural marriage. Gurley had written as early as 1873 that he believed Hyrum Smith taught the doctrine, and although the proof was not as strong against the prophet, he was

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convinced that Joseph was also guilty.  

Gurley insisted that Smith's guilt or innocence concerning plurality was no major issue however, thus it was a waste of time to dwell on it.  

In letters written afterwards, Gurley stated he had forgiven Smith of his connection with plural marriage.  

Pondering the testimony of people like Gurley, McLellin and others over the years, Joseph may have wavered somewhat in his resolution, for he wrote in 1879:  

I believe that during the later years of my father's life there was in discussion among the elders, and possibly in practice, a theory like the following: that persons who might believe that there was a sufficient degree of spiritual affinity between them as married companions, to warrant the desire to perpetuate that union in the world to come and after the resurrection, could go before some high priest, whom they might choose, and there making known their desire, might be "married" for "eternity," pledging themselves while in the flesh unto each other for the rights of companionship in the spirit; that this was called spiritual marriage, and upon the supposition that what was sealed by this priesthood, before which this pledge was made on earth, was sealed in heaven, the marriage relation then entered into would continue in eternity. That this was not authorized by command of God, or rule of the Church; but grew out of the constant discussion had among the elders. . . . From this: if one, why not two, or more, and plural marriage, or the plurality of wives was the growth. . . . That my father may have been a party to the first step in this strange development, I am perhaps prepared to admit though the evidence connecting him with it is vague and uncertain; but that he was in any otherwise [sic] responsible for plural marriage, plurality of wives, or polygamy, I  

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339 Zenus H. Gurley, Jr. to The Herald, 5 December 1873, RLDS Library-Archives.  
340 Ibid.  
341 Zenus H. Gurley Jr. to Joseph III, 5 March 1879, RLDS Library-Archives.  
   Zenus H. Gurley Jr. to Joseph III, 6 April 1879, RLDS Library-Archives.
do not know, nor are the evidences so far produced to me conclusive to force my belief.\textsuperscript{342}

But whatever the implications of these reflections, Joseph was unwilling to make further concessions, so that by the mid-1880s the issues between Joseph and the Briggs-Gurley coalition came to a head. In protest Briggs explained the reasons for their alienation in the \textit{Herald} in 1886:

\begin{quote}
We, Z.H. Gurley and myself, controverted certain doctrines and dogmas, usages and policies of the rejected church, as contained and taught in the book of Doctrine and Covenants, and which we alleged were not necessarily applicable to, or binding upon the Reorganized Church. For this the Herald was closed against us, and the conference promptly placed us under a bar. We then submitted our reasons for withdrawing, which were a disbelief in those things that we had controverted, and these reasons constituted our assault upon the doctrine or faith of the church, if we assailed it at all.\textsuperscript{343}
\end{quote}

Briggs and Gurley both left the church and their exit left a void in the broad scope of Reorganized Church tradition.\textsuperscript{344} Yet by the 1880s, the Reorganization had finally gained its own identity and in the process had become fairly unified. The prevailing philosophies and theological directions were no longer those of the early dissenters of Mormonism, but were the attitudes and directions decided upon by Joseph III after his long struggle to bring respectability and honor to the term "Mormon," and to his father's name.

\textsuperscript{342}Tullidge, \textit{Joseph the Prophet}, pp. 798-800.

\textsuperscript{343}History of the Reorganized Church, 4:542.

CHAPTER V

WINDING UP SCENE: JOSEPH SMITH III's LEGACY

During the 1890s, Joseph III faced continuing demands for organizational changes. Some apostles, James W. Gillen, James Caffall, Joseph Luff and Alexander Hale Smith, demanded that the Quorum of Twelve be granted power equal to that of the First Presidency, and this situation might have caused a rift in the power structure. However, because of the rapid expansion of the church membership, the First Presidency delegated more authority to that quorum so that the differences were quickly and "amicably settled." Also for the first time in the Reorganization the High Council was organized. Its membership consisted of men who were already General Authorities and its role was secondary to that of the presiding quorums.

New issues which faced the church in the last decade of the 19th century involved women's rights, social Darwinism, higher criticism, and baptism for the dead. The women of the church demanded that they be given a more active role within the framework of the church. The first major step in that direction was the

345 History of the Reorganized Church, 5:653-654.
346 Ibid., 4:653.
347 Ibid., 5:169.
formation of an organization known as the Prayer Union. This was a group of ladies who met to hold their own prayer meetings and to discuss church business and activities without having the priesthood present, which they felt inhibited their discussions. The Presidency gave its support somewhat grudgingly to this organization in hopes this small gesture would pacify the women. The leaders of the church were not prepared to "promote the broader interests of the women of the church: because it seemed to them a bit out of place to allow women too many freedoms.  

Social Darwinism also elicited a response from the editorial board of the Herald, who felt that its position was "directly opposed to the Christian ethic." As education became more widespread among the members, Joseph feared that the gospel would be lost somewhere in the race for the acquisition of worldly wisdom. Higher criticism, one of the issues in higher education, he felt, was yet another "tool to discredit the Christian message." Although he felt the advocates of higher criticism made legitimate points concerning errors in the Bible, he observed that in the main they were trying to undermine Christ's Mission.  

Baptism for the dead again became an issue for Joseph as the members questioned the decision to place it "on the shelf."

348 Ibid., 5:169.
349 Ibid.
350 Ibid., 5:377.
351 Ibid., 5:127-128.
352 Ibid.
The General Conferences of both "1884 and 1886 had described baptism for the dead as a commandment of local character which is binding on the Reorganization only as it may be 'reiterated or referred to as binding' by commandment to the Reorganization."\(^{353}\) The General Conference of 1892 stated in regard to the practice:

> Whereas inquiry is being made regarding the teaching and practice of baptism for the dead, and whereas we understand that the observance of said ordinance was prohibited for a time by command of the Spirit, Resolved, that as a Quorum we put ourselves upon record as being ready to promulgate the doctrine as soon as the Lord shall so direct us as to time, place, and conditions for observance.\(^{354}\)

The conference took no direct action upon this statement which caused the question to be raised again in early 1893. The _Herald_ of 25 February 1893 commented that "until such time as the teaching of the doctrine is either enjoined or permitted, the safest way for the eldership is to let it alone in public ministrations, for it is at best at present only a matter of speculation."\(^{355}\)

Perhaps the most significant issue that faced the Reorganization during the 1890s was the disposition of the temple lot. In 1831, 63 1/3 acres had been dedicated for the purpose of building a temple complex in Independence, Missouri. In 1848 Brigham Young as president of the Mormon Church, had authorized sale of the remaining lands held by the church in Independence, which included the "temple lot." In 1864, the "Hedrickites" or

\(^{353}\) _Ibid._, 5:188.

\(^{354}\) _Ibid._, 5:145.

\(^{355}\) _Ibid._, 5:188-189.
Church of Christ, a small dissident faction of Mormonism, had purchased part of the original 63 1/3 acres.

The area they had purchased contained the specific place where the cornerstones for the temple had been laid by Joseph Smith in the year 1831. During the 1880s the Reorganization had entered into a series of discussions with the Hedrickites in order to gain possession of this particular parcel of land. When these efforts were rebuffed, the Reorganization brought suit in the United States Court for the Western Division of Missouri, which action initiated the "Temple Lot Suit." 356

The issue at hand was whether the title held by the Hedrickites was indeed legal. The Reorganization produced a counter-deed known as the Partridge-Cowdery deed which they affirmed gave them title. 357 The case involved much more than just the acquisition of the land in question. It became a vehicle for Joseph III as he attempted to prove in a court of law that his father was not the author of plural marriage in the Mormon Church and that his church was the legitimate successor to that church founded by the Mormon prophet. The case dragged on for nearly three years before a decision was finally reached on 6 February 1894. 358

356 Ibid., 5:53.
358 History of the Reorganized Church, 5:236.
The original decision was given in favor of the Reorganized Church by Judge John F. Phillips whose wife was a member of that organization. The Church of Christ immediately filed an appeal of the decision and on 25 January 1895 the result of that appeal was made known. 359 Judge Amos M. Thayer of the Court of Appeals reversed the decision of the lower court, ruling that the Church of Christ held the only legal title to the land in question. 360 The Reorganized Church then attempted an appeal in the form of a Writ of Certiorari to the Supreme Court of the United States but the appeal was denied. 361 To this day the Reorganization recognizes the original decision of Judge Phillips and ignores the appellate decision of Judge Thayer.

Another source of conflict as the church ended the 19th century was that it was troubled to a small degree with racial problems. The question of what to do with blacks in the church was a minor issue which was never fully resolved. The racial tension between white and black was maintained despite a revelation in 1865 which stated that blacks would hold the priesthood. 362 Blacks were proselytized only half-heartedly and accepted into the church with a similar spirit.

Joseph for a number of years had entertained the idea of having a church sponsored college; by the mid-1890s the dream

359 Ibid., 5:286.
360 Historical Facts Concerning the Temple Lot, p. 49.
361 Ibid.
362 History of the Reorganized Church, 5:211.
became a reality. A site was chosen in 1893 at Lamoni, Iowa. The land was partly purchased while the rest was received by donation. By 12 November 1895 the cornerstone for the administration building had been laid and the college was opened. It was to be a non-sectarian university which promoted high Christian ideals without forcing any student to accept the Restoration message. Religion classes were not required as Joseph felt it would detract from the academic freedom of his institution.

Nonetheless, Joseph's interest in education seems to have been rooted in sectarian concerns as the following suggests. He stated he wanted his members:

... well acquainted with the peculiar and conflicting positions of various sectarian religious bodies on the question of authority, the history of their origin, their faith and general claims; with the necessity of studying such positions old and new.364

At this time tragedy again struck Joseph when his second wife Bertha, died after being seriously injured in a horse and buggy accident in October 1896.365 Joseph was fortunate to find someone he liked and on 12 January 1898, he was married to the former Miss Ada Rachel Clark.366

As Joseph's family life once again resumed normality, he returned to the affairs of the church. For the first time since the organization of the Reorganized Church, the Twelve was completely

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363 Ibid., 5:313.
364 Ibid., 5:39.
365 Joseph III, Memoirs, pp. 128-129.
366 History of the Reorganized Church, 5:423.
In the same year, 1897, Alexander Hale Smith, Joseph's younger brother, was chosen as Presiding Patriarch of the church, another office which had not been filled before. This move came only after a great amount of pressure was applied by the rank and file, and Joseph received a revelation on the matter. It was not, however, until June 1898 that Alexander Smith was prepared to give patriarchal blessings to those who requested them.

The membership of the church grew steadily but lack of sufficient finances prevented the missionary program from reaching its full potential. The Reorganization depended upon the offering plate and limited tithing for their main source of income. Their interpretation of tithing differed from that of the Utah church in that instead of demanding ten percent of the gross income, they only required ten percent of what they called "increase" or funds left after paying ones necessary expenses. This liberal policy left the church with a chronic lack of funds and prevented the church from supplying adequate financial support for their full-time missionaries.

Toward the end of the 1890s, Joseph's health began to fail him. He was growing deaf and blind and these handicaps, plus the growing demands of the office, caused him to work more closely with his oldest son, Frederick Madison Smith. One of the first

367 Ibid., 5:423.
368 Ibid., 5:445-446.
369 Ibid., 5:445.
370 History of the Reorganized Church, 5:582.
responsibilities given to Frederick M. was the question of "the gathering." The largest ratio of members was found in and around Lamoni, and others were moving there slowly but steadily. An official statement was issued which neither encouraged nor discouraged "gathering" but simply stated that since the disappearance of the frontier, perhaps the opportunity for the unique community-building efforts of the past had also disappeared. The abandonment of the gathering he quickly pointed out did not mean the abandonment of ZIONIC goals, but rather a reevaluation of those goals in light of the changing geographical and political situations.\textsuperscript{371}

Shortly after the beginning of the new century, Joseph gave a revelation to the church at the conference of 1902 in which he designated two new members of the First Presidency. He named new Apostle Richard C. Evans, a fairly young Canadian convert, and his son, Frederick M. Smith, to the positions.\textsuperscript{372} The growing demands upon the First Presidency and the failing health of Joseph caused more and more of the workload to fall on these new officers.

As Frederick was being groomed as his father's successor, it caused some resentment within the Quorum of Twelve and the church at large. Joseph's new counselors exercised their authority more so than any previous members of the First Presidency ever had. Joseph's

\textsuperscript{371}Ibid., 5:600.

\textsuperscript{372}Book of Doctrine and Covenants of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1975), Section 126, p. 325 (hereafter cited as Book of Doctrine and Covenants (Reorganized)).
rule was relegated to mostly minor problems within the church as his failing health caused more and more restrictions upon his activity. Consequently many in the Reorganization became fearful of the danger of a centralization of too much power in the body of the First Presidency. The situation was such that Joseph issued an official statement through the Herald in which cited the increased size of the church and the difficulty of administration in so large an organization as reasons for the increased centralization. 373

Meanwhile the Reed Smoot hearings had begun in Washington in 1903. The Republican-dominated legislature of Utah had elected Mormon Apostle, Reed Smoot, to the United States Senate only to find that a violent reaction was stirred among non-Mormons who felt his election to the Senate threatened the separation of church and state.

The objections to Senator Smoot took different forms. In addition to the fact that he held ecclesiastical office, it was charged that he was a polygamist. The latter charge was easily refuted. However, the more serious charge was that he belonged to a body of church rulers who controlled Utah's elections and economy and that these rulers were secretly continuing to violate the law by performing or allowing plural marriages. It was also asserted that as a Mormon apostle, he had taken a secret pledge known as the Mormon "Oath of Vengeance," which was disloyal to the United States government. 374

373 History of the Reorganized Church, 6:150.
In a reversal of his usual attitudes, Joseph issued a long editorial in the *Herald* on 4 November 1903 defending Senator Smoot's right to office. He said in part:

> We object to the making of any man's religion a cause of war against him when no overt act of outrage against the laws and usages of the social institutions of the country is alleged, or proved. It is a dangerous principle and is a menace to the rights of citizens of the United States affirmed by statutes everywhere.  

Joseph was subpoenaed by the Committee on Privileges and Elections to testify in connection with the investigation in February 1906. Senator J.C. Burrows of Michigan, chairman of the committee, had lived in Kirtland as a boy and was acquainted with the differing philosophies in the two churches. Burrows, no doubt, felt Joseph's testimony could be beneficial when the differences between the two churches were aired and the radicalism of the Utah church made clear. After Joseph's arrival in Washington, Senator Burrows came to his hotel to explain to Joseph "the claims of the protestants, and gave a succinct review of what he had learned and what he deemed important points in the case."  

After this interview which surprised Joseph because of Senator Burrows' "clear, comprehensive knowledge of the history and fact concerning" the Reorganized Church, he was told he would be admitted to the committee rooms but may or may not be called to the witness stand.  

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377 Ibid.
officials deemed it unnecessary to raise such side issues as would probably have developed had the Reorganized Church been introduced into the controversy.\.378

Senator Smoot in reply to the charges against him emphasized the legality of his election and said he could be unseated only if he had been convicted of violating the law against plural marriage or had taken an unpatriotic oath. None of these charges were ever proven and Senator Smoot was finally allowed to take his seat in the Senate and went on to serve a distinguished thirty year career becoming a highly respected member of that body.379

In 1905 Joseph made his last trip to Utah. Frederick M. was at that time there on a mission for his church and Joseph stayed several weeks with his son while he preached and visited with his many friends and relatives. While there Joseph and Frederick M. were courted by the anti-Mormon politicians of the day in an effort to recruit them for political reasons, in the hopes they would prove advantageous to their anti-Mormon crusade.380

This group of politicians was led by Frank J. Cannon, a polygamous son of George Q. Cannon who had left the Utah church over political issues and formed a new political party. Frank Cannon especially disliked President Joseph F. Smith of the Utah church and sought to overcome the powerful church interests dominant in the city. Joseph met with him and former senator Thomas J.

\[378\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 233-234.}\]

\[379\text{Allen and Leonard, }\text{The Story of the Latter-day Saints}, \text{pp. 441-443.}\]

\[380\text{Joseph III, }\text{Memoirs}, \text{pp. 538-543.}\]
Kearns and "enjoyed a long and interesting conversation with them over Utah conditions in general." 381 Joseph admired Cannon because he had displayed what Joseph thought was great courage in denouncing the Utah Mormon Church in no uncertain terms. Despite this personal respect for Frank Cannon, Joseph refused to become involved politically with them for he saw them as essentially political opportunists. 382

Joseph spent six weeks in Utah where he gave several sermons outlining the positions of his church. John Smith, John Henry Smith, Samuel H.B. Smith, Joseph Baily Smith Sr., George Albert Smith, Mary Smith, Julia Smith, Lucy Smith, and other Utahns spent considerable time with their cousin, well aware that this would be perhaps the last opportunity to visit one another. 383 Joseph in his Memoirs recalled this last visit warmly, stating several times his love and appreciation for his Utah relatives.

After his return to Iowa, Joseph was seriously ill. At the urging of his friends, he moved into a small home in Lamoni, and sold his large home on the outskirts of town to the church for $3,000.00. 384 After his return from Washington and the Smoot hearings in February 1906, Joseph decided to remove himself and his family to Independence, Missouri. His failing health and lack

381 Ibid., p. 539.
382 Ibid., p. 541.
383 Ibid., pp. 543-546.
384 Ibid., p. 558.
of mobility were of course major concerns, but Joseph offered another set of reasons for the move.

In removing to Independence I did so to get into direct and closer touch with the Bishop's office and also to fulfill, as I believed, a religious duty to become a resident of the place designated as Zion. 385

At the conference of 1906 Joseph introduced a revelation which formally designated Frederick Madison Smith to be his successor as the next president of the church. The revelation read in part:

Inasmuch as misunderstanding has occurred in regard to the meaning of a revelation hitherto given through my servant Joseph Smith in regard to who should be called to preside in case my servant should be taken away or fall by transgression, it is now declared that in case of the removal of my servant now presiding over the church by death or transgression, my servant Frederick M. Smith, if he remain faithful and steadfast, should be chosen, in accordance with revelations which have been hitherto given to the church concerning the priesthood. Should my servant Frederick M. Smith prove unstable and unfaithful, another may be chosen, according to the law already given. 386

Joseph by giving this revelation was attempting to remove for his son the burden of having to prove that he was indeed the lawful successor to his father, as he himself had been forced to do.

This revelation also contained a reference to a hospital or sanitarium to be built in Independence, "a place of refuge and help for the sick and afflicted," and a children's home. 387 This revelation was accepted by the conference and the facilities were

385 History of the Reorganized Church, 6:591.
386 Book of Doctrine and Covenants (Reorganized), Section 127, p. 329.
387 Ibid., p. 327.
built shortly thereafter. Commenting years later upon that section of the revelation, he said:

The directions given in 1906 concerning the establishment of the Sanitarium, were clearly presented to me, and came as the result of several years of prayer and consideration as to how we were to place ourselves before the world as advocating the healing art. 388

By 15 December 1909 the Sanitarium was dedicated and totally free from debt. 389

On 5 January 1907 the Herald Printing and Bindery Plant in Lamoni burned to the ground. Over three thousand volumes in the church library were lost as well as several important and irreplaceable historical documents. There was a question at that time as to whether the plant should be moved to Independence, which was gradually taking Lamoni's place as the gathering center, or to leave the facility, which was Lamoni's only industry, where it was. The citizenry of Lamoni was painfully aware of their need for the Herald and after the fire did everything humanly possible to aid the reconstruction of the plant. Joseph too believed that it would be wise for the present to rebuild the Herald office there in Lamoni, which was completed by November of that same year. 390

By 1908 the issue of divorce had become such a problem that the Reorganization had to take a formal position on the status of their divorcees. There existed within the church a sharp division of opinion as to whether any divorced person should

388 Joseph III, Memoirs, p. 626.
389 History of the Reorganized Church, 6:213.
390 Ibid., 6:227-229.
receive the blessings of the church. The Herald published an editorial upon the subject written by Joseph which in effect stated that each case must be dealt with in light of its individual merit, and the matter would be left open to the eldership.391

With the exception of a brief trip to Canada and the eastern states, Joseph spent most of 1908 at his home in Independence where he attended to his vast correspondence and the dictating of his autobiography.392 The next few years passed in the same manner. By 1910 Joseph was totally blind and almost totally deaf.393 His son Frederick M. was now "chairman of the Board of Trustees of Graceland College, president of the Sanitarium Board, secretary of the Order of Enoch and chairman of the Library Commission" in addition to being acting president of the church as his father's first counselor.394 By the end of the year 1911, the church had made "the transition from a somewhat loose association of small and largely independent branches to a highly organized and better integrated church institution."395 Much of the burden of administration during these years fell on the shoulders of Frederick. At the conference of 1912, Joseph resigned from all his committee

391 Ibid., 6:272.
392 Ibid., 6:292.
393 Ibid., 6:405.
394 Ibid.
395 Ibid., 6:418.
assignments stating quite frankly that his ill health prevented him from performing an effective service.396

By 1914 Joseph was aware of the growing need of the church to provide programs suitable to the youth of the church in order to keep them interested in the church and also guide them toward Christian living. The result of his effort to provide such programs was to have the problem referred to Committee.397

Joseph's editorials in the Herald in these years dealt with world problems such as labor, imperialism, and by 1914, impending war in Europe. The Herald was becoming a vehicle by which its readers could study some of the major world issues through the eyes of the church and gain an insight into how inspired men perceived the impending situation. The church under Joseph's leadership had grown from a loose smattering of some 300 members in 1860, to a vibrant, dynamic church organization of some 70,000 members.398

Joseph became ill on Thanksgiving Day 1914 and after a two week illness died on 10 December. His last few years had seen his physical powers dwindle away, but he had retained his mental vigor until the very last.399 This man of tremendous sensitivity and vigor had lived a goodly and exemplary life in which he had made

396 Ibid., 6:433.
397 Ibid., 6:516-517.
398 Ibid., 6:675.
399 Saint's Herald LXI (9 December 1914) Lamoni, Iowa, p. 1161.
many friends and few enemies. While he possessed little of the
glamor and charisma his father had, yet he proved himself a man
of great integrity in almost all situation. The legacy he left his
church and his family has never been fully understood or appreciated
by either.

When Joseph first came to the seat of power in the church in
1860, one of the first compromises toward moderation which he initi-
ated was the choice of Nauvoo as the gathering place for his church.
This gesture informed not only the local citizenry but also the
nation and the world that his brand of Mormonism could and would
flourish within the confines of the United States. Unlike his
father before him, Joseph felt the safest course to pursue if
Mormonism was to survive and have any influence in the "gentile"
world, was one of conciliation with existing religious, political
and social values of the day.

Joseph set about immediately in Nauvoo and the surrounding
communities demonstrating that he intended to abandon the political
imperialism of his father's more militant kingdom of God, and
replace it with a more idealistic kingdom which would allow the
free exercise of suffrage without undue demands from the leaders
of the church. There was to be no room in his organization for a
Council of Fifty, a political kingdom or prophetic politicking,
for he perceived that these were the policies which had initiated
his father's troubles.

His attempt at placating the anti-Mormons in Illinois was
not an easy task as there were several old citizens who remained
from the days of the Mormon War who still bore a great deal of
animosity toward anyone and anything connected with Mormonism. Joseph, however, through the exercise of considerable patience and compromise, finally convinced them that his brand of Mormonism certainly did not bear any threat to their personal or political security.

From the beginning of his active interest in the Reorganization, Joseph opposed Mormonism's esoteric doctrines. He believed for his brand of Mormonism to survive, it would be necessary to refurbish the Mormon image to gain popular acceptance and support. One way to improve the image was through theological accommodation. Initially, this came with respect to a rejection of the doctrine of sealing, a doctrine tainted by polygamy which he had rejected as early as 1853. Joseph also repudiated many of the esoteric rituals associated with the Mormon Temple which were thought by his father to be necessary steps in acquiring exaltation. He repudiated the doctrine of plurality of Gods, and that man has the potential to become God. He accepted the prevailing Protestant view that there is only one God, although he may have accepted the Utah Mormon idea that God has a body.400

The temple endowment was another esoteric part of Mormonism which was discarded. It seemed too closely associated with the doctrine of plural marriage. In surrendering these esoteric principles, Joseph III made it easier for non-Mormons to see the

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400 Joseph III to Brogen J. Jeramiah, 8 September 1877, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, RLDS Library-Archives, p. 222.
Reorganization as only a slightly deviant religious denomination with no conspiratorial or menacing attributes. Baptism for the dead was the only exception to this rather rapid renunciation of esoteric principles. Several times the rank and file challenged Joseph's attempt to disregard the doctrine until he convinced them, with the help of Briggs and Gurley that it had been a local doctrine of Nauvoo and that it would be necessary for the Lord to repeat a similar revelation to the Reorganization before the actual practice could be reinstated.

Joseph furthered the deliniation between Utah Mormonism and the Reorganization by de-emphasizing the gathering. He felt with the passing of the frontier the time had long since past when the unique community building ventures of earlier years could be successful. An attempt to gather at Nauvoo had failed dismally and the prospects of a successful effort elsewhere were at best minimal.

He also de-emphasized the word of wisdom which had first been stressed during his father's lifetime at Kirtland, Ohio. Joseph realized that to make special effort to avoid the use of tea, coffee, liquor and tobacco only widened the gulf between the Mormons and the Gentiles and thus retarded the process of accommodation.

By the mid-1880s, Joseph's attention turned to another phase of his program. Instead of concentrating his energies upon

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402 Joseph III to Joseph Lampert, 22 February 1878, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #1, RLDS Library-Archives, p. 316.
the remaking of the church from within, he turned to attacking the Utah Mormons and their continued practice of polygamy. He wrote several letters to the leading legislators of the day including several presidents of the United States urging the enforcement of anti-polygamy laws in Utah. He even traveled to Washington to present his program to Secretary of State, Frederick T. Frelinghuysen. In consistently opposing polygamy, Joseph was able to establish the idea firmly in the non-Mormon mind that his church was opposed to sexual license, and fully committed to prevailing marriage practices in America.

Through the leadership of Joseph III the Reorganized Church had made a quite conscious effort to become a half-way house to Protestantism--a moderate Mormons' stopping place where what was seen as most valuable in Mormonism could be preserved without alienation from American society as a whole. Joseph had taken a few dissident Mormons who could not and would not support his father's more radical theology and had carved a niche for them. He gave their protest dignity and purpose as he became a respected leader in the Gentile community. No longer would anyone who accepted Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon but rejected the extreme aspects of Mormon doctrine be without a home. The Reorganized Church and Joseph Smith III provided this alternative.
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JOSEPH SMITH III: MODERATE MORMON

Robert Duane Hutchins

Department of History

M.A. Degree, December 1977

ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of the Mormon movement, certain members or groups of members, have exercised free agency in the form of dissent against the direction which the prophet of that church chose to lead his movement. The form of this dissent varied but the theme was usually quite consistant: a demand for moderation. For many of these dissenters the extremes of Mormon doctrine seemed to take them out of touch with prevailing American values.

Joseph Smith III, a son of the Mormon founder, proved to be one of these moderates. He ultimately rejected all of his father's more radical theology as he created a movement in which the believers in his father's divine mission and the Book of Mormon, could exercise their faith without losing the good will of the American people.

COMMITTEE APPROVAL:

Marvin S. Hill, Committee Chairman

Thomas G. Alexander, Committee Member

Ted J. Warner, Department Chairman