Debating Succession, March 1846: John E. Page, Orson Hyde, and the Trajectories of Joseph Smith's Legacy

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When I gain that [testimony], I shall as fearlessly advocate your interest, and claims, as I did Pres- Smiths . . . For surely if Pres- Smith did not "apoint" a Prophet Revelator, Translator, and seer, "in his stead" the whole work has come to a dead stand, and adjourned procedings Sini Die in a legal point of light." –John E. Page to James J. Strang, February 1, 1846[1]

The contest here has been a hard one. . . . You may think that I have taken a responsibility that I ought [not] to do, but I prayed to the Lord to give me power to preserve his people from the wolves. . . . But all goes well, as the boy said when his breeches were down and his fingers so numb that he could not button them up. But I tell you that God has been

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[1]John E. Page, Letter to James J. Strang, February 1, 1846, James Jesse Strang Collection, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; hereafter Strang Collection.

with me so far and enabled me to keep the enemy at bay.–Orson Hyde, Letter to Brigham Young, March 16, 1846[2]

THE DEBATES OVER CHURCH LEADERSHIP that followed Joseph Smith's death in 1844, commonly referred to as the "Succession Crisis," have received much attention in Mormon historiography.[3] Most treatments of this period have focused on the ecclesiastical questions that plagued Mormonism's structure. What power did the Quorum of the Twelve hold in Nauvoo? What role did lineage play in Smith's conception of ecclesiological succession? A less common but still persistent framing is the question of personalities: How did Brigham Young dismiss Sidney Rigdon? Why did James Strang's Smith-like charisma garner so many followers?

While these are important questions, what is often overlooked is the dynamic role creative theology and religious thought played during the debates. Scholars often depict Smith's Nauvoo theology as a set path with logical progressions that led to the radical Mormonism of Utah—a path that was consciously rejected by some competing groups while adapted by others. Most accounts present Smith's thought at the time of his death as a coherent worldview meant to be accepted, rejected, or, in some cases, peeled back to a pristine past that preceded corruption. We argue in this article that Smith's theology, even as late as 1844, was pregnant with possibilities, saturated with inherent tensions and paradoxes, and capable of several trajecto-

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[2]Orson Hyde, Letter to Brigham Young, March 16, 1846, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church History Library.

[3]Most influential are Michael D. Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994); Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Succession Question" (M.A. thesis: Brigham Young University, 1982); Ronald K. Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham, and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity," *BYU Studies* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 301–41; Danny L. Jorgensen, "Dissent and Schism in the Early Church: Explaining Mormon Fissiparousness," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 15–39; Danny L. Jorgensen, "Studies of Mormon Fissiparousness: Conflict, Dissent, and Schism in the Early Church," in Newell G. Bringhurst and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The Historiography of the Last Half Century* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2004), 229–52.

ries poised to depart in numerous directions—directions explored in the leadership debates of 1844–47 and, as a case study for this paper, the debates between John E. Page and Orson Hyde in 1846.[4]

The thought of Joseph Smith, just like the thought of any other religious or ideological innovator, is difficult—if not impossible—to fully reconstruct. Smith's revelations and teachings were more concerned with establishing doctrinal foundations and possibilities than with the niceties of systematic theology.[5] Prophets, by nature, are often eclectic, leaving behind an inchoate set of beliefs that must be synthesized and expanded by followers of the religious system. The role of a theological inheritor is not a faithful continuation of the founder's belief structure, despite their objections to the contrary, but the obligation to choose, utilize, expand, and appropriate concepts already present, if not yet fully realized, in the existing institution.[6] Thus, the debates over Smith's religious legacy that followed his death were not so much a rejection of already present ideological structures, or even a retrenchment to previous points of Mormonism's theological development, but defenses for specific emphases that had existed within the Mormon movement.

Further, more than just revealing the ambiguities within Smith's theology, the debates over Smith's mantle demonstrate the broader culture in which Mormonism throve. Just as Smith's own thought did not develop in a vacuum, his successors drew from contemporary ten-

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[4]A recent and useful treatment is Christopher Blythe, "Recreating Religion: The Response to Joseph Smith's Innovations in the Second Prophetic Generation of Mormonism" (M.A. thesis: Utah State University, 2010).

[5]This concept is more fully explored in Benjamin E. Park, "(Re)Interpreting Early Mormon Thought: Synthesizing Joseph Smith's Theology and the Politics of Religious Formation in Antebellum America," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 45 (Summer 2012): 59–88. The most cogent examination of Smith's theological vision as a coherent whole is Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[6]Max Weber has been the most influential in establishing the methodological concept. Weber, *On Charisma and Institutional Building*, edited by S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968). See also Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

sions, fears, and ideas in their own interpretations of Mormonism. The antebellum period was a dynamic moment in American religious history, where Christian sects fought in a frenzied landscape steeped in debate and dissent. Religious disestablishment, coupled with the growing connection between American culture and capitalist ideology, created a spiritual marketplace that forced competing religionists to utilize cultural currents in their promotion of specific beliefs and practices.[7] By closely examining the debates surrounding Mormonism's leadership in 1844–47, then, one can decipher not only remnants of Smith's thought, but crucial themes in American religion during the mid-nineteenth century.

This article traces various strains and issues by focusing on a single moment of interaction: the March 1846 debates between John E. Page, representing charismatic leader James J. Strang, and Orson Hyde, advocating the Quorum of the Twelve. In one respect, the time and place of this debate was a moment of power for the Twelve: These debates took place in Nauvoo shortly after many Saints had participated in the Nauvoo Temple ordinances and when Brigham Young and most of the Twelve had led a solid body of Church members into Iowa the preceding month. In another respect, this was also a period of great tumult: Threats of external violence, growing questions over polygamous practices, and the expected difficulties of a westward migration contributed to Strangism's most formidable—though ultimately unsuccessful—push in Mormon Nauvoo.[8]

In the midst of this upheaval, Page, once a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and long-time follower of Joseph Smith, became convinced of Strang's succession claims and transformed briefly into the movement's most powerful orator in Mormonism's center city. His advocacy posed a sufficiently serious threat that Hyde, the apostle left in charge of the Saints lacking the resources or other-

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[7]Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[8]For an overview of Strangism's success during this period, see Robin Scott Jensen, "Gleaning the Harvest: Strangite Missionary Work, 1846–1850" (M.A. thesis: Brigham Young University, 2005), 17–72; Vickie Cleverley Speek, *"God Has Made Us a Kingdom": James Strang and the Midwest Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006).

wise unable to migrate, sought to confront and dispel Page's (and thus Strang's) claims. The ensuing debates—argued in front of what Hyde called, with one exception, "the largest congregation assembled at the stand west of the Temple that I ever saw"[9]—touched on many of the tensions and malleability inherent within Mormon thought.

On November 16, 1845, Thomas Bullock, clerk to the Historian's Office, began to record sermons in a forty-eight-page notebook. This sermon notebook was not his first nor last, as he provided important historical and ecclesiastical continuity of public discourse in Nauvoo through much of 1845 and 1846. Bullock's carefully preserved minutes of these public sermons documented for future generations oral texts otherwise lost to history. This 1845–46 notebook includes several sets of minutes in February/March 1846 detailing Hyde's sermons in which he preaches, in part, against James J. Strang. In addition, Bullock recorded on loose pages a March 3, 1846, meeting called by Page, then a Strangite apostle. Though not knowable, we wonder if Bullock's use of loose sheets, rather than his notebook, was Bullock's judgment of these minutes as less official. The March 3, 1846, minutes and the minutes of the two meetings recorded in Bullock's more official notebook—meetings called by Hyde in response to and under the auspices of the Twelve—have particular interest for this study and to the rhetoric surrounding the questions of theological development after Joseph Smith's death.[10]

Historians should not slip into a false security about the capability of the minutes to represent the past. Thomas Bullock carefully captured the language spoken at these sermons within the limitations of the event and of his own note-taking. Though Bullock knew Taylor shorthand, he wrote these minutes in longhand. As a result, the wording is curt, the handwriting difficult to decipher in places, and abbreviations are frequent. Once transcribed, the resulting notes are not a complete text but are broken into phrases and shortened passages. While it is tempting to treat this text as definitive sources of the oral sermons, these documentary remnants must always be viewed with

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[9]Orson Hyde, Letter to Brigham Young, March 10, 1846, Brigham Young Papers.

[10]The minutes, which were retained in the LDS Church's possession since their creation, are now in the General Church Minutes Collection, Box 1, fds. 43, 45, LDS Church History Library. The block quotations that appear at section breaks without citation are from these minutes.

an element of incompleteness. At times, phrases are incomplete, thoughts are left ambiguous, and what Bullock meant by some abbreviations cannot be deduced. In addition, such notes rarely capture gestures, vocal inflections, pauses, or other nontextual elements. In sum, these surviving notes provide only a shadow of the actual oral text. Yet despite these limitations, important insights can be drawn from them.

Although this article focuses on the March debate, and takes as its text the sermon notes, the analysis and conclusions reach beyond that textual record into the larger context in which the sermons were given. Of course, Hyde did not wholly represent Brigham Young and the Twelve, nor did Page fully mirror Strang's own theology. Rather, these two important men represented the way in which so many Mormons following Joseph Smith's death personalized and conceptualized their arguments regarding succession. In an attempt to foreground the voices and arguments from the debate and to help ground this paper better on the text of the debate itself, we have punctuated our analysis with block quotations from these sermons that illustrate the tensions of each individual section. This text-centered approach will, we hope, offer more complete glimpses into the immediate context and environment. Because we are not presenting the texts in their entirety as a documentary editing presentation, we favor readability and comprehension over transcription accuracy and close adherence to the textual record. Among our silent emendations to increase readability are correct spellings, the introduction or modernization of punctuation and capitalization, and the silent expansion of abbreviations and other non-standard truncated words. Clarifying words are in brackets. Researchers interested in accessing scans to the original documents can also consult their DVD publication.[11]

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> *In every case of dissension that has come under me, it has been to investigate the private character–a course which no honest man will pursue. Private character is one thing, public principle is another & it is my firmness to the principle of 1830 that causes me to be here. . . . I*

[11]Richard E. Turley, ed., *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2 vols. DVD (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, [Dec. 2002]), Vol. 1, DVD #18.

dissent from no principle which has been taught me by the "thus saith the Lord."–John E. Page[12]

The origin narrative of Mormonism by 1844 was replete with questioning the religious authority of the larger antebellum religious culture. But questioning authority was a reality in the Church's recent past as well. Schism in Mormonism often resulted in conservative members reaching back into a more revelatory past that communicated greater orthodoxy. Page, citing the frequent "dissensions" of Mormonism, identified the "general laws" that should govern Mormonism and by which various fractured Mormonisms could be judged. These general laws—which Page saw as eternal principles—were made known to the Church through revelation by a prophetic leader. "It is my firmness to the principles of 1830," Page announced, "that causes me to be here." Ignoring these general laws and the revelatory leadership that brought them forth typified a rejection of what many began to call 1830 Mormonism, hearkening back to when the Church was first organized.

Citing prophetic change on the one hand while simultaneously citing the static principles or "general laws" of Mormonism on the other typifies other paradoxes in Page's view of the direction of the Church. These tensions included a prophet who received revelation but who had to be bound by past revelation; a temple built according to a revelation but with little actual meaning or importance tied to its liturgy; and a charismatic leader but one who would not offend followers' sensibilities. These tensions not only represented Page's understanding of what Mormonism should be, but they also hinted at the complexities and real paradoxes some Mormons faced after Smith's death.

Whatever theological differences may have existed between Page and Hyde, a practical consideration clearly influenced Page's responses: Page had grown distant from his brethren in the Twelve, partly due to his own (in)actions.[13] While most of the Twelve rushed back to Nauvoo as soon as they heard of Joseph Smith's death, it took Page about a year and a half to return, well after key events solidified

[12]These block quotations differentiating sections are in the General Church Minutes Collection, Box 1, fds. 43, 45, LDS Church History Library.

[13]For a brief biography of Page, with a particular emphasis on his Strangite connections, see William Shepard, "Shadows on the Sun Dial:

the authority of the Twelve in many members' minds. Page was therefore not present for the contest between Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon, the subsequent trial of Rigdon that resulted in his excommunication, the development of a post-Smithian temple theology, nor the economic and practical necessity of the Twelve taking charge of the institutional Church.

But a more personal distance also developed. Page expressed this distance in a letter to Strang, specifically complaining about his financial difficulties: "My brethren of the same Quorum appear to enjoy a reasonable plenty to sustain them in their capacity, I do not say they enjoy too much, but I do say, that I do not enjoy enough."[14] Page's distance and difficulty in achieving unity with his quorum serve as important reminders that schism rarely stems purely from theological differences.

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> *If Joseph did not receive the revelations as Moses did, why should we be governed by it now? It became of more force when he died. The new order of things is, not to read the revelations to the people. Measure your Spirit by the letter of the word. (reading) "until I shall appoint another in his stead" For what? to receive revelations. If no more commandments are to be given, how are you to build another temple without a "thus saith the Lord?" If J.J.Strang is not the man who is appointed, I want to know who is? You are without a head, a revelator, or seer–you are a body without a head & I would not have a red cent over for it.–John E. Page*

Page mourned the direction in which the Church was going—particularly considering the patterns already established in the Doctrine and Covenants. There, the Lord, speaking through Joseph Smith, informed the Church members how they should be governed: "Verily, verily I say unto you, that ye have received a commandment

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John E. Page and the Strangites," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 41 (Spring 2009): 34–66. See also John Quist, "John E. Page: Apostle of Uncertainty," in John Sillito and Susan Staker, eds., *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 19–42.

[14]John E. Page, Letter to James J. Strang, February 1, 1846, Strang Collection.

for a law unto my church, through him whom I have appointed unto you, to receive commandments and revelations from my hand." According to Page, the Lord clarified how He would reveal His word to His Church so that confusion would be minimal. Smith's revelation explicitly directed "that ye receive not the teachings of any that shall come before you as revelations or commandments: and this I give unto you, that you may not be deceived, that you may know they are not of me."[15] The general laws of Mormonism as found in the revelations outlined a prophetic figure to lead the Church, which ensured that the revelations to lead the Church could be tested based on the source from which they came.

The Twelve, according to Page, acted under a new revelation to move west—a false revelation that contradicted the canon of Joseph Smith's revelations and the expectation of future revelation. Jehiel Savage, Page's companion, opened the March 3 meeting with prayer asking God "that the Saints run not until they are commanded." Any new commandment, according to Page's interpretation, should be weighed against previous commandments.

The juxtaposition of this Nauvoo sermon with Orson Hyde's a little less than a year and a half earlier is striking. At the trial of Sidney Rigdon, Hyde preached: "When any man comes here with a revelation, purporting to be from God, we feel in duty bound to question its validity. This is a kind of furnace to prove all things, and Elder Rigdon don't like to come into the furnace."[16] In 1844, Hyde spoke against Rigdon and his new revelation on the basis that it countered the established pattern; in 1846, Page preached against Hyde and the new revelations his quorum presented that also went against the establishment.

To be fair, while Page called for comparing the new revelations with past revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1844, Hyde called for a close analysis of the revelation by the quorums of the Church. Because Page's ultimate authority was the Doctrine and Covenants, he shared his concern with the direction of the Church: "I have heard the appeal made that the book of [Doctrine and] Cove-

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[15]Revelation given in February 1831, as printed in the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (Nauvoo, Ill.: John Taylor, 1844), 14:2 (1979 LDS edition 43:2, 5–6).

[16]"Trial of Sidney Rigdon," *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 17 (September 15, 1844): 648.

nants is not a law for this people—that when Jesus died he did not appoint a successor—but it devolved upon the 12. . . . If any man says that the general laws [or eternal principles] of the D. & C. are done away," he asks "what order are we going to have in its place[?]" For Page, Smith's past revelations held the key to testing the content of additional revelation. Revelation testing revelation provided intellectual stability for those looking to the past but produced a paradox to those anticipating a revelatory future.

Relying strictly upon past revelation, Page told his audience that he found only a foreign structure and organization of the current Church. "Where is the common sense of it?" he asked his audience. The Doctrine and Covenants describes the roles and responsibilities of the various quorums: "The President of the Church is appointed by revelation." "If we go to the D. & C for a [leadership position within the] quorum of the 12," he declared, "the same book shews the 'necessity' of a prophet. Where was the necessity for a prophet for the last few years?" The printed revelations explicitly list the roles and responsibilities of the differing quorums: "Where is the propriety of sending out the Elders to proclaim the authority of the 12 doing two duties?" "The 1st presidency was to stay at home, & direct the 12—& the 12 to direct the 70s. The necessity is: the President must receive revelations & direct the 12 wherever they shall go." If Page was wrong to believe in such a literal and firm reading of the revelations, so be it. "Here is my apostasy," he declared. "I can't believe that a travelling council can stay at home." Page's invocation of one of Joseph Smith's most prominent revelations (LDS D&C 107)—which calls for a First Presidency (which would not be organized for another three years), and limited authority for the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (which the text defines as a "traveling council" with jurisdiction only over peripheral branches)—was a literalist argument seemingly drawn unambiguously from Joseph Smith's earlier ecclesiology.

Page's close reading of these revelations, however, reveals one example of how Mormons interpreted their religion during this transitional period of the Church hierarchy. For those living in Nauvoo during Smith's lifetime, their model of Mormon government was that of adaption. New circumstances produced constant change, with Smith being the most conspicuous proponent of such a model. During the Nauvoo period, for example, Smith moved beyond the revelations Page quoted by personally giving the Twelve more authority at Church headquarters. But for those outside Nauvoo, a more static

model prevailed, with the Doctrine and Covenants and the Church's newspaper, the *Times and Seasons*, leading the thinking. Away from Smith, the Church was more autonomous and therefore depended more heavily on Smith's revelations and other writings. Page's call for a closer dependency on the guidance in the Doctrine and Covenants reveals, at best, a dated understanding of how Church governance worked during that time within Church headquarters. Page, as an apostle, must have seen how some of the revelations from the mid-1830s were outdated, even if he did no more than consult his own memory of the Twelve's shifting roles since 1835. The tension Page preached that winter day in 1846 called for a return to Mormon leadership as found in the revelations of Joseph Smith—but which had not actually been practiced by Smith for years.

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> *It is a new point of doctrine & a new idea to me that the Doctrine & Covenants is not necessary for the sanctification of the people. There is not a greater damnable error that was ever preached in the whole world. If this makes me an apostate, I shall be proud of being considered an apostate & promulgate it to the world. –John E. Page*

One of Page's complaints about the Twelve's leadership stemmed from their treatment of him. As the leadership of the Church fell to the Twelve, an exclusionary mentality began to manifest itself against the supporters of Rigdon, William Marks, and those like James Emmett, Lyman Wight, and Alpheus Cutler who felt they were justified in fulfilling Smith's instructions given before his death. Such pressures for unity from the Twelve violated Page's concept that the Restoration should preserve open-ended questioning from its followers. Such exploration, as it were, went against the charismatic and demanding prophet Page discussed during his March 3 address. The individualism of the American republic rejected the submission of one's will to authoritarian figures; the exception was a singular and clear designation of God's prophet who had the right to require obedience. And here, Page spoke out against such a totalitarian rule.

Describing the meeting at which he was disfellowshipped, Page recalled that Hyde "gave [him] a real tear down [and] reproof. & when he [Hyde] finished he said this is by the voice of the Holy Ghost." Page quipped, "I say, God deliver me from the Holy Ghost. . . . I will go to

hell sooner than take abuse. & the devil shall have it to say 'here's a man that is damned like a man.'" For Page, leadership of the Church should act in accordance to Christian living, but Page did not explain how the charismatic religious figure he longed for, prone to bursts of revelations, could satisfy everyone in the Church. Smith's own past showed the impossibility of pleasing everyone, for religious schisms had plagued the Mormon movement from the beginning.

Page's appeal for sympathy from his audience was a gamble that failed to pay off materially or, more importantly for Page's proselytizing effort, religiously. In countering the Twelve's argument about the additional duties in bestowing ordinances in the temple, Page cited his poverty as his reason for not participating: "Why was not I receiving the ordinances that the others were promoted to? I went to the council as often as my circumstances would permit." According to Page, many Church members and leaders considered complete sacrifice necessary to receive these keys and Page's inability to gain access to the councils of the Twelve—through his own inaction—meant that "condemnation rolls on my head." Page's rhetorical pathos largely failed to open members' purses. "On Sunday evening," according to Hyde, "Page preached for the Strangites, and he murmured and complained of poverty so bitterly that they passed round the hat for him. 3 or 4 small pieces of money were put in with any quantity of nails, buttons, chips &c. The hat was capsized upon the table before him and the people, and its contents were not a little annoying to the fallen hero, besides furnishing a fine dish of sport for the curious."[17]

But Page sought more than monetary assistance. He was appealing for sympathy as a faithful member of the Church who had been spiritually abused by the Twelve: "I stand up in the dignity of a man. I will go to hell sooner than take abuse [from the Twelve]. & the devil shall have it to say 'here's a man that is damned like a man' (laughter [from the audience]). I want you to examine the Book of Mormon & are [sic] what liability there was to apostatize. If I have erred, it is because I placed too much confidence in them that taught me." Page set himself up as a spiritual martyr in an attempt to draw followers away from the more dominant authority of the Twelve. However, Page miscalculated his influence over his audience. Mormonism already had

[17]Orson Hyde, Letter to Brigham Young, March 10, 1846, Brigham Young Collection.

its prophetic martyr to look to for spiritual strength and authoritative justification.

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> *Ever since I have been engaged in Mormonism I have driven the gentiles to the letter of the book in which they have believed, having the example of Joseph, the 12, & the authorities of the church to draw the line between general & local laws. When a local law is discharged it becomes nothing more or less than history. When a temple is finished it is not a command to build another, unless another command is given. The laws given in the days of Moses were not abrogated at his death. In regard to the laws that shall guide all Israel those laws are yet enforced upon Israel.–John E. Page*

To Page, the temple served as an additional symbol to bolster his argument about the Twelve's usurpation of power. But even the place of the temple in Page's understanding presented a paradox. To Page, the command to Joseph Smith and the Church to build the temple was paramount.[18] Only a prophet could command the building of a temple. Thus, to abandon such an edifice resulted in permanent consequences in Page's understanding of the direction of the Church. "The 12 have only to soap any thing over with the name of Joseph & down it goes. There is nothing but involves your character at this time to forsake the Temple." But Page was unclear what the temple represented to his brand of theology or concept of Mormonism. The rituals did not appear to play a central role to Page or his understanding of the rights of authority in arguing for a successor to Smith. He did not argue during his sermon what the temple and the ordinances actually did for Mormonism. This failure to attach any significant meaning to it was likely due in part to his exclusion from the endowment and the Quorum of the Anointed under Smith. One thing was clear to Page: To move west was to leave behind an important structure—a structure that could not be easily built again without a prophet to lead them: "How are you to build another temple without a 'thus saith the Lord[?]'" he demanded rhetorically. The physical building represented the leadership of a prophet and revelator to Page. Without a

[18]Joseph Smith had dictated the commandment to build a temple January 19, 1841 (LDS D&C 124).

prophet, there could be no temple. What occurred inside that building was secondary. This paradox of temple importance without an emphasis on the internal ordinances of the temple did not fit into Page's interpretation of Mormonism.

It is true that Joseph Smith's death left a hole in the leadership of the Church—a void some rushed to fill. Smith's method of leadership, however, and revealed knowledge created a way for multiple interpretations of the future direction and interpretation of the religion he left. The revelations in print provided one such way in which individuals could interpret Mormonism. But those close to Nauvoo and Smith's charismatic leadership, with his oral teachings that went beyond what was in print, provided an expanded view of Mormonism.

Page, increasingly distant from the inner councils of the Church, failed to see (or ignored) the way in which Smith himself deviated from the established teachings he had set up earlier. Smith treated Mormonism as a living organism—a precedent continued after his death. Simplifying or ignoring Smith's treatment of past revelation represents Page's selectivity in (de)emphasizing Smith's teachings. Thus, as Page called for a closer adherence to Mormonism's past traditions, he also promoted a paradoxical view of Mormonism, one that most in Nauvoo could not accept.

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> *This morning I shall speak on the organization of the church. Don't you recollect [when] Jesus Christ was the president of the Church he chose 12 Apostles & they were witnesses, to go to all the nations & preach? By & bye the Savior was crucified & ascended to heaven–did he take the keys with him or leave them on the Earth? He did both–he left knowledge on Earth & took knowledge with him, & Knowledge is power. Says [Jesus] to Peter, I give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.–Orson Hyde*

John E. Page, and the interpretation of Mormonism he represented, was poised to take many believers from the Twelve. Strang had successfully appropriated an important and public strain of Joseph Smith's theology and thus presented a compelling claim to the Mormon mantle. Yet Orson Hyde was able to use other equally valid rhetorical and theological strains of early Mormonism in defending the Quorum of the Twelve. Specifically, in his March 1846 debate against Page, Hyde drew at least three primary arguments from

Smith's legacy: (1) a literal biblical exegesis based on a New Testament pattern and grounded in Mormonism's idiosyncratic tradition of scriptural interpretation; (2) a collapse of the distance between the earth and the spirit world argument that, concomitantly, venerated Joseph Smith even as it gave power to the Twelve; and, finally, (3) an emphasis on kingly power and hierarchical organization that served as a standard for truth.

Just as Joseph Smith patterned his own prophetic position after Old Testament models, the Twelve patterned their succession rights after the New Testament narrative. "Don't you recollect," Hyde reasoned, when "Jesus Christ was the president of the Church he chose 12 Apostles"; and later, when he "was crucified & ascended to heaven," he left the "keys [and] knowledge" with the Twelve. As scholars have long noted, much of early Mormonism's message hinged on specific interpretations and literalistic readings of the biblical text that, in turn, reaffirmed desired messages—what Philip Barlow aptly described as "selective literalism."[19] Mormons, of course, were both a reflection of and expansion from a broader antebellum American tradition of biblical groundedness, a culture that based epistemological truth on appeals to the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Religious innovations often meant, even for radical departures from American orthodoxy like Mormonism, a creative rereading of the Bible instead of a revolutionary transplantation of ideas and systems not found therein; Christianity in antebellum America was validated first and foremost through a biblical common-sense that often trumped competing claims.[20]

For the Twelve, however, the Bible was much more than just a theological database: It was also an archetypal standard upon which ecclesiastical systems were to be justified. Indeed, Hyde grounded the Twelve's succession claims on a New Testament precedent that seemingly validated the quorum's right to succeed a founding prophet.

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[19]Philip Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 32–36, 65.

[20]E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 174–80; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 169; Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 93.

Much as the Bible provided fragments or building blocks for theological and doctrinal debates during the period, it similarly provided useable materials for ecclesiastical arguments. Such a reading collapsed the distances between American and Palestinian contexts, establishing scriptural passages not only as a repository for religious principles but as a blueprint for practical organization. This institutionalized reading of scriptures aptly represents the Twelve's emphasis on centralized power and routinized charisma over individual spirituality.

This message found especially fertile ground in a debate saturated with scriptural exegesis. Strangite arguments were typically based in Doctrine and Covenants passages, seeking patterns and precedents that were both logical and authoritative. Yet Joseph Smith's revelations as printed in the Doctrine and Covenants lacked the narrative clarity and unequivocally shared foundation of the biblical text. By appealing specifically to the Bible—a text that was both authoritative enough to bring credibility but malleable enough to bolster his argument—Hyde drew from a tradition that was perceivably both clear and well established.

Indeed, while the Bible itself was full of scattered and, at times, contradictory blueprints for ecclesiastical reform, Mormons mirrored their Protestant neighbors by being selectively literal and presenting biblical examples as if they were foundational, universal, and unwavering. The ecclesiastical sections of the Doctrine and Covenants were ambiguous and could be debated due to their shared heritage, while the biblical narrative provided a clear example that affirmed the role of twelve apostles. Even in a restorationist setting, then, where a modern prophet perceivably allowed current expansions to that tradition and a modern book of scripture provided competing guidelines, Mormonism's belief in biblical continuity both restricted and enabled possible arguments. Even though the participants were debating the latter-day organization, arguments made from ancient settings still carried enormous weight. This was, for the most part, true with Joseph Smith, and it continued to be true in the succession debates.

* * *

[The] Doctrine & Covenants says, "I will never take the keys from thee (Smith) in this world nor in the world to come"–how can a man try & skip into his place? But I say, "you can't cause it." Allowing that Joseph Smith is in his place, where is the promise that another is to

be appointed in his place? (no) [The] D&C: "the keys of the Kingdom shall never be taken from thee, in this world nor in the world to come."–Orson Hyde

But a simple reliance on the Bible would not be enough. A common accusation against Brigham Young and the Twelve was that they were departing from Joseph Smith's legacy as an inspired prophet and the Doctrine and Covenants as a revealed text: In the first place, Smith never publicly declared through revelation, discourse, or print, challengers argued, that the Quorum of the Twelve was supposed to take authoritative control; second, the direction the Twelve was leading the Church—including centralized power and a growing knowledge of the Twelve's polygamous practices—trampled on the liberating message of "pure" Mormonism.[21] Thus, when facing challengers who emphasized what they believed to be the "Mormon tradition," the apostles were forced to ground their arguments in Smith's revelations and scriptural texts. This was especially the case with Page, who focused his remarks on what the Mormon scriptural corpus does—and does not—say about succession. Hyde realized that any theological position that did not have a base in the Doctrine and Covenants would be a losing position but recognized that many of that scripture's passages could be interpreted in various ways.

Hyde, and many other innovative interpreters like Parley P. Pratt, found a way around this quandary by reorienting the theological discussion. Instead of relying on the popular but somewhat ambiguous ecclesiastical sections like Doctrine and Covenants 107, Hyde focused on other theological principles that better correlated with their present position. Particularly fertile ground was Smith's role as president of the priesthood. The "Doctrine and Covenants says," Hyde reasoned in the debate, "I will never take the keys from thee (Smith) in this world nor in the world to come." This scriptural passage (LDS D&C 90:3) on its surface, doesn't seem to have much relevance to suc-

[21]For an outline of the politics involved when reconstructing "pure" Mormonism, see Thomas G. Alexander, "The Past as Decline from a Golden Age: Early Mormonism's Restorationist Tendency," and D. Michael Quinn, "'My Eyes Were Holden in Those Days': A Study of Selective Memory," both in *The William E. McLellin Papers, 1854–1880*, edited by Stan Larson and Samuel J. Passey (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007), 49–58, 59–82 respectively.

cession debates; but interpreted through the prism of the Twelve's priesthood linkages, it had significant latent possibilities.

Ironically echoing the argument of the defeated Sidney Rigdon sixteen months earlier, Hyde reasoned that no one could replace Joseph Smith as leader of the Church and that there really was no change in how the Church functioned after Smith's death. "Suppose I have a house with several rooms in it," Hyde mused. "If I go in a room by myself, am I out of my house? No. So it is with Joseph Smith. He is gone into another room." This common-sense reasoning, significantly grounded in Smith's revealed text itself, provided a creative foundation for one of the Twelve's succession claims, for it dismissed many of Strang's claims and, in the end, reaffirmed an ecclesiastical structure of which Smith was presumably still the center. If Smith remained at the head of the Church, then the structure that was in place before his death—implying the Quorum of the Twelve as second-in-command—remained the guiding principles of Church government.[22]

This idea expanded and realized the proclaimed "collapse of the sacred" in early Mormonism, specifically the disappearance of the veil. As Samuel M. Brown has persuasively argued, the "conquest of death" was at the center of Smith's soteriological vision, as sealing ordinances, a familial-based heaven, and a collapsed ontology served to close the distance between life and death.[23] While this idea had radical theological implications, it could also be used, as Hyde employed it in March 1846, as an ecclesiastical argument designed to block competing authoritative claims and reaffirm what was then considered to be the "orthodox" succession position. Mormonism's radical redefinition of the afterlife had profound implications, or at least rhetorical potential, in the debates over how the Church was to be governed on earth.

It is significant that Hyde, as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, could now afford a rhetorical strategy that assumed their ec-

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[22]Orson Hyde's response to Rigdon's claims are found in "Trial of Elder Rigdon," 649–51, 653. For this trial and its relevancy to the succession debates and temple ordinances, see Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances," 189–236.

[23]Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth*. See also Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37–52.

clesiastical primacy, because their argument self-perpetuated its own position: Implying that the same authoritative structure that existed during Smith's life was continued after his death, as Hyde reasoned, meant that the Twelve's authoritative position was taken for granted as the established ecclesiology in late Nauvoo. This position was an important rhetorical shift from even fifteen months previous, when the Twelve, though with some ecclesiastical precedent in Nauvoo, were considered merely one possibility in the competing claims for Mormonism's leadership. By capitalizing on the trust and responsibility that Smith had placed on them during the last three years of his life and by stretching that responsibility beyond this life into the next, the Twelve were able to cement their succession claims through arguing ecclesiastical continuity. By 1846, Hyde's position was a position of power, and his argument reflected an assumption that the quorum was the favorite rather than the challenger. This assumption was grounded in increased authority in the early Nauvoo period, over a year of dominance in Church headquarters following Smith's death, and, as we argue below, their possession of the Nauvoo Temple— which came to serve as the trump card in the game of succession.[24]

* * *

> *This is no church but is a Kingdom. They may cry poor Pussy & want to cry Treason. . . . There was once a time when the fragments were more than the meal. We will gather up the fragments. Joseph Smith is the Hook in Heaven, the 12 are the next link & you are all linked on.–Orson Hyde*

Hyde's third rhetorical strategy was the increasingly prominent symbol of "keys." A central message of early Mormonism was the possibility of personal revelation: the idea that each individual had access to the divine. While the emphasis on this principle was tempered by an expanding hierarchical structure, it entailed a trajectory that, for many outsiders, bordered on revelatory anarchy. The implications of such an egalitarian religious structure, most extensively drawn out by religious

[24]For an overview of how the Twelve solidified control in Nauvoo, see Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002).

scholar Nathan Hatch, appeared at the acme of Jacksonian culture.[25] Individual mobility and republican rhetoric dominated movements like Mormonism that were nourished by democratic culture. James Strang and other competitors claimed that Brigham Young was forgetting this significant Mormon tradition with their authoritarian claims and centralized power.

Hyde argued that Smith's revelatory position was not being "trampled," but rather that it had evolved into the esoteric rituals of the temple—the climax, according to Hyde, of Smith's prophetic career. Through temple ordinances, the Church was still linked to Smith and the fountain of revelation. "Joseph Smith is the Hook in Heaven," Hyde asserted, "the 12 [are] the next link—& you [are] all linked on." This hierarchical structure, which was realized and reaffirmed through the ordinances later associated with the Nauvoo Temple, helped to centralize authority and knowledge within a framework controlled by the Twelve.

With the Twelve, the rites of the Nauvoo Temple became the standard of all knowledge and validity. It was only through the priesthood keys that the fountain of knowledge could continue. Indeed, the term "keys," a term that served several different purposes for Joseph Smith, came to be the dominant descriptor for salvific truth and specifically meant priesthood dominion—a move that demonstrates the lengths to which the Twelve routinized soteriological and epistemological authority. Smith's revelations had laid the foundation, but now the temple ordinances ritualized and fulfilled that spirit and message. "I asked Elder Page the other day," Hyde mused, "which is the greater, this Book (the D&C) or the Spirit that gave it?" For the previous year, the Twelve had emphasized temple ordinances as the apex of this spirit of revelation. Because this debate between Hyde and Page took place mere weeks after fifty-six hundred Saints experienced these salvific ordinances, and the fact that the discourse was given in the very shadow of the Nauvoo Temple, would have underscored the connection between "knowledge" and "priesthood keys," and further confirmed the apostles' succession claims. Knowledge could and

[25]Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, esp. 113–22; Gordon S. Wood, "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism," *New York History* 61 (October 1980): 359–86; Kenneth Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830–1836* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

would be gained through reason and revelation, but it could only be confirmed through priesthood rites.

In this sense, Mormonism's canonicity expanded to include not only recorded revelations but also experiential rituals. While Smith himself had made the connection between priesthood keys and knowledge, he did so sporadically and without systematic precision; and while Smith himself introduced the temple ordinances that the Twelve would emphasize, these rituals did not gain importance with average Latter-day Saints until after the Twelve took control. They introduced their apostolic control of the temple in the charged climate of succession debates and centralized power. It is impossible to conjecture the implications of how Smith would have expanded his private rituals into larger availability for the average Saint, but it is possible to trace how the rituals' introduction served the Quorum of the Twelve's succession claims.

By placing the temple and priesthood keys at the center of Mormonism's epistemological claims, the Twelve succeeded in establishing a theological framework in which their claims triumphed over all others. By holding the keys to the temple, both literally and symbolically, Brigham Young and the apostles held the keys to salvation and knowledge. But in doing so, they dictated that Joseph Smith's revelatory legacy would be understood in a way that led first and foremost to the future temple rituals—ceremonies that were not introduced until two years before his death and not made public until shortly after his murder. What had been a set of secret rituals limited to a small circle of initiates—though they planned to have larger participation once the Nauvoo Temple was completed—was now the only path through which one could gain salvific knowledge.[26] Previous Mormon rhetoric concerning revelation hinged on what Parley Pratt termed the "Fountain of Knowledge," meaning dialogic revelation through a personal connection to deity; now the "fountain" was more to be experienced rather than merely learned. While this adapted framework of revelatory knowledge threatened to routinize what had hitherto been a dynamic understanding of truth, it succeeded in centering epistemological power in Brigham Young and the Twelve and attaching be-

[26]Kathleen Flake, "'Not to Be Riten': The Mormon Temple Rite as Oral Canon," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 1–21; Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth*, 170–202.

lievers to a unified religious movement.[27]

And thus, the hallmark of what came to be known as the Brighamite response to the succession crisis was emphasizing Mormonism's theocratic view of the cosmos. John Page's biggest problem, Hyde reasoned at the end of the first day of debate, was that he mistook Mormonism for a "church" rather than a "kingdom." The structure of a "church" could be debated, challenged, and even reformed through the democratic voice of the people or a charismatic leader. A kingdom, on the other hand, offered stability through an authoritative hierarchy centered on rites and power, a position that Orson Hyde and the Twelve claimed in 1846 once their position was accepted as orthodox. While similar sentiments could certainly be found in Joseph Smith's own sermons and private teachings, nothing approached the tenacity and consistency of kingdom-centered discourse during the immediate post-martyrdom period. Smith's fragments of temple rituals and theology, introduced to his inner circle, were intended to anoint "kings and priests" and extend exaltation to all those worthy followers. Brigham Young and the Twelve adapted and expanded those teachings to solidify their claims of succession and stabilize a fledgling faith within a tumultuous republican and democratic climate.[28]

This theocratic vision served not only as a reaction to the succession debates of Nauvoo, but also as a critique of the broader tumultuous and vibrant culture that was antebellum America. While many religions, including many faiths competing over Smith's crown, sought to become more democratic in knowledge, power, and authority, the Twelve centralized those elements in a way that brought stability in the face of both internal and external influences. Brigham Young and

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[27]See Parley P. Pratt, "The Fountain of Knowledge," in Pratt, *An Appeal to the Inhabitants of the State of New York, Letter to Queen Victoria (Reprinted from the Tenth European Edition,) The Fountain of Knowledge; Immortality of the Body, and Intelligence and Affection* (Nauvoo, Ill.: John Taylor, Printer, 1844). For "dialogic revelation," see Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 209–39.

[28]See Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). For a fuller exploration, see Benjamin E. Park, "Theocracy, Authority, Patriarchy: Early Mormonism and Democratic Culture," unpublished paper.

his fellow apostles drew on—even enhanced—the fears and misgivings of certain segments of an American society in which the excesses of democracy were well known. Hesitant about the new path upon which American culture was embarking, the Twelve systematized the Prophet's theology by emphasizing elements that paved the way for the later Utah theocracy. And in doing so, they vocalized a strain of American reservations about the cultural revolution that, while originally promising equality and empowerment, now appeared on the brink of anarchy and instability.[29]

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During Page's sermon in March, he claimed that "ever since I have been engaged in Mormonism I have driven the gentiles to the letter of the book in which they have believed, having the example of Joseph, the 12, & the authorities of the church." What Page failed to realize as problematic was that Joseph Smith left many authoritative texts at his death, resulting in conflicting directions drawn from different, but equally valid, interpretations. Page's version of Mormonism called for an acknowledgment and embracing of that tension, while the Twelve called for a structure and theological approach that completely jettisoned that tension. The debate in March of 1846 not only provides an important microcosm of the succession crisis among the many interpretations of Mormonism but exemplifies the broader antebellum culture.

On March 10, 1846, Orson Hyde wrote to Brigham Young a report of his dealings with Page and the religion he represented. Tellingly, he proclaimed: "Strangism and Pageism were blown into annihilation by the Spirit and power of God through your humble servant and brother." Hyde's remark was more than mere "humble" boasting. Hyde increasingly dismissed and ignored the competing claims, a strategy that Young and others of the Twelve took toward schismatic

[29]For the political and cultural tumult of the period, see Yonatan Eyal, *The Young American Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828–1861* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 411–45; Marshall Foletta, *Coming to Terms with Democracy: Federalist Intellectuals and the Shaping of an American Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

groups for at least the following decade. Young and the Twelve that followed him established a culture in which any tension based on competing Joseph Smith ideas and texts could no longer exist. Smith was still at the head of the Church, though the Twelve were at the head of the earthly institution. The kingdom-theology of the Church established a hierarchy within which strict obedience was crucial, and a close dependency upon New Testament readings contributed to an organization that disdained paradoxes, ambiguities, or tensions.

On March 14, four days after his letter to Young, Hyde received and printed his own revelation for the people of Nauvoo and the other "Churches" of Mormonism. Hyde, troubled and meditating upon the "false pretences by evil designing persons to gain power, [to] lead away the flock of God," was told in his revelation that the Twelve were indeed chosen by God and that Strang "cursed my [the Lord's] people by his own spirit and not by mine [and] Never, at any time, have I appointed that wicked man to lead my people, neither by my own voice, nor by the voice of my servant, Joseph Smith." Hyde's revelation clarified the place of the people in the Twelve's view of the Church. Though some, including Page, felt that Hyde and the other Twelve were taking advantage of a strict hierarchical structure, Hyde's revelation stated otherwise. "The worthy shall have their rights. . . . But the unworthy have no rights except these: Repentance or condemnation."[30]

For Hyde, Mormons who followed the counsel of the Twelve maintained their rights as members of the Church and even spoke with God's voice, but those who did not forfeited their rights as citizens of the kingdom of God. The Twelve's hierarchical structure of Mormonism opened up the rights and alleviated the tensions of members—as long as those members adopted and accepted the Twelve's model. The revelation's closing words served as the final word on the matter: "Let there be no more disputes or contentions among you about doctrine or principle, neither who shall be greatest, but hearken to those things which I have spoken unto you, and which have before been given and you shall rest in my kingdom, and have

[30][Orson Hyde,] "He That Hath Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear What the Spirit Saith unto the Church," [Nauvoo, Ill., March 1846], broadside, LDS Church History Library.

glory and honor forever and ever."[31] Leaving the unfaithful outside the established order of Mormonism gave Orson Hyde the opportunity of disregarding their actions.

But this establishment of a strict hierarchical structure was a model against the grain of the larger antebellum culture of individuality, republicanism, and democracy. Page recognized this resistance when he viewed what Hyde was presenting. Speaking as much from an American culture as from a Mormon one, he told his audience on March 3: "You are without a head, a revelator, or seer—you are a body without a head & I would not have a red cent over for it—& I would just go & join the most popular sect that I could."

Page's rejection of the version of Mormonism presented by Hyde and the Twelve was the embodiment of antebellum individualist culture helped along by his distance from his former quorum. Page's willingness to "shop around" for another religion represents the pattern of many individuals who went from Mormon group to group. Their dissatisfaction in religious choices was not just about Mormon theology; it was also about finding a Mormon body that could align with their antebellum sensibilities. The succession crisis, then, was more than a crisis of Mormon succession. It was a radical realignment of cultures. Mormonism—especially the schism that remained within the borders of America—was more of an American religion than most realized.

[31]Ibid.