

The Patriarchal Crisis of 1845

E. Gary Smith

ALMOST A YEAR after Patriarch to the Church Hyrum Smith was killed, the *Times and Seasons*, the official church newspaper in Nauvoo, carried an editorial entitled "Patriarchal," with the prefatory note: "As the nature of the office of Patriarch, does not seem to be fully understood, we thought a little explanation on this point might not be amiss."¹ If what followed failed in its stated purpose of providing a complete understanding of the office, it nevertheless represents the first attempt to provide a written description of the duties and responsibilities of the office of Patriarch to the Church, and for that reason has usually figured largely in historical studies of the subject and period.²

"Patriarchal," which appeared 1 June 1845, was authored by John Taylor, of the *Times and Seasons* and presumably spoke on behalf of Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve.³ Taylor, in his description of the office of Patriarch to the Church, concluded among other things that: the title is "Patriarch to the Church" and not "Patriarch over the whole Church"; that the Patriarch to the Church is one of several patriarchs, all of whom have equal

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¹ "Patriarchal," *Times and Seasons* 6 (1 June 1845): 927. Although bearing the publication date of 1 June 1845, the article was not written until 23 June 1845 and was not published until shortly thereafter. John Taylor, *Diary*, 23 June 1845, photocopy in the Historical Department Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; cited hereafter as LDS Church Archives.

² See, for example D. Michael Quinn: "Joseph Smith III's 1844 Blessing and the Mormons of Utah," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 1 (1981): 14; and *DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT* 15 (Summer 1982): 69-90; G. Homer Durham, ed., *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), pp. 146-49.

³ Taylor, *Diary*, 23 June 1845.

authority to give blessings; that patriarchs only bless the “fatherless” (those without worthy priesthood-bearing fathers); and that the presiding rights of the Patriarch to the Church are limited to presiding over other patriarchs.

To make use of this editorial in reconstructing the office as it once existed we must remember that, as with other offices in the Mormon hierarchy, the position of Patriarch to the Church evolved with few written guidelines during the lifetime of the Prophet Joseph Smith. We are left to evaluate and collate the miscellaneous and disparate evidences available to us. Taylor’s article must be viewed as only one of those evidences; and to test the extent of its value in the reconstruction process, we must first understand what prompted its authorship and the point of view from which it was written.

The story begins with the martyrdom of Hyrum Smith on 27 June 1844. Historians have given much attention to the controversy surrounding Joseph’s rightful successor but little has been written concerning the uncertainty surrounding Hyrum’s successor and the effect of that process on the history of the office of Patriarch to the Church. The patriarchy was then barely ten years old. Joseph Smith, Sr., the first patriarch, was ordained by the First Presidency on 18 December 1833.⁴ On his deathbed, 14 September 1840, Father Smith sealed the patriarchal power upon the head of his son Hyrum.⁵ Four months later Joseph Smith, Jr., received a revelation confirming Father Smith’s action: Hyrum was to take the “office of Priesthood and Patriarch which was appointed unto him by his father, by blessing and also by right.”⁶

When Hyrum was killed at Carthage, his oldest son, John, was not quite twelve years old,⁷ too young, like Joseph III in the case of succession to the presidency, to be considered. Of the brothers, only Samuel and William survived Hyrum. Samuel died a month after Hyrum on 30 July 1844.⁸ This left William Smith as the nearest adult male relative of Hyrum.

⁴ In the larger sense, Joseph Smith, Jr., was the first patriarch. Oliver Cowdery recorded the blessings pronounced by the younger Joseph upon his family on 18 Dec. 1833, before the older Joseph received the priesthood office from his son on the same occasion. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1953), 1:473, originally published as *Course of Study for the Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums, 1947–1950*. Brigham Young once stated that his father, John Young, was the first patriarch in the Church by reason of his ordination after the return of Zion’s Camp, *Journal History*, 21 June 1874, p. 30. However, the return of Zion’s Camp was in 1834, after Joseph Smith, Sr.’s ordination on 18 Dec. 1833. See also D. Michael Quinn, “The Evolution of the Presiding Quorums of the LDS Church,” *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 26; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 3:163; and Earnest M. Skinner, “Joseph Smith, Sr., First Patriarch to the Church” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1958), pp. 83–86.

⁵ B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978), 4:29; Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), p. 309.

⁶ D&C 124:91; see also *Times and Seasons* 2 (1 June 1841): 42.

⁷ John Smith was born 22 Sept. 1832.

⁸ *History of the Church*, 7:213.

At the time of the martyrdom, William, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, was on a mission to the eastern states.⁹ He did not return to Nauvoo until 4 May 1845, over ten months later.¹⁰ However, William, as well as others, had considered his possible role as a successor to Hyrum's patriarchal office well in advance of his return. On 8 August 1844, Brigham Young had spoken publicly of such a possibility during his confrontation with Sidney Rigdon over leadership of the church, contrasting the cases of the president and the patriarch. At that time Brigham Young opposed naming any man as head of the Church in Joseph's place and declared that the Twelve were sufficient to lead the church without a replacement for Joseph: "Inasmuch as our prophet and patriarch are taken from our midst," he propounded to the congregation, "do you want someone to guard, to guide and lead you through this world into the Kingdom of God, or not? All that want someone to be a guardian, or a prophet, a spokesman, or something else, signify it by raising the right hand (no votes)."¹¹ He then addressed the question of a replacement for Hyrum Smith:

Do you want a patriarch for the whole church? To this we are perfectly willing. If Brother Samuel H. Smith had been living, it would have been his right and privilege, but he is dead, . . . Do you want a patriarch? here is Brother William left . . . Here is Uncle John, he has been ordained a patriarch. Brother Samuel would have taken the office if he had been alive; it would have been his right; the right is in Uncle John, or one of his brothers. I know that it would have belonged to Samuel. But as it is, if you leave it to the Twelve, they will wait until they know who is the man. Will you leave it to the Twelve, and they dictate the matter (a unanimous vote)."¹²

William Smith wrote to Brigham Young only two weeks later from his missionfield and asked: "Will the Bretherin remember me and my clames in the Smith family I do not mean sucession as a prophet in Joseph place for no man on earth can fill his place . . . hence the 12 come next to him . . . and govern the church in all things."

William pledged his support to Brigham Young as head of the Quorum and as the proper person to receive revelation for the church, then continued: "The next in order is the Patriarch of the church this Singular personage stands as father to the whole church, a patriarch can be a prophet and revelator not to the church as government but to the church as his children in Patriarchal Blessings upon their heads . . . and all I have to say farther is that this office

⁹ William Smith was ordained an apostle 15 February 1835. See Reed C. Durham, Jr., and Steven H. Heath, *Succession in the Church* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), p. 17. His arrival in the Eastern States Mission was some time prior to the martyrdom, for correspondence was addressed to him in Philadelphia on 20 June 1844. See *History of the Church*, 6:519.

¹⁰ James M. Monroe, *Diary*, photocopy, Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., 4 May 1845; William Clayton, *Journal*, 4 May 1845, LDS Church Archives.

¹¹ *History of the Church*, 7:232.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7:234, 241-42.

of Patriark must continue in the Smith family while they live and are in the faith.”¹³

Brigham Young responded over a month later in a letter dated 28 September 1844:

As it regards a Patriarch for the whole church there has not been any appointed yet in the place of Brother Hyrum and I do not calculate to do anything but what is strictly according to the mind and will of God; the right rests upon your head there is no doubt and all will remain as it is until we have further connections from you, but if you feel disposed you can bestow it upon Uncle John or Uncle Asael; and if not disposed to do so but feel to have it yourself we wish you to come to Nauvoo as soon as possible to receive your ordination as Patriarch.¹⁴

At the October 1844 conference a few days later, Brigham Young “went on to show that the right to the office of Patriarch to the whole church belonged to William Smith as a legal right by descent.”¹⁵

Though the Quorum of the Twelve moved steadily toward William’s appointment as Hyrum’s successor, it was a decision they probably would have preferred to avoid. Aware of William’s independent nature, they probably perceived him as less than totally committed. They undoubtedly remembered William’s rebellious conduct ten years earlier at the church trial of a Sister Elliot when he became so angry with his brother, Joseph, that he turned in his “license.” The remaining eleven apostles had to be humbled by a “*Revelation to the Twelve*” before they would open their minds to William’s reinstatement in their quorum: “As for my scrvant William, let the Eleven humble themselves in prayer and in faith, and wait on me in patience, and my servant William shall return, and I will yet make him a polished shaft in my quiver, in bringing down the wickedness and abominations of men.”¹⁶

A month later William physically attacked Joseph at a meeting of a debating society. In the wake of this disastrous breach in Smith family unity, the Twelve called William to account for his conduct and Orson Johnson preferred charges against him. Orson Hyde, a fellow apostle, even expressed resentment over William’s “superior privileges.”¹⁷

¹³ William Smith to Brigham Young, 24 Aug. 1844, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives.

¹⁴ Brigham Young to William Smith, 28 Sept. 1844, *The Prophet*, 9 Nov. 1844, New York City Public Library Annex, Newspaper Collection. William responded letter dated 16 Oct. 1844: “In relation to the Patriark for the whole church I must say I am vary thankful to get your opinion on this important subject as favorable to me as it is the legal right rests upon me & all I have to say you know the sufferings of the Smith family. . . . in case I should leve Nauvoo to stay any time Uncle John or Uncle Asel could be appointed to act in my place” Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives.

¹⁵ *History of the Church*, 7:301.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:294–301. For a review of William’s difficulties with the Quorum of the Twelve, see Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), pp. 163–65.

¹⁷ *History of the Church*, 2:334–44, 346–47, 352–54.

William's refusal in later years to serve missions like others in the Quorum of the Twelve prompted his defensive letter published in the *Times and Seasons* in 1840.¹⁸ However, the hardships William described as excuses were hardly greater than other members of the Twelve suffered who, nevertheless, responded to the calls. Furthermore, friction between William and the Twelve was in evidence as recently as October of 1844 when apostle Wilford Woodruff wrote disparaging comments to Brigham Young concerning William's activities in the east.¹⁹

Thus it would not be surprising that Uncle John or Uncle Asael, both brothers of Joseph, Sr., were more acceptable to Brigham Young and the rest of the Twelve as possible successors to Hyrum, and Brigham was obviously disappointed that Samuel had not lived to assume the office.²⁰ But it is also apparent that Brigham Young genuinely felt an obligation to follow what he saw as the Lord's will in the matter and to honor what he understood to be Smith family "rights," even if it resulted in conferring the office on William. Accordingly, on 24 May 1845, Brigham Young ordained William Smith to be "Patriarch to the whole church."²¹

Immediately thereafter, an article authored by William appeared in the *Times and Seasons*. (The issue is dated May 15 but the editor apologizes for its lateness. Actual publication was running in excess of three weeks after the stated publication dates. It probably appeared about two weeks after William's ordination.)²² It began with a review of the sufferings of the founding family of Mormonism. William did not refer to Joseph individually but attributed the accomplishments of the Church to "the family." He then referred to his own sufferings and sacrifices, his continuing trust in God, and the fact that he, as "the last of the family" had now settled in Nauvoo. He asked: "Shall I be sustained by this community?" William also advised: "Support and uphold the proper authorities of the church — when I say authorities, I mean the whole, and not a part; the TWELVE and not one, two, six, eight, ten, or eleven, but the whole TWELVE: follow me as I follow Christ."

William's article was not overtly inappropriate but in the context of the times it was filled with possible double meanings. The Council of the Twelve

¹⁸ "Communications," *Times and Seasons* 2 (15 Dec. 1840): 252.

¹⁹ Wilford Woodruff to Brigham Young, 9 Oct. 1844, Journal History, Church Archives.

²⁰ Brigham Young's multiple references to Samuel Smith after Samuel's death in connection with the patriarchal office, may have been intended to divert attention away from any of Joseph's comments about presidential succession inconsistent with leadership by the Twelve. William Clayton in his diary 12 July 1844 states: "Prest. [William] Marks came up to enquire which was best to do about appointing a trustee . . . The Trustee must of necessity be the first president of the Church & Joseph has said that if he and Hyrum were taken away Samuel H. Smith would be his successor."

²¹ *History of the Church*, 7:418; Willard Richards, Diary, 24 May 1845, LDS Church Archives.

²² "Patriarchal," *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 May 1845): 904. In referring to William's article, Taylor said in his 1 June 1845 editorial: "And concerning Brother Wm. Smith, we are better acquainted with him, and with his views, than to believe that he intended to convey any such idea as the one which some persons would put upon, or gather from his sayings."

concluded the day before William's ordination, that William Smith "constitutes the greatest danger" — probably referring to the Twelve's fear that the Smith family, through William, might challenge their leadership of the church.²³ William's emphasis in his postordination article on the Smith family and his position as the only surviving brother could have been seen as a request for support beyond the patriarchal office. His reference to supporting each of the Twelve equally could also have been seen as an effort to undermine Brigham Young's obvious leadership role in the Quorum.²⁴ Furthermore the invitation to follow William as he followed Christ might suggest that William was not subject to the Twelve; and, if so, might not holding the office of patriarch actually put William in a position equivalent to that held by Joseph prior to his death? The Twelve were, after all, aware that Hyrum was also associate president at the time of his death and no doubt sensed a certain merging of the two offices in the minds of some members.²⁵

A second article in the same issue of the *Times and Seasons* written by W. W. Phelps did not discourage such speculation.²⁶ He called William Smith "Patriarch over the whole church," who, in addition to being "a father to the church," would confer blessings upon his "descent," confer blessings upon "all," and confer blessings upon "such as have not a father living to do it." Phelps maintained that William had inherited by right of lineage the same office that Joseph, Sr., and Hyrum had held; he eulogized the Smith family; and he emphasized William's role as the family representative.

The response was immediate. The return to Nauvoo of the only adult male member of the Smith family, coupled with his new ordination and the accompanying articles in the *Times and Seasons*, raised serious questions. The possibility that William might be viewed by the membership as the successor to Joseph as well as to Hyrum was all too real.

²³ William Clayton, Journal, 23 May 1845: "Wm Smith is coming out in opposition to the Twelve and in favor of Adams. The latter has organized a church at Augusta, Iowa Territory with young Joseph Smith for President, William Smith for Patriarch, Jared Carter for President of the Stake and himself for spoke[s]man to Joseph. Wm. says he has sealed some women to men and he considers he is not accountable to Brigham nor the Twelve nor anyone else. There is more danger from William Smith than from any other source, and I fear his course will bring us much trouble. [In the p.m.] The case of Wm. Smith was also talked over. It appears he is determined to rule the church and monopolize the whole to himself."

²⁴ Brigham Young was sustained at the 6 Oct. 1844 general conference of the Church as "the president of the Quorum of the Twelve, as one of the Twelve and the First Presidency of the Church," *History of the Church*, 7:294. Although a separate First Presidency was not formed until 1847, Brigham Young was acting as de facto president of the Church at least by October 1844.

²⁵ For a more complete review of Hyrum's position as associate president see Robert Glen Mouritsen, "The Office of Associate President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972).

²⁶ John Taylor, in the 1 June 1845 article, identifies W. W. Phelps as the author of the *Times and Seasons* 15 May 1845 article: "So far as the editorial is concerned it was written rather hastily by our junior editor, W. W. Phelps, and did not come under our notice until after it was published." (It is probably safe to assume the article written by William in the same edition escaped prior detection also.)

The Quorum of the Twelve had to respond quickly and strongly to put aside any such notions. They did so through editor John Taylor in the 1 June 1845 editorial, which was published only two weeks after the articles by William Smith and W. W. Phelps. Taylor did not present a dispassionate description of the nature of the office of patriarch. Rather, he set out to demonstrate, by presenting a restrictive definition of William's position, that such a calling could not possibly be construed as giving credentials which could challenge the exclusive leadership of the Quorum of the Twelve.

John Taylor began with a discussion of the name of the office. The record of William's ordination indicates he was to be "a Patriarch *to* the whole church";²⁷ Brigham Young, in the August and October conferences of 1844, referred to the office as "patriarch *for* the whole church"²⁸ (italics added), the phrase he had used in his September 1844 letter to William. On the occasion of Joseph, Sr.'s death, the Prophet Joseph referred to his father as "Patriarch of the Whole Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," and as "Presiding Patriarch of the Church."²⁹ However, the Taylor article maintained that this preposition meant William was "patriarch *to* the church" and not "patriarch *over* the *whole* church" (italics in the original). Taylor clearly made the distinction to prevent the title from legitimizing, even inadvertently, any presidential claims William might make. Taylor's article conceded that William would act as a "senior Patriarch," have "priority and presidency," hold the keys of the patriarchal priesthood, and in a council of patriarchs, preside by right of office.

While the article stated that William would be acting "more especially" in the Nauvoo area, and thus implying a geographical restriction, the language carefully avoided denying actual church-wide authority. No known historical evidence suggests any geographical restrictions on either Hyrum or Joseph, Sr. In fact, the article itself quotes, in reference to William, the language of Hyrum's calling — to hold "the keys of the patriarchal blessings upon the heads of *all* my people." (italics added).³⁰

Taylor then proceeded in the editorial to the primary purpose for which the parameters of the office were being drawn:

We have been asked, Does not "patriarch over the whole church" place Brother William Smith at the head of the whole church as president? Ans. No . . . But does not the Book of Doctrine and Covenants say, "First," I give unto you Hyrum Smith to be a Patriarch unto you to hold the sealing blessings of my church, even the Holy Spirit of promise whereby ye are sealed up unto the day of redemption, that ye may not fall?" Yes, But that is in regard to seniority not in regard to authority in priesthood, for it

²⁷ *History of the Church*, 7:418.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7:234, 301.

²⁹ B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 1:387: "The presiding patriarch over the patriarchs of the church, however, is not so limited, since his jurisdiction in the line of his calling extends throughout the church, and he presides over, instructs and directs the labors of all the patriarchs of the church."

³⁰ *History of the Church*, 4:189.

immediately follows, "I give unto you my servant Joseph to be a presiding elder over all my church." . . . And from this it is evident that the president of the church, not the patriarch, is appointed by God to preside. But does not the Patriarch stand in the same relationship to the church, as Adam did to his family, and as Abraham and Jacob did to theirs? No.³¹

Taylor made the argument that since the Twelve are commanded to ordain evangelical ministers (patriarchs), the patriarchal office must necessarily be under and subject to the Twelve. This argument ignored the distinction made during Joseph's lifetime between the presiding patriarch and local patriarchs. D&C 107:39 states: "It is the duty of the Twelve *in all large branches* of the church, to ordain evangelical ministers" (italics added). Neither Joseph, Sr., nor Hyrum Smith, as the presiding patriarch, had been ordained by or was subject to the Quorum of the Twelve—only to Joseph Smith. Since the membership voted not to replace Joseph as president, the Twelve had necessarily adjusted the line-authority for the office of the presiding patriarch so that, for the first time, it was subject to the Twelve.³²

Undoubtedly, the most interesting subject Taylor touched upon in the June 1 article is the relationship between fathers and ordained patriarchs in the giving of patriarchal blessings. "Every father, after he has received his patriarchal blessing, is a Patriarch to his own family; and has the right to confer patriarchal blessings upon his own family; which blessings will be just as legal as those conferred by any Patriarch of the church: in fact it is his right; and a Patriarch in blessing his children, can only bless as his mouthpiece."³³

Although Taylor was obviously attempting to demonstrate the absence of unique priesthood authority in the office of patriarch by pointing out the parallel authority of all worthy fathers and thereby further dampening any similarity between William's office and that of president of the Church, his discussion nevertheless gives us important insight into the early relationship between fathers and patriarchs.

Of over 360 patriarchal blessings dating prior to October 1845, reviewed for this paper,³⁴ 226 (or 63 percent) specifically stated that a father's blessing was being given. Eighteen of the 226 blessings identify the recipient as not hav-

³¹ *Times and Seasons* 6 (1 June 1845): 921. See also D&C 124:124.

³² The Twelve announced prior to William's return from the East that his patriarchal office would be subject to the quorum: William will "stand in the same relationship to the Twelve, as his brother Hyrum did to the First Presidency, after he was ordained a patriarch," *Times and Seasons* 5 (1 Dec. 1844): 727. This announcement may have been counterproductive, however, since after Hyrum was ordained a patriarch he also stood to the First Presidency as associate president.

³³ *Times and Seasons* 6 (1 June 1845): 9:921. Eliza R. Snow used similar language in discussing the office of patriarch long after the Saints were settled in the West. Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (1877; lithographic reprint, Salt Lake City: no publisher, 1957), p. 96.

³⁴ The blessings reviewed include "Patriarchal Blessings Not of the RLDS," RLDS Research Library and Archives Independence, Missouri; Patriarchal Blessings Book 1845 June–1846 April, Theodore A. Schroeder papers, microfilmed by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, copy at RLDS Research Library and Archives; and numerous blessings from individual journals, collections, and private sources.

ing a “priesthood-father.” For example, Joseph, Sr., used the following phraseology in different blessings: “standeth to me as an orphan,” “as thou hast no father,” “to bless thee with a father’s blessing which thou shouldst have received from thy father, if living,” “as thou hast no father with priesthood,” and “for thy father is dead and has not the power of the priesthood.”³⁵

It is also apparent from these early blessings that fathers could and did give patriarchal blessings to their children once they received their own patriarchal blessing from the hands of an ordained patriarch.³⁶ Joseph Smith, Sr., instructed one man in an 1840 blessing: “Thou shall have power to bless thy children, and shall be a Patriarch in thy family and shall have power by the authority of the priesthood to bless thy kindred, thy children, thy children’s children, if they are brought to thee”³⁷

William Smith similarly promised in an 1845 blessing, “Thy posterity after thee shall receive in their turn Priesthood and Patriarchal blessings handed down from father to son according to the established order in the Church of Christ making thee from this time a Patriarch over thine own offspring”³⁸

William’s linking of “Priesthood and Patriarchal blessings was not unusual, and some ordinations to the priesthood took place within patriarchal blessings. However, these seem to have been incidental to the nature of the patriarchal blessing.³⁹ Apparently, it was a man’s knowledge of the lineage through which his children would receive blessings (knowledge imparted by the ordained patriarch), coupled with his own priesthood power and natural authority as a parent, which gave a man the ability to give patriarchal blessings to his own children. Once he knew his own lineage, he could pass the same knowledge on to his issue along with a father’s blessing, the combination thus constituting a “patriarchal blessing.”⁴⁰

But this did not mean that ordained patriarchs were authorized to give blessings *only* to those without “priesthood-fathers” in the church. A careful

³⁵ These examples appear variously in approximately fifteen blessings. See also Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 3:165.

³⁶ Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 3:172.

³⁷ Patriarchal blessing of John Landers, given 17 July 1840 by Joseph Smith, Sr., “Patriarchal Blessings Not of the RLDS, June to September 1845,” RLDS Research Library and Archives.

³⁸ Patriarchal blessings of Joseph McNeil, given 6 August 1845 by William Smith, Patriarchal Blessing Book of William Smith June to September 1845, RLDS Library and Archives.

³⁹ See for example, Hyrum’s patriarchal blessing to Phileman C. Merrill, 2 Jan. 1841 which states: “I ordain you an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and ordain you to that office to preach repentance and baptism” Patriarchal Blessing Book 1845 June 1846 April, Theodore A. Schroeder Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

⁴⁰ Bruce McConkie has provided an interesting variation on this theme: “In addition to *ordained patriarchs*, there are also *natural patriarchs*. Every holder of the higher priesthood who has entered into the patriarchal order of celestial marriage — thereby receiving for himself the blessings of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — is a natural patriarch to his posterity.” (Italics in the original.) Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), p. 506. This language was omitted from the second edition published in 1966.

reading of the Taylor article, coupled with historical precedent, shows that early patriarchs could and did give patriarchal blessings to individuals who had available and worthy priesthood-holding fathers. But in such instances, the patriarch acted only at the request of the father or with his consent. On occasion, Joseph Smith, Sr., and Hyrum Smith indicated in the text of blessings that it was “by permission.”⁴¹ William Smith became more specific: “By the consent and request of thy father which shall be his blessing upon thy head sealed by the authority of the office of Patriarch. . . .”⁴² Similar language is found in blessings given by Patriarch Isaac Morley as late as 1857.

Patriarchal blessings by fathers and patriarchal blessings by ordained patriarchs were not mutually exclusive in the early church. In fact, the practice of giving multiple blessings to the same recipient was common into the twentieth century. Thus, there was no reason why worthy fathers would not consent to the blessing of their children by an ordained patriarch, particularly by a presiding patriarch carrying the mystique of the founding Smith family name. It is uncertain when the requirement of parental consent died out, but today it has been replaced by formal church recommends for all members, and the role of the father as a giver of patriarchal blessings disappeared for many years. Recently the Church cautiously gave “priesthood fathers” permission to once again give patriarchal blessings to their children. Such blessings cannot be preserved in the archives of the Church, but otherwise appear to be indistinguishable from blessings bestowed by ordained patriarchs.⁴³

Interestingly, Taylor did not mention that one of the responsibilities of patriarchs was to declare the lineage through which a recipient would receive his or her blessings in the house of Israel. This aspect of the patriarchal calling was undoubtedly so well understood that it was taken for granted.

Similarly, the sealing powers were mentioned only incidentally and were probably a matter of common knowledge. While making it clear such powers were not related to presiding priesthood authority, Taylor nevertheless acknowledged the 1841 revelation to Joseph wherein Hyrum was “to hold the sealing blessings of my church, even the Holy Spirit of promise whereby ye are sealed

⁴¹ See for example, patriarchal blessing of Alpheus Haws given by Joseph Smith, Sr., in Haws Family Patriarchal Blessing record book, copies in RLDS Research Library and Archives (Haws’ father received his blessing immediately before Haws did).

⁴² Patriarchal blessing of John Willis, 19 Aug. 1845, by William Smith, Patriarchal Blessing Book of William Smith, June to September 1845, RLDS Research Library and Archives. (The father of the recipient received his blessing immediately before his son).

⁴³ “Fathers Blessings to Children,” *Melchizedek Priesthood Handbook* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975), p. 25: “The First Presidency has issued the following policy statement: ‘Certainly we should give new and additional emphasis to the role of the father in giving blessings to children in the family. We think we should generally leave to the ordained patriarchs in the stake the responsibility of declaring lineage in connection with an official patriarchal blessing, but still we could leave unlocked the door so that any father who felt inspired to pronounce the lineage in connection with a father’s blessing he was giving to his children should not be prevented from doing so’ A father’s blessing may be recorded in family records, but it is not to be preserved in the archives of the Church. (Suggestions to Patriarchs, pp. 3–4.)” See also Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:172; McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (1966), p. 558.

up unto the day of redemption that ye may not fall notwithstanding the hour of temptation that may come upon you." In the same revelation Hyrum was given the authority "that whoever he blesses shall be blessed and whoever he curses shall be cursed; that whatsoever he shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever he shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (D&C 124:124, 92–93)

Thus, Hyrum held the sealing powers along with and subject to Joseph, and these powers, in Hyrum's case, were connected to his calling as Patriarch to the Church. Further evidence of this authority is found in the text of Hyrum's patriarchal blessings in which he would frequently "seal up" the recipient "unto eternal life." He also "sealed" husbands and wives for eternity. The giving of patriarchal blessings for the dead through living proxies was also a familiar practice.⁴⁴ Although the 1 June 1845 editorial seemed to concede the sealing powers to William in his new calling as patriarch, William's efforts to exercise those powers subsequently aggravated what was already open hostility between himself and Brigham Young. By August 1845 William was writing, perhaps defensively, to Brigham Young asking: "When the Brethren call on me to be sealed to their wives, their dead friends &c also to get patriarchal blessings for their dead — what shall I say to them?"⁴⁵ Brigham Young responded on behalf of the Twelve:

Of what use for sealing when everything of the kind must be done over again in the Temple to make it valid? And it is not according to the order of the Church to confer Patriarchal Blessings on the dead by proxy, until baptism &c has been attended to for them by proxy, which must be done in the Lord's House, therefore, any thing of the kind done at this time would be of no effect The Twelve . . . recollect that Joseph said that the sealing power is always vested in one man, and that there never was, nor never would be but one man on the earth at a time to hold the keys of the sealing power in the church, that all sealings must be performed by the man holding the keys, or by his dictation, and that man is the president of the Church. Hyrum held the patriarchal office legitimately, so do you. Hyrum was counsellor, so are you, but the sealing power was not in Hyrum legitimately, neither did he act on the sealing principle only as he was dictated by Joseph. This was proven, for Hyrum did undertake to seal without counsel, & Joseph told him if he did not stop it he would go to hell and all those he sealed with him.⁴⁶

In effect, Brigham was saying that William as patriarch no longer needed the sealing power because the temple superceded former arrangements. And even if that weren't true, William would still have to seek permission to seal from the president of the Twelve case by case. Brigham Young's reluctance to allow William maximum access to the sealing powers is understandable, given William's overt attempts to claim presidential authority himself, particularly after August of 1845. However, William's excommunication in October of

⁴⁴ Several such blessings for the dead given by William appear in the William Smith Patriarchal Blessing Book June to September 1845, RLDS Library and Archives.

⁴⁵ As quoted in Brigham Young to William Smith, 10 Aug. 1845, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

1845 resolved that conflict while leaving the ambiguous legacy of a changed office to future holders of Hyrum's calling. Not only were the sealing powers thereafter disassociated with the office, there was also a perception of diminished importance, authority, and dignity which perhaps in part contributed to the ultimate demise of the position in the Mormon hierarchy.⁴⁷

Thus, the 1845 controversy between William Smith and Brigham Young resulted in modifications of the office of Patriarch to the Church and undoubtedly set in motion changes affecting the nature of patriarchal blessings and the role of ordained patriarchs and fathers in general. The heart of the controversy was over whether William was receiving the same position of patriarch as that held by his brother, Hyrum. The Quorum of the Twelve claimed it was. In fact it was not the same nor could it be. It had to change one way or the other. Either the office became subject to the Twelve for the first time with far less stature, or it must expand its former authority and become the most important single position in the Church. William attempted, perhaps naively, to convince Brigham Young that there could be, in essence, two heads of the Church: one with line and priesthood authority to manage the organizational needs, and another with staff or spiritual authority to minister to the responsibility of blessing the Church and its members. This was considered unworkable, improper, and unacceptable by the other eleven of the Twelve. Their decision left only the two more extreme options, each unacceptable to the other.

The Taylor article was an important factor in educating the membership to the interpretation favored by the Quorum. Unfortunately, it does so in the guise of defining the office as it had always been and so falls short of giving an objective and comprehensive treatment of the premartyrdom patriarchal office and practices. However, by understanding the article's underlying concern and the context in which it appeared, we can come a little closer to understanding the true nature of what has been an important office in the Mormon hierarchy.

⁴⁷ Patriarch to the Church Eldred G. Smith was designated patriarch emeritus in the 6 October 1979 general conference "because of the large increase in the number of stake patriarchs and the availability of patriarchal service throughout the world." "The Sustaining of Church Officers," *Ensign* 9 (Nov. 1979): 18.

