

William B. Smith: The Persistent “Pretender”

Paul M. Edwards



William B. Smith was a difficult man. Like so many who feel denied power and recognition, he was probably best described as being his own worst enemy. Certainly he could not be stereotyped as the typical patriarch — rather a fire-eating, blistery sort of a character who reveled in his bad temper, often confused stubbornness with correctness, and found that life was best lived as a battle. Yet his life seemed to have been centered in the Church and identified with the role that was his only briefly. Called to the office of patriarch on the death of Hyrum, his older brother, he held that office with vigor, with dedication, and with considerable belief in the purpose and validity of the calling. He spoke of this belief in several of his blessings. Typical is this statement from his 1845 blessing to Irene U. Pomery:

This blessing shall serve unto thee in all things as a father's blessing according to the flesh, and even more for it is given by him who is appointed a father to the fatherless and Patriarch over the whole church of Christ. This therefore will seal upon thee a greater blessing and power than any other could give as this office by the power of the priesthood legally holds the right of administering all blessings; and of the presidency over all the Patriarchs in the church of God at this present time . . . upon thy head I seal the blessing of eternal salvation with an irrevocable decree. (Blessing Book, 1845)

For William Smith his continual concern over the patriarchate was more than a case of William wanting to hold office. In a larger sense it dealt with William's desire to be someone of authority, a person on whom the responsibility of the movement could rest, at least in part. There were other questions, many of them related to his concern about the nature of the church — whatever variety he might be associated with at the moment — a view that was amazingly consistent through numerous trials and responses. In addition there was the question of recognition as a loyal “founding member” and the lesser, but significant, financial question.

PAUL M. EDWARDS is president of Temple School, Independence, Missouri.

Born in Royalton, Vermont, on 13 March 1811, he was younger by six years than his brother the martyred prophet. Working with Joseph and Hyrum during the organization, he was ordained first a teacher, then an elder, and a high priest in 1833. In 1835 he was called to the Quorum of Twelve. His relationship with Joseph appears to have been good, though one could not call it excellent. William had the habit of saying what was on his mind, and as a very active and concerned man, he was often in the midst of controversy.

William was away from Nauvoo when Joseph and Hyrum were killed by the mob at Carthage. Shortly thereafter, in September 1844, Brigham wrote to William:

... 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 that all will remain as it is until we have further connections from you . . . but [if you] feel to have it yourself we wish you to come to Nauvoo as soon as possible to receive your ordination as Patriarch. (*Prophet*, 9 Nov. 1844)

In his response to Brigham Young dated 16 October 1844, William indicated pleasure at the letter and willingness to accept (Young Collection). His calling would seem to have assured him a place in the hierarchy of the movement.

William, however, did not fit well with the authorities of the Church. Again, his outspokenness, his less than loyal expressions, were to cause serious unrest. William seriously questioned the legal rights of the emerging presidency; and at the October 1845 conference, Elder Parley P. Pratt suggested he should not be allowed to remain in the Twelve "until he thinks different from what he does now." Pratt called William "an aspiring man" (*History* 3:32); William would later suggest it was a matter of conviction. It was probably both.

William Clayton had also expressed concern about William's attitude in his journal, 23 May 1845: "William 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. . . . There is more danger from William Smith than from any other source, and I fear his course will bring us much trouble." The feeling about William Smith must have been highly negative for William was not sustained as an apostle and, on the same day, was rejected in his role as Patriarch to the Church.

Following his excommunication from the Church in 1845 William made numerous attempts to regain recognition or associate with one of the other bodies emerging in the confusion. In March 1846 he sent letters which reaffirmed his position and petitioned both the Twelve and James Jesse Strang. To Strang he made lightly veiled promises and to the Twelve provided claims and demands. Failing to get a response from the Twelve, he launched a series of efforts to establish an organization among those who had disaffected from the group that later went to Utah, suffering in the process a number of setbacks that would have trampled the ego and ambition of a lesser man.

There is no doubt William felt strongly the need to preserve the Church as he understood it. But there certainly must be some cause for wonder about his determination, as it appeared, to seek leadership of whatever organization emerged. The reasons for his failure to accomplish these goals are many, and support for any one of them would depend on one's convictions about the eventual outcome of the various movements. But one reason seems to be fairly obvious. William had many of the dreams, much of the conviction, and probably some of the understanding of Joseph or of Brigham Young. But he lacked the charisma necessary to capture the loyalty of those he sought to lead. He seemed to be able to attract their attention but not to sustain their commitment.

Just sixteen years to the day after Joseph had organized the Church, William accepted an apostolic position under the charismatic James Jesse Strang. He was acknowledged as the Patriarch as well. He demonstrated no real ability to survive under Strang's leadership, however, and was expelled from this fellowship in 1847. He joined with Isaac Sheen at Covington, Kentucky, for awhile but failed there as well. He preached for the Baptist church in New York but he resigned that post just ahead of a trial for heresy. In 1852, he was rebuked because of his "pretensions" for assuming his right to lead the Church in his own stead, or as guardian of his young nephew (Briggs 1893, 208). His efforts to start a church in Binghamton, Illinois, near Amboy in October 1851 was no more successful than the other had been.

William's point of view was well stated in Philadelphia on 10 January 1848 where he met with members of the original church. During that conference, the body passed a resolution stating that the Church had fallen into iniquities. Basic to a church free from such contentions, they proclaimed, was an organization which conformed to that created by Joseph, primarily a presidency being called by revelation. They contended that they had received such a revelation in 1847 calling William to lead the people, and the people to follow him. It commanded William to: "take the place of my servant Hyrum Smith, thy brother, as Patriarch unto the whole church, and to preside over my people, saith the Lord your God, and no power shall remove thee there from, and thou shalt be the prophet, seer, revelator, and translator unto my church during the minority of him whom I have appointed from the loins of Joseph" ("True Succession," 701).

The editors of the 28 July 1909 *Saints Herald*, in which this was reported, did not see fit to challenge this attempt but saw it as one more evidence that the church was called to wait for Joseph III. No comment was made about William's continued designation of himself as patriarch.

In the early 1850s William made another serious attempt to become reconciled with Brigham Young — or at least to assume his old position among the church leaders. On 8 August 1853, he wrote to Brigham: "You President Young are not ignorant of the matter as they now stand or exist between us. When Joseph was alive difficulties in the Church (if any there were) could be settled upon just and amicable terms to all parties concerned and I am not informed of the fact President Young that the same things cannot be done now altho changes have taken place and others have the rule stand at the head of the people."

This approachable statement was, however, coupled with a more assertive appraisal of his situation as he understood it:

As it regards the Patriarchial office I submitted to your Council and that of the Twelve in respect to this ordination this however was not a matter of my own seeking consequently I do not feel that am so much to blame as to the [results]. It was upon your assurance President Young at the time of the ordination took place that no infringement should be considered upon my rights of office [as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ] that I consented to receive the ordination.

William recalls as a matter of deep concern that he was to receive a copy of the ordination but that he had not seen it. He observed that he could not see the wisdom or the rules involved in taking a man who already was an apostle and “ordaining him to an office in the church, that in conjunction with his brethren of Twelve he held jurisdiction over previous to his being ordained” and suggests that it was a “sly game and an imposition had been imposed upon me — under the laws of the Council to silence me from my office as one of the Twelve — for purposes best known to themselves.” William takes the occasion to reaffirm his position in fairly strong terms:

I shall never submit willingly to suffer the disgrace of a wrong. I have never [considered] nor am I willing to relinquish claims that justly belong to me in the Church and Kingdom of God. Such a sacrifice would be dearer to me than life itself. Nor do I believe that if Joseph were *alive* and occupying the Presidency of the Church that he would do me the *first* particle of *injustice* in relation to this affair. And now *President* Young, I appeal to you to look into this matter and if a reconciliation — or a settlement of our long standing difficulties can be had — upon *honorable* principles in regard to *all parties concerned* I want that it should be done.

Williams ends his appeal in the name of Christ and as the last member of the Smith family, recognizing that the salvation of thousands everywhere — “sheep without shepherds” — depends on Brigham’s acceptance of the epistle. He then signs the letter “William Smith Apostle and Patriarch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints.”

These attempts proved unsuccessful and two years later, on 7 May 1855, he wrote to Brigham Young again, this time sending it in the care of Elder James Colburn “one of the Old Pioneers of the Church.” William acknowledged that previous attempts had been unable to close the gap between them and he reaffirmed his position in the same manner — almost in the same words — as previously. There is a soft acknowledgment as well of his own outspokenness:

I was not to blame but the affect was all the same to me as it produced the excitement and created the fear and as a matter of course as many men would have done under the same circumstances I have published and said a great many things which can all be [settled] when I am within [a] place that will enable me to do it with honor [both] to yourself and the Church. (Young Collection)

As late as 1860 William was still making an effort to create a bond with Salt Lake City. Brigham Young’s office journal of 14 May 1860 reports a conversation with Albert Carrington, later his counselor, in which Carrington read a letter from William Smith expressing a desire to come to the valley and be

restored in his former association. The letter suggested that William had been rebaptized. Young says this was confirmed by a second letter, from a J. J. Butler, who had performed the baptism.

Time was to work against William, however, and when young Joseph accepted his position as leader of the Reorganization it was increasingly apparent there would be no role for William if it was not in the Reorganization. He did not agree quickly but in 1868 shared some of his feelings about Mormonism with the young nephew: "And, least some of your adherents might think that I am swinging for a place in the New Organization, I would inform them that I am satisfied perfectly with my present position; and should I hereafter seek a change in my locality as to a connection with any religious class of professor, I think I could suit myself better than to unite with any class of Latter Day Saints or Mormons that I have knowledge of at the present" (Smith, Letterbooks, 16 Oct. 1868).

In a letter to Joseph III four years later, however, he seems to have softened a little and asserted his belief that young Joseph was the head of the Church:

I feel it a duty that I owe to the old time Saints and for the good of the cause of Zion abroad, to say to you and to all whom it may concern, that I am not a leader of any class of Mormons whatsoever; and that I do most cordially endorse the Reorganization; and further stated now, as I always have done from the time of the great apostasy in 1844 and 1845, that the legal presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints belongs of right to the oldest son of the martyred prophet, Joseph Smith, who was the first prophet of the church, and the called of God. (History 3:719)

This letter was signed Patriarch and was published as such in the *Saints Herald* in December 1872.

Although no immediate response from Joseph III has been located, he wrote just after the new year, carefully acknowledging William's desire to be involved with the Reorganization — a desire William had not stated — and indicated he had no difficulty with the possibility of "recognition of your office as High Priest, the highest grade known to the Melchisedec priesthood, and carrying with it the right to officiate in every ministerial office in the church. Therefore I am ready to recognize you publicly in this office, at once; leaving the question of apostleship, and patriarchate, to be settled subsequently as the necessity of the case may demand, wisdom direct, or the spirit command." Feeling that William might well push for more, Joseph adds: "The temper of the church is well known to me, better than it has been possible for you to know it . . . and to attempt to urge anything further than this at the start will not meet with success" (Smith, Letterbooks, Jan. 1873).

William apparently took no immediate steps concerning this limited but firm offer. There must have been some continued correspondence during this time for Joseph III mentions in his *Memoirs*: "It is not my purpose to follow in detail these movements of my Uncle William before he finally turned to us, for the facts are recorded in current history, but I refer to them to show the liberal attitude of the Reorganization toward those who had once been members under Joseph and Hyrum . . . regardless of what bypaths may have attracted them in the interim" (1979, 184).

In 1878 Joseph III invited his uncle to attend the conference at Plano, Illinois. When he came, he was made welcome in the Smith home and they engaged in what must have been some long and very serious conversations. Their content has been lost, probably forever; but as Joseph III reported them they centered around these differences: William demanded that he be received into the Reorganization on the basis of his former membership — without rebaptism — and that he retain his standing as an active member of the Quorum of Twelve. In addition, he wanted the new church to recognize his several attempts to preserve the essence of the movement. Joseph's response reaffirmed his offer to receive William on his original baptism but withdrew his previous offer of High Priest standing. Priesthood would have to be determined by the conference. Joseph also stressed that whatever work William had done to bring the Church together would need to be examined carefully by the Church and would be evaluated in terms of its nature, its quality, and its value (1979, 184).

Writing in January 1878 Joseph offered an observation that may well be taken as a threat or a challenge: "Besides this, you are now well advanced in years, the time for you to have attempted an organized resistance to the Reorganization if ever contemplated by you, is past and now is your golden opportunity to throw the power of your mind and the influence of your name into the scale in favor of the work for which honorable place is rapidly being made." While assuring William that he has no enemies in the Church — perhaps a few personal ones may exist — Joseph goes on to complete his veiled threat:

The prestige of my father's name belongs to me; hence could not be wrest from me by any one. My personal influence at home and abroad is good and any attempt to divide or antagonize would either prove altogether fruitless or at most would only result in distrust, bitterness, and ultimate failure; as, it would take longer time to complete the work of disproving the position I have assumed than you have to spare. But as there is no disposition upon our part to refuse you what we may legitimately grant, we shall look for an honorable acceptance and a complete affiliation at no distant day. (Letterbook, 12 Jan. 1878)

The two do not appear to have reconciled these differences by the time that the conference began, nor during the opening days. William kept pressure on Joseph to support his unqualified reception; but Joseph held his ground, determined not to "recognize, endorse, or approve any such work until a full knowledge of the facts concerning it, frankly presented and thoroughly canvassed, should warrant us in doing so" (J. Smith 1979, 185). At this point William had a change of mind if not of heart, or at least became aware that he was not going to change Joseph's position. On the third day, he authorized Joseph to recommend his baptism and a select committee was appointed by Joseph to investigate and to report back to the conference on its wisdom. Consideration was also given to his acceptance into the high priesthood based on his ordination to apostolic office. This, Joseph suggests, seemed to satisfy William.

The committee recommended that

said Wm. B. Smith be so received as a member, and upon the rule long since obtained and acted upon by the Reorganization, namely, that 'it is a matter of conscience' upon

the part of the individual as to his being rebaptized when once it is shown that he has received a legal baptism, of which we have satisfactory evidence namely, that said William B. Smith was baptized by Oliver Cowdery in the early days of the church. (History 3:212)

On the next day a resolution was adopted "that we recognize Wm. B. Smith, received into the fellowship yesterday, as a high priest, and request that his name be enrolled among the Quorum of High Priests" (History 3:212). This was done.

William was not totally satisfied, nor did it end the discussion. In less than a year, Joseph was to write to William: "So far as the Patriarchy of the church is concerned, there will probably be but one opinion concerning where it goes, when the question is brought up before the church — I believe that opinion to be in your favor. At a propitious time it will be presented and disposed of." But Joseph adds an interesting sort of "don't call me I'll call you" ending: "There is nothing likely to arise at the April conference necessitating your presence, that I know anything about . . . and suggest you spend neither time nor money to come but rather continue your work in Hamilton, Missouri" (Letterbook, 20 Feb. 1879).

William accepted his work as a missionary with vigor, but nothing about his demeanor suggested that he was giving up his desire to be recognized as the patriarch of the Reorganization. He would not forsake discussions of church structure and brought it up wherever he went. There was concern among Church leaders about William's determination to affirm the office itself. Apostle Jason Briggs voiced concern about this to his friend, fellow member of the Quorum, and bishop, William Kelly, in a letter dated 6 March 1881: "What do you think of the pipe laying to spring a patriarch upon us? And what a speciman." And he calls the office a "wart upon the ecclesiastical tree, unknown in the Bible, or Book of Mormon," while expressing a desire to eradicate it.

In March 1881 William wrote to the *Herald* in response to some questions raised about the role of the patriarch. From the revelation of 1841, he stated, we learned not only of Hyrum's call and the right of the Patriarch to preside over all other patriarchs, but

that this office of Patriarch is an office that belongs in the Church of Christ; and that whosoever is appointed to fill the place left by the death of Hyrum Smith will hold the right to the same presiding authority. . . . Joseph, inherited the patriarchate by lineal descent from Jacob who was the father of the twelve patriarchs; and from father Joseph Smith, the patriarchal office was given, as the revelation of 1841 declares, by blessing and by right, for such is the order of this evangelical priesthood handed down from father to son. . . . It is the duty of the First Presidency to select and ordain the Patriarch, that is to fill the space left vacant by the death of Hyrum Smith. (1881, 82)

In the same article he admits to concerns and interest about this office, stating that he cannot rest until "this Church of Christ be clothed upon as a bride adorned for her husband. Not until she is organized in her perfection, with all the gifts and officers made complete in the church."

Joseph apparently held off a reply until March of the following year when the pressure not only of the *Herald* article, but of William's pending biography

of Church leaders, again caused the prophet/president unrest. Fearing, perhaps, that William would, in his usual manner, undermine the efforts that had been made to remain unassociated with polygamy, Joseph wrote:

I have long been engaged in removing from father's memory and from the early church, the stigma and blame thrown upon him because of polygamy; and have at last lived to see the cloud rapidly lifting. And would not consent to see further blame attached, by blunder now. Therefore uncle, bear in mind our standing today before the world as defenders of Mormonism from Polygamy, and go ahead with your personal recollections of Joseph and Hyrum.

Pointedly, he also instructs his aging uncle to remember selectively: "If you are the wise man I think you to be, you will fail to remember anything, [but] referring lofty standard of character at which we esteem those good men. You can do the cause great good; you injure it by vicious sayings." He also suggests caution about the financial outcome: "Pecuniarily I have no confidence in you working anything out of it; though, if the right sort of enterprising men got hold of it, and would divide it with you there would be a degree of money in it" (Letterbook, 11 March 1882).

William continued in his dual concern both trying to restore the Patriarchy and to serve. But by 1888, he was seventy-seven years of age, was slowing down, and had to report to conference that his activities had been extremely limited for the past two years because of serious illness.

At this point the tone of his letters begins to change. He was living with his wife in Osterdock, Iowa, on a pension of \$42 made available every six months by a government "grateful for his military service." But he had little else, and he frequently appeals for funds.

William found it increasingly difficult to repair his home which he felt he must maintain for "the work" in order to impress people and enhance the reputation for the Church. In early September 1891 he wrote to Bishop Kelly:

The mention of a warming stove is greatly needed for a spare room and comfort for the labouring brethren while here at work as well as for myself. But if this mention of a warming stove is not in place you can judge from my condition of health what is wanted. . . . I hope I have not asked too much. I will submit the matter for your thoughts. I am making a bold stand here and am anxious to keep up in all appearances both be for the credit of my name and the cause I wish to sustain if then you think I have asked too much in my present needs please send in what in your judgment you think best whether much or little it cannot be a miss. You see the situation I am in and the needs.

By the 15th of the same month, he wrote again. "Now brother this letter is a letter of inquiry to know what province you may have under Church rule to consider my case and to know if its possible for you to aid me still further in supply of my wants . . . The \$25.00 you did send was a god send and I cannot be too thankful for the help."

On 15 October he found opportunity to write a long and appealing letter on a brown paper sack. It is nearly covered with descriptions of hard work, long endurance, and need:

In the mission field I notice of late that a certain amount of means is set apart for the support of the families of Elders who labor and expenses paid on the cars to the

field assigned them. . . . Is it not lawful to ask are we not all brethren of the same faith and then again may we not ask who is it that stands next to the oldest claim in the church for either moral growth or for an amount of labor done in planting the standard of this latter day work . . .

William discussed these trials and asked: Who helped remove the tar from Joseph Smith? Who stood guard for long hours to protect Joseph Smith's life? Who was driven from his home and forced to move from place to place in the name of the church, sleeping on the ground and in tents, to do the work of the Lord in Iowa and Illinois? He closed the letter by telling Bishop Kelly that "I think it due me that you place a salary on my family of eight dollars per month."

Just what William expected the Church to do is not really clear in these early letters. It does seem obvious that he saw himself as one who should be taken care of. On 2 May 1892 he wrote again to Bishop Kelly: "I have already as you well know in the history of the church sacrificed hundreds of dollars that now in my old age ought to be in ready hand for my support and protection in life and in health."

Sick most of the time, unable to cut wood, low on supplies and with a sick wife as well, he wrote again 2 February 1893 to Bishop Kelly:

Brother, I want the church to grant me some compensation for the woman's help — these three years of my sickness. I am fully aware that if the Church as a body knew my present condition of both finance and health during this terrible winter that I do not think that their gifts of charity would be simmered down to the small mention of a five or a ten dollar check . . . William Smith's name gets to be such small potatoes that his name in the church is only worth a small check of five or ten dollars check when almost on a dying or sick bed. I think Brother a check of a twenty five dollar bill would look more humanity-like towards a brother in my present condition.

There are a good many letters asking for money, usually a specific amount, which he apparently does not get. His pattern was to write two to three times begging, after justifying the funds by the work that he was doing in the field. He tried a wide variety of appeals — his sickness, his age, and how he needed the money for when church missionaries were staying with him. Then, after receiving no response he would get angry and write a letter like the one just quoted. On several occasions small sums were sent, but it is not clear if these came from the official coffers or from the private funds of Kelly or others.

In October 1892 he begins his last series of letters, all to Bishop Kelly, dealing with his views concerning the patriarch. These are both more pointed and more rambling, perhaps the product of an aged mind. He refers to these last letters as "the odds and ends and for the garbage." On 7 October 1892 he wrote:

A three first presidency is in pattern of both the old and new church under Joseph the Seer of 1830 . . . but where is the pattern now in that form full and complete . . . The young prophet has not stepped up upon the high key note when there is one link gone in the chain. Then there is the patriarchal office the seed of which was sown in the church among all the prophets, a seed that was planted and in the church of 1830 this seed like topsey grew. My nephew is lame on some of these points, the Church under him is not yet perfect in organization fearfulness and jealousy keeps the organization imperfect.

Just ten days later on 17 October, he again affirmed his loyalty, asserting: "As to the Reorganized Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints I am fully in accord. This is not saying however, that so far as its present organization is concerned that their will not be any new amendments added in the course of time."

On the 23rd, he made another point:

The Patriarch is not hereditary by lineage, it is an office gift like that of wisdom, or the gift of discerning of spirits, it is an office that can be bestowed at any time by revelation out of respect to the name of the patriarchal fathers not as a lineal claim.... Hyrum's children and sons have forfeited all claims to any legitimate office of priesthood ever held by their father from the fact of both apostasy and 2ndly from never having been ordained nor appointed to such office.

He takes several pages in this letter to expound about the Utah Mormons, suggesting that Joseph III might have been reluctant to add a patriarch because of the misuse of the office by the Mormons: "There is a time when charity ceases to be a virtue, and the time I think has passed long time ago and if the Reorganization Church will omit one office to drop from the Church because of the disease these Salt Lake Mormons [have] brought upon any one office of the Church . . . then why not the Reorganized Church drop all and everything named in the order of the ordaining offices." He concluded: "I am done with this subject . . . hoping that times may change and crack open some of these hard nuts, I am writing and hoping for the possibility I may live to see the change."

Just a month before William's death, Joseph wrote to him concerning polygamy. Aware of the potential of William's testimony, he asked again for "evidence" that his father was innocent of the charge of polygamy.

Now, if you will make a statement in writing before a magistrate in respect to the fact that at no time in father's lifetime, or during your connection with the Twelve, either before, or after father's death was there a revelation presented or read to the quorum, instituting, or sanctioning spiritual wifery, plural marriage, or polygamy, by Joseph Smith, or any other officer of the Church, or other person, if such is the truth, I will greatly prize it, and use it only as occasion may demand. (Letterbook, 26 Oct. 1893)

William had provided such a statement before and was willing to do so again in an undated missive that ran to several pages: "Neither your father nor any member of the Quorum of the Twelve ever said anything to me about a plural marriage revelation either before or since your father's death up to the time of my separation from the Quorum which took place in September 1845." Yet he specified his belief that the doctrine was rampant in the Church:

I became convinced that the plural marriage doctrine was taught and practiced in Nauvoo by the Brigham party, Taylor, Kimball, Richards, Brigham, E[rastus] Snow and others and so notorious did the doctrine become that the houses of these apostates was constantly thronged with the sealed wives of these men and such were the evidences of the fact that there was no disputing it and from the consistent affirmations of A. B. and C. that your father had taught and practiced the doctrine I had well nigh become a convert to the doctrine. (Mss. F 2311, p. 13)

In the next few months William grew weaker and the letters fewer, yet the convictions remained strong. Shortly before his death, he spoke with E. C. Briggs reaffirming his concern for, his belief in, and his love of his nephew as the president and prophet of the Reorganization (*Ensign*, 13 Jan. 1894). He died on 18 November 1893.

Richard Howard, in his study included in *The Patriarch*, makes the astute comment that Joseph III was "probably trying to manifest kindness toward his Uncle William in declining to comment on the patriarchate. He chose silence as the most effective way to convey the fact that this matter was really not open, as far as William's claims were concerned" (1978, 28). I agree, but there is more to the matter than this. Joseph was not unwilling to state his case fairly plainly and did so on several occasions. What he was not willing to do was to bring the issue to a conclusion. On numerous occasions, some mentioned here, Joseph gave the impression that perhaps something could be done in the future. Because he chose not to act, we can only conclude that he wished the issue to remain open. The available evidence indicates that Joseph began to give serious consideration to the idea of ordaining a patriarch just after the death of the "pretender." Within three years, Joseph called his brother Alexander to that position; but Alexander's own comment established that new information about the office or its calling did not prompt his action: "I knew so little about those duties, I did not know where to begin. . . . I consulted with President Joseph Smith and learned that he was nearly as much in the dark in the matter as I" (Minutes 1900, 166-67).

Perhaps too much is made of William's desire to be patriarch to the Reorganization. Certainly, too little is made of his concern for the nature of the office. Either way one must give some consideration to the paradoxical nature of William's stand, for he was apparently willing to drop the apostleship conferred upon him by his brother Joseph in favor of maintaining the role of patriarch brought to him through Brigham Young, a man William had continuously proclaimed as an illegal president. It may well be that it was necessary to develop a lineal justification for that which he had received without "authority."

It should be noted as well that William's view on the Church and on the office of the patriarch were primarily accepted, though he was argued with during most of his association with the Reorganization. Brigg's efforts to do away with the office failed. However, William's efforts to identify the office as one of lineage also failed. To what extent his views on the office were determined by his desire to be accepted as leader and father of the Church and to what degree his association was based on financial need will never really be known. What is known is that William felt that the Church and its people really owed him something for what he had done. He felt that they should acknowledge him, support him, and to an extent, follow him. In this endeavor, he had mixed success: he was never officially recognized for the years of effort put into the "dark days" but he was recognized, nearly revered, by the people as one of the "old timers" and as the brother of the Prophet.

Some assume he was power hungry, others that he was an opportunist; yet he always held himself as regent, not king, and saw his eventual contribution as

father-patriarch not president-prophet. His own needs and frustrations may have often overshadowed his contribution, but he did aid in the preservation not only of the organization, but the office.

Perhaps the best that can be said are words he penned himself back in 1845 when the trouble was just beginning: "God knows I wish to do right and to see the church prosper, to this end I have labored for years. My only desire now is that my friends be calm and devote their minds to the cultivation of the spirit of kindness; to do good to all, to deal justly, and to love mercy" (W. Smith, 1845).

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In all quotes from archival sources, spelling has been modernized but not grammar. RLDS Archives refers to the Library-Archives of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Independence, Missouri. LDS Archives refers to the History Department Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

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