

# Patriarchal Blessings and the Routinization of Charisma

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Patriarchal blessings contemplate an inspired declaration of the lineage of the recipient, and also, where so moved upon by the Spirit, an inspired and prophetic statement of the life mission of the recipient, together with such blessings, cautions, and admonitions as the patriarch may be prompted to give for the accomplishment of such life's mission, it being always made clear that the realization of all promised blessings is conditioned upon faithfulness to the gospel of our Lord, whose servant the patriarch is.<sup>1</sup>

THE POLICY OF RECORDING PATRIARCHAL BLESSINGS, copies of which are deposited in the office of the LDS Church Historian, affords a valuable picture of cultural change in the church, perhaps reflective of changes in American society in general.<sup>2</sup> In the interests of privacy, however, the church does not allow access to its copies of blessings, unless there is proof of blood relationship to the recipient. The researcher, therefore, must access blessings recorded in journals, those appearing in other manuscripts, and any blessings which individuals may choose to release for examination and publication. All of the 744 blessings upon which this study is based are drawn from these sources.<sup>3</sup>

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1. First Presidency [David O. McKay, Stephen L Richards, and J. Reuben Clark, Jr.] to all stake presidencies, 28 June 1957, in Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 504.

2. For a valuable exploration of nineteenth-century American culture, see Daniel Walker Howe's introductory essay in *Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976).

3. The idea that patriarchal blessings are too "sacred" to be shared is a relatively recent

Five hundred and sixty of these blessings were bestowed during the nineteenth century. Early Saints were faithful in keeping journals, and over time they have become accessible to researchers. Most of the nineteenth-century blessings used in this study are from these and other manuscripts, with less than 7 percent from published sources. It was more difficult to gain access to twentieth-century blessings. With the current official emphasis on the privacy of patriarchal blessings many members are reluctant to share them. Of those who responded to my request for copies, many donors wished to remain anonymous, and twenty-eight recipients simply filled in questionnaires relating to specific themes. While this sample of blessings is limited and cannot be regarded as representative in a statistical sense, it does appear to be a random sampling and to provide clear indications of significant cultural change. In examining this sample, I was able to distinguish twenty-three early recurring themes, eleven of which fell into disuse after the turn of the century.

I will compare the time periods 1833-99 and 1900-80, but the dates are not simply arbitrary. The 1890 Manifesto ending the practice of plural marriage had an obvious impact on the content of blessings, some of which had referred to promises of "many wives." A period of adjustment followed the Manifesto, and it was not until 1904 that plural marriage became grounds for disciplinary action by the church. Other intrusions by the larger society had already brought changes for the Saints; for example, the railroads and the discovery of gold had eroded some of Utah's isolation. But with the Manifesto and subsequent statehood for Utah, granted in 1896, there began a process of accommodation. By the turn of the century compromises allowed for more friendly relations with American society. These enabled the church to resume missionary work and renew efforts toward the "gathering of Israel." But converts would gather to a church much changed in terms of its social values and expectations. Patriarchal blessings reflect these changes.

Apostle John A. Widtsoe once cautioned the Saints, "Since patriarchs are but men, they are subject to human frailties. Their manner of speech and thinking is reflected in their blessings."<sup>4</sup> In a social system as cohesive as Mormonism, it follows that blessings embrace the imagery, language,

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one. In the early days of the church such blessings were bestowed at "blessing meetings" where all might hear and appreciate them. Most of the blessings included in this essay are available to researchers in journals and diaries, which suggests that the writers intended others to read them. Other blessings were shared personally for the express purpose of this study, the aim of which is to show yet another interesting and rich aspect of Mormon religious culture.

4. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, comp. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954), 234.

and content of the social climate of the church in any particular time period. And with the Mormon belief in continuous revelation on all levels of the community, patriarchs would be expected to address current concerns. General observations can be made, therefore, relative to change over time. To this end we shall look at several aspects of patriarchal blessings: first, declarations of lineage; second, changes in major prophetic themes; third, adjustments in the content of blessings given to women; and fourth, changes in policies or practices in the administration of blessings. Finally, some general observations will be made.

#### DECLARATIONS OF LINEAGE

Mormons take literally God's promise that Abraham "shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him." Patriarch Abraham was told, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 18:18, 22:18). Jacob passed on this heritage through the twelve tribes of Israel. And Ephraim, because of the faithfulness and integrity of his father, Joseph, inherited the birthright in Israel. Anciently, the birthright endowed the firstborn with certain special blessings, rights, powers, and privileges (see Gen. 25:24-34; 27; 43:33; 1 Chron. 5:1-2, for references to birthright). Modern Mormon revelation refers to the gathering of the Lost Tribes of Israel who will receive their blessings at the hands of the children of Ephraim (D&C 133).<sup>5</sup> Latter-day Saints believe they will receive the promised blessings through a specific tribe. Declarations of tribal lineage in patriarchal blessings have been seen variously over time as designating: (1) literal blood relationships, (2) transformations of the blood, (3) adoptions into certain tribes, and (4) simply the tribe through which one may expect future blessings. The first mention of lineage in patriarchal blessings appears to have been made on 9 December 1834 when Joseph Smith, Sr., blessed his family. Among other things, he said to his eldest son, Hyrum, "I now ask my heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ, to bless thee with the same blessing with which Jacob blessed his son Joseph, for thou art his true descendant, and thy posterity shall be numbered with the house of Ephraim . . ."<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent blessings given by Father Smith referred to recipients as being "through the loins of Ephraim" or "of the lineage of Ephraim," or simply thou art "an Ephraimite."<sup>7</sup> The inference that most recipients were

5. The gathering of Israel and the role to be played by Ephraim is foretold in Jeremiah 31:9-18.

6. Blessing of Hyrum by his father, Joseph Smith, Sr., 9 Dec. 1834, Smith family records, private possession.

7. Blessing of Abel Butterfield by Joseph Smith, Sr., 8 Dec. 1836, Research Library and

literal descendants of the House of Israel was repeated by subsequent patriarchs. William Smith referred to the priesthood power and authority being confined to "that Royal stock and noble blood that was not allowed to mingle among the nations in order to preserve the purity of the sanctuary of the Lord and the Holy Priesthood from adulteration."<sup>8</sup> Harriet Knowlton was assured by Patriarch Isaac Morley, "Thy name is enrolled with the daughters of Abraham in the Lamb's Book of Life; for thy descent is from Jacob (notwithstanding thou hast much of the gentile blood running in thy veins)."<sup>9</sup>

Patriarchs continued to refer to a blood relationship with the tribes of Israel. In 1929, Patriarch Hyrum G. Smith stated,

At the present time in the Church the great majority of those receiving their blessings are declared to be of the house and lineage of Ephraim, while many others are designated as members of the house of Mannasseh; but up to the present time we have discovered that those who are leaders in Israel, no matter from where they come, no matter out of what nation they have come, are of Ephraim; while the blood of Mannasseh is found in the tribes and nations of the Indians of North and South America.<sup>10</sup>

In a letter addressed to eighth patriarch Eldred G. Smith, 20 February 1961, the writer noted that, according to the Church Historian's Office, patriarchal blessings had been given through ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, the two not mentioned being the tribes of Issachar and Asher. And fifteen other lineages had been named in blessings, including that of Cain.<sup>11</sup> The patriarch, replying to another inquiry in 1971, pointed out that "names of biblical characters [that are] not tribes of Israel" should not be used in patriarchal blessings.<sup>12</sup>

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Archives, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Independence, MO, hereinafter RLDS archives. Similar phrasing was used in the blessings of others. Joseph Smith, Sr., did not always declare the tribal lineage of those he blessed, however.

8. Blessing of Francis A. Brown by William Smith, 9 Sept. 1845, William Smith Patriarchal Blessing book, Theodore A. Schroeder Collection, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison. Brigham Young reportedly taught that Joseph Smith was a prophet because his Ephraim blood was pure: "Ephraimites are the Anglo-Saxon race" (Archibald F. Bennett, "The Children of Ephraim," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 21 [1930]: 67).

9. Blessing of Harriet Knowlton by Isaac R. Morley, 1 July 1840, Knecht family records, private possession.

10. Hyrum G. Smith, "The Day of Ephraim," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 20 (1929): 123; general conference address given 17 Apr. 1929.

11. Thomas G. Truitt to Eldred G. Smith, 20 Feb. 1961, Smith family records.

12. On 22 November 1971 the patriarch responded to a letter from Earl N. White. Smith explained that "Levi has no birthright blessing. He was the officiator for all the other tribes

While such declarations of lineage have long been routinely included in blessings, during the past fifty years there have been varying interpretations. An 1834 revelation to Joseph Smith had provided the divine assurance that "Ye are the children of Israel, and of the seed of Abraham" (D&C 103:17). Brigham Young later commented, "Ephraim has become mixed with all the nations of the earth, and it is Ephraim that is gathering together. It is Ephraim that I have been searching for all the days of my preaching, and that is the blood which ran in my veins when I embraced the gospel."<sup>13</sup> Apostle Bruce R. McConkie stated "Nearly every member of the Church is a literal descendant of Jacob who gave patriarchal blessings to his 12 sons."<sup>14</sup> McConkie's father-in-law, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, held to the belief that the majority of those who have received the gospel and the priesthood in the latter-days were descendants of Ephraim. Of those who were not, he added, "No person who is not of Israel can become a member of the Church without becoming of the house of Israel by adoption."<sup>15</sup>

When questions were raised about the likelihood of pure lineage, Patriarch Eldred G. Smith declared,

We are all mixtures. There is no such thing, as far as I have been able to determine, as any one of us being just one lineage and no other mixture in our genealogy at all. . . . So it is the right of the Patriarch to declare which line through which the blessings will come. In other words, he's giving blessings, he's not declaring lineage by terms of just genealogy. He's declaring lineage in terms of blessing. You go to a Patriarch to get a blessing. If you can get that distinction it will help you to understand.<sup>16</sup>

This might suggest that the patriarch still subscribed to the idea of a literal blood relationship, however mixed the strain might be, between present-day Mormons and ancient Israelites. He did not believe that to be the case. At the time he was attempting to divert those receiving blessings from a preoccupation with tribal lineage toward an emphasis on the blessing itself.<sup>17</sup>

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and received his blessing through the tribe for whom he officiated" (Smith family records).

13. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: F. D. Richards, 1854-86), 2:268-69 (hereafter JD). Young quoted Hosea 7:8 that "Ephraim 'hath mixed himself among the people."

14. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 504.

15. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 3:247-49.

16. Eldred G. Smith, "Patriarchal Blessings," speech given at the LDS Institute of Religion, Salt Lake City, 17 Jan. 1964, copy in my possession.

17. Discussions between Eldred G. Smith and his son, E. Gary Smith, later relayed to me.

That some church leaders concerned themselves with lineage, however, is evident in official rhetoric. In a 1980 address to the student body of Brigham Young University, Apostle James E. Faust offered comfort to those "coming into the Church in this day and time who are not of the blood lineage of a specific tribe of Jacob." He said, "Indeed, I am fully aware that there could be some within the sound of my voice who fall into this category. No one need assume that he or she will be denied any blessing by reason of not being of the blood lineage of Israel." Faust went on to suggest the possibility of being "spiritually begotten . . . through faith." He referred to the biblical writings of Paul, passages from the Book of Mormon, and modern-day scriptures. Joseph Smith, he said, taught that "as the Holy Ghost falls upon one of the literal seed of Abraham, it is calm and serene . . . while the effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to purge out the old blood, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham. That man that has none of the blood of Abraham (naturally) must have a new creation by the Holy Ghost."<sup>18</sup> Whether most members of the church think in these terms today is debatable, even though a declaration of lineage is still expected in patriarchal blessings, and the literal fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham is still preached from the pulpit.<sup>19</sup>

One blessing given by Joseph Smith, Sr., in 1836, is of particular interest in connection with Mormon racial attitudes. Elijah Abel was a black convert, born in Maryland, 25 July 1808. He was ordained an elder in the Melchizedek priesthood in 1836 at Kirtland, Ohio, and shortly afterwards was given a patriarchal blessing by the prophet's father.<sup>20</sup> Abel was referred to as an "orphan," as were others whose fathers were either non-members of the church or were deceased. No lineage was declared.<sup>21</sup> In Abel's blessing, which describes a scene that could well be understood as a prophetic vision of the Civil War, the patriarch made several predictions. He told Elijah:

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18. Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1972), 149-50, cited in James L. Faust, "Patriarchal Blessings," speech given at Brigham Young University, 30 Mar. 1980.

19. There is a discussion of the Abrahamic covenant in Mormonism in Rex Eugene Cooper, *Promises Made to the Fathers: Mormon Covenant Organization* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 113. Those members with whom I have discussed this aspect of their blessing seem less concerned with tribal lineage than with what they may be told about their personal lives, present and future.

20. For details of Abel's experiences in the church, see Newell G. Bringhurst, "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks within Mormonism," in Lester E. Bush, Jr., and Armand L. Mauss, eds., *Neither Black Nor White: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1984), 130-48.

21. Only 50 percent of Joseph Sr.'s blessings included in this study declared lineage. Such declarations became routine later.

Thou hast been ordained an Elder and annointed to secure thee against the power of the destroyer. Thou shalt see His power in laying waste the nations, and the wicked slaying the wicked, while blood shall run down the streets like water, and thy heart shall weep over the calamities. Angels shall visit thee and thou shalt receive comfort. They shall call thee blessed, and deliver thee from thine enemies. They shall break thy bands and keep them from affliction. Thou shalt be made equal to thy brethren, and thy soul be white in eternity and thy robes glittering; thou shalt receive these blessings because of the covenants of thy fathers.<sup>22</sup>

This blessing is particularly significant because earlier the church had been accused of having sympathy with the abolition movement and the Mormon newspaper, *Evening and Morning Star*, had published a rebuttal, January 1834. "No Mormon," the editorial asserted, "had ever been implicated on a charge of tampering with slaves."<sup>23</sup> And in August 1835 a "Declaration of Belief" was issued to members of the church, which became section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants. After a long preamble, including the statement that "we believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good and safety of society," the section ends with a caution to the Saints,

we do not believe it right to interfere with bond-servants, neither preach the gospel to, nor baptize them, contrary to the will and wish of their masters, nor to meddle with or influence them in the least to cause them to be dissatisfied with their situations in this life, thereby jeopardizing the lives of men; such interference we believe to be unlawful and unjust, and dangerous to the peace of every government allowing human beings to be held in servitude (D&C 134:12; sec. 102 in 1835 ed.).

Following the death of Joseph Smith the policy of the church was to exclude blacks from ordination to the priesthood and from Latter-day Saint temples. Although some black members of the church were given patriarchal blessings, declarations of lineage were omitted as a matter of policy. But guidelines were not consistent, and the question remained the subject

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22. Blessing given to Elijah Abel by Joseph Smith, Sr., ca. 1836, at Kirtland, Ohio, in Minutes of the Council of the Twelve, 4 June 1879, Adam S. Bennion Papers, Archives and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, cited in Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8 (Spring 1973): 11-68. The full text of the blessing is in Joseph Smith's Patriarchal Blessing Record, 88, archives, historical department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, UT (hereafter LDS archives), and is not available to researchers.

23. Bush, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine," 13.

of debate.<sup>24</sup> In a 24 September 1972 interview, President Harold B. Lee said "skin color is not what keeps the Negro from the priesthood. It [is] strictly a matter of lineage and involves only African Negroes. In comparison, he noted, dark or black islanders, such as Fijians, Tongans, Samoans, or Maoris, are all permitted full rights to the priesthood."<sup>25</sup>

That color did have a negative connotation, however, can be seen in several early blessings referring to native Americans. The Saints were told they should preach the gospel to the Lamanites (Mormon terminology for American Indians) to enable them to "become a white and delightsome people."<sup>26</sup> Because of unrighteousness the Lord had caused a dark skin to come upon the Lamanites (2 Ne. 5:21). The expression "white and delightsome" is included in all but the latest, 1981, edition of the Book of Mormon, where the phrase now reads, "a pure and delightsome people" (2 Ne. 30:6). On 8 June 1978, however, priesthood and temple blessings were extended to "every worthy man in the Church . . . without regard for race or color" (D&C OD 2).<sup>27</sup> The June revelation, submitted to the vote of members of the church at the 30 September 1978 general conference, was affirmed unanimously. It would be interesting to survey patriarchal blessings given to black members of the church both before and after the 1978 declaration.

Although declaration of lineage is still one of the salient features of all patriarchal blessings, more sophisticated knowledge may demand some adjustment of the earlier claims of pure blood relationship.<sup>28</sup>

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24. In 1934 Patriarch James H. Wallis wrote in his journal, "I have always known that one of negro blood cannot receive the Priesthood nor the blessings of the Temple, and are also disqualified from receiving a patriarchal blessing . . . But I am sure there is no objection to giving them a blessing of encouragement and comfort, leaving out all reference to lineage and sealing." Apostle John A. Widtsoe relayed President Heber J. Grant's reply to Wallis's request for a ruling. It stated, "It will be alright for Brother Wallis to bless them, but as to their status in the future, that is . . . in the hands of the Lord" (in Gloria W. Rytting, *James H. Wallis, Poet, Printer and Patriarch* [Salt Lake City: R. & R. Enterprises, 1989], 186).

25. Bush, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine," 68n209. Patriarchs in the Brazilian mission did declare lineage and were often the final authority in ordaining mixed races to the priesthood. Mark Grover, "Religious Accommodation in the Land of Racial Democracy: Mormon Priesthood and Black Brazilians," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17 (Autumn 1984): 32-33. There is a valuable "Chronological Bibliography on the Negro Doctrine" in Bush and Mauss, *Neither Black Nor White*, 226-35.

26. For example, the blessing of Mary Ellen Owens Bradshaw, 8 May 1898, in her journal, Special Collections, Lee Library, and that of William McLaws, 10 Sept. 1900, in "Biographical Sketches of John W. McLaws," Special Collections, Lee Library. Both blessings were bestowed by Patriarch Lorenzo Hill Hatch.

27. For factors leading to this change, see Bush and Mauss, *Neither Black Nor White*, 213.

28. A few of the later blessings still refer to the recipient as being "of the blood" of Ephraim. For example, one blessing, given 17 May 1973, states "the blood that courses through your veins and gives you life is in very deed the blood of Israel . . . through the

One other change related to declarations of lineage is that natural fathers, encouraged to give a father's blessing to their families, were once told they should not designate the tribe through which blessings would come. In 1919 the *Relief Society Magazine* cautioned,

Women sometimes bless each other and their little children, which is eminently proper and fitting both in times of sickness, sorrow or distress; but neither they nor other lay members of the Church are justified in announcing the lineage of the person blessed, which is the prerogative of the patriarchs of the Church, upon which in no sense should any one trench.<sup>29</sup>

More recently the advice is that fathers may declare lineage "if they feel so inspired," but that such blessings are not to be included in official church records, as are the formal blessings given by an ordained patriarch.<sup>30</sup>

#### THEMATIC CHANGES IN BLESSINGS

The Manifesto ending plural marriage brought a few obvious changes in the content of blessings, but there were other significant adjustments in Mormonism's world view around the turn of the century that are also reflected in patriarchal blessings.

The nineteenth-century belief in an imminent millennium, which permeated the new nation after the Revolution, continued to be held by Mormons long after such immediacy had been tempered in the larger society.<sup>31</sup> After Joseph Smith, Sr., was called as Church Patriarch in December 1833, his blessings, and those of subsequent nineteenth-century patriarchs, reflected the sense that the Saints were living in the last days. In 1837 Wilford Woodruff was told by Patriarch Joseph Smith, Sr., "I bless thee as Melchisedeck [sic] blessed Abram when he returned from the Slaughter of the ten kings . . . thou shalt stand in the flesh & witness the winding up scene of this generation. Thou shalt remain on earth to behold thy Savior come in clouds of heaven."<sup>32</sup> At least fifty-seven men and four women

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loins of Ephraim." Such literalness is less common today, however. Copy of blessing in my possession.

29. *Relief Society Magazine* 6 (May 1919): 302. This general instruction was repeated many times in various church publications. See, for example, in Eldred G. Smith, "What is a Patriarchal Blessing?" *The Instructor*, Feb. 1962, 42-43.

30. *Melchizedek Priesthood Handbook* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975), 25.

31. See Grant R. Underwood, "Millenarianism and the Early Mormon Mind," *Journal of Mormon History* 9 (1982): 41-51.

32. Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833-1898*, typescript, 9 vols.

received that same promise.<sup>33</sup> For example, Rhoda Ann Richards was promised by Patriarch Uncle John Smith that she "would stand on earth during the Millennial reign," and her father Willard Richards was told he would "stand upon the Earth when the Savior makes his appearance."<sup>34</sup> Even though millennialism is still a defining part of the Mormon belief system this type of specific promise no longer appears in blessings.

Some early patriarchal blessings referred to the terrible destruction of the last days and pointed to the part Latter-day Saints were expected to play in overcoming the wicked. Benjamin F. Knowlton's blessing assured him that he "shall be a mighty man in Israel and when the remnant of Jacob shall go through among the Gentiles, or a lion amongst the flocks of sheep, you shall be captain over thousands, shall tread down and destroy, and none shall deliver them out of your hands."<sup>35</sup> This sense of mission was an important influence in the lives of the early Saints. It was reflected in the conviction that the Saints would be included among the 144,000 high priests who would be a special missionary force in the last days (referred to in the New Testament book of Revelation 14:1), "who will stand up to crown the tribes of Israel when they come shouting to Zion."<sup>36</sup> Joseph Smith, Sr., William Smith, and Uncle John each made similar predictions.

The phrase was often linked with another that appears in several early blessings. Joseph Sr. told Wilford Woodruff, among others, "Thou art numbered with the horns of Joseph, for thou shalt push people together."<sup>37</sup> This imagery relating to the gathering of Israel is from

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(Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 1:142-43.

33. Among these was a blessing given to Hyrum Smith by his father, Joseph Smith, Sr., 9 Dec. 1834, Smith family records. Others including Simeon A. Dunn, 22 June 1840, were promised they would witness the "winding-up scene" and remain on the earth until the Savior appeared (Knecht family records). For details of a similar blessing given to Charles H. Smith, 29 Jan. 1836, see Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1989), 125.

34. Blessing of Rhoda Ann Richards and Willard Richards by Patriarch Uncle John Smith, 22 Jan. 1845, Knecht family records. Patriarch Isaac Morley also gave this promise to Leonard E. Harrington. See P. A. M. Taylor, *Expectations Westward: The Mormons and the Emigration of Their British Converts in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), 23.

35. Blessing given to Benjamin F. Knowlton by Patriarch Uncle John Smith, 30 May 1852, Knecht family records.

36. Blessing of Curtis Edwin Bolton by Patriarch Hyrum Smith, 10 May 1844, in Cleo H. Evans, ed., *Curtis Edwin Bolton: Pioneer Missionary* (Fairfax, VA, 1968), 3-4. Hyrum also promised Orson Pratt on 26 December 1843 that he would be one of the 144,000, in Elden Jay Watson, ed., *Orson Pratt Journal*, (Salt Lake City: E. J. Watson, 1975), page number unclear. Fifty others were similarly blessed, including seven women.

37. Blessing given to Wilford Woodruff, 15 Apr. 1837, in Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff*

Deuteronomy 33:17, where the glory of Joseph of Egypt is likened to “the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns; with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth; and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.” In biblical literature the term “horns” was used to symbolize both aggression and sanctuary (see Dan. 7:8, 8:20-22, 1 Kgs. 1:50-51). William Smith continued to use the term, as did Uncle John. Further research might provide evidence of some familiarity with the symbol in other religious circles of the time. Today it appears that such terms are no longer included in LDS blessings.

Other nineteenth-century prophecies were phased out in the more skeptical twentieth century. Oliver Huntington received the promise that he would “have power with God even to translate thyself to Heaven, and preach to the inhabitants of the moon or planets.”<sup>38</sup> And Benjamin Clopson was told by Joseph Smith, Sr., in 1837, “thou shalt stand on a great planet, the one nearest to the Celestial world of Colob and preach to its inhabitants.”<sup>39</sup> Many were the predictions that recipients of blessings would “have power to command the waters” or “cause the earth to tremble.” Or were told “at thy command the waters shall be divided,” and “at thy word the winds shall be stayed,” or similar promises.<sup>40</sup> Young John Smith was advised, “the mantle of the Lord shall fall upon thee. Wilt enable thee to do mighty miracles in the name of the Lord. To command the raging of the sea and it shall be still. Cause streams to break forth in dry places. Shall be able to feed thousands in times of famine by the prayer of faith.”<sup>41</sup> Several recipients were told “if you desire it with your whole heart, [you] shall not taste of death, but shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye and caught up to meet the Lord.”<sup>42</sup>

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Journal, 1:142. Joseph Sr. had used the same term in blessing Hyrum Smith on 9 Dec. 1834, Smith family records.

38. D. Michael Quinn comments on this blessing in *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 129-30n6, noting that Brigham Young stated publicly there were moon men and that the sun was inhabited. Van Hale in “Mormons and Moonmen,” *Sunstone* 7 (Sept. 1982): 12-17, points out that the renowned astronomer William Herschel in 1780 regarded the existence of life on the moon as “an absolute certainty.”

39. Blessing of Benjamin Clopson by Joseph Smith, Sr., 1837, RLDS archives.

40. Blessing of Wilford Woodruff, 22 Feb. 1837, noted above. Willard Richards was told by Joseph Sr. on 22 February 1837 that “God will cause the earth to tremble for thy good. . . . The nations of the Earth shall greatly fear thee, for thou shalt be a terror unto them, for their wicked deeds shall be made manifest to them, through thy organ” (Knecht family records).

41. Blessing given by Uncle John Smith to his young nephew John Smith, 20 June 1852, Smith family records.

42. For example, the Lucy M. Smith blessing, 27 Nov. 1844, given by John Smith when

Rhoda Ann Richards, along with her brother Heber John, was promised that she would live until she was 120 years old.<sup>43</sup>

Evidence of the acceptance of such promises and the great faith of early church members can be found in other early blessings. Lorenzo Snow, later to become fifth president of the church, was blessed that he should "have power when not able to visit the sick, to send his handkerchief to them, that the afflicted by touching it should be made whole." According to Michael Quinn, Joseph Smith, Jr., advocated this and practiced it himself during the 1840s.<sup>44</sup>

Many of the promises of early patriarchs may seem extravagant today, but they were in tune with the climate of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. They were also reminiscent of ancient Israel. The vengeful God of the Old Testament co-existed with a loving God who was mindful of the suffering of his people. When the Saints were experiencing a great deal of violent persecution, the belief that the Lord would punish the aggressors, or give the victims the opportunity to retaliate, was a recurring theme in patriarchal blessings. After the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum Smith this became more focused as "avenging the blood of the Prophets."<sup>45</sup>

Of particular significance is a blessing given by Patriarch Elisha H. Groves on 20 February 1854. In this blessing William H. Dame was told, "Thou shalt be called to act at the head of a portion of thy brethren and of the Lamanites [native Americans] in the redemption of Zion and the avenging of the blood of the Prophets . . . The Angel of Vengeance shall be with thee." Dame, who was described as "a mild-mannered, kindly man," was later involved in discussions which led to the Mountain Meadows Massacre in southern Utah in 1857.<sup>46</sup> The blessings of William Smith and

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he was a local patriarch, George A. Smith Papers, Marriott Library, University of Utah. Lucy M. Smith was a plural wife of George A. Smith.

43. Blessing of Rhoda Ann Richards by Uncle John Smith, 22 Jan. 1845, at Nauvoo, Illinois, Knecht family records.

44. Lorenzo Snow's blessing, 15 Dec. 1836, by Patriarch Joseph Smith, Sr. Quinn also quotes Wilford Woodruff who told of an incident in 1839 when the prophet inaugurated the practice. The inspiration for this may have come from Acts 19:12, where Paul sends handkerchiefs or aprons to heal the people. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 221-22.

45. Blessing of young John Smith by his great-uncle John, 20 June 1852, Smith family records. Also some of the blessings given by William Smith included these words.

46. Juanita Brooks, *John D. Lee: Zealot—Pioneer Builder—Scapegoat* (Glendale, CA: Arthur Clark Co., 1973), 209. See also Brooks, *Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1950). Earlier, in December 1838, Lee had been told by Patriarch Isaac Morley, "Thou shalt come forth in the morning of the first resurrection, and no power shall hinder, except the shedding of innocent blood, or consenting thereto" (courtesy Wilma Bozung).

of Uncle John Smith had frequently referred to vengeance, as did those of local patriarchs, but as the Saints became more settled in Utah such phrases began to disappear.

Another adjustment has been more subtle. Although almost all patriarchal blessings include the phrase "I seal you up unto eternal life" or "I seal you up to come forth on the morning of the first resurrection," today less is made of the sealing powers formerly assigned to presiding patriarchs. There appears to have been some confusion with other sealing ordinances, especially those concerned with plural marriage and with "second anointings."<sup>47</sup>

The end of plural marriage did not affect the essential character of the patriarchal order, but it did bring change in the content of blessings. Before the Manifesto announcing the end of polygamy in 1890 a number of blessings assured men that the Lord would give them "many wives." Usually the promise included "a numerous posterity" and the prediction "of the increase of thy dominions there shall be no end."<sup>48</sup> Mercy Harman's 1877 blessing included the words, "You will be like Sarah of old. Through the enlightenment of your mind by the Spirit of the Lord, you will give unto your husband wives."<sup>49</sup> The latest of such blessings was one given to George F. Richards on 19 April 1891, six months after the Manifesto. He was told he would "be blessed with wives and numerous prosperity." Richards never did live the law of plural marriage, but he was sealed to six women "for eternity," two from consecutive monogamous marriages and four women after they were deceased.<sup>50</sup>

Some predictions have been retained in blessings, although the language and content have been tempered. During the nineteenth century men were told they would become "a king and a mighty prince" who "would rule over many even ten kingdoms" and women were promised

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47. See David John Buerger, "'The Fulness of the Priesthood': The Second Anointing in Latter-day Saint Theology and Practice," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (Spring 1983): 10-44. See also Cooper, *Promises Made to the Fathers*, 138-48.

48. These promises appeared in blessings when the Saints had settled in the Salt Lake Valley and after the practice of polygamy had been made public. It was believed that those entering into plural marriage would qualify for the highest degree of glory in the Celestial Kingdom but that plurality of wives was not a necessary condition for exaltation. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 522-23.

49. Blessing of Mercy Harman by Patriarch E. R. Billingsley, 3 Dec. 1877, from the diary of George Harman, 1825-91, typescript, 1942, Special Collections, Lee Library.

50. George F. Richards diaries, Book 3, 156-58, in Dale C. Mouritsen, "A Symbol of New Directions: George Franklin Richards and the Mormon Church, 1861-1950," Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1982. Men can still be sealed "for eternity" to several wives (from consecutive monogamous marriages), but patriarchal blessings no longer refer to this. Judging from this practice, it seems that Mormonism still includes polygamy as part of its doctrine, if only for the hereafter.

they would become "a queen and a priestess" to rule with their husbands over dominions during the resurrection.<sup>51</sup> Even though such descriptions of celestial empires have become more restrained, the idea that men and women will become kings and queens, priests and priestesses in the after-life remains a part of the Mormon belief system and as such is still commonly referred to in patriarchal blessings. This raises the question of hierarchical kingdoms in the hereafter, a concept which seems oddly out of touch both with Mormonism's early egalitarian social and economic experiments, and with Jesus Christ's teachings.<sup>52</sup> Insofar as mortal life is concerned there has been a general shift in a more conservative direction.

After the turn of the century, despite the persistence of distinctive Mormon beliefs and practices, there was an increasing tendency in the church to identify with the economic and political values of the larger society. From being a persecuted minority the church has become a valued supporter of the U.S. government. Certainly the tone and direction of twentieth-century blessings is conciliatory. President Joseph Fielding Smith advised the patriarchs to be conservative and cautious in their blessings, unless they were especially inspired otherwise. Today there is more stress on living virtuous lives, obeying the commandments, supporting church programs by attending meetings, celebrating domestic life, and obeying the law of the land.

#### PATRIARCHAL BLESSINGS GIVEN TO WOMEN

A survey of blessings given to women during the early years of Mormonism illustrates the significance of the roles prescribed for women. During the nineteenth century these roles were both empowering and restrictive. In at least thirty-two nineteenth-century patriarchal blessings, for example, women were told they would have the power to heal the sick. On 27 October 1882, Charlotte Cornwall was told by Patriarch John Smith, "Thou shalt be enabled through prayer and faith to heal the sick of thy family and hold the adversary at bay that health and peace may reign in thy dwelling."<sup>53</sup> A similar promise was given to Sophina Alcesta Gee and

51. For example, the blessing of Joseph T. Ball by William Smith, 14 July 1845, Schroeder Collection. Such promises appear in most nineteenth-century blessings.

52. According to Rex E. Cooper, the concept of a hierarchical order first appeared in the Pearl of Great Price, in the Book of Abraham. Published in March 1842 in the *Times and Seasons* 3:704-706, 719-22, this revelation was interpreted by Joseph Smith to mean that "individuals within a species are hierarchically ordered by biological or spiritual connections; human beings and gods are thus linked in a continuous hierarchy" (*Promises Made to the Fathers*, 103).

53. In Marie Cornwall, "The Gender Question," *Sunstone* 13 (Dec. 1989): 47.

to Eda Rogers.<sup>54</sup> Patty Sessions was told she "would partake of the Blessings of the Priesthood in common with thy companion shall have Faith to heal the sick by the laying on of hands when there is no Elders present."<sup>55</sup> Zina Y. Card was promised that "she would have power over the adversary, over evil spirits and wicked influences, as well as over diseases and all manner of sicknesses." Patriarch Joseph Young told Zina that the blessings and the power were hers "according to the holy Melchizedek Priesthood, you received in your [temple] Endowments, and you shall have them."<sup>56</sup> Helen Maria Fisher (who later married young John Smith) was advised she would be able to "do any miracle which shall be for the health and happiness of your family."<sup>57</sup> Others were similarly advised.

In the days when men were often absent on missions for long periods of time, it may have been deemed necessary to spiritually empower women to deal with the crises of pioneer life. Today the ordinance of blessing the sick is regarded as exclusively the prerogative of male priesthood holders. But the change was gradual. In 1908 President Joseph F. Smith answered an inquiry about women washing and anointing the sisters prior to childbirth: "We desire you to impress upon the sisters of your Relief Society that this practice is in no sense an ordinance, and must not be regarded as such, unless it be attended to under the direction of the proper authority [meaning the priesthood] in connection with the ordinance of laying on of hands for the healing of the sick."<sup>58</sup> As late as 1910, however, Lydia Clawson was promised by Patriarch John Smith, "Thou shalt, through prayer and faith, heal the sick of thy family, and health and peace shall reign in thy dwelling."<sup>59</sup>

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54. Blessing given to Sophina Alcesta Gee by Patriarch John Smith, 21 May 1876, Smith family records. Eda Rogers's blessing given in 1837 advised her, "In the absence of thy husband thou must pray with the family. When they are sick thou shalt lay hands on them and they shall recover. Sickness shall stand back," quoted in Linda King Newell, "Gifts of the Spirit: Women's Share," in Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 114.

55. Blessing given to Patty Sessions by Uncle John Smith, 18 Mar. 1848, in "Patty Bartlett Sessions: Mother of Mormon Midwifery, 1795-1893," typescript, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA. Photocopy of the original blessing is included as page 6a.

56. Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Mormon Women and the Temple," in Beecher and Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit*, 101. Leonora Taylor was also blessed with "your portion of the Priesthood which belongeth unto you" (*ibid.*).

57. Blessing given to Helen Maria Fisher by Uncle John Smith, 10 or 20 Apr. 1853, Smith family records.

58. Newell, "Gifts of the Spirit," 129.

59. Blessing of Lydia Clawson by Patriarch John Smith, 10 May 1910, Rudger Clawson papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library. Lydia was the wife of Apostle Rudger Clawson.

Linda King Newell has told of the "official death knell of this particular spiritual gift" as practiced by women. On 29 July 1946 Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith wrote to the Relief Society general president, saying, "While the authorities of the Church have ruled that it is permissible . . . they feel that it is far better for us to follow the plan the Lord has given us and send for the Elders of the Church." As Newell points out, "It would certainly be difficult for a woman to say that she did not wish to follow 'the plan the Lord has given us.'"<sup>60</sup> Other nineteenth-century precedents raise interesting questions about the changes in perceptions of women's spiritual powers.

During the nineteenth century several blessings endowed women with the priesthood. Emily Jacob's blessing in 1846 is explicit. In 1846 Patriarch Uncle John Smith said to her, "I place my hands upon your head in the name of Jesus of Nazareth; seal upon thee the priesthood with all the blessings of the new and everlasting covenant which was sealed upon the children of Joseph, for this thy lineage the same as thy companion, thou hast a right to all the blessings which are sealed upon his head."

But then the patriarch continued, "For a woman can have but little power in the priesthood without a man."<sup>61</sup> Although most of these blessings refer to the woman being "a lawful heir to the Priesthood in common with thy companion" or similar phrases that tie the power to her husband, a few made no mention of such contingencies. Elizabeth Bean was told,

I seal upon you all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and all the priesthood that was sealed upon the daughters of Joseph in the land of Egypt which is to abide with you and your posterity, giving you the power to heal the sick and to understand all the principles of the priesthood, and mysteries that have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world.<sup>62</sup>

And Mary Ann Dowdle was told by Patriarch Charles W. Hyde on 22 November 1875 that she was "a daughter of Ephraim and [had] a right to the fullness of the Priesthood and thy children to the fourth generation."<sup>63</sup> Mehitable Duty was told "The Priesthood in its fullness shall be conferred upon thee in due time, thou shalt have power over thy relatives and friends and thy husband . . . to preserve them in the bonds of the new and everlasting covenant."<sup>64</sup>

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60. Newell, "Gifts of the Spirit," 138.

61. Blessing of Emily Jacob by Patriarch John Smith, 26 Jan. 1846, in "The Record of Norton Jacob," Special Collections, Lee Library.

62. Blessing of Elizabeth Bean by John Smith, 16 May 1853, George Washington Bean papers, Archives and Manuscripts, Lee Library.

63. Diary of John Clark Dowdle, 1836-94, Archives and Manuscripts, Lee Library.

64. Blessing of Mehitable Duty by Patriarch John Smith, 27 Dec. 1845, RLDS archives. A blessing given to Mary Webster informed her, "the Priesthood shall be conferred upon

Caution has been advised in concluding from this that women were being given equal priesthood rights with men.<sup>65</sup> Yet Nancy Howd was told in 1845 that despite an unbelieving husband, "thou hast a right to the Priesthood by inheritance from thy Fathers, and if thy companion refuses to take his place and receive the gospel and you abide faithful you shall not be deprived of the privilege of haveing it sealed upon you in fullness in due time."<sup>66</sup> She was also promised she would heal the sick. That women did feel empowered, can be seen in the great number of healings undertaken by women, especially in blessing women during childbirth.

But this is not to say that women in the nineteenth century were endowed with overall power. There were limits placed upon such possibilities. While it is true that Bathsheba Smith and others were told they would be made "equal to thy brethren," or "thou shalt be blest, and not come one single whit behind thy brethren in knowledge and understanding," Mary Ann Hubbard was told that although she would be blessed in common with her companion, "nevertheless thou wilt not receive as great blessings as him [thy husband], because of thy sex."<sup>67</sup> Many women were cautioned to obey their husbands or alternatively that he was to be their savior or deliverer.<sup>68</sup> Yet Bathsheba Bigler's blessing included the warning, "Thou must be faithful and not give way to the enticing of men or the power of Satan, for thou knowest not the subtlety that there is in man."<sup>69</sup>

During the tenure of Patriarch William Smith when polygamy was practiced secretly in Nauvoo, Illinois, many of the women were troubled. In at least seven blessings there is mention of "strange questions" troubling the minds of the sisters. To Rachael Swanner Patriarch William Smith said, "The Devil has sought to ensnare thee and bind thy Soul fast and because of strange questions that have arisen thy Spirit has been troubled but the

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you in due time with thy Companion, making known unto the[e] mysteries . . . giving power unto the[e] to heal the sick in thine house," cited in Ian G. Barber, "The Ecclesiastical Position of Women in Two Mormon Trajectories," *Journal of Mormon History* 14 (1988): 72.

65. Barber, "The Ecclesiastical Position of Women," suggests that these promises may be associated with temple ordinances, especially the "second anointing" (72).

66. Blessing of Nancy Howd by Uncle John Smith, 16 Dec. 1845, when he was a local patriarch, in Jesse Perse Harman papers, Archives and Manuscripts, Lee Library.

67. Blessing given by Joseph Smith, Sr., to Bathsheba Bigler, 8 Feb. 1839, Special Collections, Lee Library. Blessing given by Joseph Smith, Sr., to Mary Ann Hubbard, 27 Jan. 1839, copy in my possession.

68. For example, the blessing given by Joseph Smith, Sr., to Amanda Rogers, 11 Aug. 1837, Archives and Manuscripts, Lee Library.

69. Blessing given by Joseph Smith, Sr., to Bathsheba Bigler, 8 Feb. 1839, Special Collections, Lee Library.

purposes of God cannot fail and the time shall come when thou shalt see it and understand it and thy Soul shall be comforted."<sup>70</sup> To Lovinia Dame he said,

although thy fears have troubled thee and doubts have arisen because of strange questions that have troubled thee this has become a matter of talk and conversation between thee and thy husband, yet because of the integrity of his heart and because of thy desires to do right, thou hast made thyself content and desired to become reconciled to thy fate and to the will of God.<sup>71</sup>

William assured Sara Ann Willis and several other women that if they would abide by the law of the Lord their "glory shall be like the bright stars of the firmament or the sun in its meridian glory for none shall outshine thee in all the heavenly kingdom or be made more glorious in their place."<sup>72</sup> Others received similar reassurance from Patriarch Hyrum Smith. Many women accepted plural marriage convinced that this was the only sure pathway to the celestial kingdom. Mary Alice Lambert was referred to "He whom God has appointed to rule over thee" and was promised, "if thou art faithful in keeping the law of thy husband while he is controlled and governed by the wisdom and power of heaven, none shall take thy crown."<sup>73</sup> The promise of glory in the world to come must have given hope and a welcome relief from the drudgery and privation that the women faced in frontier life. But there is also a sense of women's participation in the spiritual life of the community here on earth. Several women were told they would be "a mighty prophetess in the midst of the daughters of Zion," or were promised that "prophets and prophetesses [will] rise through your posterity."<sup>74</sup> And often they were given the laudatory title, "Mother in Israel."

The term "Mother in Israel" has long been a favorite in Mormon patriarchal blessings, and it continues to appear. Methodists and other nonconformist groups in England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries referred to women preachers this way, and it seems possible that Mormon missionaries, who had much success among these groups in Britain, adopted it as a description for valiant women. It may well

70. Blessing of Rachael Swanner by William Smith, 29 July 1845, Schroeder Collection.

71. Blessing of Lovinia Dame by William Smith, ca. June 1845, Schroeder Collection.

72. Blessing of Sara Ann Willis by William Smith, 19 Aug. 1845, Schroeder Collection.

73. Blessing of Mary Alice Lambert by William Smith, 1845, Schroeder Collection.

74. For example, Lucy M. Smith's blessing by Patriarch Zebedee Colton, 15 Jan. 1884, Smith family records. Also the blessing of Ellen Elsie Bradshaw by Patriarch John Reidhead, 2 Apr. 1899, in journal of Ellen Elsie Bradshaw, 1840-1920, 10, Special Collections, Lee Library.

have been a transatlantic phenomenon, however; Joseph Smith, Sr., was familiar with the term, which derives from the Old Testament.<sup>75</sup> In 1834 he designated his wife Lucy a "Mother in Israel" in one of the first blessings he gave as patriarch. (It is interesting to note that while 83 blessings mention the term "Mother in Israel," I have found only fifteen that refer to a "Father in Israel.") Although the church today acknowledges that "this designation has a deep and significant meaning, one that is far more than marrying and bearing children in this life, great and important as that course is," an association with the responsibilities of earthly, biological motherhood still receives greater emphasis.<sup>76</sup>

Another question raised by blessings given to women stems from the important concept of "Mother in Heaven." Lucy Emily Smith Woodruff's blessing included, "I place my hands upon thy head and seal the blessings of thy mother upon thee with also the blessings of an everlasting covenant for they are thine through right of lineage."<sup>77</sup> Another was told there is "a reward in Heaven laid up for you and the key is thy mother."<sup>78</sup> Were these blessings referring to an earthly mother or to a heavenly mother?<sup>79</sup>

Some women were told that their male posterity would have a special mission. Bathsheba Bigler was promised by Joseph Smith, Sr., in 1839 that she would have "a son who shall be mighty, for he shall be a prophet and seer."<sup>80</sup> Bathsheba later married George A. Smith, nephew of Joseph Sr. He became an apostle, as did their son John Henry Smith. Their grandson George Albert Smith became eighth president of the church. In 1845 Jennetta Richards was promised by Uncle John Smith that her children would "grow up around thee like healthful plants; one shall chase a thousand and two put 10,000 to flight, for the enemy shall not prevail over the saints in the last days."<sup>81</sup> And Abigail Abbott was told "one of thy posterity named

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75. The title "Mother in Israel" was bestowed on the prophetess Deborah because of her valiant defence of Israel (Jdgs. 5:7).

76. See the *Relief Society Personal Study Guide* No.1, Lesson 4, "Mothers in Israel" (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 119-24.

77. Blessing given to Lucy Emily Smith Woodruff, 16 June 1901, Special Collections, Marriott Library. The patriarch was not named.

78. The blessing, given to Frances Crosby by Patriarch Hyrum Smith, 18 July 1943, courtesy Linda King Newell.

79. The idea of a mother in heaven has increasingly become a focus for Mormon feminists. See Linda Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," in Beecher and Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit*, 64-77. Also John Heeren, Donald B. Lindsey, and Marylee Mason, "The Mormon Concept of Mother in Heaven: A Sociological Account of Its Origins and Development," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 23 (1984): 396-411.

80. Blessing of Bathsheba Bigler by Patriarch Joseph Smith, Sr., 7 Feb. 1839, in "Record of Bathsheba Smith," Special Collections, Lee Library.

81. Blessing given to Jennetta Richards by Uncle John Smith, 22 Jan. 1845, Knecht family records.

after the name of his father and after the name of his great-grandfather who was a descendant of the tribe of Judah and of the household of David, shall be a mighty warrior and be led on to avenge the blood of the Prophets and Patriarchs."<sup>82</sup>

Such militancy, however, was replaced in the twentieth century by an emphasis on the nurturing influence of women. For most Mormon women in the twentieth century the role of wife and mother is elevated to that of being "a shining light of inspiration" to husband and children, reminiscent of the role of women in Victorian America.<sup>83</sup> In the past thirty years, however, a few concessions have appeared, such as encouraging women to seek an education. One in 1971 promised: "thou shall gain the education which will help thee, along with the inspiration and guidance of the Lord, to accomplish the great work which thou shall do upon this earth . . . thou shall do a work upon this earth that shall be like unto that which thou did in the pre-existence, one of counseling thy brothers and sisters." The recipient was told also that she should not be in a hurry to find a husband but should get an education first.<sup>84</sup> Most blessings of women today, however, dwell on the privileges and duties of domestic life and the responsibilities of church membership.

#### SUMMARY OF THEMATIC CHANGES

The following tables give some idea of the changes that have occurred in the themes covered in patriarchal blessings. The figures are based on: (1) blessings that I have seen (either holographs, photocopies, or reproduced in journals); (2) thirty-seven blessings and excerpts of blessings from published sources; and (3) twenty-eight responses to questionnaires specifying themes that appeared repeatedly in nineteenth-century blessings. (The questionnaires were directed to those receiving blessings during the past fifty years). Of the later blessings of which I have copies, although many recipients wished to remain anonymous, permission was granted to use them in this analysis. Even though the sample cannot be considered as

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82. Blessing given to Abigail Abbott by William Smith, 23 June 1845, Schroeder Collection.

83. Blessing given 21 May 1973, copy in my possession. In a paper given at the 1990 Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, D. Michael Quinn noted the church's adoption of Victorian social and economic values following the 1890 Manifesto. Quinn suggests that the church's surrender of plural marriage—which the Saints believed the Lord would never allow to happen—paved the way for the acceptance of other American values of the pre-1890s.

84. From the 1971 blessing of Lorie Erikson, courtesy of the recipient. It should be mentioned that of the seven questionnaires returned by women whose blessings mention education only three refer to secular learning, the others to religious education.

representative of the many thousands of blessings given, some tentative conclusions can be drawn.

<i>Themes</i>	1833-99 (N=560)	1900-79 (N=184)
1. Remain until Second Coming	57	4
2. See "last days"	51	2
3. Command elements	39	1
4. Perform miracles	30	0
5. Have gift of healing	60	9
6. Be one of "horns of Joseph"	29	1
7. Prophecy	18	2
8. Have visions	25	2
9. Not taste of death	6	0
10. Raise the dead	8	0
11. Avenge blood of prophets	12	0

Breaking down these figures in terms of gender, some interesting patterns emerge, but the limited nature of the sample can only suggest possibilities for comparison:

1833-99		
<i>Themes</i>	Men (N=297)	Women (N=263)
1. Remain until Second Coming	33	21
2. See "last days"	29	17
3. Command elements	39	0
4. Perform miracles	24	3
5. Have gift of healing	27	28
6. Be one of "horns of Joseph"	29	0
7. Prophecy	12	6
8. Have visions	14	11
9. Not taste of death	3	3
10. Raise the dead	8	0
11. Avenge blood of prophets	11	0

1900-82		
<i>Themes</i>	Men (N=91)	Women (N=93)
1. Remain until Second Coming	1	3
2. See "last days"	1	1

3. Command elements	1	0
4. Perform miracles	0	0
5. Have gift of healing	8	2
6. Be one of "horns of Joseph"	1	0
7. Prophecy	1	1
8. Have visions	0	2
9. Not taste of death	0	0
10. Raise the dead	0	0
11. Avenge blood of prophets	0	0

Gifts of healing and of visionary experiences appear to have been more evenly distributed between men and women during the nineteenth century, but women were seldom given power to control the elements, perform miracles, raise the dead, serve as one of the "horns of Joseph," or be given power to avenge the blood of the prophets. In the twentieth century most of the more extravagant promises appear to have disappeared in blessings given to both men and women.

While it is true that patriarchs have been cautioned to be more conservative in their blessings to avoid possible damage to faith, some of the changes can be seen as reflections of cultural change. Most of the twentieth-century blessings that I have seen focus on such things as service in the church, education (both religious and secular), gender roles, and directions for family life, plus the traditional statement of lineage and the promise that recipients will "come forth on the morning of the first resurrection clothed in glory, immortality, and eternal life." Blessings also include observations about the character, talents, and earthly callings of recipients.

Before discussing changes in administrative policies, some general observations might be made about patriarchal blessings. There can be no doubt that early blessings provided comfort and reassurance for the beleaguered Saints. Among grateful tributes paid to the patriarch was one expressed by Wilford Woodruff on 19 July 1868. He said, "now all men who were acquainted with Father Joseph Smith know that when he laid his hands upon a man's head it seemed as if the heavens and the hearts of men were open to him."<sup>85</sup> Several poems written in honor of Uncle John Smith reflect the comfort received. For example, in 1846 Eliza R. Snow wrote, "Thou art greatly below'd by the saints that surround thee They have tasted thy blessings & greatly rejoice The pow'r of the Priesthood is felt thro' thy presence The weak become strong at the sound of thy voice. . . . I have oft

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85. JD 12:277.

felt the pow'r of thy blessing upon me And my heart feels to bless thee, thou servant of God."<sup>86</sup>

The comfort that recipients received led even non-members to seek a patriarchal blessing. Joseph Smith, Sr., gave blessings to several such people in 1836, some of whom joined the church later, including his cousin Israel Duty.<sup>87</sup> Colonel Thomas L. Kane, non-member friend of the Saints during the exodus from Nauvoo, requested a patriarchal blessing from Uncle John in 1846. His blessing promised,

Inasmuch as you have had in your heart the interests of the Children of God, the Lord is well pleased with your exertions. He has given his angels charge over you in times of danger to help you in time of trouble and defend you from your enemies. Not a hair of your head shall fall by the hand of an enemy. For you are called to do a great work on the earth . . . Your name shall be had in honorable remembrance among the Saints to all generations. You shall have the Comforter to comfort your heart, and sustain you in all your trials . . .<sup>88</sup>

It is unlikely that a non-member could obtain a patriarchal blessing today, although some may have received other ministrations.

One of the purposes of patriarchal blessings today is "to give unto us the inspiration that will enable us to make good here in mortality, that we will be worthy of the great calling that came to us before the foundation of the world."<sup>89</sup> The Mormon belief in a "pre-existence" figures largely in patriarchal blessings to this day. One blessing assured the recipient, "You were chosen to come to earth through this royal lineage [Ephraim] and to be reserved to come forth in the greatest of all dispensations—the dispensation of the fulness of times when the Gospel and the Holy Priesthood have been restored."<sup>90</sup> Some were told they had been held in reserve to come forth in this day, and others that they were given the opportunity to choose the time and place in which they would come to earth.<sup>91</sup> During the

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86. Eliza R. Snow diary, 1846, Huntington Library. A copy of the complete poem was sent to me by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher.

87. John Smith journal, 1781-1854, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

88. Blessing given to Colonel Thomas L. Kane by Patriarch John Smith, 7 Sept. 1846, at Cutler's Park, Omaha Nation, in Leonard J. Arrington, "In Honorable Remembrance": *Thomas L. Kane's Services to the Mormons, Task Papers in History*, No. 22 (Salt Lake City: LDS Historical Department, 1978), n.p.

89. LeGrand Richards, "Patriarchal Blessings," address to BYU student body, 27 May 1953, in R. Clayton Brough and Thomas W. Grassley, *Understanding Patriarchal Blessings* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publisher, 1984), 37-38.

90. Blessing given 21 May 1973, copy in my possession.

91. Blessing of Watkin Rees by Patriarch George Mumford, 18 May 1914, that of Harvey Sessions by Patriarch Jos. R. Shepherd, 12 Oct. 1929, and a blessing given to Lorie

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this led to the conviction that we chose our various stations in life, even to the point of selecting parents, husbands, or wives.<sup>92</sup> In 1857 Apostle John Taylor wrote in answer to a woman's query, "Where did I come from?":

Knowest thou not that eternities ago thy spirit dwelt in thy Heavenly Father's bosom and in His presence, and with thy mother, one of the Queens of Heaven. [While there thou] made a covenant . . . with two others, male and female spirits, that thou wouldest come and take a tabernacle through their lineage, and become one of their offspring. You also chose a kindred spirit whom you loved in the spirit world . . . to be your head, stay, husband and protector on earth and to exalt you in eternal worlds.<sup>93</sup>

Many young Mormon men and women were told in blessings that they would find and marry the "choice spirit" they had known in the pre-existence. According to Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton this idea received "some discouragement from church leaders who considered it too fatalistic . . . it served mainly to give religious overtones to the common conception of a 'one and only.'"<sup>94</sup>

Patriarchal blessings still reflect the belief that we are born into a particular situation for some divine purpose or because of some circumstance in the pre-existence.<sup>95</sup> As recently as 1973 a woman was told,

Now there are choice spirits, a part of your posterity, now awaiting in the Spirit world for the proper time when they will be worthy and anxious to come to this earth, and you could play an important part in providing a clean channel through which these choice spirits can come to earth and obtain mortal bodies. So take good care of this body.<sup>96</sup>

The doctrine of a pre-existence remains strong in Mormonism even

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Erikson, 10 Mar. 1971, copies in my possession.

92. One woman was told in 1951 that she had been "permitted to be born in this generation under the new and everlasting covenant, to goodly parents, whom it was your privilege to choose." Another recipient was told by Patriarch W. Glenn Harmon in 1970 that "before you came into this life you chose a companion, and when the time comes that this blessing should be yours, you will know her and she will know you." Copies in my possession.

93. John Taylor, *The Mormon* (1855-57) 3:28, in Cooper, *Promises Made to the Fathers*, 104.

94. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 187.

95. One of the traditional explanations given for the denial of priesthood to blacks was that they had been less valiant in the pre-existence.

96. Blessing given on 17 May 1973, copy in my possession.

though the more dramatic links with pre-mortal life contained in earlier patriarchal blessings have been tempered by an official caution to patriarchs. But as the church has expanded throughout the world the process governing the administration of blessings has been routinized, gradually, through the years.

#### CHANGES IN POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATING TO BLESSINGS

In the early days of the church when there was an easy familiarity within Mormon communities, anyone could ask for a patriarchal blessing whenever there was felt a need for direction or comfort. Many Saints received multiple blessings. Heber J. Grant, for example, received six patriarchal blessings before becoming seventh president of the church in 1918. But on 21 October 1922 Patriarch Hyrum G. Smith counseled local patriarch Joseph A. Quibell about "cranks" and others who go about trying to get a blessing from every patriarch they meet:

I think every member of the Church should have at least one blessing . . . and for that purpose the Stake Patriarchs are placed in the church—for it is an utter impossibility for the Patriarch of the Church to bless all the people. I think all members of the Church may receive blessings in the stakes, and then those who are fortunate enough may receive one from the Presiding Patriarch—then they should be well blessed for this life.<sup>97</sup>

The procedure for obtaining blessings has changed. During the earliest days members could ask for one during a blessing meeting. But beginning with Hyrum G. Smith the instruction to local patriarchs was to "bless the worthy members of your stake." From the 1930s on, teenage girls in order to obtain their Golden Gleaner Award in the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association were required to get their patriarchal blessing. On 29 November 1944 a message was relayed through the YWMIA general board to the stakes and wards that this no longer was a requirement, although the girls should be encouraged to ask for a blessing. Apparently a stake patriarch had complained when eighteen girls had tried as a group to make an appointment to receive patriarchal blessings.

Today obtaining a patriarchal blessing follows a strict procedure—almost a rite of passage—a routinization of what was formerly a charismatic, spontaneous response to promptings of the spirit. Guidelines are laid down by the institutional church in terms of who can receive a blessing, by whom it can be given, and the necessary paperwork that has to be completed. The conditions outlined include: (1) a person must be a baptized member of the

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97. Hyrum G. Smith to Joseph A. Quibell, 21 Oct. 1922, Smith family records.

church; (2) the bishop or branch president has the responsibility for determining when any member is ready to receive a patriarchal blessing, whether they are mature enough in an understanding of the gospel, and if they are worthy. Although no specific age is designated, Patriarch Eldred G. Smith strongly recommended that no one under twelve years of age should be given a blessing:

It should come at a time when the individual has a desire to be of service to others, when he has a desire to do the work which the Lord desires of him. He should be old enough to understand the history of Israel. He should be of an age when he begins to feel the "loosening of his mother's apron strings" and has a desire to make something of himself in serving the Lord in his life.<sup>98</sup>

Members of the church are required to obtain written "Recommends," signed by their bishop, attesting to their faithfulness and worthiness to receive a patriarchal blessing. These "Recommends" are given after formal interviews similar to the ones experienced by members seeking permission to participate in temple ordinances.<sup>99</sup> The manner in which blessings are bestowed has changed also. In Joseph Smith Sr.'s day, within the relatively close-knit congregations, communal blessing meetings were celebrations which included feasts, and in one instance Lucy Mack Smith, wife of the first patriarch, added her own blessing to that given by her husband.<sup>100</sup> Today the patriarch conducts private pre-blessing interviews with recipients who may not be known to him personally in which he seeks to gain some understanding of their background and personality. And the communal meetings have been replaced with private sessions with only the patriarch and individual recipient present and, if desired, close family members. Even the scribe has been replaced by a tape recorder.

There have been other changes on the administrative level. For example, in the days of Joseph Smith, Sr., it was decreed that since "a laborer is worthy of his hire," the patriarch should be paid for his services. It was agreed that he should receive ten dollars each week plus expenses. Payment for services continued, with adjustments, through subsequent patriarchs. There are references to direct compensation from those receiving blessings.<sup>101</sup> Uncle John Smith's journal records on 22 May 1846, "For the first

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98. Smith, "What is a Patriarchal Blessing?" 42-43.

99. *Handbook of Instructions*, No. 16 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1940), 128-29.

100. Caroline Barnes Crosby, "Journal and Memoirs, 1807-1882," 21 Feb. 1836, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

101. Lyman A. Shurtliff, after receiving a blessing on 6 December 1837, noted in his journal, "I made the Patriarch a present of four or five dollars with which he was well

time since we left Nauvoo I blessed 3 persons & received one dollar. This same day I paid out my last half dollar." Four days later he noted, "Gave four blessings and one gratis."<sup>102</sup> In 1848 Patty Sessions refers to taking dinner to Father Smith (Uncle John): "He blessed us with a Patriarchal Blessing. I gave him \$2.00 in money for Mr. Sessions and mine. He gave E. R. Snow's to her."<sup>103</sup> Benjamin Ferris, secretary for Utah territory, wrote in 1854: "Among other singular institutions they have a Patriarch, whose business it is to bestow blessings. The blessing is given in writing to the applicant who pays for the same one dollar and a half, of which one dollar belongs to the Patriarch and the balance is paid to the scribe for recording the document."<sup>104</sup> Later this practice began to reflect more general changes in the world view of members of the church. The values of private enterprise, instead of community service, began to show a troubling face. John Taylor, newly sustained president of the Quorum of the Twelve, wrote to fellow apostle George Q. Cannon on 7 November 1877:

The subject of the present condition of the patriarchs has lately been considered by us. It has appeared to several of the members of the Quorum that they have noticed a spirit amongst some of the brethren ordained to this office, to degrade it to a mere means of obtaining a livelihood, and to obtain more business they had been travelling from door to door and underbidding each other in the price of blessings. This, we all considered an evil that should be remedied as soon as practicable.<sup>105</sup>

The solution, suggested Taylor, was to organize a quorum of patriarchs over which "by virtue of his calling" Patriarch John Smith would preside.<sup>106</sup> After the late nineteenth century the presiding patriarchs received a living allowance from church funds, but local patriarchs continued to support themselves by their secular occupations, as they do today. Service as a stake patriarch is similar to that of all local callings in the church, a purely voluntary activity. One difference is that patriarchs work alone, have no council (or quorum), and are relatively unattached within the hierarchical

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pleased" ("Biographical Sketch of the Life of Luman Andros Shurtliff, 1807-1864," 27, typescript, Huntington Library).

102. John Smith journal, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

103. Patty Bartlett Sessions journal, typescript, Huntington Library.

104. Benjamin G. Ferris, *Utah and the Mormons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854), 314.

105. John Taylor to George Q. Cannon, 7 Nov. 1877, John Taylor papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

106. It is not known if this advice was acted upon immediately, but there are later references to a quorum of patriarchs in solemn assemblies when a new church president was sustained.

church structure, even though stake presidents have the responsibility for supervising patriarchs within their boundaries.

Although no record is available as to when a quorum of patriarchs was first formed, John Taylor's dream was certainly realized when Hyrum G. Smith became patriarch in 1912. Hyrum G. directed, supervised, and gave counsel to stake patriarchs. In fact he professionalized the whole operation. One of his directives was a circular letter of instructions to patriarchs throughout the church, dated 19 August 1914. Among other things the patriarch expressed some concern about any commercialization of the calling when he advised all stake patriarchs, "You may accept a gift if it is offered, but do not permit anyone you have blessed to leave your presence feeling that they have paid for a blessing; Patriarchal blessings cannot be purchased, they are the free gifts of God to his children under the hands of His Patriarchs."<sup>107</sup> This advice was repeated on the title page of each patriarch's Record of Patriarchal Blessings book, under the heading "Duties of Patriarch."<sup>108</sup> Finally, in 1943 the receipt of gratuities was condemned.

Other directives regarding the giving of blessings may provide more subtle indications of change and bureaucratization in the church. From the beginning there was some ambivalence in describing the function of patriarchs. Many times it was said they were to "bless the fatherless" or to bless those whose fathers were not members of the church, or blessings were given by permission or request of the fathers. Yet often recipients had worthy fathers who were not even mentioned. These phrases gradually disappeared as the practice of giving patriarchal blessings became integrated within the institutional procedures of the church.

In 1958 Elder Bruce R. McConkie referred to patriarchal blessings as "a necessary part of church administration."<sup>109</sup> Despite their charismatic nature they now serve as an accepted rite of passage within the institutional setting. And, even though today's stake patriarchs are instructed to rely on the spirit, and many have expressed their deep sense of humility and responsibility in seeking the Lord's guidance, twentieth-century blessings differ from the earlier, mystical and colorful, spontaneous outpourings. In this sense they tend to reflect change in the larger American culture as they have become less other-worldly and generally more practical or rational in their language and focus. Also in their content and in the administrative policies governing their bestowal, patriarchal blessings clearly reflect the cultural changes accompanying the evolution of the institutional church.

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107. Circular letter to stake patriarchs, 19 Aug. 1914, signed by the presiding patriarch, Hyrum G. Smith, Smith family records.

108. Title page of Record of Patriarchal Blessings book of John M. Young, Liberty Stake, 20 Mar. 1920, Smith family records.

109. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 224.

The belief in continuous revelation embraces such adjustment. And despite the routinization accompanying institutional change, this does not take away from the patriarchs themselves any of the reverence arising from their sense of being in touch with the divine. Nor does it deprive recipients of any perceived value in the blessings themselves. Patriarchal blessings are still regarded with respect and appreciation, they are still seen as a sign of God's interest in the individual, and they are accepted as a direction-finder, an anchor, and a comfort in times of stress or insecurity. Perhaps the ability to institutionalize this ancient charismatic tradition, allowing it to embrace cultural change, is another indication of the genius of Mormonism.