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EMBODIED AUTHORITY: PRIESTHOOD ORDINATION AND THE LAWS OF THE MORTAL BODY

As we have seen, ritual is often an ordinary act made special, yet every now and then a ritual is based on an uncommon act. Such is the case with the laying on of hands. Arguably the earliest ritual performed in this dispensation (see Joseph Smith—History 1:68), this act may be underappreciated because it is performed so often. The rite itself is found in at least three ritual settings: ordination of priesthood, the bestowal of priesthood blessings, and the setting apart of individuals in their ecclesiastical callings. The fact that all three are associated with the priesthood reveals the integral nature of this rite in our Church and is the subject of this study by Aaron Reeves. —DB

JOSEPH SMITH JR. WAS PREOCCUPIED with dissolution, and this sensitivity can be witnessed early in his life. Truman G. Madsen has noted that the religious tension in the Smith family was intensely felt by Joseph and that the contradiction he observed between the order of the heavens and the disorder in his own family propelled him into the grove in 1820.¹ The possibility of the dissolution of family and filial relationships through death was particularly abhorrent, as demonstrated in his deep grief at the death of various family members.² For Joseph, death not only dissolved the physical association between individuals but also intensified the heavenly risk associated with intrafamilial religious differences.

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Death seemed to provoke “careful and pondurous and solom though[ts],”³ and it is not accidental that some of his most significant religious revelations were received in response to death among friends or family.⁴ Alvin’s death in particular⁵ had a profound impact upon Joseph’s religious imagination,⁶ which was the foundation for a number of revelations that established a theology of redemption allowing earthly relationships to persist beyond into the eternities.⁷

This paper explores this theology through one Mormon ritual, namely priesthood ordination. Though a ritually simple, routine act, it embodies principles of belonging that counteract potential dissolution, which in turn reveals the true nature of salvation.

Theodicy and the Chain of Belonging

Because ordination obviously concerns priesthood, it would be instructive to understand how Joseph understood priesthood and its place in the cosmos. In his book *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition*, Douglas Davies teases out the constellation of doctrines that formed Mormonism’s “orientation to the world” and argues that Mormonism’s force as a religion is in part derived from the narrative quality of its story of redemption.⁸ This narrative centers upon interactions between three key actors—Jesus, Satan, and Joseph Smith—and three paradigmatic scenes—the Grand Council, Gethsemane, and the Sacred Grove. According to Davies, within each of these scenes the protagonists can be understood to represent certain principles, in particular the principles of fidelity or apostasy, with their interaction within each scene confronting the nature and problem of evil. Because theodicies speak to how God’s divine attributes can be maintained in the face of the existence of evil, they imply a narrative of the origin and the end of that evil. Thus, by locating the origins of evil within the framework of apostasy from fidelity to God and other people, Davies develops part of what is unique in the Mormon approach to the problem of evil.⁹

While Davies states that his study on Mormon theodicy is not concerned with the “ritual expression” of these motifs, within the faith such ritual expression does in fact encompass the Mormon problem of evil.¹⁰

Jonathan Z. Smith has written that rituals (or ordinances) enact “the way things ought to be”¹¹ and are very often a response to the evil that is perceived in the world. Thus ritual becomes one solution to the problem of evil when it is acted out in various settings. Similarly, Bryan Turner argues that rituals affirm a community’s response to the problem of disorder, dissolution, and death.¹² In this sense, as Turner observes, religion is a form of social theodicy which is an “inevitable consequence of the universalistic feature of human embodiment.”¹³

For Turner, being embodied involves pain, reproduction, and mortality, and these characteristics are almost universal across human societies. Consequently, religions can be understood as responses to these characteristics of having a body. Thus Turner argues that “the body and theodicy are intimately connected, because the central features of theodicy are . . . responses to the problem of human pain, the nature of sexuality and the moral problems of death,” which suggests that rituals, bodily actions, are particularly suited to address these problems.¹⁴ It appears that Smith saw the intersection between suffering, evil, and death, which pushed him to seek for divine guidance regarding how he might preserve life and family relationships. Dissolution therefore was a central concern in Mormonism’s theodicy and, not surprisingly, is reflected in its ritual corpus.¹⁵

This impulse in Joseph Smith appears to have been part of a wider project which, as described by Terryl Givens, involved both a restoration of specific keys of authority by embodied individuals and a restoration of truths through a particular prophetic process.¹⁶ This restoration process consisted of gathering together all truth (and the attendant rituals) from any available source and combining them into a coherent and properly ordered unity. According to Givens, Joseph believed that truth was already present in the world but that it had been disorganized through apostasy and consequently was fragmented and scattered. The Prophet’s mission was to glean all truth and forge it into one great whole.¹⁷ Hence the confluence of these lines of authority is a product of Smith’s vision of the “great whole” into which all truth could be organized.

Recently, Samuel Brown explored this impulse by describing how Joseph Smith transformed the “chain of being” into what Brown calls a “chain of belonging.”¹⁸ The “chain of being” was an attempt to organize all forms of life (including God, humankind, plants, and animals) into a series of hierarchical relationships. In reconfiguring this chain, Joseph anchored these hierarchies in a specific conception of priesthood which connected different types of beings (testial, terrestrial, and celestial) across not only space but also time, from the premortal life into the after-life. This crossing of time was represented by priesthood transferal from one individual to another (often within families).

This transformation of the chain of being into the chain of belonging is an important feature of Smith’s developing theology. Beginning in 1832 Joseph Smith’s revelations began to reflect his efforts to elaborate a theology of priesthood which served to reconfigure the order of the cosmos. Smith and Rigdon’s vision of the degrees of glory, even an “infinite hierarchy of glories,” expanded the conception of heaven, where previous religious traditions had seen only one divine kingdom.¹⁹ In December of the same year, the Olive Leaf revelation reiterated the multiplicity of kingdoms and reaffirmed that these hierarchies were determined by whether recipients had celestial, terrestrial, or testial bodies. Likewise, Smith’s early revelations on priesthood distinguished between higher and lesser orders which also mapped onto these heavenly organizations. Thus the bonding nature of the priesthood, across both time and space, structured the cosmic hierarchies that determined the powers and glories available to those in the worlds to come. By receiving this priesthood, recipients were given a place within the hierarchy of existing things (“being”) whilst simultaneously belonging to a specific sociality of priesthood holders.

A few years later, the translation of the Book of Abraham concretely tied the social priesthood organization with the physical cosmos,²⁰ and with the introduction of the temple and its attendant rites in 1836, these connections now affected the Church membership directly. The Nauvoo period, with its greatly expanded temple ordinances, including marriage sealings (particularly for polygamy) and baptisms for the dead, were the

culmination of Smith's attempts to give ritualized expression to this lineal priesthood and the chain of belonging into which people were initiated.²¹

Each of these developments forged new forms of association with the heavenly bodies, deceased ancestors, marriage partners, and friends. Smith's chain of belonging was clearly complex and multifaceted. Baptism for the dead, for example, was a method for adopting ancestors into this new family of God despite the fact that they had never heard the message of the Restoration. Priesthood became the channel through which members of the Church (both biological and nonbiological) were bound together into one great family of God, a lineage that went back to Adam.²² And for Brown, these revelations show that "priesthood offered a metaphysical substitute for blood," a substitute that was also more secure and which could preserve relationships beyond death and the ever-present threat of dissolution.²³

Hutch and the Laws of the Mortal Body

In light of the above discussion, it appears that for Joseph, the soul was, in part, constituted through earthly and premortal relationships with others and therefore salvation was a social endeavor. Richard Hutch has explored a similar understanding of self and has provided "laws of the mortal body" that may be useful in understanding Joseph's theodicy and the role of the priesthood in that theodicy.²⁴ For Hutch, the self is derived through narratives; in other words, we are defined primarily by the stories that we have inherited and taken for our own.²⁵ These stories emerge from the culture into which we have been immersed since birth but are then refined and revised by our own individual experiences and as such can be retold in various ways. Joseph Smith's different accounts of the First Vision²⁶ and President David O. McKay's varied iterations of the "Prayer under a Pepper Tree"²⁷ both illustrate that stories are told and understood in the broader context of the narratives that we use to define our lives. Moreover, extending the example of the First Vision, Joseph's different accounts reflect a shifting (and, to some extent, expanding) sense of his own mission.²⁸ Stories shape how people think of themselves, but they

also shape how we think about the world, and they are certainly social, for it is in the telling and retelling that the definitions of self are actualized.

Hutch further suggests that the body is an integral component in the constructions of these narratives and that there are two primary laws that govern the manner in which the body affects these self-defining narratives. The first of these laws, designated by Hutch as “the turnover of generations,” describes the manner in which the body governs the nature of time within a given narrative, particularly the narratives of birth and death. For Hutch, “the turnover of generations . . . is grounded . . . in the need to make way for the next generation.”²⁹ In self-narratives, the body can be understood as “an idiom of the past and the future, through which the young are linked with ancestors and the elderly are linked to progeny.”³⁰ Thus our bodies become a way of expressing the lives of ancestors and progenitors both in terms of genetics and, more importantly, in terms of action. Our actions can be the storybook by which we define ourselves, either by being faithful to the lives of our ancestors or by disregarding their legacy.

The second law is what Hutch calls “active biological/gender complementarity.” Here Hutch is referring to the necessity of sexual reproduction in the turnover of generations, and like the first law, this second law also describes the role of the body in designating time within a given narrative of self. Narratives governed by this second law would include marriage and courtship narratives, gender roles, and so on. But because these also reflect mortality (sexual activity is related to birth, which is related to death), there is an overlap between the first and second law. As Hutch himself notes: “Sexuality is located within mortality” and “practical sexuality . . . reflects biological mutuality . . . [and] turns the past into the future.”³¹ Clearly, this second law is less universal than the first because not everyone is able (nor do some people want) to participate in the act of reproduction, while death is an experience of all. Hutch argues that this second law, and the implied reproductive capacity, demonstrates the coupling of birth and death: becoming a parent or an aunt, for example, shifts the generations and positions you as “the next in line to die.”³²

At root, Hutch's concern here is with narratives regarding the creation of life, the attendant death which must inevitably follow, and the continuity these narratives provide across the generations who are born and die. It is in this manner that Hutch's laws and Joseph's concept of priesthood come together. In terms of priesthood, it is the initiates who are charged with the transmission of this power, and it is through transmission that it is preserved from one dying generation to the next.³³

In terms of Latter-day Saint theology, the Mormon exalted self can be thought of as being composed of two elements: life (in the form of mortality or immortality) and belonging (in the form of being sealed to God and other divine individuals, including family). Gender complementarity (or sexual reproduction) necessarily provides mortal life, but priesthood anchors the social element of belonging as well as the physical form of immortality. Not only is Jesus a Melchizedek Priesthood holder and the source of resurrection, but Brigham Young and Spencer W. Kimball have both taught that priesthood keys and a specific ordinance are required to resurrect people.³⁴ In addition, it is only certain priesthood holders who have the authority to perform ordinances and rituals which seal relationships in the eternities. Thus priesthood ordination is a form of death conquest, creating narratives in which the dissolution of our social relationships is overcome as well as enacting a new "coupling" in which new life emerges.³⁵

Hutch's two laws and the individual narratives of self they govern, as reflected in these priesthood narratives, intersect with the broader story of redemption from the threat of dissolution. It is in this intersection that we can explore the significance of priesthood ordination. In particular, three narratives emerge that establish networks of belonging on both the individual level and the communal level. The first of these is a genealogical chain which focuses upon the lineage of Adam, the second is a Christological chain which connects priesthood with the act of atonement, and the third is an institutional chain derived from the institutional position of priesthood holders. Each of these lines embeds the recipient in a broad story of salvation which draws upon the notions of fidelity to the community and to God or apostasy from them, the very dissolution that so concerned Joseph.³⁶

The Genealogical Chain

Hutch's first law, the turnover of generations, directs attention to genealogy and priesthood. Notably, Joseph Smith claimed specific genealogical ties for those who received the priesthood, ties which were more important than blood. In a 1949 issue of the *Improvement Era*, Dr. Joseph F. Merrill, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, observed, "In an effort to show graphically the priesthood line of authority through appropriate pictures, Elder Karl Weiss of Salt Lake City, Utah, has developed a simple but effective priesthood portrait pedigree."³⁷

The origin of tracing the transmission of priesthood authority goes back in large measure to this article. Since this publication, a number of Church leaders, and various other articles and editorials have advocated that priesthood holders pass these lines onto those who they ordain to various offices in the priesthood.³⁸ While these lines are often genetically oriented, meaning that they reflect real genetic relationships (father-son, uncle-nephew), the genetic relationship is not what is being stressed in the priesthood lineage. Rather, it is an unbroken biological line of priesthood holders that could be traced all the way back to the Creation. In other words, these lineages establish a continuous relationship of flesh and blood back to the first mortal, which establishes an unbroken line for priesthood transmission; thus these lineages become creation narratives that represent an individual's sense of identity with the Creation. Further, such genealogies connect the individual or community with those they consider to be their ancestors. Brown notes that Joseph Smith's projects to develop (or restore) a pure language and to translate the Egyptian artifacts purchased in the Kirtland era³⁹ are, at root, exploring "genealogy and progeny on the one hand and priesthood on the other."⁴⁰

It is no surprise to find that Adam and Abraham, as creation narrative figures—Adam for all mankind, Abraham for Israel—are central figures in the gospel's restoration. In particular, part of the Restoration was the awareness that the Saints were the progeny of both figures, the seed of Abraham especially. This focus upon progeny was evident in the *Lectures on Faith*.⁴¹ In the second lecture there is an explicit concern with tracing the genealogical transmission of faith back to Adam. Similarly, in

an 1832 revelation on priesthood, Moses' authority was connected back to Abraham's authority and ultimately to Adam.⁴² As Brown observes, "The center of genealogical and sacerdotal power was Adam."⁴³ Moreover, Smith's "new grades of heaven reflected no simple statement of merit or ontological superiority: they were an index of one's placement in the genealogy of eternal 'intelligences.'"⁴⁴ In short, receiving the priesthood meant that an individual was adopted into a celestial genealogy with Adam as the mortal center.

Yet it does not appear that the connection back to Adam is necessarily the end of this lineage. He is merely the first of the mortal progenitors. Our first hint of an even grander element to this lineage is found in the Book of Abraham: "[The priesthood] was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth" (Abraham 1:3).

Moses 6:67–68 is even more explicit in describing the conference of priesthood. Here we are given the process by which Adam becomes a son of God, a process promised to all who are "after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity." This promise of sonship to God via the priesthood is prefaced by a priesthood lineage from Enoch to Adam, "who was the son of God" (v. 22). Thus, the priesthood not only ties one to the mortal beings long gone but suggests a living biological chain back to God himself.⁴⁵

The Christological Chain

Just as ordination to the priesthood ties one to a long, continuous lineage of priesthood holders, so it also establishes a lineage that promises future continuation, a Christological chain that ties the recipient to Christ. In this lineage the concern is not so much an actual biological connection between the individual links as it is a connection to the office of Christ. As Davies observes, "To speak of a priesthood holder is, thus, to mark a line of authority linking ordained men to Christ."⁴⁶ Similarly, Elder L. Tom Perry has said, "Every priesthood bearer in the Church can trace his line of authority back to the Savior Himself."⁴⁷ And by virtue of this

line of authority, this priesthood chain makes it possible for each priesthood holder to be a Christ type.

Priesthood, for Mormons, involves the capacity to engage in the Christological act, allows one to perform many of the same salvific, divine acts as Christ, and implies adopting the characteristics of Jesus as a divine human. For example, that “priesthood is an attribute of divinity conferred upon Jesus through ordination” indicates that when members of the Church are ordained, they too receive this attribute of divinity.⁴⁸ In contemporary Mormonism, the priesthood is often perceived as holding the divine power to establish relationships which will not be broken by death (sealing) and to have power over nature (healing and other miracles).⁴⁹ Hence as part of the oath and covenant of the priesthood, holders of that authority are taught that “all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord; for he that receiveth my servants receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth my Father” (D&C 84:35–37).⁵⁰

In terms of overcoming dissolution, this Christological lineage, as outlined in section 84, also promises a renewing of the bodies of the recipients (see v. 33). The exact meaning of “renewing of bodies” is not clear from the text, and a variety of interpretations have been offered by different commentators:⁵¹ it could refer to resurrection,⁵² a physical renewal of the flesh in this life,⁵³ or a form of spiritual sanctification from sin.⁵⁴ At the very least this promise, once again, infers a new type of life which is rooted in a particular conception of lineage (see D&C 84:34) but which also seems to refer to the conferral of a Christological body, a fact that is further developed in LDS temple rituals.⁵⁵ As a result it is clear that priesthood ordination is a ritualistic response to some of the universal features of human embodiment in that ordination promises the recipient the capacity to transcend the corruption of the body, even if the exact mechanism is unclear.

In the context of Hutch’s earlier question concerning the “turnover of generations,” ordination to the priesthood situates recipients in a specifically Christological chain where the characteristics and capacities of Jesus are potentially inculcated in the recipient. They are empowered, and even embodied, to conquer death, decay, and corruption, reminiscent of Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension.

The Institutional Chain

This Christological kinship suggests another line of authority for each newly ordained priesthood holder, a line which centers upon the hierarchy of the institutional Church.⁵⁶ In 1882, a circular which was also a precursor to the *Church Handbook of Instructions* was sent to all local leaders emphasizing both the importance of the institutional line of authority governing the Church and the importance of Christ as the head of the Church.⁵⁷ This emphasis continued during the later “priesthood reform movement of 1908–1922,” which was a response to the manifestos on polygamy⁵⁸ and which further “strengthened the hierarchical line of authority.”⁵⁹ By 1964, the handbook explained, “Priesthood correlation involves the carrying out of priesthood or church activities by individual members of families, presided over by the parents, who are presided over by priesthood leaders, who in turn are presided over by bishops. The bishops are presided over by stake presidents, who are presided over by the General Authorities of the Church. . . . All priesthood activities should properly recognize and be funneled through this line of authority as it is revealed from our Father in Heaven.”⁶⁰ Even more recently, an increased focus in this particular priesthood chain has been noted as the Church has sought to contrast itself from what it has seen as a modern, more permissive culture.⁶¹

What makes this lineage distinct from the ones above is that while the priesthood holder is ultimately encouraged to see Jesus as the head of the Church, the stress is not on a personal linkage with Christ but instead on the individual’s relationship with the priesthood hierarchy, or the Church institution. In other words, the connection between the individual and Christ is not the individual to Christ as kin or as Savior, but to Christ as presiding authority, and as such establishes a particular relationship with the institution of the Church itself.

Through ordination, as the quotation above describes, the Melchizedek Priesthood holder has moved into a position which involves presiding and also being presided over, a particular form of belonging. Hence this chain is distinct from the Christological chain which relates to the Resurrection and the individual’s own work, as well as distinct from the biological line which establishes kinship continuity.

Priesthood Chains and the Laying on of Hands

Of course, in many ways the distinctions made here between these three chains or lines of authority are somewhat arbitrary. For example, Doctrine and Covenants 107 suggests that those of the lineage of Aaron have a right to the office of bishop, a blend of both the biological line and the institutional authority line.⁶² Moreover, these chains are all enacted through one ritual event (discussed below), not three separate ones, and to argue that these chains are separate would radically reconfigure the theologies erected using this ritual framework. At heart, for all three, no matter their distinctions, is their common purpose—to overcome dissolution in any form, be it physical death, abandonment, or apostasy.⁶³

The rite itself is simple. An individual who already possesses the priesthood (along with other priesthood holders who may have been invited to participate) places his hands on the head of the individual receiving the priesthood. Though Joseph gives no indication as to why this rite was the means by which priesthood conferral would happen, to those familiar with the canon, this rite is found early on in the Old Testament and is the rite associated with the transferal of power and authority from one individual to the next. Joseph himself may simply have been following the example of John the Baptist, who, upon appearing to both Joseph and Oliver Cowdery, conferred the Aaronic Priesthood by laying his hands upon Joseph, who then did the same to Oliver.

Across cultures, the hand is a symbol of power and might, as well as creation. Moreover, the hand may also represent the means by which these things are transferred. Thus the hand can be understood as both the source and agent of transferal of authority. But there may be another purpose to the use of the hand for conferral. The hand is the primary tactile means by which we express the physical act of touching. The notion of touch is quite complex, and a number of philosophers have gone to great lengths to meditate upon this theme.⁶⁴ While we may think of touch as an equally shared experience, touch is highly personal; what one may feel in the touch is not necessarily what the one who touches feels. The act of touching is the intimate act of crossing the “space” by which others define themselves and impacts us directly in a way that sight or hearing

does not.⁶⁵ Because it crosses a spatial boundary that we use to define our “self,” touch is highly regulated by society, unlike the other senses. Yet touch is essential in our development, both physically and socially.⁶⁶ Touch triggers physiological reactions that the other senses do not, such as the release of oxytocin, a hormone often associated with childbirth but also necessary in the development of empathy and bonding overall.⁶⁷ Touch defines us and our space in the world and is crucial in the development of any given community.

The ambiguity of touch between two (or more) embodied persons is a key feature of this rite of ordination. That we never feel the other touching us but only feel ourselves being touched reinforces the separateness of our individual identities, and yet at the same time, the touched is changed as a result of that exchange. The ordained, for example, feels and experiences another person, and the two are therefore brought into a form of communion with each other. Like other forms of touch, the laying on of hands has parameters which define what is legitimate and appropriate (particular words are said by particular people in a particular embodied posture), which validate as well as elaborate the special and unique feature of this new identity and this new community.

Thus, through the act of the laying on of hands, while the person who is ordained is still believed to be the same spirit or intelligence as prior to ordination, a change is made in the very nature of that person. This new identity, or new life, is an essential feature of ordination. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the reception of a new title upon ordination (e.g., “elder,” “deacon”), which signifies the introduction into a new community but which also reinforces the continuity of the self by adding this title to the names of individuals. Thus, although this genealogical chain is concerned with the past, it (potentially) shapes the subjectivity of the present, and the rite by which this chain is engendered, both symbolically and perhaps physically, only reinforces the narratives that are continued.⁶⁸

Hands touch the head of the person to be ordained, reenacting the same ritual space across the centuries and memorializing the various hands on various heads which have brought this authority to this point and time, each performance reestablishing God’s divine life and power on

the earth. That the rite may engender physiological reactions that would enhance the recipients bonding to these chains as well as the proclivity to participate accordingly only enriches the relationship between this rite and the purpose of the priesthood as outlined above.

Yet being ordained to the priesthood is more than simply finding a place or belonging: it also carries with it the implicit responsibility to maintain the continuity of this priesthood lineage. In other words, not only does one find place but one is now obligated to make sure that this continuity (be it the biological line, the Christological line, or the institutional authority line) is passed on and regenerated in the next generation so that no dissolution emerges. This redemptive intention implies an “ongoing human sacrifice” which involves being faithful to the past in order to perpetuate this order in the future. It is a willingness to live “out of the past generations and into future ones” and is also an awareness that the ordained is the means by which this persists.⁶⁹ In the words of Davies, the death of Joseph Smith “stood full contrary to betrayal or apostasy.”⁷⁰ This betrayal would not have been merely of his immediate and present community (the Mormons located in Nauvoo) but it is also a refusal to betray those ancient personalities who extended their powers to him. Further, Joseph refused to betray those priesthood generations which will be bound to him in this chain of belonging. Thus being a living sacrifice to life, as Hutch calls it, involves a willingness to be faithful to the embodied lives found in each of these chains: extending to Adam, to Christ, and toward the current prophet and President of the Church. To sacrifice, in this sense, is to live in harmony with those with whom the ordained are ritually connected, to live as though their bodies bear upon the recipient in the present. In light of this, it is not surprising to find Joseph Smith speaking of sacrifice in this manner: when one reads sacrifice, one can automatically think of priesthood.

Conclusion

The Melchizedek Priesthood involves being initiated into an order that is “without beginning of days or end of years” and involves possessing power over death (D&C 84:17). Davies, after quoting a *Millennial Star* editorial,

notes that, for Joseph Smith, “the powers of death” are from Satan and that “dissolution opposes organization and [is] part of the problem of evil.”⁷¹ The powers of death seek to dissolve this organization, to encourage apostasy. In contrast, priesthood ordination is one of the ordinances which grant access to the great chain of belonging. These “belongings” are the foundation of that sociality, or self-identification, upon which the Mormon vision of exaltation is predicated. To apostatize is to lose your place in the great chain of belonging which has been conferred through the priesthood and to reject the cosmological extension of that life. Priesthood ordination, for Joseph, was one mechanism through which life and belonging were ritually and eternally established.

Notes

1. Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 8.
2. Samuel Brown, “The ‘Beautiful Death’ in the Smith Family,” *BYU Studies* 45, no. 4 (2006): 123; Richard L. Bushman and Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 2005), 30–35. Death (of siblings and children), societal dishonor, and economic insecurity were dominant features of the family life of the Smiths.
3. Joseph Smith to the Church at Quincy, Illinois, March 20–25, 1839, in *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 436.
4. *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 340–62.
5. Brown, “The ‘Beautiful Death’ in the Smith Family,” 123.
6. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 95.
7. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 327–31. Two recent articles in the *Journal of Mormon History* explore this theme in detail. See Samuel M. Brown and Jonathan A. Stapley, “Mormonism’s Adoption Theology: An Introductory Statement,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 1–2; Samuel M. Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 3–52.
8. Douglas James Davies, “Father, Jesus and Lucifer in Pre-Mortal Council,” *International Journal of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010): 2.
9. Kathleen Flake, “Evil’s Origin and Evil’s End in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis,” *Sunstone*, August 1998, 24–29; Kathleen Flake, “Translating

- Time: The Nature and Function of Joseph Smith's Narrative Canon," *Journal of Religion* 87 (2007): 500.
10. David L. Paulsen, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 1 (2000): 53–65; Paul Ricoeur, *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology* (London: Continuum, 2007); Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: Continuum, 2006). For LDS treatments of this question, see John Sutton Welch, "Why Bad Things Happen at All: A Search for Clarity among the Problems of Evil," *BYU Studies* 42, no. 2 (2003): 75–90.
 11. Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," *History of Religions* 20, nos. 1–2 (1980): 125.
 12. Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1991), xiv.
 13. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory*, xiv.
 14. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory*, xiv.
 15. Douglas James Davies, *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition: Atonement, Evil and the Mormon Vision* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 175–94; Douglas James Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace, and Glory* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000).
 16. Terryl L. Givens, "Joseph Smith: Prophecy, Process, and Plenitude," in *Joseph Smith Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, ed. Reid Larkin Neilson and Terryl L. Givens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111.
 17. Joseph Smith taught on July 9, 1843, according to Willard Richard's diary: "One the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to recieve thruth let it come from where it may." *Words of Joseph Smith*, 229.
 18. Samuel Brown, "The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 1 (2011): 1–2. Brown's paper ends shortly after the death of Smith, but he does capture some of the ways in which Mormonism has reconfigured these notions over time. As some elements of Smith's chain of belonging have been reformulated, so too has the shape of this Mormon theodicy. Although there will not be time to discuss this here, one idea underlying this paper is how these narratives have shifted from an emphasis upon the "chain of belonging" to the "line of authority." However, this change in emphasis has not completely removed the "chain of belonging" from Mormon thought.
 19. Brown, "Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," 10.
 20. The Book of Abraham establishes a cosmological association between the hierarchy of the heavenly planets and the hierarchy of intelligences in the presence of God. It reflects the divine correspondence between the earthly and the heavenly.
 21. Brown, "Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," 24.
 22. Brown, "Early Mormon Adoption Theology," 35–36.

23. Brown, "Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," 3.
24. Richard A. Hutch, *The Meaning of Lives: Biography, Autobiography, and the Spiritual Quest* (Washington, DC: Cassell, 1997), 88.
25. The self is usually conceptualized as being constituted by two components: the first part is the "I," which involves the capacity to think about our thoughts (reflexivity), and the second part is the "Me," which refers to the organized conceptions of the "I" that are perceived by the external world. For Hutch, both the "I" and the "Me" are constructed through stories. For Latter-day Saints the story of Adam and Eve is particularly important and forms the basis of how Mormons conceive their identity and their relationships to each other. Hutch is primarily concerned with this narrative view of the self. See also Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 205–19.
26. See Bushman and Woodworth, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 30–35.
27. See Lavina Fielding Anderson, "Prayer under a Pepper Tree: Sixteen Accounts of a Spiritual Manifestation," *BYU Studies* 33, no. 1 (1993): 73.
28. Bushman and Woodworth, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 30–35.
29. Hutch, *Meaning of Lives*, 88.
30. Hutch, *Meaning of Lives*, 88.
31. Hutch, *Meaning of Lives*, 88–89.
32. Hutch, *Meaning of Lives*, 89.
33. Within Mormonism, one view on the process of apostasy argues that it occurs when there are no worthy priesthood holders left to pass on this authority from God. Steven L. Peck notes the importance of face-to-face interaction in the preservation and transmission of knowledge. Peck writes, "When I read the scriptures, I see a God who makes arrangements for irreplaceable records to be kept, preserved, and maintained through conscious effort. He implies that, if they are not, this knowledge will be lost and not brought back through His intervention. I see the Lamanites languishing in unbelief until the sons of Mosiah are inspired to go among them. Angels bear messages to other consciousnesses but do not seem to manipulate the world in interventionist ways. Almost all of the scriptures can be reinterpreted as acts of consciousness acting in the world." Steven L. Peck, "Crawling out of the Primordial Soup: A Step toward the Emergence of an LDS Theology Compatible with Evolution," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 1 (2010): 29.
34. Spencer W. Kimball, "Our Great Potential," *Ensign*, May 1977, 49. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 15:137.
35. Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 96.
36. Davies, "Father, Jesus and Lucifer," 2.
37. "Know Your Priesthood Line of Authority," *Improvement Era*, March 1949, 167.

38. See L. Tom Perry, "Elder Perry on the Priesthood, Part 4: Restoration Makes Authority Clear," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <http://lds.org/study/prophets-speak-today/unto-all-the-world/restoration-makes-authority-clear-elder-perry-says>; Hoyt W. Brewster Jr., "Ordination to the Priesthood, in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1034; *Where Is Wisdom? Addresses of Stephen L Richards* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955), 234.
39. Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132–34.
40. Brown, "Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," 18.
41. Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 18–24. For a recent treatment on the question of authorship of the *Lectures on Faith*, see Noel B. Reynolds, "The Authorship Debate Concerning Lectures on Faith: Exhumation and Reburial," in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-Day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2000). Reynolds concludes that the historical data suggests that Rigdon was the primary author rather than Joseph Smith.
42. Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 1: Manuscript Revelation Books*, vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011), 149–51.
43. Brown, "Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," 18–19.
44. Brown, "Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," 25.
45. This is a somewhat cryptic reference. As it stands, the text seems to imply that Adam became part of that "order," which also made him a "son of God," as a result of being baptized. Ezra Taft Benson has expanded upon the similar phraseology in Moses 6:67 and Abraham 1:3, D&C 84:17, Alma 13:7, and Hebrews 7:3 to argue that this reference in the Book of Moses teaches that "to enter into the order of the Son of God is the equivalent today of entering into the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood, which is only received in the house of the Lord. Because Adam and Eve had complied with these requirements, God said to them, 'Thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity.' (Moses 6:67.)" Ezra Taft Benson, "What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children about the Temple," *Ensign*, August 1985, 6–10. This relationship between Adam's ordination with other premortal priesthood holders has been discussed elsewhere. See *Selected Writings of M. Catherine Thomas* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 19–38; Monte S. Nyman and Charles D.

- Tate, *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word, Papers from the Sixth Annual Book of Mormon Symposium, 1991* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 61–88.
46. Davies, *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition*, 178.
 47. Perry, “Elder Perry on the Priesthood, Part 4.”
 48. Davies, *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition*, 178.
 49. See Helaman 10:4–5; D&C 128:18; 132:7; JST, Genesis 14:25–31.
 50. Hence within the same revelation there are two forms of priesthood lineage outlined. One is genealogical and focuses upon Adam, as discussed previously, and the other centers upon Christ.
 51. Each of these interpretations is problematic. Resurrection is offered to all in Mormonism and therefore is not a blessing specifically associated with priesthood. Physical strength is promised to those who live the Word of Wisdom and also those who receive their endowments. It seems problematic to believe that only Melchizedek Priesthood holders will be sanctified from sin.
 52. Hoyt W. Brewster, *Doctrine & Covenants Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 460.
 53. Robert L. Millet, *Magnifying Priesthood Power* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1974), 45.
 54. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 3:98.
 55. In the Pauline epistles there is a recurrent concern with how the bodies of the disciples can imitate the body of Christ. Hence Paul speaks of being crucified with Christ, or crucifying the flesh, and of being baptized in likeness of Jesus’ death. In LDS temple worship, these themes are expanded on. For a popular example of some of the potential connections between these bodies, see Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1987), 49.
 56. This line was discussed at some length in an October 2010 general conference address by Elder Dallin H. Oaks in remarks entitled “Two Lines of Communication,” *Ensign*, November 2010, 83–86.
 57. President Taylor writes, in circular, that “while that is the case [being “subject to counsel”] with regard to Bishops, High Councillors and other Stake authorities, and the people in the several Stakes, it is quite as necessary that the Presidents of Stakes and their Counsellors should place themselves under the direction of the legitimate authority that presides over them; and that all people and Presidents and other officers in the various Stakes, as well as the Twelve and the First Presidency of the Church, should place themselves under the guidance and direction of the Almighty for the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our king, the Lord is our lawgiver, and He shall rule over us.” *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1833–1964*, ed. James R. Clark (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 2:340.

58. Leonard J. Arrington, *The Presidents of the Church: Biographical Essays* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986). Scott Kenney writes of Joseph F. Smith's era as president that "as far as the general membership of the church was concerned, plural marriage had ended, though exceptions were granted until President Smith ended the practice in 1904" (p. 199). In the April 1904 conference, President Smith read this official statement: "Inasmuch as there are numerous reports in circulation that plural marriages have been entered into contrary to the official declaration of President Woodruff, of September 26, 1890, commonly called the Manifesto, which was issued by President Woodruff and adopted by the Church at its general conference, October 6, 1890, which forbade any marriages violative of the law of the land; I, Joseph F. Smith, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, hereby affirm and declare that no such marriages have been solemnized with the sanction, consent or knowledge of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and I hereby announce that all such marriages are prohibited, and if any officer or member of the Church shall assume to solemnize or enter into any such marriage he will be deemed in transgression against the Church and will be liable to be dealt with, according to the rules and regulations thereof, and excommunicated therefrom." President Joseph F. Smith, *The 74th Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1904), 75.
59. Jill Mulvay Derr and C. Brooklyn Derr, "Outside the Mormon Hierarchy: Alternative Aspects of Institutional Power," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 4 (1982): 23. Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).
60. Richard O. Cowan, *The Church in the Twentieth Century* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 312.
61. Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 157–76.
62. When D&C 107 was originally written in 1831, there was no reference to this special authority for those of the lineage of Aaron. Specifically, this conflation of lineage and ecclesiastical authority emerged in an 1835 revision of the revelation, after the earlier 1832 revelation (D&C 84) already cited (which established genealogical and Christological chains of authority). Jensen, Woodford, and Harper, *Revelations and Translations, Volume 1*, 217–19. See also William V. Smith, "D&C 107. Part 9. Revisions of The November Revelation," Book of Abraham Project, BOAP.org blog, posted August 18, 2010, <http://boaporg.wordpress.com/2010/08/18/dc-107-part-9-revisions-of-the-november-revelation>.
63. See Davies, *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition*, 101–2.

64. See Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), 59; Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2012).
65. Because of this, one scholar describes touch as an act of violence in that it “presupposes” a response. One has an immediate reaction regardless of choice. See Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 50–51. To substantiate this approach, a series of studies have demonstrated that touch often triggers great compliancy in those receiving the touching act. See Matthew J. Hertenstein, “The Communicative Functions of Touch in Adulthood,” in *The Handbook of Touch: Neuroscience, Behavioral and Health Perspectives*, ed. Matthew J. Hertenstein and Sandra J. Weiss (New York: Springer, 2011), 299–328, specifically 313–16.
66. Studies have shown that touch is essential in neonatal, infant, and adolescent development. It also appears to have a positive effect on the elderly.
67. Hertenstein, “The Communicative Functions,” 315. See also Ruth Feldman, “Maternal Touch and the Developing Infant,” in *The Handbook of Touch*, 373–407.
68. A rite involving touch may be more efficacious to perpetuating a series of narratives which attaches one to larger communal organizations. Symbolically, touch represents transference of states, properties, or authority from one body to another; thus the act reinforces the conferral of this priesthood narrative. Physiologically, touch triggers certain reactions that enhance, or even create, the bonding necessary for those narratives to have power in the lives of the individuals receiving them.
69. Hutch, *The Meaning of Lives*, 119.
70. Davies, “Father, Jesus, and Lucifer,” 11.
71. Davies, *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition*, 101–2.