

Notes on Apostolic Succession

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THE RECOGNITION OF BRIGHAM YOUNG as leader of the Church in August 1844 and the reorganization of the First Presidency under his direction in December 1847 have provided the basic pattern and precedent for apostolic succession. This important event has been discussed in depth by a number of historians (Quinn 1976, 1982; Esplin 1981; Ehat 1982). Apostolic succession since Brigham Young has been treated in an important study by Durham and Heath (1970, 78–175). Succession questions, decisions, and innovations by Young's apostolic successors were considered well into the twentieth century and form a little-studied but important topic of Church history.

THE JOHN TAYLOR SUCCESSION

John Taylor attained his senior position in the Quorum of the Twelve in a unique series of events. In 1861, he was moved ahead of Wilford Woodruff when seniority was established by ordination date rather than age (Durham and Heath 1970, 65–66). Later in 1875, Brigham Young moved him and Woodruff ahead of Orson Hyde and Orson Pratt because they had the longest continuous ordination as apostles (Durham and Heath 1970, 73–76). Taylor, speaking at a priesthood meeting in the Assembly Hall on 7 October 1881, reports that this action took place in Sanpete County in June 1875 (Taylor 1881, 17). The evidence, however, clearly indicates that it occurred at the April 1875 general conference. When the general authorities were sustained 10 April, Woodruff recorded in his journal: "G Q Cannon presented the authorities and when he came to the Twelve, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff was put before Orson Hyde and Orson Pratt, upon this principle" (Woodruff 7:224, 10 April 1875). He then explained the reasons. The *Salt Lake Tribune* announced that Orson Hyde had been "degraded by his dread master

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to third man in the apostolic ranks” and that Elder Taylor had been “promoted to the primacy” (13 April 1875). Exactly what the changes meant was further clarified by President Young at the spirited June meetings in Sanpete when the Twelve were rebaptized (Young, 22–23 June 1875). Despite these actions, Taylor was not sustained as president of the Twelve at any of Brigham Young’s remaining general conferences. In fact, Brigham Young declared that he was president of the Twelve at a meeting of the Church United Order in the fall of 1875, since he was the only one whom the Lord had acknowledged as such (Woodruff 7:241–42, 31 Aug. 1875).

When President Young died in August 1877, Taylor had to legitimize his senior position. At a meeting of the Council of the Twelve and President Young’s counselors on 4 September 1877, three important decisions were made: First, that the Twelve should “take their place as the presiding Quorum of the Church”; second, that Elder John Taylor should be appointed President of that Quorum; and third, that Elders John W. Young and Daniel H. Wells “are to stand as Counselors to the Twelve as they did to Brigham Young” (Woodruff 7:372, 4 Sept. 1877). Taylor established his position before the entire Church in a dramatic and impressive manner. At the October 1877 general conference after a number of reports in the opening session, George Q. Cannon announced that the conference would meet in a priesthood solemn assembly at the afternoon session, explained that such assemblies had been held under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith in Kirtland, and then gave directions for seating of the priesthood quorums and congregation for the assembly (*Deseret News*, 8 Oct. 1877, Minutes of the General Conference, p. 2). This assembly would offer a public ritualistic acceptance of President Taylor in his new role as presiding priesthood officer of the Church.

The Saints had met in solemn assembly at three previous general conferences. The first occurred at the 17 August 1835 general conference when the *Book of Doctrine and Covenants* was adopted by the vote of the individual priesthood quorums and groups (HC 2:243–46). The second occurred at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple when Joseph Smith and the Twelve were sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators (HC 2:417). The third came with the reorganization of all the priesthood quorums in Nauvoo in April 1841. The Nauvoo assembly was dictated by a revelation (D&C 124) which prescribed the officers to be sustained. Brigham Young was sufficiently impressed by it to assure that all these offices, which included stake priesthood officers and Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidencies, were sustained at every general conference in his administration. President Taylor discontinued this practice after the October 1877 conference (*Deseret News*, 9 April 1878).

Joseph Smith explained the necessity of obtaining a vote of priesthood quorums in solemn assembly, saying that if a resolution had passed through all the quorums, it should be “received as a law to govern the Church” (Jessee 1984, 166).

During the next three years, Taylor gained the admiration of the Church: He reached a settlement of the complicated Brigham Young estate, established a new economic movement in Utah and the Church with the Zion’s Board of

Trade, and celebrated the Church's Jubilee anniversary. He then reorganized the First Presidency at the October 1880 general conference using the 1877 solemn assembly script, with minor modifications. The sustaining ceremony in essence sanctions the actions of a new president. His official pronouncements then became the law of the Church. The Taylor script was used to sustain every president through Spencer W. Kimball. A major modification in the procedure was made in April 1986 with the sustaining of Ezra Taft Benson as the Church's thirteenth president. For the first time priesthood quorums were not seated together. The ceremony was also shortened. (For other changes compare Durham and Heath, 141-56 with *Ensign*, May 1986, 73-74).

Taylor had affirmed and established several important apostolic succession principles. He had reinforced the fundamental doctrine, established by Young, that the Quorum of the Twelve presides when the president of the Church dies. He made it clear, as Young had, that counselors to a former president were subservient to the Quorum, even though they may have been apostles themselves. He also initiated the concept that the president of the Twelve is sustained not only as the successor-to-be, but also as the quorum's presiding officer (Durham and Heath 1970, 141-56). But his most significant innovation was his establishment of the priesthood solemn assembly sustaining procedure for a new president.

THE WILFORD WOODRUFF SUCCESSION

Even before Taylor's death, Wilford Woodruff became involved in the succession question. Heber J. Grant raised the most often-asked query about the seniority system: "Is it possible for a younger man or one other than the senior apostle to succeed to the Presidency?" In particular Grant was advocating the possible appointment of Joseph F. Smith as Taylor's successor. To support his views, Grant argued that Woodruff had prophesied at an Ogden stake conference that Smith would become president of the Church. To fulfill that prophecy, the Twelve would have to deviate from the usual order (Woodruff to Grant, 28 March 1887).

In a lengthy reply to Grant, Woodruff defended the established and "inspired precedent." After citing reasons why the president of the Twelve should rightfully succeed, he warned that "it would be a very dangerous precedent for us to set, to depart from the order which God has pointed out" (Durham and Heath 1970, 97-99). He then addressed the question concerning Joseph F. Smith.

Now if Elder Woodruff delivered such a prophecy by the inspiration of the Lord (which I firmly believe he did) [Woodruff 8:8, 23 Jan. 1881] it will be fulfilled as sure as fate, and that too without deviating from the path marked out by the Lord, and followed by the leaders of the Church. It was said that that prophecy was recorded. I will also make a statement, that I Wilford Woodruff, heard Heber C. Kimball and Joseph Young say that they heard Joseph Smith say in their presence and in the presence of others in 1832, the first time that Joseph Smith ever had an interview with Brigham Young he said Brigham Young would yet be President of the Church, and that was four years before there was any Twelve Apostles chosen, and

no man knew that Brigham Young would ever be an Apostle (unless God revealed it to the Prophet). And still, after sixteen years of revelation and change, Brigham Young was president of the Church, without turning to the right or left from the path marked out to be the revelation of God. And that prophecy was also recorded. And there was not one chance in ten for that to be fulfilled that there is for Joseph F. Smith to be president of the Church in the regular channel of the order of God (Woodruff to Grant, 28 March 1887).

The Woodruff letter has become a fundamental document in the defense of apostolic succession. Woodruff had expressed both in the letter and his journal that he did not expect to outlive Taylor; however, when he received word of Taylor's death, he immediately understood his position and responsibility as president of the Twelve (Woodruff 8:448, 26 July 1887).

The Quorum of the Twelve, Taylor's counselors, and Daniel H. Wells, counselor to the Twelve, met to consider the new role of the Twelve on 3 August 1887. Woodruff expressed his views first, explaining the presiding authority of the Twelve. The quorum then discussed reinstating Cannon and Smith into the Quorum of the Twelve. This action was adopted by vote, but not without serious discussion of Cannon's dealings in the Bullion Beck silver mine and his handling of Church affairs without consulting the Twelve during Taylor's final days (Lyman 1985, 68-73). The Cannon case was to have a profound effect on Woodruff's attempts to reorganize the First Presidency.

Woodruff brought the reorganization question up for the first time on Tuesday, 20 March 1888, no doubt anticipating an April conference reorganization. Instead the council spent four long days hearing the Cannon case. Five of the twelve — Erastus Snow, Moses Thatcher, Francis M. Lyman, John Henry Smith, and Heber J. Grant — openly opposed Cannon's actions during the last year of Taylor's Presidency. On 23 March, Woodruff, frustrated over the whole affair, spoke strongly about the divisive spirit in council and announced that the reorganization would no longer be considered (Richards, 23 March 1888).

For Woodruff, the affair was one of the most disappointing of his life. He wrote of the painful experience:

Here we have spent four days in listening to the Accusations of five Apostles against G.Q. Cannon and six sustained him. I never saw as much bitterness manifest against one good man by 5 Apostles since the days of Apostate Twelve against the Prophet Joseph in Kirtland and all through Jealousy as Br Cannon was first Councilor to John Taylor and the blame of any acts of Presidet Taylor that five of the Twelve did not think was right was laid to George Q Cannon. It is painful to record these things but it is true. We have tryed to settle these things but so far we are still apart (Woodruff 8:490, 23 March 1888).

The council was adjourned for the weekend but agreed to meet again on Monday. After another long day on the Cannon case, they "finally came to an understanding and forgave each other" (J. H. Smith, 26 March 1888).

Woodruff did not bring up the reorganization question again until 5 April 1889. By then, all had had a change of heart about Cannon but Moses Thatcher who was still making accusations against Cannon by 3 April. Woodruff reprimanded Thatcher for his insubordination, and after the scolding,

Thatcher finally agreed to the reorganization with Cannon as Woodruff's first counselor. Grant, who had strongly opposed Cannon in 1888, would discuss this incident fifteen years later when George Albert Smith was ordained an apostle in 1903. He advised Elder Smith never to come to a Council meeting "with set desires of having certain motions carried" and cited a personal example:

At the time referred to by me there were some things advocated by my brethren which did not meet with my approval, and I contended against them, so did Brother Thatcher; and Apostle Erastus Snow agreed with Brother Thatcher and with me in the rightfulness of our views; but he said to both of us that if we did not repent of this spirit of contention and determination on our part to have our way and to carry our point, notwithstanding the fact, he said, that you are striving for that which you regard to be right, you will both lose your positions as apostles. Moses denies that Brother Snow ever made any such remark, but from that moment I avoided Moses Thatcher as contagion, and when I got away from his influence I could see that he was fast losing the spirit, and that the course he was pursuing, which was the course I was pursuing also until I was delivered from him, was right in opposition to the wishes of Presidents Woodruff, Cannon and Smith, although the Presidency was not then organized, and it meant his downfall unless he repented. I thank the Lord for this advice from Brother Erastus, and I have thanked him many and many a time since; and I can truthfully say that from that day to this, although I have a very tenacious disposition, that I have ever felt ready and willing to surrender my views, and that I have not had any such feeling in my heart since to carry a point in this Council (G. A. Smith 1903, 7-9).

The general conference sustained the reorganization in solemn assembly on 7 April 1889. For Woodruff, it was a moment of great pride and satisfaction. Though his apostolic presidency was short compared to Young's and Taylor's, he was frustrated and hurt by the delays. He wanted to insure shorter future transition periods. After a serious illness in the fall of 1892, he advised Lorenzo Snow, president of the Twelve, and other apostles, that it was in the best interest of the Church to have a shortened apostolic presidency (Snow 1906, 110-11; Durham and Heath 1970, 103-4; CR, April 1913, 5).

Woodruff's influence on the apostolic succession question was extremely important: He left a persuasive written document supporting apostolic succession; he established procedures to reintegrate counselors who had previously served as members of the Twelve back into the Quorum of the Twelve; and he laid the groundwork for a shortened apostolic presidency.

LORENZO SNOW SUCCESSION

During the Woodruff presidency, Lorenzo Snow worked hard to unify the Quorum of the Twelve. Woodruff died 2 September 1898, and the new First Presidency was organized eleven days later in an atmosphere of good will. His advanced age of eighty-four was not even discussed (Durham and Heath 1970, 108-11).

His appointment established another important precedent. Snow and his counselors were unanimously sustained by the Quorum of the Twelve on 13 September 1898. A solemn assembly ratified that appointment on 10 Octo-

ber 1898. After the conference, the First Presidency and Twelve met to ordain newly sustained apostle Rudger Clawson. Franklin D. Richards recorded:

Then to Presidents office where the 1st Presidency and 11 Apostles laid their hands on Rudger Clawson and Pres. Lorenzo Snow ordained him an apostle and into the Council of Apostles. President Snow with 14 hands on his head was set apart and blessed by GQ Cannon then Pres. Snow and 14 set apart and blest GQ Cannon as his First and Jos. F. Smith as his 2nd Counselor. Then Prest. Snow directed Geo. Q. Cannon to bless me as President of the Twelve Apostles, which he did (Richards, 10 Oct. 1898).

For the first time, a Church president had been "ordained" as president by his fellow apostles. Each apostle thus symbolically yielded his keys to the senior apostle. It was a gesture of unity, an outward sign that there was but one head of the Church at a time, even though each apostle received the "keys of the kingdom" at ordination. This innovation became the standard procedure at all reorganizations after President Joseph F. Smith.

The most important succession decision in the Snow presidency was precipitated by the death of Franklin D. Richards in December 1899, which made Brigham Young, Jr., senior apostle. But the relative seniority of Young and Snow's two counselors, Cannon and Smith, was still unclear. The question had been raised several times before, but no action had been taken. On 9 September 1898 when Cannon and Smith were received back into the Quorum of the Twelve, they took their seats after Snow and Richards in this order: Cannon, Young, and Smith. Cannon and Smith were then called on to give an update of the financial condition of the Church, and the meeting closed. Brigham Young, Jr., wrote of the discussion which followed the meeting's end:

After dismissing talk began by Bro. H.J. Grant about my preceding Jos. F.S. in the Quorum. He thought it wrong and was surprised to see us take our seats with me between GQC & JFS. I said I am willing to be in the quorum any place, felt I was fit to be an apostle; ready to follow Bro Joseph will do just as the Lord wants; Said that I submitted this matter to father one day and he said rather severely "It is just right the way it is, and you let it alone." I never had courage to tackle the question again; still I am of the opinion that when a man is ordained an apostle and seeks to magnify that office, no new man can rank him in (being) set apart to fill a vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve. I am anxious for God through my brethren to decide this question and I yield my views to theirs with all my heart. After left for home at 7:40 P.M. (Young, 9 Sept. 1898).

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve met to discuss the problem on 5 April 1900. They decided that apostles took precedence from the date they entered the quorum and that Smith outranked Young (Durham and Heath 1970, 111-16).

The meeting minutes reveal the rationale for this resolution:

Bro. John Henry Smith said that he regarded this as a very important question from the fact that he understood there had been quite a number of men ordained apostles who had never been voted upon as such by the church. His kinsman, for instance, Joseph Smith, who stood at the head of the Re-organized Church, claims he was ordained an apostle by his father. Of course his claim as such is not before

this Council, neither can it be as he is an enemy to this church. The speaker said he desired greatly to be right on such a proposition as this, and therefore it did not become a question of man in his mind, it mattered not who was involved in it as it was a vital question of principle, and in this light only could be considered. Bro. Smith said he recognized the right of the President of the Church to ordain his sons apostles if he chose to exercise that right, and he took it for granted that the late President Young ordained Brigham and others of his brothers apostles, and he supposed history was correct in stating that Brigham and John W. were ordained before Pres. Cannon; but it struck him that the action of the people on such ordinations was of supremest moment, and therefore whenever their action was taken, that would be considered the basis. On this phase of the proposition, the question of man was simply this: Has a father — himself being an apostle — a right to ordain his son to the apostleship, and that son to preside without the action of the church, his ordination antedating that of the man chosen and acted upon by the church? The speaker said, to his mind there was but one view to be taken to safeguard the church and this council, and to the maintenance of their dignity in the world, such ordinations were dependent upon joint action, first, on the presentation by the First Presidency to the Council of the Apostles for their acceptance, and then to the people for their approval, and then he must be ordained in the proper way; otherwise it would open a door for questions to be sprung entirely unlooked for, and even the claim of his kinsman, Joseph, of the Re-organized Church, might not be barred from a consideration. His view therefore was that the safety of the organization of the church must be based on the action of the people, the action of the Presidency and Apostles, and the final action of ordination after having been passed upon legitimate lines (Minutes 1900, 2-3).

The meeting was the most thorough discussion of succession in the history of the Church. Not only was the Young-Smith case examined in detail, but George Q. Cannon brought up two other interesting cases. The first was one in which he was involved:

Suppose all the Twelve should pass away and I be left as the senior Apostle, (Pres. Cannon here remarked that he ought to say this was prompted with only a natural desire to understand things, and of course with no other) how would I stand as compared with Bro. [Daniel H.] Wells on the question of seniority, he having been ordained an apostle before me, but was not a member of the quorum of the Twelve? President Taylor answered that his prior ordination under those circumstances would make no difference, that I would be the senior member. How would you reconcile that, with the fact that Bro. Wells laid his hands on my head in connection with ten of the Twelve and the First Presidency when I was ordained an Apostle, I asked? That makes no difference, he answered; you are in the quorum of the Twelve and accepted as a member thereof, and the quorum of the Twelve is the presiding quorum if anything happens to the First Presidency (Minutes 1900, 6).

The second case involved Hyrum Smith. After reading Doctrine and Covenants 124:93-95, Cannon explained that there might be special exceptions to this rule:

When this revelation [D&C 124] was given (1841) Joseph was recognized as the only prophet seer and revelator in the church. The Twelve had not received their endowments; but Hyrum was chosen then to be a prophet, seer, and revelator. President Young said after the death of the Prophet Joseph, that if Hyrum had lived he would have presided over this church, for Joseph had ordained him. But, said the speaker, that was a special rule, a departure from the general rule. The church was at sea as to who should be the successor of Joseph, and it was this state of things that

brought forth the remark from President Young, that if Hyrum had lived — and it was Joseph's wish that he should live, and for that reason he did not want Hyrum to accompany him to Carthage — he would have been President of the church. This was a special revelation from the Lord appointing him; but there has been no departure since the death of Joseph from the rule that now prevails (Minutes 1900, 6-7).

Following Cannon's remarks, Snow expressed his love and admiration for Brigham Young, Jr., then asked the council to sustain the decision that Smith outranked Elder Young. The vote was unanimous. He also spoke about the presidency of the Quorum of the Twelve. He said it was Cannon's right to claim the position, but in order to do so, he would have to resign his counselorship, an option Snow felt should not or would not be taken. In Cannon's absence, Brigham Young, Jr., as senior member was to preside (Minutes 1900, 8; Durham and Heath 1970, 128).

Snow contributed significantly to apostolic succession in his short but exciting presidency. He implemented the Woodruff instruction for a shortened apostolic presidency, he established a formal ceremony for the setting apart of a president, and he defined and clarified the seniority question in the Quorum of the Twelve. But despite these important innovations and decisions, a new succession question arose almost immediately following his death.

THE JOSEPH F. SMITH SUCCESSION

Following the Snow precedent and Woodruff charge, Joseph F. Smith completed the reorganization of the First Presidency just seven days after his predecessor's death. The reorganization meeting and of the next several general conferences created another important issue: What was the role of the Church patriarch in succession? Smith wanted to elevate the patriarch, the position held by his father, Hyrum Smith, and his grandfather, Joseph Smith, Sr. In fact, on one occasion, he himself had been seriously considered for the position (Woodruff 7:249-50, 9 Oct. 1875). At the reorganization meeting, President Smith called upon his brother John Smith, the patriarch, to set him apart as president of the Church. It was the first time the Patriarch to the Church had ever been involved in a reorganization meeting. A natural question was: Did the patriarch have the authority to set a president apart?

A month later, President Smith, in a meeting with his new counselors John R. Winder and Anthon H. Lund, argued that the patriarch should be sustained at conference before the apostles. Lund felt that such a move might cause trouble at a future reorganization and advised caution (Lund, 9 Nov. 1901). Smith took Lund's advice, for the next day at the special solemn assembly general conference called to sustain the new First Presidency, the General Authorities were sustained as usual with one minor change — John Smith was sustained as "Presiding Patriarch" instead of "Patriarch of the Church." In his inaugural address to the Church at the conference, President Smith explained:

I do not know of any more perfect organization than exists in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today. We have not always carried out strictly the order of the Priesthood; we have varied from it to some extent; but we hope in due time

that, by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we will be led up into the exact channel and course that the Lord has marked out for us to pursue, and adhere strictly to the order he has established.

After reading a portion of an 1841 revelation (D&C 124:124) specifying that Hyrum Smith should be sustained first at the April 1841 general conference, he continued:

It may be considered strange that the Lord should give first of all the Patriarch; yet I do not know any law, any revelation or any commandment from God to the contrary, that has ever been given through any of the Prophets or Presidents of the Church. At the same time we well know that this order has not been strictly followed from the day we came into these valleys until now—and we will not make any change at present. But we will first take it into consideration; we will pray over it, we will get the mind of the Spirit of God upon it, as upon other subjects, and be united before we take any action different to that which has been done (CR, Oct. 1901, 71).

Even though President Smith only advocated that the Patriarch be sustained before the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, as the revelation implied, some of the Twelve were concerned about patriarchal succession. The Twelve had held ascendancy over the patriarch since Brigham Young's succession, but it was evident that the reverse had been true during Joseph Smith's administration. What role would they play in the future? At least one meeting of the First Presidency and Twelve was held early in the administration of Joseph F. Smith to consider the patriarch's role in succession. Brigham Young, Jr., wrote briefly of this important meeting:

1:20 p.m. Pres. and Twelve met in the Office and discussed question of Church Historian. It was decided to sustain Br. Jenson, Bishop Whitney, A.M. Musser and B.H. Roberts. This question of Patriarch Jno. Smith, standing next to Presidency, preceeding the Pres. of Twelve. Bro. Jno. H.S. said might change succession of President of Twelve to Presidency. I thought him unnecessarily exercised. Decision on question was delayed for the present, until we could look into it. I said, "Pres. Smith, if the Presidency will decide this question, we will sustain your decision" (Young, 6 April 1902).

If the question was considered again during the Smith presidency, no decision was reached. However, two significant occurrences elevated the patriarchal position. First, President Smith gave the patriarch public prominence by having him speak regularly at general conferences. During the previous three administrations, the patriarch had participated in general conference directly only by giving prayers. Even during Brigham Young's thirty-year tenure, the patriarch was asked to speak at only one general conference ("Minutes of the General Conference," MS 14:35, 1852). The second, and even more significant event, occurred at the October 1902 general conference when the patriarch was sustained as a prophet, seer, and revelator for the first time (CR Oct. 1902, 83).

Though President Smith left the patriarchal succession question open, it is clear that he advocated basic principles of apostolic succession toward the end of his presidency. At the April conference in 1913, he presented his strongest public argument for the established procedure: "There is always a head in the

Church, and if the presidency of the Church are removed by death or other cause, then the next head of the Church is the twelve apostles until a presidency is again organized of three presiding high priests who have the right to hold the office of first presidency over the Church (CR, April 1913, 4–5).

There is no indication that President Smith felt any differently in private. In November 1918, just hours before his death, he reassured Heber J. Grant, president of the Twelve, of the “Lord’s Will”: “He knows whom He wants to lead His Church, and never makes any mistake” (Lund, 18 Nov. 1918; Durham and Heath 1970, 125).

President Smith, clearly, gave the Church patriarch an elevated and important status but probably never advocated that the Patriarch succeed him and did not press for a change in the sustaining order though he had considered it. With his death in 1918, there was no question about the position of the Twelve.

HEBER J. GRANT SUCCESSION

The Council of the Twelve met 23 November 1918 to consider the reorganization of the First Presidency. After all those present were given an opportunity to express themselves, Anthon H. Lund, second in seniority, nominated Heber J. Grant as president and Ruder Clawson, third in seniority, seconded the motion. Grant then chose Lund and Penrose as his counselors. President Lund pronounced the blessing in setting apart Grant and, in turn, Grant set apart his counselors (Lund, 23 Nov. 1918). This pattern of formal nomination, seconding, and setting apart by the three senior apostles has been followed in every succession from 1918 through 1973 (Kimball and Kimball 1970, 220–21, 268, 388, 409).

President Grant then proposed sustaining Lund as president of the Council of the Twelve. After some discussion, he was. The title, “President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles,” had come to mean “successor to be.” James E. Talmage records: “It is very evident that President Lund will not be able to attend all the meetings of the Twelve, and it was deemed advisable therefore to sustain and set apart the next in order of seniority, vis., Ruder Clawson as acting President of the Council of the Twelve. This was done, Elder Orson F. Whitney officiating in the setting apart of Brother Clawson” (Talmage, 23 Nov. 1918).

Faced with the same dilemma, Lorenzo Snow had not designated a president of the Twelve, because in his mind the presidency of the Twelve was an active and integral function of that quorum. On two occasions since 1918, acting presidents of the Twelve have been sustained when the president of the Twelve was a member of the First Presidency—Joseph Fielding Smith in October 1950 and Spencer W. Kimball in April 1970. Interestingly, the appointment of Ruder Clawson as acting president of the Twelve was not sustained by the Church until Grant’s second general conference in October 1919 (CR, Oct. 1919, 214).

At the 1918 succession meeting, the Patriarch again functioned with the rest of the apostles (Lund, 23 Nov. 1918; Talmage, 23 Nov. 1918). Grant

and the Twelve had recognized the Church patriarch as a prophet, seer, and revelator. He was then Hyrum G. Smith, a grandson of his predecessor Patriarch John Smith and a great-grandson of Hyrum Smith. Hyrum G. pressed for a serious examination of the questions raised by President Joseph F. Smith: Should he not be presented first at conference as the revelations imply and what was his position in succession?

Within two months, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve considered these points. According to Talmage,

At intervals for years past, the Presiding Patriarch of the Church has called the attention of the brethren, mostly in private conversation, to the fact that he finds an inconsistency in the order of presiding officials of the Church as they are presented today for the vote of the people, in comparison with D&C Section 124 verses 124 and 125. He has repeatedly asked for a consideration of the matter. Today the decision of the First Presidency and Twelve was made a matter of record to the effect that the Presiding Patriarch of the Church ranks in order of office between the Council of the Twelve and the First Council of Seventy, and that his name should be presented in such order for the vote of the people as has hitherto been done. Revelation to and the history of the Church combine in making plain the fact that no officer stands between the Council of the Twelve and the First Presidency of the Church. However, this was not the plan to which Presiding Patriarch Hyrum G. Smith asserted any claim, but he asked whether, in view of the Lord's having mentioned his great-grand father, Hyrum Smith, first in order of the Priesthood (D&C 124:124), the place of the Presiding Pat. is not that of first officer in the Church, ahead of the First Presidency. As stated, it was the unanimous decision of the Council that the order heretofore observed shall be maintained, unless the Lord reveals another course as the one to be followed (Talmage, 2 Jan. 1919).

Lund recorded additional details of the discussion:

H.G. Smith felt that he was honored in the place which the Lord indicated in the 124th section in which the Lord said first I give unto you Hyrum Smith to be a patriarch and next Joseph Smith is then mentioned. So Hyrum G felt his place should be first in being sustained, as the apostles are called to look for patriarchs and to set them apart, it is plain that they occupy the higher place. I moved that we follow the example set by the Church heretofore this was agreed to (Lund, 2 Jan. 1919).

This decision determined the basic pattern of apostolic succession, but a few minor refinements since 1918 deserve comment.

SUCCESSION SINCE 1918

Of the six changes in the Church Presidency since 1918, (George Albert Smith, 1945; David O. McKay, 1951; Joseph Fielding Smith, 1970; Harold B. Lee, 1972; Spencer W. Kimball, 1973; Ezra Taft Benson, 1985), only two produced any modification in the expected succession. In addition, actions during the Kimball administration imply several minor changes in succession.

When McKay became Church president in April 1951, he chose Stephen L Richards as first counselor and J. Reuben Clark, Jr., as second counselor, although Clark had been first counselor to both Grant and George Albert Smith. This choice shocked the brethren and the Church (Kimball and Kimball 1970, 268-69; Quinn 1983, 122-26) but made it clear that the choice

of counselors belongs to the president and is not dictated by any previous arrangement. McKay's decision was based on his counselors' seniority and reinforced the basic principles of apostolic succession and the importance of seniority in a powerful way.

McKay died at age ninety-six in January 1970. Joseph Fielding Smith, the senior apostle, was ninety-three. Even the Twelve wondered if an immediate reorganization was appropriate or wise; but when the council met to consider the question, "all agreed it was right to proceed with the reorganization promptly" (Kimball and Kimball 1970, 387) — a reaffirmation of the principle of seniority. At the April 1970 general conference, Harold B. Lee, first counselor, and Spencer W. Kimball, acting president of the Twelve, both spoke on the succession process after the solemn assembly. Kimball explained:

The appointments have long been made, the authority given, the keys delivered. . . . No running for position, no electioneering, no stump speeches People talk about precedent. If it is precedent, it has become such by repetition of the revealed order from the beginning. . . . [A prophet] must be certain of his divine appointment, of his celestial ordination, and his authority to call to service, to ordain, to pass keys which fit eternal locks (Kimball 1970, 92-94).

Kimball's persuasive defense of apostolic succession was followed by Lee's address to the question, "How is the president of the Church chosen or elected?"

The beginning of the call of one to be President of the Church actually begins when he is called, ordained and set apart to become a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. . . . All members of the First Presidency and the Twelve are regularly sustained as "prophets, seers and revelators," . . . This means that any one of the apostles so, chosen and ordained, could preside over the Church . . . on one condition, and that being that he was the senior member or the president, of that body. Occasionally the question is asked as to whether or not one other than the senior member of the Twelve could become President. Some thought on this matter would suggest that any other than the senior member could become President of the church only if the Lord reveals to that President of the Twelve that someone other than himself could be selected (Lee 1970, 28).

Lee concluded his sermon by quoting Woodruff's 1887 defense of apostolic succession and praising Joseph Fielding Smith and the significance of his call. Not since the October 1877 general conference had there been such a public explanation and defense of the principles of apostolic succession. The successions of Lee and Kimball produced no modifications of the law of succession.

Kimball's dynamic administration reconstituted the First Quorum of Seventy with rotating presidents and designated certain General Authorities as "emeritus." At the October 1979 general conference, Patriarch Eldred G. Smith was given emeritus status and the position of Church patriarch was eliminated. For the first time in seventy-seven years, the patriarch was not sustained as a prophet, seer, and revelator. Presumably, this action made the 1919 decision irrelevant. The removal of the patriarch as a possible successor understandably placed the First Quorum of Seventy and its presidents next in the succession line. Since the senior member of this presidency is now appointed, clearly succession by this individual is remote. It is interesting that, so far,

members of the Twelve have not been granted emeritus status. In light of the history of apostolic succession, such a development is unlikely.

The Ezra Taft Benson succession in November 1985 illustrated the Twelve's commitment to established precedent. Although Marion G. Romney was physically unable to function as president of the Twelve, he was appointed anyway. Howard W. Hunter was appointed as acting president to take responsibility for day-to-day affairs of the quorum. It is the first time that an acting president has been appointed because of the president's poor health and not because he was serving in the First Presidency.

If the Brigham Young succession established the basic pattern of apostolic succession, then the important decisions and innovations of each succession have reinforced those principles. For those who have faith in the divinity of these appointments, then the Taylor solemn assembly, the Woodruff letter, the Snow setting apart of a president, and the numerous other decisions are manifestations of God's confirmation and approval. For those who feel that the seniority system has a built-in flaw in the increasing age of the incumbent, the faithful can only point to the accomplishments of the Church's aged prophets. Future succession could be radically different than it is now, but change seems unlikely. The history of apostolic succession points only to the succession of the senior apostle.

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