

*What would Mormonism be like if Joseph Smith's final and most mature definition of Mormon foundations had taken hold? Is it too late?*

# “THE GRAND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF MORMONISM”

## JOSEPH SMITH'S UNFINISHED REFORMATION

By Don Bradley

SINCE THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD FIRST DEFINED the “Five Pillars” of Islam, Muslims have proclaimed them as the *sine qua non* of Islamic devotion. For some twenty-six centuries, Buddhists have similarly been guided by the “Four Noble Truths” and “Eightfold Path.” And however poorly they have often lived their Master’s first and second “great commandments,” Christians have always acknowledged the absolute centrality of these to the faith. Mormons, by contrast, have all but forgotten the final definition of the essence of Latter-day Saint faith given by their founding prophet, Joseph Smith.

Many of the Saints have some awareness of the 1830 statement of belief included in D&C 20. More know of the 1835 “Lectures on Faith,” and most are quite familiar with the 1842 “Articles of Faith.” Few, however, would recall “the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism” defined by the prophet during the last year of his life. Indeed, one can attend ward meetings and read works by LDS authors for a lifetime without ever becoming aware of this summation of the faith’s foundations.

This is surprising and unfortunate. Joseph Smith’s identification of “grand fundamental principles” is of great significance. Joseph rarely undertook to define the fundamentals of Latter-day Saint faith.<sup>1</sup> And, in light of contemporary definitions, his choice of the phrase “grand fundamental principles” communicated that these were cornerstones of the faith’s foundation—the basis of [the] system,” its “rules of action” or normative standards.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I examine the sermons in which Joseph Smith introduced the “grand fundamental principles of Mormonism” and attempt to situate these principles in a broader context that illuminates their meaning and purpose. I also describe how Joseph may have come to formulate this set of principles,

and I explore their place in his life and faith. Finally, I suggest how these grand fundamental principles may have faded from the Mormon memory and what place they might be given in the faith today.

THE “GRAND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES” OF MORMONISM  
*“I will have a reformation.”*

IN JULY 1843, Joseph Smith delivered a series of remarkable sermons. On Sunday, the 9th, he proclaimed himself a friend to all, having “no enmity against anyone.” Echoing his opponents’ perplexity at his success, he asked, “Why is it this babbler gains so many followers, and retains them?” He explained his secret simply: “Because I possess the principle of love.” Offering the world “a good heart and a good hand,” he declared himself “as ready to die for a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or any other denomination” as “for a Mormon.”

Narrowing the gap between Latter-day Saints and those of other denominations, the prophet asserted, “we do not differ so far in our religious views.” He declared the Saints’ faith ready to receive the truths of all others: “One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive truth, let it come from where it may.”<sup>3</sup>

The following Sunday, 16 July, Joseph preached again, proposing a radical change in church organization. William Clayton, the prophet’s personal secretary, wrote of Joseph’s sermon, “He stated that Hyrum held the office of prophet to the church by birthright, and he was going to have a reformation, and the Saints must regard Hyrum for he has authority.”<sup>4</sup> Apostle Willard Richards gave a similar report in a letter to the absent Brigham Young: “[Joseph] said he would not prophesy anymore—Hyrum should be the prophet.” Richards added that Joseph had withheld from his hearers the anticipated arc of his post-prophetic career: “[he] did not tell them he was going to be a priest now, nor a king by and by.”<sup>5</sup>

We don’t know what reaction Joseph expected for this



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sermon, but it caused considerable alarm. The following morning, a number of fretting Saints came to him protesting, “Brother Joseph, Hyrum is no prophet: he can’t lead the church.”<sup>6</sup>

In response, the following Sunday, the 23rd, Joseph returned to the pulpit to eat his words. Of his earlier assertion that he was no longer prophet, he explained, “I said it ironically,” adding enigmatically, “It was not that I would renounce the idea of being a prophet, but that I would renounce the idea of proclaiming myself such.” Then, as if to bewilder the assembled Saints, Joseph reiterated that he was vacating the office of prophet—and revealed the trajectory of his future: “I will advance from prophet to priest and then to king, not to the kingdoms of this earth, but of the Most High God.”<sup>7</sup>

In this same sermon, Joseph expounded on the virtue of friendship. Having characterized himself in his 9 July sermon as the universal friend of humankind, the aspiring “priest” now proclaimed this as not merely a personal virtue, but the essence of the faith: “Friendship is the grand fundamental principle of Mormonism.”<sup>8</sup>

No doubt it was difficult for those who heard him to take in the dizzying swirl of sweeping pronouncements in this series of sermons. But Joseph provided a key to understanding his intent: “I will have a reformation.” His appointment of Hyrum as prophet, his advancement to the enigmatic office of “priest” now and “king” in a time to come, and his declaration of two “grand fundamental principles of Mormonism” were not disconnected innovations but different aspects of a single, seismic shift. Joseph was intent on reforming the faith he had founded.

For most of us, the term “reformation” conjures up images of Martin Luther nailing his ninety-five theses to the door of the Wittenburg chapel. But for Joseph, who consistently understood his identity in terms of biblical patterns, the paradigmatic reformer was more likely King Josiah, who reformed Israelite religion in the early days of the prophet Jeremiah.<sup>9</sup>

Josiah based his reformation on a startling find in the Jerusalem temple. Hilkiah, the high priest, discovered and sent to the king “the book of the law of the LORD.” Dismayed at the distance between the commandments of the book and Israel’s faith as it had been practiced during his reign, Josiah rent his clothes and threw himself upon God’s mercy. With the backing of both prophet and high priest, Josiah set about the difficult task of conforming Israel’s religion to the standard of the new-found book (2 Kings 22–23).<sup>10</sup>

Josiah’s reformation had served as a model for Joseph Smith at the opening of his prophetic career. A revelation Joseph presented to Martin Harris in March 1829 characterized the new prophet’s task of bringing forth the Book of Mormon as God’s way to “work a reformation.” This revelation also required of Harris a covenant of obedience modeled on the covenant Josiah made on behalf of his people as a key part of his reformation (2 Kings 23:3; 2 Chronicles 34:31; D&C 5:28).<sup>11</sup>

A revelation on 22–23 September 1832 again connected the Book of Mormon to Hilkiah’s book and Josiah’s reformation. D&C 84:57 warned that the Saints would languish under divine condemnation “until they repent and remember the

new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but *to do according to that which I have written.*” This echoes Josiah’s lament that God’s wrath was kindled against Israel “because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, *to do according unto all that which is written . . .*” (2 Kings 22:13).<sup>12</sup> Several years after these revelations implicitly modeled Joseph’s early work on that of Josiah, the prophet again stepped into the shoes of that ancient reformer.<sup>13</sup>

To understand the nature, extent, and zeal of Josiah’s reformation of Israel, one must know about Hilkiah’s discovery of the book and the impact of its message on Josiah. Similarly, to understand how and why Joseph Smith undertook to reform Mormonism, we must know the standard by which he intended to reform it.

Like Josiah’s reformation, Joseph’s began with teachings received from the temple—not the Latter-day Saint temple, but the *Masonic* temple. It was in Freemasonry that he first encountered the structure, principles, and rituals with which he would reform Mormonism.

#### JOSEPH SMITH AND FREEMASONRY

*“Bro Joseph Ses masonary was taken from The preasthood but has become degen[e]rated. but menny Things are perfect.”*

JOSEPH SMITH BEGAN his relationship with Freemasonry early in life.<sup>14</sup> His father Joseph Smith Sr. joined the Masons when Joseph Jr. was eleven years old, and Joseph’s brother Hyrum eventually joined their father at the lodge. The young Joseph’s own early religious experiences echoed in remarkable ways those attributed in Masonic legend to Enoch. Ironically, however, the fruit of those experiences—the Book of Mormon—was understood by many, including its special witness Martin Harris, as an “anti-Masonic Bible.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite his anti-Masonic reputation, the prophet pursued at Nauvoo a line of spiritual inquiry that was almost certain to pique his interest in Masonic keys, grips, and tokens: he explored the keys to revelation and the signs by which true messages and messengers from God could be distinguished from false. In his Nauvoo sermons before his Masonic initiation, the prophet addressed this subject no fewer than half a dozen times, offering keys for testing the goodness of a spirit, a principle, or one’s own conduct. Among other keys, he famously explained how to test a spirit by attempting to shake the visitor’s hand, and he identified the dove as a sign of the presence of the Holy Ghost.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, Joseph’s explanation of Facsimile 2 of the Book of Abraham, published in the *Times and Seasons* under the same date that Joseph received the first Masonic degree, describes God as having revealed “the grand Key-words of the Holy Priesthood” to Adam, Noah, and others, and giving “the sign of the Holy Ghost unto Abraham in the form of a dove.”<sup>17</sup>

Freemasonry claimed to possess signs and keys handed down from the ancient worthies of the biblical age. Franklin D. Richards, a Nauvoo Mason and Joseph Smith intimate, attributed Joseph’s entry into the Masonic brotherhood to this claim:

Joseph, the Prophet, was aware that there were some things about Masonry which had come down from the beginning and he desired to know what they were, hence the lodge. The Masons admitted some keys of knowledge appertaining to Masonry were lost. Joseph enquired of the Lord concerning the matter and He revealed to the Prophet true Masonry, as we have it in our temples.<sup>18</sup>

Joseph apparently accepted at face value the Masonic traditions that traced the roots of the institution to the builders of Solomon's temple, and from them to the patriarchs Enoch and Adam. Heber C. Kimball, a long-time Freemason, wrote shortly after his own initiation into the Nauvoo endowment ceremony, "Bro Joseph Ses masonary was taken from The preasthood but has become degen[e]rated. but menny Things are perfect."<sup>19</sup>

But signs and keys were not the only elements of Masonry Joseph appropriated and amended in an effort to restore their purity. In proposing in July 1843 to ascend the ladder of priesthood stations—from prophet to priest to king—he both adopted and adapted Masonic structure. These same offices were employed in Royal Arch Masonry, with high priest being the most prestigious, followed by king, and then by scribe/prophet.<sup>20</sup> Joseph reshuffled the preeminence of the offices, placing the king at the highest level, followed by the priest (or high priest), and then the prophet.<sup>21</sup>

As "prophet," Joseph had presided over the institutional church. As "priest" or "high priest," he would preside over the Anointed Quorum, the council of men and women who had received the endowment ceremonies. And when later ordained king on 11 April 1844, he would preside over the political kingdom of God and take charge of its directing body, the Council of Fifty.<sup>22</sup>

Although the separation of offices of prophet, priest, and king is biblical in origin, Joseph's introduction of this order in the context of the "true Masonry"—Nauvoo temple ritual—suggests that Freemasonry was the spark that led him to "study out in his mind" their place in Mormonism.

In addition to its role in the development of priesthood ordinances and offices, Freemasonry almost certainly impacted Joseph's identification of "the grand fundamental principles" of Mormonism. Masonry was founded upon a few broad concepts, often referred to as "grand tenets" and "grand principles," and sometimes also by the distinctive phrase "grand fundamental principles."<sup>23</sup> Of these three tenets, two correspond to the principles Joseph enunciated in his July sermons: "truth" and "brotherly love." The Masonic principle of "truth" corresponds to what Joseph introduced as the fundamental Mormon imperative "to receive truth, let it come from whence it may." And Freemasonry's principle of "brotherly love" corresponds to the Mormon principle of "friendship," or, as Joseph Smith also called it in his July 1843 sermons, "the principle of love."<sup>24</sup> Extant accounts of Joseph's teachings show him applying the term "grand fundamental principle" *only* to these Masonic principles.<sup>25</sup>

That Joseph would have encountered these principles

during his Masonic sojourn is beyond doubt. They were defined as foundations of the Masonic order by the early 1700s and have continued to hold that place of honor to this day.<sup>26</sup>

The 1818 edition of Thomas Smith Webb's *The Monitor of Freemasonry* describes the third section of the lecture of the first Masonic degree (Entered Apprentice) thus: "Brotherly love, relief and truth, are themes on which we here expatiate."<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, a detailed account from later in the Nineteenth Century gives the following wording for the catechism for an Entered Apprentice candidate:

WORSHIPFUL MASTER: "Name the grand principles on which the Order is founded."

CANDIDATE: "Brotherly love, relief and truth."<sup>28</sup>

Joseph Smith passed through the first three Masonic degrees on 15 and 16 May 1842, and should have then learned the "grand fundamental principles" of this venerable tradition. As in the catechism above, these principles included not only truth and brotherly love, but also "relief," or assistance to those in need.

At the very time Joseph learned the importance of relief as a principle of Masonry, his wife Emma was independently working to put the principle into practice. The "elect lady" had been working with Sarah Kimball and others to organize a group to sew for the Nauvoo temple workmen and administer aid to those in need, adding yet another to the "thousandfold Relief Societies" Emerson had complained of the year before in his famous essay "Self-Reliance."<sup>29</sup> The society thus began at the "grassroots" with the women of Nauvoo. But immediately upon his initiation into Freemasonry, Joseph Smith placed the society under the auspices of the church and co-opted it as an institution of the faith.<sup>30</sup>

Joseph Smith first officially convened the new society on 17 March 1842 in the "lodge room" where he had been raised to Master Mason the night before. One of the women at this meeting found in the room, upon an open Bible, a scrap of paper bearing the following prayer: "O Lord! help our widows, and fatherless children! So mote it be. Amen. With the sword, and the word of truth, defend thou them. So mote it be. Amen." This bears the earmarks of a Masonic prayer to accompany the opening of a lodge. The otherwise obsolete use of "mote" for "might" was and is perpetuated in Masonry and often used to conclude Masonic prayers in the phrase "so mote it be." And the Masonic ceremony for opening a lodge reminds participants of their duty to protect widows and the fatherless.<sup>31</sup> Finding this Masonic prayer to encapsulate their own purpose in meeting, the sisters of the Relief Society adopted it as a kind of motto, giving it a place of honor as the frontispiece of their society's record book.<sup>32</sup> The Relief Society and the Masonic lodge converged in their benevolent purposes.

Addressing the Relief Society again two weeks later, Joseph characterized it in Masonic terms, stating that "every *candidate*" should be examined closely and that "the society should grow up by *degrees*," and become "a kingdom of *priests*," "moving according to the ancient order of the priesthood."<sup>33</sup> Why did Joseph act so promptly to make this voluntary society into a semi-autonomous branch or "female lodge" of Mormon

“Masonry”? Two reasons suggest themselves. First, the workmen the society was to assist were—like the Freemasons’ legendary forbears in the days of Solomon—temple builders. And, second, Joseph Smith had adopted, or was contemplating the adoption of, the Masonic “grand fundamental principles” as a blueprint for reforming Mormonism. If, as seems likely, he considered the core of Masonry ancient and divine in origin and regarded its best elements as something to enhance and restore to the Church, then the Relief Society would have suggested itself to his mind as the appropriate “female lodge” of the faith precisely because it was dedicated to *relief*, a grand fundamental principle belonging to both church and lodge.<sup>34</sup>

As we have seen, the Mormonism of Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo “reformation” overlapped with Masonry in significant elements of ritual, hierarchical structure, and foundational principles. It would appear that in Freemasonry, as supplemented and amended by his own revelations, this latter-day Josiah found the “book of the law” upon which he would reform *his* Israel.

To Joseph Smith, the principles of truth and friendship, likely alongside the principle of relief, comprised a single set. In declaring openness to all truth to be “one of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism,” Joseph Smith implied the existence of a set of such principles. In naming friendship a “grand fundamental principle” as well, he placed it in the set. Joseph further implied the linkage of these principles by speaking of them in conjunction. In the sermon in which he declared the grand fundamental principle of truth, he also expounded that of friendship. And in the sermon in which he declared the grand fundamental principle of friendship, he also expounded that of truth. In his mind, it would appear, they were inextricably bound.

While less certain, it seems reasonable to conclude that Joseph understood relief to belong to this set as well. Had he formulated a complete statement of foundational principles during the Nauvoo reformation, it might have been, “The grand fundamental principles of Mormonism are truth, friendship, and relief.”

To further illuminate the reformation Joseph began, we need to recognize what the principles on which it was based meant to him and what role they played in his life and faith.

#### THE GRAND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF TRUTH

*“Let it come from whence it may”*

**T**HE PRINCIPLE OF receiving truth, “let it come from whence it may,” is a thread that runs through the establishment of Mormonism. Joseph Smith’s story is one of seeking and drawing into his personal faith and the teaching and practice of the Church ideas from diverse sources—sources ranging from the traditional to the radical. Indeed, the

Joseph Smith story effectively begins with Joseph’s flouting the mores of establishment Protestantism by seeking latter-day revelation and setting it on par with the Bible.

This revelation in turn promoted an attitude of openness to further truth. The Book of Mormon enticed its readers with “greater things” just beyond their present spiritual reach (3 Nephi 26:9), tantalized them with a foretaste of other records yet to come forth (Alma 37; Ether 4–5), and promised hidden knowledge through latter-day spiritual gifts (Moroni 10). Their old men would dream dreams; their young men would see visions. With sufficient faith and devotion, they would “speak with the tongue of angels” (2 Nephi 31:13–14), “know the mysteries of God” (Alma 12:9–10), and “reveal things which never had been revealed” (Alma 26:22).

The book taught that God reveals his word to all nations, implicitly inviting the reader to embrace the world’s scriptures (2 Nephi 29). It advocated performing “experiments” to discover moral and spiritual truths (Alma 32). It affirmed the truth and divinity of “every thing which inviteth to do good, and to . . . believe in Christ.” (Moroni 7:16).

The revelatory texts presented by Joseph Smith after the Book of Mormon further encouraged this broad search for truth. The 1832 “Olive Leaf” chartering the School of the Prophets (D&C 88:78–79) established for the Saints a curriculum

so extensive that one commentator has compared it to that of a university.<sup>35</sup> Three months later, a revelation to the First Presidency commanded Joseph and his counselors to “study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people” (D&C 90:15). Joseph carried out this injunction in the School of the Prophets, where he began his study of Hebrew—an effort for which he was repaid with numerous doctrinal insights.

Near the end of his life, Joseph even drew on insights he acquired through studying German. Reading from the Bible in both these languages—the Book of Genesis in the original Hebrew and the New Testament in Martin Luther’s German—afforded him the new perspectives he used in crafting what B. H. Roberts called his life’s “crescendo,” the King Follett discourse.

Openness to truth from all sources was integral to the prophetic career of Joseph Smith from call to crescendo. Anticipating his later identification of truth as a “grand fundamental principle,” Joseph wrote in a March 1839 letter to Isaac Galland:

Mormonism is truth. . . . The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of



MASONIC KING, HIGH PRIEST, & SCRIBE/PROPHET

*Joseph Smith declared: “I will advance from prophet to priest and then to king, not to the kingdoms of this earth, but of the Most High God.”*

Illustration from Jeremy L. Cross, *The True Masonic Chart, or Hieroglyphic Monitor* (New Haven: John C. Gray, 1820), 38.

men, or by the dominations of one another, when that truth is clearly demonstrated to our minds, and we have the highest degree of evidence of the same.<sup>36</sup>

He further expounded this principle in the 23 July 1843 sermon in which he also defined the grand fundamental principle of friendship. Joseph's diary, kept by Willard Richards, offers the following sketchy report of this portion of the sermon: "Presbyterians any truth. embrace that. Baptist. Methodist &c. get all the good in the world. come out a pure Mormon." We might reconstruct his message as follows: "Have the Presbyterians any truth? Embrace that. Have the Baptists, Methodists, and so forth? Embrace that. Get all the good in the world, and you will come out a pure Mormon." The prophet himself proved a "pure Mormon" in the very act of drawing Masonic tenets into Mormonism.<sup>37</sup>

Prior to declaring these "grand fundamental principles," Joseph had attempted to define Mormonism in *doctrinal* terms in D&C 20, the Lectures on Faith, and the Articles of Faith. But each of these inevitably failed to provide a timeless or final definition of the faith's essence. The task of capturing Mormonism in a creedal statement was Sisyphean, because Mormonism was more committed to the *principle* of forever acquiring truth than to any particular formulation of the truth. It was a circle no static set of doctrines could square.

THE GRAND FUNDAMENTAL  
PRINCIPLE OF FRIENDSHIP  
"All drink into one"

**J**OSEPH SMITH ENVISIONED a restoration not only of the lost, but of the broken. Not content to reinstitute ancient doctrine, practice, and authority to humankind, he sought to restore humankind itself to wholeness and peace—to mend a world fractured into opposing nations, sects, parties, and cliques. In the Book of Mormon's "Sermon at the Temple," the resurrected Jesus teaches that it is Satan who has divided the human house against itself, desiring to stir "up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another" (3 Nephi 11:29).

In the Sermon on the Mount, the mortal Jesus had preached that standing in right relation to one's fellow beings is a prerequisite to standing in right relation to God. He taught that before one could have his or her sacrifice accepted by God at the altar of his temple, he or she needed to make amends for wrongs inflicted on others: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23–24). Reiterating this in 3 Nephi, the resurrected Jesus broadens and universalizes this instruction by removing it from its Jewish temple context.

Joseph would later similarly teach the women of the Nauvoo Relief Society that "fuller fellowship" among human beings would lead them to fuller fellowship with Deity. "It is by union of feeling," he told them, "that we obtain power with God."<sup>38</sup>

Joseph propounded a theology in which salvation is ob-

tained by covenant.<sup>39</sup> And the covenants of salvation must be made not only between the human soul and the Divine but also between human souls. At the first baptism recorded in the Book of Mormon, the church founder Alma identifies baptism as the way one witnesses a willingness to keep the commandments of God and also to "bear one another's burdens . . . mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:8–9). And the "everlasting covenant," which is represented in Joseph's revelations as essential to salvation, is described as a covenant not only between God and humans but also between humans and humans—a covenant of friendship.<sup>40</sup>

Nothing could be clearer than the revelation commanding the teacher of the School of the Prophets, or Smith as its president, to open its sessions by first "offer[ing] himself in prayer upon his knees before God, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant" and then greeting the arriving students with uplifted hands and the following words of covenant:

Art thou a brother or brethren? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless, in thanksgiving, forever and ever. Amen. (D&C 88:133)

The students were then to return the salute "with this same prayer or covenant, or by saying Amen, in token of the same" (D&C 88:135).

In a 15 April 1842 *Times and Seasons* editorial that followed this revelation by nearly a decade, and after he had been received as a brother in the Masonic fellowship, Joseph expounded the principle of human brotherhood:

The Mussulman condemns the heathen, the Jew, and the Christian, and the whole world of mankind that reject his Koran, as infidels, and consigns the whole of them to perdition. The Jew believes that the whole world that rejects his faith and are not circumcised, are Gentile dogs, and will be damned. The heathen is equally as tenacious about his principles, and the Christian consigns all to perdition who cannot bow to his creed, and submit to his *ipse dixit*.

But while one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard; He views them as His offspring, and without any of those contracted feelings that influence the children of men, causes "His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."<sup>41</sup>

Compare these expansive sentiments to the lecture Joseph had received in the Entered Apprentice degree precisely one month earlier:

By the exercise of brotherly love, we are taught to re-

gard the whole human species as one family, the high and low, the rich and poor; who, as children of one Almighty Parent and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support and protect each other. On this principle, masonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion, and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.<sup>42</sup>

The parallels between these strongly suggest that Joseph was expounding the Masonic principle of brotherly love as he had encountered it in the lodge. Further confirming Masonic influence on his editorial, Joseph calls God the “Great Parent of the universe,” evoking both the “Almighty Parent” from the Entered Apprentice degree and the distinctively Masonic divine appellation “Great Architect of the Universe.”

Joseph Smith further expounded “the principle of love” or “friendship” in the 9 July 1843 sermon in which he declared the grand fundamental principle of truth.<sup>43</sup>

In explaining the principle of friendship, Joseph raised a frequently asked question—“Wherein do you differ from other[s] in your religious views?”—to which he gave an unexpected answer: “In reality & essence we do not differ so far in our religious views but that we could all drink into one principle of love.”<sup>44</sup>

Several years earlier, when his theological understandings were much closer to those of traditional Christians, Joseph had characterized the difference between Latter-day Saints and those of other denominations less ecumenically: “We believe the Bible and they do not.”<sup>45</sup> In the intervening years, Joseph’s theological understandings had moved further from those of traditional Christians, and the pace of this widening had quickened in Nauvoo. Yet, at the very time that many non-LDS Christians saw the gulf between themselves and Joseph Smith broadening most rapidly, he aimed to bridge it.

The assertion that Latter-day Saints and Christians of other denominations “do not differ so far in our religious views” is remarkable in its own right. But how truly magnanimous this declaration is cannot be appreciated without knowing the origin within scripture of the phrase “drink into one.” Outside of the 9 July 1843 sermon, the phrase appears in LDS literature only in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where Paul uses the expression to explain the mystical or metaphorical “body of Christ”:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12–13)

Invoking this passage, Joseph Smith conveyed the radical idea that the Latter-day Saints and those of other traditions jointly comprise the body of Christ.<sup>46</sup>

In his 9 July sermon, Joseph also identified the building of an ecumenical fellowship based on mutual friendship and love—a universal Christian unity—as a positive duty of discipleship: “Christians should cultivate . . . friendship with others & will do it.”

By defining the principle of love (or friendship), on which all denominations can agree, as more fundamental to Mormonism than its particular doctrines or “religious views,” Joseph collapsed the distance between Latter-day Saints and the faithful of other sects. They were not different bodies but distinct parts of one body, all animated by a single spirit, that of love.

Joseph envisioned a Christendom united by faith in God and Jesus Christ and by mutual love, a contemplated unity which might best be understood on the model offered by Freemasonry. Freemasons have long sought cross-denominational unity, without ecclesiastical integration, based on belief in God, brotherhood, and a commitment to truth and to relieving the needs of the poor.

While advocating Christian unity, however, Joseph clearly did not envision the institutional unification of Christendom,

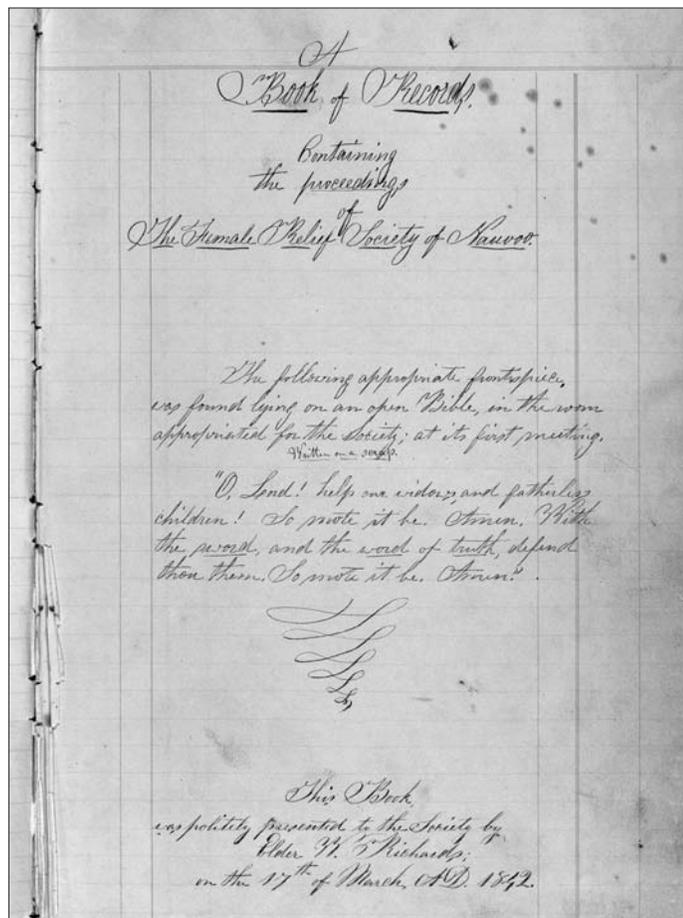


JOSEPH SMITH'S "RED BRICK STORE," NAUVOO, ILLINOIS.

*Early meetingplace of the Nauvoo Masonic lodge, Relief Society, and Anointed Quorum*

the merging of all church structures into one. He continued to maintain Mormonism’s exclusive claims to authority to perform ordinances or sacraments. Sandwiched between his ecumenical 9 July and 23 July sermons, for instance, Joseph dictated and taught a revelatory text declaring that the sacrament of marriage was eternally binding only if performed by the priesthood of Elijah and that Joseph himself was the one man on earth holding the keys of this priesthood.<sup>47</sup>

But Joseph averred that he would not use his authority to press others to follow his beliefs and revelations, nor would he condemn them for failing to do so: “If I esteem mankind to be in error shall I bear them down? No! I will lift them up. & [each] in his own way if I cannot persuade him my way is



TITLE PAGE, RELIEF SOCIETY MINUTES, MARCH 1842–MARCH 1844

As they convened for the first time, the Relief Society sisters found a Masonic prayer on a scrap of paper and decided to let it serve as a motto for their new society, inscribing it on the front page of their minutebook.

better! . . . I will ask no man to believe as I do."<sup>48</sup>

In the 23 July sermon in which he declared friendship a “grand fundamental principle,” Joseph voiced his love for his friends, the Latter-day Saints: “Let me be resurrected with the saints whether to heaven or hell . . . what do we care if the society is good?” In short, “good society” makes a “good place.” People bound together in true friendship create their own heaven.

Joseph placed the virtue of friendship, or love, above other virtues: “[I] don’t care what a [man’s] character is if he’s my friend.—a friend a true friend . . . I will be a friend to him[.] Friendship is the grand fundamental principle of Mormonism.” While declaring moral perfection “the prettiest thing of all,” Joseph taught and modeled the forbearance of imperfection that ought to exist among friends: “I see no faults in the church . . . I do not dwell upon your faults [and] you shall not upon mine.”

Employing the common Masonic metaphor of welding, Joseph preached that friendship, if truly taken as a foundational principle, would weld all together “like Bro. Turley [in his] Blacksmith Shop.” It would “revolutionize and civilize the world.”<sup>49</sup>

## THE PRINCIPLE OF RELIEF

“To be righteous is to be just and merciful.”

“RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT that which men esteem holiness. That which the world calls righteousness I have not any regard for. To be righteous is to be just and merciful.”<sup>50</sup> With these words, Joseph shoved aside conventional piety to make space for the righteousness of helping one’s fellow beings.

This emphasis on social righteousness pervades the Book of Mormon. Yet the Book of Mormon is so familiar to many of us that we often overlook this focus as a distinctive aspect of the book. We need to view it with fresh eyes—like those of the distinguished non-LDS historian of American Christianity Nathan O. Hatch. To Hatch, “the single most striking theme in the Book of Mormon is that it is the rich, the proud, and the learned who find themselves in the hands of an angry God.”<sup>51</sup>

The Book of Mormon describes the punishment and ultimate destruction of two societies as they wax in pride, divide into social classes, and exploit or ignore the poor. The book thus invites privileged latter-day readers to liken the pattern to themselves. Thoughtful readers may ask themselves where they are in this cycle of pride, exploitation, and destruction (cf. Alma 5:55).

Such self-scrutiny is necessary in the Book of Mormon worldview because to turn one’s back on the poor is to invite personal damnation as well as societal destruction. This is nowhere clearer than in the magisterial sermon of King Benjamin. As R. Dennis Potter has observed, “For King Benjamin, the fundamental sin . . . is the failure to take care of the poor.”<sup>52</sup> Since for Benjamin, to serve others was to serve God, to neglect others in need was to neglect God, jeopardizing one’s standing before him. In Benjamin’s theology, receiving a remission of sins requires faith and repentance, but “retaining a remission of sins from day to day” requires that one “impart of [one’s] substance to the poor” (Mosiah 4:26).<sup>53</sup>

From this perspective, relief is essential to the spiritual health of religious communities as well as of individuals. In the Book of Mormon, the apostasy of Christendom consists as much in its inversion of relief as in its perversion of truth; it is social and ethical as well as doctrinal. Nephi and Moroni foresee that churches will be “corrupted” and “polluted” because they “love money . . . more than [they] love the poor and the needy” and thus “rob from” the poor by spending sacred resources lavishly on “that which hath no life” (2 Nephi 28:9–15; Mormon 8:32–40).

Joseph’s revelations subsequent to the Book of Mormon perpetuated and intensified this emphasis on relief. An 1831 revelation told the Saints pointedly, “And remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple” (D&C 52:40). Here, it is assistance to those in need that separates the true disciples from those who merely profess discipleship.

In an 1834 revelation, willingness to assist the poor also separates the saved from the damned: “Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart

not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment” (D&C 104:18). The warning here is reminiscent of that given the rich man who left Lazarus covered with sores begging at his gate: those who do not succor the poor in this world will find no one to succor them in the next (Luke 16:19–25).

These are lofty ideals. But the latter-day revelations aimed to make them concrete and actionable. The revelations required the fledgling church to take specific steps to provide for the poor. Months after the church was organized, revelation commanded its first branch to appoint persons to “look to the poor and the needy, and administer to their relief that they shall not suffer” (D&C 38:34–35). Shortly thereafter, “the law of the church” commanded the Saints to consecrate all property beyond what they required for their own sustenance “unto the poor and the needy of my church, or in other words, unto me” (D&C 42:37; cf. Matthew 25:40). Provision was made that until such time as the law of consecration could be put into full effect, the elders of the church “must visit the poor and the needy and administer to their relief” (D&C 44:6).

The overriding goal of the Latter-day Saints during the church’s early years was the establishment of Zion, a righteous society defined by unity and the absence of poverty: “And the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). Joseph anticipated that when the Saints succeeded in establishing a Zion society, their Zion would be literally united with that of Enoch. The latter-day Zion established through the law of consecration was to rise from below while that established under the prophet Enoch descended from above (Moses 7:62–63; D&C 84:100). Another revelation similarly taught that when the Saints achieved “the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom,” that of consecration, God would “receive her unto myself” (D&C 105:4–5).

The “law of the gospel,” or principle of relief, is, in many ways, a practical extension of the principle of friendship. Where bonds of friendship are strong, people will be motivated to give assistance to others. And relief, taken to its ultimate conclusion, creates equality, the ground on which can be built the strongest bonds of unity and friendship.

In Joseph Smith’s vision, when human beings live in the bonds of unity enjoyed by the Gods, their circle of friendship comes to include the Gods themselves, who—to borrow the words of W. MacNeile Dixon—“stoop to admit these creatures of promise into their divine society.”<sup>54</sup>

#### AN UNFINISHED REFORMATION

*What if Joseph’s “grand fundamental principles” had taken hold as the foundation stones of the faith and the standards for defining the “pure Mormon”?*

**I**N JOSEPH SMITH’S final and most mature definition, the foundation of Mormonism is not a doctrine or practice, nor a set of doctrines and practices, but a set of *prin-*

*ciples* through the application of which doctrines could be worked out and measured and by which actions could be judged and directed. But Joseph Smith’s reformation of Mormonism on the basis of these principles, and other elements of “true Masonry,” failed to entirely take hold among the early Latter-day Saints. Joseph slowed the pace of this reformation when the Saints balked at recognizing Hyrum as their prophet. Joseph continued to act publicly as prophet and kept secret his 28 September 1843 ordination to the office of high priest, or president of the Anointed Quorum.<sup>55</sup> The Saints’ understanding of Joseph’s intent to reform the faith was likely further obscured by his declaring the grand fundamental principles in separate sermons, rather than a single sermon, and by the fact that these sermons, like virtually all of Joseph’s sermons, were not published until after his death. And more than anything, this untimely death, coming less than a year after he had publicly inaugurated his reformation, stopped its progress.

Since Joseph Smith’s assassination, the world in which Latter-day Saints live has changed, and the Church has evolved. His successors in the presidency have collapsed the offices of prophet and priest into a single position and deferred Joseph’s project of establishing a political kingdom of God until the second coming of Christ. Still, the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism he declared have never been revoked.

On no less authority than that of Joseph Smith, these principles provide foundation stones of the faith, as well as standards for defining the “pure Mormon”—for distinguishing between what is and what is not purely, or legitimately, Mormon. When these principles are accorded their proper place, it becomes clear that Mormonism does not need to be “liberalized” from without, on the basis of external standards. In its final formulation by the prophet, Mormonism is *inherently* liberal in the classical sense of that word—it is generous, open, and expansive. Whether it is so in its embodiment in the world depends on the willingness of individual Latter-day Saints to continue their prophet’s reformation by reforming Mormonism as it exists in their personal faith and lives.

Sweeping declarations aside, Mormonism will encompass all truth no faster than individual Mormons seek out and embrace all truth. Mormonism will “revolutionize and civilize the world” no faster than individual Mormons receive erstwhile enemies and strangers as “friends and brothers” and sisters. Mormonism will provide relief to the needy of the world, and build a heaven on earth, no faster and more effectively than individual Mormons shoulder this responsibility themselves, as did the women of Nauvoo.

How would such a Mormonism look? How would the beliefs, institutions, and lives of Latter-day Saints improve if conformed to the standard of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism—openness to truth no matter what its source, universal friendship, and relief to those in need? The answer, if there is to be one, is in the hands of the living disciples of Joseph Smith’s religious vision. 

## NOTES

1. In searching the extant reports of Joseph Smith's Nauvoo sermons, I was unable to find any explicit declaration of foundational principles other than those discussed in this essay.

2. See Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828). An online version of the dictionary is available at <http://www.cbministries.org/resources/webster1828.htm>.

3. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 9 July 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 229. In the interest of clarity, I have largely standardized the spelling and punctuation of quotations from the reports of Joseph Smith's sermons.

4. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 16 July 1843 (Sunday Afternoon), in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 232. The complex series of events that led Joseph to announce his resignation as prophet are the subject of a book I'm writing tentatively titled *Fortunate Fall: Polygamy, Transgression, and the Prophetic Transformation of Joseph Smith*.

5. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 233.

6. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 23 July 1843 (Sunday Afternoon), in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 234.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. While the term "reformation" is not used in the Bible, it was frequently employed by nineteenth-century Christians in referring to the Josiah reform. See, for instance, Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible . . . with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, vol. 2 (New York: Phillips and Hunt, n.d. [1830]), 701, commentary on 2 Chronicles 34:2. Clarke remarks, "He [Josiah] never swerved from God and truth; he never omitted what he knew to be his duty to God and his kingdom; he carried on his reformation with a steady hand. . . ." (emphasis added)

10. I am summarizing the account of Josiah's reign offered in 1 Kings 22–23. According to a variant account in 1 Chronicles 34, the book of the law of the LORD was found in the temple after Josiah began his reformation and served to intensify the reform, rather than initiate it.

11. The version of this revelation published in the Doctrine and Covenants from 1835 to the present is heavily edited and has had the reference to "a reformation" removed. The most accessible version of the unexpurgated text, which contains the term "reformation," is H. Michael Marquardt, ed., *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 26–31.

12. Parallel phrasing is also found in 1 Chronicles 16:40 and D&C 24:14.

13. I further explore Joseph Smith's self-perception as a "Josiah" in a separate book I'm writing on the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

14. See Reed C. Durham Jr., "Is There No Help for the Widow's Son?" in *Mormon Miscellaneous* 1 (October 1975): 11–16. The text of this lecture is also available at <http://www.xmission.com/~country/reason/widowson.htm>. Nicholas S. Literski is currently completing what promises to be the most thorough exploration to date of Masonic influences on Joseph Smith. His book *Method Infinite: Freemasonry and the Mormon Restoration* is forthcoming from Greg Kofford Books.

15. The quotation from Martin Harris can be found in *The Geauga Gazette* (Painesville, Ohio), 15 March 1831, text available at <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/OH/chrd1831.htm>, accessed 20 April 2006. For background on the anti-Masonic context into which the Book of Mormon emerged, see Dan Vogel, "Mormonism's 'Anti-Masonick Bible,'" *Journal of the John Whitmer Historical Association* 9 (1989): 17–30. The relationship of the Book of Mormon to anti-Masonry is hotly debated. Critiques of Vogel's work include Daniel C. Peterson, "Secret Combinations' Revisited," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no.1 (1992): 184–88; and Paul Mouritsen, "Secret Combinations and Flaxen Cords: Anti-Masonic Rhetoric and the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 64–77. Vogel has responded to several of these

critiques in "Echoes of Anti-masonry: A Rejoinder to Critics of the Anti-Masonic Thesis," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 275–320.

16. See Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 6–7, 58, 60, 64, 66, 74. The process culminating in the establishment of the Nauvoo lodge had been initiated some months earlier, demonstrating that the prophet's interest in Masonry predated his initiation.

17. Joseph was initiated into Masonry "in the evening" of 15 March. It is possible that this issue of the *Times and Seasons* was not readied until after this date, and that the interpretation of the facsimiles was directly influenced by Masonry. Such influence would only serve to confirm that the prophet valued Masonry in substantial measure for its potential to reveal "signs" and "keys."

18. Richards made these remarks in a meeting of the Council of Twelve Apostles, and they were recorded by fellow apostle Ruderger Clawson. *Clawson Diary*, entry for 4 April 1899, cited in Michael W. Homer, "Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry": The Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 27, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 70–71.

19. Heber C. Kimball to Parley P. Pratt, 17 June 1842, Parley P. Pratt Papers, LDS Church Historical Department, as quoted in Andrew F. Ehat, ed., "They Might Have Known That He Was Not a Fallen Prophet: The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding," *BYU Studies* 19 (Winter 1979): 23 n.26.

20. Joseph Smith's re-ranking of the "principals" or officers of a Royal Arch lodge actually restored their traditional order in Masonry. In British lodges, the chief among the principals had always been the king. But in the United States, the king was demoted in favor of the high priest, perhaps reflecting anti-monarchical sentiment inspired by the American Revolution. For the traditional ranking of the Royal Arch principals, see Rev. F. de P. Castells, *Historical Analysis of the Holy Royal Arch Ritual* (London: A. Lewis, 1929), 14–18. For the U.S. ranking, see Jeremy L. Cross, *The True Masonic Chart, or Hieroglyphic Monitor* (New Haven: Flagg & Gray, 1819), 139. Although the Nauvoo Lodge was denied the privilege of becoming a Royal Arch lodge, Joseph Smith could have easily learned the offices of the Royal Arch from fellow Masons and from widely circulated Masonic and anti-Masonic literature, such as the exposé *Light on Masonry*, by David Bernard, published in

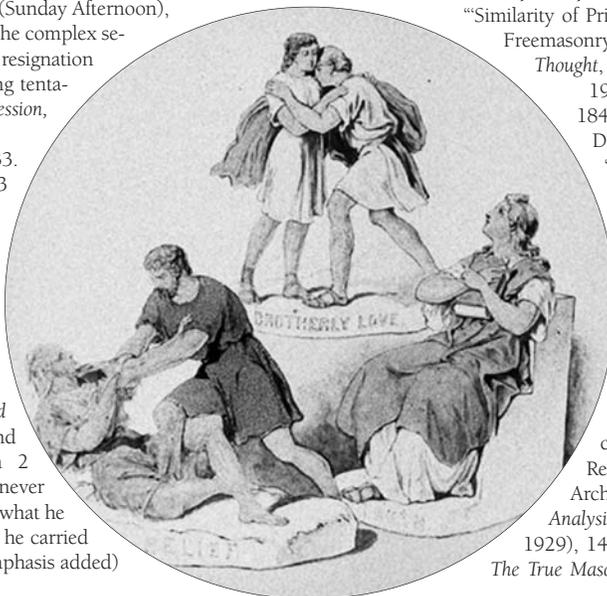
Utica, New York, 1829.

21. The third-ranking office in the Royal Arch is generally termed "scribe," but sometimes "prophet," since it is modeled on the historical figure Haggai, who filled both scribal and prophetic roles. See Castells, *Historical Analysis*, 14–18.

22. For detail regarding the Anointed Quorum, see Andrew F. Ehat, *Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question*, master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982; and D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 491–520. For further information on the Council of Fifty and Joseph Smith's ordination to kingship, see Andrew F. Ehat, "It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God," *BYU Studies* 20 (Spring 1980): 253–79; and Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy*, 120–32. Among other things, Quinn documents Masonic connections to the Council of Fifty.

23. The term "grand principles" is used quite frequently in early Masonic literature. See, for example, the instances in notes 25 and 27 below. The term "grand fundamental principle" is occasionally used as well. I have located two late eighteenth-century sources that use the phrase in reference to "brotherly love": William Hutchinson, *The Spirit of Masonry in Moral and Elucidatory Lectures*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, England: F. Jollie, 1796); and James Wright, *A Recommendation of Brotherly Love, Upon the Principles of Christianity. To Which is Subjoined, An Inquiry into the True Design of the Institution of Masonry...* (Edinburgh: printed for J. Dickson, and C. Eliot, and J. Murray, 1786). I have also read a source from the 1780s that applies the term "grand fundamental principles" to the full set of three principles, but I have thus far been unable to locate this source again.

24. Freemasonry also links brotherly love with friendship. The lecture of the



## "MASONIC TENETS"

Slide for a "magic lantern" (forerunner to modern slide projector), which was used as part of the initiatory rites of the Entered Apprentice degree, circa 1890

Still Photograph Archive, George Eastman House  
[http://www.geh.org/ar/strip55/htmlsrc/r198606330023\\_ful.html](http://www.geh.org/ar/strip55/htmlsrc/r198606330023_ful.html)

first degree says of brotherly love, “On this grand Principle, Masonry . . . conciliates true Friendship amongst those, who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual Distance.” J. Browne, *The Master Key through All the Degrees of a Free-mason’s Lodge* (London: n.p., 1768), 28. Although the term “grand principle” has largely fallen out of use in Masonry, a review of Masonic literature shows that the remaining wording of this quotation is still used by Masons today.

25. That Joseph Smith applied the term “grand fundamental principle” only to principles that held that status within Freemasonry was pointed out to me by Clinton Bartholomew, who reviewed and offered helpful suggestions on this essay.

26. These Masonic principles are enumerated in several early eighteenth-century sources I have encountered, including the anonymous work *The Ancient Constitutions of the Free and Accepted Masons, Neatly Engraved on Copper Plates*, 2nd. ed. (London: n.p., 1731), 17. This work refers to “our three Grand Principles of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.”

27. Thomas Smith Webb, *The Freemason’s Monitor; or Illustrations of Masonry: In Two Parts* (Salem, Massachusetts: Cushing and Appleton, 1818), 39.

28. *The Lectures of the Three Degrees of Craft Masonry* (London: privately printed for A. Lewis, 1891), available at The Web of Hiram, hosted by the University of Bradford, <http://www.bradford.ac.uk/webofhiram/>, accessed 2 May 2006).

29. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” text available in the online complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson at <http://www.rwe.org/>.

30. For a complete history of the Relief Society, see Janath R Cannon, Jill Mulvay-Derr, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: A History of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

31. “In the opening of the Lodge is mention of the widowed and the fatherless, that we may never forget a Mason’s duty to those whose natural protector is no more.” Anonymous, *Short Talk Bulletin* 12, no. 6 (June 1934).

32. Relief Society Minutes, March 1842–March 1844 (MS 3424), Selected Collections, LDS Church Archives, DVD 19. My thanks to Joe Swick for bringing this Masonic prayer to my attention.

33. Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes, 30 March 1842, in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 109, emphases added.

34. For a differing approach to Joseph Smith’s purposes for the Relief Society, see D. Michael Quinn, “Mormon Women Have had the Priesthood Since 1843,” in Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 365–409.

35. Steven Epperson, panelist, in “Scripture, History, and Faith: A Round Table Discussion,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 105.

36. Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, March 22, 1839, in *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, compiled and edited by Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 420–21. It is noteworthy that Joseph Smith had identified openness to all truth as “the first and fundamental” principle of Mormonism before his encounter with Masonry. Learning later that one of Masonry’s “grand fundamental principles” was “truth” may have helped spark his insight that the entire set of Masonic foundational principles belonged to Mormonism as well.

37. It should be noted that Masonic literature speaks of the grand tenet of truth principally in the sense of truthfulness (honesty), but also in the sense in which Joseph Smith understood it—as anything factual or spiritually edifying.

38. Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes, 9 June 1842, in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 123.

39. The centrality of covenant in Joseph Smith’s theology is examined at length in Rex Eugene Cooper’s anthropological study *Promises Made to the Fathers: Mormon Covenant Organization* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1990).

40. See D&C 66:2; 76:98–101; and 132:4.

41. *Times and Seasons*, 15 April 1842, 758.

42. Webb, 39.

43. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 9 July 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 229. The meaning of Joseph Smith’s identification of friendship as a “grand fundamental principle” has also been explored by Steven Epperson. Epperson understands “friendship” in this context to refer to close and unique interpersonal relationships and explores the place such sociality had in Joseph Smith’s life. See his “The Grand Fundamental Principle: Joseph Smith and the Virtue of Friendship,” *Journal of Mormon History* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 77–105.

44. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 9 July 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 229.

45. Journal of Joseph Smith, entry for 21 January 1836, in Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 117. “He then asked me wherein we differ from other Christian denomination[s]. I replied that we believe the Bible and they do not.”

46. This interpretation of the allusion is reinforced by context. Joseph’s ap-

parent intent in delivering the sermon containing the allusion was to build ecumenical bridges, as noted by Levi Richards, who called it “a conciliatory address to Strangers & all.” Journal of Levi Richards, entry for 9 July 1843, in *Words of Joseph Smith*, 231.

47. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:7 (dictated 12 July 1843); and Sermon of Joseph Smith, 16 July 1843 (Sunday Afternoon), in *Words of Joseph Smith*, 232.

48. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 9 July 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 229.

49. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 235. See also Joseph Smith Jr., ed., *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 5:517.

50. Sermon of Joseph Smith, 21 May 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 206.

51. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 117. Hatch further observes, “The interlocking themes of pride, wealth, learning, fine clothing, and oppression of the poor reappear throughout the Book of Mormon as the principal objects of divine displeasure” (119).

52. “Liberation Theology in the Book of Mormon” (unpaginated), in the forthcoming volume of the proceedings of the first annual conference of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology, to be published by Greg Kofford Books. My thanks to Annie Bryce for bringing this paper to my attention.

53. Compare this to the parable of the unjust servant (Matthew 18:23–35) and the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13).

54. W. MacNeile Dixon, *The Human Situation: The Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Glasgow, 1935–1937* (London: Hutchinson & Co., n.d. [1937?]), 438. MacNeile was a professor of literature and a religious thinker.

55. After the initial alarm created by his designation of Hyrum as prophet, Joseph backtracked and attempted to introduce Hyrum’s new status gradually. Two weeks after publicly retracting his own resignation, Joseph deferred to Hyrum on a matter of revelation for the Church, advocating that the Saints obey Hyrum’s revelation to vote for Joseph Hoge for state representative and stating, “I do not want anyone to tell [that] I am a prophet. . . .” See Sermon of Joseph Smith, 6 August 1843 (Sunday Morning), in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 236–37.

That insiders knew Joseph Smith had secretly risen from prophet to priest is indicated by Franklin D. Richards’ reference to him as “Joseph the Priest” the day before the organization of the Council of Fifty. Franklin D. Richards, entry for 10 March 1844, “Scriptural Items” notebook, in Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 344 (emphasis in original).



## ON SPEAKING A CHILD’S BLESSING IN NOVEMBER

To give a name, perpetuate a name  
To look as if into a mirror’s depth  
And see a face and form—though not my own—  
Still mine. . . a part of me incipient.

Sugar-maples droop red-fingered leaves to  
Earth; magnolias express blood-vibrant  
Drops—I give a Blessing-Name to one whose  
Breath has bloomed with blood in autumn-time,  
Who promises to stay until the Dawn.

To give a name, perpetuate a name,  
And breathe upon the coals an infant’s song. . .  
Rejuvenate a cooling ember flame.

—MICHAEL R. COLLINGS