

Introduction

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“I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me... the followers of Jesus ran away from him; but the Latter Day Saints never ran away from me yet.”¹

—Joseph Smith, Jr., May 1844

Schism has been a persistent theme within Mormonism from its earliest days. In 1831, just one year following the organization of Joseph Smith’s Church of Christ, the Mormon prophet was confronted with the conflicting claims of two rivals: Wycam Clark who formed his own Pure Church of Christ and the self-proclaimed prophet John Noah. Even prior to that, in late 1830, two early church members manifested unorthodox beliefs and practices at variance with the church’s emerging norms.² The first, Black Pete—an African American convert—was active among Smith’s Kirtland followers as “a self-styled revelator” or “chief man” and “sometimes seized with strange vagaries and odd conceits.” The second, a woman, Laura Hubble “professed to be a prophetess of the Lord” wanting to establish herself as “a teacher in the Church.”³

Dissent and schism continued to plague Smith throughout the 1830s. In 1832, a Mormon by the name of Hoton withdrew from the church, rejecting both Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, organizing his own Independent

¹ Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 26 May 1844, reprinted in Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 7 volumes (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976) 6: 408-09. (In the *History of the Church*, “Latter Day Saints” is altered to read “Latter-day Saints.”)

² Steven L. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 4th ed., Revised and enlarged (Los Angeles: Restoration Research, 1990), 21-22.

³ Black Pete’s activities are discussed in Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981). For a description of Laura Hubble’s activities, see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). A detailed examination of both Black Pete and Laura Hubble is contained in Mark L. Staker, “Among them is a Man of Color, a Chief Man: Black Pete, the Morley Family, and the Rise and Fall of Religious Enthusiasm in Ohio’s Mormonite Community,” in *Hearken O Ye People: the Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations*, forthcoming.

Church.⁴ Four years later James Colin Brewster, a precocious ten-year-old child, claimed direct communication with the Angel Moroni and proceeded to write his own works of scripture—all of which led to his disfellowship and ultimate excommunication.⁵ A more serious threat came in 1837 with the formation of the Church of Christ by Warren Parrish. A one-time traveling elder with a reputation as an “eloquent preacher,” Parrish brought into his organization a number of important dissidents, including three original members of Smith’s Council of the Twelve—specifically, brothers Luke S. and Lyman Johnson along with John F. Boynton. Members of Parrish’s Church of Christ believed that Smith and other leaders “had strayed from the gospel” by renaming their organization “The Church of the Latter Day Saints.”⁶ Also joining Parrish’s organization following his break with Smith was Martin Harris—an important early convert and financial benefactor in the church, made famous as one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon.⁷

Opposition to Joseph Smith’s leadership continued at Far West, Missouri, where the church established its headquarters during the late 1830s. In addition to more defections from within the Council of the Twelve, including William E. McLellin and council president Thomas Marsh, Joseph Smith was forced to deal with the withdrawal and/or excommunication of other important individuals, including Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer—the remaining two of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. Two schismatic groups emerged during this difficult period. One was formed by George M. Hinkle, one-time leader of the Caldwell County militia, who had negotiated the surrender of the Latter Day Saints at the conclusion of the Missouri Mormon War. Hinkle, strongly criticized for this action by fellow Mormons, rejected Smith’s leadership, forming his own group, “The Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride, the Lamb’s Wife”—an organization that continued in existence over the next several years.⁸ A second group formed as a direct result of the Missouri Mormon War was the Alston Church, formed by Issac Russell, an English convert. Russell sought support from dissident Mormons who desired to remain in Missouri contrary to Joseph Smith’s directive to leave that state and settle in Illinois.⁹

⁴ Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 55-56. Brewster proceeded to produce two works of scripture, the first his “Book of Moroni” in 1836, apparently not completed. In 1842 he brought forth a second work published under the title of *The Words of Righteousness to All Men, Written from One of the Books of Esaras...* For a good overview of Brewster’s life and career, see Dan Vogel, “James Colin Brewster: The Boy Prophet Who Challenged Mormon Authority,” in Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds., *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 120-139.

⁶ Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 22-23.

⁷ H. Michael Marquardt, “Martin Harris: The Kirtland Years, 1831-1870,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 3 (2002): 1-40.

⁸ Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 25-27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-25.

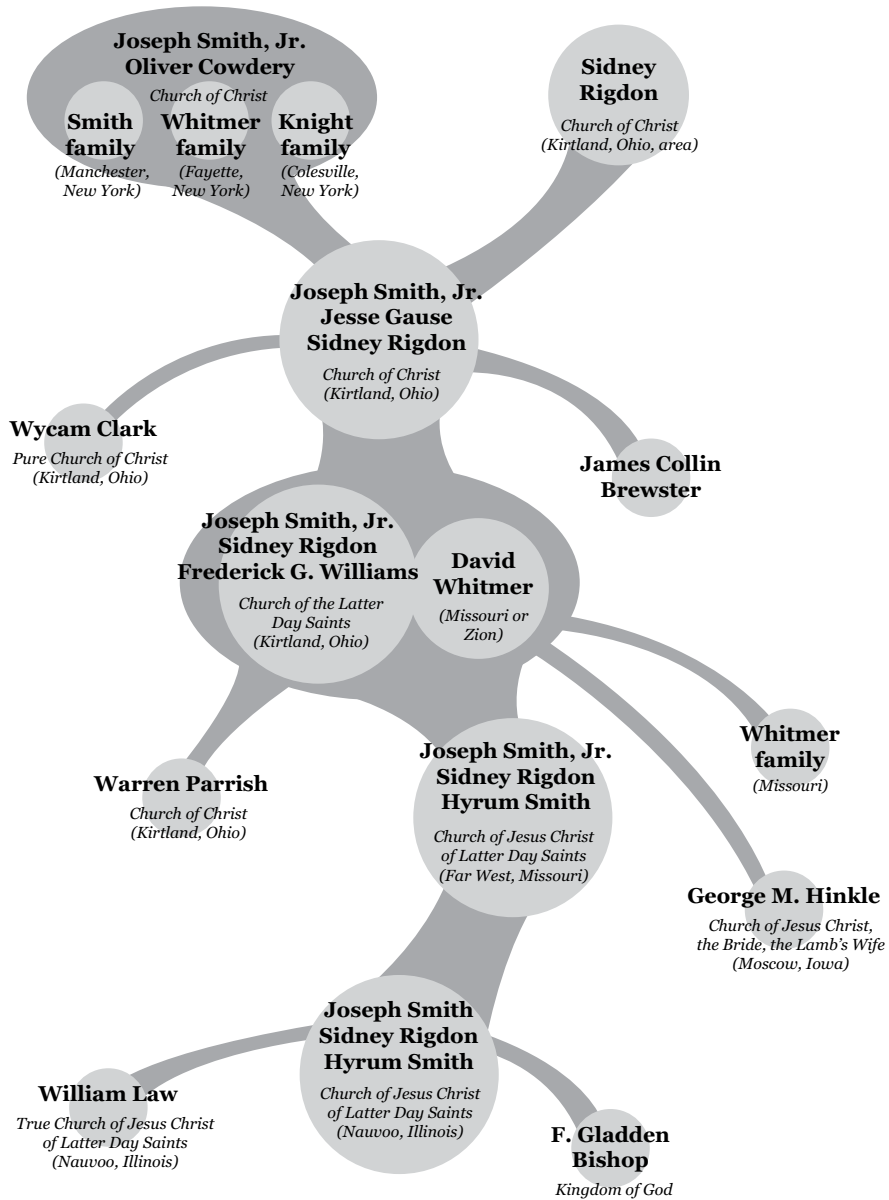


FIGURE 1.1 — *Selected Mormon schisms in the lifetime of Joseph Smith, Jr.*

In Nauvoo, the Mormons' new gathering place, dissent and schism continued. In March 1842, Oliver H. Olney was disfellowshipped on charges of setting himself up "as a prophet." Olney claimed to have been "set apart by the 'ancient of days'" and "charged with setting up a new dispensation."¹⁰ Also in

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27-28. Olney published two pamphlets, the first, *The Absurdities of Mormonism Portrayed* in 1843; and the second, *Spiritual Wifery at Nauvoo Exposed*, which appeared in 1845.



FIGURE 1.2 — Selected Mormon locations in the lifetime of Joseph Smith, Jr.

1842, Francis Gladden Bishop asserted his own claims as a prophet. Presenting himself as an “inspired man of God,” Bishop “received and taught revelations” which resulted in the formation of his own group, the Kingdom of God.¹¹

Two years later, Smith faced the most serious challenge to his leadership—one with fateful results. It came from a group of dissident Latter Day Saints led by William Law, a wealthy Canadian convert who was a special councilor in Smith’s First Presidency. William Law was joined by his brother, Wilson, along with Robert D. and Charles A. Foster, Francis M. and Chauncy L. Higbee. This group opposed the emerging practice of plural marriage as well as Smith’s involvement in politics, characterizing the Mormon leader a “fallen prophet.” Presenting themselves as reformers, these dissidents set up a rival church organization, the True Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and began publication of their own newspaper, the *Nauvoo Expositor*. Smith reacted swiftly in his capacity as Nauvoo mayor, proclaiming the *Expositor* a “public nuisance” and ordering its destruction. Smith’s controversial action set the stage for his arrest, imprisonment, and assassination at the hands of a well-organized mob at Carthage, Illinois in June 1844.¹²

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28-29. For a good biographical overview of Bishop, see Richard L. Saunders, “The Fruit of the Branch: Francis Gladden Bishop and His Culture of Dissent,” in Launius and Thatcher, *Differing Visions*, 102-119.

¹² Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 29-30. For two views of the life and activities of William Law, see John Frederick Glaser, “The Disaffection of William Law,” *Restoration Studies*

The pace of Mormon schism and fragmentation accelerated in the wake of Joseph Smith's death. While the largest group of Mormons, mainly located in Nauvoo, chose to accept the leadership of the Twelve under Brigham Young, a number of rival Latter Day Saint organizations emerged during the so-called "fragmentation period" from 1844 to 1860.¹³ Among the noteworthy Latter Day Saints opposing Young and the Twelve were members of Joseph Smith's own family, specifically his legal wife Emma, his mother Lucy, and his younger brother William—all of whom eventually joined and/or affiliated with various Midwestern expressions of Mormonism. Other important Mormons asserting alternate claims to Latter Day Saint leadership included Sidney Rigdon—last living counselor in the church's First Presidency; Lyman Wight—a member of the Council of the Twelve; Alpheus Cutler—a close confidant to Smith and member of the secret Council of Fifty; William McLellin—a former member of the Twelve; Charles Blancher Thompson—an articulate early church pamphleteer; and James J. Strang—a gifted charismatic leader who claimed prophetic powers not unlike those asserted by Joseph Smith himself.¹⁴ Historian D. Michael Quinn has calculated eight options or "legitimate methods of Mormon presidential succession" that emerged during this fragmentation period.¹⁵ As a result, "no fewer than fifteen important groups emerged" following Joseph Smith's death.¹⁶

The period of exceptional fragmentation drew to a close in 1860 with the formation of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) under the leadership of Joseph Smith III. In assuming his father's role of "prophet, seer, and revelator" Joseph III attracted to his organization a significant portion of the one-time followers of Strang, Wight, Cutler, Thompson and other scattered Midwestern saints. Over time, the "Josephite" Reorganized church became the second largest of all Latter Day Saint denominations.¹⁷

But a significant number of Midwestern and Eastern Latter Day Saints rejected the claims of Joseph III and, in the process, coalesced into other denominations. The first of these, The Church of Jesus Christ, was organized in 1862 by William Bickerton—a former leader in the defunct Church of Christ that Sidney Rigdon had organized in 1844. At present, The Church of Jesus Christ, with Headquarters in Monongahela, Pennsylvania is generally recognized as

3 (1986): 163-75; and Lyndon W. Cook, *William Law: Biographical Essay, Nauvoo Diary, Correspondence, Interview* (Orem, UT: Grandin Books, 1994).

¹³ Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-53.

¹⁵ D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844," *Brigham Young University Studies* 16 (Winter 1976): 187-233.

¹⁶ Launius and Thatcher, "Introduction: Mormonism and the Dynamics of Dissent," in *Differing Visions*, 11.

¹⁷ For the definitive biography of Joseph III, see Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

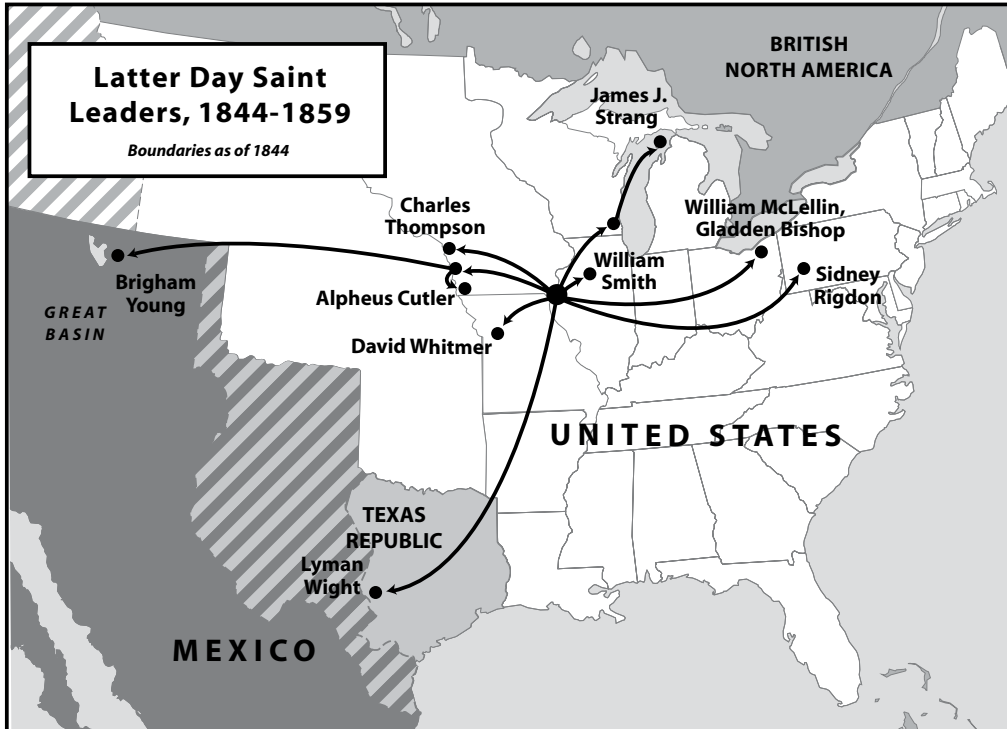


FIGURE 1.3 — Latter Day Saint leaders and groups emerging from the 1844 succession crisis.

the third largest Latter Day Saint denomination to have emerged from the 1844 succession crisis.¹⁸ A second denomination, now known as the Church of Christ (Temple Lot), was formally organized in 1863 under the leadership of Granville Hedrick. This Church of Christ was formed when a group of independent Latter Day Saint branches unaffiliated with any of the Mormon leadership organizations came together in the aftermath of Joseph Smith's death.¹⁹

Meanwhile, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), under the leadership of Brigham Young, established their church as the largest of all Latter Day Saint denominations—thanks, in part, to their control of the church's European missionary operations and their ability to grow in protected isolation in the Great Basin. But despite the LDS church's geographic insulation—well away from schismatic Latter Day Saint activity in the Midwest—"Brighamite" Mormons were forced to deal with their own

¹⁸ William H. Cadman, *A History of The Church of Jesus Christ* [vol. 1] (Monongahela, PA: The Church of Jesus Christ, 1945) and Larry Watson et al., eds., *A History of The Church of Jesus Christ, Volume 2: Covering the Restoration to the Year 1960* (Monongahela, PA: The Church of Jesus Christ, 2002).

¹⁹ B. C. Flint, *An Outline History of the Church of Christ (Temple Lot)* (Independence, MO: Church of Christ, 1953).