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NEW LIGHT ON JOSEPH SMITH'S “LAST CHARGE”

“For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.” (1 Nephi 10:19)

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Jacob Vidrine
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<http://OneEternalRound.org/>
Phone: (801) 882-4754
Email: Admin@OneEternalRound.org

INTRODUCTION

One key event that has been called the “zenith” of events affecting the outcome of the 1844 Succession Crisis is an event that occurred in March 1844. At this time, Joseph Smith gave the apostles the “keys of the kingdom” and charged them to bear off the Kingdom of God triumphantly to the world, saying that he had “rolled” the responsibility of bearing it off of his shoulders and onto theirs. This event in late March 1844 came to be known as Joseph Smith’s “Last Charge”.

With the recent release of the Council of Fifty minutes in 2016, more questions have been raised than clarity brought to the Last Charge. The event is not explicitly recorded in the minutes — and private discussion about the Last Charge a year later raises questions about what was said and what significance it held. Did Joseph Smith intend to confer ecclesiastical authority with the Last Charge? Was the charge exclusively to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles? Brigham recalled that Joseph “made no mention of the anointing” during the Council of Fifty meeting where he gave the charge, — so was there an anointing?

This becomes the subject of this issue of *One Eternal Round*, namely, the meaning and significance of the “Last Charge”.

NEW LIGHT ON JOSEPH SMITH'S “LAST CHARGE”¹

by
Jacob Vidrine

INTRODUCTION

In the Nauvoo period the Prophet Joseph Smith began to introduce a higher order of priesthood and new organizations of the Kingdom of God. The Prophet first revealed this new priesthood on May 4, 1842, when he began to organize a secret body of men (that would eventually also include women), known as the “Anointed Quorum” or “Holy Order”. The priesthood introduced at this time was referred to as

¹ An abbreviated version of this paper was presented at the 2018 Sunstone Summer Symposium on July 28, 2018.

the “Patriarchal Priesthood” or the “highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood”, and was conferred through an anointing and ordination, first in the Nauvoo Endowment ceremony, and later a fullness of this highest priesthood authority was given through an ordinance that was referred to as the “Second Anointing”.

Willard Richards’ account of the May 4, 1842 meeting recalls that the Prophet tied the four Signs and Tokens of the Endowment to four different orders of priesthood, two Aaronic orders and two Melchizedek orders, that the Prophet communicated “keys pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood, and so on to the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood.”² Apostle Franklin D. Richards in 1922 recorded that at that time the Endowment explicitly referenced a “higher order of the Aaronic Priesthood” transitioning to a “lower order of the Melchizedek Priesthood”; but he desired to remove that reference, and only say “Aaronic” transitioning to the “Melchizedek”, and so with the approval of the First Presidency that reference was removed.³

The lower order of the Aaronic Priesthood is the Aaronic Priesthood in the Church of Christ with the offices of Bishop, Priest, Teacher, and Deacon. The higher order of the Aaronic Priesthood was held and practiced in ancient Israel with Priests, High Priests, and their accompanying ordinances. The

² *History of the Church* vol. 5 <4 May 1842> pages 1–2.

³ This change is noted by George F. Richards in his diary, June 3, 1922, quoted in *The Development of LDS Temple Worship, 1846-2000* page 186.

foreseen restoration of this order appears to be alluded to by Joseph Smith in the 24 Temples Diagram for the City of Zion.⁴

The *lower* order of the Melchizedek Priesthood is the Melchizedek Priesthood practiced in the Church of Christ. This Priesthood was restored by Peter, James, and John. The *higher* order of the Melchizedek Priesthood was secretly restored by Moses, Elias, and Elijah. Even though the Apostleship began to be publicly taught by the Twelve and their supporters to be the ultimate priesthood authority not long after the Prophet Joseph Smith’s death, such comments are notably absent and foreign to Joseph Smith’s lifetime.

When he first introduced and conferred the Patriarchal Order of the Melchizedek Priesthood on May 4, 1842, Joseph Smith taught that this new priesthood pertained to Church of the Firstborn, the “order pertaining to the Ancient of Days” or in other words the “kingdom of Daniel”. Heber C. Kimball echoed a connection between the Holy Order of God, Kingdom of God, and Church of the Firstborn when he stated “Here, in the Territory of Deseret, is The Kingdom of God and here are all the officers Pertaining to That Kingdom; and here is an organization that is organized after the order of God, and it is organized after the order of The Church of the Firstborn,” effectively equating the three.⁵

⁴ *History of the Church* vol. 1 <25 June 1833> page 359.

⁵ *Journal of Discourses* volume 5 <2 August 1857> pages 129–130.

In Joseph Smith's lifetime, he anointed and ordained individuals in their endowments as Kings and Priests and Queens and Priestesses, to hold a *portion* of the Highest Priesthood but not the *fullness* of that Priesthood, the Sealing Power or Sealing Keys of Elijah, which was conferred in the ordinance known as the "Second Anointing" or "Second Endowment."

On September 28, 1843 the Prophet was the first individual to receive his *Second Anointing* as a King and Priest, sealing him up to Exaltation with his wife Emma. This anointing made one's "Calling and Election Made Sure", seals an eternal marriage by the Holy Spirit of Promise, and confers the Sealing Keys of Elijah, the Fullness of the Priesthood, on its recipients. Between September 1843 and the end of February 1844 nearly 20 men and their wives received this highest priesthood authority that one man could give another.⁶

THE COUNCIL OF FIFTY

Shortly after the last Second Anointings in the Holy Order, the Prophet began to organize a new body that he taught was the literal "Kingdom of God", which came to be known as the Council of Fifty. In March 1844, he initiated virtually all of the

⁶ For more information on the Second Anointing, see David Buerger's article "The Fulness of the Priesthood: The Second Anointing in Latter-day Saint Theology and Practice" in *Dialogue Magazine* vol. 16 no. 1 <Spring 1983> pages 10-44.

men who had received their Second Anointings into this organization, in addition to 20 or so other men.

While three gentiles were also members of the Council of Fifty in Joseph Smith’s lifetime, the reality is their involvement was “minimal and brief” as scholar Jedediah Rogers noted.⁷ The gentiles weren’t seen as the source from which the Council’s theocratic authority was derived, but by including non-Mormons, council members viewed that such representation gave them legitimacy to govern the world.⁸ The Gentile members merely represented that the Kingdom of God was founded upon the liberal principle of protecting a man in his natural rights to worship how he pleases, and believe as he wants, without being infringed upon by others.

While it is recognized by some scholars today that the new order of priesthood was the source of the Council of Fifty’s authority, few acknowledge that the Council wielded this authority as a body. Speaking of the Council of Fifty on February 27, 1845, Heber C. Kimball said that “whatever this Council seals, blesses, or curses on Earth will be sealed, blessed, or cursed in heaven.”⁹ Heber C. Kimball repeatedly connected the authority of the Council of Fifty to that of Kings and Priests: telling new initiates that each member “will

⁷ *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History* page 6.

⁸ See for example, George J. Adams’ comments on April 18, 1844 in *Joseph Smith Papers: Administrative Records, Council of Fifty Minutes, March 1844—January 1846* <18 April 1844> pages 124-125, hereafter referenced as *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes*.

⁹ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <27 February 1845> page 529.

be anointed and ordained priests and kings” if faithful. In this speech Heber C. Kimball called Joseph Smith the “king of kings” over the Council of Fifty.¹⁰

Brigham Young, in a speech recalling the initial organization of the Kingdom of God said that “The kingdom of God was fully established in the days of Joseph, when he gave to a few their blessings pertaining to the sealing ordinances”, a clear reference to the Second Anointing and its accompanying sealing power.¹¹ Sidney Rigdon likewise, when he organized his own replica Kingdom in April 1845, taught that the sealing power “belongs to the kingdom of God alone” — that it was “the priesthood which pertains to the Kingdom of God.”¹²

Edmund Briggs, a missionary for the Reorganization, recorded in 1859 that Cutlerites believed that the Church was rejected, and all priesthood in the Church was nullified, but that the priesthood of the Kingdom of God, or “Quorum of Fifty”, organized in Nauvoo remained in full force, apparently being higher than the Church’s priesthood.¹³ Cutlerite documents themselves note that Cutler was sustained as “head or chief

¹⁰ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <4 March 1845> page 278.

¹¹ *The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <6 October 1866> page 2371.

¹² Minutes of a meeting of a conference, Thursday, 10 April 1845, published in *The Latter Day Saint Messenger and Advocate* vol. 1 (Pittsburgh, 1 May 1845), No. 12.

¹³ Edmund C. Briggs, *Early History of the Reorganization* <13 September 1859> page 175.

counsellor” over the Church President and other offices in his church — which historian Christopher Blythe candidly noted was tied to his position in the Council of Fifty:

“Cutler's position of chief counselor was a not-so-veiled reference to his position in the Council of Fifty. In the Kingdom of God meetings in Nauvoo, the council was ranked according to age. In 1853, seventy-three-year-old, John Smith was the only surviving Council of Fifty member ranked ahead of Alpheus Cutler. Considering John Smith out of the quorum, Cutler was thus the eldest member of the Council of Fifty. If in 1853, Joseph Smith were alive and still meeting with his council, Cutler would have been the first voice in the meeting — Smith's right-hand man or chief counsellor.”¹⁴

Lyman Wight and George Miller, at a church conference at Wight's Texas colony, had themselves sustained as “two of the fifties”, implying ecclesiastical significance.¹⁵

Lyman Wight asserted his belief that the Council of Fifty was the ultimate head of Church government, and would be the authority to unify the Church. He wrote:

“I will here state the first thing to have been done would have been to have called the fifties together from the four quarters of the earth, which contained all the

¹⁴ Christopher James Blythe, “The Church in the Days of Alpheus Cutler”, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* vol. 29 (2009) page 77.

¹⁵ Journal of William Leland, quoted in Klaus Hansen, “The Theory and Practice of the Political Kingdom of God in Mormon History, 1829-1890” page 120.

highest authorities of the church. As you will readily see, that had not the fifty constituted the highest authorities, it would have been a species of weakness to have ordained all the highest authorities into that number. The fifties assembled should have called on all the authorities of the church down to the lay-members from all the face of the earth, as much as was convenient, and after having taken sweet counsel together, in prayer and supplication before God, acknowledged our sins and transgressions which had caused our head to be taken from our midst; and then have called on young Joseph, and held him up before the congregation of Israel to take his father's place in the flesh!"¹⁶

James Brewster's publication *The Olive Branch*, critical of the Nauvoo priesthood developments also made this connection a decade earlier. In an article in August 1848 they wrote that Joseph Smith "had organized a quorum of authority, not known in the law of the church; this was a council of fifty; ordained kings and priests, constituting an authority that no tribunal in the church could control."¹⁷

This idea of the Council of Fifty as a priesthood body above the Church, and presiding over the Church, was indicated by Sidney Rigdon and James J. Strang instituting replica kingdoms at the head of their Church governments.¹⁸ James

¹⁶ Copy of a letter by Lyman Wight to the *Northern Islander*, July 1855, quoted in *History of the Reorganized Church* vol. 2 page 789.

¹⁷ *Olive Branch* vol. 1 <August 1848> page 18.

¹⁸ As historian Christopher Blythe noted: "The kingdoms of Strang and Rigdon had much in common. Both placed their

Whitehead, who was a clerk in Nauvoo who later would join the Reorganization, also testified that the “Legislative Body of the Kingdom of God, consisting of fifty” was organized by Joseph Smith to be the ultimate head of Church government.¹⁹

To differing degrees, those that followed the Quorum of the Twelve held to such a view as well. Reuben Miller, who was taught about succession directly from the apostles in Nauvoo in January 1846, wrote a pamphlet tying the Twelve’s claims to authority to being members of the “Quorum of Fifty” or “kingdom of Daniel”.²⁰ Brigham Young candidly stated his opposition to certain other members of the Council of Fifty who did not see the Kingdom of God as having to do with spiritual matters. In an 1845 Council of Fifty meeting he declared:

“This fifty will be the governing and controlling body of this kingdom even if we called in ten thousand men into the council. I defy any man to draw the line between the

respective councils at the head of church government. Both re-envisioned the traditional priesthood officers in connection with the kingdom. Finally, despite instituting replica councils, both concealed or resolved not to publicize knowledge of the original Council of Fifty.” (Blythe, “Ecclesiastical interpretations of the Kingdom”, page 125.)

¹⁹ *Saints’ Herald* vol. 26 no. 6 <15 March 1879> page 87.

²⁰ Reuben Miller wrote that “the same Priesthood which Joseph held, he had left with a High Quorum which he organized a short time before his death” later on in the pamphlet identifying the “High Quorum” in stating “Joseph, before his death, organized a quorum of fifty in the kingdom of God on the earth, in which he left the same keys and priesthood that he held.” (*James J. Strang, Weighed in the Balance of Truth and Found Wanting*, pages 4-5.)

spiritual and temporal affairs in the Kingdom of God. Every man that is in this organization has to do with every thing between earth and heaven or hell.”²¹

WAS THE KINGDOM OF DANIEL ONLY A TEMPORAL KINGDOM?

While Joseph Smith did make a statement on April 18, 1844, that “the Kingdom which Daniel saw was not a spiritual kingdom, but was a kingdom designed to be gotten up to protect the saints in their rights”, his actions did not indicate a strict view that the Kingdom of God did not have anything to do with spiritual or ecclesiastical matters.²² In the Council of Fifty, at Joseph’s blessing and often his direction, they discussed opening new missions in Europe, passed resolutions to turn apostates over to the buffetings of Satan, discussed heavenly matters, and spiritual doctrine was taught.²³ One interesting example was William Clayton’s brief note on April 5, 1844 that Joseph Smith “explained the meaning of the word ‘Ahman’ which signifies the first man or first God.”²⁴ This likely marks the time in the Council of Fifty where Benjamin F. Johnson recollected that Joseph Smith “taught us that God

²¹ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <11 April 1845> page 278, recorded as a third person statement, re-worded as a first person remark.

²² *Ibid.* <18 April 1844> page 128.

²³ See the May 6, 1844 meeting of the Council of Fifty for example: *Ibid.* <6 May 1844> pages 148–159.

²⁴ *Ibid.* <5 April 1844> page 81.

was the great head of human procreation — was really and truly the father of both our spirits and our bodies;” a belief that came to be known as the Adam-God Doctrine.²⁵

The minutes indicate, as several individuals later testified, that the Council of Fifty was to hold the authority to receive and test revelations. To a certain degree, this function was acknowledged and exercised under Brigham Young and John Taylor.²⁶

Joseph Smith had argued in his 1842 article “The Government of God” that when the Theocratic Kingdom of God was established, it would be a merge of Ecclesiastical and Civil government, writing that in Moses’ day, Civil and Ecclesiastical affairs “were both one, there was no distinction; so will it be when the purposes of God shall be accomplished: when ‘the Lord shall be King over the whole earth’ and ‘Jerusalem His throne.’ ‘The law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem’.”²⁷

This view is echoed in both Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon’s talks on the Council of Fifty at the April 1844 Conference, indicating that the Prophet’s doctrine had not changed two years later, being reiterated by members of the newly established Kingdom of God. Rigdon preached that “When God sets up a system of salvation, he sets up

²⁵ Benjamin F. Johnson’s 1903 Letter to George F. Gibbs, LDS Archives, published in *Doctrine of the Priesthood* vol. 7 no. 5 <May 1990> page 25.

²⁶ See Appendix B — The Council of Fifty’s Authority to Test Revelations.

²⁷ “The Government of God,” *Times and Seasons* vol. 5 <15 July 1842> page 857.

a system of government; when I speak of a government I mean what I say; I mean a government that shall rule over temporal and spiritual affairs” Similarly, Brigham Young also preached at this conference that “the government belongs to God. No man can draw the dividing line between the government of God and the government of the children of men.”²⁸

So more likely when Joseph Smith said “the Kingdom which Daniel saw was not a spiritual kingdom”, in context, he was not teaching that the Kingdom of God did not hold spiritual authority, but was emphasizing that Daniel wasn’t witnessing the growth of a church in his vision, but rather a temporal kingdom.

What Daniel witnessed and described were the effects of a temporal government that would grow and eventually consume other governments. He saw and was writing about the *temporal* effects of the Kingdom of God, not the *spiritual* effects. There was a spiritual aspect to the Kingdom of God — it just wasn’t what Daniel saw, nor the unique purpose of the Council of Fifty. The Kingdom was uniquely organized to wield the kingly authority of Kings and Priests to defend the saints in their rights, and ultimately enact the civil law of God to “govern nations.”²⁹

Joseph’s interpretation of the Daniel’s vision is fitting with some Bible commentaries on the subject. *Gill’s Commentary on the Entire Bible*

²⁸ *History of the Church* <5 April 1844> page 292. *History of the Church* vol. 6 <9 April 1844> pages 322.

²⁹ *History of the Church* vol. 6 <23 February 1844> page 224.

notes on Daniel 7:27: “The kingdoms of this world will become Christ’s, and Christian princes will be kings of them everywhere; and not only the royal power and authority will be vested with them, but all the grandeur and state belonging to them will be theirs; as well as all the saints in general shall reign in a spiritual manner with Christ, enjoying all ordinances, and all religious liberties, as well as civil, and be free from all persecutions.”³⁰

But, given that barely half of the men — 31 members of the Council of Fifty — were members of the Holy Order, why would it be described as a body of Kings and Priests? Why would so many sources after the death of Joseph Smith indicate that he had created it to be a presiding body of King and Priests over the church, when we have no contemporary account of him teaching this?

THE LAST CHARGE

After studying and compiling evidence about the event that has come to be known in Mormon History as the “Last Charge”, I believe that it was this event, near the end of March 1844 that was the source for so many, in diverse branches of the Restoration, holding ecclesiastical views of the Kingdom of God. In a nutshell, the Prophet in late March 1844 took members of the newly organized Council of Fifty through certain temple ordinances — a “holy anointing” as several called it —

³⁰ Gill’s *Commentary on the Entire Bible*, quoted on <https://biblehub.com/daniel/7-27.htm> accessed October 6, 2018 at 11:35 PM.

anointing and ordaining them Kings and Priests, and at the same time sealing upon their heads the highest keys and powers of the priesthood. Then on March 26, 1844, while giving new members of the Fifty the “charge” to establish the Kingdom of Daniel, he went into a detailed speech on his life and persecutions, what he had accomplished, and the responsibility he had borne, and then told the council that he had organized everything necessary, and the responsibility would be upon them to bear it off to the world, because he desired to rest.

Followers of Brigham Young were not the only ones who believed that the “Last Charge” occurred — it’s something that was entertained or accepted to different degrees in several different branches of Mormonism. Sidney Rigdon and his followers, James J. Strang, and even James Whitehead and Ebenezer Robinson as members of the Reorganization accepted that the Last Charge happened — they just debate how the Twelve and their followers used the event to bolster their succession claims.³¹

While the Council of Fifty minutes don’t directly record the event, it shouldn’t be surprising given the bizarre brevity in the 1844 minutes kept by William Clayton. However, the editors of the Joseph Smith Papers project pinning a brief note by

³¹ Ebenezer Robinson accepted the Last Charge account as given to him by Orson Hyde at face value, just rejected its authority because he did not view Joseph Smith’s secret actions inspired. All the other names I listed accepted that a Last Charge event happened, but disagreed that it has succession significance exclusive to the Quorum of the Twelve.

Clayton on March 26th as being the Last Charge, and I don’t believe that they were out in the night in making the connection. William Clayton recorded in the minutes on that day that “President J. Smith continued his instructions on heavenly things and many other important subjects,” in the midst of initiating new members into the Council of Fifty.³²

The Joseph Smith Papers editors observe from the more detailed post-1844 minutes that when new members were added to the Kingdom, part of the initiation ritual was to receive a “charge.” The most detailed extent explanation of this initiation charge — Thomas Bullock’s rough minutes of the December 25, 1846 meeting of the Council of Fifty — records William Clayton describing this initiation charge as given by Joseph Smith in similar language to the language frequently used as occurring at the events of the “Last Charge” — a mention of taking responsibility off of the Prophet’s shoulders and placing it upon others.³³

Similar to William Clayton’s brief comment in the Fifty minutes, several of the earliest accounts of the Last Charge recall Joseph speaking on “heavenly things” at the time of the Charge. John Dinger, to his credit, noted in his recent paper³⁴ that Woodruff’s earliest detailed account, in October

³² *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <26 March 1844> page 66.

³³ Excerpts of the December 25, 1845 meeting were published in *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <26 March 1844 introduction> page 63.

³⁴ John S. Dinger, “The Council of Fifty, Orson Hyde, and the ‘Last Charge’: A Re-evaluation,” *JWHA Journal* vol. 37, no. 2 <Fall 2017> pages 62–82.

1844, explicitly uses the same language as William Clayton, wherein Wilford Woodruff testified:

“And when they received their endowment, and actually received the keys of the kingdom of God, and oracles of God, keys of revelation, and **the pattern of heavenly things**; and thus addressing the Twelve, exclaimed [the Prophet], ‘upon your shoulders the kingdom rests, elders, and bear it; for I have had to do it until now. But now the responsibility rests upon you. It mattereth not what becomes of me’.”³⁵

However, John Dinger in his quick word search for “heavenly things” missed that Parley P. Pratt’s earliest written account, in March 1845, also directly makes the same connection to “heavenly things”, only worded differently:

“The Lord is about to lay the burden on your shoulders and let me rest awhile; and if they kill me the kingdom of God will roll on, as I have now finished the work which was laid upon me, by committing to you all things for the building up of the kingdom **according to the heavenly vision**, and the pattern shown me from heaven.”³⁶

Other accounts make the reference as well, such as an account by Brigham Young on December

³⁵ Woodruff’s epistle “To the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, Greeting,” written October 11, 1844, was published in *Times and Seasons* volume 5 <2 November 1844> page 698.

³⁶ Parley P. Pratt, *Millennial Star* vol. 5 <March 1845> page 151, Pratt’s interjection in Joseph’s remarks was removed without note, emphasis added.

27, 1847, where he similarly tied the Prophet’s speech at the Last Charge with the “perfect pattern” to “enter in the celestial gate.”³⁷

But, probably more important to documenting and understanding the Last Charge than this is a discussion about the event in a Council of Fifty meeting a year after it occurred. This discussion was sparked by a certificate written by Orson Hyde, which Hyde desired to publish about the events of the Last Charge. In this private meeting on March 25, 1845, candid remarks were made about the event that aren’t as clearly laid out in other sources. Ultimately, the discussion ended with Brigham Young desiring Orson Hyde to not publish anything on the Last Charge or the Twelve’s claims to authority, but commenting on the event, President Young said, “In regard to Joseph’s remarks, he did not mention any thing about the anointing; he said it was this council of fifty which had to bear the responsibility of establishing the kingdom in all the world.”³⁸

Some take the fact that Brigham did not want this certificate published (and it never being signed) as evidence of a lack of witnesses to the event. However, this is short sighted and ignores other sources. Multiple members of the Council of Fifty testified of the Last Charge occurring, within months of the event. In August 1844, Council of

³⁷ *The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <27 December 1847> page 272.

³⁸ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <25 March 1845> page 380.

Fifty members W.W. Phelps and Reynolds Cahoon testified that they had “hurd [heard] it from the Prophet’s lips.”³⁹

A more detailed account of their remarks was written by Wilford Woodruff in his journal: “W. Phelps and R. Cahoon bore testimony to the same thing, saying that Joseph said unto the Twelve ‘upon your shoulders the kingdom of God must rest in all the world. Now round up your shoulders and bear it’.”⁴⁰ Alpheus Cutler, another original member of the Council of Fifty, also bore witness to the charge. After Orson Hyde gave an account of it before the Nauvoo High Council, the minutes record that Hyde’s “statements were sanction by Councilor A. Cutler.”⁴¹

Brigham’s statement that the “Last Charge” was directed to the Council of Fifty confirms what had long been long understood by some individuals, such as Ross LeBaron, and Fred Collier.⁴² Their

³⁹ Heber C. Kimball Journal, 25 August 1844, quoted in *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* page 193.

⁴⁰ *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal* vol. 2 <25 August 1844> page 455, spelling and grammar corrected.

⁴¹ Nauvoo High Council Minutes, 30 November 1844, LDS Archives.

⁴² Ross Wesley LeBaron comments on the Last Charge in a 1950 letter to Joseph Musser. He wrote that Johnson “was one of the youngest members of the Council of the Kingdom, and was 25 years of age at the time Joseph Smith gave the last charge to the twelve apostles, and records it more clearly than any other I have read. He makes it plain that the twelve received it (the High Priesthood) in connection with the Council of the Kingdom.” (Ross Wesley LeBaron to Joseph Musser, 20 October 1950, typescript in the possession of author.) Fred Collier similarly published in 1992: “The ‘Last Charge’ was not given exclusively to the Twelve, but rather it

understanding came from Benjamin F. Johnson’s multiple accounts of the Last Charge. Particularly in his autobiography, Benjamin F. Johnson indicated that the Last Charge did not single out the twelve apostles at all. In it, Johnson wrote that at a “meeting of the Council of Fifty” Joseph Smith “turned to those around him, including the Twelve,” and said, “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I now place it [i.e. the responsibility of bearing off the Kingdom of God] upon you my brethren of this Council”, indicating the Twelve were not singled out in the charge.⁴³

Similarly, Lyman Wight, though not present for the Last Charge, alludes to this understanding when he wrote to his nephew that “I then stood as one of the Twelve and the Twelve constitute the number twelve of the Fifty — Now, Benjamin, do you not see that every one of the Fifty should have carried out the measures which brother Joseph gave unto them.”⁴⁴ In a later letter, Lyman Wight utilized Last Charge language, writing “Then should the Fifty have sailed forth unto all the world, and built up according to the pattern which Brother Joseph had given.”⁴⁵

was given to the Fifty Princes, and the Twelve were members of this body, just as were many others who had proven their faithfulness in the Priesthood.” (*Doctrine of the Priesthood* vol. 9 no. 4 <April 1992> page 26.)

⁴³ Benjamin F. Johnson “My Life’s Review”, Mss. p. 96, LDS Archives; Published by Lyndon Cook and Kevin Harker (Gardin Book Company: Provo 1997) page 89.

⁴⁴ Lyman Wight letter to Benjamin Wight, January 1853, RLDS Archives.

⁴⁵ Lyman Wight to the *Northern Islander*, July 1855, quoted in *History of the Reorganized Church* 2:789.

James Whitehead likewise took issue with the claim that the Last Charge was exclusively to the apostles: “I further testify that Joseph did not say that he rolled the kingdom of God upon the shoulders of the Twelve” but upon “the entire priesthood” present at that occasion, stating that Joseph said “he had finished his work and was going to rest, and said, ‘Now I roll off upon you, my brethren of the priesthood, the responsibility of the kingdom of God, that you may bear it off victorious in the name of the Lord’.”⁴⁶ Similar to Whitehead’s account, Brigham Young himself preached that “Joseph told the priesthood there is not one principle or one key to enter in the celestial gate but what I have given you — I have shewed you and talked it to you — the Kingdom is set up and you have the perfect pattern — you can lead the kingdom in at the gate — I am going to rest.” However, in the edited version of the sermon, “the priesthood” was changed to “the Twelve”.⁴⁷

It becomes clear, in examining the sources, particularly Benjamin F. Johnson’s many accounts of the charge, that it was merely a policy to recognize the Twelve as the public face of the Fifty in receiving the charge.⁴⁸ This understanding is also

⁴⁶ *The Saints’ Herold* vol. 26 no. 6 <15 March 1879> page 87.

⁴⁷ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <27 December 1847> page 272-273; published in *Millennial Star* vol. 10 <> page 115.

⁴⁸ Benjamin F. Johnson’s multiple accounts of the Last Charge further demonstrate this policy. While he privately described the last charge being to the entire Council of Fifty in his autobiography, in one public account testified that Joseph “placed upon the shoulders of the Twelve the responsibility of

implied in one of Orson Hyde’s accounts of the Last Charge: “‘Now,’ said he, ‘round up your shoulders and bear off this kingdom.’ **Has he ever said this to anyone else? I do not know; I do not care.** It is enough for me to know that he said it to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.”⁴⁹

However, Brigham’s candid comment in private about the event in response to Orson Hyde raise two big questions about the event. First, was ecclesiastical significance attached to the charge? Second, if an anointing wasn’t mentioned, was there an anointing in connection to the Last Charge?

To answer the first question, I would turn to the fact that virtually every break off from Nauvoo Mormonism tied religious and spiritual authority to the Kingdom of God, and this likely was because the authority the Prophet placed upon them was spiritual. The Council of Fifty minutes themselves indicate that the body in April and May 1844 took a vested interest in spiritual matters — and this continues into 1845 and 1846, wherein the Council of Fifty also took an active role in deliberating on finishing the Nauvoo Temple and Nauvoo House —

bearing off and establishing the Kingdom of God upon the earth,” but then at the end of his letter added “This is my Testimony only in part upon these subjects.” (Benjamin F. Johnson, letter to the *Deseret News*, 29 October 1895; published in *The Historical Writings of Benjamin F. Johnson* pages 405-406) In contrast to this, Benjamin F. Johnson’s private letters more often described the Last Charge as being given to the twelve “in connection” to the Council.

⁴⁹ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 13 <6 October 1869> page 180, emphasis added.

two church projects, and ultimately the Council discussed and decided on who were to be appointed the Trustee-In-Trusts for the Church and its property while as part of the saints preparing for the exodus from Nauvoo. If we had the Utah period minutes, the Joseph Smith Papers editors suggest church matters continue to be actively discussed in that period as well.

William Clayton's December 25, 1846 account of the "charge" to the members of the Kingdom also factors into my perspective. In their volume on the Council of Fifty minutes the Joseph Smith Paper editors wrote:

"The [Last Charge] may have been an extension of the charge relating the history, purpose, and rules of the council that was typically given to new members and that JS may have delivered in this meeting. The most complete recorded version of this charge was written down by Thomas Bullock in December 1846. On that occasion William Clayton related that at the organization of the Council of Fifty, JS stated that the council served two purposes: it was to establish 'the Kingdom spoken of by Daniel' and 'to take from his [JS's] shoulders a great weight of responsibility & place it [on] others'."⁵⁰

If the Council of Fifty minute editors accurately summarized William Clayton's remarks, that the "charge" to members of the Kingdom was two different responsibilities, then Clayton's recollection gives credibility to ecclesiastical views

⁵⁰ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <editors' introduction to the 26 March 1844 meeting> pages 62-63.

of the Kingdom, insofar as establishing the *temporal* Kingdom of Daniel was separate from the “authority” taken off of Joseph’s shoulders and placed upon others.

Such a distinction implies that the authority Joseph gave the Council of Fifty was *both* temporal and ecclesiastical, as virtually all the sources tie the event to conveying ecclesiastical authority. If only we had that Christmas 1846 meeting’s minutes and other Utah period Council of Fifty minutes to shed further light on the matter!

“NO MENTION OF THE ANOINTING”

Probably the best source for answering the ecclesiastical question comes from the answer to the other big question — if Brigham said Joseph “did not mention anything about the anointing”, was there an anointing tied to the events of the Last Charge?

I initially leaned towards there being an anointing, as a variety of sources tie the Charge to ordinance work, as well as a number of independent comments about the Council of Fifty.⁵¹ Rather than quote the same commonly used statements by the Twelve, I’ll instead cite some other witnesses,

⁵¹ Orson Hyde’s earliest remarks describe receiving temple ordinances, specifically an anointing under the hands of Joseph and Hyrum, and this pattern continues to some of the last accounts of it, including Benjamin F. Johnson’s accounts describing priesthood keys conferred before the charge, and and Johnson connecting the two events.

including those opposed to succession to the Twelve, who referenced ordinance work in connection to the Last Charge.

Sidney Rigdon's paper *Latter Day Saint Messenger and Advocate* accepts that ordinance work was given in March 1844 with the comment: "Now, that the sealing power has been committed to certain men in the church supposing we admit" and that "in the month of March, 1844, Smith, by virtue of the power vested in him, delegated the sealing power to B. Young, H. C. Kimball, and others... Now, with these facts before us (for I believe them to be such) I would ask, in the name of the Lord, what is their sealing power worth?" Instead of dismissing the ordinance work done in connection with the Charge to bear off the Kingdom of God, Rigdon stated that it was irrelevant if they rejected his position as Prophet.⁵²

James J. Strang tried to dismiss the significance of the event as well, while accepting it had occurred, conceding that Joseph had given an "endowment of ordinances" "upon some twenty-five men with their wives as he commenced a political career". Strang dismissed any significance of Joseph Smith doing this, writing that if this "vacated his [i.e. Joseph Smith's] office and those of his Counselors and superseded the first Presidency and an entire quorum of the Church it is certainly most extraordinary."⁵³

⁵² *Latter-Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* vol. 1 <15 March 1845> no. 10.

⁵³ An epistle from James J. Strang, 25 December 1845, *The Diamond* page 9. This could be seen as a reference to men in the Holy Order receiving ordinances before the establishment

So the question becomes, what evidence — if any — outside of testimonies connected with the Last Charge is there of ordinance work for the Council of Fifty?

During the trial of Sidney Rigdon, Heber C. Kimball offered an explosive claim that there were more than 30 men who held higher authority than Rigdon — curious, considering there were less than 20 men in the Holy Order who we have record of receiving the Second Anointing in the Prophet’s lifetime — unless, of course, some members of the Council of Fifty also received that ordinance during the events of the Last Charge.⁵⁴

Followers of the Quorum of the Twelve echoed similar claims. Reuben Miller wrote that after the Council of Fifty was organized, men in that organization “were washed and anointed and ordained by the prophets [i.e. Joseph and Hyrum] in person, to high and responsible stations, ministers and servants of the Lord Jesus, in his kingdom on earth.”⁵⁵

John D. Lee in his autobiography wrote that “about forty men” received the Second Anointing

of the Council of Fifty, but tying it to Joseph’s political career and being only a few months prior to the Prophet’s death fits the Last Charge better. “Some twenty-five” appears to be an estimate of those included in the initial March ordinance work, and it could indicate some members of the Fifty who had already received all of their ordinances didn’t re-receive them. The additional detail Strang gives of ‘wives’ receiving ordinance work at this time is an added detail by Strang and an anomaly that I don’t see in other Last Charge sources.

⁵⁴ *Times and Seasons* vol. 5 <8 September 1844> page 663.

⁵⁵ Reuben Miller, “James J Strang, Weighed in the Balance of Truth, And found Wanting” <September 1846> page 12.

— which curiously correlates to the number of men in the Council of Fifty in March 1844.⁵⁶ A new source that has come to light is a letter by a supporter of a Twelve named Elias Adams, who, writing to a relative about the Last Charge being given to the Twelve, explained that Joseph Smith “imparted the Keys of the Kingdom to Fifty — full authority equal with himself”, and on this basis, Brigham Young as the “President of the Fifty” presided.⁵⁷

Using similar language to Elias Adams, Lyman Wight argued that the members of the “Grand Council of the Church” consisting “of Fifty members” were given “full authority to build up the Kingdom of God”.⁵⁸ A late reminiscent account from a Wight supporter confirmed: “[Gideon] Carter said he heard Lyman Wight speak of a Council of Fifty... Wight believed that each of this Council was authorized and empowered to build up a Church in any part of the earth.”⁵⁹

George A. Smith provides a surprising admission to this as well, in a rebuttal to Lyman Wight, trying to downplay Wight’s claims by saying that the “members [of the Council of Fifty] received no more of the Endowment than any other

⁵⁶ John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled* page 169; the additional 13 men were added to the Council of Fifty by Joseph Smith in April and May 1844.

⁵⁷ Elias Adams letter to George Adams, 18 February 1847, LDS Archives.

⁵⁸ Lyman Wight, *An Address to All Believers*; to be published in a future issue of *Doctrine of the Priesthood*.

⁵⁹ *The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon, 1889-1895* <4 April 1894> pages 487-488

people.”⁶⁰ While it is true that if the Fifty received their temple ordinances, they didn’t receive any more than were conferred on the Quorum of the Twelve or others in the Holy Order, he directly downplays and ignores the implication of the Prophet taking this other body through those ordinances also.

So, with all that, seeing that it isn’t completely crazy to believe that there could have been an anointing, do we have any specific examples of ordinance work for any of the 20 members of the Council of Fifty, who were not members of the Holy Order?

GEORGE J. ADAMS

On August 8, 1844, Brigham Young made the first comment explaining the rights of Kings and Priests, saying: “If there is a Spokesman, if he is a King and Priest, let him go and build up a kingdom unto himself; that is his right and it is the right of many here.”⁶¹ Traditionally the reference to “spokesman” has been seen as referring to Sidney Rigdon’s claim to be a “spokesman” for the Prophet; however this statement could also be a reference to the reality that the members of the Council of Fifty were considered “spokesmen” for God, as laid out in the revealed constitution for the body: “Verily thus saith the Lord, yea are my

⁶⁰ Pottawattamie High Council Conference Minutes, 7 October 1848, LDS Archives.

⁶¹ *History of the Church* vol. 7 <8 August 1844> page 235.

constitution, and I am your God, and ye are my spokesman. From henceforth do as I shall command you. Saith the Lord.”⁶²

George J. Adams was one member of the Council of Fifty who wasn’t shy about referencing himself as a “Spokesman and Councilor” to the Prophet.⁶³ George J. Adams, while never a member of the Anointed Quorum, was recognized by followers of Sidney Rigdon as well as by followers of the Twelve as being anointed by the Prophet Joseph Smith. Commenting on Sidney Rigdon and his followers making mocking remarks about George Adams being anointed, William Smith retorted in *The Prophet*:

“From whom did Elder Adams receive his anointing? Was it not from the same one that Mr. Rigdon received his from? Yes! Then what are we to understand from this ridicule and sport made of the ordinances of God’s house? Is not the anointing of Elder Adams as valid as that of Mr. Rigdon? Or does Mr. Rigdon consider it all a farce?”⁶⁴

Rigdonites also indicate that Elder Adams had received “sealing power” among other “keys” in connection to his “commission” from the Prophet.⁶⁵

While Adams wasn’t initiated into the Council of Fifty until April 5, 1844, several weeks

⁶² *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <25 April 1844> page 137.

⁶³ George J. Adams, "To the Saints Scattered Abroad in All the World," *Voree Herald* <July 1846> pages 31–32.

⁶⁴ *The Prophet* vol. 1 <16 November 1844> no. 26.

⁶⁵ *The Latter Day Saint’s Messenger and Advocate* vol. 1 <1 March 1845> no. 9.

after the Last Charge, Joseph Smith expressed his desire to endow the late additions to the Kingdom to priesthood authority. Speaking on the request to send Lyman Wight off on an electioneering campaign he said, “all who could, should go electioneering, but must tarry in Jerusalem until they be endued [i.e. endowed] with power”.⁶⁶

BENJAMIN F. JOHNSON

Benjamin F. Johnson also was a member of the Council of Fifty who was never initiated into the Holy Order, but left testimony in several places indicating he received instruction on temple ordinances and the priesthood keys to them by the Prophet.⁶⁷

JAMES EMMETT

Another member of the Council of Fifty who never was initiated into the Holy Order, but appears to have received some kind of temple ordinance work was James Emmett. Emmett was an early

⁶⁶ For George J. Adams’ being added to the Council of Fifty, see *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <5 April 1844> page 80; for Joseph Smith’s comment, see *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <6 May 1844> page 157, spelling corrected.

⁶⁷ Benjamin F. Johnson indicates a knowledge and participation of priesthood keys to temple ordinances being turned in *My Life’s Review* page 88; Johnson also suggests that keys were turned to the Council of Fifty as a body in connection of the “Last Charge” in his 1903 Letter to George F. Gibbs, LDS Archives, published in *Doctrine of the Priesthood* vol. 7 no. 5 <May 1990>.

member to the Council of Fifty, initiated on March 13, 1844.⁶⁸ If there was ordinance work at the Last Charge, he likely would have been a participant, having been the first Council of Fifty member given an assignment — to do missionary work among the Lamanites.⁶⁹ Validating this, references indicating Emmett received temple ordinance work are repeated made by Heber C. Kimball in 1845 Council of Fifty minutes. Kimball spoke of James Emmett, like Lyman Wight, as holding “kingly authority”, however having stepped out of bounds in breaking from the saints Emmett lost his right to a kingdom as Lucifer did and “it will be given to others who are more worthy.”⁷⁰ In another meeting, discussing the fact that James Emmett had drawn off a party from the church, Kimball commented that “if he goes off and forms himself a Kingdom it will be stripped from him hereafter”, indicating that James Emmett had been given authority as a King and Priest, and was potentially going to utilize it.⁷¹

SIDNEY RIGDON

Another individual who likely received ordinance work in March 1844 as part of the events of the Last Charge was Sidney Rigdon. This is

⁶⁸ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <13 March 1844> page 46.

⁶⁹ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <19 March 1844> page 58.

⁷⁰ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <4 March 1845> page 278.

⁷¹ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <27 February 1845> page 529.

likely the reason why Rigdon did not have any problems believing that others had received temple ordinances in March. This should not be surprising — given that Rigdon was an active participant of the Council of Fifty from his initiation on March 19, 1844.⁷²

But what of statements indicating Rigdon was not involved in the Last Charge? The minutes make no mention of Rigdon during the morning session on March 26, 1844, even though he was an active participant in meetings before and after that meeting — and so if he missed the Last Charge meeting, it appears to have been likely accidental, rather than intentional, and so, being an early member of the Council of Fifty, Rigdon should have received ordinance work privately, prior to this meeting.⁷³

It turns out that Rigdon references receiving ordinance work during one of his talks on the Council of Fifty in the April 1844 conference, declaring “I have a right to proclaim myself a King and a Priest unto the Most High God.”⁷⁴ This is fitting with Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Jedediah Grant, and Wilford Woodruff’s statements that surprisingly indicate that the quorum that W.W.

⁷² *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <19 March 1844> page 50-51.

⁷³ The Joseph Smith Papers editors mention this in *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <26 March 1844> page 62-63, footnote 149.

⁷⁴ Sidney Rigdon Speech, 6 April 1844, printed in *Doctrine of the Priesthood* vol. 7 no. 12 <December 1990> page 67.

Phelps brought Rigdon into to receive his endowment was actually the Council of Fifty.⁷⁵

Now, this statement by Rigdon might be dismissed by some scholars because Phelps, Kimball, and others commented as a matter of fact that Rigdon did not have his Second Anointing.⁷⁶ However, the truth be told, in Joseph Smith's lifetime, the Prophet did in fact anoint and ordain Kings and Priests in the Endowment ceremony, rather than merely only giving an anointing to eventually become as such. It was in this ordination that individuals received the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, the Patriarchal Priesthood, and without such an anointing and ordination an individual did not receive priesthood through the endowment. This isn't to say that the Fullness of the Priesthood was conferred in such an Endowment — only a *portion* of that highest order of priesthood. An individual would receive the rest of the highest order, the *Fullness* of the Priesthood, when they received the Second Anointing.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See Appendix C — Sidney Rigdon brought into the Council of Fifty by W.W. Phelps.

⁷⁶ On August 8, 1844, W.W. Phelps commented: "Elder Rigdon must know how he obtained his Endowment, or what he has; for he has not received all. He did obtain a small part, and I hope he will submit." During the trial of Sidney Rigdon, Heber C. Kimball commented: "He was not in the council pertaining to the High Priesthood until just before he started for Pittsburgh. Brother Phelps was the means of bringing him in, but he has not got the same authority as others; there are more than thirty men who have got higher authority than he has."

⁷⁷ For more on this subject, see *One Eternal Round* issue #1 "The Nauvoo Priesthood Developments" and *One Eternal*

George Miller and Heber C. Kimball both left testimony that the Prophet anointed and ordained them Kings and Priests at the May 4, 1842 meeting.⁷⁸ Later comments in 1843 and 1844 by the Prophet indicate that was still the way he taught the Endowment was to be performed.⁷⁹ At the April 1844 conference he instructed the saints to finish the temple so they could receive “endowments to make kings and priests unto God.”⁸⁰

*Distinguishing Second Anointing Kings and Priests
from First Anointing Kings and Priests*

I believe that in order to differentiate between First Anointing and Second Anointing Kings and Priests, different terminology was used in the Nauvoo period to distinguish the two levels of Kingly and Priestly power.

Round issue #3 “King and Priest Endowments and the Washing of Feet”.

⁷⁸ George Miller letter to the *Northern Islander*, published in *Annual Publications Historical Society of Sothern California* vol. 10 <1917> pages 120-121. Similarly Heber C. Kimball recorded that he was “anointed and sealed and ordained a priest, and so forth” at this meeting. (*Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed 1842 – 1845* pages 4 – 8.)

⁷⁹ During his August 27, 1843 speech, the Prophet indicated Melchizedek anointed Abraham a King and Priest, however Abraham wouldn’t receive the Fullness of the Priesthood, the Sealing Keys of a Kingdom of Endless Life, until he offered up Isaac. (*Words of Joseph Smith* page 244 – 246)

⁸⁰ Joseph Smith on April 8, 1844 speaks upon finishing the temple for the saints to be able to receive an “endowment to make K[ings] & P[riests] unto the Most H[igh] G[od].” (*Words of Joseph Smith* page 362.)

The term “Prophet, Priest, and King”, while used in a context to reference the One Anointed and Appointed who administers in all the ordinances of the Kingdom of God, also was utilized to reference the Second Anointing.

It also appears that they used the term “Priest” to recognize a first anointing, and “King” to reference the Second Anointing. Heber C. Kimball used this language when specifically referencing his ordination at the May 4, 1842 meeting as being “ordained a priest and so forth.”⁸¹ Joseph Smith himself utilized this language when he said he was advancing “from prophet to priest & then to King; not to the kingdoms of this earth but of the Most High God.”⁸² Willard Richards noted in a letter to Brigham Young that the Prophet “did not tell them he was going to be a priest now, nor a King by and by.”⁸³ William Clayton also references this language when he recorded the week after the Prophet’s Second Anointing that Joseph told him he had been anointed “King”.⁸⁴

And so Sidney Rigdon preached at the April conference “I have a right to proclaim myself a King and Priest unto the Most High God. Yet I will not transgress your laws. But don’t do as they did in Missouri and kill people because they would not break the law. I don’t want any office in this

⁸¹ *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed, 1842 – 1845* page 4.

⁸² *Words of Joseph Smith* <23 July 1843> page 234.

⁸³ Letter of Willard Richards to Brigham Young, published in *Words of Joseph Smith* <16 July 1843> page 233.

⁸⁴ William Clayton Diary entry, 19 October 1843, published in *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed* page 27.

government, for I am determined to be a King in the Kingdom of God.”⁸⁵ In essence, he was saying he received a King and Priest Endowment — he was a “Priest” in the Holy Order, — but that he still aspired to the office of the Second Anointing King and Priest — a “King” in the Kingdom of God.

Brigham Young’s speech on August 8, 1844 as well as his statements on September 8, 1844 at Sidney Rigdon’s excommunication trial also indirectly affirm that Rigdon was a King and Priest, even though Rigdon did not yet hold the Fulness of the Priesthood as a “Prophet, Priest, and King”. Brigham said that it was Kings and Priests who could form themselves a kingdom, and repeated on both occasions that Rigdon had been sent to Pittsburg to do so.⁸⁶

But what of Sidney Rigdon’s initiation into the Holy Order on May 11, 1844?⁸⁷ Most accounts of the Last Charge only indicate an anointing

⁸⁵ Sidney Rigdon Speech, 6 April 1844, printed in *Doctrine of the Priesthood* vol. 7 no. 12 <December 1990> page 67.

⁸⁶ Brigham Young commented on August 8, 1844: “We feel as though we could take Brother Rigdon in our bosom along with us; we want such a man as Brother Rigdon. He has been sent away by Brother Joseph to build up a kingdom; let him keep the instructions and calling; let him raise up a mighty kingdom in Pittsburg, and we will lift up his hands to Almighty God.” (*History of the Church* vol. 7 page 249)

During the Trial of Sidney Rigdon John Taylor stated “Elder Rigdon was appointed by President Smith to go to Pittsburgh and build up a church.” Brigham Young more explicitly stated “His orders were to go to Pittsburgh and build up a kingdom.” (*Doctrine of the Priesthood: The Trial of Sidney Rigdon* page 34, page 51.)

⁸⁷ *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed* <11 May 1844> page 75.

conferring priesthood keys under the hands of Joseph and Hyrum, rather than the full endowment ceremony with signs, tokens, the creation play, etc. Sidney Rigdon was probably initiated into the Holy Order in May 1844 to receive a full endowment with the signs, tokens and keywords, while in March he had only received his washing and anointing, whereby Joseph Smith ordained him a King and Priest and conferred upon him the “keys and power” pertaining to that office.

SUMMARY

The evidence appears compelling that there was in fact an anointing associated with the Last Charge, wherein the Prophet empowered the Council of Fifty with the “keys and power” mentioned in the initial revelation naming the organization: “The Kingdom of God and His Laws with the Keys and Power thereof, and Judgment in the Hands of His Servants, Ahman Christ.”⁸⁸

The available evidence indicates that when Brigham Young commented that Joseph “made no mention of the anointing”, Brigham was not saying there was no anointing in connection with the Last Charge — but indicated that the ordinance had occurred at a separate meeting or meetings, rather than at the official meeting of the Council of Fifty on March 26, 1844.

⁸⁸ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <14 March 1844> page 48

This can be seen from Benjamin F. Johnson’s accounts that indicate that the “keys of power” were turned shortly before the Last Charge, yet still connected to the event. This serves as an explanation of the discrepancy in Orson Hyde dating the Last Charge to March 23rd in one of his accounts — March 23rd could have very well been one of the days the Prophet did perform a “holy anointing” to confer the keys of the priesthood upon the members of the Council of Fifty, to be the presiding quorum over the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Following the Prophet conferring these keys and power to the members of the Kingdom, at the next Council of Fifty meeting he reviewed his life and labors, and told them that he had given them everything necessary to perpetuate the Kingdom of God according to the pattern he had been given.

Appendix A — A Special Charge to the Twelve?

A variety of post-martyrdom sources suggest or state that the Twelve were given a special commission as a body, possibly at the Last Charge, and these sources are worth mentioning in this paper. Heber C. Kimball said “I bear testimony of what brother Joseph said on the stand at Nauvoo, and I presume hundreds here can bear witness of the same. Said he, ‘These men that are set here behind me on this stand, I have conferred upon them all the power, Priesthood, and authority that God ever conferred upon me.’ There are hundreds present this day who heard him utter words to that effect, more than once.”⁸⁹ Brigham likewise recalled “Joseph more than one score of times told [the Apostles] both in private and in public, that he rolled the Kingdom on to their shoulders.”⁹⁰ George Q. Cannon testified that though he was but a boy, he remembered the prophet declare as much.⁹¹

While some authors have taken these statements as being connected to the Last Charge, there is a distinction — Heber C. Kimball wasn’t saying the Last Charge was publicly proclaimed by Joseph, but that the Twelve had been given all their temple ordinances, conferring upon them all the keys of the priesthood, was publicly proclaimed.

⁸⁹ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 1 <8 October 1852> page 206.

⁹⁰ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <7 October 1866> page 2379.

⁹¹ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 23 <29 October 1882> page 363.

While it may or may not have happened (no contemporary records exist recording it), I lean towards Joseph making such comments. It is likely for this reason the Twelve were in a better position than any other members of the Council of Fifty to step forward and lead the Church. Brigham proclaiming they had been “ordained and anointed to bear off the keys of the kingdom of God in all the world” would wield greater credibility if the audience was merely being reminded of what they already knew, rather than being told new information; and indeed, the saints found Brigham’s arguments persuasive.

These types of comments by the apostles and their supporters have led some to entertain the possibility that the Twelve were singled out in some way at the Last Charge, or received a separate charge in a different setting. However, if that were the case, why didn’t Brigham just reference the correct meeting and charge in response to Orson Hyde, rather than correcting that Joseph said the Last Charge was to “this Council of Fifty”? Tellingly, Orson Pratt did not like the mention of “the anointing” in connection with the Last Charge. He wanted it be corrected in the certificate to say that the Twelve “had the same authority before the time referred to in the document”, as the apostles had received their Second Anointings in January 1844, two months prior to the Council of Fifty receiving their temple ordinances in March.⁹²

⁹² Orson Pratt comment in *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <25 March 1845> page 379; For a record of the Twelve’s Second Anointings, see Signature Book’s volume edited by

Brigham Young, while acknowledging the events of the charge, did not want it published. Instead of Joseph saying that “Upon the shoulders of the Twelve must the responsibility of leading this church hence forth rest” as Orson Hyde recalled, Brigham corrected: “he said it was this council of fifty which had to bear the responsibility of establishing the kingdom in all the world.”⁹³ Brigham’s private correction of Hyde’s views — that it wasn’t to the Twelve but to the Fifty, settles the debate. If Brigham did not see the Last Charge as having any special significance exclusive to the Twelve, then any statements to the contrary were fabrications to boost the Twelve’s authority claims, nothing more, nothing less. The Last Charge did not glorify the Twelve, and so Brigham did not like basing the Twelve’s succession claims on it. As Lyman Wight correctly testified, “the twelve were but twelve of fifty”, who were commissioned to carry out Joseph’s measures to perpetuate the Kingdom of God. But as Orson Hyde said, when he implied others had received a charge as well, what mattered to the apostles was that they endeavored to fulfill their calling.

Devery Anderson and Gary Bergera, *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed, 1842-1845, A Documentary History* pages 52–63.

⁹³ Orson Hyde, Certificate about the Twelve, circa March 1845, LDS Archives; ⁹³ Brigham Young in *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <25 March 1845> page 380

Appendix B — The Council of Fifty’s Authority to Test Revelations

Joseph Smith taught that the Nauvoo period temple ordinances led to greater authority and ability to receive revelation and commune with God. Bathsheba W. Smith testified that “When speaking in one of our general fast meetings, he [Joseph Smith] said that we did not know how to pray to have our prayers answered. But when I and my husband had our endowments...Joseph Smith presiding, he taught us the [true] order of prayer”.⁹⁴ On another occasion Joseph stated “I want every man that goes [west] to be a king and priest. When he gets on the mountain he may want to talk with his God.”⁹⁵ As he had written two years earlier, “For him to whom these keys [of Elijah] are given there is no difficulty in obtaining” revelation.⁹⁶ Similarly, Orson Hyde commented that “the word of God comes to all [who are] kings and priests.”⁹⁷

This ability and authority is mentioned in the Council of Fifty minutes. Joseph Smith wanted members to be able to seek light and knowledge from God, “droppings...from the presence of God”,⁹⁸ and bring it to him and the rest of the body.

⁹⁴ *Juvenile Instructor* vol. 27 <1 June 1892> page 345.

⁹⁵ *History of the Church* vol. 6 <23 February 1844> page 224; Joseph Smith journal, 23 February 1844, *Joseph Smith Papers, Journals* vol. 3 page 182.

⁹⁶ D&C 128: <6 September 1842> verses 10-11.

⁹⁷ *Millennial Star* vol. 9 <15 January 1847> page 24.

⁹⁸ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <11 April 1844> pages 92-93. Credit goes to Johnny Stephenson for pointing out this

This is evident in the process by which the drafted Constitution for the Council was brought about: A committee was selected, and the draft presented to the body read as though it was almost as if a first person revelation from God. Joseph Smith ended up receiving a simpler revelation regarding the Kingdom's constitution: "Verily thus saith the Lord, yea are my constitution, and I am your God, and ye are my spokesmen. From henceforth do as I shall command you."⁹⁹

This is also born out in discussion of the nature of the organization. In discussing "the dividing line between the 'kingdom of God,' and 'the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints'," Willard Richards didn't want the Chairman to just give an explanation of what the Council of Fifty was, but wanted "the council to tell it," and so the Council deliberated upon the matter until Joseph Smith as chairman explained that the Kingdom was a distinct organization of the Church.¹⁰⁰

Brigham Young also brought his doctrinal revelation that "we are in Eternity, [and] the Millennium has now commenced" to the body of the Council of Fifty before presenting it to the Church.¹⁰¹ Two years later, he presented "The Word

statement, as I had glossed over the significance of this comment by Joseph on the subject.

⁹⁹ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <25 April 1844> page 137.

¹⁰⁰ *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <18 April 1844> page 121, 128-129.

¹⁰¹ See *Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <27 February 1845> page 533. This doctrine was publicly announced at the

and Will of the Lord”, now canonized in D&C 136, to the Council of Fifty the day after receiving it — before presenting it to High Council or other quorums.¹⁰²

From the real world contemporary evidence of the Fifty receiving revelations, it isn’t surprising that multiple independent sources identify a function of the Fifty was to test and approve revelations before they were to be presented to the Church.

Almon Babbitt in the Council of Fifty minutes commented that “When a revelation comes from the proper source that is the law to him, but he understands that when a subject is presented before this council we have to investigate it and when we agree upon it that is a revelation; that is the mind of God”.¹⁰³ Babbitt believed the revelations given to the body by the “proper source” — the Prophet, Priest, and King over the Council¹⁰⁴ — were “law” without question, however the Council held the prerogative to investigate matters and when they came to a consensus was “the mind of God”. The minutes record no one objecting or correcting his

following conference, see *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <6 April 1845> page 80.

¹⁰² I am not sure what original source Quinn cites for this, but he includes this in his timeline at the end of *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* pages 657–658.

¹⁰³ *Council of Fifty Minutes* <11 March 1845> page 307.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Smith told the council on April 18, 1844: “It is not wisdom to use the term ‘king’ all the while. Let us use the term ‘proper source’ instead of ‘king’ and it will be all understood and no person can take advantage.” (*Nauvoo Council of Fifty Minutes* <18 April 1844> page 128).

claim ascribing the authority to test revelations to the body.

Later, Peter Haws and James Whitehead also asserted that the Council of Fifty was a quorum where revelations were to be tested and approved before being brought before the Church, Peter Haws commenting that “no Revelation could be given as a command to the Church without the sanction of the Fifty.”¹⁰⁵ Almost identically, James Whitehead, described the Council of Fifty as the ultimate head of Church government stated that “no revelation or law could go to the church without being presented to and sanctioned by this body of fifty.”¹⁰⁶

George A. Smith responded to Peter Haws by imply he incorrectly mixed the authority of the Holy Order with the Fifty; and that in actually the Holy Order was the body to test revelations, not the Fifty: “There was a Quorum organized by Joseph where the truth of every document, professing to be revelation could be tested. That Quorum had no members in it but those who held the Priesthood; but not so, with the ‘Fifty.’ It had members in it who did not belong to the Church.”¹⁰⁷

However, it seems unlikely Whitehead was conflating the Fifty with the Holy Order, as in another place testifying of the Holy Order as a

¹⁰⁵ *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History* page 188; George A. Smith was utilizing the fact that three gentiles had limited participation in the body to create ambiguity and doubt as to whether the Council had any spiritual authority, to undermine claims by other Council of Fifty members that priesthood authority was held by the body.

¹⁰⁶ *Saints’ Herald* vol. 26 no. 6 <15 March 1879> page 87.

¹⁰⁷ *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History* page 189

“High Council” as “**one** of the quorums that God gave through Joseph for the protection of the church from false spirits and false revelations” indicating more than one body was delegated this authority — i.e. both the Holy Order *and* the Council of Fifty were given it.¹⁰⁸

While I have no doubt that the Holy Order was told they were a body of saints to test revelations — utilizing the priesthood keys and power they received in the Nauvoo temple ordinances, — the reality is that as a quorum, the Holy Order ceased to exist as a body after December 1845 when the Nauvoo Temple endowments began.¹⁰⁹ I see no reason that this body — if intended to be a permanent body to test revelations before being presented to the church — would cease to exist, unless another quorum was intended to fulfill that responsibility. It is therefore my view, that this responsibility, while originally placed upon the Holy Order, was passed onto the Council of Fifty as a *further development* of the Holy Order and the higher order of the Melchizedek priesthood.

¹⁰⁸ *Vision: A Magazine for Youth* vol. 1 <22 May 1887> page 202, emphasis added. Whitehead’s comment that this quorum ceased existing around the time the apostles began to institute the Law of Adoption and solicit for adopted sons (i.e. winter 1845-1846), fitting with the reality that the Anointed Quorum ceased to exist as a body after the Nauvoo Temple was completed and the saints at large began to receive their endowments.

¹⁰⁹ “... [when the] Temple was finished, at which time the Anointed Quorum stopped meeting as a separate body...” (*Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed*, editors’ introduction)

While we don't seem to see any regular prayer circle meetings of the Kingdom of God on the Trek westward, we do have one recorded instance where the members of the Council of Fifty gathered together and utilized their temple priesthood in True Order of Prayer. William Clayton recorded:

“Soon afterwards all the members of the Council of Fifty or Kingdom of God in the camp except Brother Thomas Bullock, went onto the bluffs and selecting a small circular, level spot, surrounded by bluffs, and out of sight, we clothed ourselves in the priestly garments and offered up prayer to God, for ourselves, this Camp, and all pertaining to it, the brethren in the army, our families and all the Saints, President Young being mouth.”¹¹⁰

To a degree, this authority to accept and approve revelations is also seen exercised when John Taylor revived the Council in the 1880s. John Henry Smith recorded that on June 27, 1882 that in the Council of Fifty “two revelations were accepted as the word and will of God. They were given through President John Taylor, and in the same the Lord has promised to fight our battles for us.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ William Clayton's entry, as well as Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith's recordings of this meeting, can be found in *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History* <30 May 1847> pages 131-133. I have been told second hand that other prayer circles are documented in the post-Nauvoo Council of Fifty minutes, and that this temple ritual is one of the reasons the LDS Church is reluctant to publish the Utah minutes.

¹¹¹ John Henry Smith diary June 27, 1880, as quoted in *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History* page 298.

Appendix C – Sidney Rigdon brought into the Council of Fifty by W.W. Phelps

The context of Sidney Rigdon receiving his Endowment provides further validation that the ordinance work he received was in connection with the Council of Fifty. As W.W. Phelps explained on August 8, 1844: “I want to say that there is a Quorum that the Twelve belong to, and that the people will receive an Endowment. I brought President Rigdon into that same Quorum, and he did receive in part the blessings. I could not bear the thought of President Rigdon going into the world without his Endowment. Elder Rigdon must know how he obtained his Endowment, or what he has; for he has not received it all. He did obtain a small part, and I hope he will submit.”¹¹²

Many scholars view this “Quorum” as a reference to the Holy Order, however, statements by Jedediah M. Grant and Orson Hyde suggested that the quorum Rigdon actually was brought into by Phelps was the Council of Fifty. Near the end of 1844, Grant wrote a pamphlet going into Rigdon’s history, wherein he wrote:

“Last Spring, Elder W. W. Phelps, prevailed on Elder Rigdon, to go with him and attend the councils of Elder J. Smith, he went, and after listening to the instructions and viewing the order of the council, and the manifestations of the power of God through Elder J. Smith, he leaped for joy, and walked the room as sprightly as a boy in his gayest frolics. Exclaiming,

¹¹² *History of the Church* vol. 7 <8 August 1844> page 238.

“Joseph! Joseph! Thou servant of the most High God, I will never leave nor forsake thee, for mine eyes now see what Kings and Prophets desired to see and hear. But they fell asleep to rest in hope of what mine ears hear and mine eyes see. Brother Joseph you have tried to shake me off for several years, but you cannot do it, I will hold on to the skirts of your garment, I am now determined never to let you go.” His visits to the councils revived him up so much, that he spoke at the April Conference, several times, with considerable spirit and energy.”¹¹³

Similarly, Orson Hyde wrote:

“In the month of March, 1844, Mr. Rigdon appeared in council, and Joseph Smith was present. It was in the upper room in the brick building situated in Water-street, commonly known as Joseph’s Store. Mr. Rigdon there received an explanation of many important matters connected with the kingdom of God: after which, he began to speak, then to shout, then to dance, and threw his feet so high that he lost his balance, and came well nigh falling over backwards upon the stove. His language was something like the following: — “Glory to God and the Lamb! Hallelujah to Jesus! that mine eyes have seen this day; and thanks to my brethren that I have been permitted to enter here; for I perceive that God is here with you in power and glory!” He expressed to me at his own house, but a day or two after, his entire satisfaction with Joseph as a man of God, and also his approbation of the course of the church and council. He was so extravagant in his shoutings in that council, that most of the members hung their heads. I also thought to

¹¹³ Jedediah M. Grant, *Rigdon, Number One, A Collection of Facts Relative to the Course Taken by Elder Sidney Rigdon*, page 16.

myself that he shouted too loud to shout long. When a tune reaches the highest notes it very soon turns.”¹¹⁴

It is apparent from Orson Hyde’s statement that the council W.W. Phelps brought Rigdon into, where he went overboard in excitement, occurred in March, the month Rigdon was initiated into the Council of Fifty, rather than May, the month Rigdon was initiated into the Holy Order; and both Hyde and Grant make comments alluding that this council in question was the Council of Fifty.

Heber C. Kimball also described that Rigdon “was not in the council pertaining to the High Priesthood until just before he started for Pittsburgh. Brother Phelps was the means of bringing him in, but he has not got the same authority as others; there are more than thirty men who have got higher authority than he has.”¹¹⁵ This statement, like Phelps’ August 8, 1844 comment, is often taken as a reference to the Holy Order. But, rather than more than “thirty men”, there were less than 20 men in the Holy Order who had received their Second Anointing. However, if as part of the Last Charge to the Council of Fifty, most of the Fifty were given their temple ordinances, this would perfectly fit Heber C. Kimball’s remarks.

¹¹⁴ Speech of Elder Orson Hyde, Delivered before the High Priests’ Quorum, in Nauvoo, April 27th, 1845, Upon the Course and Conduct of Mr. Sydney Rigdon, and Upon the Merits of His Claims to the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, pages 8–9.

¹¹⁵ “The Trial of Sidney Rigdon”, *Times and Seasons* vol. 5 <8 September 1844> page 663.

The statement clearly pinpointing which organization W.W. Phelps initiated Sidney Rigdon into is found in Woodruff's written statement against Rigdon: "It is true, that Elder Rigdon attended some of the councils that President Smith held with the *Twelve and others*, before his death, while giving them instructions; but **I heard President Smith say that he came in without his wish or invitation, as he had no confidence in him.**"¹¹⁶

Wilford Woodruff and W. W. Phelps were present and around for the meetings of the Council of Fifty when Rigdon was initiated. However, Woodruff left on his mission to the East on May 9, 1844 two days prior to Rigdon's formal admission to the Holy Order on May 11, 1844, writing in his journal: "I took the parting hand with my family & left Nauvoo in company with Elders G. A. Smith J. M. Grant and Ezra Thayer and son." He later added to this journal entry: "I this day took the last Parting hand & look with the Prophet and Patriarch at their own dwellings. Oh what a look Joseph gave me. Ah he knew what I did not."¹¹⁷ Woodruff simply never spoke to the Prophet again, meaning that that the council he heard "President Smith say he came in without [Joseph's] wish or invitation" had to be the Council of Fifty, as Orson Hyde, Heber C. Kimball, and Jedediah M. Grant indicated.

¹¹⁶ Woodruff's epistle "To the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, Greeting," written October 11, 1844, was published in *Times and Seasons* volume 5 <2 November 1844> page 698, emphasis added.

¹¹⁷ *Wilford Woodruff Journal* vol. 2 <9 May 1844> page 394.

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