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Chapter Eight
Thy Kingdom Come . . . in Texas

An express has just arrived here from the city of Mexico, bringing the important intelligence that JOE SMITH, the celebrated Mormon Prophet, of the Latter-day Saints, has concluded a treaty with President Santa Anna for the purchase of Texas.

news parody in Lee County (Iowa) Democrat, January 20, 1844

It would seem that the entire Indian tribes, and their vast territories, were already under his jurisdiction in a great measure, and ready to cooperate with him, and that some of our western states, together with Texas and Mexico were in a fair way to strike hands politically at least with the Prophet.

Boston Correspondent to The Prophet (New York City) May, 1844

“What I have said in my ‘Views’ in relation to the annexation of Texas is with some unpopular,” Joseph continued in his remarks before the Temple Committee on the afternoon of March 7. Everyone in attendance knew the Texas question was one of the major issues in the 1844 presidential campaign. “They object to Texas on account of slavery;” Joseph pointed out. The first American settlers in Texas were slave owners. If admitted to the Union, Texas would more than likely become a slave state. Northern Whigs were opposed to annexation on this ground alone. “Why, it is the very reason she ought to be received,” Joseph countered, “so that we may watch over them; for, of the two evils, we should reject the greatest.” (The “two evils” were slavery and the prospect of Texas becoming a British colony. Joseph thought the two problems could be resolved.)

1. Anonymous satirical letter to the editor Lee County Democrat (Fort Madison, Iowa Territory), 20 January 1844.
“Governor Houston of Texas, says—‘if you refuse to receive us into the United States, we must go to the British Government for protection,’ he noted. “It will be more honorable for us,” Joseph proposed, “to receive Texas and set the negroes free, and use the negroes and Indians against our foes. Don’t let Texas go . . . How much better it is for the nation to bear a little expense than to have the Indians and British upon us and destroy us all. We should grasp all the territory we can . . . The South holds the balance of power,” Joseph went on. “By annexing Texas, I can do away with this evil [slavery]. As soon as Texas was annexed, I would liberate the slaves in two or three [southern] States, indemnifying their owners, and send the [free] negroes to Texas, and from Texas to Mexico, where all colors are alike. And if that was not sufficient, I would call upon Canada, and annex it.”

Joseph’s solution to the Texas problem was suggested, in part, by a letter he had received from Elders Lyman Wight and George Miller, writing from Black River Falls, Wisconsin Territory, informing the prophet of their success in cutting timber for the Nauvoo temple. “We can deliver in Nauvoo about one million feet of lumber by the last of July next,” they wrote, “which will be a great deal more than what is necessary.”

Conditions in the pineries were unsettled. Mormon loggers had disputes with the local Indian agent, “a gruff, austere man,” who was “determined to stop all trespassing on Indian lands.” Wight and Miller were confident they could induce the Indians to “sell their lands to the United States, and go to a climate southwest (all according to the policy of the U.S. Government).” They proposed to “go to the table-lands of Texas, to a point we may find to be the most eligible, [and] there locate.” This Texas sanctuary, they suggested, would become “a place of gathering for all the South (they being incumbered with that unfortunate race of beings, the negroes); and for us to employ our time and talents in gathering together means to build according to the commandments of our God, and spread the Gospel to the nations according to the will of our Heavenly Father.”

Members of the Anointed Quorum (and others) were organized into a new administrative structure beginning on March 10. One participant described the new body as “the perfect organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on earth . . . with full authority to build up the Kingdom of God on earth, that his will might be done on earth as in heaven—The Kingdom thus being established.” The body was charged with preparing the way for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Distinct from the Mormon Church, this secret organization became known by its members (and those close to the inner workings of the organization) as the Kingdom of God, the Grand Council, or the Council of Fifty. “And from day to day

4. Smith, _American Prophet’s Record_, 456 [6 March 1844]. Smith, _History of the Church_ 6:243–44. Smith, _American Prophet’s Record_, 457 [6 March 1844]. See also Woodruff, _Journals_ 2:358 [7 March 1844]. Hill, “The Manipulation of History,” 99, concluded, “Joseph Smith was, therefore, to some degree a racist, a segregationist, a colonizer, and only incidentally a supporter of abolition. He had some elements of liberalism in his thinking, but these had definite limits. His record, like Jefferson’s and Lincoln’s, is marked by ambiguity.”

[the prophet] called some of the brethren about him, organizing them as princes in the kingdom of God, until the number of fifty-three were thus called.6

Joseph Smith was the standing chairman. Membership in the spring of 1844 included the First Presidency of the Church (with the notable exception of renegade counselor William Law, who earlier had opposed Joseph and Hyrum’s political manipulation of the 1843 election), the Council of the Twelve Apostles, and several non-Mormons. As one member later explained, “there may be men acting as officers of the Kingdom of God who will not be members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.” Although the number of non-Mormons in the Council of Fifty never amounted to more than tokenism, their presence within the Kingdom of God served two important symbolic functions. First, it supported the idea that the Council of Fifty was to be representative of all peoples, ultimately to become a worldwide political body. And, second, the organization of the Council allowed the Latter-day Saints to maintain the public fiction that they advocated the American ideal of the separation of church and state.7

The deliberations of the political Kingdom of God were to be confidential. One member recorded a line later struck out: “Joseph required perfect secrecy of them.” This “perfect secrecy” was an oath-bound allegiance; the penalty for revealing decisions made by the secret council to outsiders was the prospect of a horrible death. The Council of Fifty oath reinforced promises of confidentiality previously made by many of the men. A number of its members were former Danites, an organization that had administered its own oath of secrecy. Likewise the large number of Freemasons in the council would have found the oath similar to promises made during their Masonic initiations, not to mention the covenant of secrecy entered into during the Mormon endowment ceremony.8

Journal entries describing the proceedings of the Council of Fifty were frequently disguised by their authors, some referring to the body as the K. of G., Council of L, or the Council of YTFIF. In his record of the March 10 organizational meeting kept for Joseph Smith, Willard Richards reversed the letters in certain key words to produce phrases which, it was hoped, would be nonsensical to an uninitiated reader. As noted, the meeting was prompted by the aforementioned letter received from Lyman Wight and George Miller,

6. George Miller to The Northern Islander, 27 June 1855, in Miller, Correspondence, 20 (called quote). Wight, An Address, 3 (established quote).

7. Quinn, Origins of Power, 122. Apostle George Q. Cannon’s full comment: “We are asked, Is the Church of God, and the Kingdom of God the same organization? And we are informed that some of the brethren hold that they are separate. This is the correct view to take. The Kingdom of God is a separate organization from the Church of God. There may be men acting as officers in the Kingdom of God who will not be members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” in Smith, History of the Church 7:382.

8. Smith, American Prophet’s Record, 459 [10 March 1844], also cited in Quinn, Origins of Power, 128. It is possible that the strikeout was inserted when the minutes were prepared for publication as part of the Joseph Smith History. Note similarly, Davis, Authentic Account, 7, “[Joseph] further impressed upon the council crowning him, that God’s desire was, as revealed to him, (Joe,) that, for the time being, this was to remain a perfect secret until God should reveal to the contrary. And accordingly Joe swore them all to present secrecy, under penalty of death!” Davis’s source was an unidentified disaffected member of the Council. See also Hansen, Quest for Empire, 69–71.
about removing to the table lands of ——— /Saxet / &c. &c . . . Joseph asked, can this council keep what I say, not make it public, all held up their hands . . . Copy the constitution of the U.S. [blank space] [placed in the] hands of a select committee [as a guide for drafting the constitution for the council][one blank line] No laws can be enacted but what every man can be protected. [several lines left blank] Grant their petition, go ahead concerning the Indians and the Southern states &c [several lines left blank] . . . Send 25 men by /the yrenip [Pinery]/through to Santa Fe /Atnas Eef / &c, and if ——— /Notsuoh/ will embrace the gospel [...] [several lines left blank] [We] can amend that [Texas] constitution and make it the voice of Jehovah and shame the U. S.9

The objectives of the theocratic body were political. George Miller, an early member of the Council of Fifty, recorded that if Joseph Smith was elected president in 1844 the Mormons “would at once establish dominion in the United States.” If the political contest was not successful, the Saints would send a representative to the Republic of Texas, “to make a treaty with the Cabinet of Texas for all that country north of a west line from the falls of the Colorado River to the Nueces; thence down the same to the Gulf of Mexico, and along the same to Rio Grande, and up the same to the United States territory, and get them to acknowledge us as a nation.”10

Lucian Woodworth was “sent out on a mission” on March 14 as a secret ambassador from the Council of Fifty to the Republic of Texas. He was to enter into negotiations with General Sam Houston for the establishment of a Mormon kingdom within the confines of the Republic. Fewer than two weeks later the Council of Fifty approved a lengthy memorial to the U.S. Congress requesting permission for Joseph Smith to raise “a company of one hundred thousand armed volunteers in the United States and [its] Territories” in order to “extend the arm of deliverance to Texas [and other frontier regions] to prevent the crowned nations [Spain and England] from encircling us as a nation on our western and southern borders.” An envoy from the Council of Fifty, with a duplicate request addressed to the president of the U.S., would depart for the nation’s capital in early April.11

Beneath the bold proclamation “FOR PRESIDENT, GEN. JOSEPH SMITH, NAUVOO, ILLINOIS,” the March 15 issue of Times and Seasons provided the first public communications alluding to the recent deliberations within the political Kingdom of God. An editorial, written by John Taylor, a member of the Council of the Twelve and the Council of Fifty, was on the topic of “Religion and Politics.”


10. George Miller to The Northern Islander 27 June 1855, in Miller, Correspondence, 20.

Either God has something to do in our national affairs, or he has not . . . By a careful perusal of the scriptures . . . we shall find that God in ancient days had as much to do with governments, kings and kingdoms, as he ever had to do with religion. The Jews, as a nation, were under the direct government of heaven, and not only had they judges and kings anointed of God, and set apart by him; but their laws were given them of God . . . Certainly if any person ought to interfere in political matters it should be those whose minds and judgments are influenced by correct principles—religious as well as political.

“Our revelations tell us to seek diligently for good and wise men,” Taylor concluded, citing a revelation received by Joseph Smith in 1833. He issued an appeal:

No one can be more fit for the task [of president of the U.S.] than Gen. Joseph Smith: he is wise, prudent, faithful, energetic and fearless; he is a virtuous man and a philanthropist; if we want to find out who he is, his past history shows his indomitable perseverance, and proves him to be a faithful friend, and a man of exalted genius, and sterling integrity; whilst his public addresses and views, as published to the world, prove him to be a patriot and a statesman.

Let every man then that hates oppression, and loves the cause of right, not only vote himself; but use his influence to obtain the votes of others, that we may by every legal means support that man whose election will secure the greatest amount of good to the nation at large.12

The same issue of Times and Seasons included correspondence addressed to the editor of the Quincy Whig in response to an article critical of the Mormons copied from Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune. The letter was even more direct than Taylor’s editorial by its assertion that the Kingdom of God would not simply “triumph over the state.” The writer reminded his readers that “There is one God who presides over the destinies of all nations and individuals, both religiously and politically.” Those who pray “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,”

virtually asks God to destroy the distinction of Church and State on earth; for that distinction is not recognized in heaven. With God, politics and religion are both one . . . He also prays that God may establish a government on the earth like that in heaven, and that “the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.” The Church [of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] must not triumph over the state, but actually swallow it up like Moses’ rod swallowed up the rods of the Egyptians. If this be not so, the kingdom of God can never come.

The letter was signed “A Friend to the Mormons.”13

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“We have supplied ourselves with [the] Tribune’s Mill Boy, Olive Branch, Whig Almanac &c, and have begun to campaign vigorously,” William D. Abernethy reported to John J. Hardin (then still in Washington) on March 19. Abernethy was a Clay Club organizer and anti-Mormon from Augusta, in southeastern Hancock County. They still needed copies of The Junius Tracts.

“Our Clay Pole is nearly ready to go up,” he said. “The old Whigs of 1840 are all here & a good crop of young ones [are] all ready to do their duty next fall... The Whigs are active, full of zeal and united. The other party, here as elsewhere, [is] divided, cross and discouraged... They will not be able to rally much till after the nomination and if VB [Van Buren] is the man, many in this region will not vote. Others will support Mr. Clay.” Developments in Nauvoo made it extremely unlikely that the Latter-day Saints would vote for Clay. “Our Mormon neighbors cannot be relied on,” Abernethy concluded. “Joe is a candidate for President. He will not support Mr. Clay & cannot go for Van Buren. They may yet have a Revelation to go for the Locos, they are inclined that way but have a great dislike to VB.” Unless a Democratic candidate were put forward who was more to the Mormon’s liking than Van Buren, a Whig victory was still possible. “If the Mormons do not join the Locos in Nov[ember] I think the Whigs can carry the State.”

The time had come for the Whigs to once again play a more active role in influencing the Mormon vote. An opportunity presented itself with the anticipated completion of the Masonic hall in Nauvoo.

Long an opponent to Mormon Freemasonry, the worshipful master of the Bodley Lodge reported that “the Nauvoo Lodges [are] working and finishing their hall, notwithstanding their dispensations had been withdrawn by the Grand Lodge.” And, contrary to Masonic law, those contraband Mormon lodges had persisted in “receiving, passing and raising Masons.” There were several reasons for concern. In addition to the fact that the Mormon lodges were openly defying the authority of the Illinois Grand Lodge, itself founded on shaky ground at Jacksonville in 1840, some feared the Mormons might take the next logical step, which was to either dominate the Illinois Grand Lodge or establish their own Grand Lodge (with Hyrum Smith as Grand Master) in direct competition with the Jacksonville body. After all, by 1844 more than two-thirds of the Masons in the state were Latter-day Saints.

In a “Masonic Notice” dated March 13, 1844, (signed by William Clayton as secretary of the Nauvoo Lodge, who was also Joseph’s private secretary and clerk of the Council of Fifty) the Nauvoo Lodge announced “to the Masonic world that they have fixed on Friday the 5th day of April, for the dedication of their Masonic Hall, to take place at 1 o’clock P.M. All worthy brethren of the fraternity who feel interested in the cause, are requested to participate with us in the ceremonies of dedication,” one day before the annual general conference of the church.

15. Minutes of the Bodley Lodge, 1 April 1844, quoted in Carr, Freemasonry and Nauvoo, 27. The minutes added that “brethren of the Warsaw Lodge had notified the Grand Officers on the subject.” See also Hogan, “Erection and Dedication,” 14.
Dr. William Gano Goforth, of Belleville, Illinois, was one of the first Masonic guests to arrive. He, together with his wife, disembarked “at the wharf of the city of Nauvoo” the morning of April 5 and “after visiting the house of a connection, called on Gen. Joseph Smith.” Goforth’s wife would be baptized into the Mormon church during their visit; Goforth himself was known to have “a strong inclination to the Mormon faith.” He was an even stronger supporter of Henry Clay.

Dr. Goforth, “a living skeleton of a man,” and “the most perfect personification of Don Quixote that was ever seen,” was the grandson of William Goforth, an original member of New York’s Sons of Liberty and one of the first settlers of Columbia on the “land between the two Miamis” in southern Ohio in 1788. His father was Dr. William Goforth, an early Cincinnati physician and Freemason. Born in 1795, William Gano Goforth was named after the Reverend John Gano, founder of the First Baptist Church of New York City and father of John Stites Gano; both men were early Columbia settlers. In 1787 Goforth’s aunt, Mary Goforth, married John S. Gano, under whom future Supreme Court Judge John McLean was apprenticed between 1804 and 1806. Following the death of his father in 1816, William Gano Goforth went west, and settled in Belleville, St. Clair County, Illinois. His mother and three younger siblings remained in Ohio and moved, for a time, to Lebanon, to be near her old friends from Columbia, the Anthony Howard Dunlevy family.

Dr. Goforth practiced medicine in Belleville for many years, and was known for his “exceedingly eccentric character, [which] at times [was] intemperate.” Nonetheless, Dr. Goforth became the chief physician to John Reynolds, an Illinois politician who found Goforth to be “bold and fearless in his practice.” Reynolds had been a member of the Illinois state House of Representatives, Democratic governor of Illinois, and a U.S. representative from the state for nine years, between 1834 and 1843. Reynolds’s brother, Thomas, was governor of Missouri from 1840 until his death in early 1844.

Like his father, Dr. William Gano Goforth was an active Freemason. His first recorded Masonic activity in Illinois took place in December 1842, when he was elected marshal of the newly constituted St. Clair Lodge No. 60, operating under authority from the Grand Lodge of Missouri.¹⁷

On the afternoon of April 5, following a morning session of Masonic “work,” the dedication of Nauvoo’s new Masonic Hall was performed by Worshipful Master Hyrum Smith. This important task was usually reserved for the grand master of the state. Indeed, the cornerstones of the building were inscribed, “M. HELM. G.M.A.L.5843”—Meredith Helm, Grand Master After Light 1843. With the Nauvoo Lodge under suspension, grand master Helm could not be expected to conduct the

ceremony. Even past grand master Abraham Jonas (once a valiant Mormon sup-
porter) failed to attend the clandestine dedication.18

Master Mason (and Council of Fifty member) Erastus Snow “delivered a pleas-
ing and instructive address on the beauties and benefits of the Institution.” He was
followed by Hyrum Smith, Dr. William G. Goforth, and Joseph Smith, whose speech-
es were “all characterized by feelings of the purest friendship.” When the Grand
Lodge was mentioned in one of the speeches, “a feeling of holy indignation seemed
to prevail, yet an universal expression of forgiveness was evidently in the breast of
all present and especially should our oppressors take off the iron yoke and treat us
as members of the family of mankind,—as members of the most noble of moral
institutions and as brethren of the same noble Fraternity.” Following the addresses,
the visiting Freemasons were given dinner at the Masonic Hall “at the expense of the
Nauvoo Lodge.”19

The church scheduled its regular annual conference to begin the following day,
Saturday, April 6, the fourteenth anniversary of its founding in 1830. More than ten
thousand Saints were in attendance. Joseph convened the meeting.

The prophet was confident. Despite reports there was a new conspiracy against
his life, he determined not to allow “petty difficulties” (such as William Law’s op-
position to polygamy) to interfere with the “instruction on the principles of eternal
truth” which had been prepared. “I feel in closer communion and better standing
with God than ever I felt before in my life,” he said, “and I am glad of this opportu-
nity to appear in your midst. I thank God for the glorious day that He has given us.”
He decided not to speak at that time, on account of “the weakness of my lungs,” but
would defer to others. “The Elders will give you instruction,” he said. “And then, if
necessary, I will offer such corrections as may be proper to fill up the interstices.”20

Elder Sidney Rigdon, recently rehabilitated and initiated into the Council of
Fifty, was the first speaker. Because of ill health and other concerns, it had been five
years since he last addressed the Saints during a general conference. Rigdon chose as
his topic, “The Church of Jesus Christ in the Last Days.” He did not require a passage
from the Bible for inspiration.

“I can make a text for myself,” he began. Involved as he was with the affairs of
the church from the first year of its existence, the history of the institution would be
his guide. “I recollect in the year 1830 I met the whole Church of Christ in a little old
log-house about 20 feet square, near Waterloo, N.Y., and we began to talk about the
kingdom of God as if we had the world at our command.” He admitted that church
leaders had held “secret associations” since its organization in 1830.

“The time has now come to tell why we held secret meetings,” he continued.
“We were maturing plans fourteen years ago which we can now tell. Were we ma-
turing plans to corrupt the world, to destroy the peace of society? No. Let fourteen
years’ experience of the Church tell the story. The Church never would have been
here if we had not done as we did in secret.” Rigdon recited an inventory of the suc-
cesses and persecutions of the Latter-day Saints during their fourteen-year history,

tion and Dedication.”
from Kirtland to Missouri and, most recently, in Illinois. “Do not be astonished, then, if we even yet have secret meetings, asking God for things for your benefit. Do not be afraid . . . There was no evil concocted when we first held secret meetings, and it is the same now . . . The things that were done in secret in the beginning are now seen openly and there is nothing secret now but what all will know in time to come.”

He paused at this allusion to the recent work of the political Kingdom of God. “I am disposed to give some reasons why salvation only belongs to the kingdom of God, and to that alone. . . . I discover one thing: Mankind have labored under one universal mistake about this—viz., salvation was distinct from government; i. e., that I can build a Church without government, and that thing have power to save me!” To the contrary, Rigdon argued, “When God sets up a system of salvation, He sets up 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 . . . The kingdom of God does not interfere with the laws of the land, but keeps itself by its own laws.” In other words, now that Joseph Smith had organized the Kingdom of God, he was obligated to observe a higher law than that of the United States of America. He was to follow only the will of God, not man. Rigdon paused, his health still not fully recovered, and sat down to refresh himself.

Elder John Taylor was called upon to speak. His observations, like his editorials, were circumspect. “Many things have been spoken by Elder Rigdon concerning the early history of this Church,” he began. “There is no person who has searched the oracles of eternal truth, but his mind will be touched with the remarks made by our venerable friend, which unfold the dispensation of Jehovah, and have a tendency to produce the most thrilling feelings in the bosoms of many who are this day present, and to promote our general edification . . . We are laying the foundation of a kingdom that shall last forever—that shall bloom in time and blossom in eternity. We are engaged in a greater work than ever occupied the attention of mortals. We live in a day that prophets and kings desired to see, but died without the sight . . . Tell your rulers that all their deeds of fame are tarnished, and their glory is departed.”

The conference continued on Sunday morning. The sun was “pleasant,” the air “calm and serene.” Nearly twenty thousand were assembled to hear Elder Sidney Rigdon conclude his remarks on the history of the church and the Kingdom of God. “I shall preach from the same text we preached from yesterday, The Church of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God, the leaven, the little stone spoken of by Daniel &c.,” Sidney said. He answered a question raised by the recent letter published in Times and Seasons. “Let no man be alarmed because the Lord said that the kingdom of God should swallow up all other kingdoms. What harm would it do? For all the world would have the same spirit. The Lord said He intended to do by the whole world the same as he has done by us, & this is the thing the world is afraid of. Reflect then. This is as far as I intended to go upon this subject.”

21. Ibid., 6:288–96. See also Smith, American Prophet’s Record, 463 [6 April 1844]. Note History of the Church title, “Behold the Church of God of the last days.” Woodruff, Journals 2:376, 378, 380 [6 April 1844]. An editorial “From the Holy City,” Warsaw Signal 10 April 1844, described Rigdon as “an old horse [that] was turned out on the commons to die,” performing in “pliant submission to the dictation of his master.”
The Sunday afternoon session commenced at two p.m. While waiting for the prophet to arrive, Patriarch Hyrum Smith spoke about progress on building the Nauvoo temple and admonished all missionaries departing Nauvoo to “preach the pure truth.”

Joseph approached the stand at three fifteen and rose to present a message before the congregation. Inspired by the untimely death of King Follet, who was killed in a well accident the previous month, Joseph announced that he would “address [them] on the subject of the dead.” He began by examining the character of God. “What kind of a being is God?” he asked. The answer was startling. “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret... We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil so that you may see. These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are simple.” Joseph concluded his dissertation—touching on the plurality of gods, eternal progression and the nature of intelligence—more than two hours later, at five thirty that afternoon.

The effect on the Saints was electric. “I have evidence enough that Joseph is not fallen,” one elder joyfully recorded. “Any one that could not see in him the Spirit of Inspiration of God must be dark, they might have known that he was not a fallen Prophet even if they thought he was fallen.” William Law, Joseph’s estranged counselor in the First Presidency of the church, was less impressed. “Conference is over, and some of the most blasphemous doctrines have been taught by J. Smith & others,” Law wrote in his diary. “Such as a plurality of Gods, other gods as far above our God as he is above us. That he wrought out his salvation in the flesh with fear and trembling, the same as we do;... that secret meetings are all legal and right and that the Kingdom [of God] must be set up after the manner of a Kingdom (and of course have a King).”

Dr. Goforth met privately with Joseph in the evening. They spoke of politics. The prophet expressed his “disapprobation of Martin Van Buren-ism—and [his] unwillingness to vote for, or influence a vote for HENRY CLAY... Americans cannot sustain a man that will not inviolably protect national rights!” Afterwards Goforth wrote to the editor of the *Belleville Advocate*:

The name of Joseph Smith, of Nauvoo, is now before the people as a candidate for President of the United States. With this name is proclaimed Jeffersonianism... Jeffersonian Democracy, and free trade and sailors’ rights, and protection of person and property. The interview on this occasion was satisfactory, & I know not of hearing a sounder policy designed for public inspection and American prosperity.

Brigham Young, as president of the Quorum of the Twelve, presided over the final session of Conference—an electioneering meeting—on Tuesday, April 9. Some

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23. Ibid., 6:302, 305.
eleven hundred elders were present. Brigham admonished the men to preach only the “first principles”—faith, repentance, baptism for the remission of sins, and the Gift of the Holy Ghost—when they went out. They “need not go into mysteries,” he cautioned. Mention of the ideal of plural marriage (one of “the mysteries”) was to be avoided. Any elder found teaching the newly revealed doctrines would have his name published in *Times and Seasons* and his license to preach revoked. Brigham was insistent. “We want the Elders to electioneer for President Smith and we want to build the temple this season and by the help of God we will do it. We are acquainted with the views of Gen. Smith, the Democrats and Whigs and all factions,” Brigham Young went on. “It is now time to have a President of the United States. Elders will be sent to preach the Gospel and electioneer.” Remember, he told them, “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. You can’t touch the Gospel without infringing upon the common avocations of men. They may have helps and governments in the Church, but it is all one at last.”

Hyrum next admonished the men. “We engage in the election the same as in any other principle,” he said. “You are to vote for good men, and if you do not do this it is a sin: to vote for wicked men, it would be sin. Choose the good and refuse the evil. Men of false principles have preyed upon us like wolves upon helpless lambs. Damn the rod of tyranny; curse it. Let every man use his liberties according to the Constitution. Don’t fear man or devil; electioneer with all people, male and female, and exhort them to do the thing that is right. We want a President of the U. S., not a party President, but a President of the whole people; for a party President disfranchises the opposite party. Have a President who will maintain every man in his rights.”

“I wish all of you to do all the good you can,” Hyrum continued. “We will try and convert the nations into one solid union. I despise the principle that divides the nation into party and faction . . . Whatever are the rights of men guaranteed by the Constitution of these United States, let them have them. Then, if we were all in union, no one dare attempt to put a warlike foot on our soil. I don’t like to see the rights of Americans trampled down.” He moved on to the Texas question. “I am opposed to the policy of all such persons as would allow Great Britain or any other power to take from us Oregon or any portion of our national territory; and damn all who attempt it. Lift up your voices like thunder: there is power and influence enough among us to put in a President.”

Brigham Young again took the stand. He “requested all who were in favor of electing Joseph to the Presidency to raise both hands.” The voting was nearly unanimous, with eleven hundred elders “clapping their hand[s]” and giving “many loud cheers.” Only one unidentified dissenting vote was manifested.

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27. Smith, *History of the Church* 6:323–24. The next line notes, “I don’t wonder at the old Carthaginian lawyer being afraid of Joseph Smith being elected.” It is uncertain who is being referred to here.

Apostle and Council of Fifty member Heber C. Kimball spoke next. “We are going to arrange a plan for Conferences,” Kimball explained, “and we design to send Elders to all the different States to get up meetings and protracted meetings, and electioneer for Joseph to be the next President.” Kimball recognized the task would not be easy. “A great many of the Elders will necessarily have to leave their families,” he noted, “and the mothers will have to assume the responsibility of governing and taking care of the children to a much greater extent than when their husbands were at home.”

At the conclusion of Elder Kimball’s remarks a “call was made for the volunteers to go preaching to pass out to the green.” A “great company” of men, nearly 250 in all, formed two ranks on the right of the stand. Those able to serve for six months were seated first, followed by those who could serve for three months or less. Following an adjournment, the names of the volunteers were called and their assignments made. In a few weeks the volunteers would number nearly four hundred.

That afternoon, following the conclusion of the political meeting, Joseph, his wife Emma, and Dr. William Gano Goforth rode out to “the mound” together where they admired the peach groves. Dr. Goforth prepared to return to his home in Belleville. “On morning of the 10th, a strong lookout for the Osprey was commenced, and late in the afternoon she approached—when my wife and I embarked, expressing for the people of Nauvoo our prayers, and receiving their expressions of reciprocity.”

James Arlington Bennet formally responded to Willard Richards’s vice presidential proposal on April 14. He could not run for public office, he wrote, and he doubted that Joseph could be elected. “If you can by any supernatural means elect Brother Joseph President of these U. States, I have not a doubt but that he would govern the people and administer the laws in good faith, and with righteous intentions, but I can see no natural means by which he has the slightest chance of receiving the votes even of one state.” He reminded Dr. Richards that “every man’s hand is against the Mormons, and the Mormons against every man in a religious sense.” Arlington Bennet proposed that “the Mormons should settle out of the States and have an

30. Ibid., Smith, American Prophet’s Record, 469 [9 April 1844]. Robertson, “The Campaign and the Kingdom.”
empire of their own. Not only thousands but millions would flock to an independent people. In this case a Patriarchal government with Joseph at the head would be just the thing. In unity there is power. Nothing could resist such a people.”

The letter would have arrived in Nauvoo at an auspicious moment. On April 11 Joseph was anointed “Prophet, Priest and King” in the Kingdom of God, an act greeted with “loud shouts of Hosanna” by the Council of Fifty. On April 18 the prophet “declared the council full” composed of fifty-two men (including the clerk and recorder) “called upon to form the grand K. of G. by revelation.” The clerk of the council, William Clayton, was nearly overwhelmed by the day’s events. “It seems like heaven began on earth,” he wrote, “and the power of God is with us.”

Democrat Francis Preston Blair, publisher of the Washington, D.C., Daily Globe and the Congressional Globe, was the first national political figure to respond to Joseph Smith’s Views. His article, “A new Advocate for a National Bank,” was published in the Daily Globe, and copied by newspapers throughout the U.S. It was a barbed assessment of Smith’s fiscal platform. “We have cast our eyes hastily over General Smith’s (Mormon Joe) ‘Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States,” Blair began. Instead of discovering anything original, Blair found his Views to be in accord with proposals by “Messrs. Clay, Webster, Sargeant, and the whig party in general, for a national bank.”

Blair balked at the prophet’s recommendation that state legislatures should be petitioned to “pardon every convict in the several penitentiaries; blessing them as they go, and saying to them, in the name of the Lord ‘Go thy way and sin no more.’” If that were done, Blair feared “the ‘specie basis’ would soon disappear from Joe’s mother bank and branches, including that of Nauvoo,” although perhaps no more ill effect could be expected from the “small thieves” than the depression caused by the “great thieves who robbed millions from the late whig bank and its satellites” and who were never prosecuted for their crimes.

“Upon the whole, however,” Blair continued, “we will do General Smith the justice to state, that we think his financial doctrines more sound, his views more honest, and his scheme more feasible, than those of the hypocrites and quacks who, supported by a great party, have fleeced the country to the very quick, and are now eager to repeat the application of the shears.”

With Joseph Smith’s platform supposedly so closely resembling that of the Whigs, Blair wrote, “let General Smith be the Whig candidate for the vice presidency . . . Cannot Mr. Clay persuade the General to accompany him on his electioneering tour?” Blair’s suggestion was all in jest. “With . . . Joe Smith, and a few other quadrupeds to complete his menagerie,” Blair jibed, Clay “could not fail to convince the moral and enlightened people of the United States of the necessity of a national bank, and of their duty to make him President.”

33. Clayton, Council of Fifty minutes, 11 April 1844, in Ehat, “Heaven Began,” 267. This soon became common (if not exactly public) knowledge. See, for example, “W.” [Nauvoo, Illinois] to editors of the Missouri Republican, 25 April 1844 (reprinted in the Clay Tribune, 8 June 1844): “Joe, is not only Prophet, but he is Mormon King, and in his triune function of Prophet, Priest and King.” See also Josiah Quincy [to family], 16 May 1844, in Woodworth, “Josiah Quincy’s 1844 Visit,” 85 and note 15.
Blair concluded his “analysis” of Joseph Smith’s Views with a mock proposal. “We propose, then, that Joe Smith . . . be made president . . . of the new whig national bank that is not to be; that the mother bank be established at Nauvoo, with branches over all creation.” With selected bank officials carefully chosen from the Whig party, “we should have the perfection of a whig system of finance.”

Joseph replied to Blair on April 15. The prophet emphasized that he rarely responded to many of the wild speculations about the Mormons that appeared in the nation’s press. Written by a respected editor of two of the leading national newspapers, Blair’s commentary was viewed differently.

It was “extraneous, irrelevant and kick shawing to connect me or any part of my ‘Views on the Powers and Policy of the Government,’ with Mr. Clay, Mr. Webster, Mr. Adams, Mr. Benton, Mr. Calhoun, Mr. Van Buren, or any of their galvanic cronies,” Joseph protested. They have done “nothing but draw money from the treasury. It is entirely too late in the age of this Republic, to clarify a Harry of the West; deify a Daniel of the East; quidify a Quincy of the Whigs, or bigify a Benton of the Democrats; leaving Mr. Calhoun and Mr. Van Buren such fair samples of bogus-democracy, that he that runs [for public office] may read.”

Even so, Joseph continued, one suggestion “worthy of commendation relative to a National Bank, in Mr. Blair’s remarks, is, that the mother bank should be located at Nauvoo.” Nauvoo was not a city adulterated by “dishonor, crime, corruption or bribery,” he pointed out.

Joseph concluded his response to Blair with a summary of his political creed:

“As the world is governed too much” and as there is not a nation or dynasty, now occupying the earth, which acknowledges Almighty God as their lawgiver . . . And as ‘crowns won by blood, by blood must be maintained,’ I go emphatically, virtuously, and humanely, for a THEODEMOCRACY, where God and the people hold the power to conduct the affairs of men in righteousness.

(Joseph’s concept of precisely what constituted a theodemocracy is never fully spelled out, although Council of Fifty member George A. Smith later preached that, “What we do [politically] we should do as one man. Our system should be Theo-Democracy,—the voice of the people consenting to the voice of God.”)

Continuing his rejoinder to editor Blair, Joseph Smith maintained that government could be effective only “where liberty, free trade, and sailor’s rights, and the protection of life and property shall be maintained inviolate, for the benefit of ALL.” (The inclusion of “sailor’s rights” in his 1844 campaign platform was part of a larger movement to ban the practice of impressing captured sailors, regardless of nationality, into service under a victor’s flag.) This lead neatly to his next point, that “to exalt mankind is nobly acting the part of a God; to degrade them, is meanly doing the drudgery of the devil.” He concluded his political credo with the phrase: “Unitas,

libertas, caritas—esto perpetua!” [Unity, liberty, charity—forever!]

A list of nearly 340 political missionaries and 47 proposed general conferences appeared in *Times and Seasons* for April 15. The first conference outside of Illinois was scheduled to take place in Cincinnati, Ohio, on May 18. The final general conference (lasting nine days!), to be held in Washington, D.C., was slated for early to mid-September.

“Those Elders who are numbered in the foregoing list,” Brigham Young advised the prospective missionaries, will “preside over the different states, will appoint conferences in all places in their several states where opportunities present, and will attend all the conferences, or send experienced and able elders, who will preach the truth in righteousness, and present before the people ‘General Smith’s views of the power and policy of the General Government’ and seek diligently to get up electors who will go for him for the presidency.” The Council of the Twelve would serve as traveling general authorities and attend as many conferences as was possible.

Simeon Francis, Whig editor of Springfield’s *Sangamo Journal*, was becoming exasperated with the Mormons. “I can’t understand Joe Smith,” he wrote in a letter to John J. Hardin on April 2. “Some of our friends believe that he will ultimately tell his Mormons to vote for Clay.” The prospect of the Mormons voting for Henry Clay was becoming even less likely, however. On that same day Joseph was visited in Nauvoo by an unnamed Vermonter (a self-proclaimed “prophet of God”) who “prophesied that this government was about to be overthrown and the Kingdom of Daniel spoke of was about to be established somewhere in the west and he thought in Illinois.”

On the morning of Tuesday, April 23, a general meeting of the Nauvoo Saints was held in the Masonic Hall. Its purpose was to select delegates to attend the Whig national convention in Baltimore the first Monday in May. David S. Hollister, a member of the Council of Fifty, was among those chosen to meet with Whig representatives in Baltimore. That afternoon the body again assembled to hear electioneering speeches “about Presidents &c.”

In the meeting it was concluded that Joseph could count on between two hundred thousand and five hundred thousand votes “independent of any other party,” some 10 to 15 percent of the electorate. Available sources indicate neither how those figures were arrived at, nor how it was thought the votes would be distributed. If the 1844 race was as close as most observers predicted it would be, the Mormon prophet was quite possibly in a position to force a repeat of Henry Clay’s 1824 election compromise. Accurate or not, it was soon rumored that Joseph Smith might “withdraw from the canvass for President, if he could get to be Secretary of State or Minister to Russia,”
an echo of John Hardin’s offer to Judge John McLean the previous summer.39

The *Nauvoo Neighbor*’s report on of the gathering was understated and probably would have been missed by many readers. Even so, a Whig correspondent in attendance at the meeting expressed alarm at the political developments taking place

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in Nauvoo. Referring to Joseph’s recent ordination within the Council of Fifty, the reporter wrote, “Joe, is not only Prophet, but he is [the] Mormon King, . . . in his triune function of Prophet, Priest and King.” Furthermore, he warned his readers,

It is the design of these people to have candidates for electors in every state of the Union; a convention is to be held in Baltimore, probably next month. The leaders are busy organizing their plans—over a hundred persons leave in a few days for different states to carry them out as far as possible . . . He indignantly spurns the proposition to run for the second office on the same ticket with Mr. Van Buren: he thinks his chance would be much better alone . . . let no man sneer at these people or deem them of little consequence, either for good or evil. They are becoming of potent influence to the people of the State of Illinois. It is a serious question: What will be the end of things?

The letter was initially published in the Missouri Republican and gained wide exposure when copied by Greeley’s New York Tribune. The story was also picked up by the Clay Tribune and Niles’ National Register.40

Council of Fifty member Orson Hyde arrived in Washington the same day as the Nauvoo meeting. He called on Illinois representatives in the capital, Illinois Whig John J. Hardin, and Democrats Joseph P. Hoge, Stephen A. Douglas, and John Wentworth, the following day. Elder Hyde presented the men with Joseph’s proposal to raise one hundred thousand army troops to protect the American frontier. The legislators saw little likelihood of passage.

Hyde felt that Joseph’s plan to colonize Texas was more feasible. “Congress will pass no act in relation to Texas or Oregon at present,” he wrote to the prophet on April 25. “She is afraid of England, afraid of Mexico, afraid the Presidential election will be twisted by it. The members all appear like unskillful players at checkers.” Hyde pointed out that “most of the settlers in Oregon and Texas are our old enemies,” however if “the settlement of Oregon and Texas be determined upon, the sooner the move is made the better; and I would not advise any delay [waiting] for the action of our government, for there is such jealously of our rising power already, that government will do nothing to favor us. If the saints possess the kingdom I think they will have to take it; and the sooner it is done the more easily it is accomplished. Your superior wisdom must determine whether to go to Oregon, to Texas, or to remain within these United States.” Don’t delay, he urged. “The present perhaps is the most proper time that ever will be.”

The next day, Hyde had a long conversation with Judge Stephen A. Douglas. Hyde reported that the senator “would resign his seat in Congress if he could command the force that Mr. Smith could, and would be on the march to the [western] country in a month . . . the eyes of many aspiring politicians in this place are upon that country.”

Hyde’s assessment of the political climate in Washington centered on the issue of slavery. “The Northern Whig members are almost to a man against Texas and Oregon; but should the present administration succeed in annexing Texas, then all the Whigs would turn around in favor of Oregon; for if Texas be admitted slavery is extended to the South; then free states must be added to the West to keep up a balance of power between the slave and the free states.” Hyde also warned the prophet. “Should Texas be admitted, war with Mexico is looked upon as inevitable.” Hyde reflected on the difficulties of getting any of the Saints’ proposals approved. “There are many powerful checks upon our government,” he noted, “preventing her from moving in any of these important matters; and for aught I know these checks are permitted to prevent our government from extending her jurisdiction over the territory which God designs to give to His Saints.” Hyde reported that Judge Douglas told him “he would equally as soon go to that country without an act of Congress as with . . . and that in five years a noble state might be formed and then if they would not receive us into the Union, we would have a government of our own.”

At the very time the Mormon delegates were meeting with Illinois representatives in Washington, D.C., national political conventions were being planned for Baltimore and Nauvoo. Forces in opposition to General Joseph Smith’s presidential campaign were also gaining momentum.