

Comments on *William B. Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet*
by Kyle Walker

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by H. Michael Marquardt

I suppose that I was chosen to respond to *William B. Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet* because I am coauthor with Bill Shepard, a friend and historian of the early Mormon experience, of our book *Lost Apostles: Forgotten Members of Mormonism's Original Quorum of Twelve* published by Signature Books in 2014. I read the six hundred page book on William Smith and would like to share some comments on this richly illustrated book.

William Smith was the second youngest son of Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith being born in 1811. The book's first chapter opens with an exploration of Jesse Smith, the older brother of Joseph Sr., and explores Jesse's negative feelings of Joseph Sr.'s faith. While this gives a backdrop to Joseph Smith Sr. there was no use or reference to Jesse Smith's ledger which would have given valuable insight into his financial business.

The religious experiences of Joseph Jr. are explained and developed from William Smith's perspective from 1841 and later recollections. There is no mention of treasure seeking by Joseph Sr. and Jr. in the book. A footnote questions William's 1883 publication, which does contain mistakes, that mentions a church conference or meeting held in his brother Hyrum's log house on April 6, 1830. Though this recollection was printed ten years before his death this appears to be correct.

William Smith's early missionary preaching is certainly a highlight of his service as a minister and this book includes small photographs of his teacher and priest licenses retain in the Community of Christ Library-Archives. From statements made by two of the three member committee to choose the first Quorum of Twelve Apostles, Joseph Jr. pushed the witnesses to select his brother as one of the apostles. This is according to Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer.

Because William Smith was for the most part absent from Nauvoo most of 1843 and 1844 he was not involved with other members of his quorum in the developing ideas explored in the higher church councils. The book explains that William was sealed to a plural wife in 1843.

It is to the book's credit that William Smith's eastern states mission was not a highlight of Smith's ministry. His association with George J. Adams and Samuel Brannan was a disaster and his leadership and teaching of spiritual wives were questioned by church members. Those who opposed him were excommunicated. Kyle states it in these words:

After his appointment to the Twelve, William's Church membership had been called into question on at least six separate occasions, stemming from his struggle with insubordination, a sense of entitlement resulting from his position as a member of the Smith family and his apostleship, and his expectation of being supported from Church funds. (460)

After the return to Nauvoo in May 1845 William Smith, as the last living male priesthood holder of the Joseph and Lucy Smith family he was ordained church patriarch. His over four hundred patriarchal blessings attributes to his spiritual responsibilities in ministering these sacred blessings. William was always looking for a prominent place in church leadership as he held the positions of both an apostle and church patriarch. William Smith was not very smart in how he approached his quest for higher office and financial support. William was finally excommunicated from the church in October 1845.

Before his separation from the church, he like others, considered his young nephew Joseph Smith III to succeed his father in church service. But William held extremely negative views of his former members of the Quorum of Twelve. He did give some patriarchal blessings in early 1846 including a man named Adam Long who had received his endowment in the Nauvoo Temple.

Like Martin Harris and members of the Whitmer family, William Smith associated with fellow dissenters and eventually considered with some Smith family members that James J. Strang was appointed by the prophet Joseph Smith to be his successor in the office of president. After his separation with Strang's church William Smith worked on organizing his own restoration church. While William pushed for lineal succession he claimed to receive revelations for his organizations. He and Aaron Hook printed a broadside titled *William Smith, Patriarch & Prophet of the Most High God. Latter Day Saints, Beware of Imposition!*

This is strange because William insisted that he had been ordained before Joseph's death a prophet, seer, revelator and translator. William said he was against the practice of polygamy while he privately taught the doctrine. This was one reason why many of his followers separated from him. William Smith was not a nice man. In November 1851 Jason Briggs issue a revelation condemning polygamy and William Smith including these words:

And because you have asked me in faith concerning William Smith, this is the answer of the Lord thy God concerning him. I, the Lord, have permitted him to represent the rightful heir to the presidency of the high priesthood of my Church . . . But as Esau despised his birthright, so has William Smith despised my law, and forfeited that which pertained to him as an Apostle and High Priest in my Church. And his spokesman, Joseph Wood, shall fall with him, for they are rejected of me. . . . Behold, that which ye have received as my celestial law is not of me . . .

There was a critical comment in the book that RLDS historians, naming Richard Howard and Mark Scherer, as not giving William Smith more recognition in various ideas leading up to the New Organization that eventually became the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I think these RLDS and Community of Christ historians were smart not to put too much emphasis on William Smith since he was a controversial figure for many years.

Eventually William joined the Reorganization in 1878 based upon his original 1830 baptism and as a high priest. In 1883 he was appointed as a minister for Iowa and Illinois at a church general conference. He did produce a small booklet titled *William Smith on Mormonism* that included a brief history of his life from his birth to his

ordination as one of the original Quorum of Twelve. He included a hymn sung by his mother Lucy that was given in the Lamanite tongue and interpreted.

William B. Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet presents both the positive and negative aspects of William's life. He lived the longest of the Smith family and died at the age of eighty-two in November 1893. There is a lot of repetition as one reads the book. A list of wives and children are included in an appendix. Thank you Kyle for writing this book, I enjoyed reading it.