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Power from on High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood

Gregory A. Prince

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Authority and priesthood were concepts that developed gradually in Mormon theology, not as thunderbolts but as ideas that acquired meaning and momentum over time. Acting initially on the basis of implied leadership, Joseph Smith moved toward explicit angelic authority and an increasingly defined structure drawn from biblical models.

All the while the structure of higher and lower priesthoods fluctuated in response to pragmatic needs. Priests were needed to perform ordinances, teachers to lead congregations, bishops to manage church assets, and elders to proselytize–responsibilities which would be redistributed repeatedly throughout Smith's fourteen-year ministry.

Gregory Prince charts these developments with impressive interpretative skill. Besides the obvious historical significance, he underscores the implications for current Mormon governance. For instance, where innovations have characterized the past, one need not be bound by custom or surprised when church leaders instigate change.

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