



Binding Earth and Heaven: Patriarchal Blessings in the Prophetic Development of Early Mormonism

Gordon Shepherd, Gary Shepherd

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In *Binding Earth and Heaven*, Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd use early nineteenth-century Mormonism as a case study to examine questions about how new religious movements may, as rare exceptions, survive and even eventually become successful in spite of intense opposition. Initial scorn and contempt for Mormonism—the fledgling creation of the young Joseph Smith—quickly elevated to mob violence as both Smith’s innovative teachings and converted followers proliferated, resulting in the widely held perception that the Mormons constituted a social menace. This book examines how Mormonism attracted and maintained the loyalty of increasing numbers of people despite mounting hostilities and severe hardships.

The book focuses on the unique Mormon ritual (and accompanying doctrinal underpinnings) of “patriarchal blessings.” Patriarchal blessings were an innovative adaptation of the Old Testament practice of fathers making quasi-legal pronouncements over the heads of their sons—a way of verbally conferring rights, promises, admonition, and guidance to heirs. *Binding Earth and Heaven* shows how the organizational complexities of this practice contributed to strengthening and sustaining member faith and fealty, thereby bolstering the continuity and development of Mormonism.

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