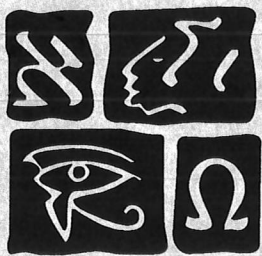




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Transcript

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Scott H. Faulring

The Articles and Covenants of the Church: D&C 20 and Its Antecedents

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Summary

In 1830 the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation that became known as the Articles and Covenants, later included in the Doctrine and Covenants as section 20. In this paper Scott Faulring discusses the emergence and significance of that revelation that would become a constitutional and procedural guide to regulating church affairs.

Transcript
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The Articles and Covenants of the Church: D&C 20 and its Antecedents

Scott H. Faulring¹

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This paper focuses on the coming forth of the "Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ" and the influence of the Book of Mormon translation and other events of the early restoration on this foundational revelation and its antecedents. The revelation we call the "Articles and Covenants," now Doctrine and Covenants section 20, was the most elaborate and detailed of any revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith prior to the organization of the church. Scriptural commentators have in recent years described this inspired document as the constitution of the restored church or the earliest *General Handbook of Instructions*.

Surely one of the most redeeming and appealing qualities of the latter-day restoration is the living prophets, seers, and revelators who receive modern revelation for the church and the world. The Lord's anointed oracles have direct access to an information source that is infinitely greater than anything humanly imaginable. I am confident that as it was in Joseph Smith's time, so it continues today with President Gordon B. Hinckley. President Hinckley was recently asked by a newspaper reporter how it feels to receive revelation. He responded in part by saying, "Now, if a problem should arise, we pray about it, we may fast about it, and [revelation] comes. Quietly. Usually no voice of any kind, but just a perception in the mind."²

This is not to say that an audible voice of the Spirit is not heard by the Lord's prophets as occasion may require, but that revelation usually comes to them (as it does to all persons seeking with sincerity of heart and mind) by the Spirit's quiet whisperings to the mind and is confirmed by the burning bosom actuated by the Holy Ghost. In the beginning of this last gospel dispensation, Joseph Smith and those who labored with him frequently had to inquire of the Lord for additional light and knowledge. These first believers were called to lay the groundwork for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and his authorized church here upon the earth in preparation for the second coming of the Lord.

An interesting fact of early church history and doctrine is that the emergence of the "Articles and Covenants" was directly influenced by the Book of Mormon translation. The an-

¹Scott H. Faulring is a research associate with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS). Appreciation to my colleague John A. Tvedtnes for suggesting this title and offering useful feedback on an earlier version of this paper. Also thanks to Richard L. Anderson, Larry C. Porter, Robert J. Woodford, and Larry E. Dahl for their valuable insights that have contributed much to my understanding of Doctrine and Covenants 20 and its historical development. I accept complete responsibility for the conclusions and opinions expressed herein. This paper does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of either FARMS or the Smith Institute.

tedent of the "Articles and Covenants" was also shaped by several early revelations given to the Prophet Joseph Smith and his trusted assistant Oliver Cowdery.

For twenty years my research in early Mormon history has focused on what historians call the primary sources—the original manuscripts and printed documents that help us interpret the events and movements of Joseph Smith's era of Mormon history. As I have worked with these unique materials, I am constantly impressed by the wealth of documentation created by these first-generation Latter-day Saints. The early disciples of the modern church were misunderstood and persecuted because of their peculiar religious beliefs, and as a result they sacrificed greatly. But in spite of their difficulties, many members did their best to comply with the heavenly mandate given to the Prophet Joseph Smith the day the restored church was formally organized. In this revelation (D&C 21) the Lord commanded Joseph as First Elder and Oliver Cowdery as Second Elder to create a written record of the miraculous events associated with the restoration. The revelation opens with a specific historical charge to these founding elders: "Behold, there shall be a record kept among you" (D&C 21:1). In giving this command, the Lord did not call upon college-educated historians or theologians but instead on his meek and lowly servants. This assignment was an added challenge for Joseph and Oliver; they were called not only to lay the foundation for the last dispensation, but to preserve for future generations a lasting record of their thoughts and prayers, revelations and visions, accomplishments and failures. In mentioning this commandment, I do not mean to imply that we have a complete or comprehensive record of all their church activities, discourses, deliberations or councils held in the opening days of the dispensation of the fulness of times. Unfortunately, we do not. Five years after this appointment was made, the Prophet Joseph, addressing the recently called Twelve Apostles, lamented the church's earlier negligence in not documenting better the decisions made during these important early days. He said, "I have something to lay before this council . . . I have for myself learned a fact by experience which on reflection gives me deep sorrow. It is a truth that if I now had in my possession every decision which has been given upon important items of doctrine and duties since the rise of this church, they would be of incalculable worth to the saints, but we have neglected to keep record of such things, thinking that perhaps that they would never benefit us afterwards, which had we now, would decide almost any point that might be agitated; and now we cannot bear record to the church nor unto the world of the great and glorious manifestations that have been made to us with that degree of power and authority which we otherwise could if we had those decisions to publish abroad."³

²As quoted in an interview in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 April 1997.

³The original source of Joseph Smith's remarks, delivered 27 February 1835, at Kirtland, is "A record of the transactions of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Christ [of] the Latter Day Saints," Patriarchal Blessing Book, Book Two, 1-2 (first numbering), Historical Department, The Church of Jesus

Anyone who studies the reestablishment of the Lord's church discovers quickly that the restoration did not happen all at once but developed through a series of events over an extended period. In a recent opening session of general conference, President Boyd K. Packer taught an important concept regarding the "line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little" (D&C 128:21) development of the early latter-day church: "Some suppose that the organization [of the Church] was handed to the Prophet Joseph Smith like a set of plans and specifications for a building, with all of the details known at the beginning. But it did not come that way. Rather, it came a piece at a time *as the Brethren were ready and as they inquired of God.*"⁴ As President Packer pointed out, the complex process of the latter-day restitution, occurred as the early leaders were prepared and as they humbled themselves and asked for the Lord's guidance.

With these comments in mind, I will describe the events and revelations that preceded the reception of the "Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ."

Most Latter-day Saints associate the "Articles and Covenants" with the organization of the restored Church of Christ on 6 April 1830 in the provincial log home of Peter Whitmer Sr. in Fayette Township, Seneca County, New York. This was when the church was organized by divine mandate. I believe, after studying all available primary sources, that this important milestone, the organizational meeting on 6 April, actually climaxed a series of inspired events initiated by the Lord ten years earlier. This historic spring day at the beginning of the 1830s certainly marked a turning point in the opening of the last dispensation.

To fully understand the emergence of the "Articles and Covenants," we need to briefly review the key spiritual events directly connected with the rise of the church. The Prophet Joseph Smith, in his earliest manuscript history, written in 1832, described his life story: "An account of his marvelous experience and of all the mighty acts which he doeth in the name of Jesus Christ the son of the living God of whom he beareth record and also an account of the rise of the church of Christ in the eve of time according as the Lord brought forth and established by his hand."⁵ Joseph detailed several important experiences he had prior to the restoration of the

Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as HDC). I have standardized spelling, capitalization and punctuation in the primary sources quoted herein. This address was changed to third person and edited slightly in Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 2:198–9 (hereafter cited as HC).

⁴Boyd K. Packer, "The Twelve Apostles," *Ensign* (November 1996): 6 (emphasis added). Also published in *Official Report of the One Hundred Sixty-Sixth Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996), 5.

⁵"A History of the life of Joseph Smith Jr.," Joseph Smith Letterbook One, 1 (first numbering), Joseph Smith Papers, HDC. The complete 1832 history is published in Dean C. Jessee, ed. and comp., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 4–8; Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An*

church. The Prophet said he received a testimony from “on high,” alluding to his first vision; the “ministering of Angels,” which would include the visitations by the angel Moroni; the reception of the Aaronic Priesthood by the ministration of John the Baptist to “administer the letter of the Gospel”; and the reception and confirmation of the Melchizedek Priesthood (apostleship) from Peter, James, and John with “power and ordinances from on high to preach the Gospel” and the conferral of the “keys of the Kingdom of God.”⁶

After his first vision in 1820, young Joseph knew that an apostasy had occurred and that God’s acknowledged church was not upon the earth. Twelve years later, in 1832, he noted that in studying the Bible as a young man he had discovered that “mankind did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatized from the true and living faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament.”⁷ This realization led Joseph to a secluded, silent grove near his parent’s home, where he offered his first spoken prayer seeking wisdom from the Lord who “giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). Joseph’s official history, written in 1838, explained that he was told by the Lord during the first vision that he should not join any of the existing churches, that “they teach for doctrines the commandments of man” and “deny the power thereof.”⁸ In his 1842 history the Prophet clarified that in 1820, during his vision of God the Father and the Savior, he received a promise from the Lord “that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.”⁹

Without question, Joseph Smith’s initial prophetic responsibility was as the inspired translator of the Book of Mormon. From the autumn of 1823, when Moroni first revealed to the young prophet his foreordained mission in bringing forth this ancient scripture, until the entrustment of the plates to him on the morning of 22 September 1827, Joseph focused on preparing himself morally and spiritually to receive and translate the Nephite record. Organizing the Lord’s church based on restored priesthood power and authority was an obvious part of his

American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1989), 3–8; and Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989) 1:3–10.

⁶“History of the Life of Joseph Smith,” 1; published in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 4; *American Prophet’s Record*, 4; and *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 3.

⁷“History of the Life of Joseph Smith,” 2; published in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 5; Faulring, *American Prophet’s Record*, 5; and Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 5.

⁸Manuscript History of the Church, Book A–1, 3, HDC (hereafter cited as MHC, Book A–1); published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:273; HC, 1:6. This was canonized in the Pearl of Great Price (see Joseph Smith—History 1:19 [hereafter cited as JS—H]).

⁹Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 March 1842): 707. This brief historical summary is known today as the Wentworth Letter.

mission, but Joseph was told that he would have to wait until the Book of Mormon was translated to do that.¹⁰

The earliest known revelation relating to the church's being restored occurred in 1828. It was given because Martin Harris lost the initial translation of the Book of Mormon that had been temporarily entrusted to him. The Lord warned Joseph Smith that in the reestablishment of his church, this generation must be spiritually desirous and openhearted. The applicable passage reads: "And for this cause have I said, if this generation harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them. Now I do not say this to destroy my church, but I say this to build up my church: therefore, whosoever belongeth to my church need not fear, for such shall inherit the kingdom of heaven."¹¹

Six months later, in March 1829, the Lord informed Joseph Smith and Martin Harris that the restored Church of Christ would be modeled upon the primitive church. The Savior declared, "And thus, if the people of this generation harden not their hearts,"¹² I will work a reformation among them, and I will put down all lyings, and deceivings, and priestcrafts, and envyings, and strifes, and idolatries, and sorceries, and all manner of iniquities,¹³ and I will establish my church, like unto the church which was taught by my disciples in the days of old."¹⁴

The Lord clarified to these early latter-day believers that this reformation signaled the "beginning of the rising up, and the coming forth of [his] church out of the wilderness--clear as the moon and fair as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."¹⁵

¹⁰Oliver Cowdery, in the final installment of a series of historical essays addressed to W. W. Phelps on the rise of the church, stated that the angel Moroni told Joseph Smith in 1823 that "when they [the Book of Mormon plates] are interpreted the Lord will give the holy priesthood to some, and they shall begin to proclaim this gospel and baptize by water, and after that they shall have power to give the Holy Ghost by the laying on of their hands" (Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, Letter 8, undated, ca. September–October 1835, printed in *Messenger and Advocate* 2 [October 1835]: 199).

¹¹Book of Commandments (Zion [Independence, Mo.]: Phelps, 1833), chapter 9, verse 14a (hereafter cited as BC); 1835 D&C 36:13a; current D&C 10:53–55.

¹²Joseph Smith read a similar statement while translating the Savior's teachings to the Nephites sometime in May or June 1829. Speaking about the latter-day Gentiles, the Lord said, "But if they will repent and hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them" (current 3 Nephi 21:22).

¹³The Lord made a similar prophecy to the Nephites (see 1830 Book of Mormon, [3rd] book of Nephi, chapter 9, p. 500; current 3 Nephi 21:19) about doing away with "lyings, deceivings, envyings, strifes, priestcrafts, and whoredoms" in the latter-days. Joseph Smith probably translated this material in May or June 1829.

¹⁴BC 4:5. This material was rewritten when the revelation was prepared for publication in the 1835 D&C (see 1835 D&C 32:3 [p. 159]). Its original placement follows the material in current D&C 5:18a: "And their testimony [the Three Witnesses] shall also go forth." The only extant manuscript of D&C 5 is worded slightly differently: "And I will establish my Church, yea even the church which was taught by my Disciples" (undated D&C 5 manuscript, Newel K. Whitney Collection, BYU Special Collections and Manuscripts).

¹⁵1835 D&C 32:3a (p. 159). See current D&C 5:14. This phrase was added to the revelation when

Between September 1827 and March 1829, the Prophet Joseph Smith, hindered by incessant persecution, chronic poverty, and a general lack of scribal help, produced only 116 manuscript pages from his translation of the abridgment of the book of Lehi (which Martin Harris subsequently lost) and a small amount of additional material. During this time he was helped by his wife, Emma, and her brother Reuben.¹⁶ It was not until Oliver Cowdery, whom the Lord called into immediate service as the Prophet's scribe, arrived in Harmony, Pennsylvania, at the beginning of the second week of April 1829 that the Book of Mormon translation began to make real progress. In an amazingly productive two and one-half months, from early April to mid-June, Joseph and Oliver worked through most of the unsealed portion of the Nephite scriptures. During this time, the Prophet also received at least a dozen revelations.¹⁷

Shortly after making Joseph's acquaintance on 5 April 1829, Oliver asked for a revelation in order to know his duty. The Lord counseled Oliver, not once, but twice, to "give heed unto my words."¹⁸ The Lord also advised the young schoolteacher, "Now as you have asked, behold I say unto you, keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion."¹⁹ Oliver was reminded by the Lord, "For thou hast inquired of me, and behold as often as thou hast inquired, thou hast received instruction of my Spirit."²⁰ In this and a subsequent revelation given through the Prophet, Oliver was assured that he would receive a knowledge of whatsoever things he should "ask in faith, with an honest heart."²¹

Intrigued by the miraculous ability to translate by the gift and power of God that the Lord had endowed Joseph, Oliver desired the same blessing. Weeks earlier, in the first revelation received by the Prophet on Cowdery's behalf, the Lord promised Oliver the gift to translate "even

it was published in the 1835 D&C.

¹⁶Shortly before her death, Emma Smith was interviewed by her son Joseph Smith III and asked to identify the scribes for the Book of Mormon translation. She responded, "Myself, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and my brother Reuben Hale" ("Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26 [1 October 1879]: 289). Emma, in this recollection, left out Samuel H. Smith and possibly several of the Whitmer brothers (John, David, and Christian) who assisted either with the original translation (September 1828 to June 1829) or in preparing the printer's manuscript (summer 1829 to winter 1829–30).

¹⁷These revelations are in current D&C 6–9, 11–18. Current D&C 10, received in the summer of 1828, is chronologically out of order due to the 1833 BC editors assigning a later date of May 1829 (see BC chapter 9 heading, p. 22). While compiling the Prophet's official history in 1839, James Mulholland, one of the Joseph Smith's clerks, inserted a copy of this revelation into the Prophet's manuscript history immediately following section 3 (dated July 1828). Mulholland used the 1835 D&C as his source text for this revelation (see MHC, Book A–1, 11). For an in-depth discussion of the dating of D&C 10, see Max H. Parkin, "A Preliminary Analysis of the Dating of Section 10," *Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, January 27, 1979, *The Doctrine and Covenants* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Instruction, 1980), 68–84.

¹⁸BC 5:1 (current D&C 6:2).

¹⁹BC 5:3 (current D&C 6:6).

²⁰BC 5:6 (current D&C 6:14a).

²¹BC 5:2b, 5a, 6–7a (current D&C 6:5, 10–11, 14–15); BC 7:1–2, 3b–4a (current D&C 8:1–4, 9–11a).

as my servant Joseph.”²² Little is known about the scribe’s attempt to translate but, after Cowdery “did not translate according to that which [he] desired of the [Lord],” he resumed his scribal duties alongside the Prophet, and the Lord directed him to continue writing for the remainder of the work.²³ The Lord assured Oliver that after he completing this sacred assignment, he would be given power to assist in the translation of other records. In verse two of the current edition of Doctrine and Covenants 9, superscript letter *a* on the word *other* is keyed to the phrase *other records*, which, as explained in the footnote, describes Oliver Cowdery’s later participation in the inspired translation of the Bible (known as the Joseph Smith Translation, or JST) and a similar revelatory work called the book of Abraham, which was derived from the Egyptian papyrus purchased by church members at Kirtland in July 1835.²⁴ Before Cowdery was involved in either of these scriptural undertakings, the Lord commanded Oliver to lend a hand in laying the foundation of the latter-day church of Jesus Christ.²⁵

By mid-May 1829, at Harmony, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, while living in a small clapboard home on 13.8 acres of land that he had purchased from his father-in-law, the Prophet, assisted by Oliver as scribe, translated the third book of Nephi. As the translation progressed, they became enlivened by the Savior’s teachings to his disciples in ancient Bountiful. As this pure and undiluted gospel unfolded before them, Joseph and Oliver wanted to know more about priesthood authority to perform baptisms for the remission of sins. Years later, in the first in a series of eight letters describing the rise of the church, Oliver reflected on how their work with the translation spiritually motivated them. The scribe wrote: “No men in their sober senses, could translate and write the directions given to the Nephites, from the mouth of the Savior, of the precise manner in which men should build up his church, . . . without desiring a privilege of showing the willingness of the heart by being buried in the liquid grave, to answer a “good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”²⁶

²²BC 5:12b (current D&C 6:25).

²³BC 8:1 (current D&C 9:1).

²⁴Oliver assisted Joseph in the “New Translation” of the Bible from June to mid-October 1830. Cowdery’s handwriting is present in the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of the Old Testament, Manuscript One (JST OT 1), starting on page one and ending on page ten, line five. The original JST manuscripts are in the RLDS archives in Independence, Missouri. The vision of Moses and the first eight chapters of the JST are canonized in the Pearl of Great Price as Moses 1–8. Oliver’s involvement with the inspired translation of the book of Abraham (also in the Pearl of Great Price) occurred during the latter half of 1835. The surviving Kirtland Egyptian manuscripts, only a small portion of which are in Oliver’s handwriting, are in the HDC.

²⁵Many years later, while separated from the church, Oliver Cowdery expressed his concern for the welfare of the church. He wrote that the church, “the foundation of which my own hands helped to lay[,] is constantly near my thoughts” (Oliver Cowdery to Phineas H. Young, 12 November 1846, Brigham Young Collection, HDC).

²⁶Oliver Cowdery to William W. Phelps, Letter 1, 7 September 1834, published in *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834): 15.

Cowdery explained that from translating third Nephi they learned that “none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the gospel.”²⁷ The Prophet’s manuscript history confirms that a desire for baptism for the remission of sins influenced their subsequent inquiry.

On 15 May Joseph and Oliver adjourned to the nearby woods to pray for guidance on this subject. As they sought the Lord in prayer, the heavens opened and the Savior sent his appointed servant John the Baptist. The resurrected John laid hands upon them and bestowed the priesthood of Aaron; in other words, as Cowdery later explained, he delivered the keys of the gospel of repentance, which included the authority to baptize. The heavenly messenger clarified that this Aaronic priesthood did not include the power of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but he promised that they would receive the higher priesthood authority thereafter, adding that at that time Joseph would be called the First Elder of the church and Oliver as the Second. John then directed Joseph to baptize Oliver, after which Oliver should do the same for Joseph. This ordinance was completed in the nearby Susquehanna River. As soon as they were baptized, the Holy Ghost manifested himself and opened the visions of heaven to them. Joseph explained, “No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery than the Holy Ghost fell upon him and he stood up and prophecied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the Spirit of prophecy when standing up I prophecied concerning the rise of this Church and many other things connected with the Church and this generation of the children of men.”²⁸

Immediately after immersing each other, Joseph and Oliver did as John the Baptist commanded—they laid hands on each other’s head and conferred the Aaronic priesthood.²⁹ Shortly thereafter, the Savior’s three senior apostles from the meridian of time (Peter, James, and John) visited the Prophet and his worthy companion and gave them the Melchizedek priesthood with the associated keys of this higher priesthood, including the apostleship.³⁰ Although Peter, James

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸1839 Draft History, first unnumbered page, Archive of the First Presidency (hereafter AFP); published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:231. This draft was the source of the material copied into MHC, Book A-1, 18; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:291; HC, 1:42; JS—H 1:73.

²⁹The official account of the Aaronic priesthood restoration is in MHC, Book A-1, 17–18; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:290–1; HC, 1:39–41 ; JS—H 1:68–72.

³⁰Neither Joseph Smith nor Oliver Cowdery recorded the precise date on which the Melchizedek Priesthood was restored. In the last two decades, many articles have been written by historians attempting to identify the time frame for the bestowal of the Melchizedek Priesthood and the accompanying apostleship. After carefully studying the known facts and different views related to this issue, I accept Larry Porter’s findings (see his 1996 *Ensign* article listed below) that this event likely occurred in late May 1829. The most informative sources, some offering different interpretations, are: Larry C. Porter, “Dating the Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood,” *Ensign* (June 1979): 5–10; Larry C. Porter, “The Priesthood Restored,” in *Studies in Scripture: The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet

and John gave Joseph and Oliver the Melchizedek priesthood, with the keys and power necessary to organize or restore the church once again upon the earth, they were not at that time given permission to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.

By late May or early June 1829, after receiving the saving ordinances and restored priesthood, Joseph and Oliver moved to Peter Whitmer Sr.'s farm in Fayette Township, New York. David, one of Peter's five sons, first met Oliver in 1828, when they discussed the widespread rumors of Joseph's receiving the Book of Mormon record from an angel. During April and May 1829 Oliver wrote at least three letters to David describing the miraculous work he was helping the Prophet with. David responded to Joseph and Oliver's plea for assistance and made the three-day trip to Harmony with a two-horse wagon and brought them to his father's log home, where they could work unhindered on the Book of Mormon translation.

The month of June was an especially busy time for Joseph and his friends. Comfortably situated at the Whitmer farm, the Prophet translated at an increased pace. He was able to translate most of the time because at least two scribes, Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer, wrote for him.³¹ The surrounding community's attitude toward the Lord's work was positive. Joseph later described, "We found the people of Seneca County in general friendly and disposed to enquire into the truth of these strange matters which now began to be noised abroad."³² They held meetings in neighbors' homes, and this allowed the Prophet, Oliver, and others to teach and explain the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to the honest in heart. A number of people believed and were baptized, including Hyrum Smith, David Whitmer, and Peter Whitmer Jr. All three were baptized in Seneca Lake by either Joseph or Oliver.

On 11 June the Book of Mormon title page was used to apply for a copyright at the U.S. Northern District Court of New York at Utica.³³ The filing of this application with clerk Richard

and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall, 1985), 2:389–409; William G. Hartley, "'Upon You My Fellow Servants': Restoration of the Priesthood," in *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith*, ed. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 49–72; Gregory A. Prince, *Having Authority: The Origins and Development of Priesthood During the Ministry of Joseph Smith* (Independence, Mo: John Whitmer Historical Association Monograph Series, 1993), 16–32; updated and expanded in Gregory A. Prince, *Power From On High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 3–15, 47–57; Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Priesthood," *Religious Studies Center Newsletter* 9 (May 1995): 1–12; D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy* (Salt Lake City: Signature Book, 1994), 1:1–38; Brian Q. Cannon and BYU Studies Staff, eds., "Priesthood Restoration Documents," *BYU Studies* 35/4 (1995–96): 163–207; and Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods," *Ensign* (December 1996): 30–47.

³¹Zenas Gurley, who interviewed John Whitmer, recorded that "it was his [John's] especial pride and joy that he had written sixty pages of the Book of Mormon" (*Saints Herald* [15 December 1879]: 370).

³²MHC, Book A–1, 23; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:294; HC, 1:51.

³³We do not know for sure whether Joseph Smith went to Utica (a distance of nearly one hundred miles from Fayette) to file the copyright application himself or if, because the translation was pro-

R. Lansing was the first legal action directly related to the restoration and demonstrates an awareness and respect on the Prophet's part for the law of the land.

Sometime close to 14 June Joseph, Oliver, and David, together at Father Whitmer's, asked the Lord for further "instructions relative to building up the Church of Christ, according to the fulness of the gospel."³⁴ From the revelation received on this occasion we learn that Oliver in particular wanted to know how to build up the church. The Lord responded with a commandment directing Cowdery to "rely upon the things which are written" (D&C 18:3). Of course, the things which Oliver the scribe had written were the Book of Mormon translation and the revelations given to the Prophet. Since an understanding of this commandment is crucial to fully appreciate Cowdery's later involvement in helping to prepare for the organization of the church, I quote the forepart of the revelation: "Now behold, because of the thing which you [my servant Oliver Cowdery,] have desired to know of me, I give unto you these words: Behold I have manifested unto you, by my Spirit in many instances, that the things which you have written are true: . . . behold, I give unto you a commandment, that you rely upon the things which are written; for in them are all things written, concerning [the foundation of] my church, my gospel, and my rock. Wherefore if you shall build up my church, upon the foundation of³⁵ my gospel, and my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you."³⁶

Only days later, Oliver, David, and Martin implored Joseph for the privilege to be the three special witnesses they discovered mentioned in the translation of the original eleventh chapter of the second book of Nephi (see 2 Nephi 27:12). The Prophet, in the draft of his manuscript history, recalled that his three friends were "very solicitous and teased me," so he inquired through the Urim and Thummim and the Lord gave a revelation (see D&C section 17).³⁷

At the end of June, in a cluster of trees near the Whitmer farmhouse, an angel visited these three individuals and Joseph Smith. The heavenly messenger turned the gold plates over one leaf

gressing so well, he sent a trusted associate. The person Joseph most likely gave this assignment to was Martin Harris, who had the time, interest, and resources needed to travel. There is possible circumstantial evidence to support this theory. Less than a week after the copyright application was filed, on 17 June, Jesse Smith, Joseph Smith Sr.'s oldest brother, wrote a rather sarcastic letter to his nephew Hyrum in which he referred to a visitor who recently called upon him in upstate New York. This visitor, a believer in the Book of Mormon, was probably Martin Harris, who was sent as a messenger to visit Joseph Sr.'s other brother Samuel (see Jesse Smith to Hyrum Smith, 17 June 1829, retained copy in Joseph Smith Letter Book Two, 59–61, JSC, HDC). It is possible that Martin Harris was in Utica on 11 June, kept traveling east, and visited the Smith relatives in Stockholm, New York, by 17 June.

³⁴BC, chapter 15 heading (p. 34).

³⁵1835 D&C replaced *and* with *upon the foundation of*.

³⁶BC 15:1–4 (pp. 34–5). The material in square brackets was added to this revelation when it was published in the 1835 D&C 43:1 (p. 172). See current D&C 18:1–5.

³⁷1839 Draft History, 4–5; see Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:235–6. This draft was the source for the material copied into MHC, Book A–1, 23–4; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:294–5. Also published in a slightly edited text in HC, 1:52–53.

at a time so that they could examine the meticulously engraved characters. Besides the ancient record, they also saw the Nephite interpreters, the Liahona, the breastplate, and the sword of Laban.³⁸ During their vision, the voice of God declared to them that the Nephite record was true and had been translated by the gift and power of God. These three eyewitnesses were directed by the voice of the Lord to bear record that the translation was correct. Afterward, the Three Witnesses, as they came to be known, prepared a written statement and signed their names to it, bearing solemn testimony to the world that what they had seen was undeniably true. Within a couple days, in Manchester, eight additional witnesses, in the presence of Joseph the translator, physically handled the golden plates but did not see the angel or the other ancient artifacts as did the three. These eight men of sound intellect and solid character also wrote a formal statement to which they subscribed their names. These written declarations of the Three and Eight Witnesses have been included in every edition of the Book of Mormon published by the church since 1830. Although several of the witnesses later separated from the church, all of them remained faithful throughout their lives to their testimony of these sacred events.³⁹

During the summer of 1829 the Prophet Joseph met with his closest supporters⁴⁰ in the upper chamber of Father Whitmer's modest log home to petition the Lord for a fulfillment of John the Baptist's earlier promise, namely, permission to exercise the previously bestowed keys of the Melchizedek priesthood in laying on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Prophet's history clarifies that they had been praying for some time before this solemn gathering. Together they hoped to focus their prayers and receive additional guidance. Responding to their solemn and fervent prayer, the Lord gave a revelation describing how they should conduct the organizational meeting of the church. They were told that Joseph would ordain Oliver an elder in the Church of Jesus Christ and vice versa. Other men were to be ordained to the restored priesthood as the church's first two elders were inspired to do. The Lord gave specific instructions requiring Joseph and Oliver to receive the consenting vote from those assembled to their ordination as

³⁸Joseph, Oliver, David, and Martin all went into the woods together to pray, but after two unsuccessful attempts, Martin, feeling that his presence was the cause for the failed response, withdrew. The heavenly vision then opened to Joseph, Oliver, and David. Shortly after the vision closed, Joseph joined Martin, who was fervently praying nearby, and they had a similar experience (see 1839 Draft History, 5–6; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:236–38). This draft was the source for the material copied into MHC, Book A–1, 24–6; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:295–98. Also published, with minor edits, in HC, 1:54–57.

³⁹The most detailed and carefully researched study on the lives and characters of the Book of Mormon witnesses is Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989).

⁴⁰The historical evidence does not state whether just Joseph and Oliver, or if others (e.g., Martin Harris, Hyrum Smith, any of the Whitmer brothers, etc.) joined in asking the Lord for further revelation on the issue of receiving permission to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost (see 1839 Draft History, 7–8; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:238–39). This draft was the source for the material cop-

presiding officers and to know whether the assemblage would receive them as their spiritual teachers. At this founding meeting, the sacrament would be administered and they could also then perform the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost to those whom they had already or would baptize. For reasons unexplained, the Lord commanded his latter-day servants to defer these actions until, as Joseph reported, "such time, as it should be practicable to have our brethren who had been and who should be baptized, assembled together."⁴¹ When they met on 6 April 1830, Joseph and Oliver complied with the instructions detailed in this revelation.

In a revelation given a short time later "by the Spirit of Prophecy," Joseph said it was "pointed out to us the precise day upon which, according to his [the Lord's] will and commandment, we should proceed to organize his Church once again, here upon the earth."⁴² That revealed date, as we know now, was 6 April 1830, but what were these early believers to do in the meantime? According to David Whitmer, an eyewitness and participant in many of these great spiritual happenings, they preached the restored gospel, baptized for the remission of sins, and ordained several brethren to the priesthood offices of elder, priest, and teacher.⁴³ The most significant concern during the summer of 1829 was finding someone willing to print what was then commonly called the "Gold Bible." This effort was no easy undertaking, but eventually E. B. Grandin, publisher of the *Wayne Sentinel*, a weekly newspaper in Palmyra, was persuaded to take the job. Publication of this second witness of Jesus Christ was most likely a prerequisite to the organization of the church.

Considering the various religious activities they were already engaged in, David Whitmer, in a reminiscence written almost sixty years later, stated his belief that the Church of Christ was "spiritually organized" in 1829. As he explained, "In June 1829, the translation of the Book of

ied into MHC, Book A-1, 26-7; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:299-300; HC, 1:60-62.

⁴¹1839 Draft History, 7-8; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:238-39. This part of the draft, with some editing, was copied into the MHC, Book A-1, 26-7; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:298-300. In both the 1839 Draft History and MHC, Book A-1, the revelation given in June 1829 to Joseph, Oliver, and David (current D&C 18) comes after the narrative about the revelation received at Father Whitmer's log home. However, the correct historical sequence is probably the reverse. The other revelations particularizing the order of the church organizational meeting and specifying the date when the church should be restored were most likely given after mid-June 1829 (the latest possible date on which the revelation in D&C 18 was received) and following completion of the Book of Mormon translation (the end of June, according to David Whitmer). The latest they could have been received is prior to Joseph Smith's departure from western New York for Harmony in August 1829 after contracting with E. B. Grandin to print the Book of Mormon.

⁴²MHC, Book A-1, 27; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:299-300. This material was original to the MHC. The 1839 Draft History reads, "We continued to receive instruction concerning our duties from time to time, and among many things the following directions, fixing the time of our anticipated meeting together for the purpose of being organized were given by the Spirit of prophecy and revelation" (1839 Draft History, 8; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:239).

⁴³See David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Mo: printed and published by the author, 1887), 32.

Mormon was finished. God gave it to us as his Holy Word, and left us as men to work out our own salvation and set in order the Church of Christ according to his written word."⁴⁴

Sometime in the latter half of 1829, obedient to the commandment given him the previous June to rely on the written word, Oliver Cowdery, holding the priesthood keys jointly with Joseph Smith and acting as an apostle of Jesus Christ, used the Book of Mormon manuscript and the early manuscript revelations to compile Mormonism's first organizational statement. According to Oliver, this manuscript was titled the "Articles of the Church of Christ."

This revelation was written on a large sheet of paper folded in half, creating a four-page document. Cowdery wrote on the first three pages, the fourth page is blank.⁴⁵ According to Oliver's notation at the end of the document, we know that this document is a "true copy"⁴⁶ of the articles of the church as they existed in late 1829.

While it was commonplace for Oliver to write down revelations as the Prophet received them, for him to be the actual revelator for the church seems unorthodox. Nevertheless, in the context of the preorganization, Oliver's activity in this instance was legitimate. Keep in mind that it was almost a year later, in the summer of 1830, months after the church was organized, that the Lord gave a revelation (see D&C 28:1-7) that clarified to Oliver and the church that Joseph and Joseph only was the Lord's prophet. We should also remember that Oliver Cowdery's calling as Second Elder, a bipartite holder of the restored keys of the Melchizedek priesthood, entitled him to certain gifts of the Spirit. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, the church historian at the time he expressed this view, described Cowdery's unique position in the church: "Now I am going to call your attention to something that is not, I regret to say, generally known. Oliver Cowdery was called to be what? The 'Second Elder' of the Church, . . . *Oliver Cowdery's standing in the beginning was as the "Second Elder" of the Church, holding the keys jointly with the Prophet Joseph Smith.*"⁴⁷

Many years before, in a public discourse, Heber C. Kimball, first counselor in the First Presidency and a contemporary of the second elder's, acknowledged the revelatory aspect of Cowdery's calling when he recognized that "Oliver Cowdery received revelations and wrote them."⁴⁸

⁴⁴Whitmer, *Address to All Believers*, 30.

⁴⁵There are 1,444 words in Cowdery's articles; page one has 522 words, page two, 521 words, and page three, 401 words.

⁴⁶As cited in Robert J. Woodford, *The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants* (n.p.: Woodford, 1974) 1:287-90.

⁴⁷Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:211-12. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁸Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Discourses*, 5:28. These remarks were delivered 12 July 1857 in Salt Lake City.

It is apparent then that Oliver, as the Second Elder and an apostle, had the authority to write these articles. As previously discussed, the Lord commanded him to assist in building up the church. Oliver testified that the Spirit of the Lord guided him as he selected and arranged these first church articles. Within the document he attested: "Behold I have written these things which he [the Lord] hath commanded me. For behold his word was unto me as a burning fire shut up in my bones and I was weary with forbearing and I could forbear no longer."⁴⁹

Before I describe the contents of Oliver Cowdery's articles, let me tell you a little of this document's interesting history or provenance.

In the early 1970s, while conducting in-depth research on the textual development of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, Robert J. Woodford, a Church Education System instructor, had access to all extant manuscript revelations, most of which are in the Church Historical Department.⁵⁰ One of the manuscripts Woodford studied was Cowdery's "Articles of the Church of Christ," and he included a verbatim transcription of these articles in his dissertation.⁵¹ This was the first public discussion of Cowdery's 1829 revelation.

Cowdery's revelation was part of the unpublished revelations in the LDS Church Archives' Revelations Collection, but in recent years, this document has been moved to a collection of Oliver Cowdery papers. What is unique about this manuscript is that during Joseph Smith's lifetime it was an official church record but was lost (possibly stolen) from the church in the summer of 1831. Nearly 130 years later, in 1960, the church was fortunate enough to receive this Cowdery document as part of an unsolicited donation from the non-Mormon descendants of an individual briefly noticed in the Ohio period of early church history. You might recall the name Symonds Ryder. He joined the church in 1831, but his conversion was short-lived and he apostatized after only a few months. Symonds was identified in the official church history as the ringleader of the mob at Hiram, Ohio, who tarred and feathered Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in March 1832. Although an obscure character in church history, Ryder is mentioned in Doctrine and Covenants 52:37, where he is called to replace an unfaithful missionary. Unfortunately, in writing the revelation and letter of appointment, the scribe misspelled Symonds Ryder's name. This mistake allegedly gave Ryder reason to question the Prophet Joseph's inspira-

⁴⁹Oliver Cowdery, "Articles of the Church of Christ," 3, HDC. Cowdery's statement is a paraphrase of Jeremiah 20:9.

⁵⁰In April 1974, Robert J. Woodford, completed a massive 1,900-page dissertation at Brigham Young University entitled "The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants" (3 vols.). The core of Woodford's meticulous study was a section-by-section examination of the textual changes in each of the revelations. He compared all known manuscripts, printed copies of the revelations in early church publications, and English-language editions of the Book of Commandments and Doctrine and Covenants.

⁵¹See Woodford, "Historical Development," 1:287-90.

tion. For the record's sake, the correct spelling of his name is S-y-m-o-n-d-s R-y-d-e-r. Ironically, his name is still misspelled in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Recently I discovered an interesting connection between Ryder's apostasy in 1831 and Cowdery's 1829 manuscript revelation. On 19 June 1831 the Prophet Joseph Smith, accompanied by many of the leading brethren in Ohio, departed Kirtland on their first visit to the land of Zion (Independence, Jackson County, Missouri). While they were away, it appears that Symonds Ryder went to the church headquarters in Kirtland from his farm in Hiram, Ohio. Somehow, without being detected, Ryder located and carried off a particular group of manuscript revelations. The documents he took detailed, in one way or another, the organization, procedures, or laws of the church.⁵² Among these manuscript was Cowdery's revelation and a copy of the revelation wherein his name was misspelled. In 1958 Ryder's descendants found these manuscript revelations tightly rolled up in a linen handkerchief in a dresser drawer. They took these precious old papers out and flattened them in books. Two years later, through an LDS family living in their community, they gave these revelatory documents to the church historian.⁵³

Let us look briefly at the contents of Cowdery's "Articles of the Church of Christ." As you will see, sometime in the latter half of 1829 Oliver integrated passages from the then-unpublished Book of Mormon manuscript with material from one of the Prophet's June 1829 revelations (D&C 18, which I will call the June revelation) and received his own direct revelation. Cowdery's articles are organized as follows:

1. Begins simply, "A commandment from God unto Oliver how he [Oliver] should build up his [the Lord's] church and the manner thereof" (compare the June revelation, D&C 18:5a).
2. The Spirit tells Oliver to "listen to the voice of Christ . . . and write the words which I [the Lord] shall command you concerning my Church, my Gospel, my Rock" (the phrase *my church, my gospel, my rock* is in the June 1829 revelation, D&C 18:4 [4-5]).

⁵²Later in his life, Ryder explained that when Joseph and the other church authorities went to Zion, they "left their papers behind." Without identifying himself as one of the "converts," Symonds described how the "new converts [took] an opportunity to become acquainted with the internal arrangement of their church" (Symonds Ryder to A. S. Hayden, 1 February 1868, published in A. S. Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve, Ohio* (Cincinnati: Chase & Hall, 1876), 220-1).

⁵³For further details on the finding and subsequent donation of these documents, see William D. Daily's statement, 27 September 1960, HDC; Robert J. Woodford, "The Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ and the Book of Mormon," *Doctrines for Exaltation: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 262-3; and Scott H. Faulring, "Symonds Ryder," *Mormon History Association Newsletter*, no. 103 (fall 1996): 3-5. The detailed information about the documents being found tightly rolled up in a linen handkerchief in a dresser drawer is from a personal telephone conversation between this author and Mr. Wayne E. Watters and his wife, Virginia (she is the Ryder descendant), on 2 October 1996. Notes of conversation in my possession.

3. The church is warned, "Behold the world is ripening in iniquity and it must needs be that the children of men are stirred up unto repentance both the Gentiles and also the House of Israel" (wording from June revelation, D&C 18:6).
4. Call to repentance, apostolic calling of Oliver: "For behold I [the Lord] command all men every where to repent and I speak unto you [Oliver] even as unto Paul mine apostle for ye are called even with that same calling with which he was called (wording from June revelation, D&C 18:9b).
5. Manner and form of baptism defined. The wording comes from the Book of Mormon manuscript (see printer's manuscript [hereafter cited as PM], 381; 1830 Book of Mormon, third book of Nephi, chapter 5, 478 [current 3 Nephi 11:23b–27]). Includes the original opening to the baptismal prayer, "Having authority given me of Jesus Christ," rather than the revised "Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ" first introduced in the 1835 edition of the "Articles and Covenants" (see D&C 20:73).⁵⁴
6. Procedure for church elders to ordain priests and teachers. The wording also comes from the Book of Mormon manuscript (see PM, 454; 1830 Book of Mormon, book of Moroni, chapter 3, 575 [current Moroni 3:1–3]).
7. Duties of Priests specified. Direct revelation to Oliver reads, "And this shall be the duty of the Priest He shall kneel down and the members of the Church shall kneel also which Church shall be called The Church of Christ and he shall pray to the Father in my name for the church and if it so be that it be built upon my Rock I will bless it And after that ye have prayed to the Father in my name ye shall preach the truth in soberness casting out none from among you but rather invite them to come."
8. Manner and form of administering the sacrament. The wording comes from Book of Mormon manuscript (see PM, 454; 1830 Book of Mormon, book of Moroni, chapter 4, 575–76 [current Moroni 4–5]; D&C 20:77).
9. Commandment to not allow the unworthy (unrepentant) to partake of the sacrament. Wording from the Book of Mormon manuscript (see PM, 392–93; 1830 Book of Mormon, third book of Nephi, chapter 8, 492 [current 3 Nephi 18:28–33]).
10. Church counseled to meet together often for prayer. Members need report their progress toward eternal life. Direct revelation to Oliver.
11. Warning against evils and iniquities and instructions to dismiss those that will not repent. Direct revelation to Oliver.
12. Lord calls all to repentance and invites them to come unto him, be baptized and endure to the end and be saved. First part wording from the Book of Mormon manu-

⁵⁴Compare with current Mosiah 18:13 and with the baptismal prayer in current D&C 20:73.

script (see PM, 406; 1830 Book of Mormon, third book of Nephi, chapter 12, 508 [current 3 Nephi 27:20a]). Second part of wording from June revelation (see D&C 18:22b–25).

13. The next part reads, “Behold ye must walk uprightly before me and sin not and if ye do walk uprightly before me and sin not my grace is sufficient for you that ye shall be lifted up at the last day.” This is either direct revelation to Oliver or a combination of wording from the June revelation (see D&C 18:31b) and another revelation received in June 1829 (see D&C 17:8b).
14. Direct quotation from the first revelation given to Oliver Cowdery by the Prophet Joseph Smith in April 1829 (see D&C 6:21).
15. Lord’s testimony that “these words are not of men nor of man but of me” from June revelation (D&C 18:34a).
16. The Lord’s closing statement, which is direct revelation, reads, “Now remember the words of him who is the first and the last, the light and the life of the world. And I, Jesus Christ, your Lord and your God and your Redeemer, by the power of my Spirit hath spoken it. Amen.”
17. Oliver’s authority statement: “And now if I have not authority to write these things judge ye behold ye shall know that I have authority when you and I shall be brought to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” This wording is a close paraphrase from the Book of Mormon manuscript (PM, 436; 1830 Book of Mormon, book of Ether, chapter 2, 548 [current Ether 5:6]).
18. Cowdery’s apostolic testimony: “Behold I am Oliver I am an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

As I have just shown, Cowdery’s articles incorporated procedures and ordinances from the recently translated Book of Mormon with material from modern revelation, and they are to a great extent dependent on the Book of Mormon manuscript. More than half of Cowdery’s revelation is either directly quoted from the Book of Mormon text or a direct paraphrase.⁵⁵ In the last twenty years, several historians and commentators, including Woodford, have described Cowdery’s revelation as an early draft of the “Articles and Covenants,” implying that Joseph Smith later revised and expanded Oliver’s revelatory text and that it eventually became the “Articles and Covenants.” This is not, however, a correct interpretation. It should be noted that the earliest extant manuscript (which I will refer to as Watters-Daily) of the “Articles and Covenants” is less dependent on the Book of Mormon and that more of the contents of the

⁵⁵Approximately 746 words of the total 1,444 words (52 percent) in Cowdery’s articles are dependent on the Book of Mormon text.

"Articles and Covenants" came by direct revelation to the Prophet. Only 21 percent of the text of section 20 depends on the Book of Mormon.⁵⁶ A comparison of Cowdery's "Articles" and the Watters-Daily text of Doctrine and Covenants 20 demonstrates that the former had little influence on the latter. Although certain parts (a small percentage) are similar, there are significant differences.⁵⁷ The "Articles and Covenants" revelation is a richer, more complete doctrinal and procedural text. More than a decade ago, Richard L. Anderson offered what I feel is a more accurate description of this document. He classified Cowdery's revelation as a "forerunner" to Doctrine and Covenants 20.⁵⁸

Cowdery's articles, written sometime in the latter half of 1829, were superseded by the more comprehensive "Articles and Covenants" sometime in the second quarter of 1830. Let me suggest that Cowdery's document be read and interpreted as a preliminary step taken by the Second Elder to help lay the administrative groundwork for the organization of the restored church.

The historical heading of section 20 in the current edition of the Doctrine and Covenants gives an approximate reception date of April 1830 but does not identify a location. The most specific date and location given during Joseph Smith's lifetime was June 1830, at Fayette, New York.⁵⁹ Regrettably, unlike the 1829 articles, we do not have an original or even a pre-1831 copy of the "Articles and Covenants." The closest we can get is the Watters-Daily manuscript and an early printed copy, which both preserve the text as it existed in early 1831.⁶⁰ In analyzing these early copies, we need to keep in mind that the Prophet revised and expanded the "Articles and Covenants" as the church developed. So, for example, because the Book of Mormon does not mention the Aaronic Priesthood office of deacon, we do not find deacons in

⁵⁶The Watters-Daily text of D&C 20 at the HDC (manuscript copy dating from between 9 February and 19 June 1831) was used for comparison. Of its 2,119 words, only 443 words have any dependence on the Book of Mormon text.

⁵⁷The only similarities between Cowdery's articles and the Watters-Daily manuscript of the "Articles and Covenants" are in the manner and form of administering the ordinances of baptism and sacrament. The Watters-Daily copy of D&C 20 has 392 words dealing with baptism or sacrament, while Oliver Cowdery's articles document has 650 words on these same subjects.

⁵⁸Richard L. Anderson, "The Organization Revelations," *Studies in Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Randall, 1984), 1:114.

⁵⁹See BC chapter 24 heading (p. 47).

⁶⁰See manuscript copy of D&C 20 from the Watters-Daily acquisition, Revelations Collection, HDC, and "The Mormon Creed," *Painesville Telegraph*, 19 April 1831. The Watters-Daily document was part of the manuscript revelations donated to the LDS Church by Symonds Ryder's descendants and was written by an unidentified church scribe between 9 February (the reception date of D&C 42, a copy of which is in the same manuscript gathering preceding this copy of D&C 20) and 19 June 1831 (the date Joseph Smith left Kirtland for Missouri). Ryder obtained these manuscripts prior to the Prophet's return to Kirtland in August 1831. E. D. Howe, the antagonistic editor of the *Telegraph*, claimed that the copy he printed was "obtained from the hand of Martin Harris," and was titled "The articles and covenants of the Church of Christ agreeable to the will and commandments of God."

Cowdery's articles, and they were probably not in the 1830 version of Doctrine and Covenants 20. Both 1831 versions of the "Articles and Covenants" refer to the office of deacon, which was restored to the church at least by early 1831.⁶¹

Several historical sources provide details that allow us to reconstruct the approximate time period for the reception of Doctrine and Covenants 20. It appears that the Prophet Joseph Smith received section 20 no earlier than March 1830 but no later than the first week of June that same year. The "Articles and Covenants" were introduced in the Prophet's manuscript history and assigned a mid- to late-1829 setting, historically a more accurate context for the writing of Cowdery's organizational statement.⁶² Realistically, Joseph most likely received the core of Doctrine and Covenants 20 after he returned to Manchester, New York, from his home at Harmony, Pennsylvania, in the spring of 1830. Joseph Knight, a close friend and supporter of the Prophet's from Colesville, provided a detailed description of how he brought Joseph up to Manchester soon after the Book of Mormon was published and just prior to the church's organization.⁶³ Knight recorded in his history of Joseph Smith that the Prophet told him in late March 1830 that "there must be a Church formed" but did not reveal the date.⁶⁴ At the conclusion of the trip from Harmony, as they neared the Smith home in Manchester, the Prophet pointed out to Knight that Martin Harris was approaching and had an armload of printed copies of the Book of Mormon. According to Knight, Martin was worried that the books would not sell due to a local community boycott.⁶⁵

Other historical evidence suggests that Joseph and Oliver were together when the "Articles and Covenants" were first written. We know that Oliver Cowdery was in the Palmyra/ Manchester area during the spring of 1830 helping to finish the proofreading and publication of the Book of Mormon. Undoubtedly, Cowdery was involved in writing section 20 but probably only in a literal sense—as the Prophet's scribe. Years later Brigham Young described Oliver's struggle with Joseph Smith during the reception of the "Articles and Covenants." Brigham related, "You read that Oliver Cowdery was the Second Elder and you remember the Revelation on the

⁶¹A detailed analysis of the textual variants in the "Articles and Covenants" is in Woodford, "Historical Development," 1:303–51.

⁶² 1839 Draft History, 8; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:239, 241. This draft material, with some editing, was copied into the MHC, Book A–1, 29–30; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:300.

⁶³The 1830 Book of Mormon was available by the last week of March 1830. It was first publicized for sale in the *Wayne Sentinel* on 26 March 1830.

⁶⁴ Joseph Knight, "Manuscript of the History of Joseph Smith," 6, HDC. The complete Joseph Knight history is published in "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," ed. Dean C. Jessee, *BYU Studies* 17 (autumn 1976): 29–39.

⁶⁵Joseph Knight was impressed that the Prophet could correctly identify Martin Harris from a distance of some 440 yards (see "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," 36–37).

Priesthood;⁶⁶ . . . Joseph was two hours laboring with O[liver] C[owdery] to get him to write the Revelation in humility.”⁶⁷ The fact that Oliver had written his own version of the articles in the latter part of 1829 could at least partially explain the struggle. The Second Elder may have felt that his version of the articles was sufficient to govern the church.

No one knows for certain whether the Prophet had received or committed the “Articles and Covenants” to paper by 6 April 1830, or, if he had, whether section 20 was read or discussed at the Whitmer farmhouse that day. Because we do not have any contemporary minutes from 6 April, we cannot say for sure if Doctrine and Covenants 20 was presented at that foundational meeting. We must thus rely on the recollections of those who participated or attended. None of those present in Fayette on that mentioned the “Articles and Covenants” in connection with the formal organization. On the other hand, during the first quarterly conference of elders (also held at the Whitmer home) on 9 June 1830, Joseph Smith read the “Articles and Covenants” and then called for a sustaining vote.⁶⁸ The official conference minutes indicate that Doctrine and Covenants 20 was “received by the unanimous voice of the whole congregation, which consisted of most of the male members of the Church.”⁶⁹ During this inaugural conference, the priesthood holders were presented with their licences, which indicated that they had been “baptized and received into the Church according to the Articles and Covenants of the Church.” These certificates were signed by the Prophet Joseph Smith as First Elder and Oliver Cowdery as Second Elder.⁷⁰

Careful examination of the contents and structure of the “Articles and Covenants” suggests that the information included in this revelation was divided. The first part, represented in

⁶⁶The priesthood revelation mentioned here by Brigham Young, which Oliver was present for the reception of, can only be the “Articles and Covenants.” In the Latter-day Saint scriptures there are only two other revelations revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith that overwhelmingly focus on priesthood: D&C 84 and 107. When D&C 84 was received, in September 1832, Cowdery was serving as the presiding priesthood leader in Zion (Independence, Jackson County, Missouri) and was not present for the reception of this revelation. Also, there is no evidence to suggest that Cowdery was involved in the writing (scribal or otherwise) of D&C 107, parts of which were given in 1831 and 1835.

⁶⁷Brigham Young, Provo School of the Prophets Minutes, 1; published in Eldon J. Watson, ed., *Brigham Young Addresses, 1836–1849* (Salt Lake City: printed and published by the compiler, 1984), vol. 5, 15 April 1868.

⁶⁸The official minutes note that this first conference was convened “according to the Church Articles and Covenants” (Far West Record, 1, AFP [hereafter cited as FWR]; published in Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983], 1).

⁶⁹The minutes of the June conference were kept by Oliver Cowdery, who was serving as church recorder, and a copy was retained in FWR, 1; published in Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 1–2.

⁷⁰At least two of these licenses still exist and both refer to the “Articles and Covenants” (see Joseph Smith Sr. priesthood license, 9 June 1830, Joseph Smith Papers [Ms 155, box 5, folder 15], HDC and John Whitmer priesthood license, 9 June 1830, Western Americana Collection [WA Mss 79], Yale University).

the current edition of the Doctrine and Covenants as verses 1–36, has five sections or paragraphs that all end with “Amen” and that are beautifully succinct historical and doctrinal statements. The second segment, comprising verses 37–84, details the procedural requirements and ordinances of the restored Church of Christ. A brief outline of the contents, referenced by the modern versification, follows.

- 1–4: The latter-day church of Jesus Christ was founded according to civil law and “by the will and commandments of God” on 6 April 1830. These commandments were given to “Joseph the Seer,”⁷¹ who was called and ordained an apostle of the Savior “to be the first elder”⁷² of the church and Oliver Cowdery, who was called and ordained an apostle and the Second Elder
- 5–12: After Joseph Smith received forgiveness for his youthful sins (which he received during the first vision), he became “entangled again in the vanities of the world.” As a result of his repentant actions, God sent the “holy angel [Moroni], whose countenance was as lightning and whose garments were pure” to the Prophet (Moroni appeared several times from 1823 to 1827) and “inspired him and gave him power from on high” to translate the Book of Mormon plates, “proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true,” or, in other words, that the Book of Mormon is a second witness of Jesus Christ and his eternal gospel.
- 13–16: The world is to be judged by the testimony of the Three Witnesses. Those who accept the Book of Mormon will “receive a crown of eternal life; but those who harden their hearts and reject it” shall be damned.
- 17–28: The doctrine of the unchangeable God and the creation, fall, and atonement is explained.
- 29–36: The doctrine of repentance, faith, justification, and sanctification is given.

Verse 36 concludes the historical and doctrinal segment of the “Articles and Covenants.” The remainder of Doctrine and Covenants 20 includes the core administrative procedures and ordinances by which the priesthood and general members are to abide. This concluding section of the church constitution appears in the following order:

- 37: Prerequisites for baptism are explained.

⁷¹Both the earliest manuscript copies of D&C 20 (the Watters-Daily document and a copy made by John Whitmer for Zebedee Coltrin) refer to the Prophet Joseph Smith as “Joseph the Seer.”

⁷²Earlier versions (both manuscript and published) read simply “an elder.” Joseph’s unique position and calling as “first elder” was clarified in the 1835 D&C. It should be noted that the priesthood licenses issued at the first conference of elders, held 9 June 1830, specifically designated that Joseph was the First Elder and Oliver the Second. See Joseph Smith Sr. and John Whitmer’s priesthood licenses, as cited in note 68.

- 38-67: Duties of the elders, priests, teachers and deacons and members of the Church of Christ are detailed.
- 68-71: Duties of baptized members are explained.
- 72-74: Mode of baptism specified (immersion) and baptismal prayer is given.
- 75-79: Church commanded to “meet together often” to partake of the sacrament in the “remembrance of Jesus Christ.” The sacramental prayers on bread and wine are specified.
- 80: Dealing with members in transgression is explained.
- 81-84: Church regulation governing membership lists and recommends is given.

An interesting episode directly connected to the “Articles and Covenants” occurred several months after the church was organized. The details of this incident are preserved in the Prophet’s manuscript history.⁷³ Sometime in either July or August 1830, while Oliver was staying with the Whitmers at Fayette, he discovered what he felt to be an error in the manuscript of the “Articles and Covenants.” Evidently, in reading and studying the revelation, the Second Elder became alarmed when he read, “And truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins” (D&C 20:37b). In dictating his history in 1839, Joseph remembered that Oliver wrote an angry letter to him at Harmony in which he (Cowdery) pointed out the so-called mistake in the revelation. Cowdery demanded “in the name of God” that the Prophet delete that part of the “Articles and Covenants” so that, as Oliver warned, “no priestcraft be amongst us.” Although the exact nature of the supposed error is unclear, obviously the Second Elder was sincerely concerned that the offending phrase legitimized a form of priestcraft in the church and was not in harmony with the restored gospel. Oliver Cowdery’s concern is odd considering that the prophet Moroni in the Book of Mormon presents a similar doctrinal statement concerning baptism.⁷⁴

In a timely answer to his close associate, the Prophet asked “by what authority he took upon him to command me to alter or erase, to add or diminish to or from a revelation or commandment from the Almighty God.” A short time later, Joseph visited Oliver and the Whitmers, and, as the Prophet’s history described, “with great difficulty and much labor” he was able to reason with and convince them that Oliver’s “rash judgement” was improper and that the disputed phrase in the “Articles and Covenants” was in “accordance with the rest of the commandment.”⁷⁵

⁷³See 1839 Draft History, 23; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:259–60. This draft material, with some editing, was copied into the MHC, Book A–1, 50–1; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:319–20. It also appears in a slightly edited version in HC, 1:104–5.

⁷⁴1830 Book of Mormon, Moroni 6, p. 576; current Moroni 6:1–4.

⁷⁵1839 Draft History, 23; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:260. This draft material,

When the church met for its second quarterly conference on 26 September 1830, which convened at the Whitmer farm in Fayette township, the Prophet presided. The minutes clearly indicate that Joseph was "appointed by the voice of the Conference to receive and write revelations and commandments for this Church." This action most likely was taken because of the infamous Hiram Page "peep stone" incident⁷⁶ and Cowdery's earlier insistence that the "Articles and Covenants" contained a error, both of which occurred the previous summer. Recognizing the Prophet Joseph Smith as the principle revelator for the church clarified once and for all, for leaders and members alike, that he was charged with the prophetic governance of the church. More than four years later, in December 1834, when Oliver Cowdery was set apart as assistant president of the high and holy priesthood in the church, he elaborated on the "power and authority" of the office of church president. Oliver wrote, "The office of the President [of the church] is to preside over the whole Church; to be considered as at the head; to receive revelations for the Church; to be a Seer, Revelator and Prophet, having all the gifts of God, taking Moses for an ensample."⁷⁷

In late September 1830, during the second elders conference, Oliver addressed the congregation by reading the "Articles and Covenants." After he finished, the Prophet made some comments.⁷⁸ Evidently, by the fall of 1830, Oliver Cowdery became reconciled to and fully sustained the "Articles and Covenants" as the constitutional authority of the church.

In conclusion, let me summarize what we know about the "Articles and Covenants" and their antecedents:

1. During the first vision, the Prophet Joseph Smith learned of the apostasy and was told that he would be instrumental in establishing the restored Church of Christ in the last days and that the fulness of the gospel would at some future time be made known to him.
2. In June 1829 the Lord directed Oliver Cowdery to "rely upon the things which are written" (D&C 18:3) in formulating the church's earliest policies and procedures.

with some editing, was copied into the MHC, Book A-1, 51; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:320. It also appears in a slightly edited version in HC, 1:105.

⁷⁶Hiram Page claimed to be receiving revelation "concerning the upbuilding of Zion [and] the order of the Church" (1839 Draft History, 25; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:263). This draft material, with some editing, was copied into the MHC, Book A-1, 53-8; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:322-3. It also appears in a slightly edited version in HC, 1:109-15.

⁷⁷ Oliver Cowdery, unfinished manuscript history, 5-6 December 1834, in MHC, Book A-1, 17 (first numbering), HDC; published in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:21.

⁷⁸As with the June conference, Oliver Cowdery kept the minutes. The official copy is in FWR, 2; published in Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 3.

3. Cowdery's "Articles of the Church of Christ," a shorter, less developed revelation that is heavily dependent on the Book of Mormon text, was written sometime during the latter half of 1829.
4. The Prophet Joseph Smith, assisted by Oliver, received the revelation known as the "Articles and Covenants" sometime between late March and early June 1830.
5. The Lord gave the "Articles and Covenants" to the church as a constitutional and procedural guide, or general handbook, to regulating church affairs.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 20 was presented and read in the first two church conferences and was cited on official church documents such as priesthood licenses and member recommends.
7. Because of the expanding nature of the early church, there have been additions, deletions, and refinements to the "Articles and Covenants" since their initial reception in 1830.