

## *Mormonism: From Its New York Beginnings*

LEONARD J. ARRINGTON

THAT THE HANDFUL of early Mormon converts decided to migrate from New York only nine months after their church was organized has led some scholars to suppose that the basic influence on Latter-day Saint doctrines and institutions stemmed from their experiences in Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and Utah.<sup>1</sup> This would seem the right time and place for me to discuss five developments which occurred in the Palmyra area in the 1820s and 1830 which, as it turned out, formed the principal themes or building blocks of Mormonism in the 150 years that have followed. These events, harbingers of important things to come, were (1) the occurrence of important heavenly visitations, visions, and revelations; (2) the "translation" and publication of the Book of Mormon; (3) the organization of the Church of Christ; (4) the inauguration of missionary work; and (5) the commencement of mutual aid and helpfulness. From these five seeds, planted in the Palmyra nursery of Mormonism, have grown the essential programs of the Restoration, a movement that has found embodiment in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon) and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) and also in some smaller units independent of those two major denominations.<sup>2</sup>

The first event, of course, was the personal vision of Joseph Smith, Jr., believed to have taken place in a grove of trees on a woodlot on the Smith family farm in Manchester township near Palmyra in the spring of 1820.<sup>3</sup> As related by him a few years later, he had gone to many religious services, studied the Bible intently, conducted conversations with many believers, and become "convicted of my sins."

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By searching the scriptures [he wrote] I found 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. . . . I looked upon the sun . . . and the moon . . . and the stars shining in their courses, and the earth . . . upon which I stood, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters, and . . . man . . . in the likeness of Him who created them . . . walking forth upon the face of the earth in majesty and in the strength of beauty, [with] power and intelligence in governing the things which are so exceeding great and marvelous. . . . [and] my heart . . . exclaimed, "All these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent and omnipresent power—a being who maketh laws and decreeth and bindeth all things. . . . When I considered . . . that that Being seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth, I cried unto the Lord. . . ."

While in [this] attitude . . . a pillar of light above the brightness of the sun at noonday came down from above and rested upon me and I was filled with the spirit of God. . . . I saw the Lord and he spoke unto me, saying "Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee. Go thy way, walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments. . . . Behold, the world . . . have turned aside from the Gospel and keep not my commandments. They draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me. . . ."

My soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great joy, and the Lord was with me. . . .<sup>4</sup>

That First Vision, as it is called in Mormon literature, persuaded the fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith that his "sins" were forgiven him and that he need not seek membership in any of the churches of the region.

Young Smith reported a second vision or visitation, occurring during the night of September 21-22, 1823. Joseph had been a jolly youth, with irrepresible zest for life. He enjoyed sports and games and "sometimes associated with jovial company."<sup>5</sup> Finding it impossible to be as consistently grave as he might have expected to be after his earlier theophany, the seventeen-year-old Joseph knelt at his bedside to pray for forgiveness. Soon, as he told his parents and brothers and sisters the next day, he saw a light in his room, and a personage appeared at his bedside wearing a loose robe "of most exquisite whiteness." "His whole person was glorious beyond description. The "messenger," who said his name was Moroni, said that God had a work for Joseph to do, that there was a record engraved on gold plates deposited in a nearby hill, and that this work contained an account of former inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere. The historian finds it difficult to describe such transcendental experiences as fact, but Joseph stated that Moroni impressed upon him that the record contained "the fullness of the everlasting Gospel," and an account of the visit of the Savior to America's ancient inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> According to Joseph, the angel returned three times that night to reiterate the message and instructed him to meet Moroni at a certain spot at the same time each year for four years. On the final occasion, if he proved worthy, the plates would be delivered to him "for translation."

Joseph's father, mother, and brothers and sisters accepted his story. When his older brother Alvin lay dying just two months after the angel's visit, he (Alvin) took the opportunity of saying "last words" to the members of his family. According to his mother, Alvin's last words to Joseph were "I want you to be a good boy, and do everything that lies in your power to obtain the Record. Be faithful in receiving instruction, and in keeping every commandment that is given you."<sup>7</sup>

Joseph met the angel, according to family accounts, at the Hill Cumorah on the four annual September meetings, in 1824, 1825, 1826 and 1827.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, he had continued working on his father's farm, other farms in the vicinity, and as far south as the Susquehanna River Valley in Pennsylvania. At the latter location he had met Emma Hale and was married to her in South Bainbridge, New York, in January 1827, and they established a home with Joseph's parents in Manchester.

Friends of the family had been told of the imminent delivery of the plates in September 1827, and some had gathered there at the expected time. Sometime after midnight in the early morning hours of September 22, Joseph and Emma drove to the hill, obtained the plates and hid them in an old birch log about three miles from the Smith home.<sup>9</sup> With neighboring ruffians seeking the plates, thinking they were of great monetary worth, Joseph changed the hiding place several times and managed to keep them from being discovered and stolen.

Finding it impossible to translate in peace and quiet in the Palmyra area, Joseph and Emma went to Harmony, Pennsylvania, in December 1827.<sup>10</sup> They were followed by a neighbor (Martin Harris) who believed, and in the spring of 1828 the youthful visionary began to dictate the "translated" material to Harris, his wife Emma, and her brother Reuben. Between April 12 and June 15, 1828, some 116 pages of manuscript had been prepared.<sup>11</sup> Harris then prevailed on Joseph to take them to show his wife in Palmyra. (Harris's farm was one and one-half miles north of the village of Palmyra.) Harris showed the manuscript to his wife and others, but his wife was skeptical of the whole enterprise and incensed at her husband's eagerness to spend time and resources to support the translation work. Apparently she burned or hid the manuscript. When Joseph returned to Manchester and requested that Harris bring the manuscript, Martin could only mourn, "I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul!"<sup>12</sup>

For the next few months Joseph had to work to provide support for his wife, who had lost a baby and was not well. The translation, in which the dictation was made principally to a local teacher, Oliver Cowdery, was not resumed until April 1829, once more in Harmony. The work was moved to Fayette, Seneca County, New York, in June 1829; and the entire production, representing about 600 pages of printed material, was completed by the middle of August. At the conclusion of the translation the plates were shown to three witnesses, and later to eight witnesses, after which, according to Smith, they were returned to the angel from whom Joseph had first obtained them.<sup>13</sup>

Before we discuss the next stage, the publication of the Book of Mormon, we pause long enough to mention another message of the Angel Moroni which was reportedly delivered at the time of his first visit to Joseph Smith in 1823. The ancient biblical prophet Elijah, said the angel, would soon return to earth to "plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers."<sup>14</sup> Believers interpreted that phrase, prophetically mentioned in Malachi, to mean that they had a responsibility to link together children to parents, and parents to their parents, in an unbroken chain that would ultimately join together all God's children in "the everlasting covenant of the Gospel." As a part of the realization of this massive program of kinship between heaven and earth, temples have been erected and sacred "sealing" ordinances performed, and a vast genealogical program was soon underway to provide the names of progenitors who could thus be vicariously united into eternal family groups. To this date, the Genealogical Department of the LDS Church has microfilmed more than one million reels of genealogical data, and members have participated in ceremonies which have linked tens of millions of families together. Eventually, they hope, all mankind will become brothers and sisters in both a formal and a symbolic sense of being connected to each other in sacred ordinances conducted in Latter-day Saint temples.<sup>15</sup>

Despite its acceptance of science and higher learning, Mormonism has never downplayed the importance of heavenly participation in and direction of the building of the Kingdom of God on earth. On May 15, 1829, as Mormons believe, John the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and his associate, Oliver Cowdery, to confer the Aaronic Priesthood. At work translating the Third Nephi portion of the Book of Mormon, which gives an account of the visit of Jesus to the peoples of this hemisphere, Joseph and Oliver had come across several passages about baptism. Impressed that the ordinances of the Church must be performed with divine authority, they walked to "the woods" to pray. While thus engaged in prayer, they said, "a messenger from heaven" appeared who said his name was John, "the same who was called John the Baptist." Laying his hands on their heads, he ordained them, conferring, in the name of the Messiah, the priesthood of Aaron, which gave authority to baptize by immersion for the remission of sins. Joseph baptized Oliver and Oliver baptized Joseph. Joseph then placed hands on Oliver's head and ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood, and Oliver laid hands on Joseph and ordained him to the same priesthood. On the same day, or shortly thereafter, Joseph baptized his brother Samuel Harrison Smith, and a few days later his older brother Hyrum.<sup>16</sup> To this day, persons on whom the authority of the priesthood of Aaron has been conferred have been baptizing by immersion those who request this holy ordinance.

Sometime during the next two months, if we accept the interpretation of Brigham H. Roberts, while they were still in the process of finishing the translation, "the voice of Peter, James, and John," the apostles of Jesus, came to Joseph and Oliver "in the wilderness between Harmony, Pennsylvania and

Colesville, Broome County, New York, declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom." They ordained Joseph and Oliver to the Melchizedek Priesthood and to the Apostleship.<sup>17</sup>

Other visions of fundamental significance to Mormonism came to Mormon leaders in the years that followed. Joseph Smith had a vision of the celestial kingdom in 1836, and that same year he and some associates witnessed the appearance of several heavenly personages in the newly dedicated temple in Kirtland, Ohio. Other remarkable visions include Brigham Young's vision of the Salt Lake Valley as he crossed the Great Plains in 1847, Jason Brigg's vision of the state of church affairs in 1851, Joseph Smith III's vision on temples in 1878, Joseph F. Smith's vision of the resurrection in 1918, and Spencer W. Kimball's 1978 vision of heavenly approval for granting the priesthood to all worthy males. Mormons have always believed that the veil between earthly and heavenly life is thin, and that God is only one prayer away from the valiant and contrite heart.

Another characteristic of Mormonism has been its extensive publication program, and that too had its beginnings in New York. On June 11, 1829, even before he had completed the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith had copyrighted the manuscript. On that date the title page was deposited with R. R. Lansing, clerk of the Northern District Court of New York. For the publication of the manuscript Joseph Smith first went to Egbert B. Grandin, who operated a printing establishment in Palmyra. Publisher of the *Wayne Sentinel*, Grandin did not want to be in the position of lending encouragement and support to what many in the community regarded as a religious imposture and declined. Smith then went to Thurlow Weed, an upstate politician and publisher of the *Rochester Telegraph*. Weed also declined, despite assurances that he would be fully paid. Next Smith and associates went to Elihu F. Marshall, a book publisher at Rochester, who was fully agreeable. Smith returned to Grandin to say that it would be much more convenient for him to have the work published in Palmyra. Since the work would be published in any event, wouldn't he reconsider? Grandin somewhat reluctantly entered into a contract to print and bind 5,000 copies for \$3,000, taking the bond and mortgage of Martin Harris as security. In a mortgage dated August 25, 1829, Harris agreed to pay \$3,000 to Grandin within an eighteen-month period. If he failed to comply, his land was to be sold at public auction to satisfy the debt.<sup>18</sup>

Grandin's establishment, located on "Exchange Row" in Palmyra, began setting the manuscript in type about August 15. Closely written on foolscap paper, with no punctuation marks or paragraphing, the manuscript which was used was Oliver Cowdery's copy of the original dictated manuscript; this manuscript is extant in the library of the Reorganized Church in Independence, Missouri.<sup>19</sup> The bound volumes of the Book of Mormon were finally released on March 26, 1830. Later, Harris sold his farm to pay his obligation to Grandin. This deed is dated April 7, 1831, and conveys 151 acres to Thomas Lakey, of Palmyra, for \$3,000.<sup>20</sup>

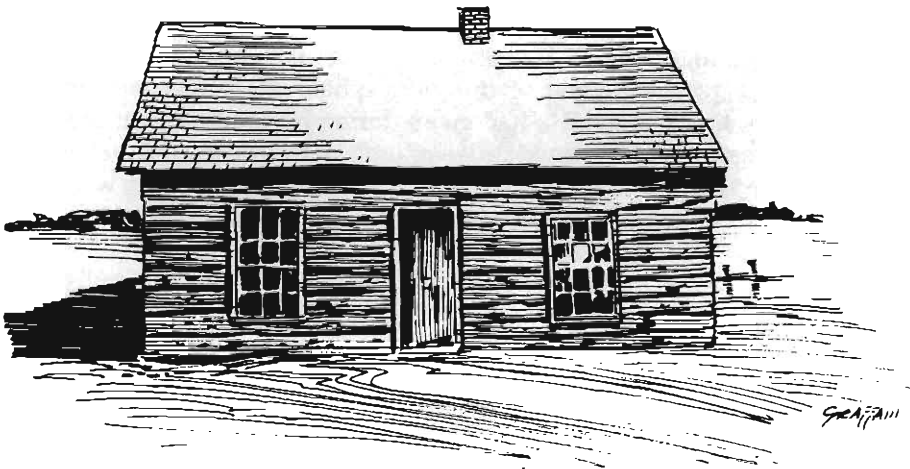
Prior to the publication of the book some pages of the manuscript were published by Abner Cole, an ex-justice of the peace, who published the *Palmyra Reflector* under the name Obadiah Dogberry. On December 29, 1829, Dogberry published the present Chapter 1 of First Nephi and the first three verses of Chapter 2. The issues of January 13, and 22, 1830, published more of the Book of Mormon text, but Smith threatened to take Cole to court for violation of copyright and Cole ran no more of the excerpts.<sup>21</sup> One result of the notoriety, however, was a visit to the Smith family of three officers of the Western Presbyterian Church, to which Lucy, Hyrum and Samuel Smith belonged. Finding Lucy adamant, Deacon George Beckwith tried to persuade her at least not to talk about the forthcoming book. "Deacon Beckwith," she replied, "if you should stick my flesh full of faggots, and even burn me at the stake, I would declare, as long as God should give me breath, that Joseph has got that Record, and that I know it to be true." Hyrum and Samuel being of the same mind, the visitors left and later the Presbyterian congregation suspended the Smiths from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and censured them for their obstinacy.<sup>22</sup>

A unique contribution to religious literature, the Book of Mormon had an undeniable impact on the minds of a few contemporary New Yorkers (and others).<sup>23</sup> Often visited by calamity, surrounded by injustice, perplexed by denominationalism, and mystified by the incongruities of life, they had read the Bible and the Bible declared that God speaks. Here was a new affirmation that He had, indeed, spoken in their day to one of their neighbors. Many were concerned about the spread of deism, "infidelity" and immorality. Here was a document which on its very title page declared that its primary purpose was to serve as another piece of evidence "to the convincing of the Jews and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God." Indeed, the book gave promise of establishing a particular relevancy of Christ for Americans by asserting that He had visited America after His crucifixion and had given a special message to the people of this hemisphere not identical with, but consistent with, the message He had given during his lifetime to residents of ancient Palestine. And for those hard-working, debt-ridden, quarreling citizens of contemporary America who believed that the Millennium was near, here was a thought-provoking statement of the necessary conditions for preparing for that fearsome eventuality.<sup>24</sup>

Count Leo Tolstoy, in speaking of Mormonism, said that, on the whole, he "preferred a religion which professed to have dug its sacred book out of the earth to one which pretended that they were let down from heaven."<sup>25</sup> But as we have seen, Mormonism is a product of forces and influences from both directions. If the vision that implanted the need for a restoration of primitive Christianity came from one direction, the engraved plates which formed the basis for the Book of Mormon came from the other. That publication launched a tradition, still in process, of producing a respectable religious literature. Some of these have been elevated to the status of scripture by one or both churches, such as the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Book of

Moses and Book of Abraham. Others deal with dogma, religious sentiments and exhortation. Just as Christianity from the beginning was a religion of the book, so Mormonism, from its earliest beginnings in upstate New York, has been a religion that used the printed word.

Unlike many religious prophets and mystics who may have had followers but gave little if any attention to organization, Joseph Smith very early set about the establishment of a church. That too occurred in New York. It was on April 6, 1830, that fifty-six persons, about half men and half women, met in the home of Peter Whitmer, Sr., located at Fayette, Seneca County, New York, about twenty-seven miles from Palmyra.<sup>26</sup> There, by unanimous vote, they agreed to form an independent church, with Joseph Smith as First Elder and Oliver Cowdery as Second Elder.<sup>27</sup> (It was at this home of the Whitmers that Smith and Cowdery had finished the translation of the Book of Mormon.) In the years that followed, the name of the Church was expanded to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the organization was perfected with the formation of a First Presidency, Council of Twelve Apostles, First Quorum of Seventy, Relief Society and other important offices and organizational agencies.



There was an impressive ceremony in which the first church members blessed bread and wine and participated in a devout communion. Joseph Smith read "A Revelation on Church Organization and Government" which gave instruction on the manner of baptism, duty of officers, administration of the sacrament, directions for the establishment and government of branches of the Church, etc.<sup>28</sup> Among those present were enough to fill two rooms in the Whitmer home—about twenty from Colesville, Broome County, New York; fifteen from Manchester; and about twenty from the vicinity of the Whitmer home in Fayette. Six Elders "sustained" at this first meeting were designated as "organizers," in compliance with New York State law for incorporating religious bodies. The Elders were: Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Samuel Smith, Peter Whitmer, Jr., and Hyrum Smith.<sup>29</sup>

After the ordination of Joseph and Oliver, the two laid hands on each individual baptized member to confirm them members of the Church and to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost. Some males were ordained to the priesthood. Other persons present, including the parents of Joseph Smith, Martin Harris and Orrin Porter Rockwell, were baptized, some of them in Seneca Lake, some four miles west of the Whitmer home.<sup>30</sup>

There are two aspects of the organization of the Church that are worthy of mention. Organized churches in the nineteenth century, an age that produced more documents than any previous period, would inevitably bring forth written documents. Right from the beginning the Latter-day Saints were commanded to "keep a record."<sup>31</sup> It is remarkable that despite the subsequent uprootings, forced expulsions and periodic migrations (and despite the burning of the RLDS archive in January 1907), a substantial body of precious primary material originating in New York State has been preserved, including:

A sheet of "caractors" from the Book of Mormon gold plates that was given by Joseph Smith to Martin Harris in February 1828 to take to "learned gentlemen" in New York City, with Smith's holograph authentication on the back.

Joseph Smith holograph, letterbook entry, June 14, 1829.

Oliver Cowdery to Hyrum Smith, June 14, 1829.

A letter from Jesse Smith to Hyrum Smith, June 17, 1829.

An 1829 deed.

Manuscripts of the dictated original and printer's copy of the Book of Mormon, 1829.

A letter from Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery, October 22, 1829.

Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith, November 6, 1829.

Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith, December 28, 1829.



Diary of Samuel Smith, 1830.

Lucy Mack Smith to Solomon Mack, 6 January 1831.

Manuscripts for ten revelations later published as Sections 3, 5, 7, 17, 20, 22, 29, 32, 35, 36 of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants.

Asael Smith's letters to his descendants and a genealogy of the Smith family, apparently done about the same time as the letters.

Some miscellaneous papers gathered by George A. Smith including manuscripts about Smith relatives, all originating in New York in the 1820s.

For the years that followed the removal from New York there has accumulated a truly impressive collection of primary documents. These include, in the LDS Church Archives in Salt Lake City, the diaries of about 4,000 persons; about a million volumes of record books of organizations of the Church—Priesthood quorums, Sunday Schools, wards, branches, states, missions, Relief Societies, young peoples' societies, and an enormous body of correspondence—virtually all the letters and reports directed to Church headquarters. And of course a substantial body of records maintained by the Reorganized Church Archives in Independence, Missouri.<sup>32</sup> Clearly, the members of the Mormon History Association owe a heavy debt of gratitude to the faithful members and leaders who accepted as religious obligation the commandment to keep a full record.

In connection with this organized, record-keeping church, two points might be made that would be easy to overlook. First, even though no one would describe this little flock of New Yorkers as learned or well-educated in the usual sense of the word (and some people saw them as an illiterate rabble), they did start out by emphasizing the importance of improving the mind. Remember that in order to study the Bible and Book of Mormon, they had to be able to read. In their new book of scripture and in some of the revelations that circulated in handwritten manuscripts they were told to study and learn. Study and learning were necessary for missionary work, for the operation of church programs, for preparation for the next life. From this simple foundation, starting modestly in New York, Mormons have gone on to emphasize education as perhaps no other religious group except the Jews.

And let us notice that attending that organizational meeting on April 6, 1830, were women as well as men. Women were counted among the first converts. From the beginning, women participated along with men in the baptismal covenants, in the reception of the Holy Ghost, in the communion service and even in voting. If they did not preside, they nevertheless played a central role. The record is not bad for a group of upstate farmers in 1830.<sup>33</sup>

Another activity that has characterized Mormons from the late 1820s to the present is missionary preaching. This too began during the New York phase of Mormon history. Even before the organization of the Church—indeed, even before copies of the Book of Mormon were bound and made available to the public—interested parties were taking extracts of the book hundreds of

miles from Palmyra to share with others. To give an example, Solomon Chamberlain, who lived in the vicinity of Lyons, about twenty miles from Palmyra, while on a journey to Upper Canada, lodged for the night in a home just one-half mile from the Smith residence in Manchester. The woman of the house told him of the "Gold Bible," as she called it, which Joseph Smith had found. Chamberlain made his way to the Smith residence and introduced himself by asking, "Is there anyone here that believes in visions and revelations?" Being answered that, yes, they were "a visionary house," Chamberlain gave them a copy of one of his pamphlets which related a visionary experience of his own. They read it aloud with increasing excitement, after which Chamberlain told them an angel had made known to him in a vision that "all the churches and denominations on earth" were corrupt, and that it had been made known to him that God would shortly "raise up a Church . . . like unto the Apostolic Church."

The Smiths related to him the story of the Angel Moroni, the gold plates and the production of the Book of Mormon. Hyrum Smith also took him to the printing office, where they gave him the first two signatures—the first sixty-four pages—which he carried with him to Canada. "I exhorted all people to prepare for the great work of God that was now about to come forth, and it would never be brought down nor confounded," he wrote.<sup>34</sup>

Such sporadic individual experiences led to the distribution of instructions for sending out missionaries on a more systematic basis. Among the first to go was Samuel Smith, brother of the Prophet, who set out almost immediately after the April 6 meeting with a few copies of the Book of Mormon in his saddle bag and with a testimony in his heart that the Gospel was true.<sup>35</sup> Among those who were persuaded to join the Smith family and their neighboring friends as the result of Samuel's testimony and the Book of Mormon he left with them were the families of Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, both of whom lived in Mendon township, New York, some eighteen miles southwest of Palmyra (twenty-six miles distant by road). These men became themselves early missionaries, apostles, and ultimately successors of Joseph Smith in the First Presidency of the Church. Virtually all male converts, upon their conversion, set out on short preaching missions, and this became standard practice. The hundreds of missionaries serving each year in the nineteenth century, turned into thousands in this century. At this sesquicentennial moment there are more than thirty thousand young men and women who devote from eighteen to twenty-four months traveling, at their own expense, in some part of the world, preaching the same Restored Gospel first preached by Samuel Smith in western New York State in 1830.<sup>36</sup>

Among the missionaries called from Manchester in 1830 were four sent expressly to make contact with Native Americans. The four, Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, Peter Whitmer, Jr., and Ziba Peterson, all Western New Yorkers, preached to the Iroquois at Catteraugus, near Buffalo; to the Wyandots of northeastern Ohio; the Shawnees in present-day Kansas; and the Delawares west of the Missouri River. In a sermon later published in *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, Cowdery told the Delawares: "We have travelled a

long distance from towards the rising sun to bring you glad news; we have travelled the wilderness, crossed the deep and wide rivers, and waded in the deep snows, and in the face of the storms of winter, to communicate to you great knowledge which has lately come to our ears and hearts." He went on to tell them of Joseph Smith, of the discovery of the gold plates, of the Book of Mormon, of the visit of Christ to the western hemisphere, and of the great civilizations which the ancestors of the Indian had built. He promised them that their rights and privileges would be restored, they would cease to fight and kill one another, and they would become one people and cultivate the earth in peace. He presented them a copy of the Book of Mormon and assured them it would do them good.

Government Indian agents took a dim view of such preaching and forced them, for the time being at least, to discontinue. "We trust that at some future day when the servants of God go forth in power to the remnant of Joseph," wrote Pratt, "some precious seed will be found growing in their hearts, which was sown by us in that early day."<sup>37</sup>

The fifth and final seed planted in Western New York was the Mormon practice of cooperation and mutual aid. In the town of Colesville, Broome County, lived a small population of farmers who had accepted the faith and who felt a close kinship with each other. Andrew Jenson refers to them as the "first branch of the Church."<sup>38</sup> When Joseph Smith suggested in December 1830 that all the Church of Christ congregations in western New York move to northeastern Ohio, the Colesville Saints decided to move as a group. The sixty-four men, women, and children traveled, in April 1831, as family and neighborhood groups to Ithaca. One witness said the train consisted of three baggage and eleven passenger wagons, all drawn by oxen. At Ithaca, on the south end of Cayuga Lake, they took water to Ohio—first on Cayuga and Seneca canalboats, then into the Erie Canal system. They arrived at Buffalo on May 1, 1831, after a week of travel. Detained two weeks at Buffalo by the ice-filled harbor, they were joined by eighty Saints who had embarked from Waterloo, Seneca County. After three days they arrived at Fairport, Ohio, which was eleven miles from the new Church headquarters at Kirtland.<sup>39</sup>

The little Colesville congregation settled at first on a thousand-acre farm in Thompson, Ohio, sixteen miles northeast of Kirtland. The farm was made available by Lemman Copley, a wealthy farmer who had consecrated it to the cause. At Thompson they organized along communitarian lines—under what was called the Law of Consecration and Stewardship. This system provided that each person consecrate his economic property to the bishop, and the bishop in turn assigned stewardships, according to individual needs, of land, livestock, implements, and other property. Those who earned a "surplus" of income were asked to consecrate it to the "bishop's storehouse," and it would be used to supply those who had greater needs than their income permitted, and to finance community edifices and programs. After two months of labor by the Colesville settlers, however, Copley apostatized and sued for the re-

turn of his property. The courts, which were oriented in favor of individual rights, supported Copley's claim, and the Colesville settlers had to give up the farm.<sup>40</sup>

The Colesville community then moved, once more as a group, to western Missouri, near present-day Independence. They travelled in twenty-four wagons, and this sight was sufficiently unusual that, as Emily Coburn wrote, "People all along the road stared at us as they would at a circus or a caravan. . . . We most truly were a band of pilgrims started out to seek a better country." "We were told [by teamsters] that we were the most peaceable and quiet emigrants they had ever carried west; no profanity, no bad language, no gambling, and no drinking."<sup>41</sup>

In Jackson County, Missouri, they re-established their communitarian society. They worked cooperatively as they built houses and fences and sowed grain. With Newel Knight as their leader they continued to maintain their group identity, from their arrival on July 25, 1831, until December 1, 1833. On the latter day they were expelled by "old settler" Missourians who took a dim view of this cooperative Yankee society. Even in the expulsion, during the winter of 1833, the Colesville Branch, as usual, kept together and formed a small settlement on the Missouri bottoms, building themselves temporary houses. Not until 1836, when the Saints in Clay County, Missouri, were required to move to Caldwell County, was the Colesville Branch finally amalgamated with other organizations of the Church and its experiment in economic idealism suspended.<sup>42</sup>

So the spirit of mutual helpfulness, responsibility for each other's well-being, seeking to live a more pure form of Christianity—which itself drew inspiration from the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and several of Joseph Smith's early revelations—was first carried into practice by a group of Latter-day Saints from New York. Forever after, Mormon programs were colored by the Colesville idealism. The sharing with new immigrants later in Nauvoo, Illinois; the mutual assistance in the trek to the Great Basin; the establishment of equalitarian institutions involving the sharing of land and water in pioneer Utah; the founding of Lamoni, Iowa—all were touched by the magic of the Colesville example. Even today, one hundred fifty years later, the ideals of these New York Saints are institutionalized in the Zionc movements of the Reorganized Latter-day Saints and the LDS Church Welfare Program, by which Mormons seek to look after the physical, social, and psychological needs of their brothers and sisters.<sup>43</sup>

In summary, despite the short stay of the Latter-day Saints in New York, it was there that the organization of the Church of Christ, the key visions, manifestations, and revelations took place and the formulative organizational steps and programs were initiated. It was in New York that the Book of Mormon was translated and published. It was in New York that missionary work was inaugurated. It was in New York that the tradition of mutual aid and helpfulness started. The youthful Joseph Smith's "cry in the wilderness" caused a blossoming in the garden place which was Western New York. From the flowers of this nursery has come a remarkable and noteworthy harvest.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>R. Kent Fielding, "The Growth of the Mormon Church in Kirtland, Ohio" (Ph. D. diss., Indiana University, 1957), esp. pp. 134-152; Mario S. DePillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 1 (March 1966): 68-88; and Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), p. 193. See also DePillis, "The Social Sources of Mormonism," *Church History*, 37 (March 1968): 50-79, in which he says (p. 60), "almost all of Mormonism developed after 1830 in the Midwest: its economics, theology, and social arrangements." The best correction to this (as I believe) mistaken point of view is Marvin S. Hill, "The Shaping of the Mormon Mind in New England and New York," *Brigham Young University Studies* (hereafter referred to as *BYU Studies*), 9 (Spring 1969): 351-372.

<sup>2</sup>In making brief mention of a number of important episodes in Mormon history which took place in the Palmyra area, I have abstracted from longer accounts which may be found in James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976); Ivan J. Barrett, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration: A History of the Church to 1846* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1973); and Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. by B. H. Roberts, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, 1951), 1:1-146. (Hereafter referred to as *History of the Church*.) The best works on the New York Phase of Mormon history are Larry C. Porter, "A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831" (Ph. D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1971); and Richard L. Bushman, *The Beginnings of Mormonism*, forthcoming from Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah. See also James B. Allen and Leonard J. Arrington, "Mormon Origins in New York: An Introductory Analysis," *BYU Studies*, 9 (Spring 1969): 241-274.

<sup>3</sup>In giving 1820 as the probable date of Joseph Smith's youthful vision, I am aware that there are variant possibilities. See Rev. Wesley P. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins from the Palmyra Revival," *Dialogue*, 4 (Spring 1969): 60-81. Most scholars, it seems to me, are persuaded that the event most likely occurred in 1820, when Joseph Smith was fourteen. See Milton Backman, in *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1971); and Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith, The First Mormon* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1977), pp. 41-54; and Bushman, *The Beginnings of Mormonism*, chapter 2.

<sup>4</sup>From Joseph Smith, "A History of the Life of Joseph Smith, Jr.," in Kirtland Letter Book, 1829-1835," pp. 1-6, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah. This holograph account has been published in Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 278-294. In preparing this selection I have provided punctuation and capitalization, regularized the spelling, and removed some connecting conjunctions. See also Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*; and James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's 'First Vision' in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 1 (Autumn 1966): 29-46.

<sup>5</sup>*History of the Church*, 1:9.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:11-12. This account was dictated by Joseph Smith in 1838. It was first published in the *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo), 15 April 1842, p. 753. For a discussion of these and other references see Richard L. Anderson, "Confirming Records of Moroni's Coming," *Improvement Era* (Salt Lake City), 73 (September 1970): 4-8.

<sup>7</sup>Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Liverpool and London, 1853), pp. 88.

<sup>8</sup>The Hill Cumorah was three miles southeast from the Joseph Smith, Sr., farm, and four miles south of the village of Palmyra on the Canadigua Road (New York State Highway 21). The hill is situated in the town of Manchester. The term "Cumorah" is derived from the "land of Cumorah" spoken of in the Book of Mormon (Book of Mormon, Mormon 6:2). See Klaus D. Gurgel, "God's Drumlin: Hill Cumorah in the Religious Geography of Mormonism," paper presented at the 70th annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Seattle, Washington, April 28-May 1, 1974, copy in possession of the writer.

<sup>9</sup>Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 104.

<sup>10</sup>*History of the Church*, 1:19-20

<sup>11</sup>Porter, "Origins of the Church," p. 145.

<sup>12</sup>Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 121.

<sup>13</sup>*History of the Church*, 1:21-32, 48-59. Despite later differences with Smith, each of the three witnesses insisted throughout his life that he had seen the plates and that the Book of Mormon story was true. One of them, David Whitmer, was excommunicated in 1838 for a variety of reasons. A second, Oliver Cowdery, was also excommunicated in 1838 but was later rebaptized. The third, Martin Harris, strayed temporarily from Mormonism by joining the Shakers, but in 1870 rejoined the Mormon community in the Far West. Harris, at one point in his life, is quoted as having stated that he had seen the plates with "the eye of faith." See Marvin S. Hill, "Brodie Revisited: A Reappraisal," *Dialogue* 7 (Winter 1972): 83-85; and Richard L. Anderson, a series of articles on the Three Witnesses in *The Improvement Era* (Salt Lake City), 81-83 (1968-1970).

<sup>14</sup>The visions and heavenly instructions to Joseph Smith are collected and published in *Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1935), hereafter referred to as D & C with the section and verse. See D & C 2:2.

<sup>15</sup>James B. Allen, Professor of History at Brigham Young University, has nearly completed a history of the genealogical work of the LDS Church.

<sup>16</sup>*History of the Church*, 1:29-51; Oliver Cowdery, in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio), October 1834, p. 15. Today a monument of Carnelian granite marks the location of this event in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. The sculpture bears the figures of John the Baptist, Joseph Smith, and Oliver Cowdery. See Porter, "Origins of the Church," p. 156.

<sup>17</sup>*History of the Church*, 1:40-41n; D & C 18:9. Some of the problems associated with this metaphysical experience are discussed in Richard P. Howard, "The Historical Method as the Key to Understanding Our Heritage," *Saints' Herald* (Independence, Mo.), November 1974, p. 53.

<sup>18</sup>Porter, "Origins," 162, 86-92; Thurlow Weed, *Autobiography of Thurlow Weed.*, ed. Harriet A. Weed (Boston, 1884): 1:358-359; Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York, 1867), 52-53.

<sup>19</sup>In 1841 Joseph Smith placed the "original" dictated manuscript of the Book of Mormon in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House. In 1882, when renovating a part of the Nauvoo House foundation and walls, L. C. Bidamon retrieved portions of the manuscript, most of which had been severely damaged by the elements. Some twenty-three complete pages and fragments of perhaps 150 other pages are now in the LDS Church Archives in Salt Lake City and have been laminated for preservation. There are differences between the "original" dictated manuscript and the printer's copy, which suggests that the original was a "first draft" and was subjected to editing and emendation in preparation for publication. See Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1969), esp. chapter two; and Dean C. Jessee, "The Original Book of Mormon Manuscript," *BYU Studies*, 10 (Spring 1970): 259-278.

<sup>20</sup>Porter, "Origins," pp. 86-92.

<sup>21</sup>Russell R. Rich, "The Dogberry Papers and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies*, 10 (Spring 1970), 315-320; Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 148-150.

<sup>22</sup>Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 146. Also Bushman, *The Beginnings of Mormonism*, chapter 3.

<sup>23</sup>An appreciation of the Book of Mormon as literature by a non-Mormon is Douglas Wilson, "The Book of Mormon as a Work of American Literature," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 3 (Spring 1968): 29-41.

<sup>24</sup>On the religious climate of early Western New York see especially Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950). "The Appeals of Mormonism" to contemporary New Yorkers and others are described in Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), pp. 20-43. On the basis of circumstantial evidence, Robert N. Hullinger recently concluded that the

Book of Mormon was intended to convince skeptics of the truth of Christianity. *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon* (St. Louis, Mo.: Clayton Publishing House, 1980).

<sup>25</sup>*Autobiography of Andrew Dickson White*, 2 vols. (New York, 1907), 2:87.

<sup>26</sup>The one or two sources which give Manchester as the place where the Church was organized are probably inadvertent errors. See Porter, "Origins," pp. 243-252.

<sup>27</sup>The Whitmer farm was in the countryside outside of Fayette village, about five miles northwest of the unincorporated village. The farm was three miles south and one mile west of Waterloo, New York. Fayette, named for Revolutionary War hero General Gilbert Morier de La Fayette, had been settled by people of German origin from Pennsylvania. Peter Whitmer, Sr., was born in Pennsylvania, and married Mary Musselman there. Peter Whitmer was an overseer of highways and was a local school trustee; his son Christian, a witness of the Book of Mormon, was a constable of Fayette township. See Richard L. Anderson, "Five Who Handled the Plates," *Improvement Era*, 72 (July 1969): 39; Porter, "Origins," p. 223.

<sup>28</sup>D & C 20-21. It is unclear whether these and other March and April revelations were read before, during, or after the organizational meeting. Clearly, the essence of the revelations was discussed on April 6. At the first conference of the Church, held June 9, 1830, the minutes state: "Articles and Covenants read by Joseph Smith, Jr. and received by unanimous voice of the whole congregation. . . ."

<sup>29</sup>No copy of the incorporation registry has been found.

<sup>30</sup>Joseph Knight, Sr., reported that one evening "Old Mr. Smith and Martin Harris came forrod [forward] to be Baptise[d] for the first. They found a place in a lot a small Stream ran thro and they were Baptized in the Evening Because of persecution." See Dean Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies*, 17 (Autumn 1976), 37.

<sup>31</sup>D & C 21:1.

<sup>32</sup>An account of records in the LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, is in Max J. Evans and Ronald G. Watt, "Sources for Western History at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 8 (July 1977): 303-312. Those in the RLDS Library are described in Madelon Brunson, "Archival Holdings of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," mimeographed, Independence, Missouri, 1978.

<sup>33</sup>The law for the incorporation of a religious society in the State of New York stipulated, in Section III, "And be it further enacted, That it shall be lawful for the male persons of full age, belonging to any other church, . . . to assemble . . . and, by plurality of voices, to elect any number of discreet persons. . . ." If the first Mormons complied strictly with this, their first act may have been by male voice, and the law of common consent inaugurated for men and women thereafter. Existing records do not make clear whether this was done.

<sup>34</sup>Solomon Chamberlain, "A Short Sketch of the Life of Solomon Chamberlain," original in possession of Mrs. Albert D. Swensen, Provo, Utah, copy in LDS Church Archives Typescript in Porter, "Origins," pp. 277-285.

<sup>35</sup>D & C 12, 14, 15, 16. Diary of Samuel H. Smith, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>36</sup>See especially S. George Ellsworth, "A History of Mormon Missions in the United States and Canada" (Ph.D., diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1951).

<sup>37</sup>*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City, 1874), 57-59.

<sup>38</sup>Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1941), 152-153.

<sup>39</sup>Larry C. Porter, "The Colesville Branch and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies*, 10 (Spring 1970): 365-385; Porter, "Origins," pp. 222, 296-306. The Waterloo Saints departed Buffalo about May 9, 1831, and arrived at Fairport about May 11 or 12. The Colesville Saints left Buffalo May 11, and arrived at Fairport on May 14, 1831.

<sup>40</sup>See Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation Among the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976) esp. chapter 2; and Mario S. DePillis, "Mormon Communitarianism, 1826-1846" (Ph. D. diss., Yale University, 1961). In "Social Sources of Mormonism," *Church History*, 37 (March 1968): 60 Mario DePillis has asserted that Mormon communitarianism was developed in Ohio as the result of Campbellite and Shaker influences. Actually, the influence (if any) more likely came from New York; the Groveland Society of Shakers was located at Sodus and a Jemima Wilkinson experiment was found at PennYon, both within thirty miles of Manchester.

<sup>41</sup>Emily M. Austin, *Mormonism; or, Life Among the Mormons* (Madison, Wisc., 1882), 63-65.

<sup>42</sup>Porter, "Colesville Branch," p. 384.

<sup>43</sup>Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), pp. 272-279 *et passim*.