Remnants of Revelation:  
On the Canonical Reading of Doctrine and Covenants 42

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With the recent church-sponsored publication of the Book of Commandments and Revelations and the Kirtland Revelation Book, it is more likely than ever before that the average Latter day Saint will learn that the revelations as found in the current, canonical edition of the Doctrine and Covenants have not always read as they do now. Although systematic studies of textual variations in the revelations have technically gone on for decades, they are likely to increase dramatically in coming years, and more will soon be known about the revelations making up the Doctrine and Covenants—their historical context, their basic intentions, their immediate consequences—than has been known since the first generation of Mormon converts passed away.

Efforts to investigate textual variants in the revelations and their historical implications should be applauded, and I hope they are undertaken without reserve. Nevertheless, I will confess that I am at the same time moved by a concern that such study obscures another question that is quite as crucial as—if not actually more crucial than—textual and historical questions about the Doctrine and Covenants. This too easily overlooked question addresses the meaning of the revelations, not at the level of the individual passage or even section, but at the level of the entire volume. The question I thus hope will not be lost in all our textual and historical analyses of the Doctrine and Covenants is a strictly canonical question. To ask the canonical question is to ask about both the shape of the Doctrine and Covenants as a whole and the meaning of the individual revelation as it is situated within that whole. Significantly, the shape of the whole Doctrine and Covenants has changed more drastically over the years of its publication than any single revelation contained within it during the same period of time. I want, therefore, to ask what seems to me to be a few poignant questions about the significance of the canonical shape of the Doctrine and Covenants as we now have it. In order to stage these questions in the most forceful way possible, I want to ask them with reference to a particular revelation, the one we are collectively considering in this volume: the revelation we know today as Doctrine and Covenants, section 42. I will argue not only that this revelation has borne a series of canonical significations over the past two centuries but also that its current canonical status marks the peculiar scriptural nature of the Doctrine and Covenants as a whole as we now have it.

Before the Doctrine and Covenants

At the time of the original reception of the revelation in question, the Latterday Saints had not even begun to speak of printing, publishing, or canonizing the modern revelations of the Prophet Joseph. But because this revelation came uniquely preannounced (see D&C 38:32) and because it was very quickly accepted by the Saints generally as constituting “The Laws of the Church of Christ,” what we know today as section 42 of the Doctrine and Covenants bore from the moment it was revealed a kind of protocanonical force, an authoritative status operative even before it was set to be included in an authorized book of modern scripture. Several historical details confirm this. (1) The revelation was immediately coupled by the early Saints with what is now section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the “Articles and Covenants” of the church. These two revelations were routinely read at conferences of the church before there was any idea of canonizing Joseph Smith’s revelations. (2) What is now section 42 was, significantly, the first of Joseph Smith’s revelations to find its way into print. Although its first publication was actually part of an anti-Mormon effort sponsored by the apostate Symonds Ryder, the fact that he thought this particular revelation uniquely worth publishing to the world says something about its status in the early church. Finally, (3) it was the third of Joseph Smith’s revelations to be printed by the church itself once a
press was established and the *Evening and the Morning Star* was launched. From all these details, the protocanonical force with which the Law was received is clear. Still more, it would not be difficult to argue that it was this revelation in particular—especially because it was published without authorization by apostates under the title “Secret Bye Laws of the Mormonites”—that turned the attention of the Saints to the possibility (or even the necessity) of printing, and eventually canonizing, modern revelation. But whatever the motivations, plans for the publication of the revelations—despite serious opposition from within the church—were seriously underway less than a year after the Law was revealed to the church.

Once plans were formalized for what was to become the Book of Commandments, the original, protocanonical, fully normative version of the Law effectively gave way to what was intended to be a historicized (and therefore somewhat less normative) version. The Book of Commandments was to be organized chronologically, the several revelations succeeding one another in the order they had been received; and the whole volume was to be introduced by a revealed preface (now D&C 1) announcing that the revelations—the Law obviously included—had been given to the Saints “in their weakness, after the manner of their language.” Moreover, as if to confirm this historicizing contextualization of the Law, John Whitmer began, within days of the decision to publish the Book of Commandments, writing an official history of the church in which the Law was narratively contextualized in a still more striking fashion by being placed within an unfolding history. (Significantly, the same John Whitmer was one of the three persons officially appointed to select and arrange the revelations in the Book of Commandments.) These historiographically inflected attempts at situating the revelations make clear that, within months of its reception, the Law—despite its pretensions, as law, to a kind of atemporality or at least immemoriality—became, almost by default, chapter 44 of a book of historically situated commandments, sandwiched between two revelations that had borne nothing like the protocanonical status enjoyed by the Law when it was received.

Contextualizing historicity, it seems, was set to displace strict normativity. But, as it turned out, the Book of Commandments was never actually published because of the 1833 destruction by a mob of the printing outfit where it was in production. The result was that the historicizing contextualization of the Law that would have been effected by the publication of the Book of Commandments—the initial print run for which had originally been set at ten thousand copies—did not really take place in the 1830s. Instead, and obviously in part as a response to the loss not only of the printing establishment in Zion, but of Zion itself as well, a completely different version of the Law would appear among the Saints in 1835, now in the shape of a “section” (no longer a “chapter”) of the heavily institutional volume bearing the title of Doctrine and Covenants. With the 1835 publication, the normative law of 1831 and the historicized law of 1833 became at last a fully canonical law. But this, its first real canonical presentation, is actually quite complex and deserves close attention.

**Creation and closure of the canon**

Full canonization of the revelations in 1835 was accompanied by a double historical cost. The revelations to be included in the volume were (1) heavily edited and (2) rearranged in an institutionally inflected, rather than strictly chronological, order. These two moves were undertaken in the wake of the massive shift, between the 1833 loss of Zion and the 1836 dedication of the Kirtland House of the Lord, from a more loosely or even democratically structured church to a church hierarchy organized for the first time around both quorums and councils. The 1835 publication of the Doctrine and Covenants clearly served to seal this top to bottom reworking of institutional Mormonism. By giving privilege of place to institutionally oriented revelations, as well as by heavily editing the revelations with an eye to the institution only then taking shape, Joseph Smith and others working on the volume wove the soon-to-be canonized collection of revelations right into the structure of the church. The Law was, of
course, anything but exempt from these editorial procedures. Indeed, in terms of textual editing, it was—for
obvious reasons—among the most drastically altered texts, particularly in its directions concerning the law of
consecration and stewardship, a law that could no longer be deployed as originally written, given the loss of the
Saints’ lands in Zion. Moreover, likely because of its erstwhile strictly normative status, the Law found its place
early in the new volume as section 13, quite different from its position in the projected Book of Commandments,
in which it was set to be chapter 44. Both the editorial alterations to the Law’s text and the positioning of the Law
as section 13 in the new volume deserve some detailed attention.

The actual placement of the Law in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants is extremely complex. Although those who
put the volume together left no explanation of the order into which the various revelations (as well as
nonrevelatory materials) were put, it is possible to divine something of their thinking from an analysis of the
volume itself, and such an analysis sheds a great deal of light on the changing meaning of the Law in 1835. The
volume was clearly divided into two major parts: (I) the “Doctrine” (or “Theology”), consisting of the Lectures on
Faith, and (II) the “Covenants and Commandments,” consisting of the revelations and a few other items. In the
latter of these two larger divisions one can further discern two major subdivisions (setting aside section 1, the
revealed preface from the Book of Commandments, and sections 100–102, which made up the appendix): (II.A)
what was probably meant to comprise the “Covenants,” consisting of revelations that seem to bear directly on
questions of the organization of the church and its direct association with Zion (sections 2–29 in the 1835
edition); and (II.B) the “Commandments,” consisting of all the other revelations (sections 30–99). The first of these
two subdivisions (the “Covenants”) is clearly privileged because of the relationship between its content and the
institution the Doctrine and Covenants was meant to seal. The second (the “Commandments”), displaced to a kind
of subordinate position, is something like an updated Book of Commandments (it is even strictly chronological in
its internal ordering), incorporated right into the last part of the new volume.

Importantly, although one encounters some mysteries at this point, there is reason to subdivide the
“Covenants” subdivision of the volume such that it consists of the following: (II.A.1) a group of revelations that are
clearly privileged because they deal directly and explicitly with the priesthood and the organization of the
institutional church and seem to be organized in terms of institutional importance (sections 2–7); (II.A.2) a group
of revelations, whose unifying theme is more difficult to ascertain but which are organized among themselves in
strict chronological order (sections 8–22); and (II.A.3) another group of revelations without a clear unifying theme
but organized according to an unascertainable logic (sections 23–29). It is the internal ordering of each of these
subdivisions that makes clear that they should be distinguished. The Law (as section 13) falls, in the 1835
volume, within the second of these subdivisions (II.A.2), that is, within the strictly chronologically ordered
group of revelations, the unifying theme of which does not seem immediately obvious. This placement is what
deserves close attention.

Because it was moved from the “Commandments” to the “Covenants” in the 1835 volume, the Law lost something
of the immediacy of its 1833 historicization. For example, though it was preceded immediately in the Book of
Commandments by what is today section 41, a revelation with clear historical connections to the Law, some
fortyseven revelations separated the Law and its immediate historical predecessor in the 1835 Doctrine and
Covenants. At the same time, though, because the Law found its place specifically in that sub subdivision of the
“Covenants” that is itself strictly chronological in its internal ordering, something of its historicization remained in
the 1835 volume. It was immediately preceded by the revelation (now section 38) that announced the coming of
the Law, and it was immediately followed by the same revelation (now section 43) that had followed it in the
historically arranged Book of Commandments. It might thus be said that the Law had been removed from a kind of
absolute historicization of the revelations (represented in the Book of Commandments) and then placed in a
relative historicization of a select and clearly privileged string of revelations (represented by sections 8–22 of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants). The 1835 production thus restored to the Law something of its former normativity while nonetheless retaining something—however limited—of its historicity. It was thus possible at once (1) to allow aspects of the revelation that could have been described, by 1835, as dated to fall away from normativity into historicity and nonetheless (2) to retain as normative what of the revelation might still be taken as bearing on the behavior and activity of the Saints.

This same double aim can be detected as well in the actual changes made to the text of the revelation. Not only was it torn from its place in an absolute chronological ordering of the revelations in 1835, it was also reworked at the level of the text in such a way that its actual wording would have been out of place in February of 1831 when it was originally received. This reworking, it is clear, was intended to allow the revelation to slip into the past while nonetheless drawing from its erstwhile normative power certain guiding principles for the church. Detailed studies of the changes made to the Law in 1835 have long been available, and I will for the most part here simply defer to them, postponing any detailed discussion of the changes until I turn to the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, where the details of the changes made to the revelation become more relevant to my purposes in this paper.

Before turning from the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, though, it is worth inserting a note because the many alterations made to Joseph Smith’s revelations in 1835 have been a point of concern for some Latter day Saints. While I understand the motivation behind such concerns, I believe them to be unnecessary, if not simply misguided. Latter day Saints today should take comfort in the fact that the Saints of 1835 were quite aware of and remained unbothered by the changes made to the revelations: the earlier, unmodified versions of many of the revelations had been made widely available in the church’s newspapers; many Latter day Saints had personal copies of the original revelations made before any version of the revelations appeared in print; and unofficial copies of the Book of Commandments were in limited circulation from 1833. Moreover, the fact that changes were made in the process of canonization is anything but surprising in light of what especially nineteenth and twentieth century biblical scholarship has discovered about scriptural texts. Canonical (or “final”) shape is given to scriptural texts only over time, and the “original” texts are inevitably altered in the process of shaping what becomes the canonical text. This fact has driven what is now a twohundredyearold debate in biblical scholarship. It serves no one’s interests to insist dogmatically that the canonical and the original texts are identical. The fact is that there are many differences, and we can actually trace and then reflect on those differences. The task of the faithful Saint, it seems to me, is decide what those changes have to teach us.

So much, then, for the shape of the Law in its first fully canonical presentation in 1835. But, significantly, the story of the Doctrine and Covenants did not end in 1835. The volume actually was, for about a decade, an open canon, primarily because the Seer was still alive. There was, therefore, little surprise when a handful of revelations—most received after 1835—were added to the volume in 1844. But the addition of these revelations, particularly because they came accompanied by an announcement of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith that was intended “to seal the testimony” of the book, effectively closed the canon, giving it what would be its definitive shape for a full generation. No significant changes would be made to the Doctrine and Covenants until 1876.

As if to confirm the closing of the canon and to establish definitively the distance between history and canon, the church began to publish for the first time Joseph Smith’s official history in the same years that the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants was in preparation, was published, and was being initially promulgated. Orson Pratt emphasized this point a decade later when he wrote that "Joseph, the Prophet, in selecting the revelations from
the Manuscripts, and arranging them for publication, did not arrange them according to the order of the date in which they were given, neither did he think it necessary to publish them all in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, but left them to be published more fully in his History."\(^{25}\)

This closure of the canon was, however, set in motion less in 1844 than in 1835. Then it was that the distance between canon and history, between the canonical and the original, was first put on display. The open/closed canon of the 1830s and 1840s would not be called into question until 1876, when the same Orson Pratt found himself with the task of completely reworking the Doctrine and Covenants. Because the version of the Doctrine and Covenants that took shape only in 1876 is more or less the same read today, and particularly because it fixed the canonical shape of the Law as it is still today found in LDS scripture, the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants deserves the closest attention of all.

Complicating the canon

The 1876 reorganization of the Doctrine and Covenants marked, in many ways, a return to the original program of the Book of Commandments. The revelations were—apparently at the behest of Brigham Young himself—returned from their 1835/1844 institutional arrangement to their 1833 chronological organization. The Historian's Office Journal from the time of Orson Pratt's work on the volume reads: "By the counsel of President B. Young, Elder Pratt has divided the various revelations into verses and arranged them for printing, according to the order of the date in which they were revealed."\(^{26}\) (The only intentional exceptions to this chronological arrangement in 1876 were also exceptions in the planned 1833 Book of Commandments. The revealed "preface" and the revealed "appendix" to the Book of Commandments, now sections 1 and 133, retained their places at the beginning and the end of the volume, though they were revealed in 1831.) Thus a kind of rehistoricization of the revelations was accomplished, a reassignation of the revelations to an absolute chronology.

As it turned out, though, this historicization of the revelations was actually more complete than that undertaken in the effort to publish the Book of Commandments. In addition to reorganizing the revelations chronologically, Orson Pratt, assigned to undertake the reorganization of the volume, added a number of sections that had never appeared in the Doctrine and Covenants. Most of these were not technically revelations but excerpts from Joseph Smith's history—whether accounts of angelic visitations or items of instruction drawn from Joseph's teachings.\(^{27}\) Given what Pratt himself had said in 1857 about Joseph Smith's intention to reserve some of his revelations and teachings for his published history, it is clear that he (Pratt) intended the 1876 edition to function as a kind of hybrid of the Doctrine and Covenants and the History of the Church—to be, that is, an as narrativized as possible compilation of the revelations. (In this regard, it is significant that Orson Pratt was already pressing for the exclusion of the not at all historically oriented Lectures on Faith soon after he had completed the reorganization of the volume for the 1876 edition. This fact suggests that he already saw the reworking of the Doctrine and Covenants as leaving little room for "theological lectures or lessons" that would soon be excluded from the volume. Indeed, it is likely best to see the 1921 removal of the lectures more as the completion of—rather than supplementary to—the reorganizing efforts Pratt undertook with the Doctrine and Covenants.)\(^{28}\)

It is difficult to know exactly what is implied by this restoration of Joseph Smith's revelations to a strictly chronological order and to a quasihistoricized format. Was the reorganization meant to flatten the structural hierarchicization of the revelations worked out in the 1835 edition? Or was it perhaps a kind of confession, at the point of the passing of the first generation of the church, that Joseph's revelations had subtly shifted from their originally strong normativity to a kind of subordinate status vis-à-vis the "living" authority of the church hierarchy? Was it tied to an implicit recognition that the serially published History of the Church would never be a popular read, both because of its length and because of its heavily documentary nature? Was it perhaps even meant to
organized a kind of prehistory of the cooperative organizations and communities that were proliferating at the very
time of the publication of the newly organized edition of the volume? Or was it connected to the enormous
reorganization of the church’s institutional structure that occupied the last years of Brigham Young’s life?

Whatever the answers to these likely unanswerable questions, the Law—what had canonically stood for four
decades as section 13 of the Doctrine and Covenants—now became section 42 of the reorganized volume,
definitively placed within a basically absolutized chronology. Gone are the fine distinctions that divided,
subdivided, and subsubdivided the 1835 volume. But as soon as one takes a detailed look at what had finally
become section 42, one immediately recognizes that there is something problematic about this restored
chronological ordering. When Pratt restored Joseph Smith’s revelations to the “original” order, he did not restore
them to their original wording; only one of the two reshapings undertaken in 1835—the altered placement in the
volume, but not the altered text itself—was controverted. The textual changes that had been made in the process
of canonizing the revelations for the institutionally oriented 1835 collection pass over without even so much as a
comment into the deinstitutionalized and rehistoricized compilation that is the 1876 edition. The vital
consequence of this decision—if it was, in fact, a question at all of decision—is that the revelations have been,
since 1876, at once both clearly chronological in their organization and yet profoundly anachronistic in their actual
content.

Section 42 is exemplary on this point. Though it was finally placed firmly between sections 41 and 43 because it
was, according to the section heading of 1876, “given … February 9th, 1831,” it is actually, at the level of the text, a
combination of two originally distinct revelations, one received indeed on February 9, 1831, and the other
received on February 23, 1831, that is, after sections 43 and 44. These two revelations had been published as
distinct communications both in early church periodicals and in the Book of Commandments. They had only
been combined into a single revelation for the first time with the publication of the 1835 edition of the Doctrine
and Covenants, their being joined together apparently motivated by obvious intentional thematic connections
between them. Nonetheless, precisely because those connections are mediated by a revelation received
between what was originally its two parts—namely, what is now section 43—the assignment of all of what is now
section 42 to the date of February 9, 1831, is ultimately anachronistic.

Of course, one should not fault Pratt for failing to separate the two original revelations in his work on the 1876
volume, especially given the fact that they were not separated in the printed version of Joseph Smith’s history
which Pratt followed so meticulously. And, frankly, what ultimate difference do the two weeks between
February 9 and February 23, 1831, make? But, as it turns out, this stitching together of two originally distinct
revelations is the least of the anachronisms of section 42 as published in 1876. Indeed, a whole series of
anachronisms appears, not surprisingly, in the verses that had been so heavily edited in the process of producing
the canonized version of the revelation for the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants—all the most glaring
of these anachronisms deal, crucially, with the law of consecration and stewardship. A few of them might be
mentioned specifically: verse 31 makes reference to high priests, an office and order of the priesthood that would
not be introduced into the church until some six months after the Law was given; verse 33 sets forth the order of
the bishop’s storehouse in terms that would not have made sense until the organization of the United Firm a year
later; and, most anachronistic of all, verse 34 mentions the high council, which would not be organized until
1834! Anyone reading the Doctrine and Covenants closely—particularly if he or she lends an attentive eye to
the historical or narrative framework the volume itself imposes—must inevitably begin to wonder what is at work
in the consistent appearance of such anachronisms. The importance of this last point must not be missed. Though
they had technically been present from 1835 (this is what I called above the inevitability of a tension between
canon and history), these anachronisms only come to light authentically and on their own terms when the revelations are officially arranged in a chronological, rather than institutional, order. While readers of the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants might have been able to spot the kinds of anachronisms I have here pointed out, they would have done so only by dismissing the canonical structure of the volume itself—by dismissing the obviously institutional arrangement of the revelations in favor of what ultimately would have been, with regard to the text, an alien historiographical concern. But because the actual canonical shape of the Doctrine and Covenants after 1876 is itself driven by a historiographical concern, it is the faithful, rather than the dismissive, reader of the Doctrine and Covenants who is now drawn to the problem of anachronism in the revelations.  

What one ultimately finds, then, in the Doctrine and Covenants after 1876—and every reader of the Doctrine and Covenants today is a reader of the Doctrine and Covenants after 1876—is a problematizing of the very notion of canon. Whereas the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants functions as a canon in a very classical sense, according to which canon is effectively at odds or in tension with history as such, the 1876 edition functions as a canon in a quite distinct fashion. The 1876 volume refuses to hold canon and history at such a distance from each other. At the same time, however, it must be noted that neither does it simply fuse history and canon in a straightforward manner, as, perhaps, the Book of Commandments would have done had it been completed and circulated widely. Had the Book of Commandments been completed and received as canonical by the church, it would have been an instance of canonizing the historical, of giving authoritative status to the history. The 1876 volume, on the other hand, can be said to effect a historicizing of the canonical, both refusing to revert from the canonical rendering of the revelations (as these were fixed in 1835) and nonetheless reorganizing the canonical revelations in a strictly historical order.

What one finds in the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, then, is not exactly a reopening, after 1844, of the modern canon. Though various documents have been added to the Doctrine and Covenants since 1876, it is not clear how open the Doctrine and Covenants can ultimately be said to be. Rather, what Orson Pratt’s reworking of the volume seems to have accomplished was a double fracturing, at once a fracturing of the idea of canonicity (a setting of one notion of canon against another) and a fracturing of the idea of history (a setting of one notion of history against another). It is as if it has, since 1876, become a part of reading the Doctrine and Covenants to begin piecing together the details of early Mormon history. At the same time, though, through the classically canonical (that is, 1835) shape of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, one is also bound to take the text at its current word, regardless of how it might “originally” have been dictated.

The Doctrine and Covenants today, then, confronts the reader not so much with revelations as with remnants of revelations, with fragments of revelatory events, texts suspended between their at once canonically historical and historically noncanonical status. This is perhaps particularly true of the Law, and so of our curious position before the law of consecration as contained in the Doctrine and Covenants. To be faithful in this instance means that we can neither settle for a kind of historiographical fundamentalism, embracing some pre-canonical “original” meaning of the Law drawn from the historical sources, nor feel comfortable taking the canonical text solely at its non-historical word, dismissing the force of a divinely orchestrated history that has produced us. Our task, it seems, is—interpretively as well as practically—to give ourselves to a God whose communicated truths are reducible neither to history nor to an absolute divine word, to act in strong accordance with the curiously Mormon belief that truth—God’s truth—is at once eternal and yet sorted out historically.

In a word, it may well be that consecration itself is precisely the difficult work of refusing to compromise either what “God once was” or what “God now is.”
NOTES


2. See especially Robert J. Woodford, “Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1974).


6. Note, however, that John Whitmer recorded in his manuscript history of the church that “there were some that would not receive the Law,” concluding that “the time has not yet come that the law can be fully established, for the disciples live scattered abroad and are not organized, our numbers are small, and the disciples untaught, consequently they understand not the things of the Kingdom.” See Bruce N. Westergren, From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 37.


8. See Staker, Hearken, O Ye People, 295.


county.” See David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 54–55. The other apparently vocal opponent was William E. McLellin, whose opposition ended up in the official History of the Church, 1:226.


13. See Robin Scott Jensen, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Riley M. Lorimer, eds., Revelations and Translations, Volume 2: Published Revelations, vol. 2 of the Revelations and Translations series of The Joseph Smith Papers, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011), 17. This revealed preface was received at the conference during which the decision to have the Book of Commandments printed was made.


15. See History of the Church, 1:270.

16. Some makeshift copies of what had been printed of the volume by the time of the destruction circulated in very limited quantities. See Crawley, “Joseph Smith and A Book of Commandments.”

17. The elaborate canonization ceremony by which the Doctrine and Covenants was ratified can be found in History of the Church, 2:244–46. The same report appears in the appendix of the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants itself.


19. Since this project began, I have published a detailed study of the idea of consecration in which I provide detailed analyses of the changes made to portions of Doctrine and Covenants 42. See Joseph M. Spencer, For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 95–131.

20. That there was some kind of reason behind the separable grouping of sections 23–29 together is clear from notations made in the Book of Commandments and Revelations. John Whitmer there numbers these eight

21. Grant Underwood traces the most important changes in what is now section 42 in some detail in Underwood, “Laws of the Church of Christ,” 114–34. A comparison of the two “systems” of consecration thus outlined, one in 1831, the other in 1835, is nicely provided in the form of two charts in Lyndon W. Cook, *Joseph Smith and the Law of Consecration* (Provo, UT: Grandin Book, 1985), 19, 32. These changes in the system of stewardship have been traced historically in many publications. Among the most widely influential are, apart from Cook’s study, Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); and Mario S. DePillis, “The Development of Mormon Communitarianism, 1826–1846” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1960). Again, I might mention my own more recent study of these changes: Spencer, *For Zion*, 95–131.

22. Unfortunately, some have compounded the problem by using a statement in the minutes for a conference meeting on November 8, 1831 (“Resolved by this conference that Br Joseph Smith Jr correct those errors or mistakes which he may discover by the holy Spirit while receiving the revelations reviewing the revelations & commandments& also the fulness of the scriptures”) to suggest that all changes made to the revelations for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants were reversions from inadvertent mistakes in copying and printing to the original received text. This simply is not the case. For the minutes of the meeting, see Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 29.

23. Now section 135 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Note that the same announcement speaks of Joseph having “sealed his mission and his works with his own blood” (D&C 135:3). The closing of the canon was structurally tied to the closing of Joseph’s mortal life.

24. The history was published in serial fashion in both the *Times and Seasons* (in Nauvoo) and the *Millennial Star* (in Liverpool) starting in 1842.


26. Quoted in Woodford, “Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants,” 76. Breck England, apparently without justification, seems to suggest that the decisions about rearrangement were Pratt’s own: “Orson also arranged the *Doctrine and Covenants* chronologically; his was the first edition to contain 136 sections in the order given by revelation.” See England, *The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985), 255.

27. Pratt’s primary source for these selections—as well as for the historical details he worked into the section headings for revelations already in the Doctrine and Covenants before 1876—was clearly Joseph Smith’s history as published in the *Millennial Star*. I plan to argue this systematically in a paper titled: “Narrativizing the Revelations of Joseph Smith: Orson Pratt and the 1876 Edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.”


29. See Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, 111–54; and especially D&C 136.
30. It is clear that Orson Pratt did not use many (if any) manuscript sources in the preparation of the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. He seems not even to have consulted the Book of Commandments. His principal—and almost only—source was clearly the history as printed in the *Millennial Star*. Again, I will be arguing for these details in "Narrativizing the Revelations of Joseph Smith." That Pratt did not consult the manuscript sources is, however, somewhat ironic, because it seems clear that Pratt was aware of them. See Jensen, "From Manuscript to Printed Page," 43, 51. And he was, during the time of his work on the 1876 edition, the official Church Historian, ensuring his full access to—and likely his full awareness of—the manuscript resources held by the church. See England, *Life and Thought of Orson Pratt*, 260.

31. See the helpful chart in Underwood, "’Laws of the Church of Christ,’” 111.

32. As Underwood points out, the Symonds Ryder manuscript of the Law makes clear that there was a historical connection between the two revelations stitched together in 1835. It describes the material from February 23, 1831, as being about “How the Elders of the church of Christ are to act upon the points of the Law given by Jesus Christ to the Church.” This language clearly draws on the language of what is now D&C 43:8, which commanded the elders of the church to “instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act and direct my church, how to act upon the points of my law and commandments, which I have given” (see the Book of Commandments, chapter 45, verse 8 for the earlier version of this wording: the elders were to “note with a pen how to act, and for my church to act upon the points of my law and commandments, which I have given”). See Underwood, “’Laws of the Church of Christ,’” 111–12. For the Ryder manuscript, see Michael Hubbard MacKay et al., eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee et al. (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 245–56.


34. These anachronisms can all be detected without reference to nonscriptural sources. That high priests were not ordained until June of 1831 is stated clearly in the (1981) section heading for section 52; that the order of the bishop’s storehouse is out of place in 1831 is immediately apparent in light of section 78; and the fact that the high council did not exist before 1834 is made abundantly clear in section 102.


36. Sections 137 and 138, as well as both official declarations, have been added to the volume since 1876. In addition, as mentioned in an earlier note, the *Lectures on Faith* were dropped from the volume in 1921.

37. This is made particularly clear when section headings refer the reader directly to the seven-volume *History of the Church*.

38. This understanding of the way the Doctrine and Covenants positions its reader between or among what appear to be several competing positions is, in many ways, reminiscent of what I have called the four discourses of Mormonism. See Joseph M. Spencer, “The Four Discourses of Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 50/1 (2011): 4–24.
39. This is the position I take also in For Zion, attempting to defend the normative force of the final form of the law of consecration as laid out in D&C 42. See Spencer, For Zion, 133–57.