The Book of Mormon: A Blueprint for Organizing the Church

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Concepts from the Book of Mormon contributed to how the church was built up and conducted. Oliver Cowdery was instructed to draw upon the Book of Mormon in formulating his vision of how the restored church should be organized and regulated. His 1829 Articles of the Church of Christ were a precursor to Joseph Smith’s 1830 Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ (now known as Doctrine and Covenants 20). Three key aspects of church organization that originated in the Book of Mormon include baptism and priesthood authority, the ordination of priests and teachers, and the administration of the Lord’s supper.
The Book of Mormon played a vital role in the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ. Its publication placed before the world another scriptural witness of Jesus Christ as well as tangible evidence of Joseph Smith's divine calling as prophet, seer, and revelator.
The book quickly assumed its appointed role as a premier missionary tool, helping bring people to Christ in anticipation of the official organization of the church in 1830. Yet the modern-day impact of the Book of Mormon on the restoration began even earlier—before the book was published. A fact often overlooked and not fully appreciated is that, during its translation, this ancient American record had a direct bearing on how the restored Church of Christ was to be organized.

While translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery learned that its teachings would guide them as they undertook their divine charge to reestablish the Lord’s church. That guidance was specific. As Oliver later recalled, it came in the form of the “directions given to the Nephites from the mouth of the Savior, of the precise manner in which men should build up His Church.” Not surprisingly, then, this early reliance on the Book of Mormon is strongly evident in nothing less than the constitutional foundation of the church—the collection of inspired bylaws set forth in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants and known in its earliest formulation as the “Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ.”

The Articles and Covenants contained revealed teachings on baptism for the remission of sins, priesthood authority and the primary duties pertaining to the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods, and the proper method of administering the Lord’s Supper. These gospel ordinances and concepts were initially derived from the Book of Mormon and later expanded by revelation to the Prophet. It is thus important to see how the Book of Mormon introduced Joseph and Oliver to ideas that would become fundamental in the Articles and Covenants.

The gradual emergence of the Articles and Covenants provides an interesting perspective on the revelation process. At one point, rather than give his prophet a full-blown, dictation-ready revelation on how the church should be organized, the Lord initially had Joseph and Oliver rely on the Book of Mormon manuscript for inspired guidance. Although the pertinent scriptural material had been given to the Nephites nearly two millennia earlier, it directly applied to Joseph and Oliver’s modern need as key participants in the reestablishment of the church. At the Lord’s behest, Oliver selected from the Book of Mormon manuscript a number of excerpts that had bearing on how the latter-day Church of Christ should be built up and conducted. Joseph was inspired to preserve essential ordinances and gospel concepts from this core material in the final formulation of Doctrine and Covenants 20. Thus, even before its publication, the Book of Mormon served as a blueprint for organizing and regulating the church.

Toward a Founding Revelation

Before considering in some detail the influence of the Book of Mormon on the Articles and Covenants, it will be instructive to see the gradual emergence of that foundational revelation from a historical perspective. This will illuminate, among other things, the Lord’s guiding hand in the events that set the stage for this revelation and the related commandments that would give Joseph and his associates “power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity” (D&C 1:30) in a manner that would ensure its continued progress.

Joseph Smith’s earliest assignment as prophet, seer, and revelator was to translate the unsealed part of the Book of Mormon record. The angel Moroni, who centuries before in mortality helped abridge the Nephite records and was the final custodian of the gold plates, informed the Prophet in September 1823 of his role in a momentous undertaking: after translating and publishing the Book of Mormon record, Joseph would proceed to reestablish the Lord’s church.

Recalling this glorious opening of a new dispensation of the gospel, Oliver Cowdery declared that the angel Moroni prophesied to seventeen-year-old Joseph Smith that “when [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.” Thus restored priesthood power, divine authority, and the required gospel ordinances would accompany the restoration of the Savior’s ancient church.

“I Will Establish My Church”

The first latter-day revelation to mention the restoration of the Lord’s church was received during the summer of 1828. In June or July, Martin Harris lost possession of the initial 116 pages of the Book of Mormon translation. This material had come from the book of Lehi, which Mormon had abridged from the plates of Lehi. This loss was the occasion for two revelations, now sections 3 and 10 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In the latter, the Lord told Joseph Smith:

“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 becometh to my church need not fear, for such shall inherit the kingdom of heaven” (D&C 10:53–55).

Several months later, in March 1829, the Lord informed Joseph and Martin that they would pattern the restored Church of Christ after the ancient church. The Savior declared, “If the people of this generation harden not their hearts, I will work a reformation among them, and I will put down all lies, and deceivings, and priestcrafts, and envyings, and strife, and idolatries, and sorceries, and all manner of iniquities, and I will establish my church, like unto the church which was taught by my disciples in the days of old” (Book of Commandments 4:5). While translating the Savior’s teachings to the Nephites, in May or June 1829, Joseph read...
statements similar to the previous one. Speaking to the Nephi
tes assembled in the land of Bountiful, the Lord
promised, “If they [the latter-day Gentiles] will repent and
hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts, I will
establish my church among them” (3 Nephi 21:22). In
the same sermon the Lord prophesied that “all lyings, and deceiv-
ings, and envyings, and strifes, and priestcrafts, and whore-
doms, shall be done away” in the latter days (3 Nephi 21:19).

Priesthood Authority and Instructions to Proceed

In mid-May 1829, while living in
Harmony, Pennsylvania, and translating
3 Nephi, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery
were intrigued by the Savior’s pure and
undiluted teachings to his ancient Nephite
disciples. Joseph and Oliver wanted to
know more about priesthood authority
and how it was to be used in baptizing for
the remission of sins, topics they often
encountered in the Book of Mormon.
Years later Oliver reflected on how their
translation labors had inspired them:

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 show-
ing the willingness of the heart by being
buried in the liquid grave, to answer a
‘good conscience by the resurrection of
Jesus Christ.’”

Together Joseph and Oliver received the
Aaronic Priesthood from the resurrected
John the Baptist and were directed to bap-
tize each other. Shortly afterward Peter,
James, and John bestowed on them the
Melchizedek Priesthood with its accom-
panying keys and authority, including the
apostleship.

Two weeks before completing the Book of Mormon
translation in late June 1829, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery,
and David Whitmer prayerfully asked the Lord for further
“instructions relative to building up the Church of Christ,
according to the fulness of the gospel” (Book of Command-
ments, heading to chapter 15). Part of the revelation received
in reply advised Oliver, the “second elder of this church”
(D&C 20:3), to “rely upon the things which are written” in
working to establish the Lord’s church in modern times.

What Oliver had been writing was the transcription of
Joseph’s divinely inspired translation of the Book of Mormon.
The Lord’s entire instructions to Oliver at that time made
it clear that the pattern set forth in the Book of Mormon was
critical to the success of the restoration effort: “Behold, I give
unto you a commandment, that you rely upon the things
which are written; for in them are all things written concern-
ing the foundation of my church, my gospel, and my rock.
Wherefore, if you shall build up my church, upon the
foundation of my gospel and my rock, the gates of hell shall not
prevail against you” (D&C 18:3–5). In
1833 W. W. Phelps, the church’s printer
and newspaper editor, in an article
directly following a printing of the Articles
and Covenants in the same issue of
The Evening and the Morning Star,
pointed out that “the church of Christ has
received the fulness of the gospel from the
book of Mormon.” Editor Phelps cor-
rectly observed that the Nephite scriptures
had been an important source of inspira-
tion and information as Joseph Smith and
Oliver Cowdery prepared for the organi-
ization of the church on 6 April 1830.

Shortly after the Prophet finished
translating the Book of Mormon, the
Lord commanded him to have Oliver
make a duplicate of the dictation manu-
script. This copy, commonly called the
printer’s manuscript, provided security
against possible theft and was to be
used by the printer at E. B. Grandin’s
printshop. While translating the plates
and copying the manuscript, Joseph and
Oliver would have had occasion to con-
sider, from the perspective of the whole
of Mormon’s history, the organizational and
administrative details of the Church of
Christ in ancient America. In their reread-
ing, they saw anew that an ordained
priesthood had established and governed
the church and that the Savior had personally visited
and taught the Nephites shortly after his resurrection. Joseph and
Oliver also read that the church’s governing high priests and
elders had received revelation for the church and that the
Nephite Christians had relied on the sacred texts in their
possession in regulating the church.

Oliver Cowdery’s 1829 Articles

During the second half of 1829, while he oversaw Grandin’s
printing of the first edition of the Book of Mormon, Oliver
Cowdery fulfilled his divine charge to envision how the restored church was to be organized. Jointly holding the keys of the restored Melchizedek Priesthood and bearing the apostleship with the Prophet, Oliver selected relevant material from the Book of Mormon manuscript and used these excerpts to compose the earliest procedural regulations for the soon-to-be reestablished Church of Jesus Christ. More than half of Oliver’s document, known as the "Articles of the Church of Christ," consisted of either direct quotations or close paraphrases from the Book of Mormon. The remaining text comprised excerpts from Oliver’s scriptural commentary on Book of Mormon passages and from Joseph Smith’s earliest revelations.

Joseph Smith’s 1830 Articles and Covenants

Oliver’s 1829 document was a precursor to the more comprehensive church regulations known as the Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ. Although nowhere within the document does the phrase articles and covenants appear, this modern revelation (now known as D&C 20) received that title at least by the time of the church’s first conference, in June 1830. The Articles and Covenants is mentioned prominently in official church records such as priesthood licenses and member recommends from that time forward.

The revelation contained in Doctrine and Covenants 20 that Joseph Smith received sometime between late March and early June 1830, supplemented the administrative and procedural regulations of the church as found in the Nephite scriptures. While the most important passages from the Book of Mormon used in Oliver’s early articles were used again in the Prophet’s Articles and Covenants, most of the latter document was the result of new revelation and thus is considered to be the earliest formulation of Doctrine and Covenants 20. Contrary to recent interpretations, little historical or textual evidence supports the idea that the Prophet simply revised Oliver’s 1829 document and came up with the 1830 Articles and Covenants. Rather, surviving textual evidence suggests that the Prophet inquired of the Lord and the Articles and Covenants was given by revelation.

The Influence of the Book of Mormon

Because Book of Mormon teachings were integrated in the Prophet’s Articles and Covenants, Oliver’s earlier efforts to “rely upon the things which are written” to help build up the church proved to be a fruitful influence on an important governing revelation. Having done all they could to draw on the divine guidance already available in the Book of Mormon, Joseph and Oliver could expect the Lord to reveal additional details suited to their particular needs and circumstance. The final form of the Articles and Covenants demonstrates, among other things, how past scriptural teaching can influence modern scripture.

Featured in the following discussions of three key aspects of church organization are comparisons of parallel passages that, in most cases, originated in the Book of Mormon, were included in Oliver Cowdery’s 1829 Articles, and later preserved in the Prophet’s 1830 Articles and Covenants.

Baptism and Priesthood Authority

During their work on the Book of Mormon, Joseph and Oliver learned much about baptism for the remission of sins. They encountered the word baptism in its various forms more than a hundred times in the Nephite record, more often than in the Bible, in fact. The Book of Mormon prophets directly linked the baptismal ordinance with membership in the Lord’s church. For example, Mormon, the abridger of most of the large plates of Nephi, including the Savior’s teachings to the first-century Nephites, observed that “they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called [as a body] the church of Christ” (3 Nephi 26:21).

Furthermore, Joseph and Oliver read repeatedly about the link between repentance and baptism. From the Savior’s own words they read, “Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name” (3 Nephi 27:20; see Ether 4:18; Moroni 7:34). In addition, Oliver later explained that in working on 3 Nephi, he and Joseph learned about the proper manner of conferring priesthood authority. They also became aware that in their day “none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the gospel.” This awareness led Joseph and Oliver to pray for direction (see JS—H 1:68).

On 15 May 1829, in the woods near Harmony, Pennsylvania, heaven answered Joseph’s and Oliver’s prayer with the visit of the resurrected John the Baptist. He laid his hands on them to confer the priesthood of Aaron, which included the keys of the gospel of repentance and the authority to baptize. Joseph was directed to baptize Oliver, after which Oliver was to baptize Joseph. Joseph later recalled: “No sooner had I
baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied 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 prophesied concerning the rise of this Church, and many other things connected with the Church, and this generation of the children of men” (JS—H 1:73).

After their baptism, Joseph and Oliver ordained each other to the Aaronic Priesthood (see JS—H 1:71). They received the Melchizedek Priesthood under the hands of Peter, James, and John a short time later, probably within two weeks.10

As Oliver Cowdery compiled the church's first procedural articles in 1829, he integrated the Savior's teachings to the Nephites on repentance and on the administration of baptism as the accepted pattern for the latter-day church. As the following comparison shows, Oliver quoted directly from the Book of Mormon; and Joseph, in the 1830 Articles and Covenants, received revelation that modified and expanded on the significance of this essential gospel ordinance.

1829 Book of Mormon Printer's Manuscript11
Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water; and in my name shall ye baptize them. And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water. And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name; for behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one. (Compare 3 Nephi 11:23–27)

1829 Articles
Now therefore whosoever repenteth and humbleth himself before me and desireth to be baptized in my name shall ye baptize them. And after this manner did he command me that I should baptize them. Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them. And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water. And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name; for behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one.

1830 Articles and Covenants12
And the way of baptism is to be administered in the following manner unto all those who repent: Whosoever being called of God and having authority given them of Jesus Christ shall go down into the water with them and shall say, calling them by name: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Then shall he immerse them in the water and come forth again out of the water... Wherefore, the Almighty God gave his Only Begotten Son... Therefore, as many as would believe and were baptized in his holy name and endure in faith to the end should be saved; yea, even as many as were before he came in the flesh, from the beginning, which believed in the words of the holy prophets, which not only those who believed after he came in the meridian of time in the flesh, but all those from the beginning, even as many as were before he came, who believed in the words of the holy prophets, were inspired by the gift of the Holy Ghost, which truly testified of him in all things, as well as they which should come after, which should believe in the gifts and callings of God by the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of the Father, and of the Son, which Father and Son and Holy Ghost is one God, infinite and eternal, without end. Amen. (Compare D&C 20:72–74, 21, 25–28)

It is interesting to note that the baptismal prayer in the 1829 Articles and in the 1830 Articles and Covenants begins with the phrase Having authority given me of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 11:25) rather than Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, as it reads today in Doctrine and Covenants 20:73. The prophet Joseph Smith revised the earlier wording in that verse when he published the Articles and Covenants in the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835. Before the organization of the church in 1830, the Articles and Covenants used the Book of Mormon's phrase Having authority. Another variant form of the baptismal prayer is found earlier in the Book of Mormon in connection with baptisms performed by Alma the Elder in the second century B.C. (see Mosiah 18:13), although the meaning is the same in each case.

Ordination of Teachers and Priests
The Book of Mormon describes the manner in which the elders of the ancient American Church of Christ ordained priests and teachers. Because the Aaronic Priesthood office of deacon is not mentioned in the Book of Mormon and was probably not restored to the church until late 1830 or early 1831, Oliver Cowdery's 1829 Articles address only the ordination of teachers and priests. The specific instructions for this ordinance came from Moroni, chapter 3.

By mid-1830 Joseph Smith, in the Articles and Covenants, had moved the elders away from the practice of using
defined wording for priesthood ordinations. The wording of Moroni 3:4—"they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was in them"—possibly justified this move from word-for-word ordination prayers to spontaneous prayers offered by the priesthood member or priesthood officiator. Doctrine and Covenants 20:60 codified this principle. The development of the instructions for ordaining Aaronic priests and teachers to include deacons and to avoid set prayers is seen in the following comparison.

1829 Book of Mormon Printer's Manuscript
The manner which the disciples, which [who] were called the elders of the church, ordained priests and teachers—After they had prayed unto the Father in the name of Christ, they laid their hands upon them, and said: In the name of Jesus Christ I ordain you to be a priest, (or, if he be a teacher) I ordain you to be a teacher, to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen. And after this manner did they ordain priests and teachers, according to the gifts and callings of God unto men; and they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was in them. (Compare Moroni 3:1–4)

1829 Articles
And ye are also called to ordain priests and teachers according to the gifts and callings of God unto men; and after this manner shall ye ordain them: Ye shall pray unto the Father in my name, and then shall ye lay your hands upon them, and say: In the name of Jesus Christ I ordain you to be a priest, or if he be a teacher, I ordain you to be a teacher, to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen.

1830 Articles and Covenants
Every elder, priest, teacher, or deacon is to be ordained according to the gifts and callings of God unto him; and he is to be ordained by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is in the one who ordains him. (Compare D&C 20:60)

Administration of the Lord’s Supper
In reporting the Savior's teachings on the sacrament, 3 Nephi 18 includes only the Savior's paraphrase of the ordinance, not the precise wording of the sacramental prayers. Later, Mormon's son, Moroni, the final editor of the Book of Mormon chronicle, prepared two supplementary chapters (Moroni 4 and 5) dealing specifically with the manner of administering the Lord's Supper. They set forth the precise manner in which the "elders and priests administer[ed] the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church...according to the [earlier] commandments of Christ" (Moroni 4:1).

Regarding the blessing of the bread, the 1829 Articles quoted verbatim from the directions recorded in Moroni 4, and the 1830 Articles and Covenants quoted nearly verbatim from that text, as seen below.

1829 Book of Mormon Printer's Manuscript
The manner of their elders and priests administering the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church; and they administered it according to the commandments of Christ; wherefore we know that the manner to be true; and the elder or priest did minister it—And they did kneel down with the church, and pray to the Father in the name of Christ, saying: O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it; that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen. (Compare Moroni 4:1–3)
Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he hath given them; that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

1830 Articles and Covenants

And the elders or priests shall minister it; and after this manner shall he do. He shall kneel with the church and call upon the Father in mighty prayer, saying:

O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he hath given them; that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen. (Compare D&C 20:76-77)

As expected, in setting forth the directions for administering the sacramental wine, the 1829 Articles and the 1830 Articles and Covenants rely on the Book of Mormon:

1829 Book of Mormon Printer's Manuscript

The manner of administering the wine—Behold, they took the cup, and said: O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen. (Compare Moroni 5:1-2)

1829 Articles

And then shall ye take the cup and say: O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do [it] in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

1830 Articles and Covenants

The manner of administering the wine—Behold, they shall take the cup, and say: O God, the Eternal Father, we ask
thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen. (Compare D&C 20:78–79)

In Moroni 6:6 the frequency of administering the emblems of the Lord’s Supper is specified as “oft,” a term repeated in the 1829 Articles and later normalized to *oftell* in the Articles and Covenants. Later church leaders have interpreted this instruction to mean in the weekly congregational sacrament meeting.

1829 Book of Mormon Printer’s Manuscript
And they [the church] did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. (Compare Moroni 6:6)

1829 Articles
And the church shall oft partake of bread and wine.

1830 Articles and Covenants
It is expedient that the church meet together often to partake of bread and wine in the remembrance of the Lord Jesus. (Compare D&C 20:75)

After Jesus Christ personally showed the Nephite disciples the proper method of administering the sacramental emblems, he impressed upon them the spiritual risks of partaking of the sacrament unworthily (see 3 Nephi 18:28–33). As recorded in the New Testament, the apostle Paul issued a similar warning (see 1 Corinthians 11:27–29). Oliver Cowdery incorporated the Savior’s counsel into his 1829 Articles, but Doctrine and Covenants 20 has no equivalent material, possibly deferring to the Savior’s instructions in 3 Nephi 18.

1829 Book of Mormon Printer’s Manuscript
And now behold, this is the commandment which I give unto you, that ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily, when ye shall minister it; for whoso eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul; therefore if ye know that a man is unworthy to eat and drink of my flesh and blood, ye shall forbid him; nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out from among you; but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father in my name. And if it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood. But if he repenteth not he shall not be numbered among my people, that he may not destroy my people. For behold, I know my sheep, and they are numbered. Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them. Therefore, keep these sayings which I have commanded you that ye come not under condemnation; for wo unto him whom the Father condemneth. (Compare 3 Nephi 18:28–33)

1829 Articles
And now behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily when ye shall minister it; for whoso eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul. Therefore, if ye know that a man is unworthy to eat and drink of my flesh and blood, ye shall forbid him; nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out from among you; but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father in my name. And if it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood. But if he repenteth not he shall not be numbered among my people, that he may not destroy my people. For behold, I know my sheep, and they are numbered. Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them. Therefore, keep these sayings which I have commanded you, that ye come not under condemnation; for wo unto him whom the Father condemneth.

1830 Articles and Covenants
[no equivalent]

The acts of translating and publishing the Book of Mormon during 1829 and 1830 drew the Prophet Joseph Smith and his companions, especially Oliver Cowdery, into valuable doctrinal and organizational discoveries and profound spiritual blessings. Prompted by the religious doctrine and procedures described in the Nephite scriptures, they asked the Lord for additional insights. As the time approached to organize the Church of Jesus Christ formally, Joseph and Oliver gleaned the church’s earliest procedures and regulations from the Book of Mormon. In time the Prophet received additional light and knowledge to supplement information harvested from the ancient American scripture.

NOTES ON PAGE 71
1. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, letter 1, 7 September 1834, in Messenger and Advocate 1 (October 1834): 15; also in Joseph Smith—History 1:71 note. Throughout this article, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in all quoted material have been modernized.

2. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, letter 8, undated (September–October 1835), in Messenger and Advocate 2 (October 1835): 199.

3. See Joseph Smith’s preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

4. Cowdery to Phelps, 7 September 1834.

5. The official account of the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood and the promise of the Melchizedek Priesthood is in the Manuscript History of the Church, Book A–1, 17–18; this account is published in The Papers of Joseph Smith, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:290–91; History of the Church, 1:39–42; and JS—H 1:68–73.


7. When W. W. Phelps published this revelation in 1832 as the lead item on the front page of the church’s original periodical, The Evening and the Morning Star, the headline read “The Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ” (The Evening and the Morning Star 1 [June 1832]:1). In 1833 the Book of Commandments, the church’s first attempt to publish a selection of the revelations received by the Prophet, included the Articles and Covenants as the twenty-fourth chapter, entitled “The Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ, given in Fayette, New-York, June, 1830.” When the church in 1835 published the Articles and Covenants in a revised and expanded version as section 2 of the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, the publication committee, which included Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, left the revelation untitled.


9. See Cowdery to Phelps, 7 September 1834.


11. Excerpts from the printer’s manuscript appear herein because the corresponding sections in the original translation manuscript have not survived. Printer’s manuscript used by permission of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Archives.

12. Text used herein is from the earliest manuscript of the Articles and Covenants in possession of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The manuscript has been dated to the period of late 1830 to early 1831.


14. This clarification is based on Moroni 6:5.