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## The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration

Author(s): Richard Lloyd Anderson

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**Abstract:** This article says that in addition to Oliver Cowdery's testimony of the Book of Mormon, his testimony of the restoration of the two priesthoods is of great value. As newly-appointed editor of the Church newspaper he wrote an account in installments of the translation of the Book of Mormon. As a part of this series he told of John the Baptist's visit to restore the Aaronic priesthood.



# The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration

*(Second in a series on The Three Witnesses)*

By Dr. Richard Lloyd Anderson

● Oliver Cowdery not only subscribed his name as one of the three witnesses to the divinity of the Book of Mormon; he also left his personal testimony as one of the two witnesses of the restoration of divine authority in modern times. In the latter capacity, he claimed the experience of standing in the presence of angels on two distinct occasions to receive priesthood powers.

A careful search of authentic documents on his life discloses an impressive number of declarations on priesthood restoration. These were made during his career in the Church as its second priesthood officer, in the midst of his personal trials and resentments outside of its organization, at his final reconciliation with the Church, and at the closing moments of his life. One may choose to disbelieve such testimony, but no informed person can deny that it exists.

Latter-day Saints have had access mainly to Joseph Smith's descriptions of the separate restorations of the lesser and higher priesthoods, but Oliver Cowdery's version of what happened is as important by way of evidence. Because the foundation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rests on its claim of the restoration of the proper authority to represent God, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the second witness, Oliver Cowdery.

The tradition of yellow journalism, so characteristic of anti-Mormon literature, continues to assert that historical evidence for priesthood restoration is wanting. But over-explanation betrays spuriousness of

events as surely as does insufficient documentation. As this article surveys reliable statements on priesthood restoration, an exact parallel is built concerning the evidence of the supernatural events of the New Testament. In the case of both ancient and modern claims to revelation, convinced and dedicated men asserted the fact of divine authority, only later explaining some details for the historical record. In both situations, later explanations do not bear the embellishments of sophisticated publicity releases, but are rather what the renowned Bible translator J. B. Phillips calls "the flat, matter-of-fact recital of known events."<sup>1</sup> The participants in ancient and modern revelation obviously expected to be believed on the strength of their simple assertions that the events of which they testified were realities.

A pioneering culture pours practically total energy into doing and is typically deficient in both literature and polished history. Despite a consciousness of the importance of records, both the early Christian and the Latter-day Saint churches show distinct marks of this phenomenon. Their records are on occasion detailed but often incomplete due to pressures of the active care of the Church. The restoration of the two priesthoods, events of the year 1829, were evidently not made matters of formal record until some years later. Thus, Joseph Smith did not describe in detail the coming of John the Baptist until his history of that event was compiled in 1842, and then he made only brief allusion to second priesthood restoration.

This messenger stated that "he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held the keys of the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which priesthood he said should in due time be conferred on us. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Joseph Smith left one other personal recollection of lesser priesthood restoration, a speech of March 10, 1844, in which he again alluded to the preparatory nature of this authority:

"In the first place, suffice it to say, I went into the woods to inquire of the Lord, by prayer, His will concerning me, and I saw an angel, and he laid his hands upon my head, and ordained me to a Priest after the order of Aaron, and to hold the keys of this Priesthood, which office was to preach repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, and also to baptize. But I was informed that this office did not extend to the laying on of hands for the giving of the Holy Ghost; that that office was a greater work, and was to be given afterward. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

The Prophet also left a personal recollection of higher priesthood restoration in an epistle to the Church on September 6, 1842. Fervently reviewing the leading events of the restoration, he passed by lesser priesthood restoration to refer to "the voice of Peter, James, and John, in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna river, declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom, and of the dispensation of the fulness of times."<sup>4</sup> Such incidental allusions to the source of modern priesthood authority were evidently characteristic of the Prophet's discourses. Speaking to the Twelve on July 2, 1839, concerning their position of leadership, Joseph Smith stressed the coming of heavenly messengers: "How have we come at the Priesthood in the last days? It came down, down, in regular succession. Peter, James, and John had it given to them, and they gave it to others."<sup>5</sup>

There is a reasonable amount of detail in Joseph Smith's later recollection of both events, but as early as 1834-35 he had taken formal steps to make them public history, through including them in the Doctrine and Covenants issued at Kirtland. One revelation names important messengers of God in the latter-day dispensation and speaks of John the Baptist, whom "I have sent unto you, my servants, Joseph Smith, Jr., and Oliver Cowdery, to ordain you unto the first priesthood which you have received. . . ." The revelation also mentions Peter, James, and John, "whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles, and especial witnesses of my name, and bear the keys of your ministry . . . and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

It has never been adequately emphasized that this review of the events of the restoration is the official testimony of both Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery that ancient messengers came to establish modern priesthood authority. Joseph Smith directly supervised the form of publication of these revelations, but he was assisted in policy decisions and details by the entire First Presidency, of which Cowdery was a key member.<sup>7</sup> In the general priesthood meeting called to accept this revision of the Book of Commandments, Oliver Cowdery spoke for the Presidency in recommending adoption of their work.<sup>8</sup> When this first comprehensive Doctrine and Covenants was printed, Cowdery's name appeared second to Joseph Smith's in presenting "the leading items of the religion which we have professed to believe" with solemn recognition "that we are to be called to answer to every principle advanced" on the day of judgment. Thus, the printing of the history of the two priesthood restorations in that book was formally acknowledged by Oliver Cowdery no less than by Joseph Smith, making the revelation a virtual certification by the two priesthood witnesses.

Although the Church did not explain priesthood restoration in its public literature until the 1834-35 Kirtland publications, substantial evidence shows that the events then placed on record were well understood on oral testimony from the beginning. One major proof of this is the blessing that the Prophet gave to Oliver Cowdery in the presence of the entire Smith family and major officials of the Church. The date of this blessing, December 18, 1833, makes it the earliest direct allusion to priesthood restoration known in LDS annals. The Prophet clearly assumes that the details of Oliver Cowdery's participation in two separate divine manifestations are well known, as he refers to them as a fulfillment of a prophecy of Israel's honored patriarch Joseph:

"These blessings shall come upon him [Oliver] according to the blessings of the prophecy of Joseph in ancient days, which he said should come upon the seer of the last days and the scribe that should sit with him, and that should be ordained with him, by the hands of the angel in the bush, unto the lesser priesthood, and after receive the holy priesthood under the hand of those who had been held in reserve for a long season, even those who received it under the hand of the Messiah, while he should dwell in the flesh upon the earth. . . ."<sup>9a</sup>

The implications of this definite reference to known facts must be underlined. Unless Cowdery and the considerable group of intimate friends of Joseph Smith knew the details of what was later described in the printed accounts of priesthood restoration, such a



Oliver received the blessings that “should come upon the seer of the last days and the scribe that should sit with him....”

blessing would have been an enigma. So the above statement shows not only that Joseph Smith spoke openly of the restoration of both priesthoods at the end of 1833—it also proves that he and those around him had a common understanding of these events for some time prior to December 1833.

This inescapable assumption is verified by the detailed “narrative of Philo Dibble,” in which he recalled a powerful speech of the prophet in Kirtland in 1831, in which Joseph Smith made a blunt answer to a challenge to his divine appointment: “No power can pluck those keys from me, except the power that gave them to me; that was Peter, James and John.”<sup>8b</sup>

There is no doubt that Oliver Cowdery also publicly claimed angelic restoration of divine authority from the beginning. His first major mission, in 1830, took him west from upstate New York through Ohio, with the ultimate destination of Missouri and the frontier Indian lands. His message is surprisingly well documented by the unsympathetic press in a number of newspaper stories mixing reporting and ridicule in various proportions. These accounts show that priesthood authority was as essential to Cowdery’s message as was the Book of Mormon. For instance, a newspaper in the Kirtland, Ohio, area reported:

“About two weeks since some persons came along here with the book [of Mormon], one of whom pretends to have seen Angels, and assisted in translating the plates. He proclaims destruction upon the world within a few years,—holds forth that the ordinances of the gospel, have not been regularly administered since the days of the Apostles, till the said Smith and himself commenced the work. . . . The name of the person here, who pretends to have a divine mission and to have seen and conversed with Angels, is Cowdray [sic]. . . .”<sup>9</sup>

Note that the report of Cowdery’s claim to the

A good likeness of Oliver Cowdery’s signature. Copy reads: “Your Obedient Servant, Oliver Cowdery.”

ance, and yet protect yourselves.  
 ally suggestion.  
 Your Obedient Servant,  
 Oliver Cowdery.

priesthood is associated with the direct appearance of angels. Lyman Wight, who was converted in this area, also entered in his journal that one of the missionaries “testified that he had seen angels.”<sup>10</sup> The satirical Palmyra *Reflector*, relaying information from its Ohio correspondent, emphasizes the point: “Cowdery and his friends had frequent interviews with angels. . . .”<sup>11</sup> Such a reference indicates that Cowdery claimed more than one divine manifestation in addition to the single experience with the angel and the plates that comprised his testimony to the Book of Mormon. By his known statements, “frequent interviews with angels” would include the two priesthood restorations. In any event, contemporary newspaper accounts of Cowdery’s Ohio mission are clear evidence of his public testimony of divine priesthood restoration at the beginning.

In 1834 some kind of policy decision was reached to begin publication of the main facts of the rise of the Latter-day Saint movement. It was perhaps Cowdery’s initiative that brought about this first detailed but incomplete recounting of Church history, since he expressed a desire as newly appointed editor of the Church newspaper to write a “full history” in installments, indicating that he had secured “authentic documents” in order to do a responsible job. But

Artist’s rendering of the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, involving the appearance of James, Peter, and John to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in 1829.





such a project had only second priority in the practically oriented church, as indicated by his intention to continue "if circumstances admit."<sup>12</sup>

Cowdery's articles did not in fact measure up to his intention, since they terminated after talking about essentially one subject, the translation of the Book of Mormon. Nevertheless, the initial installment of the series included a detailed description of the restoration of the lesser priesthood from Cowdery's pen, the earliest published account of the event. Cowdery first recalls the question of authority for baptism that confronted the two young translators of the Book of Mormon. He then narrates their withdrawal to a place of solitude and their prayer "in a fervent manner":

"On a sudden, as from the midst of eternity, the voice of the Redeemer spake peace to us, while the vail was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the gospel of repentance! . . . our eyes beheld—our ears heard. As in the 'blaze of day:' yes, more—above the glitter of the May Sun beam, which then shed its brilliancy over the face of nature! Then his voice, though mild, pierced to the center, and his words, 'I am thy fellow-servant,' dispelled every fear. . . . But, dear brother, think, further think for a moment, what joy filled our hearts and with what surprise we must have bowed, (for who would not have bowed the knee for such a blessing?) when we received under his hand the holy priesthood, as he said, 'upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer this priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon earth, that the sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness!' . . ."

"The assurance that we were in the presence of an angel; the certainty that we heard the voice of Jesus, and the truth unsullied as it flowed from a pure personage, dictated by the will of God, is to me, past description, and I shall ever look upon this expression of the Savior's goodness with wonder and thanksgiving. . . ."<sup>13</sup>

The contrast between such a circumstantial and moving description of the coming of John the Baptist and bare allusions to the subsequent appearance of Peter, James, and John has caused some believers in the restoration to question the necessity of the latter event.<sup>14</sup> This reaction is inconsistent with Cowdery's claims. When the quorum of apostles was established, the second elder was appropriately called upon to give a solemn charge on the significance of this new office and presiding authority, about which he stated, "You have been ordained to the Holy Priesthood, you have received it from those who had

their power and authority from an angel. . . ."<sup>15</sup>

That this is Cowdery's own version of the origin of the higher priesthood is clear from the terminology of a little-known account in an early patriarehal blessing record of the Church. The document is in his handwriting and signed by him as official recorder of blessings. As secretary, he inserted an explanation of the authority of the Prophet to give blessings:

". . . he was ordained by the angel John, unto the lesser or Aaronic Priesthood, in company with myself, in the town of Harmony, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, on Friday, the 15th day of May, 1829; after which we repaired to the water, even to the Susquehanna River, and were baptized; he first administering unto me, and after, I to him. But before baptism our souls were drawn out in mighty prayer, to know how we might obtain the blessings of baptism and of the Holy Spirit according to the order of God; and we diligently sought for the right of the fathers, and the authority of the holy priesthood, and the power to administer in the same; for we desired to be followers of righteousness and the possessors of greater knowledge, even the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Therefore we repaired to the woods, even as our father Joseph said we should, that is, to the bush, and called upon the name of the Lord, and he answered us out of the heavens. And while we were in the heavenly vision, the angel came down and bestowed upon us this priesthood; and then, as I have said, we repaired to the water and were baptized. After this, we received the high and holy priesthood; but an account of this will be given elsewhere, or in another place."<sup>16</sup>

Cowdery's foregoing personal statement is important as a private confirming record of the public account of Aaronic Priesthood restoration, but it is also important in indicating his own explanation that a higher priesthood restoration followed afterward. This 1833 account is the earliest known extended description of priesthood restoration. The account alludes to the dual restorations. Whether or not the record "in another place" was ever written, the subsequent ordination to "the high and holy priesthood" is authenticated.

Accurate history demands an exposure of statements falsely attributed to Oliver Cowdery about priesthood restoration. Following his spirited quarrel with Church leaders, he withdrew from the Church and was excommunicated April 12, 1838. A pamphlet circulates under Cowdery's name that was supposedly published the following year: *Defense in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints*. Although the authenticity of the pamphlet has been generally assumed, it is a strangely



"And while we were in heavenly vision, the angel came down...."

confused work to come from Cowdery's articulate pen. It repeatedly mentions the priesthood, "about which I am beginning to doubt"; yet it asserts the reality of the appearance of John the Baptist, "which I doubt not and deny not." With naive bewilderment, the pamphlet relates that the voice of the angel "did most mysteriously resemble the voice of Elder Sidney Rigdon, who, I am sure had no part in the transactions of that day." This is unlikely language to have come from the incisive mind of Cowdery, whose extensive recorded talks and preserved letters are never ambiguous on any issue. The fact is that the pamphlet has been accepted at face value for over half a century without any serious investigation of its genuineness.

Cowdery's purported *Defense* was first published by the belligerent evangelist R. B. Neal, the moving spirit of the American Anti-Mormon Association. His colorful tracts insisted that the discovery of this pamphlet was a death blow to Mormonism.<sup>17</sup> Supposedly published in Norton, Ohio, by "Pressley's Job Office" in 1839, no original can be found, nor can any other printing earlier than Neal's 1906 edition.<sup>18</sup> Norton is not a location known to have had a press; "Pressley's Job Office" by all census and property investigations fails to find confirmation; and in 1839 Cowdery was constantly in Kirtland, the fact of his presence being recorded in preserved town records and as a witness on deeds throughout the year, including the month that the pamphlet was ostensibly prepared.

If the foregoing incongruities raise more than reasonable doubt, the following considerations clearly show that no such *Defense* was published and circulated: (1) Mormon periodicals of the early period constantly noted and commented on anti-Mormon literature, and attacks on the faith were publicly refuted. Of greater significance, notorious Mormon dissenters were praised and quoted by a vigorous anti-Mormon press. Neither side displays any awareness of the purported Cowdery *Defense*. (2) Lawyers who knew Cowdery intimately while he was out of the Church indicate that he studiously avoided any public or private comment on Mormonism while in non-Mormon society. The prior appearance of a pamphlet of exposure is inconsistent with these known tactics of his life. (3) Cowdery was challenged sharply at his return for a letter that was published

and circulated among dissident Mormons. His former associates would have also asked for an explanation of his *Defense*, had it existed.

The discovery in 1934 of the Oliver Cowdery letters in the possession of Phineas Young's descendants clearly disclosed Cowdery's personal convictions about the priesthood while out of the Church. The spurious *Defense* has nothing in common with these personal writings of Cowdery in the same period. This correspondence reveals a man who waited a decade for an apology that never came. He felt that his character had been unjustly debased with charges of dishonesty at his excommunication. A practicing lawyer, he was fully aware that his testimony of the priesthood would be judged in large part by his personal reputation. In the most touching of all his letters written while out of the Church, he pled indirectly with Brigham Young for public exoneration prior to his contemplated return:

"I have cherished a hope, and that one of my fondest, that I might leave such a character, as those who might believe in my testimony, after I should be called hence, might do so, not only for the sake of the truth, but might not blush for the private character of the man who bore that testimony. I have been sensitive on this subject, I admit, but I ought to be so,

Extract from a letter of Oliver Cowdery to Phineas Young, March 23, 1846, in which Elder Cowdery affirms having "stood in the presence" of John and Peter.

I might leave such a character, as those who believe in my testimony, after I should be called hence, might do so, not only for the sake of truth, but might not blush for the private character of the man who bore that testimony. I have been sensitive on this subject, I admit, but I ought to be so - you would be, under the circumstances, you stood in the presence of John <sup>with</sup> and our departed brother Joseph, to receive the Lesser Priest hood - and in the presence of Peter, to receive the Greater, and looked down through time, and witnessed the effects that men must produce - you would feel what you never felt, were wicked men conspiring to lessen the effects of your testimony on men, after you should have gone to your long sleep rest. But, enough of this. I will here say, that I cannot fully comprehend the purport of brother Hyde's letter; from your last in referring to a conversation by brother Brigham, <sup>(about the Prophecy)</sup> I am fully, doubly, satisfied, that all a



“I have been sensitive on this subject, but you would be had you stood in the presence of Peter.”

You would be, under the circumstances. Had you stood in the presence of John, with our departed Brother Joseph, to receive the Lesser Priesthood—and in the presence of Peter, to receive the Greater, and looked down through time, and witnessed the effects these two must produce, you would feel what you have never felt, were wicked men conspiring to lessen the effects of your testimony on man, after you should have gone to your long sought rest.”<sup>19</sup>

It is no surprise that the man holding these convictions returned to the Church two and one-half years after writing the above letter. Since he arrived at Council Bluffs in the midst of a session of the October 1848 conference, his first act was a public reiteration of his testimony of the divine events of the restoration. The most detailed record of this public speech was then written by Reuben Miller, who later insisted that his diary contained a “verbatim report,” and who was vitally interested in Cowdery’s views on priesthood because Miller had been misled by Strang on the same issue.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, it is clear that Miller’s diary is both accurate and reasonably comprehensive, when compared to contemporary official records. A major portion of Cowdery’s returning speech pertains to priesthood restoration:

“I was present with Joseph when an holy angel from God came down from heaven and conferred, or restored, the Aaronic Priesthood and said at the same time that it should remain upon the earth while the earth stands. I was also present with Joseph when the Melchizedek Priesthood was conferred by the holy angels of God, which we then confirmed on each other, by the will and commandment of God. This priesthood is also to remain upon the earth until the last remnant of time. This holy priesthood we conferred upon many and is just as good and valid as if God had conferred it in person.”<sup>21</sup>

Cowdery lived but a year and a half after this solemn restatement of his testimony to the supernatural basis of the restoration of the gospel. His own letters and contacts with several Latter-day Saints during this period show conclusively that his position on priesthood restoration never changed. Moving in the winter of 1848-49 to Richmond, Missouri, Cowdery spent a snowbound fortnight with Samuel W. Richards, who procured as a souvenir a

handwritten statement that Cowdery stood “with Joseph the Seer” to receive divine authority:

“John the Baptist, holding the keys of the Aaronic priesthood; Peter, James, and John, holding the keys of the Melchizedek priesthood, have also ministered for those who shall be heirs of salvation, and with these ministrations ordained men to the same priesthoods. . . . Accept assurances, dear Brother, of the unfeigned prayer of him who, in connection with Joseph the Seer, was blessed with the above ministration. . . .”<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the original autographed statement may yet be found, but the fact that Richards obtained it from Cowdery and published it is sufficient evidence that it is Cowdery’s personal testimony.<sup>23</sup>

Richards’ recollections of his two weeks with Cowdery emphasize the materiality of priesthood restoration. Cowdery described the “personality” of these ancient prophets, together with “their heavenly appearance” and penetrating eyes. When Richards recalls placing “my hands upon his head where these angels had placed theirs,” he is undoubtedly reporting Cowdery’s specific concept of the method of ordination, not only of John the Baptist, but also of Peter, James, and John.<sup>24</sup> This point is important because it has been denied that they received a physical ordination from Peter, James, and John on the grounds that “ordain” may have the more general meaning of “appoint.”<sup>25</sup> But in every statement where Cowdery describes the double restoration, identical vocabulary appears for both events, vocabulary that refers, as it does with the Aaronic Priesthood, to the physical contact of the hands of John the Baptist. The word “ordain” as used by both Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery uniformly refers to the physical laying on of hands both in the context of human priesthood transfer and also in the experience of receiving priesthood from John the Baptist. Their own usage must define what they meant by the same terminology applied to the restoration of higher priesthood by Peter, James, and John. As a matter of fact, Joseph Smith went on record with descriptions of physical ordination similar to Cowdery’s. The official minutes of a blessing of Cowdery referring to priesthood restoration were quoted earlier in this article, in which the Prophet refers to the ordination to “the lesser priesthood” specifically “by the hand of the angel,” and the subsequent reception of “the holy



“Oliver Cowdery as a man is a superb individual: sensitive, perceptive, intelligent, with an outspoken honesty....”

priesthood under the hands of those” who had walked with Christ.

In the past, Latter-day Saint history has been presented with less historical documentation than is presently available to confirm its essential structure. The collected statements of Oliver Cowdery on priesthood restoration immeasurably reinforce Joseph Smith’s claim that two distinct priesthood restorations took place. All of the seven direct references of Joseph Smith to priesthood restoration allude to the second occasion when higher priesthood was restored, and five give some detail about it. Likewise, four of the five detailed references of Cowdery to priesthood restoration allude to the second occasion, and three of these describe the conferring of additional priesthood by further messengers. Although more detail is known about the coming of John the Baptist, the evidence is equally strong for the appearance of Peter, James, and John. From his many related remarks, there is no question that Cowdery considered the second experience the more important.<sup>26</sup> And his testimony about priesthood is consistently given from 1830 until his death in 1850. To demand more than this is to impose an unrealistic perfectionism upon history.

Oliver Cowdery as a man is a superb individual: sensitive, perceptive, intelligent, with an outspoken honesty that made him a courageous dissenter on more than one occasion in an eventful life. He left solid references and vivid descriptions of two separate priesthood restorations in his own writing in Church records, in personal conversations, in spontaneous private letters, and in his last recorded public speech at the close of his life. If human integrity exists, the restoration of the two priesthoods is a supernatural reality of the modern world.

(To be continued)

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>J. B. Phillips, *Ring of Truth* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 32. Compare Phillips’ admission (p. 112) that New Testament resurrection appearances are not arranged as evidence by critical legal or historical standards: “I should be highly suspicious of them if they were.”

<sup>2</sup>*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3, No. 19 (August 1, 1842), p. 866. Modifications in quotations in this article are limited to corrections and modernizations in spelling and punctuation. This account is reprinted in *Documentary History of the Church* (2d ed.; Salt Lake City, 1946), Vol. 1, pp. 39-40.

<sup>3</sup>*DHC*, Vol. 6, pp. 249-50. This reminiscence does not mention Oliver Cowdery, but the allusion is incidental and not designed to be detailed. The first-person-singular method of narration merely underscores the personal involvement of the Prophet.

<sup>4</sup>*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3, No. 23 (October 1, 1842), p. 936. The quotation is found in *D&C* 128:20.

<sup>5</sup>*DHC*, Vol. 3, p. 387.

<sup>6</sup>*D&C* 50:2-3 (1835 ed.); *D&C* 27:8, 12-13 (current ed.).

<sup>7</sup>See *DHC*, Vol. 2, p. 51, entry of April 19, 1834, for the blessing of Oliver Cowdery “that he be qualified to assist Elder Rigdon in arranging the Church Book of Covenants. . . .”

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 244, entry of August 17, 1835. These minutes were printed as the final item in the Kirtland edition of the *D&C*.

<sup>9</sup>Church Historian’s Patriarchal Blessing Book 1, p. 12, copied into Patriarchal Blessing Book 2, p. 23, cited in Joseph Fielding Smith,

“Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood,” *Improvement Era*, Vol. 7, No. 12 (October 1904), p. 943. The prophecy of the patriarch Joseph is similar to that recorded in 2 Nephi 3 but is a fuller version, which is also referred to by Cowdery in his explanatory notes to the blessings given them.

<sup>10</sup>*Early Scenes in Church History—8th Book of the Faith-Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City, 1882), p. 80.

<sup>11</sup>*Painesville Telegraph*, November 16, 1830. A reprint of the article is found in Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America* (4th ed.; Salt Lake City, 1967), Vol. 1, pp. 433-34. Compare the letter in the same paper of December 7, 1830, ridiculing the commission of Cowdery “directly from the God of Heaven, and . . . Jesus Christ, with whom he has personally conversed. . . .” *Ibid.*, p. 435.

<sup>12</sup>Quotation from Journal of Lyman Wight, *Saints’ Herald*, Vol. 29 (1882), p. 192.

<sup>13</sup>*The Reflector* (Palmyra, N.Y.), February 14, 1831, p. 102.

<sup>14</sup>*Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (October 1834), p. 13.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16. The value to the Church of the description is underlined by the custom of printing it in recent editions of the Pearl of Great Price as a footnote to Joseph Smith’s account of the restoration of the Aroniac Priesthood.

<sup>16</sup>Jason W. Briggs, an influential founder of the Reorganized LDS movement, took the position that the only ordination really necessary for the restoration of authority was that of John the Baptist. Any manifestation after that was priesthood authorization by commandment, not a further ordination by laying on of hands. *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, Missouri, 1951), Vol. 3, pp. 224-25. The official interpretation of RLDS history takes a similar position, acknowledging the coming of Peter, James, and John, but logically denying the necessity of their presence by inferring that they brought a “command” of God, not a further physical ordination. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 63-66.

<sup>17</sup>*DHC*, Vol. 2, p. 195, February 21, 1835.

<sup>18</sup>Patriarchal Blessing Book, No. 1, pp. 8-9, LDS Church Historian’s Office. The entry originated December 13, 1833; it was published in full in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City, 1956), Vol. 3, pp. 99-100. This explanation prefaced the blessing of Joseph Smith upon Cowdery quoted in this article and was obviously intended to acquaint the uninformed reader with the facts of the priesthood restoration as already understood by those present. Cf. note 8a. It was copied into Patriarchal Blessing Book 2, pp. 14-15.

<sup>19</sup>Of this *Defense*, Neal said, “No more important document has been unearthed since I have been engaged in this warfare.” “Sword of Laban” leaflets, No. 11, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>The date of Neal’s receipt of the supposed Cowdery *Defense* is June 2, 1905, according to his letter printed by Wingfield Watson, *Prophetic Controversy*, No. 6 (1905), p. 1. This is the first known reference to its existence.

<sup>21</sup>Letter of Oliver Cowdery to Phineas Young, Tiffin, Ohio, March 23, 1846, LDS Church Historian’s Office. The text cited is my transcription and punctuation from a photograph in the Historian’s Office. The story of the discovery and the first publication of the letter is found in the talk of Alonzo A. Hinckley, *Conference Report*, 104th Annual General Conference (Salt Lake City, 1934), pp. 127-29. The letter is reprinted by Stanley R. Gunn, *Oliver Cowdery* (Salt Lake City, 1962), pp. 250-51.

<sup>22</sup>See Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Reuben Miller, Recorder of Oliver Cowdery’s Reaffirmations,” *Brigham Young University Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Spring, 1968), pp. 277-93.

<sup>23</sup>Reuben Miller Journal, LDS Church Historian’s Office. The text is copied from the journal, with the exception of the incomplete phrase discussed in note 26 of this article. The plural “angels” is the reading of the original, though some published accounts have erroneously dropped the final “s.”

<sup>24</sup>Statement of Oliver Cowdery to Samuel W. Richards, January 13, 1849. The text is copied from the earliest known publication (*Deseret News*, March 21, 1884), which was accompanied by Richards’ description of the circumstances of obtaining the statement: “As he was about to take his leave he penned, with his own hand and in my presence, the testimony and statement herewith, which I deem worthy of record.” The earliest entry to mention the statement in Richards’ incompletely preserved journal is that of June 26, 1881.

<sup>25</sup>The entire study of ancient history is based on copies of documents once known to have existed, since there are no originals of any major writing of antiquity, including the New Testament. But Cicero’s letters are still his, even if they only exist in later copies. The same is true of Cowdery’s note to Richards.

<sup>26</sup>These memories of Richards were printed 50 years after the visit with Cowdery but probably were recollections repeated fairly often prior to that time. Obviously, the act of laying his hands upon Cowdery’s head would be easily remembered, together with the personal significance of the act at that time. When he recalled the physicalness of Cowdery’s descriptions, he was 74 and acute enough to hold demanding positions of Church leadership.

<sup>27</sup>*History of the Reorganized Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 64-65. This interpretation is quoted with approval by F. Henry Edwards, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (rev. ed.; Independence, Missouri, 1946), p. 103.

<sup>28</sup>For instance, an incomplete phrase is normally left out of the Reuben Miller account of Cowdery’s speech at his return to the Church. It appears immediately after the description of the ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood “by the holy angels of God” and reads: “. . . this was the more necessary in order that.” Despite the incomplete recording of the thought, Cowdery was obviously expressing the opinion that the restoration of the higher priesthood was “all the more necessary” than the lesser priesthood.