



Type: Magazine Article

The Edict of a Century

Author(s): Charles W. Penrose

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (April 1920)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 484–487

Abstract: This article contains an account of the first vision received by Joseph Smith and the importance of other visions leading up to the publication of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Edict of a Century

By President Charles W. Penrose

The Nineteenth Century shines out in fadeless glory, distinct from all its predecessors as their superior for advancement in art, science, invention, novel activities, developments of old ideas and forces, discoveries that startled the world, and progress in all that aforesaid was counted as intellectual, practical and beneficial. It was a wondrous age, teeming with miracles, a splendid chapter of the world's history. But there was one event therein that will be eternally regarded as the most resplendent and important of all, when its reality and its results become universally known and understood:

In the early spring of the year 1820 there occurred something unique in the annals of time. The Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, architect of the universe, center of life and light, with his beloved Son, the immortal Christ, the world's Redeemer, in the brightness of their glory, casting into shade the morning sunbeams of that beautiful day, manifested themselves to humble, trembling humanity. Not amid the thunderings of disturbed elements, in flame of fire or frowning cloud, in quaking earth or acclaiming heavenly hosts, to gaping crowds or proud professors or learned divines, but in a quiet grove near an obscure village of a sparsely populated part of western New York state, and to a mere boy, little over fourteen years of age, of the common names—Joseph and Smith, who knelt in earnest faith and prayer seeking to know which of all the clanging "Christian" sects had the true religion.

The story of this great revelation has been published far and wide but has never been told with greater effect than as given in simple form by the boy Prophet himself. The substance of it is that on beholding the two glorious beings he asked the momentous question; and one of them pointing to the other replied: "*This is my beloved Son, hear him.*"

The boy then received, through the Son, the information that the entire religious world was astray, and the injunction to go after none of the sects, for their teachings were but "the commandments of men." He was promised that in due time the fulness of the everlasting gospel should be made known to him.

This was something new indeed. Not only to the opening, remarkable century, but to all the preceding ages. Never before,

so far as history has recorded, was Deity thus fully manifested. The Father and the Son as distinct and separate personalities, spiritual, but tangible beings in human form, the Holy Spirit emanating from them as light and life and witness of their divinity to the soul of the inspired youth seeking after God! No mere immaterial, bodiless, incomprehensible abstractions were they or either of them, but real, actual beings, with form and feature and individuality, the Father and His Son each in the majesty and unity of exalted, perfected, and glorified humanity. The great truth was made plain that God did literally make man "in his own likeness" and that Christ Jesus was "the express image of his person."

Another great fact set forth was the utter departure of the whole world from the true Christian faith and worship, with the truth that "God is not the author of confusion" or contention or discord, as manifest throughout entire Christendom. The complete lack of Divine authority was also disclosed, showing that all administrations of ordinances in the name of the Holy Trinity were void and of no heavenly effect. The absolute need of a new divine dispensation was thus made palpable.

That wondrous vision was the opening scene of the great latter-day glory and "restitution of all things" predicted by the holy prophets. The world had departed from God. He condescended to come to humanity. Immortality descended and touched mortality. Not in man's ways did he proceed but in his own manner he acted. By his Son he created all things "in the beginning;" by his Son he opened the way for the world's redemption. By his Son as Jehovah he spake to the ancients, and revealed himself on Mount Sinai. By his Son he speaks today as he did a hundred years ago and calls upon the world to 'Hear him!'

Following that manifestation came numerous revelations of priceless worth and import. Such as: The uncovering of the golden plates, containing the ancient history of America, by the ministrations of the angel Moroni; the translation of the hieroglyphic engravings thereon "by the gift and power of God" given to Joseph Smith; the restoration of the Holy Priesthood (the Aaronic by John the Baptist, the Melchizedek by Peter, James and John) making legitimate the administration of baptism for the remission of sins, the confirmation by the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, the naming and blessing of children, ordinations to the sacred offices of Apostle, Patriarch, High Priest, Seventy, Bishop, Elder, Priest, Teacher, and Deacon; the full organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the further ministration of Christ himself, of Michael (or Adam), of Gabriel (or Noah), of Moses, of Elijah,

and of other prophets bearing the keys of divine power needed in "the dispensation of the fulness of times" opened by Deity in the spring of 1820.

Thus the true gospel, the one "strait and narrow way" to eternal life, has been sent forth to all nations, preparatory to the second advent of Messiah and the establishment of the Millennium of peace. All the ordinances and institutions of Christ's own Church with its signs and gifts and miracles and inspirations have been restored, and that which is sealed or loosed by this authority on earth is surely sealed or loosed in heaven. Salvation for the dead as well as for the living has been declared, by which the hosts of the departed who knew not the only way of salvation while in the flesh, can learn of it in the spirit sphere, and needful ordinances may be performed in their behalf by the living Saints who thus become "Saviors upon Mount Zion," and the justice and mercy of the Most High are maintained.

The future estates of mankind, in the "many mansions" of the Father's Kingdom, each soul being judged and given his due "according to his works," the universality, periods and distinctive conditions of a literal resurrection with the different degrees of glory to be enjoyed by the several orders of the worthy sons and daughters of God and the various rewards of corrective punishment for the wicked have been revealed in great plainness, displacing the senseless notion of centuries that a heaven of ceaseless praise or a hell of everlasting torment, was the common lot of the saved or the damned. The heavenly order of celestial marriage; that is, matrimony for time and all eternity, with ever-increasing progress in family joys and powers and posterity, has also been made known, instead of the man-made contract which ends at death and gives no hope for the eternal future.

The destiny of this globe as an orb that has "filled the measure of its creation" and is therefore entitled to the crown of everlasting life, and the presence of its Creator, with those immortal beings belonging to it who have been "obedient to law," as one of the ransomed and glorified worlds in affinity and communion with the highest constellations, is one more gleam of light from the stream that came from on high with the opening vision in the early spring of 1820 and has illumined the Church which Christ has set up, through all the experiences of a century. The past, with its pre-existent state of earth's inhabitants before they were born of the flesh, their perfect relations to Deity and each other, their future, dependent largely upon their own doings while in mortality, have been disclosed to those who "walk in the light" and are led by the Spirit of God. In all those things there is joy, and comfort, and hope, and ever-

increasing faith. And they have all come from God through revelation by "the voice of Jesus Christ," in the order declared by the Eternal Father a century ago. To the commandment, "Hear him," then given, the Prophet Joseph rendered implicit obedience, from the day that he first communed with Deity, to the end of his earthly career, when he, with his beloved brother Hyrum, together met a martyr's fate at Carthage, Illinois, on the 27th of June, 1844. No greater Prophet than he ever ministered among men. He finished the work given him to do when a boy. He faced the violent opposition of all sects and parties, put to silence the sneers and scoffs of the whole religious world, braved the fury of mobs and the tyranny of lawless civil and military forces, organized the grandest religious system ever offered to mankind, translated records by gifts unknown to science, uncovering the buried history of a hemisphere, advanced the principles on which the institutions and achievements of "Mormonism" have been built and accomplished, and obtained a fame that has spread to all nations, and will increase in appreciation as the centuries roll on.

The word of God to him in the sacred grove is going forth with force to mankind. It proclaimed the Sonship and Godhead of the Christ and gave the commandment to "Hear him." That edict is for the Latter-day Saints to obey. All the revelations to the Church have come from Jesus Christ. Read them in the Doctrine and Covenants, and in the Book of Mormon. The words "Hear him" are directed in the latter work to the Gentiles on this land as well as to the whole house of Israel. This nation is to be prospered and fortified and blest with liberty, if the people will "serve the God of the land who is Jesus Christ." This is the divinely ordained condition. And the day cometh when those who will not hearken to his voice will be rejected of God and cut off from his promise.

Great events are portending. The word of the Lord will be preached to "the ends of the earth." The duty to proclaim it rests upon his ordained ministers who have received the authority sent down from heaven to the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is here today and will not be taken again from the earth. It will prevail over every hostile power and continue its work until "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is the Christ to the glory of God the Father." Then all creation shall obey the mandate "Hear him," for his is the only name given under heaven whereby mankind may be saved. Come then, O all inhabitants of the world! Receive now the divine word of a century ago, turn to Christ and "HEAR HIM!"