

Hard Questions in Church History

Lynne Hilton Wilson

Questions to Consider

- Why do we call D&C 20 a revelation when Oliver studied it out in order to prepare the draft?
- Why do we have different names for the Church?
- Why do people record different locations, numbers and dates for the organization of the Church?

Organization of the Church of Christ (April 6, 1830)

Timeline

1829	
June 1	After a miracle of divine assistant to prepare his fields, David Whitmer arrives in Harmony, Pennsylvania, as Joseph requested. He transports Joseph & Oliver to his father's house in Fayette, New York. Emma joins them later.
June 30	Joseph finishes the translation of the Book of Mormon. Twelve witness see the plates around this time.
1830	
Mar 26	Published copies of the Book of Mormon go on sale for \$1.75 at E. B. Grandin's Bookstore.
April 6	Organizational meeting of the Church is held at the Peter Whitmer Sr. log home in Fayette, New York, where Joseph Smith received and issued the revelation now contained in D&C 21
April 6-10	Baptisms of Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, Martin Harris, and Orin Porter Rockwell
April 10	Church Constitution, also known as the Articles and Covenants, is finished (D&C 20)
June 9	First conference of the Church is held in Fayette, New York (at which meeting D&C 20 was read)

Various New York Legal Ways to Organize a Religious Society

In 1813, the State of New York passed an act specifying requirements to incorporate a religious society. If a church held property and wanted to keep it in the church, an incorporated set of rules was required. Incorporation required 1) electing three to nine men, who must be elected by the membership as “trusties, to take charge of the estate and properties; as corporation officers, to manage the temporal affairs of the church,” 2) submitting an official title, and 3) paying a fee.

To date, historians have not found an official document or evidence of a fee paid to incorporate the Church, an election of trustees, nor purchase of church property. There was no need for a church to “incorporate” when there was no property involved. Because of this lacking evidence, we assume the church was not organized in New York as a corporation.

The only evidence of any attempt to incorporate is a list of six baptized men who were possibly the only members of the church—but that was not an exclusive requirement for incorporations. Furthermore, the names of the six men was not recorded until decades later and the known lists of the six are not the same.

Rather, New York state had a second legal option to form a “Religious Society.” The law did not stipulate a specific list of requirements. David K. Stott examined other church organizations in New York from the same era and found that the organization of the Church of Christ included similar

topics that are found in other churches' organizational platforms (David K. Stott, "Legal Insights into the Organization of the Church in 1830," *BYU Studies* 49.2, 2010).

Below is a portion of Stott's research with added passages from "The Articles and Covenants of the Church" (which became known as D&C 20 and 22), that fit similar patterns found in other churches' guidelines:

Presbyterian Guidelines	Methodist Religious Society	Baptist Guidelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elect two ruling elders—D&C 20:2-3 • Set apart elders—D&C 20:38-39 • Define public worship—D&C 20:29-84 • Explain baptism—D&C 20:37 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a permanent preacher—D&C 20:45-50 —D&C 21:1-3, 12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unite in covenant—D&C 20:37 • Articles adopted—Jun 9, 1830 • Church named—D&C 20:1 • Officers elected—D&C 20:65

The Articles and Covenants of the Church include at least eight similar points from other religious societies' creeds. Yet, that the same unique document additionally offers the foundational themes of priesthood keys, revelation through the Gift of the Holy Ghost, and an apostle-prophet-seer. All of these latter bedrock structures and many more unique doctrines are mentioned in the Articles and Covenants of the restored church (D&C 20:2, 17-26, 45, 67; 21:1, which will be discussed below).

Earliest References to a New Church

It is conceivable that Joseph Smith received revelations about the future church as early as the 1820 First Vision and the 1823-1827 visitations of angel Moroni. Seven of the nine First Vision accounts include a reference to restoring a church. Additionally, Joseph received revelations that refer to a forthcoming church as early as 1828. In the Doctrine and Covenants, we find four references to the church from 1829, the year before the organization:

D&C 5:14 “. . . this the beginning of the rising up and the coming forth of my **church** out of the wilderness.”

D&C 10:53, 67, 69 “If this generation harden not their hearts, I will establish my **church** among them . . . Whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my **church** . . . Whosoever is of my **church**, and endureth of my **church** to the end, him will I establish upon my rock.”

D&C 11:16 “Wait a little longer, until you shall have my word, my rock, my **church**, and my gospel, that you may know of a surety my doctrine.”

D&C 18:4-5 “In them [The Book of Mormon] are all things written concerning the foundation of my **church** . . . 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.”

God gave the revelation known as D&C 18 in June of 1829, while Joseph was finishing the translation of the Book of Mormon in the Whitmer Home. In this revelation the Lord commanded Oliver to put together an inspired document to act as a “foundation of my church,” from the writings of the Book of Mormon (D&C 18:4).

Preparing for the Organization: Articles and Covenants (D&C 20)

Shortly after Joseph received the revelation known as D&C 18, Oliver Cowdery began searching in the Book of Mormon for church practices. When God gave the commandment, Joseph and Oliver were concluding the translation—somewhere in the small plates—but as soon as they finished, Joseph asked Oliver to rewrite the entire Book of Mormon for a printer’s manuscript, giving him ample opportunity to look for foundational doctrines and church practices as he carefully penned each word in the printer’s manuscript. He soon had enough information and prepared a draft of the “Articles and Covenants.” It was significantly revised as he and Joseph wrote up what would become Doctrine and Covenants section 20.

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery finished that document on Saturday, April 10, 1830. It was read by the Prophet Joseph at the first conference of the Church held on June 9, 1830 at the Peter Whitmer Sr. home in Fayette, New York. Those assembled there accepted the document as the Articles and Covenants of the Church. Initially, it served as a handbook of instructions for the young Church. It explained key doctrines and practices to be observed in the Church.

The Articles and Covenants is an example of how God works with us where we are. Although the fledgling Church has grown in size, name, organization, and needs, the Articles and Covenants is still applicable today as to our core doctrines of the nature of God, Creation, the Fall, repentance, priesthood offices, and ordinances.

To emphasize the document’s importance to the early Church, we can see that the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants contained revelations were arranged by importance, not in chronological order. The earliest editions began with the Lectures on Faith and the Lord’s “Preface” to the revelations (D&C 1:6), followed by the two most important sections at the time:

- The “Articles and Covenants of the Church” (now D&C 20)
- The Priesthood (now D&C 107)

Following the patterns of other religious organizations, the Articles and Covenants included:

- D&C 20:1-16 Historical Prologue
- D&C 20:17-37 History Doctrines
- D&C 20:38-67 Duties of Priesthood
- D&C 20:70-71 Children to Be Blessed
- D&C 20:82 Record Keeping

Organization of the Church

Tuesday, April 6, 1830, Fayette, New York

Ten years after the First Vision and ten days after the Book of Mormon was available for sale at the E.B. Grandin Book Store, the Prophet Joseph Smith organized the Church of Christ at the Peter Whitmer Sr. home in Fayette, New York. President Gordon B. Hinckley observed, “This day of organization was, in effect, a day of commencement, the graduation for Joseph from ten years of remarkable schooling. It had begun with the incomparable vision in the grove in the spring of 1820” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “150 Year Drama: A Personal View of Our History,” *Ensign* 10, no. 4 [April 1980], 11).

The 1839 History of the Church explains that the organization of the Church was a commandment from the Lord:

Whilst the Book of Mormon was in the hands of the printer . . . we had received commandment to organize the Church . . . Accordingly we met together for that purpose, at the house of the above mentioned Mr. Whitmer (being six in number) on Tuesday the sixth day of April, AD One thousand, eight hundred and thirty (["History, circa June–October 1839 \[Draft 1\]," p. \[9\]](#)).

There are questions on the location, number, date, and what occurred at the gathering. The following section looks at four specific details involved in the organization.

Details of the Organization—1. Location, 2. Number, 3. Date, and 4. Order of the Day

1. Location. The organizational meeting of the Church was held at the Peter Whitmer Sr. log home in Fayette, New York. It was a two-room log home, with foundation stones measuring 20 by 30 feet. Oliver, Joseph, and Emma lived there in June 1829 for the last month of translation of the Book of Mormon. There are other second-hand documents that point to the location of the organization meeting as being held in Manchester, New York. Elder D. Todd Christofferson addressed this discrepancy as well as other historical discrepancies—

Recording mistakes, for example, have sometimes been seized on as evidence of misrepresentations or bumbling by the Prophet. For example, the Book of Commandments initially referred to Joseph Smith as “an elder” and Oliver Cowdery the same, rather than “First Elder” and “Second Elder” as found in the text of Doctrine and Covenants Section 20. The 1833 Book of Commandments suggested that the Church was organized in Manchester rather than Fayette, New York. The June 1839 Manuscript History of the Church says it was Nephi who appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823 rather than Moroni. Now, however, with original manuscripts contained in the Book of Commandments and Revelations, published as part of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, and other early sources we can “peel back the onion” a little further. And we find that the supposed problems are nothing more sinister than clerical errors sometimes repeated by others (Elder D. Todd Christofferson, “The Prophet Joseph Smith,” *BYU-Idaho Devotional*, September 24, 2013, footnote 14).

The Whitmer home was also used for the next three Church conferences before the Saints moved to Kirtland, Ohio in 1831.

2. Number. When the 1839 History of the Church refers to “six” people present at the organizational meeting, it probably referred to the six male baptized members who acted as official witnesses: Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Samuel Smith, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Peter Whitmer Jr. We currently do not have a document with their names from the decade of 1830 to 1840. The available lists record different names (the above list was dictated by Oliver, and recorded by Joseph Knight). There may have been up to nine baptized members at the meeting, but these six men were named.

Others attended the meeting as interested supporters. The two rooms were full with over forty people (the numbers differ with each account; David Whitmer once claimed seventy gathered). Twenty were extended members of the Joseph Knight family and friends who traveled over ninety miles from Colesville, New York. Prior to the organization, Joseph had been in Palmyra overseeing the

completion of the publication and early sales of the Book of Mormon. He and his family made the thirty-or-so-mile journey southeast to the Whitmers' home in Fayette. Emma was not with them; she remained at her home in Harmony, Pennsylvania and did not make the 100-plus-mile journey alone for the gathering on Tuesday, April 6, 1830.

3. Date. Non-canonized revelations refer to the importance of the date for the organization of the Church:

Whilst the Book of Mormon was in the hands of the printer, . . . we had received commandment to organize the Church . . . on Tuesday the sixth day of April" (["History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 \[Draft 2\]," p. 37](#)).

In 1830, April 6 was five days before Easter, a full moon after the vernal equinox, and the day before Passover began (just as the Last Supper was on the preparation day before Passover).

Many have thought that April 6 may also be the birthdate of Jesus Christ. Consider the beginning of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 20, "The rise of the Church of Christ in these last days, being one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh . . . the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month which is called April" (D&C 20:1). Elder James E. Talmage wrote, "We believe that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, April 6, 1 BC" (James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 104). Presidents Harold B. Lee and Spencer W. Kimball also named April 6 as the anniversary of the Lord's birth (Harold B. Lee, Conference Reports, April 1973; Spencer W. Kimball, *Conference Reports*, April 1975).

However, Jeffrey R. Chadwick and others do not share that interpretation. They read D&C 20:1 as the date of the organization of the Church only (Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Christ," *BYU Studies*, 49.4). He points out that the phrase "since the coming of our Lord . . . in the flesh" was used in other documents from that time just as an ordinary way of saying 1830 A.D.

Through Google Books, I researched writings within a century of 1830 and found a few documents that use a shortened version of the phrase from D&C 20:1, "since the coming of our Lord . . . in the flesh. These other documents use the phrase in a general sense—not intended to date the Lord's birth. For example, the British preacher George Whitefield, who is honored as the father of America's First Great Awakening (1730 and 1780), used the same phrase. A variation of the phrase was yet again used in the second session of Congress for the House of Representatives in 1868 (thirty-eight years after D&C 20). In the Joseph Smith Papers Project, we find an abbreviated form of the phrase used once on June 12, 1830 by John Whitmer as he opened his History (["John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847," p. 1](#)). We have no evidence of Oliver or Joseph having used the phrase again, so we do not know what Joseph and Oliver intended it to mean when they employed it.

4. Order of the Day. The organizational meeting of the Church was simple yet powerful. By combining several records of people who were present, we learn that they began by kneeling in prayer, sustaining and ordaining officers, and partaking the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Then those previously baptized were confirmed, testimonies were born, and Joseph received and reported a revelation (D&C 21). The Prophet Joseph recorded:

Having opened the meeting by solemn prayer to our Heavenly Father we proceeded, (according to previous commandment) to call on our brethren to know whether they accepted

us as their teachers in the things of the Kingdom of God, and whether they were satisfied that we should proceed and be organized as a Church according to said commandment which we had received. To these they consented by an [sic] unanimous vote. I then laid my hands upon Oliver Cowdery and ordained him an Elder of the “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.” after which he ordained me also to the office of an Elder of said Church. We then took bread, blessed it, and break it with them, also wine, blessed it, and drank it with them. We then laid our hands on each individual member of the Church present that they might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and be confirmed members of the Church of Christ. The Holy Ghost was poured out upon us to a very great degree. Some prophesied, whilst we all praised the Lord and rejoiced exceedingly (Smith, History of the Church, 1:77).

The revelation known as D&C 21 was received at the meeting as well. It is noteworthy that the first revelation given to the Church as a whole called on them to keep a record and follow the prophet: “his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith” (D&C 21:5). Historians observe that the records kept from that time forward provide one of the most thorough archives available for any religious organization. These transcripts are now available at www.JosephSmithPapers.org.

That Tuesday gathering also marked the first time that baptized members were given the right to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost in this dispensation (*ibid.*, 1:76). This clarifies that the Melchizedek priesthood had been restored. The ordinance was a departure from other Christian churches, who did not understand the need for saving ordinances. While Protestants had deliberately left the Catholic and Orthodox belief that ordinances or “sacraments” were required to return to God, the Lord restored His priesthood authority and the saving ordinances of the sacrament, baptism, and a confirmation of the Gift of the Holy Ghost (with more priesthood ordinances to come in the next fourteen years).

Baptisms Following the Organization: April 6-18, 1830

Only six to nine believers in the restored gospel had been baptized by April 6, 1830. In addition to these members, several people who attended the Tuesday organization meeting became convinced of the truth and asked for baptism before the end of the month. The first two were Joseph’s parents. Joseph recorded that shortly after the April 6th meeting, “my own father and mother were baptized, to my great joy and consolation[;] and about the same time, Martin Harris and <Orrin Porter> Rockwell” (["History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\]," p. 38](#)). At the time Lucy was 55, Joseph Sr. 59, Martin 47, and Orrin 15 years old.

Baptized Members in 1830:

Before April 6, 1830—6 to 9 baptized
April 6-10, 1830—4 more baptized
April 11, 1830—6 baptized by Oliver
April 18, 1830—8 baptized by Oliver
May end 1830—Newel Knight baptized
June 9, 1830—30 total members
Sept 26, 1830—62 total members
Oct 17, 1830—130 to 140 total members

Lucy Mack Smith’s detailed memoirs offer an insider view of the family relationships at the baptism service:

Joseph stood upon the shore, and taking his father by the hand, he exclaimed, in tears of joy, “Oh, <praise to> my God! <that i> have I lived to see my own father baptized into the true

church of Jesus Christ!" ~~On the same day~~ the church was organized (["Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845," p. 169](#)).

Joseph Knight also left an eyewitness record of this event:

Joseph [Jr.] was filled with the Spirit to a great degree . . . he burst out with . . . joy and seemed as though the world could not hold him. He went out into the lot and appeared to want to get out of sight of everybody and would sob and cry and seemed to be so full that he could not live. Oliver and I went after him and came to him and after a while he came in. But he was the most wrought upon that I ever saw any man. . . . His joy seemed to be full (Dean Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17.4 1976, 11).

Joseph Knight's memoirs record that Martin and Joseph Sr. were baptized in the Palmyra/Manchester area, near their private homes, but he excludes young Orrin Porter Rockwell. The minor difference between Joseph Smith's, Lucy's, and Joseph Knight's memoirs is understandable and can be accounted for by the time that had elapsed between the actual event and Knight's recording it (*ibid.*).

Knowing a little of their family story, we can only imagine what it meant to the young prophet to baptize his parents. We know that Lucy and Joseph Sr. did not share the same religious goals. As previously discussed, regarding their family background, Joseph Sr. had been a Christian and a truth seeker his whole life. Lucy was raised as a Calvinist in a Presbyterian home and sought the community of a congregation. Joseph Sr. helped his father Asael Smith establish the Unitarian church in Vermont but that faith would later leave him disappointed. The children must have perceived some degree of the tension between a mother who sought organized religion and a father who favored private worship. Lucy recorded that Joseph's Sr. received seven divine dreams visualizing his journey for truth. With each, he woke with the hope of learning more of God's way.

Joseph Sr. and Lucy gave their children the religious traditions of daily devotionals—night and morning—consisting of Bible reading and prayers. This opened the door for everyone in the family to develop a knowledge of scripture and interest in the subject of religion. For Joseph Jr., to have been the means of unifying his family by offering baptism to his parents and siblings must have been one of the happiest experiences of his young life. Joseph Sr.'s acceptance of the restored gospel and baptism was the answer he had been seeking (Bushman, in Porter and Black, ed., *The Prophet Joseph*, 4-6).

Doctrine and Covenants 20

Name of Church (D&C 20:1)

The name "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" was given by the Lord in a revelation to Joseph Smith on April 26, 1838 (D&C 115:4). Prior to that, the Church had been known by several names: "The Church of Christ" from 1830 to 1834 (D&C 20:1), "The Church of the Latter Day Saints" in 1835; and "The Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints" from 1836 to 1838. The Church is commonly—but unofficially—referred to as the Mormon Church, and its members as Mormons, because of our belief in the Book of Mormon. The use of the term "Mormon" to refer to the Church is unsatisfactory from the point of view of Church members because it does not convey the conviction that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and that members strive to live Christian lives (See Susan

Easton Black, “Name of the Church,” in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed. *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* 4 vols. [New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992], 3:979).

President Russell M. Nelson at the General Conference in October 2018 said,

Some weeks ago, I released a statement regarding a course correction for the name of the Church. I did this because the Lord impressed upon my mind the importance of the name He decreed for His Church, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (President Russell M. Nelson, “The Correct Name of the Church,” *Ensign*, November 2018).

While serving as an Apostle, Elder Nelson had made a similar request years earlier; it was not until he made the request as the prophet that the church made major changes regarding the use of its name.

Articles and Covenants Reference the First Vision and Angel Moroni Visits (D&C 20:5-6)

Oliver wrote most of the Articles and Covenants to act as a “foundation of my church,” not as a history. Yet we can see a possible reference to Joseph’s First Vision in D&C 20:5—it shares similarities with his 1832 account of that vision. In D&C 20:5, we read of Joseph’s preoccupation with seeking desiring to know his standing before God and seeking for a remission of sins, followed quickly by angel Moroni’s visit. A comparison of the two accounts follows.

D&C 20:5-6	1832 Account of First Vision
<p>After it was truly manifested unto this first elder that he had received a remission of his sins,</p> <p>he was entangled again in the vanities of the world; But after repenting, and humbling himself sincerely, through faith, God ministered unto him by an holy angel, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were pure and white above all other whiteness</p>	<p>My mind became exceedingly distressed, for I became convicted of my sins, and by searching the scriptures I found that mankind did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatized . . . I felt to mourn for my own sins . . . I cried unto the Lord for mercy, for there was none else to whom I could go and obtain mercy. And the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness, and while in the attitude of calling upon the Lord . . . He spake unto me, saying, Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee.</p>

From April 1829 until March 1830, Oliver and Joseph were completely immersed in the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon. This may be why the possible reference to Joseph’s First Vision quickly changes to Moroni’s visit. Another possibility for beginning the Articles and Covenants this way is that Joseph initially did not speak much of his First Vision. This may have been all he shared of it with Oliver, or how much he wanted public at this time.

Clearly, as they polished this document, both of their minds were on the Book of Mormon—as it was hot off the press—just ten days before the organization of the church. Approximately forty percent of D&C 20 speaks of the Book of Mormon. This prominence in the Articles and Covenants declares its dominant position in the Church (see D&C 20:17).

Articles and Covenants Specify Restored Doctrines (D&C 20:17-36)

The Articles and Covenants includes similar *topics* found in other Christian creeds. Yet they neither follow dogma from the Nicene, Apostles’, or Athanasian creeds, nor the Protestant Westminster Confessions. The restoration brought up dramatic departures on key doctrinal issues of the Godhead, atonement, fall, priesthood, and revelation, to name a few mentioned in D&C 20. Earlier, we discussed the similarities between the organization of Religious Societies in New York. Here, Richard Lloyd

Anderson explains the similarity between the doctrinal topics in the Articles and Covenants (D&C 20) and that of other creeds:

Joseph and his family were involved with the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. So their statements of belief are points of departure for the Latter-day Saint Articles and Covenants. The LDS format has marked similarities, though content deeply differs. Protestant creeds generally began with God and moved to the fall, Christ's redemption, the saving ordinances, and the believer's moral duties. That also summarizes D&C 20:17-26 [36]. But this simple LDS credo eliminates all language about the God 'without body' and 'parts' as well as the strong descriptions that the Father and Son are together 'one substance.' Indeed, these phrases come from the later Christian councils, not the scriptures. Joseph said that in 1820 the First Vision taught him the error of Christian creeds, and in 1830 he avoided their non-scriptural language in the first statement of Latter-day Saint beliefs" (Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Organization Revelations (D&C 20, 21, and 22)," in Millet and Jackson, *Studies in Scripture*, 112).

The Articles and Covenants also reveal points of doctrine that are unique to the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the need for ordinances and the priesthood (D&C 20:38-67). Priesthood was not a positive topic in Protestant America in the 18th and 19th centuries; it was spoken of derogatorily as a remnant of Catholicism. The restored church priesthood, however, came with apostolic keys, which brought responsibilities to help Church members become more like Christ.

The Articles and Covenants also discuss:

- Who is God? D&C 20:17-18
- What was the Fall? D&C 20:19-20
- Why is there a Son of God? D&C 20:21-24
- What is the responsibility of believers? D&C 20:25-27a
- What is the Godhead? D&C 20:27b-28
- What is repentance? D&C 20:29
- What is justification and sanctification? D&C 20:30-34
- What is scripture? D&C 20:35-36

Each of these answers was very important at the time, clarifying points where the restored church departed from the doctrine of other churches.

Articles and Covenants: Policies and Procedures (D&C 20:37-84)

Oliver received the priesthood in 1829 following the translation of passages referencing priesthood ordinances in the Book of Mormon (see Table 1 in Come Follow Me, D&C 13). As he organized the Articles and Covenants, he included them and other instructions on baptism, administering the sacrament, and ordaining teachers and priests all in D&C 20:37-84. Here are just the first two.

1) Baptism (D&C 20:37-43):

The Articles and Covenants list seven commitments made at the time of baptism. It appears that Oliver and Joseph took these commitments directly from Moroni 6—

D&C 20:37	Moroni 6:2-4
<p>And again, by way of commandment to the church concerning the manner of baptism—All those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and witness before the church that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins, shall be received by baptism into his church.</p>	<p>Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins. And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end. 4 And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ . . .</p>

In addition to the seven commitments, D&C 20:37 includes two preparatory conditions that prepare one's heart to commit to baptism: humility and desire. These two points were hotly debated throughout the First and Second Great Awakenings in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The Enlightenment focused on the need for personal effort in the form of humility and desire to precede the working of the Spirit. This became a major distinction between most of the Reformed or Augustine- and Calvinist-based faiths and the beliefs of the Methodists and Transcendentalists. The underlying difference calls for action rather than passively waiting to be acted upon.

2) Sacrament (D&C 20:68, 76-79)

The sacramental prayers in D&C 20:77 and 79 were copied from the Book of Mormon. The earliest copy of the Articles and Covenants (D&C 20) currently available was published on April 19, 1831. It reads: "And the manner of baptism & the manner of administering the sacrament are to be done as its written in the Book of Mormon" ("Articles and Covenants, circa April 1830 [D&C 20]," p. [4], <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/articles-and-covenants-circa-april-1830-dc-20/1>, emphasis added). Later in 1831, the "Revelation Book" copied the sacrament prayers from Moroni 4-5 into the text of the Articles and Covenants, as it still reads in our Doctrine and Covenants section 20.

In conclusion, the Tuesday meeting that initiated the organization of the restored Church of Christ became a landmark event in our history. At that time, the small gathering (six to nine members with thirty to sixty inquirers) was seen by some as an expanded informational missionary meeting combined with a sacrament service. As the Articles and Covenants were neither complete at the time nor read and accepted until the first conference on June 9, 1830, we see that the organization developed as the church expanded. There have been continual organizational changes to meet the needs of the saints as the church grows. The foundational framework remains the same—a church built on the rock of our Redeemer. Christ established and continues to direct His church through 1) priesthood keys, 2) restored doctrines and ordinances found in the Book of Mormon and other modern scripture, and 3) His revelations. The members are mortal and many do their best to fulfill Christ's charge. Even when our human weaknesses get in the way of building His Kingdom on earth, our Lord knows the end and allows his saints to repent, learn, and readjust in order to move ahead toward that goal.

Sources

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