Chapter Four

THE WINTER OF 1832-33:

ADULT EDUCATION BEGINS IN KIRTLAND, OHIO

The first adult education school organized by the LDS Church in Kirtland, Ohio, was known as the School of the Prophets. It was “the forerunner of all formal educational efforts by the Church” (Backman, 1983, p. 264). In its seminal year (meeting between January and April, 1833), it was limited in size and scope of subjects studied. Being essentially a seminary for missionaries and Church leaders (Backman, 1983), the focus of study was on scripture and doctrine, though some time was devoted to secular subjects such as grammar. During the next few years the School of the Prophets grew in size and expanded in subjects taught.

D&C 88: The Command to Organize a School

Joseph Smith organized the School of the Prophets in response to three revelations he had received over a period of a few days beginning on 27 December 1832. These were combined together and recorded as Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants (hereafter D&C), “a compilation of revelations, most of which were received by the Prophet Joseph Smith for the establishment and governance” of the Church (Doxey, 1992, p. 405). The first came in the “translating room” - a room in the upper part of a store owned by Newel K. Whitney where Joseph Smith was living - during a conference attended by leaders of the Church. The minutes of that meeting, recorded in the Kirtland Council Minute Book, read as follows:
A conference of High Priests assembled in the translating room in Kirtland, Ohio on the 27th day of December A.D. 1832. Present: Joseph Smith Sr., Sidney Rigdon, Orson Hyde, Joseph Smith, Jr., Hyrum Smith, Samuel H. Smith, N. K. Whitney, F. G. Williams, Ezra Thayer & John Murdock. Commenced by prayer, then Bro Joseph arose and said, to receive revelation and the blessing of Heaven it was necessary to have our minds on God and exercise faith and become of one heart and of one mind. Therefore he recommended all present to pray separately and vocally to the Lord for [Him] to reveal His will unto us concerning the upbuilding of Zion & for the benefit of the saints and for the duty and employment of the Elders. Accordingly we all bowed down before the Lord, after which each one arose and spoke in his turn his feelings and determination to keep the commandments of God. And then proceeded to receive a revelation [i.e. D&C 88] concerning the duty [not legible] above stated. [At] 9 o'clock P.M., the revelation not being finished, the conference adjourned and commenced by prayer [and] thus proceeded to receive the residue of the above revelation. And it being finished and there being no further business before [the council], the conference closed the meeting by prayer, in harmony with the brethren and gratitude to our Heavenly Father for the great manifestation of His Holy Spirit during the setting of the conference. (Collier & Harwell, 1996, pp. 3-4)

The revelation received during this conference comprises D&C 88, verses 1-126. In this revelation, the call for the organization of a school was given. The revelation also declared the mission statement of the school as well as categorized the curriculum. Further, rules of personal student conduct were revealed. A few days later, on 3 January 1833 (Cook, 1981; Matthews, 1984), Joseph Smith received an additional revelation, recorded in D&C 88 verses 127-137, that revealed rules for classroom conduct. The date and occasion for the final revelation, comprising D&C 88, verses 138-141, making known a ritual for initiation into the school, is presently unknown (Matthews, 1984).

The revelations recorded in D&C 88 treat a variety of different topics, mainly doctrinal in nature, and not just the School of the Prophets. In keeping with the design of this dissertation to provide “rich, thick descriptions” in order to verify accuracy of research findings, those portions of D&C 88 that deal directly with the School of the Prophets will be reproduced in full. This will be followed by a discussion that will break down the verses
regarding the School of the Prophets into its constituent parts: the command to organize a school, the name of the school, the mission of the school, who was to attend, who was to teach, the curriculum to be taught, personal code of conduct, class room conduct, and rule for admission procedures.

The Revelation

70. Tarry ye, tarry ye in this place, and call a solemn assembly, even of those who are the first laborers in this last kingdom.
71. And let those whom they have warned in their traveling call on the Lord, and ponder the warning in their hearts which they have received, for a little season.
72. Behold, and lo, I will take care of your flocks, and will raise up elders and send unto them.
73. Behold, I will hasten my work in its time.
74. And I give unto you, who are the first laborers in this last kingdom, a commandment that you assemble yourselves together, and organize yourselves, and prepare yourselves, and sanctify yourselves; yea, purify your hearts, and cleanse your hands and your feet before me, that I may make you clean;
75. That I may testify unto your Father, and your God, and my God, that you are clean from the blood of this wicked generation; that I may fulfil this promise, this great and last promise, which I have made unto you, when I will.
76. Also, I give unto you a commandment that ye shall continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth.
77. And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.
78. Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand;
79. Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms--
80. That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you.
81. Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor.
82. Therefore, they are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own
heads.

83. He that seeketh me early shall find me, and shall not be forsaken.

84. Therefore, tarry ye, and labor diligently, that you may be perfected in your ministry to go forth among the Gentiles for the last time, as many as the mouth of the Lord shall name, to bind up the law and seal up the testimony, and to prepare the saints for the hour of judgment which is to come;

85. That their souls may escape the wrath of God, the desolation of abomination which awaits the wicked, both in this world and in the world to come. Verily, I say unto you, let those who are not the first elders continue in the vineyard until the mouth of the Lord shall call them, for their time is not yet come; their garments are not clean from the blood of this generation.

86. Abide ye in the liberty wherewith ye are made free; entangle not yourselves in sin, but let your hands be clean, until the Lord comes.

117. Therefore, verily I say unto you, my friends, call your solemn assembly, as I have commanded you.

118. And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.

119. Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God;

120. That your incomings may be in the name of the Lord; that your outgoings may be in the name of the Lord; that all your salutations may be in the name of the Lord, with uplifted hands unto the Most High.

121. Therefore, cease from all your light speeches, from all laughter, from all your lustful desires, from all your pride and light-mindedness, and from all your wicked doings.

122. Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege.

123. See that ye love one another; cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another as the gospel requires.

124. Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.

125. And above all things, clothe yourselves with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace.

126. Pray always, that ye may not faint, until I come. Behold, and lo, I will come quickly, and receive you unto myself. Amen.

127. And again, the order of the house prepared for the presidency of the school of the prophets, established for their instruction in all things that are expedient for them, even for all the officers of the church, or in other words, those who are called to the ministry in the church, beginning at the high priests, even down to the deacons--
128. And this shall be the order of the house of the presidency of the school: He that is appointed to be president, or teacher, shall be found standing in his place, in the house which shall be prepared for him.

129. Therefore, he shall be first in the house of God, in a place that the congregation in the house may hear his words carefully and distinctly, not with loud speech.

130. And when he cometh into the house of God, for he should be first in the house--behold, this is beautiful, that he may be an example--

131. Let him offer himself in prayer upon his knees before God, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant.

132. And when any shall come in after him, let the teacher arise, and, with uplifted hands to heaven, yea, even directly, salute his brother or brethren with these words:

133. Art thou a brother or brethren? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless, in thanksgiving, forever and ever. Amen.

134. And he that is found unworthy of this salutation shall not have place among you; for ye shall not suffer that mine house shall be polluted by him.

135. And he that cometh in and is faithful before me, and is a brother, or if they be brethren, they shall salute the president or teacher with uplifted hands to heaven, with this same prayer and covenant, or by saying Amen, in token of the same.

136. Behold, verily, I say unto you, this is an ensample unto you for a salutation to one another in the house of God, in the school of the prophets.

137. And ye are called to do this by prayer and thanksgiving, as the Spirit shall give utterance in all your doings in the house of the Lord, in the school of the prophets, that it may become a sanctuary, a tabernacle of the Holy Spirit to your edification.

138. And ye shall not receive any among you into this school save he is clean from the blood of this generation;

139. And he shall be received by the ordinance of the washing of feet, for unto this end was the ordinance of the washing of feet instituted.

140. And again, the ordinance of washing feet is to be administered by the president, or presiding elder of the church.

141. It is to be commenced with prayer; and after partaking of bread and wine, he is to gird himself according to the pattern given in the thirteenth chapter of John's testimony concerning me. Amen.
The Command

In the revelation, the command to organize a school is repeated twice. The initial command is found in verses 74-77. In these verses, the command to organize a school is only alluded to. The revelation states that “the first laborers” in the Church were commanded to “assemble . . . together” that they might become “clean from the blood of this wicked generation.” One of the main purposes for assembling was to “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.” It will be shown hereafter that the School was intended to help qualify the leaders and missionaries “for their high and holy calling” (Smith & Sjodahl, 1972, p. 554). The School was only part of a larger process that would prepare the leaders and missionaries in the work they had been called to perform. Commenting on these verses, Smith & Sjodahl (1972) discuss the process of preparation:

Our Lord in this Section, teaches His servants how to prepare themselves for their high and holy calling. They were to be His witnesses (v. 81), and they were commissioned to warn the world to escape the wrath of God (v. 85). Some preparation was needed to do that acceptably; what kind of preparation for the ministry does God require? The answer to this question is twofold: First, call a solemn assembly and purify yourselves from the sins of the world, in order that you may be clean (v. 75); fast and pray (v. 76). Secondly, form a school and teach each other all useful knowledge (vv. 77-9). This is the preparation the Lord requires. (p. 554)

The specific command to organize a school is found in verses 118-119. The revelation states that since “all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.” This was to be done in a formal classroom setting. Therefore, the command to organize the school was given. “Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God.”
The “house” referred to was to be an actual building in which the School was to be held. It would also be the same building in which the “solemn assembly” mentioned in verse 70 and 117 would be held. Construction began on July 23, 1833, and the building was dedicated on 27 March 1836. The building was called the Kirtland Temple (for further information regarding the Kirtland Temple, see Andrew, 1978; Petersen, 1972; Perkins, 1992; Robison, 1997). In a revelation given to Joseph Smith on 1 June 1833, in which the design of the building was given, we are told that the building was to be used for both religious worship as well as for educational purposes. The “lower part” or ground floor was for church worship services. The “higher part” or upper floor was to be dedicated “for the school” (D&C 95:16-17).

In the command to organize a school, the LDS concept of learning was revealed. Learning comes through “study and also by faith.” What does this mean? We are not sure how those who attended the School of the Prophets interpreted this phrase. However, later Church leaders and scholars have interpreted this to mean that learning takes place when reason and intellect are combined with inspiration and revelation. Regarding this, Matthews (1984), a scholar on LDS theology noted:

One of the most apparent factors of this part of the revelation is that knowledge, wisdom, books, learning, faith, prayer, glory, and fasting are all closely associated. Learning and wisdom are not solely intellectual pursuits but are linked with faith, prayer and fasting. “The School of the Prophets” thus presents the highest and the best ideal in education. It is a symbol of inspired learning and shows that true education cannot be separated from a spiritual and divine purpose. (p. 353)

Dallin H. Oaks (1991), of the current leadership within the Church, has said that when “Seeking learning by study, we use the method of reason. Seeking learning by faith, we must rely on revelation” (p. 16). Gordon B. Hinckley stated: “Of course we believe in the
cultivation of the mind, but the intellect is not the only source of knowledge. There is a promise, given under inspiration from the Almighty, set forth in these beautiful words; ‘God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost.’ (D&C 121:26)” (p. 78).

The Name

The revelation referred to this school as “the school of the prophets” (D&C 88:127, 136). Why it was given this name is not specifically stated in the revelation or by Joseph Smith or any connected with the School. Later Church leaders believed the name was derived from a similar assembly of people in the Old Testament (see Roberts, 1907, p. 61; Smith, 1946-50, Vol. 2, p. 137; Talmage, 1978, p. 494; Whitney, 1921, p. 13). This assemblage was called the “sons of the prophets” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1). In this phrase, the Hebrew word literally translated “sons” can also connote a “member of a guild, order or class” (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, 1951, p. 121; see also, Haag, 1998). The phrase “sons of the prophets” “hardly denotes physical descent from a prophet, but rather members of a prophetic guild, or order” (Napier, 1962, p. 426).

Little is known of this group. However, from the fragmented references found in the Bible, Jeremias (1977) gives this description of the group and their activities:

They dwell with their families (2 Kgs 4:1ff.), in larger communities (2:7), in modest circumstances (4:41ff., 38ff., etc.), and at various (cultic) sites (Bethel, Jericho, 2:3ff.; Gilgal, 4:38); they assemble in communal halls “before” their master, whom they address as “father” (2:12; 6:21; 13:14), for instruction (4:38; 6:1), and are available to him for errands (9:1ff.); but they could also receive and transmit sayings of Yahweh [Jehovah] individually (1 Kgs 20:35ff.). These circles were concerned with definite eschatological expectations for a specific future (2 Kgs 2:21; 3:16ff.; 4:43; 7:1).
Several characteristics noted in Jeremias’ description are similar to those of the School of the Prophets established in Kirtland. For example, those who attended the School dwelt with their families in modest circumstances in a larger community. As the “sons of the prophets” met at various sites, likewise, the School of the Prophets also began meeting in other areas. Further, the School was concerned with definite eschatological expectations. In fact, D&C 88 verses 81 and 84, specifically states that those who attended the school were being prepared to “warn the people” of the earth “to prepare the saints for the hour of judgment which is to come.” But most important for this discussion is the principal characteristic that defines both the “sons of the prophets” and the School of the Prophets is that they organized as a group for instruction.

It is of interest that in the writings or teachings of those who participated in the School of the Prophets in Kirtland, including Joseph Smith, there are no references connecting the Kirtland School of the Prophets to the Old Testament “sons of the prophets.” Of course, this does not evidence that they did not see the connections. Yet the similarity between both

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1 Shortly after the School of the Prophets was initiated in Kirtland, the Church organized an adult educational school in Jackson County, Missouri, similar to the School of the Prophets (see Peterson, 1972). In fact, as time went on, similar Schools of the Prophets were organized in areas of the west after the Saints moved to Utah (see Patrick, 1970; also Bear Lake School of the Prophets Minutes, in the LDS Church archives).

2 Eschatology is concerned with the last days, death, resurrection, judgment, immortality, etc. All these are concerns in LDS theology. In fact, the first part of D&C 88 is concerned with all these issues.

3 In a meeting held on Feb. 27, 1835, in Kirtland, Joseph Smith lamented the fact that he and others had been very lax concerning the recording of important events and the learning of doctrinal issues. The minutes of that meeting state: “He had for himself learned a fact by experience, which on reflection, always gave him deep sorrow. It is a fact (said President Smith) that if I now had in my possession every decision which has been had upon important items of doctrine and duties which have been given since the commencement of this work
cannot be just coincidental. Though never stated by Church leaders, the similarities between the two may suggest that the organization of the School of the Prophets was intended to be part of the restoration of the gospel.

The Mission of the School

D&C 88:80 gives the stated purpose and mission of the School: “That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you.” Therefore, the mission of the School of the Prophets was “to train the restored Church’s earliest leaders for the ministry, especially for missionary work” (Oaks, 1996, p. 115; see also Perkins, 2000). This purpose remained constant as the School of the Prophets expanded during the next few years. Evidence of this is found in a statement made by Joseph Smith (1980) in 1834 at the beginning of the next phase of the School. He stated that the School would qualify missionaries “as messengers of Jesus Christ, to be ready to do His will in carrying glad tidings to all that would open their eyes, ears and hearts” (Vol. 2, p. 176).

Why was a school necessary to prepare missionaries? First, Gentry (1978) has pointed out that many of those who attended the School of the Prophets - as well as the later schools - could not read or write. “When it is remembered that the early propagators of the faith were called upon to proselyte men whose academic attainments often exceeded that of the elders, [i.e., the restoration of the Church], I would not part with it for any sum of money. But we have neglected to take minutes of such things, thinking, perhaps, that they would never benefit us afterwards, which, had we now, would decide almost any point of doctrine which might be agitated.” (Collier & Howell, 1996, p. 85; see also Smith, 1980, Vol. 2, pp. 198-199). This comment leaves open the question, “What did Joseph Smith know that he did not record?”
the keenly felt need for educational growth and assistance will be readily apparent. One could scarcely recommend the Book of Mormon as the word of God if he, himself, could not read it” (p. 6). The School, therefore, was intended to educate missionaries in the basic educational fundamentals.

Second, many of the new members called as missionaries lacked understanding of the doctrines espoused by the Church. For the most part, their doctrinal understanding consisted in what had been taught them by the missionaries who converted them. Since the early Church had no regular system for teaching its members the doctrines, such as a Sunday School program (see Poelman, 1992), it was necessary to establish a formal educational program where such teachings could be learned in a systematic way. Speaking of this, Brigham Young (1869), second president of the Church, said:

The members of that school were but a few at first, and the prophet commenced to teach them in doctrine to prepare them to go out into the world to preach the gospel unto all people, and gather the elect from the four quarters of the earth, as the prophets anciently have spoken. While this instruction prepared the Elders to administer in word and doctrine, it did not supply the teachings necessary to govern their private or temporal lives; it did not say whether they should be merchants, farmers, mechanics, or money changers. The prophet began to instruct them how to live that they might be the better prepared to perform the great work they were called to accomplish. (p. 157)

The School of the Prophets, then, would provide a system of instruction that would enable the elders of the Church to come to a better understanding of the doctrines of the Church.

Who Was to Attend?

The School of the Prophets - unlike the other schools which would follow during the succeeding years - was not subject to open-enrollment (Backman, 1983). According to D&C 88:70-72 and 85, those who were to participate in the first session of the School of the
Prophets were “the first laborers in this last kingdom.” This consisted of the first converts to the Church who had been called as leaders and others who were called to perform missionary labors (D&C 88:127; Smith & Sjodahl, 1972). According to the revelation, these missionaries were to leave their assigned labors for a season and return to Kirtland. They were to leave those whom they had been teaching to “ponder the warning in their hearts which they have received.” Others would be sent to “take care of [their] flocks.” While the “first elders” were in Kirtland, others missionaries were to stay in their assigned fields of labor and, according to the revelation, were to continue in doing missionary work “until the mouth of the Lord shall call them” home. As we shall see in later chapters, when they came home from the missionary labors they were included in an expanded version of the School of the Prophets.

Who Were the Teachers?

The revelation gave instructions on who should teach the School of the Prophets. D&C 88:77 records: “And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.” A later verse states that all would be given opportunities to teach: “Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege” (D&C 88:122). Of this, McConkie & Ostler (2000) have noted: “The direction here is that one be appointed as the teacher (for it was not expected that Joseph do all the teaching) and that all be given the opportunity to be heard.” However, they also point out:

There is nothing here that suggests everyone in the School of the Prophets was
equal in understanding or that in a class the teacher was obligated to call on those who had not prepared themselves to contribute. This was the School of the Prophets, and all that were in attendance were expected to have the spirit of prophecy. (p. 650)

As part of this history, a brief biography, including their teaching credentials, of each teacher who taught in the adult education schools in Kirtland will be given. These are located in the various sections relating the history of each of the school.

**The Curriculum**

In the verses where the command to organize the School was given, D&C 88:118 states: “And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (verse 118). The revelation specifies the subject matter of the “best books.” D&C 88:77-78 state that they were to “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.” This included both theological and secular subjects. These comprised “the law of the gospel” as well as “all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand” including “things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms.”

Table 1 depicts the various subjects to be studied as recorded in D&C 88 and their modern counterparts as found in a typical university setting (see Smith & Sjodahl, 1972; Widstoe, 1954).
TABLE 1

Curriculum of the School of the Prophets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D&amp;C 88 Curriculum</th>
<th>Modern Disciplines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The law of the gospel”</td>
<td>Scripture, doctrine, theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“in heaven”</td>
<td>Astronomy, climatology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“in the earth”</td>
<td>Agronomy, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“and under the earth”</td>
<td>Geology, paleontology, mineralogy, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“things which have been”</td>
<td>History, archaeology, arts, music, languages, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“things which are”</td>
<td>Current events, anthropology, economics, sociology, arts, music, literature, philosophies, religions, medicine, mathematics, physics, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“things which must shortly come to pass”</td>
<td>Scriptural prophecies, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations”</td>
<td>Local, national, and international affairs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the judgments which are on the land”</td>
<td>Earthquakes, plagues, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms”</td>
<td>Physical and political geography, international governments, languages, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It may seem strange at first that a religious organization would promote such a liberal education. However, as noted in chapter three, Joseph Smith believed that the teachings of God comprise all truth. He believed mankind ought to “receive truth let it come from where
it may” (Ehat & Cook, 1980, p. 228). As already noted, there is little distinction made between correct secular and religious learning in LDS thought (Gardner, 1992). The revelations found in D&C 88 “became influential not only in instituting that first Church-sponsored school but also in the Church’s approach to learning and education throughout its subsequent history” (Backman & Esplin, 1992, p. 609). This is demonstrated in the following statements. Brigham Young (1978), who attended the latter sessions of the School of the Prophets, told the members of the Church after they had settled in Salt Lake valley: “There are a great many branches of education: some go to college to learn languages, some to study law, some to study physics, and some to study astronomy, and various other branches of science. We want every branch of science taught in this place that is taught in the world” (p. 258). Harold B. Lee (1975), a recent president of the Church, said: “Indeed, the Church of Jesus Christ does not ask us to give up any truth that we may learn from science or philosophy, law or medicine” (p. 72). Likewise, another LDS leader has stated that the LDS people should be “the best informed group on earth in both religious and secular fields” (McConkie, 1966, p. 627).

Personal Code of Conduct

As previously noted, the revelation defined learning as a combination of “study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). Matthews (1984) interprets this: “The School of the Prophets called for a mix of hard intellectual effort and inspiration from the Holy Ghost, and characterized a very particular kind of educational process” (p. 353). Orson Pratt (1878), who participated in all sessions of the School of the Prophets, explained this belief:

What does [the Holy Ghost] do for the education of the children of men? Far more
than our academies do. Our children have, by hard study, year after year, to acquire their learning in these human institutions; hard thinking is necessary, reasoning, gaining little by little, and it frequently requires many years of close application to become what is termed a learned man—a man that understands the sciences, that has worked his way through the various departments of mathematics, and perhaps geology, and mineralogy, and all the sciences, such as are usually taught in universities. But the man filled with the Holy Ghost has got the advantage of students who graduate at our universities. Why? Because he can learn more in ten minutes, in regard to many things, than another, not so favored, can in all his life. Indeed, he can learn some things by the operations of the Holy Ghost, which no natural man or woman could learn, however gifted they may be. You may inquire where they could learn these things? I answer, by the revelations of the Holy Ghost, which brings to light many things that are past, and shows things that are in the future. The Lord is just as able to show one of his pupils, who will take the necessary steps to be taught, what will take place a year, or ten years, or a hundred, or a thousand or more years hence, as the principals in our universities are to teach persons concerning things present. God is not confined to the present, or to things immediately concerning his pupils, or those who may enter into the university he has prepared, but he opens the past and future to the minds of men, just as Jesus promised his disciples, when he was about to leave them. “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; and he will show you things to come” [John 16:13]. (p. 284)

It was believed that “In order for mortal men and women to be able to learn essential truths, there has to be a certain mind-set and spiritual preparation.” Therefore, the revelation recorded in D&C 88 “states that intellectual attainment is inseparably connected with both physical and spiritual characteristics” (Matthews, 1984, p. 353). D&C 88:121-126 lists a code of conduct to be followed by students while the School was in session that would enable the students to learn “by study, and also by faith.” The students were “to cease from all [their] light speeches, from all laughter,” or in other words, they were to avoid light-mindedness. They were to control any “lustful desires,” “pride,” and avoid any “wicked doings.” They were to “love one another; cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another as the gospel requires.” They were to keep themselves busy with their learning. They were not to “find fault one with another.” They were not to “sleep longer than is needful” but were
to “retire to [their] bed early, that [they] may not be weary; arise early, that [their] bodies and [their] minds may be invigorated.”

After the School began, the code of conduct was amended to include “the Word of Wisdom,” a revelation given to Joseph Smith requiring students to refrain from using tobacco, drinking alcohol (accept when used for the ordinance of sacrament), and caffeinated hot drinks. The revelation was given during one of the class sessions of the School of the Prophet. Brigham Young (1869) explained the circumstance of this revelation:

When they assembled together in this room [where the School of the Prophets was held] after breakfast, the first they did was to light their pipes, and, while smoking, talk about the great things of the kingdom, and spit all over the room, and as soon as the pipe was out of their mouths a large chew of tobacco would then be taken. Often when the Prophet entered the room to give the school instructions he would find himself in a cloud of tobacco smoke. This, and the complaints of his wife at having to clean so filthy a floor, made the Prophet think upon the matter, and he inquired of the Lord relating to the conduct of the Elders in using tobacco, and the revelation known as the Word of Wisdom was the result of his inquiry. (p. 158)

The Word of Wisdom is recorded as Section 89 of the D&C. It is a revelation regarding the maintenance of good health.

The Word of Wisdom limited alcohol use to wine for the Sacrament and hard liquor for washing the body. It noted tobacco as useful only for treating bruises and sick cattle. Hot drinks (later defined as coffee and tea) were not for “the body or belly” (D&C 89:9). Additional advice was given permitting the use of meat, but suggesting that it be restricted to winter or times of famine (D&C 89:12-13). The revelation places strong emphasis on the use of grains, particularly wheat, as the staple of the human diet (D&C 89:14, 16-17), and upon fruits and vegetables (“herbs” verse 11; cf. 59:17-18) in season. The Word of Wisdom also states that some “herbs” are present on the earth for the healing of human ailments (D&C 89:8-11). Church members should not consume alcohol, tobacco, tea, or coffee and should use moderation in eating other foods. (Lyon, 1992, Vol. 4, p. 1584)

The Word of Wisdom ended with a promise regarding increased ability to learn: “And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, . . . shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden
treasures” (D&C 89: 18-19).

A statement made by Zebede Coltin, who attended the first session of the School of the Prophets, gives evidence that the World of Wisdom was added immediately to the code of conduct. Said he, “Those who gave up using tobacco eased off on licorice root, but there was no easing off on Tea and Coffee; these they had to give up straight off or their fellowship was jeopardised” (Graffam, 1981, p. 44). Again, Coltrin recalled:

When the Word of Wisdom was first presented by the Prophet Joseph Smith (as he came out of the translating room) and was read to the School, there were twenty out of the twenty-one who used tobacco and they all immediately threw their tobacco and pipes into the fire. (Graffam, 1981, p. 37).

According to Coltrin, then, the “word of wisdom” was added to the code of conduct and the school members immediately complied with this new addition.

**Class Room Conduct**

In the command to organize the School, it was stated that the School was to be a “house of order” (D&C 88:119). The revelation revealed “the order and etiquette to be observed in everything pertaining to the school” (Smith & Sjodahl, 1972, p. 567). D&C 88:128-137 explains how each class period was to begin. The first to enter the classroom was to be “the president, or teacher.” He was to stand in a place where, during each class, the students “may hear his words carefully and distinctly, not with loud speech.” He was to kneel down and “offer himself in prayer” (verse 130).

After praying, the president, or teacher, was to admit the students with the following salutation: “Art thou a brother or brethren? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to
fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless, in thanksgiving, forever and ever. Amen” (D&C 88:133). Those who were “faithful,” (i.e., able to repeat the salutation with an honest heart) were to “salute the president or teacher with uplifted hands to heaven, with this same prayer and covenant, or by saying Amen, in token of the same” (D&C 88:135). Those who could not with all honesty rehearse the same salutation to the president were to be deemed unworthy and therefore were not to enter the classroom. The class would then begin.

**Initiation Into the School**

D&C 88:138 explains that those who participated in the School of the Prophets were to be initiated through “the ordinance of the washing of feet.” This was to symbolize that they were “clean from the blood of this generation” (i.e., they had repented of their sins and were free from violating the commandments of God). This ordinance was the same as performed by Jesus Christ to his apostles in John 13 in the New Testament. The importance of being “clean from the blood of this generation” centers on the LDS belief that those who are sinful cannot have the Holy Ghost with them. Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr. (1962), the tenth president of the LDS Church, stated this belief in these words: “The Holy Ghost will not dwell in unclean tabernacles or disobedient tabernacles. The Holy Ghost will not dwell with that person who is unwilling to obey and keep the commandments of God or who violates those commandments willingly. In such a soul the spirit of the Holy Ghost cannot enter” (p. 264). Recall that the LDS concept of learning requires both intellectual study and inspiration from the Holy Ghost. Therefore, in the School of the Prophets, learning was dependent upon each
participant living in such a way that he would have the right to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. That they were was symbolized by the washing of their feet.

The ordinance of washing of feet was to be administered by the president of the church (D&C 88:140). Instructions for this initiation rite were as follows: “It is to be commenced with prayer; and after partaking of bread and wine, he is to gird himself according to the pattern given in the thirteenth chapter of John’s testimony concerning me” (D&C 88:141).

The School Commences

Though the revelation commanded the construction of a building or temple to house the School of the Prophets, such a building would take time and money, of which the Church had little (Backman, 1983). Further revelations were given later in 1833 regarding the manner and construction of the building or temple. However, Joseph Smith felt the need to organize the School of the Prophets before the temple was built. Shortly after the revelations were received to organize the School of the Prophets, Joseph Smith sent his brother, William, to “call the Elders to Kirtland to attend a school of the Prophets” (History of William Smith, 1865, p. 7).

The response was quick. On 23 January 1833, Joseph Smith gathered those who had been called into an upper room of the house in which he was living to organize the school and initiate the members as instructed in the revelation. Joseph Smith recorded in the official Church records, record the following regarding that day:

On the 23rd of January, we again assembled in conference [they had met the previous day]; when, after much speaking, singing praying, and praising God, all in tongues, we proceeded to the washing of feet (according to the practice recorded in the 13th chapter of John's Gospel), as commanded of the Lord. Each Elder washed his own feet first, after which I girded myself with a towel
and washed the feet of all of them, wiping them with the towel with which I was girded. Among the number, my father presented himself, but before I washed his feet, I asked of him a father's blessing, which he granted by laying his hands upon my head, in the name of Jesus Christ, and declaring that I should continue in the Priest's office until Christ comes. At the close of the scene, Brother Frederick G. Williams, being moved upon by the Holy Ghost, washed my feet in token of his fixed determination to be with me in suffering, or in journeying, in life or in death, and to be continually on my right hand: in which I accepted him in the name of the Lord.

Following the ordinance of the washing of the feet, Joseph Smith “pronounced them all clean from the blood of this generation.” The account then reads: “Having continued all day in fasting, and prayer, and ordinances, we closed by partaking of the Lord’s supper. I blessed the bread and wine in the name of the Lord, when we all ate and drank, and were filled; then we sang a hymn, and the meeting adjourned.” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 1, pp. 323-324)

The School Room

The place where the School was held during the first season was in a small room on the second floor of a small house attached to the store owned by Newel K. Whitney. The room was often simply called “the school room” (e.g., Smith, Vol.1, p.332, 333, 342, 354). Brigham Young (1869) gives this description of the school room:

The first school of the prophets was held in a small room situated over the Prophet Joseph’s kitchen, in a house which belonged to Bishop Whitney, and which was attached to his store, which store probably might be about fifteen feet square. In the rear of this building was a kitchen, probably ten by fourteen feet, containing rooms and pantries. Over this kitchen was situated the room in which the Prophet received revelations and in which he instructed his brethren. The brethren came to that place for hundreds of miles to attend school in a little room probably no larger than eleven by fourteen. (p. 158)

Prior to its use as a school room, the room, which actually was 10 x 14 (see Cook,
1981, p. 186), served as a porch for Joseph Smith and his wife. Levi Hancock, who attended the first session of the School, was given the job of remodeling. In his autobiography, Hancock (1803-1836) remarked: “After I finished the school room Joseph offered to let me trade out of Whitney’s store. I told him I would pay for all I purchased and I did do it” (p. 51).

**Who Attended?**

Brigham Young (1868) noted, “The members of that school were but a few at first” (p. 157). It appears that those in attendance on the first day included Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Frederick G. Williams, Newel K. Whitney, Hyrum Smith, Zebedee Coltrin, Joseph Smith, Sr., Samuel H. Smith, John Murdock, Lyman E. Johnson, Orson Hyde, Ezra Thayer, Levi Hancock, and William Smith (Smith, 1980).

As the session progressed, others joined the School. Zebedee Coltrin recalled that eventually there were at least twenty-one members (see Graffam, 1981, p. 37). Each new member was initiated through the ordinance of washing of the feet. Orson Pratt (1975) who joined the school in February, 1833, recorded in his journal: “Washed my hands and feet as a testimony unto the Lord that I had warned this wicked generation, and that my garments were clean of their blood, and on the same day I was admitted into the school of the Prophets” (p. 16). It is not clear from his statement whether he washed his own feet or if another performed the ordinance for him.
Daily Class Routine

The first session of the School of the Prophets continued from 23 January into April (see Smith, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 340). Little is known of the details of the daily classes. Two interviews with Zebedee Coltrin, give us our only real look into the daily activities of the School. In an interview held 3 October 1883, the following was reported:

The salutation, as written in the Doctrine and Covenants was carried out at that time, and at every meeting, and the washing of feet was attended to, the Sacrament was also administered at times when Joseph appointed, after the ancient order; that is, warm bread to break easy was provided, and broken into pieces as large as my fist and each person had a glass of wine and sat and ate the bread and drank the wine; and Joseph said that was the way that Jesus and his disciples partook of the break [bread] and wine; and this was the order of the church anciently, and until the church went into darkness. Every time we were called together to attend any business, we came together in the morning about sunrise, fasting and partook of the Sacrament each time; and before going to school we washed ourselves and put on clean linen. (Graffam, 1981, p. 38)

In an interview held on 10 October 1883, Coltrin stated:

Elder Orson Hyde was the teacher and saluted the brethren with uplifted hands, and they also answered with uplifted hands. Spoke of the administration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The brethren always went fasting; they went in the morning, remained until about four o’clock in the afternoon, when each had a glass of wine and piece of bread, after the ancient pattern. Joseph was the president and appointed Elder Orson Hyde teacher, as the school was not only revelations and doctrine, but also for learning English grammar, etc. The teacher saluted the brethren (one or more) as they came in. This salutation was given every morning when they met. Brother Sidney Rigdon lectured on grammar sometimes. (Graffam, 1981, p. 44)

The interviews with Coltrin were fifty years after the first session of the School of the Prophets took place. It is reasonable to question the accuracy of his memory of these events after so many years. However, they are our only eye witness account of these events. According to Coltrin’s memory, in the first session of the School of the Prophets both religious and secular subjects were taught. He says: “Joseph was the president and appointed
Elder Orson Hyde teacher, as the school was not only revelations and doctrine, but also for learning English grammar, etc” (emphasis added). This suggests that Joseph Smith taught the religious subjects while Orson Hyde was appointed to teach the secular subjects. Coltrin also recalled that Hyde was aided by Sidney Rigdon on occasions.

The appointing of Orson Hyde as teacher was in accordance to the revelation recorded in D&C 88 where the School was instructed to “Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once” (verse 122). As teacher, however, he was not just to lecture. The revelation stated, “but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege” (verse 122). This suggests that others were to also express their views. These views apparently were to be prompted by the Holy Ghost. Orson Pratt, who attended the first session, said that one of the purposes of the members gathering in the School was so that they could learn “the operations of the Spirit upon the mind of man” (Backman, 1983, p. 266). Joseph Smith instructed the School that the Holy Ghost would “reveal some things to obscure individuals” unknown to others. “Consequently, an exchange of ideas and reflections was considered profitable to all” (Backman, 1983, p. 266).

We are given few particulars about the actual topics taught. Coltrin’s statements tell us nothing of the religious doctrines or revelations discussed. As far as secular subjects, Coltrin twice states that English grammar was taught. On another occasion, Coltrin stated, “[T]he science we engaged in for the winter was English grammar, of which we obtained a general knowledge” (Van Wagoner, 1994, p. 161). The interviews also suggest other secular topic were taught as well.
The Teachers

What were the teaching credentials of Orson Hyde and Sidney Rigdon? Orson Hyde was born in Oxford, Connecticut, in 1805. In 1812, his mother died in childbirth and his father was drowned in 1817. He lived with some neighbors until he was about 17 or 18 years old. But he received no education while living with this family. When he was about to leave the family and seek for an education, the family, including Hyde, moved to Kirtland. This was in 1818. Shortly thereafter, Hyde left the family and moved around Ohio finding employment.

It was during this time, that Hyde began to yearn for education. In an autobiography, he wrote that “feeling a great deficiency in learning” he moved to Mentor, Ohio, in 1828 or 29, and studied English Grammar under the tutelage of Sidney Rigdon, a Campbellite preacher, who “took unwearied pains and care to instruct me in this elementary science” (Hyde, 1864, p. 744). This was his first real education. Several months later, he left Rigdon’s tutelage to receive formal education. Hyde recalled:

After spending several months in this way [under Rigdon’s tutelage], studying day and night, I went two quarters to the Burton Academy and placed myself under the tuition of the preceptor, Reuben Hitchcock, Esq. (since judge of the Court). Here I reviewed Grammar, Geography, Arithmetic, and Rhetoric; then returned to Mentor and spent one season with a young man by the name of Matthew J. Clapp, at his father’s house, where the public library was kept. Here I read history and various other works, scientific and literary. (p. 760)

After receiving this education, he became a Campbellite preacher and taught school in Florence, Ohio, in the fall and winter of 1830-31 (see Barron, 1977, p. 21). It was at this time that he joined the LDS church.

Sidney Rigdon was gifted in learning. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1793. As a youth, his parents allowed him to receive a primary education “obtained at the nearby log
school during the winter.” Rigdon wanted to continue his education. But his father refused, deciding instead to allow his younger brother to receive a higher education because he was physically less suited for the strains of farm work. Rigdon’s father did not view higher education as necessary in order to make a living on the family farm. Rigdon, however, “held a contrary opinion about learning. Possessing a restless mind that revealed itself early, he began borrowing books from whomever would lend them and spent time alone, pondering and reading.” His favorite subjects were the Bible, history, literature, and English grammar. He apparently had a photographic memory for his son said that he could recall “everything he read and in this way he laid up a fund of Knowledge that was of great value to him in later years” (Van Wagoner, 1994, p. 5).

Later in life, after the death of his father, Rigdon continued his informal education whenever possible. Having a religious spirit, he pursued the ministry. He was interned by Reverend Andrew Clark. “The apprenticeship included an extensive self-improvement course of reading ‘history, divinity, and general literature’ as well as reading and memorizing extensive portions of the Bible” (Van Wagoner, 1994, p. 9). Throughout his life, Rigdon continued his love of learning by reading books.

In 1820, Rigdon moved to the Western Reserve of Ohio where he was a minister in the Baptist Church. During the next ten years, he moved around to various locations where he continued his ministry. He joined the LDS church in 1830, while living in Mentor, Ohio, just a few miles north of Kirtland.
In LDS theology, there is a difference between priesthood authority and priesthood keys. Joseph F. Smith (1919), sixth president of the LDS church, delineated the difference: “The Priesthood in general is the authority given to man to act for God. Every man ordained to any degree of the Priesthood, has this authority delegated to him. But it is necessary that every act performed under this authority shall be done at the proper time and place, in the proper way, and after the proper order. The power of directing these labors constitutes the keys of the Priesthood” (p. 136).

Presidency of the School

The organization of the School of the Prophets could only be accomplished through the President of the Church who held special priesthood “keys.” Joseph Smith held those keys. In March of 1833, before the first session of the School ended, Joseph Smith received a revelation - recorded as Section 90 in the D&C - in which he was told that Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams were to be made his counselors in what became known as the First Presidency of the Church and were to be “accounted as equal with [Joseph Smith] in holding the keys of this last kingdom; As also through [Joseph Smith’s] administration the keys of the school of the prophets, which I have commanded to be organized” (D&C 90:6-7).

On March 18, in a session of the School, Williams and Rigdon were ordained as counselors in the First Presidency (see Smith, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 334).

D&C 90 also stated that Joseph Smith was to “preside over the affairs of the church and the school; And from time to time, as shall be manifested by the Comforter, receive revelations to unfold the mysteries of the kingdom; And set in order the churches, and study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people” (D&C 90:13-15). This reiterated some of the things stated in the D&C 88:118 but added the necessity of learning languages as well. As we shall see in Chapter Six, Joseph Smith took this command seriously.

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Outcome of the First Session

Regarding the educational accomplishments and achievements of the first session of the School of the Prophets, little is stated in any of the records or journals of those who attended. Only two statements are noteworthy. First, the History of the Church records: “March 18. Great joy and satisfaction continually beamed in the countenances of the School of the Prophets, and the Saints, on account of the things revealed, and our progress in the knowledge of God” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 334). Nothing specific as to what was learned is stated.

The second statement has already been mentioned but is worth repeating again. Regarding the learning of English grammar, Zebedee Coltrin said: “[T]he science we engaged in for the winter was English grammar, of which we obtained a general knowledge” (Van Wagoner, 1994, p. 161). Again, no further details are given as to the learning process or the outcomes achieved.

Summary

Joseph Smith received three revelations in December and January of 1832-33 directing him to organize a school in which both theological and secular subjects were to be studied. The school was to be called the School of the Prophets, apparently after similar assembles in the Old Testament. The mission of the school was to better prepare Church leaders and missionaries to spread the message of the restored church throughout the world. A teacher was to be appointed but all students were to be given opportunities to teach. Students attending the school were taught that learning is achieved through study (intellect) and faith (divine inspiration). To keep students worthy for inspiration, they were to keep a code of
honor which came to include “the word of wisdom” which forbade the use of alcohol, tobacco, coffee or tea. The daily routine of the school called for the teacher to enter the school room first and offer prayer. The teacher then would admit the students with a salutation that recalled the gospel covenants they had made. Each student was initiated into the school through a ceremony similar to John 13 where Jesus Christ washed his Apostles feet.

The school commenced on 23 January 1833. It was held in a room in the second story of the Newel K. Whitney store. About twenty-one or twenty-two elders attended. Little is known of the history of the first session of the School. Orson Hyde was appointed teacher but Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon also taught. Joseph Smith was the president of the school. The subjects taught were theological in nature though no specifics are known. English grammar, as well as a few other subjects, was also taught.

The History of the Church records: “In April the School of the Prophets closed to commence again in the fall” (Smith, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 340). With full intentions of continuing the educational efforts the next fall, Joseph Smith and the other leaders of the Church turned their attention to administrative matters of the Church. Some Elders were assigned to missionary labors while others were assigned the task of beginning the efforts of building the Temple where the School of the Prophets would be housed (see Smith, 1980, Vol. 1, pp. 342-343). But troubles lay ahead that would delay the next session of the School of the Prophets.