

••God's Pattern To Establish His Church¹

By Vance Snively



The Ordination of Joseph Smith III, painting by Nancy Harlacher²

For simplicity, the use of the word "God" in this article refers to one or the other of the two Personages in the Godhead—the Father or the Son. (See Lectures on Faith 5:2a-e.)

Those of us today who worship in independent Restoration branches would agree that the Church—the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—is not functioning in its fully organized state because no legitimate higher quorums (First Presidency, Apostles, Bishopric, Seventy, etc.) are in existence. Since the Restoration branches movement started, many factions have come into existence because their leaders believed it was their duty to set the Church in order, while our belief has always been that we should wait and allow God to do this. However, we are beginning to hear the call from a few of our independent Restoration branch

leaders that it is time for our branches to unify so we can be one. To do this, in my opinion, would require our independent branches to organize into one body, which I see as yet another attempt by man *without direction from God* to fully organize God's Church.

Nevertheless, we—who are convinced that it is only God, and not man, who has the authority to organize His Church—understand that one day God will indeed set His Church in order. And it is this belief which makes us vulnerable to follow leaders who prematurely say that now is the time to fully organize. When they bring forth "revelations" commanding us to do so, it is easy for us to become confused and misled by them. This is the reason so many factions have misled so many Saints. Because we are eager to have His Church again in its fullness, we willingly follow those who promise to accomplish this.

So how do we discern a false attempt by man to set the Church in order?

In *Vision* issues 87-90, a series of reprints about the beginning of the Reorganization from Volume 3 of the RLDS *History of the Church* were included for the purpose of showing the pattern God will use in

1. This article is reprinted from *Vision* 91 as a supporting document of the previous article, "Independent Restoration Branches Must Remain Independent."

2. Those ordaining Joseph Smith III to be Prophet, Seer, and Revelator of the Church and President of the High Priesthood on April 6, 1860, are from left to right: W.W. Blair, Samuel Powers, Zenas H. Gurley Sr., William Marks, George Morey.

the future to set His Church in order. Because God is unchangeable, it is the same pattern He has used from the beginning to either establish His Church on earth or to set in order the existing one.

In the past, churches (factions) have been created using the same procedural pattern used to establish the Reorganization. However, procedure alone does not guarantee that the church that is created is God's true Church. The pattern I am suggesting is not related to any organizational procedure that God has given man in the past to accomplish this task, such as is indicated in the following regarding the Reorganization:

Let the greatest among you preside at your conference. Let three men be appointed by the conference to select seven men from among you, who shall compose a majority of the Twelve Apostles. . . . Let the President of the Conference, assisted by two others, ordain them. (The senior of them shall preside.) Let them select twelve men from among you, and ordain them to compose my High Council. Behold, ye understand the order of the Bishopric, the Seventy, the Elders, the Priests, Teachers, and Deacons. These organize according to the pattern. (RLDS History of the Church 3:217-218) .

This type of procedural pattern can easily be duplicated by man in any "revelation" they may bring forth or any organization they may establish. Thus, procedure alone should never be used to determine that God is directing a group to set in order His Church.

The pattern I am suggesting is a spiritual pattern and not one that can be duplicated by man. The pattern is simple. First, God reveals His will to establish His Church to those who will listen and obey, and He confirms to them by the power of the Holy Spirit-leaving no doubt-that the revelation is from Him and not man. Because He is unchangeable, what He reveals will be consistent with the doctrine and laws of His Church as recorded in the Scriptures.

Second, once God's Church has been established according to His will, He will give to it His Spirit in power-through the gifts of the Spirit and angelic ministry- to authenticate it as His work and not that of man. Thus, the presence of His Spirit in power during and after His Church is organized is our litmus test that the organization is God's and not man's. It is the Holy Spirit-and only the Holy Spirit-that communicates the will of God in *power*, and man cannot duplicate this. As 2 Peter 1:20-21 states, "No prophecy of the scriptures is given of any private will of man. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were

moved by the Holy Ghost." The *power* of the Spirit that I am referencing should be equal in power to the standard set in the Reorganization, which is indicated in the quotations below, as well as the other times God established His Church, which are shown at the end of this article.

If the spiritual pattern discussed above is true, we should see evidences of it in our Church History as well as in our Scriptures. For brevity's sake, I will discuss this pattern only as it relates to the establishment of the Reorganization. However, at the end of this article I will give Church History and scriptural references so you may further study this spiritual pattern in the establishment of His Church- going back to the beginning with Adam.

On November 18, 1851, Jason Briggs petitioned God on the plains outside of Beloit, Wisconsin, as to where His true Church was, since none of the splinter groups were teaching the true doctrine of the Church established through Joseph Smith Jr. God spoke to him, essentially telling him that He would fully organize the Church by bringing one of the sons of Joseph as the legitimate heir to the Presidency of the high priesthood, respecting the law of father-to-son lineal descent of priesthood. God also told him that he was to renounce polygamy and the factions; the elders were to preach nothing but the Gospel; and he was to send this revelation to all the branches with the promise that "whomsoever will . . . ask of me, shall receive of my Spirit a testimony that these words are of me" (see RLDS History of the Church 3:200-201). Please note that the doctrine and law stated in this revelation were consistent with that which God had previously established in His Church as recorded in the Scriptures. As promised, the truth of this revelation was confirmed by the *power* of His Spirit to many, including Zenos H. Gurley Sr. who stated:

About ten or fifteen days after I had heard of this revelation . . . my boys came running into my room, declaring with great earnestness that their little sister was up to Brother Newkirk's, speaking and singing in tongues.... Immediately I went up, and when I was within one or two steps of the house, I paused. . . . I knew that it was of God.... I opened the door and went in. It appeared to me that the entire room was filled with the Holy Spirit. Shortly after I requested them all to join with me in asking the Lord to tell us who the successor of Joseph Smith was. I felt anxious to know that I might bear a faithful testimony. We spent a few moments in prayer, when the Holy Spirit declared, "The successor of Joseph Smith is Joseph Smith, the son of

Joseph Smith the Prophet. It is his right by lineage, saith the Lord your God." (RLDS *History of the Church* 3:207-208)

Over the next few years, those believing that this revelation was from God came together in conference to affirm that the revelation was true, that Joseph Smith III would be their next Prophet, and that all the other groups were false. During this time they *refused to organize*, until at one point they were told by the Spirit to do so. According to Zenos H. Gurley Sr.:

The manifestation of the Spirit was fully equal to any on former occasions, and perhaps it is well to say that this was the first time that the angels of God were seen present in our meetings.... We were then told ... expressly to organize ourselves, "for ere long, saith the Lord, I will require the prophet at your hand." Such was the manifestation of the power of God, that *not a doubt* was left on our minds concerning the source from which the commandment came. (RLDS *History of the Church* 3:216, italics added)

As a result of these manifestations of the Spirit, they came together in conference on April 6, 1853, for the purpose of organizing the Church. At the Conference, the Spirit specifically told them how to procedurally organize. About the spiritual events of the Conference, Zenos H. Gurley Sr. stated the following:

The glory of God, such as I never witnessed before, was manifest. The Spirit seemed to rest upon all in the house. Three were in vision, the Spirit testifying through others at the same time that the recording angel was present. And as we afterwards learned, two of the three who were in vision saw the roll, while the third saw the angel and the roll. (RLDS *History of the Church* 3:220)

Jason Briggs also related the spiritual events that took place at the Conference.

[There was] an exhibition of *power, light, and unity of spirit*, above any ever before witnessed among us. Tongues were spoken and interpreted; hymns sung in tongues and the interpretation sung; prophecy and visions were exercised here for the first time to the writer. Many sang in tongues in perfect harmony at once, as though they constituted a well practiced choir. Angels appeared and were seen by some, and a testimony of their presence given by

others affirming one of them to be the recording angel, who exhibited a partially unrolled parchment as an unfinished record upon which we were assured should be recorded the act we were called to perform in the reorganization of the church. . . . *The evident proofs of divine direction were so strong, that doubt disappeared, while the light was so clear to all that diversity of opinion ceased, and the whole people were truly of one heart and one soul.* •.

The closing of this conference was by a general testimony meeting, in which the various gifts were abundantly poured out. (RLDS *History of the Church* 3:222-223; brackets in the original; italics added)

By the end of the Conference in April 1853, the Church had been organized-except for the First Presidency. The Church was fully organized later at the Conference in April 1860, when Joseph Smith III accepted his call to be President of the Church and high priesthood.

As can be seen from the formation of the Reorganization, the spiritual pattern discussed above is plainly evident. God spoke to man to initiate and finalize the organization of His Church, and He confirmed the truth of His words to them by the power of His Spirit. When they organized His Church as He directed, He poured out His Spirit upon them in power (through the gifts and angelic ministry) to authenticate to them that what they had done was of God and not of man.

It is interesting to note that the Lord expressed this spiritual pattern to Joseph Smith III in answer to his inquiry as to which of the many groups of the Restoration he should join. In 1859, before the Church was fully reorganized, the Lord told him, "The Saints reorganizing at Zarahemla, and other places, is the *only* organized portion of the church accepted by me. I have given them my Spirit and will continue to do so while they remain humble and faithful" (RLDS *History of the Church* 3:263; italics added). The Lord will only give His Spirit to His *true* Church!

Because God is unchangeable, when He sets His Church in order in the future-as He certainly will- He will use this same spiritual pattern. If an organization claims to have received revelations to set the Church in order (establishing the higher quorums-Seventies, Apostles, Bishopric, First Presidency, etc.), several tests, according to the spiritual pattern, will prove it true or false. For it to be God's true Church:

- The revelations must agree in doctrine and Church law with the Scriptures;

FEED MY SHEEP

- The Spirit must confirm the truth of the revelations in power; and
- The organization routinely exhibits the power of the Holy Spirit through the legitimate expression of the gifts of the Spirit and angelic ministry.

If these criteria are met, then God has set His Church in order. If not, it is man's church and should be avoided.

For a further study of the spiritual pattern used by God to establish His Church, see the following references:

His Church in the Beginning:

- God spoke to man to establish His Church: Genesis 6:50-53; Genesis 5:44-45; Genesis 6:67-71
- God authenticated His Church by the gifts of the Spirit and angelic ministry: see above scriptures; Genesis 5:1; Genesis 6:4, 8; DC 104:29a; Genesis 6:27, 33-37, 41, 44; Genesis 7:3-13, 26-75; Genesis 8:4, 7; Genesis 14:26-31

His Church at Jerusalem:

- God spoke to man to establish His Church: Matthew 3:45-46; Matthew 16:19; Mark 1:12; John 15:16; Matthew 10:1-4; Luke 10:1-2; Ephesians 4:11-12
- God authenticated His Church by the gifts of the Spirit and angelic ministry: read the miracles performed by Jesus Christ in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; read the miracles performed by His priesthood in Acts; 1 Corinthians 12:3-11

His Church in the Americas:

- God spoke to man to establish His Church: 3 Nephi, chapters 5-9, 12
- God authenticated His Church by the gifts of the Spirit and angelic ministry: 3 Nephi, chapters 5-9, 12; 4 Nephi 1:3-7

The Restoration:

- God spoke to man to establish His Church: RLDS *History of the Church* 1:9-10, 12-48; DC 1:4-5; DC 26:3a
- God authenticated His Church by the gifts of the Spirit and angelic ministry: RLDS *History of the Church* 1:77; RLDS *History of the Church* 2:16-18, 33-47

(Vision 91:9-11)



The risen Lord admonished Peter three times to feed His sheep and lambs (see John 21:14-17). This is understood to mean that Christ desires His priesthood and Church-like Peter-to teach *His Word* and *doctrine* to the Saints that they might have *everlasting life* with Him and the Father. As it says in 2 John 1:9, "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."

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