

Oliver Cowdery's 1835 Response to Alexander Campbell's 1831 "Delusions"

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All his life, Richard Lloyd Anderson has set an important example for many Latter-day Saint scholars and students. His emphasis on documentary research—locating and analyzing the best primary sources—has become the hallmark of his scholarship, with respect to both the New Testament and early Mormon history. As an undergraduate and graduate student in his ancient history and Greek New Testament classes, I learned firsthand to appreciate his skills in working with texts, in forensically evaluating claims of various scholars, and in providing substantial arguments in support of the commonsense, mainstream views of the central events in the history of the church from the time of Christ to the era of Joseph Smith. The present study deals with a little-known editorial written by Oliver Cowdery in the 1830s.¹ By contributing to this volume in Richard Anderson's honor, I hope to pay tribute to him, to his attention to historical documents, and to his devoted defenses of the characters and concepts that are crucial to the restoration of the gospel in these the latter days.

The First Substantive Attack on the Book of Mormon

As early as February 1831, a barrage of incendiary criticisms against the Book of Mormon was published by a Baptist minister, greeting the first of the Saints as they moved into the Kirtland, Ohio, area. The author of that onslaught was Alexander Campbell (1788–1866), a potent preacher, lecturer, and philosopher who took part in contemporary debates; ran two newspapers (*Christian Baptist* and *Millennial Harbinger*); organized and led the largest indigenous Protestant group in the New World (the Campbellites); became the founder, first president, and professor of Bethany College; and crusaded for a new basis of Christian unity.² “During his life he sought to bring essential religious beliefs and the philosophically novel ideas of his contemporaries into some kind of intellectual harmony.”³

The *Millennial Harbinger*, launched on 4 January 1830, was the second and larger of the two papers published and contributed to by Campbell. On its masthead was the text of Revelation 14:6–7. Living and working in northern Ohio, Campbell indicated that the comprehensive object of the magazine was to be “devoted to the destruction of sectarianism, infidelity, and antichristian doctrine and practice. It shall have for its object the development and introduction of that political and religious order of society called The Millennium, which will be the consummation of that ultimate amelioration of society proposed in the Christian Scriptures.”⁴ Campbell then listed nine objectives of the magazine that were based on an interest in proclaiming fundamental gospel truth and discrediting those organizations that wandered from that path.⁵

On 10 February 1831, the *Millennial Harbinger* carried a lengthy article by Campbell entitled “Delusions.” The piece reviewed the Book of Mormon and proceeded to develop a number of arguments against its authenticity. This article was published less than a year after the Book of Mormon first appeared in March 1830, and it ran only a few weeks after the conversion of Sidney Rigdon, a Campbellite minister also living near the soon-to-become-Mormon Kirtland, Ohio. Though Campbell probably had only a few weeks to read the Book of Mormon and to write his response, he covered most of the areas of criticism still in use by anti-Mormons against the Book of Mormon today.

Campbell began his article by taking insulting jabs at the Book of Mormon as he rehearsed the history of the Nephites: He called the book a romance: “This romance—but this is for it a name too innocent” (p. 86). This label still pops up from time to time in anti-Mormon literature. Campbell exaggerated the claims made by the Book of Mormon. According to Campbell, “Lehi was a greater prophet than any of the Jewish prophets, and uttered *all the events* of the Christian era, and developed the records of Matthew, Luke and John 600 years before John the Baptist was born” (p. 87, emphasis added). He glibly affixed oversimplified classifications: “The Nephites were good Christians, believers in the doctrines of the Calvinists and Methodists” (p. 87). And so on: Nephi preached “every thing which is now preached in the state of New York” (p. 87); Mormon was no Quaker—he commanded 42,000 men (see p. 89); God is the same—“consequently, must always create suns, moons, and stars, every day!!” (p. 90)—not such a bad idea. After his cursory overview of the Book of Mormon, Campbell presented a number of evidences that he thought worked against Joseph Smith’s story: “Admitting the Bible now received to have come from God,” Campbell asserted, “it is impossible that the book of Mormon came from the same Author” as the Bible (p. 91)—which conclusion at least ignores the fact that the Bible was actually written by many authors.

Despite the sarcasm and occasional misunderstanding, Campbell gave a fairly accurate synopsis and detailed overview of the historical contents of the Book of Mormon. Though the book was quite new, Campbell obviously had read much of it in a very short time.

The body of his attack presents a parade of evidences that he thought invalidated Joseph Smith’s story. Campbell argued that because the following “internal evidences” were contrary to his understanding of the Bible, the claim of the Book of Mormon to have come from the same God as the Bible had to be false:

1. According to scripture, God gave Levi all rights to the priesthood and Aaron all rights to the high priesthood, forever. Even Jesus, said Campbell, “were he on earth, could not be a priest; for he was of a tribe concerning which Moses spake nothing of priesthood” (p. 91). The result of Korah’s rebellion against the priesthood in Numbers 16, Campbell asserted, was that no one except Levites can ever hold the priesthood. Campbell was disturbed that Lehi offered sacrifices and that Nephi was a priest and consecrated others as priests, built a temple, and made “a new priesthood which God approbates” (p. 91). Campbell was concerned that the tribe of Joseph, which supposedly followed the law of Moses, could have a new priesthood. He held that such a development would make God a liar—effectively repudiating his promises to the tribe of Levi (see p. 92).

2. Campbell saw a problem in the existence of a second Promised Land. If reprobate Jews had departed from the Holy Land on their own initiative and had gone off to another land and built another temple, that would be tolerable, because it would not implicate God in the process. But to think that God would command Lehi to depart from the land which God himself had sworn to their fathers was their promised land was a “monstrous” error (p. 92), in Campbell’s mind.

3. He also believed Lehi violated the law by separating a family from the nation of Israel (see Deuteronomy 29:21), and he concluded incredulously that the Book of Mormon depicts Lehi as doing better out in the desert than the best Israelite ever did living “under the best of all governments!!!” (p. 92).

4. Campbell criticized the Book of Mormon for seeming to claim there were more Jews in the New World than in Judah, that the scepter had departed from Judah, and that King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon was wiser than Solomon in the Bible (see p. 92).

5. The Book of Mormon, contrary to every precept of the law of Moses, told of temple worship in the new land. Campbell accused the Nephites of never being sad about being cut off from the main group and never having

looked back to Jerusalem and to God's temple. Even Jews in captivity looked to Jerusalem, but the Nephites, in their "wig wam temple" enjoyed God's presence in a foreign land—even though God's only house of prayer stood in Jerusalem (see p. 92). Campbell claimed that the Book of Mormon portrayed the Nephites as subverting the law of Moses, even though Malachi and Moses commanded the Jews to keep the law until the Messiah should come (see pp. 92–93).

6. The Book of Mormon, according to Campbell, besides distorting God's laws and commandments, also proved to be ignorant of the New Testament (see p. 93). In Ephesians 3:5, Paul reserved for the apostles the first right of announcing certain secrets that were disclosed by Nephi regarding the blessing of gentiles. Paul said that those things were "not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 3:5). Campbell also concluded that the Book of Mormon was betrayed by its portrayal of the geography of Judea (see p. 93). It claimed that John baptized in the village of Bethabara (see 1 Nephi 10:9; John 1:28 is not so clear) and—Campbell misstates—that Jesus was born in Jerusalem (see Alma 7:10).

7. Campbell was surprised that the Book of Mormon contained sections that discussed—according to his topic headings—infant baptism, ordination, the Trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, the right of man, and apostasy. He claimed that phrases such as "your own eternal welfare," "salvation is free," "everlasting salvation of your souls," "an infinite atonement," "flesh must go to mother earth," and "death must deliver up its dead" (p. 94) reflected the New York background of Joseph Smith and confirmed the book's falseness. He concluded that it must have been easy for Joseph Smith to "prophecy [*sic*] of the past or of the present time" (p. 93).

8. Pre-Christian Jewish-Christianity was claimed by the Book of Mormon. Campbell observed that the Nephite-Jews were called Christians (see Alma 46:14–15), that the resurrection of Jesus was known to them, that they believed the Great Creator would die for all men, and that they knew his name would be called Jesus Christ (see 2 Nephi 10:3).

9. "I could swear that this book was written by one man," said Campbell (p. 93). He criticized its uniform style, calling Joseph Smith, who names himself the author on the title page, a very ignorant man (see p. 93). He said the phrase *of which hath been spoken* appears in other writings by Joseph Smith, words of Oliver Cowdery, as well as in the Book of Mormon (see p. 94), and he pointed out several other often-used phrases.

10. Campbell also took delight in singling out mistakes of grammar in the first edition of the Book of Mormon: "we are a descendant," "virgin which," "ye are like unto they," "I saith," "arrive to the promised land," "made mention upon the first plate," "the righteous . . . shall be confounded," "I had spake," "for a more history part," "do not anger again," and "Lord remembereth all they" (p. 94).

11. He alleged the presence of anachronisms in the Book of Mormon. He was the first to cite such examples as "the God of Nature suffers" (a pagan concept), and Shakespeare's idea of death being a silent grave (see p. 94).

12. Campbell also criticized those who were associated with the Book of Mormon, starting with Joseph Smith, claiming that this "New York imposter" (p. 85) was "as ignorant and impudent a knave as ever wrote a book" (p. 91); he also included many other disparaging opinions about Smith's intellect and practices.

I have reviewed many of Campbell's arguments, not because they are particularly insightful or compelling, but because he charted the course that has been followed almost routinely by anti-Mormon writers ever since. It is

interesting that from the 1830s, virtually all the criticisms raised against the Book of Mormon by numerous detractors can be classified into five general assertions. In the 1980s, I organized a project to identify anything that anyone had ever claimed was wrong with the Book of Mormon. With the help of many people (initially Ara Norwood, Joe Zwick, and subsequently Matthew Roper, Donald Parry, William Hamblin, Daniel Peterson, and others), we found that the claimed errors could be classified into five categories: (1) supposed contradictions between the Book of Mormon and such other things as the Bible, Israelite culture, or even the subsequent teachings of Joseph Smith; (2) alleged absurdities and anachronisms—including internal inconsistencies, erroneous quotations from the Bible, mistakes in geography, or other incomprehensible details; (3) asserted environmental influences from nineteenth-century sources, culture, or ideas; (4) claims that significant people involved with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon were untrustworthy, unreliable, or generally evil; and (5) discrepancies and changes in the subsequently published editions of the Book of Mormon from one printing to the next. Even a cursory glance shows that Campbell's arguments cover the first four categories in considerable detail and the only reason he did not claim any problems in the fifth category was because only one edition of the Book of Mormon had been published at the time. Campbell covered many of the main types of arguments ever raised in opposition to the Book of Mormon.

Many of Campbell's arguments continue to lead the recurring parade of Book of Mormon criticisms. These five areas are still the main areas of attack pursued by anti-Mormons today, many of whom merely rehash the same points or questions Campbell raised. Moreover, many of his specific attacks are still found among the most familiar and often repeated accusations. For example, Campbell's criticism that the Nephites and Lamanites took upon themselves the name of Christ before the time of Christ is often brought up by critics.⁶ Many authors still bring up the questions of whether the Nephites and Lamanites really kept the law of Moses,⁷ offered sacrifices,⁸ or had anything like a compass.⁹ To those familiar with the routine fare of Book of Mormon criticism, reading Campbell's parade of horrors is like seeing yet another rerun of an old TV show.

The Published LDS Response to Campbell

When Latter-day Saints settle in an area, they often begin distributing official church publications or start unofficial church-oriented papers to share local news and to keep posted on the international church.¹⁰ The early Saints took advantage of the news media popular in their day: "The period from 1800 to 1865 saw the printing of religious literature in America reach a high point—the result of the Second Great Awakening and the activities of various interdenominational Bible and tract societies. It was in this environment of vigorous printing activity that the [LDS] Church emerged and grew."¹¹

The *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* succeeded the *Evening and the Morning Star* in October 1834 as a publication of the church.¹² It was published in Kirtland, Ohio, from October 1834 to September 1837, in the form of thirty-six sixteen-page, two-column issues. Its name described its purpose: to be the messenger and advocate of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, thus to help the Saints better understand its doctrine and principles.¹³ "Main doctrinal contributions came from Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, W. W. Phelps, and John Whitmer. . . . Oliver Cowdery edited the *Messenger and Advocate* from October 1834 to May 1835. He was succeeded by John Whitmer from June 1835 to March 1836, but returned as editor from April 1836 to January 1837."¹⁴

The members of the church at this time had had many encounters with Campbellites.¹⁵ A response to Alexander Campbell's article was therefore important to clarify the church's stand. Accordingly, an article entitled "Delusions" was printed in March 1835 during Oliver Cowdery's first term as editor. It ran with the byline "ed.," presumably indicating that Oliver Cowdery was the author. This little-known article is a classic early-Mormon testimony of the truthfulness and importance of the Book of Mormon and is one of the most impressive responses to an anti-Mormon publication ever printed in an official church magazine.

As interesting as what Cowdery said in this editorial is what he did not say. Of all the many trivial and scurrilous barbs thrown at the Book of Mormon by Campbell, Cowdery responded only to three points. By focusing his rebuttal on these three points—the priesthood, the promised land, and temple worship—Oliver managed to answer his critic by affirming and preaching important principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Cowdery avoided the temptation of responding point by point to insignificant criticisms hardly worth mentioning; instead, he turned the tables by basing his response on key concepts of the restoration. By grounding his rebuttal in these ultimate declarations, Cowdery rested his case, as a good lawyer would, on firm ground and did not allow Campbell to set the ground rules or to prescribe the boundaries of their debate. Instead, Cowdery took the upper hand by answering with solid arguments that not only responded defensively, but also established affirmatively his three most meaningful points.

Because of its obscurity, Cowdery's 1835 document will be quoted here in full, interspersed with a few brief remarks. Cowdery, like Campbell, began his editorial with mild sarcasm, discounting the effect of Campbell's publication and viewing it as a mere distraction:

Said Mr. A. Campbell, in 1831, soon after the church of the Saints began to be established in this place; but unfortunately for his purpose, if a purpose he had, his cry was unheard, the cause still progressed, and *continues* to progress. As this gentlemen [*sic*] makes high professions as a Reformer, and is some tenacious that his sentiments are to pervade the earth before the final end of darkness, we think, or at least hope, our readers will pardon our digress from ordinary matters, to give this modern apostle a passing notice.
(p. 90)

The Priesthood

Cowdery then got serious with the first of his three points. He quoted Campbell's claim that God had given the priesthood only to the tribe of Levi:

In his [not] far-famed pamphlet, of Feb. 10, 1831, this grave Reformer, while examining the book of Mormon, says:

"Internal Evidences: It admits the Old and New Testaments to contain the revelations, institutions, and commandments of God to Patriarchs, Jews and Gentiles, down to the year 1830—and always, as such, speaks of them and quotes them. This admission at once blasts its pretensions to credibility. For no man with his eyes open can admit both books to have come from God. Admitting the Bible now received to have come from God, it is impossible that the Book of Mormon came from the same Author. For the following reasons:—

1. Smith, its real author, as ignorant and impudent a knave as ever wrote a book, betrays the cloven foot in basing his whole book upon a false fact, or a pretended fact, which makes God a liar. It is this:—With the

Jews God made a covenant at Mount Sinai, and instituted a priesthood, and a high priesthood. The priesthood he gave to the tribe of Levi, and the high priesthood to Aaron and his sons for an everlasting priesthood.— He separated Levi, and covenanted to give him this office irrevocably while ever the temple stood, or till the Messiah came.” (pp. 90–91)

It is significant that Cowdery began his defense of the Book of Mormon by defending the restoration’s knowledge of the doctrines of the priesthood. After all, Oliver Cowdery was present with Joseph Smith when the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods were restored. This topic would have been close to Oliver Cowdery’s heart; on this matter he could speak from firsthand knowledge. Indirectly, his answer to Campbell becomes one of the earliest testimonies for the restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods.

Cowdery answered Campbell by making four points: that God takes a longer view of things, that God can bestow or restore the priesthood anew on any people he wishes, that the temple itself did not stand when Aaron was given the priesthood (and so Campbell’s picky argument on this point collapses), and that modern revelation has clarified how Moses received his priesthood, which allows for others holding the Melchizedek Priesthood to officiate as did Lehi and his posterity:

Mr. Campbell attempts by a single stroke, to overthrow the validity of the book of Mormon, by bringing forward the institution of the priesthood, conferred upon Aaron and his sons, but we are willing to go the whole length in this matter of priesthood, and say that it was conferred upon Aaron and his seed throughout their generations. Ex. 40:15. And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they minister unto me in the priest’s office: for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations. We quote this passage because Mr. C. says, that it was only “while ever the temple stood, or till the Messiah came.” Israel’s God takes a longer stretch than this Rev. gentleman. He says “throughout their generations.” If the literal descendants of Aaron are no more, then this priesthood is lost from Israel, unless God bestows it upon another family; but if not, not.

But Mr. C. says “while ever the temple stood, or till the Messiah came.”— By-the-by the temple was not reared when this covenant was made, it, nor the Messiah at the time: it is only one of this Reformer’s new fashioned spiritualizing systems—we have not yet learned it.

This is not all: He says that the scripture teaches, that a person of another family who should come near, when this holy ordinance [sacrifice] was being performed should be put to death. We know that, “the stranger, who cometh nigh, shall be put to death,” and that the heathens were called strangers, but not the children of Israel.

Again: Lehi and his sons, who were descendants of Joseph, offered sacrifice, and this is enough to “blast the pretensions of the book of Mormon, to credibility.”

Now, as it is, and very correctly too, Lehi and his sons were blessed with the high priesthood—the Melchizedek priesthood. They never made any pretense that they were descendants of Aaron or ever received that priesthood which was conferred upon him by the hand of Moses, at the direction of the Lord.

How did it happen that Moses had authority to consecrate Aaron a priest? Where did he get his authority to arrange the tabernacle, ark, &c.? Who laid hands upon him? Had he authority to “come near” when the Lord was entreated by sacrifice? He was Aaron’s brother, to be sure, but Aaron was the high priest.

Should Mr. C. finally learn, that Moses received the holy priesthood, after the order of Melchisedek, under the hand of Jethro, his father-in-law [see D&C 84:6], that clothed with this authority he set Israel in order, and by commandment ordained Aaron to a priesthood less than that, and that Lehi was a priest after this same order, perhaps he will not raise so flimsy a criterion as he does when he says the validity of the book of Mormon is destroyed because Lehi offered sacrifice; and perhaps, also, he may not be quite so lavish with his familiar titles as he was when he called brother Smith “as impudent a knave as ever wrote a book!!” (p. 91)

The Land of Zion

Second, Oliver Cowdery turned to Campbell’s claim that only one land of promise could ever exist, namely, the land of Canaan. But the early Saints knew that not only had a land of promise been given to Lehi and his people, but that Zion was being gathered for the New Jerusalem in the Western Hemisphere. The concept of a promised land was a critical doctrine of the restoration in the 1830s, and Cowdery defended it by making early and novel uses of Genesis 49:26 (in which Jacob declared that Joseph’s blessings prevailed above those of his progenitors unto the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills; Jacob conferred those blessings on the head of his son Joseph, from whom Lehi descended) and Deuteronomy 33:13 (in which Moses promised land to Joseph) in support of the Book of Mormon and of the gathering of Zion from all the corners of the earth:

This is a mere specimen: “This ignorant and impudent liar, [bro. Smith] in the next place, makes the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, violate his covenants with Israel and Judah concerning the land of Canaan, by promising a new land to a pious Jew.”

We know that God promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his seed, but we have yet to learn where he said that he would not give them any more. Mr. C. will find, in the 49th of Genesis, where Jacob declared that his blessings had prevailed above those of his progenitors unto the *utmost bounds of the everlasting hills*, and that he confers them upon the head of his son Joseph, of whom Lehi was a descendant.

If the reader will also look into the 33d chap. of Deut. he will find that Moses promises Joseph a land; for he says, “blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and the deep that crouches beneath, and for the precious fruits bro’t forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills.

Why all this parade about the blessing of Joseph, if he were only to inherit an equal proportion of the land of Canaan? Surely the Messiah was never promised through his lineage, or descendants: then why say so much about Joseph? But we quote another verse from the same chap which makes the subject sufficiently plain only to a man who has been crying Millennium! Millennium!! some four or five years, without ever giving his hearers one solitary scroll to point them to the word of God for a preparatory guide to be prepared for that august period!

“His [Joseph’s] glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.”

Now, if some friend of ours, or even the editor of the Millennial Harbinger, will be so kind as to solve one mystery on the subject of Joseph's blessing, he will do us a favor. Place Joseph in the land of Canaan and never suffer his descendants to go out, and then set him to push the *people together to [from] the ends of the earth*, and if you do not see a new thing under the sun, it will be because the Millennial Harbinger has gathered Israel from the four winds, and left them all standing where they now are!

If the Lord promised, (which he did,) the land of Canaan to Abraham, and Jacob's blessing had prevailed above that, to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills, where could he find it? Not in the land of Canaan, merely, though Mr. C. has the daring effrontery to say that if God should take any of the seed of Jacob to any other part of the earth, he would violate his covenant which he had previously made!—How does he know it? (pp. 91–92)

The Temple

Third, Oliver Cowdery defended the idea that God's people in all dispensations are temple-building people. The construction of the Kirtland Temple was well under way when his answer to Campbell went to press, and dreams were still alive for a temple in Independence, Missouri. Cowdery rightly rejected Campbell's interpretation of the Bible to the effect that it permitted the building of a temple only in Jerusalem, and he boldly declared the right of men, namely Joseph Smith and himself, who were "endowed with the holy priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek," to construct a house of glory acceptable to God:

With his boasted knowledge he will not be disturbed if we give our readers another specimen:

"The pious Jews in the captivity turned their faces to Jerusalem and the holy place, and remembered God's promises concerning the place where he recorded his name. They hung their harps upon the willow trees, and could not sing the songs of Zion in a foreign land; but the Nephites have not a single wish for Jerusalem, for they can, in their wigwam temple, in the America, enjoy more of God's presence than the most righteous Jew could enjoy in that house of which David had rather be a door-keeper than to dwell in the tabernacles of men. And all this too, when God's only house of prayer, according to his covenant with Israel, stood in Jerusalem."

Here are further secrets unfolded.—We remember to have read, in the 137th Ps. either a history of what had taken place, or a prophecy concerning something to come, and which, in the days of David was yet to transpire;—but the lamentation was uttered by those who were in distress and mocked by the heathen. The reader will also remember that Solomon, the son of David, built the Temple, and how, we ask, could David be a door-keeper in the same, when it was not reared until his earthly tabernacle was crumbling to dust? But it does very well for Mr. C.—he can get him up there with songs of thanksgiving, waiting before God, and keeping the doors of his sacred Temple, and not a stone of it yet laid!!

We remember also to have read a sublime sentence uttered by the mouth of a prophet, in the name of the Lord, something like this: "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: Where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things that my hand has made." Solomon, who built the Temple, of which Mr. C. says David desired to be a door-keeper, after he was gathered to his fathers, says: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven, and heavens of heavens cannot contain thee."

Now, if God's presence and glory fill the heavens, is he not sufficient to fill more than one small house like that built at Jerusalem? and has not a man, endowed with the holy priesthood, after the order of Melchisedek, authority to build a house to the honor of HIS name, and especially, when the worship of that at Jerusalem was corrupted, or it thrown down? We have yet to be informed *when* the Lord said that he would *not* fill another house with his glory, if he did that at Jerusalem, or when he ever said that the descendants of Joseph should be cursed, if they should build another like that, when enjoying the promised blessing, made to them by the mouth of God, through Moses, that they should possess the ends of the earth.

Our readers will understand that these extracts are taken from Mr. C.'s writings of 1831, and if occasion requires, we shall give them a specimen of his writings since, in a future number, and then close with this gentleman forever.—[Editor.] (pp. 92–93)

Conclusion

Oliver Cowdery's reply was logically persuasive and forensically compelling. Displaying his aptitude for lawyering, he showed keen ability to mount a strong response. He argued effectively on technical grounds: for example, he incisively showed that the priesthood was conferred by Moses upon Aaron and his seed throughout *their* generations (see Exodus 40:15), and that if the literal descendants of Aaron are no more, then God is not limited, but can bestow it on another. He skillfully exposed logical inconsistencies in his opponent's position: for instance, in response to the claim that only Levi was to have the priesthood "while ever the temple stood, or till the Messiah came," Cowdery pointed out that the temple was not reared nor the Messiah come in the days of Moses at the time the covenant was made. Cowdery accurately interpreted authoritative texts: for example, he rightly observed that when the scriptures require that if any foreigners were to come near when sacrifices were being performed, they should be put to death ("the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death," Numbers 18:7), this refers to heathens, not the children of Israel. In several ways, Cowdery exposed defects in Campbell's position and showed ways in which Campbell had not carried his burden of persuasion. Moreover, he showed how modern revelation had clarified how Moses received his priesthood as did Lehi and his posterity.

Moreover, a good debater knows that the best defense is a strong offense. Cowdery offered affirmative arguments: for example, he asked how Jacob's blessing to Joseph was to be fulfilled that he should reach to the ends of the earth and prevail to the "utmost bounds of the everlasting hills" (Genesis 49:26), and how Moses' promise to the tribe of Joseph would come to pass that he "shall push the people together to the ends of the earth" (Deuteronomy 33:13), if Joseph was to be found only in the land of Canaan.

But even more than that, Cowdery was effective in singling out a few key points and focusing his attention on those issues while simply ignoring the dozens of other sometimes flippant and even silly arguments that Campbell had tossed into his stew. Many papers have been published by others over the years that have more than amply answered virtually all of Campbell's detailed concerns; but instead of responding line by line or word by word, Cowdery took the tack of building his response on three points—only those that were most important and that were points of strength for the restoration: the restoration of the priesthood, the gathering of Zion from the ends of the earth, and the reinstatement of temple ordinances. By turning his attention to the strengths of his own position, Cowdery was able to reclaim the higher ground in the debate and, in the process, to proclaim affirmatively the main messages of the restoration.

Oliver Cowdery's strategy offers modern defenders of the Book of Mormon an interesting model to keep in mind. Although Campbell may not have conceded the victory to Cowdery and may have felt that Cowdery failed to address his numerous sparring jabs, I think that Cowdery won the exchange going away, by showing, in effect, that Campbell had neither discredited nor even hit upon the real issues of the restoration.

Notes

I thank Claire Foley for her work on this article.

1. Oliver Cowdery, "Delusions," *Messenger and Advocate* 1/6 (March 1835): 90–93.
2. See S. Morris Eames, *The Philosophy of Alexander Campbell* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Standard, 1966), 16.
3. *Ibid.*, 17.
4. *Millennial Harbinger* 1/1 (4 January 1830), quoted in Robert F. West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 165.
5. See West, *Alexander Campbell*, 165–66.
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10. See Jack A. Nelson, “LDS Newspapers,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1011. In 1831 a revelation was given to Joseph Smith, recorded in section 57 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which includes a command to W. W. Phelps to be a printer, and to Oliver Cowdery to edit material for publication. See also Doctrine and Covenants 112:6.

11. Larry W. Draper, “Publications,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1173.

12. See Ronald D. Dennis, “The Evening and Morning Star,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:477.

13. See David B. Galbraith, “Messenger and Advocate,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:892.

14. Ibid.

15. See, for example, *The Journals of William E. McLellin: 1831–1836*, ed. Jan Shipps and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1994), 65–66, 124, 152, 160, 167–68, 224, 225; *Times and Seasons* 1 (1840): 135–36; John Murdock Journal, typescript, BYU-A, 8–11; and Milton V. Backman Jr., “The Quest for a Restoration: The Birth of Mormonism in Ohio,” *BYU Studies* 12/4 (1972): 346–64.