

The Quest for a Restoration: The Birth of Mormonism in Ohio

MILTON V. BACKMAN, JR.*

In the latter part of October 1830, four Mormon missionaries—Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, Jr., Parley P. Pratt, and Ziba Peterson—appeared in Mentor, Ohio, and introduced the restored gospel to one of the influential preachers of the Western Reserve, Elder Sidney Rigdon. Within one week, these elders had not only preached in Mentor, Euclid, and Kirtland but had created the nucleus of a branch of the Church by baptizing seventeen in Kirtland.¹ Moving from Rigdon's home to the farm of Isaac Morley, they continued to declare their faith in the community where they were enjoying their greatest success; and on Sunday, 31 October, the missionaries held another meeting in Kirtland which was followed by the confirmation of a dozen newly baptized converts. On the ensuing Sunday, 7 November, about thirty additional settlers were confirmed at a meeting held in Mayfield. During the subsequent week, they preached in Warrensville and other communities located near the small town of Cleveland.² On Sunday, 14 November, Sidney Rigdon preached in the Methodist meetinghouse in Kirtland and probably was baptized the following Monday.

*Dr. Backman, professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University, is an authority in early Church history. The author of *American Religions and the Rise of Mormonism* (1965) and *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (1971), he is a frequent contributor to *BYU Studies*.

¹Josiah Jones, "History of the Mormonites," *The Evangelist*, Vol. 9 (1 June 1841), pp. 132-33; "Mormonism," *The Telegraph* (Painesville), 15 February 1831; "The Golden Bible," *The Telegraph*, 16 November 1830, p. 3.

²Diary of John Murdock, p. 1, LDS Church Historian's Office; John Murdock, Journal of John Murdock, pp. 10-13, typewritten copy located in BYU library.

When the elders left, about one month after their arrival in Ohio, they had not only proclaimed the restored gospel in many communities of northeastern Ohio but had also baptized approximately 130 settlers and had initiated a theological flame that was being fanned widely by the newspapers of the Western Reserve.³ When Joseph Smith arrived in Kirtland on 1 February 1831 to direct the activities of the new converts, the branch of the Church in that community consisted of about one hundred members.⁴

The relative success of the four Latter-day Saint missionaries in Ohio appears most significant when compared to the previous growth of the Church. Six months after the Church had been organized, membership was reported to be sixty-two which was an increase of thirty-five from the preceding conference held three and a half months earlier.⁵ Although a number of converts baptized by traveling Mormon elders were probably not counted in these membership figures, the fact remains that about twice as many people were baptized in the Kirtland area in one month as had been converted in other parts of the new nation during the first half year of the history of the Restored Church; and the rapid growth continued in Ohio after the missionaries resumed their journey to Missouri.⁶

After learning of the significant increase in Church membership in Ohio during the winter of 1830-1831, many ask why the conversions were so numerous in that section of America. Why was the Western Reserve such a fruitful field ready to harvest at the beginning of the 1830s?

An examination of the religious conditions in Kirtland and vicinity in 1830 provides one key describing the fertile conditions prevailing there then. Immediately prior to the introduction of Mormonism in the Western Reserve, four Christian societies worshipped in Kirtland—Congregationalists,

³Journal of Lyman Wight, cit. in Heman C. Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, Mo., 1951 reprint), Vol. 1, pp. 153-54; Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Impact of the First Preaching in Ohio," *BYU Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Summer 1971), pp. 486-87, 494-95.

⁴Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (2nd ed. rev.; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1959-1960), Vol. 1, p. 146.

⁵Far West Record, p. 2, LDS Church Historian's Office.

⁶John Murdock reported that immediately after being baptized and ordained he began preaching the restored gospel and baptized about seventy in four months. *Diary of John Murdock*, p. 2.

Methodists, Regular Baptists, and a group sometimes called "reformers" who were not affiliated with any denomination but were seeking a return to New Testament Christianity.

The Congregational Church of Kirtland was constituted in September 1819, after ten members united and endorsed a creed patterned after the Westminster Confession of Faith which included the five points of Calvinism—total depravity of man, unconditional election or predestination, limited atonement, irresistibility of grace (man cannot reject the call), and perseverance of the saints (man cannot fall). After meeting in the homes of the early settlers, members of this society constructed a log meetinghouse in 1822 on the site of the present Old South Congregational Church.⁷

After the arrival of the Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, some members of this society sold their property to the new immigrants and a few families moved to Indiana. There is no evidence, however, that many in this congregation were attracted to the restored gospel, and their membership does not seem to have been seriously affected by the arrival of the Saints in Kirtland. Even though some Congregationalists emigrated in the early 1830s, the reduction in membership was offset in 1834 when fifty-six were added to this society.⁸

Approximately the same year that the Congregationalists of Kirtland united, Methodists commenced holding services and in about 1820 erected a small church building on the corner of the cemetery lot, across the street from where the Kirtland Temple was constructed. When originally constituted, the Methodist society was included in the Grand Circuit which consisted of forty-four preaching stations in Ashtabula, Geauga, and Trumbull counties. Every four weeks, a Methodist circuit rider preacher traveled about two hundred miles to visit the classes and congregations included in this vast circuit. Since records of this society have not been uncovered, one cannot determine the numbers from this group who might have been attracted to Mormonism; but diaries of the Kirt-

⁷Records of the Presbyterian Church of Kirtland, copied from the original by Lucy M. Morley, Western Reserve Historical Society; "Extracts from 'A Brief History of the Congregational Church of Kirtland, Ohio,'" p. 2. written copy in Lake County Historical Society, Mentor, Ohio.

⁸Mary B. Sim, "Old South Congregational Church," *The Lake County Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 2 (Summer 1960), p. 2; "Extracts from 'A Brief History of the Congregational Church of Kirtland, Ohio,'" p. 2.

land converts reveal that few left the Methodist Church and united with the Latter-day Saints.⁹

There was also a Baptist society in Kirtland in 1830. This congregation had been admitted into an alliance of closed-communion Calvinist Baptist churches in 1828 called the Grand River Association; and since there was no settled minister to serve the needs of these Protestants, for almost five years this group was irregularly supplied by visiting elders assigned by that alliance.¹⁰

Prior to the arrival of the four Latter-day Saint missionaries in Ohio, the Calvinist Baptists of Kirtland had rejected a view popularized by reforming preachers concerning the need to restore the everlasting gospel. They had committed themselves to the belief that their church creed was a proper expression of faith; and, like most Congregationalists and Methodists of Kirtland, the Baptists were not receptive to the message of the Restoration. Between 1828 and 1834 their membership remained almost the same, fluctuating from twenty-one to twenty-five. The only significant impact the introduction of Mormonism seems to have had on this group is that it failed to grow after the Saints established Kirtland as one of the headquarters of the Church. In 1833 when Elder Rufus Rider was serving as minister, there were only twenty-one belonging to this congregation; and in 1834 when there were twenty-five members, these Baptists complained that their small church was struggling "with many and severe difficulties, being surrounded by Heresies."¹¹

There also was a congregation in Kirtland in 1830 that was not affiliated with any denomination. Members of this re-

⁹Christopher G. Crary, *Kirtland: Personal and Pioneer Reminiscences* (Marshalltown, 1893), p. 20; John Marshall Barker, *History of Ohio Methodism* (Cincinnati, 1898), p. 109. On 22 May 1838, the Methodist meetinghouse in Kirtland was destroyed by fire. A "ruthless villain" also cut the well rope and hid the buckets kept near the church which prevented others from controlling the blaze. That same night individuals attempted to "fire the stone Temple" but the fire in a small bundle of straw failed to "kindle into a blaze." Recent heavy rains prevented the destruction of other buildings located near this meetinghouse. *Telegraph* (Painesville), 31 May 1838. According to Zera Pulsipher, an attempt was made to blame the Mormons for the destruction of the Methodist church, for he wrote, "The next day the mob circulated news that the Council of Seventies had burnt down the Methodist meeting house." Zera Pulsipher's statement, 17 March 1855, LDS Church Historian's Office.

¹⁰Grand River Baptist Association Records, 1817-1842, p. 81, Western Reserve Historical Society.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 81, 88-89, 95-97, 114; *Minutes of the Grand River Baptist Association* (Ashtabula, 1834), p. 8.

ligious movement called themselves "Reformers," "Reformed Baptists," "Reforming Baptists," "Christians," and "Disciples"; but their opponents often referred to these protestors as "Campbellites." But Alexander Campbell, one of the leaders of this reform movement, vehemently opposed this designation, for he insisted that Christians should not be identified by the names of human leaders.¹²

Although Campbell believed that the "Reforming Baptists" who contended "for the ancient gospel" could "legitimately assume the name 'Christian,'" he preferred not to use that title because a similar restorationist movement which had emerged in New England at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had adopted that name.¹³ Under the direction of Abner Jones and Elias Smith, the "Eastern Christians" spread from Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts across New York and Pennsylvania into Ohio and other parts of the Old Northwest.¹⁴ Although Campbell recognized that members of this denomination held a number of views that harmonized with his convictions, he concluded that they had failed to restore the purity of the gospel as taught by those called "Christians first at Antioch." They did not immerse for the remission of sins, Campbell declared. They neglected to hold a weekly Lord's Supper; and, he added, they incorrectly believed that the Father and Son were separate and distinct beings. Consequently, to avoid being associated with the Eastern Christians or members of the "Christian Connection," Campbell suggested in August 1830 that individuals who endorsed his interpretation of the New Testament continue calling the local congregations the churches of Christ and refer to the people and the general movement as the "disciples of Christ."¹⁵

When the missionaries to the Lamanites introduced the re-

¹²Thomas Campbell to George Archer, 20 August 1830, quoted in Alexander Campbell, *Memoirs of Elder Thomas Campbell* (Cincinnati, 1861), pp. 150-52; Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (Chicago, 1888), p. 49; Alexander Campbell, ed., *The Christian Baptist*, 7 Vols. (Cincinnati, 1835), Vol. 1, p. 561.

¹³David Millard, "Christians, or Christian Connexion," *An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States*, ed. I. Daniel Rupp (Philadelphia, 1844), pp. 166-70.

¹⁴"The Christian Church in Boston," *Christian Palladium*, Vol. 4 (15 July 1835), pp. 82-84; David Millard's Letter, *Ibid.*, Vol. 3 (1 August 1834), pp. 112-13.

¹⁵Alexander Campbell, *The Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. 1 (2 August 1830), pp. 372-73.

stored gospel in the Western Reserve, there were approximately fifty Reformed Baptists living on Isaac Morley's farm in Kirtland. All these reformers joined the Church.¹⁶ Many others seeking a restoration were living in Mentor, Painesville, Warrensville, Mayfield, Chardon, and other communities located near Kirtland; and a number of these persons also joined the Church shortly after the gospel was introduced in Ohio.¹⁷ More members of this religious movement were attracted to the restored gospel in 1830 than emerged from any other society; and when the first branches of the Church were constituted in that state during the winter of 1830-1831, they were located in Kirtland, Mentor, Warrensville, and Mayfield, communities where a distinct form of a restorationist movement prevailed.¹⁸

Many farmers, merchants, and craftsmen of Kirtland and vicinity had launched a quest for a restoration of New Testament Christianity after they had been inspired by one of the influential preachers of the Western Reserve, Sidney Rigdon. Elder Rigdon arrived in the area of Kirtland in 1826 when he was called to be minister of a Regular Baptist congregation located in Bainbridge, Geauga County, a community lying about fifteen miles south of Kirtland.¹⁹ Within a year after assuming this position, Sidney Rigdon accepted the call to be leader of another Regular Baptist Church in Mentor, located nine miles northeast of Kirtland. A former elder of the Mentor church, Warner Goodall, had died in June 1826, and members of that congregation became acquainted with Rigdon

¹⁶Journal of Lyman Wight, cit. in Heman C. Smith, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 153; Jones, "History of the Mormonites," *Evangelist*, Vol. 9 (1 June 1841), p. 133.

¹⁷Journal of Lyman Wight, cit. in Heman C. Smith, *History*, Vol. 1, pp. 153-54; Journal of John Murdock, pp. 13-15; Chardon Church Book of the Disciples, Vol. 1, pp. 40, 41, 44, located in Pilgrim Church, Chardon, Ohio; Edward Partridge, Jr., Extracts from the Journal of Edward Partridge, p. 5, LDS Church Historian's Office.

¹⁸Journal History, 31 December 1830, LDS Church Historian's Office.

¹⁹"History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 4 (15 May 1843), pp. 193-94. There is an excellent biographical sketch of Sidney Rigdon included in the "History" written by the Prophet which was prepared while Rigdon was available for consultation.

Although two biographies have been written on Sidney Rigdon—Daryl Chase, "Sidney Rigdon: Early Mormon" (Master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1931) and Mark F. McKiernan, "The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas, 1969)—this article emphasizes the evolution of Rigdon's theology and beliefs held by the followers of Rigdon when the restored gospel was introduced to the inhabitants of the Western Reserve.

when he delivered the funeral sermon. During the summer of 1826, however, this group called Reverend Thomas B. Stepheson to be their spiritual leader, but, after serving only a few months, Stepheson agreed to direct the Baptists in Euclid.²⁰ The path was then opened for Sidney Rigdon to begin his labors that affected the lives of many people living in northeastern Ohio.

Before arriving in Geauga County, Sidney Rigdon had concluded that the Baptist creeds contained incorrect expressions of faith; that all the popular creeds of Christendom should be replaced by one rule of faith, the Bible; and that there was a need to restore the ancient order of the gospel.²¹

Rigdon had arrived at this conclusion while serving as minister of the First Baptist Church in Pittsburg, which was the first society to call him to the ministry. He had been set apart and ordained by members of the Beaver Baptist Association in 1819 after studying a short time under the direction of the Reverend Andrew Clark.²² After his ordination, which in the opinion of the Baptists was a public acknowledgment that he could exercise the priesthood, Rigdon moved to Warren, Ohio, where he lived with the Reverend Adamson Bentley. During his first year in Warren, he not only met and married Phebe Brook but also helped Bentley baptize about fifty-six converts.²³ Recognizing Rigdon's eloquence as a preacher, the Baptists of Pittsburg in 1822 selected him to be their leader; but two years later, he informed this congregation that he could no longer uphold the doctrines which they endorsed. Consequently, he labored as a tanner for two years to support his wife and three children.²⁴

In 1824 many of Rigdon's beliefs were in harmony with tenets popularized by Alexander Campbell; and Rigdon's temporary withdrawal from the ministry coincided with Camp-

²⁰Ibid., Vol. 4 (1 June 1843), p. 204; Grand River Baptist Association Records, pp. 60, 66-67, 74-75; Amos Sutton Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve, Ohio* (Cincinnati, 1876), p. 191.

²¹"History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 4 (15 May 1843), pp. 193-94.

²²Ibid., Vol. 4 (1 May 1843), pp. 177-78; *Minutes of the Beaver Baptist Association, 1820* (Warren, Ohio, 1820), p. 4.

²³In August 1820, after fifty-six had been baptized in the preceding twelve months, there were ninety-one members in the Baptist society in Warren, and this was one of the largest Baptist congregations in Ohio. Record of the Mahoning Baptist Association, p. 44, Hiram College, Hiram, Ohio.

²⁴"History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 4 (15 May 1843), pp. 193-94.

bell's increased popularization of the impropriety of creeds and the need to restore the ancient gospel. Rigdon had become acquainted with Campbell's beliefs through personal conversations with him and by reading *The Christian Baptist* which Campbell commenced publishing in 1823 in Bethany, West Virginia (then Virginia).²⁵

The year that Rigdon left the ministry of the Baptist Church in Pittsburgh, Campbell enunciated his opposition to creeds by writing in *The Christian Baptist* that the popular creeds of Christendom were composed of "propositions deduced by logical inferences, and couched in philosophical language." To present such creeds to individuals, he added, "shocks all common sense. This pernicious course is what has paganized Christianity."²⁶

The following year, Campbell clearly emphasized his belief concerning the need for a restoration in the first of a series of thirty-two articles appearing in *The Christian Baptist* entitled "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things." "All the famous reformations in history," Campbell proclaimed, were alterations "of creeds and of clergy" rather than of religions; and the reformations which have occurred since the apostasy disrupted the Primitive Church have "left religion where it was." "Human creeds," he added, have been "reformed and re-reformed" but have remained "erroneous." "Very much is wanting" to harmonize the churches of this age with New Testament standards.²⁷

²⁵Ibid.; Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Cincinnati, 1872), Vol. 2, pp. 44-45. Alexander Campbell's faith in the popular creeds of Christendom had been shaken while he was studying theology in Scotland and upon arriving in America in 1809 had united with his father, Thomas Campbell, in rejecting all denominations and endorsing the New Testament as the only guide for religious truth. A few years later, in 1812, this former Presbyterian preacher was baptized by a Baptist elder and led the independent congregation of about thirty who supported him and his father into the Baptist fold, uniting the Brush Run society with the Redstone Baptist Association in 1815. When Alexander Campbell joined that alliance he claimed that he did not present a creed to that body, only a written declaration of faith which he did not consider binding as a term of communion. As Campbell continued to proclaim his views he met opposition from that association. Consequently, in 1823 Campbell became pastor of a Baptist society in Wellsburg composed mainly of members dismissed from the society at Brush Run and the following year united with Baptists who had formed the Mahoning Association in 1820. Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, pp. 92-93; *Minutes of the Redstone Baptist Association, 1815* (Pittsburg, 1815), pp. 4-5.

²⁶Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, pp. 60-61.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 126-28. This series on "The Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things" continued from 7 February 1825 to 7 September 1829.

Campbell further announced that in the summer of 1825 many conscientious ministers gathered in Warren, Ohio, and expressed an earnest desire to witness "the ancient order of things restored." After describing this unusual assembly, Campbell asserted that he sincerely hoped that a return to the New Testament order would "soon be exhibited in the practice of the disciples meeting on the first day of the week."²⁸

Although Rigdon endorsed the basic concepts popularized in *The Christian Baptist*, he was invited to become minister in Bainbridge. Emphasizing the autonomy of each congregation, every Baptist society selected its minister; and even though the Bainbridge group had adopted a Calvinistic creed and had joined the Grand River Association, Rigdon was called to serve without being required to endorse the local articles of faith.²⁹ Members of the Grand River Association were undoubtedly not aware of Rigdon's unorthodoxy in 1826.

Rigdon's popularity as a preacher and his recognized capacity of leadership is evidenced in part by his being invited to preach to delegates of the Mahoning Baptist Association in 1826 and 1827.³⁰ Although he was not a member of this alliance, Rigdon was approved to sit in council with them, and he joined Alexander Campbell (who united with that association in 1824) in addressing the representatives from fourteen Baptist congregations.

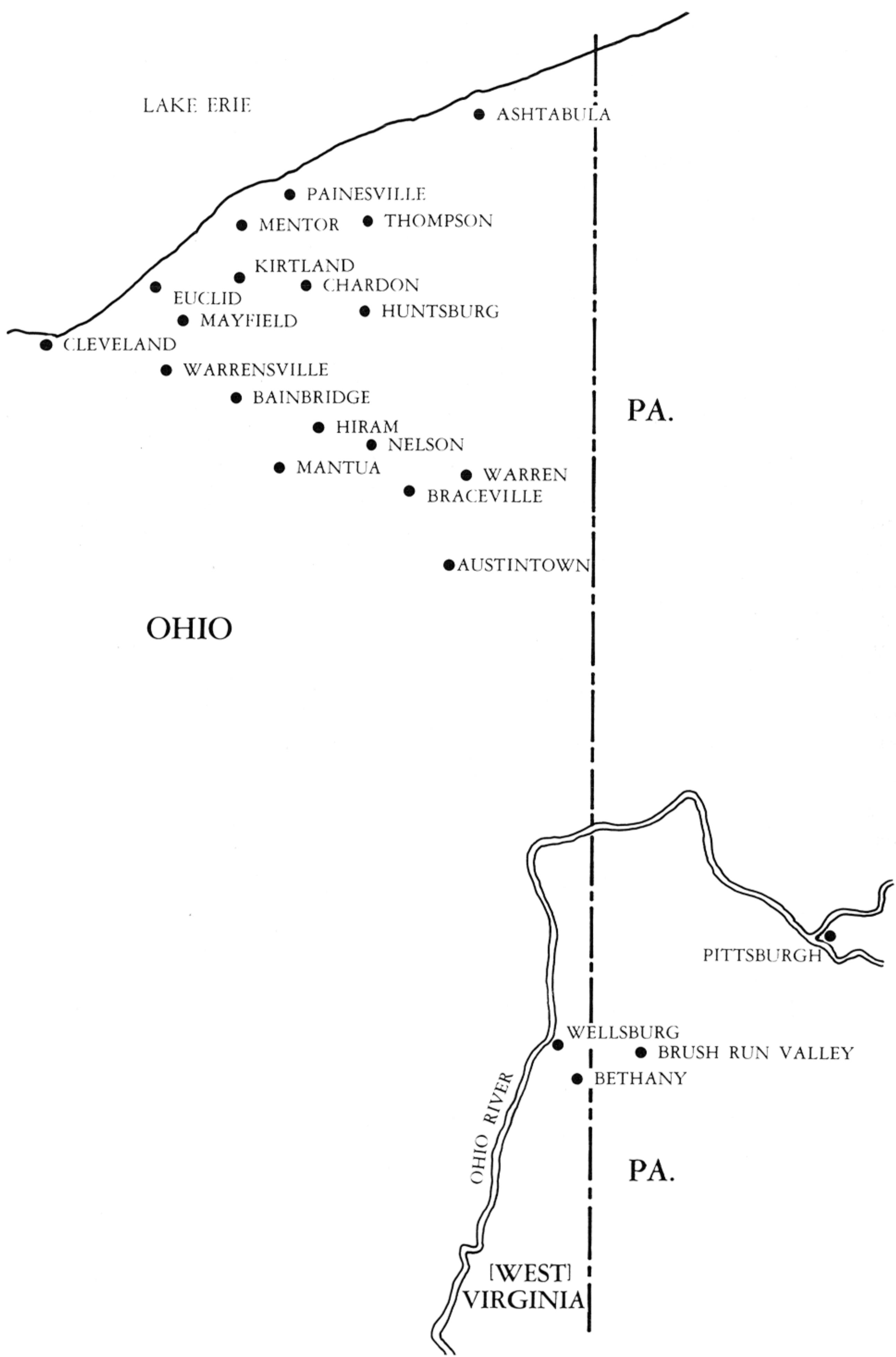
The unorthodox views of Campbell, Rigdon, and other restorationist theologians were gradually being adopted by most members of the Mahoning Association. In 1825, for example, this body took one step towards departing from the Baptist fold by voting that they would admit into membership any congregation "which acknowledges no other rule of faith and practice than the Scriptures"³¹ on condition that they walk according to the New Testament rule. Baptists, with few

²⁸Ibid., p. 169. Campbell dated the commencement of the "degeneracy" of the Christian Church about A.D. 250. Alexander Campbell, *A Debate on the Roman Catholic Religion* (New York, 1837), p. 66.

²⁹"History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 4 (1 May 1843), pp. 177-78; 15 May 1843, p. 194.

³⁰Record of the Mahoning Baptist Association, pp. 76-78, 80-82. McKiernan incorrectly concluded that in 1826 Rigdon accepted "a pastorate at Mentor, Ohio, which was in the Mahoning Baptist Association." The Painesville-Mentor congregation belonged to the Grand River Baptist Association. F. Mark McKiernan, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1971), pp. 23, 25.

³¹Record of the Mahoning Baptist Association, pp. 74-75.



Map of the Ohio, Pennsylvania, and [West] Virginia area referred to.

exceptions, insisted that creeds were not only lawful, but necessary to maintain "unity, purity, and harmony." Without these expressions of faith, they predicted that the church would become "corrupt" by the emergence of "false and spurious interpretations of the Bible."³²

Restorationist theologians living in the early Republic not only denounced the propriety of creeds but before 1828 concluded that "spurious interpretations of the Bible" were contained in the articles of faith endorsed by orthodox Baptists and other Protestants. Individuals subscribing to the views popularized in *The Christian Baptist* held that Calvinistic expressions of predestination infringed upon man's free will and that various creedal statements concerning the Godhead were unscriptural. Although Campbell's position concerning Deity was not clearly understood by others at this time, his rejection of the "Calvinistic doctrine of the Trinity," especially the use of the term *Trinity*, was being circulated in the Western Reserve prior to 1830.³³

While serving as minister of the Regular Baptists in Mentor, Sidney Rigdon formally departed from the Baptist fold. Possibly his denunciation of the creeds of Christendom would have been sufficient for the Baptists of the Grand River Association to expell him from their alliance. But his departure from traditional Baptist orthodoxy seems to have advanced about 1828 when he began emphasizing that a remission of sins and the reception of the Holy Ghost would follow the immersion of a repentant believer. Most Baptists asserted that baptism, a symbol of acceptance of Christ, did not remit sins, that such a remission was con-

³²Minutes of the . . . Grand River Baptist Association, 1829 (Ashtabula, 1829), pp. 6-9; Minutes of the Beaver Baptist Association, 1829 (Pittsburg, 1829); Minutes of the Redstone Baptist Association 1812 (1812), pp. 6-7. See also Minutes of the Redstone Baptist Association for 1827.

³³Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, pp. 254, 333-34. The Arian views of the Eastern Christians and of Barton Stone were also being circulated in Ohio about 1830 through *The Christian Palladium* and *The Christian Messenger*; and Campbell denounced Arianism while he was rejecting popular expressions of the Trinity. Although he attacked the "unintelligible jargon, the unmeaning language of the orthodox creeds on" the subject of the Trinity, Campbell held that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "three Divine persons in one Divine nature." Many in Ohio, however, were confused as they attempted to relate Campbell's position concerning the Godhead and some incorrectly classified him as an Arian. *The Observer and Telegraph* (Hudson), 11 November 1830, p. 3; 17 March 1831, p. 4; Royal Humbert, ed., *A Compend of Alexander Campbell's Theology* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1961), pp. 84-86.

nected with faith alone. And Baptists, with few exceptions, contended that reception of the Holy Ghost was not a consequence of the immersion of the faithful.³⁴

Before 1827, the doctrine that a remission of sins followed baptism had not been "practically and effectively presented" to the inhabitants of the Western Reserve, even though Sidney Rigdon had heard this doctrine taught by Alexander Campbell in 1823. While serving as a minister in Pittsburg, Rigdon rode to Kentucky to witness a debate between Campbell and a Presbyterian preacher, the Reverend W. L. MacCalla. Rigdon took notes during this debate which aided Campbell in the preparation of a tract published in 1824. Quoting Acts 2:38, Campbell told the reverend that baptism was a "divine institution designed for putting the legitimate subject of it in actual possession of the remission of sins." But Campbell confessed that since his "opponent paid little or no attention" to this doctrine, the subject "was not formally debated."³⁵

The person generally credited with being the first to popularize widely in eastern Ohio the concept enunciated on the Day of Pentecost is Walter Scott, a friend of Rigdon's while he was living in Pittsburg. In September 1827 Scott was called by the Mahoning Association to preach without binding him to creed or congregation; and, shortly after this appointment, he began proclaiming six basic principles: faith, repentance, believer's baptism, remission of sins, reception of the Holy Ghost, and eternal life.³⁶ One contemporary, Samuel

³⁴Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, pp. 454-55, 630. Six of the original members of the Mahoning Association, including the church at Warren, sanctioned in their articles of faith as an apostolic practice the laying on of hands on baptized persons, but most Baptists did not agree with the views of Scott, Rigdon, and Campbell concerning baptism as a prerequisite for receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. See Mary A. Smith, "A History of the Mahoning Baptist Association" (Master's thesis, West Virginia University, 1943), p. 27; Records of the Mahoning Baptist Association, p. 9.

³⁵Campbell, *Memoirs of Thomas Campbell*, p. 140; Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, p. 401; Alexander Campbell, *A Debate on Christian Baptism, between the Rev. W. L. MacCalla, a Presbyterian Teacher, and Alexander Campbell* (Buffalo, 1824), pp. 135-36; Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, Vol. 2, pp. 71-73, 95.

³⁶Hayden, *History of the Disciples*, p. 71; Walter Scott, *The Gospel Restored* (Cincinnati, 1836), p. vi. Scott claimed that he taught the concept of baptism for the remission of sins to Campbell and Rigdon and that Rigdon converted the Mormon missionaries to that belief. Although it appears that this doctrine was not emphasized in the preaching of most reformers before 1827, Campbell and Rigdon understood this concept before that date. The view was also clearly enunciated in the Book of Mormon and in the in-

Robbins, reported the "great excitement" which erupted in Braceville, Ohio, in February 1828, after Scott unfolded these views. "It was common practice," Robbins also observed,

for him [Walter Scott] to illustrate the five items [leading to eternal life]—viz: Faith, Repentance, Baptism, Remission of Sins, and the Holy Spirit—by holding up his left hand and using his thumb for Faith, and so on; then contrast it with the five points of Calvinism; and thus he made the Scripture order of the gospel so plain, that little boys could carry it home.³⁷

Prior to the summer of 1828 Sidney Rigdon was also effectively proclaiming Peter's Day-of-Pentecost message from Mentor to Mantua. According to Amos Hayden, another restorationist preacher, Rigdon and Scott discussed these principles in Warren in March 1828, after which Rigdon, accompanied by Adamson Bentley, rode to Mentor. There they proclaimed this doctrine in the neighborhood where Rigdon lived. After converting more than fifty inhabitants and baptizing more than twenty settlers to that which was called the "scriptural order of the gospel," these elders rode to Kirtland and converted fifty additional individuals.³⁸ Others living in Warrensville and Mayfield also embraced these doctrines.³⁹ Meanwhile, in 1827, Rigdon had been called to serve the settlers in Mantua, Portage County, who had belonged to the Baptist church in Nelson. It was while he was "building" a "large and respectable" reformed society in that community that Rigdon advanced the doctrine that believers would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost following baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.⁴⁰

Amos Hayden was not the only contemporary who reported Rigdon's success in the Western Reserve. In the summer of 1828 Alexander Campbell announced in *The Christian Baptist* that "Bishops Scott, Rigdon, and Bentley, in Ohio, within

structions of John the Baptist to the Prophet Joseph Smith and was thereby endorsed by Latter-day Saints before the LDS missionaries arrived in Ohio. For the views of Scott on this subject see Walter Scott to Br. Emmons, Mayslick, 22 October 1851, copy located in Disciples Historical Society, Nashville, Tennessee.

³⁷Hayden, *History of the Disciples*, p. 143.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 193-94.

³⁹Journal of John Murdock, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁰Hayden, *History of the Disciples*, pp. 237-38; "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 4 (15 May 1843), p. 194.

the last six months, have immersed about eight hundred persons."⁴¹

Members of the Grand River Association clearly recognized that Sidney Rigdon and members of the congregation over which he presided had departed from the historic Baptist tradition; and when they assembled in September 1828, they promptly "voted to withdraw fellowship from the Painesville and Mentor Church," agreeing that this congregation should no longer be listed in their minutes. Representatives from the seventeen congregations forming this alliance further resolved that, since the "sentiments and practices propagated by the leading men in the Mahoning Association [were] derogatory to the doctrine of Christ," fellowship with that body was terminated.⁴² Summarizing their attitude concerning the views of the restorationist theologians, these Baptists resolved

that this Association deeply deplore the existence of such evils in any of our Churches as were complained of in many of the Letters presented this session with reference to sentiments propagated by Alexander Campbell, and this Association desire to have it distinctly understood that we have no fellowship for those sentiments which have been introduced into this vicinity contrary to the original faith and platform of this body—and would caution our brethren against receiving such men or Ministers as manifest any disposition to trample upon or disregard this bond of union by which we are cemented.⁴³

Rigdon's group was the first to be expelled by the Grand River Association for endorsing the views popularized in *The Christian Baptist*. In 1830 two other churches located southeast of Kirtland, one in Chardon, lying eight miles away, and the other in Huntsburg, a distance of nineteen miles, were also dismissed because they had "departed from the faith of the gospel, by embracing the novel notions of A. Campbell."⁴⁴

Although in an attempt to return to New Testament Christianity, a few congregations, such as the Baptists of Mantua and Mentor, had withdrawn from associations in 1827 and 1828 and had denounced their former creeds, many historians date the rise of a new denomination, the Disciples of

⁴¹Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, p. 452.

⁴²Grand River Baptist Association Records, pp. 83, 86.

⁴³Ibid., p. 86.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 99.

Christ, with the dissolving of the Mahoning Association in September 1830. When delegates of that alliance assembled in Austintown for their annual meeting, they severed all connections with the Baptist faith by agreeing to discontinue their yearly gatherings as an association and to return to the primitive purity of New Testament Christianity.⁴⁵

Shortly before the Mahoning Association was dissolved, Campbell commenced publishing another periodical, *The Millennial Harbinger*, which a few months later replaced *The Christian Baptist*. In the original issue of January 1830, Campbell inserted as a heading for this work a quotation from his version of Revelations 14:6: "I saw another messenger flying through the midst of heaven, having everlasting good news to proclaim to the inhabitants of the earth."⁴⁶

Alexander Campbell not only continued to include the scripture from Revelations on the cover of his *Harbinger* but emphasized restorationist concepts in the last issues of *The Christian Baptist*. He proclaimed early in 1830 that groups had already commenced to restore the ancient gospel and predicted that this blissful revolution would produce a state in society far surpassing the fruits of righteousness, peace, and joy that had resulted from any previous religious revolt "since the great apostacy from christian institutions."⁴⁷

While various reformers were establishing independent congregations based on their versions of the New Testament Church, Sidney Rigdon and many other leaders of this movement concluded that such action was a precursor to the millennium. Hayden remembered that many restorationist theologians proclaimed in 1830 that "the millennium had now dawned, and that the long expected day of gospel glory would very soon be ushered in." The return to conditions existing in the Primitive Church was viewed as an initiatory move-

⁴⁵Mary A. Smith, "History of the Mahoning Association," p. 93. The first church of the Campbell movement in the area of the Mahoning Association to reject its creed was the society in Mantua organized on 27 January 1827. The following November, the Baptists in New Lisbon abandoned their articles of religion and in 1828 a similar action was taken by the members of the Braceville church. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

⁴⁶Campbell, *The Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. 1 (4 January 1830), p. 1.

⁴⁷Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, p. 664. Campbell also proclaimed in 1830 that "The American Revolution is but the precursor of a revolution of infinitely more importance to mankind. . . . A more glorious work is reserved for this generation—the emancipation of the human mind from the shackles of superstition." Campbell, *The Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. 1 (5 July 1830), p. 307.

ment preceding the gathering of the Jews to Jerusalem and the Second Coming of the Savior of mankind.⁴⁸

Another significant development occurred a few months prior to the arrival of the Latter-day Saint missionaries in Ohio. As Reformed Baptists of the Western Reserve compared their interpretations of the New Testament with views espoused by Campbell and other preachers, some concluded that many restorationists were teaching incorrect doctrines. In an attempt to restore New Testament Christianity, Isaac Morley, for example, convinced some of the followers of Rigdon that they should create a communitarian system. Under the direction of Morley and Lyman Wight, about eight families agreed to have all things in common, pooling their property and establishing an order called the "Family" or the "Big Family." A few settlers living in Mayfield in 1830 also decided to organize a communal society.⁴⁹ While Rigdon approved of this action, Campbell denounced the system; and after comparing beliefs, the two men rode from Austintown in the fall of 1830 with conflicting views concerning the ancient Christian order.⁵⁰

The economic actions of the reformers in Kirtland were not the only issue which kept some of the followers of Rigdon from endorsing Campbell's efforts to restore New Testament Christianity, for significant disagreements existed in 1830 concerning gifts of the Holy Spirit and authority to perform ordinances ordained by Christ.

Alexander Campbell held that after individuals through faith and baptism became the sons of God they would receive the spirit of Christ which was the Holy Ghost. Such recipients, he taught, would be filled with peace and joy and become habitations of God. He insisted, however, that individuals who received the gift of the Holy Ghost would not receive some of the spiritual gifts manifested in the early Church but would be blessed with the fruits of the spirit. Explaining this concept, Campbell stated that miracles similar to those wrought by the Holy Spirit during the generation of the apostles (such as healing and speaking in tongues) would not reappear in the latter days. Miracles performed by the

⁴⁸Hayden, *History of the Disciples*, pp. 183-86.

⁴⁹Journal of Lyman Wight, cit. in Heman C. Smith, *History*, Vol. 1, pp. 152-53.

⁵⁰Hayden, *History of the Disciples*, p. 209.

apostles, he contended, were to confirm the new religion and prove its divine origin. Such manifestations were for a limited time, and Campbell emphatically maintained that "this limited time" had "expired."⁵¹

Campbell also did not deviate from the traditional Protestant position regarding authority. Since he held that all believers in Christ were bearers of the priesthood, he did not recognize the need for a restoration of the right and power to act in God's name.⁵²

In contrast to the opinions of Campbell, some Reformed Baptists in Ohio, especially individuals who had been influenced by Sidney Rigdon, were engaged in a quest for the same power of God described so vividly in the Holy Scriptures. One preacher, John Murdock, wrote that, after being associated with Reformed Baptists for about three years, he became concerned because Alexander Campbell and many other restorationist theologians had rejected latter-day miracles and, in his opinion, had thereby denied the gift and power of the Holy Ghost. Murdock further asserted that the Holy Ghost should be conferred on others by the laying on of hands.⁵³

Shortly before the appearance of the Latter-day Saint elders in Ohio, Murdock was asked by an inquirer, "Where is the man to commence the work of baptising? or where shall he get this authority?" Murdock replied that no one had the authority. "If they are out of the way as we believe," he said, "they have lost all authority." There is only one way in which the priesthood of God can be restored, Murdock explained. "The Lord must either send an angel to baptise the first man, or he must give a special command to some one man to baptise another."⁵⁴

Edward Partridge, a successful Painesville hatter, also recalled that prior to the arrival of the Mormon missionaries he had concluded that it was "absolutely necessary" for God to "again reveal himself to man and confer authority upon some one, or more, before his church could be built up in the last days, or any time after the apostacy." Partridge further remembered that he did not consider the subject of restoration

⁵¹Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, pp. 89-91, 95, 454-55.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 26, 231-33, 243, 260-61.

⁵³Journal of John Murdock, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 9.

of the priesthood until after he was convinced that God's true church was not upon the earth. Then he concluded that all men with whom he was acquainted "were without authority from God."⁵⁵

Newell Kimball Whitney, another reformer who operated a store in Kirtland, was also seeking a restoration of God's power in 1830. Shortly before the introduction of Mormonism in the Western Reserve, Whitney and his wife prayed earnestly to the Lord, requesting to know how they might be endowed with the Holy Ghost. Like many other followers of Rigdon, Whitney rejected Campbell's view concerning the permanent cessation of miracles. It was also his conviction that Campbell's position was actually a denial of the authority to confer the Holy Ghost on others.⁵⁶

Recognizing that many Reformed Baptists living in the Western Reserve had rejected the creeds of Christendom, were seeking a restoration of New Testament Christianity, believed in faith and repentance as requisites to baptism, held that remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost would follow the immersion of the faithful, denied Calvinistic expressions of predestination, criticized some of the creedal expressions of God, believed in the imminence of the Second Coming, and were engaged in a quest for a restoration of God's power and authority, Parley P. Pratt unfolded to these seekers many truths which they were seeking. Before his conversion to the restored gospel, Pratt had been a reformer and had learned the message of the restoration which Sidney Rigdon was proclaiming, and therefore explained efficaciously the glad tidings of the everlasting gospel to the inhabitants of northeastern Ohio. In this announcement, he declared that, while the inhabitants of the Western Reserve had not been "legally baptized" God's authority had been restored.⁵⁷

But not all aspects of Parley P. Pratt's testimony harmonized with views previously held by reformers in Kirtland, Mentor, and nearby communities. Sidney Rigdon and other restorationist theologians, for example, had emphasized that the Bible was the sole norm of faith. Therefore, after the elders circulated copies of the Book of Mormon to the settlers

⁵⁵Edward Partridge Papers, 26 May 1839, LDS Church Historian's Office.

⁵⁶Andrew Jensen, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City, 1901), Vol. 1, p. 223.

⁵⁷Pratt, *Autobiography*, p. 50.

of Ohio, many cautiously but thoughtfully and prayerfully examined the contents of this new witness for Christ. Many immediately recognized that this record was a priceless account of God's dealings with some of his other sheep; and after receiving a witness of its truthfulness and embracing the basic teachings of the restored gospel, many "came forward, . . . were baptized by us, and received the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hand, and prayer in the name of Jesus Christ."⁵⁸

As one continues to examine the history of the Church, he recognizes that many leaders emerged from the men living in Kirtland and vicinity who were seeking a restoration in 1830. Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams became members of the First Presidency. Parley P. Pratt, Lyman Wight, and Orson Hyde were set apart as members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Edward Partridge and Newell K. Whitney served as Presiding Bishops, and Isaac Morley was first counselor and Titus Billings second counselor to Bishop Partridge.

As clearly enunciated in many revelations recorded by the Prophet Joseph Smith, the field was white, all ready to harvest, and one of the most fruitful fields in the early nineteenth century was northeastern Ohio.

⁵⁸Ibid. Hayden reported that the missionaries arrived in Ohio with carpet bags filled with copies of the Book of Mormon. Hayden, *History of the Disciples*, p. 210.