

A VISION OF MORMONISM

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The first half of the nineteenth century in the United States can best be described as a time of immense progress, expansion, and reform. At the turn of the century President Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory from France, which not only provided a massive new area for growth and settlement but also gave access to the interior and eventually the whole West.¹ Politically the two-party system was emerging. There were Jeffersonian Republicans, who would evolve into Democrats, and Northern Federalists, who would develop into Whigs. The former were advocates of minimal government, which although this meant less development for the nation also meant lower taxes and more freedoms for individual states. The latter supported a more centralized government, a nationalized banking system, more internal development, and higher taxation.²

Although politically divided, America was relatively at peace. The Revolution had created a brave new republic, based on a unique constitution, which provided a new vision for the future. Other parts of the world, specifically Western Europe, were not so calm. The Napoleonic wars between 1804 and 1815 had severe effects on the U.S. economy and eventually forced America into war with Great Britain in 1812, but by 1815 these wars were over and the U.S. could focus on internal developments.

From 1816 onwards the U.S. was advancing economically in all areas. It was a time of market revolution. All over the country, due to improved systems of transportation such as new canals, railroads, and the perfection of the steamboat, which is accredited in 1807 to

¹ John M. Murrin, et al., *Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People*, 4th ed. (California: Thompson Wadsworth, 2005), 281.

² *Ibid.*, 264-268.

Robert Fulton, industry and commerce were thriving.³ In the South the invention of the cotton gin, a machine designed to separate the cotton fibers from the seeds, by Eli Whitney at the turn of the century, revolutionized the cotton business.⁴ This helped turn the larger farms into massive cotton plantations, which dominated Southern industry until the Civil War.

Changes in the North were even greater. In rural areas farmers began to capitalize on new transportation and started producing enough crops for a national market. In cities like Chicago, the American System of Manufacturing had taken over with new technology enabling products like guns, watches, clocks, and sewing machines to be mass-produced.⁵ Industry was growing too, with new factories taking raw materials from the commercial farms to make products that before were available only as imports from other countries, which in turn created new jobs. Economic expansion at the time was so immense that it outpaced the growth of population.⁶

This market revolution meant significant change in many aspects of daily life. Particularly notable in the Northeast, the patriarchal system of family was dissolving as the mother began to take charge of the household. The father needed to spend most of his time tending the farm, or working his trade, which left the mother controlling not only the running of the house but also the children's education, as well as their religious upbringing. What the market revolution had created was a new middle-class in the Northeast, consisting of city and county merchants, commercial farmers, and skilled craftsman.

A different way of life was emerging in the North. It not only called for a new approach to industry and a restructuring of the household but also laid the groundwork for the

³ Mary Bellis, *The History of Steamboats: John Fitch and Robert Fulton* [book online], (About, Inc.: 2004; accessed November 15th, 2006); available from <http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blsteamship.htm>.

⁴ Mary Bellis, *The Cotton Gin and Eli Whitney* [book online], (about, Inc.: 2004; accessed November 15th, 2006); available from http://inventors.about.com/od/cstartinventions/a/cotton_gin.htm.

⁵ Murrin, et al., 447.

⁶ Ibid.

new Yankee Protestant approach to religion.⁷ This “Second Great Awakening,” the name given to the evangelical religious revivals, began sweeping the Northeast, carrying along with it a new approach to Christianity that brought comfort to people during this time of radical change.

The term evangelical itself dates back to the time of the Reformation when Martin Luther used the Greek word *evangelion*, meaning “the good word,” to describe his views on religion; however it is more commonly used today to categorize the spread of Protestant beliefs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸ Moreover, it is used to define a general set of Protestant principles: conversion to God, activism in his name, belief in the word of the Bible, and commitment to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.⁹

New Protestant-based sects were emerging with rapid regularity, from western New York eastwards, across the region, and the messages in their teachings and preachings were beginning to shape society and culture. One of the most influential preachers was a man named Charles Finney, who led the way in advocating moral accountability and personal piety over schooling and theology. The old, traditional approach to Christianity, with its doctrine of original sin, a patriarchal system of family, and which instilled fear in its followers, was being rejected. People were moving towards a gentler system based on love, kindness, conversion, and faith.¹⁰ Competition among the different Protestant leaders and congregations was intense as they competed with each other for followers.

The Second Great Awakening was a logical stepping-stone in the building of America. After the Revolution had created a new and independent nation, people were

⁷ Ibid., 324.

⁸ Larry Eskridge, *Defining Evangelicalism* [book online], (Larry Eskridge: 1995; revised 2006; accessed Nov 15th, 2006); available from http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/defining_evangelicalism.html.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Murrin, et al., 325.

establishing a new way of life as they encountered and dealt with the market revolution, urbanization, and rapid immigration.

The period between the Revolution and the Second Great Awakening was a time of religious uncertainty. The Constitution provided for separation of church and state, which had led to a massive decline in support for churches. Democratic feeling and increased antiauthoritarianism were separating people from the traditional approach to Christianity, with its strict hierarchical system.¹¹ The surge of immigration was also alarming to many established Protestants. The majority of immigrants were Irish or German Catholics, practicing a religion that American Protestants had for a long time feared.

These conditions and attitudes provided fertile ground for a new religious movement. In the northeastern United States evangelical revivalism was particularly strong. In New England the movement emphasized social activism and reform focused on education, abolition, and temperance. In contrast, in western New York the movement brought on a surge of new religious denominations; the great amount of evangelical energy in this region caused the area between Lake Ontario and the Adirondack Mountains to become known as the “burned-over” district.¹²

During the period, the Reverend John Alfonzo Clark, an Episcopalian minister, was traveling around the region and taking note of what he saw. Later, his written observations were compiled in one volume, *Gleanings by the Way*, published in 1842 in New York. His many chapters, including Chapter Thirty-Two, “The Mormon Prophet and His Three Witnesses,” provide a sense of immediacy and insight into Mormonism as a religion, about which it is evident Clark was an avid skeptic.

¹¹ Ibid., 255.

¹² Howard Cincotta, *An Outline of American History (1994): Chapter Four: “The Second Great Awakening”* [book online], (Last update: 2004-11-28 time: 08:26 © 1994- 2005; accessed November 15th, 2006); available from http://www.let.rug.nl/~usa/H/1994/ch4_p13.htm.

Chapter Thirty-Two, reflects the first half of the nineteenth century in the northeastern United States, as it illustrates the effects of the Enlightenment and the Second Great Awakening, the early history of Mormonism, the growing anti-Mormon sentiment, and the violence of the period including the Mormon War in Missouri.

Clark's letter depicts the Second Great Awakening through its discussion of Mormonism, presenting a clear picture of a new religion emerging out of the revival movement, reflecting the religious competitiveness of the times, and referring to the popular millennialism of the period.

John Clark, born in 1801, trained for several years after college and eventually was ordained as a minister of the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church had originally been a part of the Church of England. After the Revolution American Anglicans had severed ties with the Church of England and, in 1789 in Philadelphia, members of the different groups emerging in the Church had met and formed one united Episcopalian Church in America. In doing so they became one of the first examples of new dominations emerging out of the Second Great Awakening.¹³ The Episcopal Church is basically the same as the Church of England, but Americanized in ways that, for example, uphold the belief in the separation between church and state.¹⁴

Clark represented the evangelical side of his church and worked hard as a preacher, involving himself in missionary work throughout the Northeast. He traveled extensively around the region and spent time in Palmyra, New York, between 1826 and 1829, which was the exact place and time of the birth of Mormonism.¹⁵ Clark's preachings reflect the evangelical outlook of the period, with its emphasis on Jesus Christ as savior and the

¹³ *Anglican and Episcopal Church History: English Church History* [book online], (New York, Episcopal Church Centre, 2006; accessed November 15th 2006); available from http://www.episcopalchurch.org/lw_newsroom_22035_ENG_HTM.htm.

¹⁴ John E. Booty, *Episcopal Church* [book online], (accessed November 15th, 2006); available from <http://mb-soft.com/believe/text/episcopa.htm>.

¹⁵ *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: D. Appleton, 1886-89).

importance of conversion through faith.¹⁶ Clark's letter in Chapter Thirty-Two provides a clear idea of the religious spirit, teachings and aims of this revival period, when preachers and missionaries saw it as their duty to persuade people to join them in their newfound religious realm to improve their lives and achieve salvation.

John Clark's letter also provides important documentation of the Second Great Awakening in that it describes Mormonism from an immediate vantage point, as it is taking place. The Second Great Awakening took place not only because religious leaders of the time created it but also because the public itself brought it on in their post-Revolution search for religious alternatives. Mormonism surfaced at this critical time with what appeared, for some, to be the right answers, policies, and beliefs to follow.

Although Mormonism adheres to many of the same principles as other Christian faiths it also differs in many important areas. For example, Mormons believe in the word of The Book of Mormon before that of the Bible, whereas other groups, both Protestant and Catholic, adhere to The Bible as the one truth. Mormons hold that God is a man; moreover that he is three separate entities: God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Other Christian groups including the Episcopal Church believe that these three make up God as one entity, and not made of flesh and blood like man. Another key disagreement is the Mormon belief that men can become gods, whereas all other Christians believe there is only one true God.

There were also similarities between Mormonism and the other new evangelical groups in the Second Great Awakening: they all disregarded the concept of original sin and agreed that every man could gain salvation through faith and moral accountability. Clark states, in an earlier chapter in *Gleanings by the Way*, three reasons why Mormonism had become so attractive to people:

¹⁶ Ibid.

“There are two or three reasons why the Mormon delusion has spread so rapidly, and which will probably continue to give it more or less currency. One cause is, that it fully and cordially admits the truth of the sacred Scriptures. Did it discard all previous revelation,--pour contempt upon the Savior of the world, and set up an independent claim for a revelation wholly new, it would have gained comparatively few adherents. But recognizing the truth and credibility of the sacred Scriptures, and retaining as it does, many doctrines which are held in common by different denominations of Christians, and covering its own absurdities with imposing forms and lofty pretensions, it opens a winning asylum for all the disaffected and dissatisfied of other persuasions...Another cause which has contributed to the rapid spread of this imposture, is, that it appeals strongly to the love of the marvelous,--to that thirst and anxiety, so rife with a certain class of mind, to know more than God would have us know,--to find some discovery that will carry us farther than revelation,--to get some one to come back from the grave, and tell us what is in eternity,--to see with our own eyes a miracle, and obtain some new glimpse of the invisible world...But that which has given vastly the greatest strength to Mormonism is the violent persecution which its disciples have suffered in the West, and especially in Missouri . ”¹⁷

Clark was correct in two of the three. Mormonism did offer a home for people in a religion that rebelled against the aspects of Christianity with which people were unhappy while it still held to the Bible and its scriptures. Furthermore, the people of New England and New York would sympathize greatly with those experiencing religious persecution, which was a common feature in their own personal history. The second idea is less likely as this was a time after the Enlightenment had declared the “age of miracles” over. Superstitious beliefs and unscientific thought were not regarded as reasonable anymore. It is possible, however, that those who turned to Mormonism had not lost their hope in such possibilities.

A further example of how Chapter Thirty-Two of Clark’s *Gleanings* documents the effects of the Second Great Awakening is the way in which Clark’s views reflect the religious competition of the time. It was a period during which different denominations were actively competing for members. Despite their shared beliefs based on Protestantism, for these

¹⁷ John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia, W.J. & J.K. Simon; New York, R. Carter, 1842), 218-220.

churches and congregations, as in any organization, numbers meant power; consequently they spent a lot of their time attempting to discredit each other.

This attempt to discredit appears to be the aim of John Clark's letter, written in his role of Episcopalian evangelical, to disprove and discredit Mormon evangelicalism. "I have for a long time been endeavoring, as opportunity offered, to open the eyes of the community to their [Mormons] character, and to show that mischief lurks beneath,"¹⁸ he writes in the opening paragraph. Another Episcopal clergyman, Henry Caswall, a contemporary of Clark's, supports this view. In his *America and the American Church*, published in 1839, Caswell writes, "The Mormonites are the victims, and to a certain extent, the actors, of one of the grossest impostures ever palmed on the credulity of man."¹⁹

Another point of relevance to the period in Clark's writings as they depict the evangelical movement concerns his mention of what the Mormons called the Millennial Kingdom, which was a main theme in many of the religious revivals of the time. This refers to the anticipated Second Coming of Christ, who would come back to earth and rule for a thousand years. Although a common idea in most Protestant denominations, there were differences in the details. Some groups thought the Second Coming would occur after a thousand years of social perfection, whereas others believed it would be after God destroyed the world. Whichever version they believed, the subject of the Millennium was extremely prevalent in people's thoughts and conversations, and they constantly looked for signs and warnings as to its happening.²⁰

The emergence of Mormonism during the Second Great Awakening involved particular characteristics and details contributed by its principal leader and founder, Joseph Smith Jr., who claimed to have translated The Book of Mormon, on which Mormonism is

¹⁸ Ibid., 337.

¹⁹ Henry Caswall, *America, and the American Church* (London: Rivington, 1839), 322.

²⁰ Murrin, et al., 331.

based, from a set of golden plates that were given to him by an angel named Moroni. Smith's claim was that in 1820, at age 15, he received a visit from both God and Jesus together, as separate entities, who told him that all existing religions were wrong and that he should not join any of them. He was told to await further instructions concerning the one true religion.

Smith was next visited by the angel Moroni in 1823 who told him about a set of golden plates on which was inscribed the history of an ancient civilization in America. Though told of the whereabouts of these plates Smith was also told not to touch them yet. Four years later, in 1827, Smith was again visited by Moroni and told that he must fetch the plates and translate the inscription for the rest of the world.

With the help of different scribes Smith translated the plates out of which came The Book of Mormon and with it the Mormon faith. Three of the scribes, Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer, also claim that at a later date, they too were visited by Moroni and shown the Golden Plates. These three became the "Three Witnesses" who play an important part in the Mormon belief that Joseph Smith's visions were real and that Mormonism is the one true religion.

In a previous chapter in Gleanings Reverend Clark writes, "This book, which professed to be a translation of the golden Bible brought to light by Joseph Smith, was published in 1830... To my mind there never was a grosser piece of deception undertaken to practice than this."²¹

Chapter Thirty-Two reveals the early years of Mormonism by directly referring to people, places, and events involved in the founding of this new religion.

In it Clark refers to all four of the people mentioned above in the description of the beginnings of Mormonism. He writes, "Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer were two of the

²¹ Clark, 231.

three witnesses that testified to the truth of the Book of Mormon.”²² Later on he writes, “Among the number are Joseph Smith, jr., Hiram Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Parley P. Pratt.”²³ Hiram Smith is Joseph’s brother, Sidney Rigdon, is one of the first to join Joseph Smith and an extremely influential speaker for the Mormon Church, and Parley P. Pratt is one of the original Twelve Apostles and the editor of the *Latter-Day Saints Millennial Star*. All of these characters are said to have played important parts in the founding and development of Mormonism and the reference to them in Clark’s letter backs up those claims.

Clark also mentions specific places and events that took place in Mormon history. He writes, “There are two sides to the story of the Mormon war in Missouri,”²⁴ which is reference to the event which led to the arrest of Smith and many of his men and the expulsion of the Mormon community from Missouri. He also mentions a trial that began November 12th, 1838, which is a reference to the trial of Smith and these other men who were arrested by the State of Missouri as the last act of the Mormon War in Missouri.²⁵ Something else that Clark writes about is “A rare public document of a most interesting character,”²⁶ which is the testimony of a former Mormon, Dr. Sampson Avard, who was the lead witness against Joseph Smith and his followers at the 1838 trial.²⁷ Clark seems to consider this letter highly significant, as it is a Mormon testifying against the leaders of the Mormon Church.

Another important event discussed in Clark’s letter is “A paper drafted by Sidney Rigdon against the dissenters from Mormonism, and signed by eighty four Mormons.”²⁸ This paper was actually drafted by Smith, but came from a speech by Sidney Rigdon given against a group of dissenters among the leaders of the Church in Missouri. Problems between the

²² Ibid., 340.

²³ Ibid., 338.

²⁴ Ibid., 338.

²⁵ Richard Albanes, *One Nation Under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002), 167.

²⁶ Clark, 337.

²⁷ Albanes, 168.

²⁸ Clark, 340.

church presidency and these leaders led to their being excommunicated from the Mormon Church and forced to flee Missouri.²⁹ The speech also led to the formation of a group of Mormons called the Danite Band, who played a large part in the Mormon War in Missouri, which in turn plays a large part in the early history of Mormonism.

Clark was writing about these events only a few years after they had taken place, having been either in or near the areas where they were all happening. It is this first-hand, real-time information in “The Mormon Prophet and His Three Witnesses” depicting the founding persons and events in Mormon history that provides so much insight into the early years of Mormonism.

As the evidence above suggests, Mormonism was not universally popular. For some it was the answer they had been looking for, but more people viewed Mormons as deluded and their growing congregation as a social, political, and territorial threat. It is this attitude perhaps that is reflected most prominently in Clark’s writing: the anti-Mormon sentiment of non-Mormons at that time.

For those who were not seduced by Mormonism, its claims were regarded with ridicule. An example of Mormons being viewed this way comes from Henry Caswall, who writes, “I am not aware that America has given birth to any entirely new sect, with the exception of the ridiculous Mormonites.”³⁰ Less than a century after the Enlightenment, which had introduced a new more rational and scientific way of thinking, superstitious beliefs and fantastical explanation were no longer considered sensible. It was a time when people thought that any knowledge gained should be through the process of critical thinking and analysis.³¹ Mormonism, with its talk of conversations with God, visions of angels, and revelation after revelation, did not adhere to this enlightened way of thinking. Clark’s

²⁹ Albanes, 153-154.

³⁰ Caswell, 310.

³¹ Donald H. Meyer, *Democratic Enlightenment* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1976), 97.

opening paragraph states, “The Mormons have been generally regarded as a harmless sect of deluded fanatics,” which refers to statements made by citizens of Jackson County, Missouri, in a declaration made against the Mormon population there in 1833.³² Amongst a torrent of accusations and insults they describe the Mormons as “a pretended religious sect of people” and continue to say, “We believe them deluded fanatics, or weak and designing knaves.”³³

Although Clark does not give direct examples of the different reasons why there was so much anti-Mormon feeling at the time, the whole piece speaks to the idea, as it is designed to attack the heart of Mormonism and discredit its founders. In the closing paragraph of the chapter Clark concluded,

“Let this suffice on this point. And now we have before us the character of this false prophet, and of his three supporters, on whose credibility the fate of the Book of Mormon depends. Not one word of commentary is necessary, after such an exhibition of their worthlessness and vileness; and I shall, therefore, leave it as it is to speak for itself.”³⁴

There is other historical evidence of the anti-Mormonism of the period. Socially the Mormons were disliked because, unlike some denominations who were more accepting of other religions and attempted to spread themselves all over the country, Mormons isolated themselves from non-Mormons. They preferred to live as a self-sustaining community, which regarded other denominations as not only wrong but also inferior. In fact, the early history of Mormonism follows the Mormons as they move from community to community, starting in Palmyra, New York, moving to Kirkland, Ohio, then on to Caldwell County, Missouri, Nauvoo, Illinois, and finally Salt Lake City. Each location is an example of the Mormons operating within a contained community, not wishing to mingle with non-Mormons. The isolationistic policy of Mormonism was a threat politically as well as socially since it meant

³² Parley P. Pratt, *History of the Late Persecution Inflicted by the State of Missouri Upon Mormons* (Detroit: Dawson and Bates, 1839), 1.

³³ Pratt, 1 –2.

³⁴ Clark, 334.

Mormons voted together in a block. As the Mormons would settle into these towns non-Mormons were afraid that the Mormons could dominate the vote and seize political control.³⁵

There were other aspects of Mormonism that non-Mormons disliked. One was the firm stance against slavery Mormons held to. This was also referred to in the declaration by the people of Jackson County, who wrote, “Published in Independence, by the leaders of this sect, there is an article inviting free negroes and mulattoes from other states, to become Mormons, and remove and settle among us.”³⁶ They went on, “We are not prepared to give up our pleasant places and goodly possessions to them; or to receive into the bosom of our families as fit companions for our wives and daughters, the degraded negroes and mulattoes, who are now invited to settle among us.”³⁷

This is interesting as the early nineteenth century in the Northeast was a time of abolition and by 1830 and very few blacks were still slaves.³⁸ However, even though most blacks had been freed they were far from being equal. Blacks had flocked to cities to find work where they were considered by many whites to be a problem because they worked so cheaply. White society was also by no means ready to accept blacks as their equals, which is what the people of Jackson County thought the Mormons were offering. In 1845 blacks went to separate schools from whites, were banned from white churches or, as in even the Quaker churches, had to sit separately.³⁹

Another aspect that upset non-Mormons was the Mormon practice of polygamy or “plural marriage.” While trying to further discredit Joseph Smith and one of the three witnesses, Martin Harris, Clark wrote, “Levi Lewis testifies, that he has heard Smith and

³⁵ Albanes, 107.

³⁶ Pratt, 2.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Murrin, et al., 365.

³⁹ Ibid., 366.

Harris both say that adultery was no crime.”⁴⁰ Polygamy within Mormonism is a subject of large discussion. Now a condemned practice within the Church, its leaders however openly supported it in the earlier years. Introduced by Smith, who claimed that the Lord had sent an angel who commanded him to practice polygamy on threat of death, it is a practice that was continued by Brigham Young, who was Smith’s successor, and John Taylor, who was Young’s successor.⁴¹ As a concept ordained by God himself, Mormons felt obligated to practice polygamy and men who did not were viewed with ridicule as infertile and weak.⁴²

A final fear was the growing control of land that the Mormons were purchasing. In the Jackson County anti-Mormon declaration the people wrote, “They declare openly that their God hath given them this county of land, and that sooner or later, they must and will have possession of our lands for an inheritance.”⁴³

Clark’s letter is not only a strong example of the anti-Mormon sentiment of the time but also opens the door to the many other reasons why non-Mormons both feared and hated the Mormons. It is this hatred, built up in non-Mormons who lived with and around Mormons, that led to the eventual violence surrounding Mormonism and the Mormon War in Missouri.

The anti-Mormonism of the period was by no means just on paper or voiced by opposing preachers. It also involved physical harassment, threats and acts of violence, and battles for property and land. Parley P. Pratt writes of the Jackson County declaration against Mormons as saying,

“We, the undersigned, citizens of Jackson County, believing that an important crisis is at hand, as regards our civil society, in consequence of a pretended religious sect of people, that have settled and are still settling in our

⁴⁰ Clark, 343.

⁴¹ Albanes, 281-282.

⁴² Ibid., 302.

⁴³ Pratt, 2.

county, styling themselves Mormons: and intending as we do to rid our society, peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must.”⁴⁴

The Mormon community made threats of its own and by no means was innocent when it comes to acts of violence. Nevertheless, the Mormon community was so persecuted that it had to move its settlement several times. A final aspect of the early years of Mormonism that John Clark’s chapter exemplifies is the violence surrounding Mormonism and the Mormon War of Missouri.

“There are two sides to the story of the Mormon war in Missouri,”⁴⁵ Clark wrote. He was referring to the war that took place as the culminating event of the struggle between non-Mormons and Mormons in Missouri. Events leading up to this war can explain the violent nature of the struggle.

After moving the Mormon community to Kirkland, Ohio, Joseph Smith claimed to have had revelations on the “City of Zion” and where it should be built.⁴⁶ He said that it should be in the town of Independence in Jackson County, Missouri, and so a large portion of the Mormon community began obediently to settle there.⁴⁷ The existing settlers of Jackson County were unhappy about the arrival of the Mormons. Not only did Mormons talk of eventually buying all the land and displacing the old settlers but they also, in newspaper articles and eventually from Joseph Smith directly, kept announcing and predicting the fast-approaching doomsday.⁴⁸ This only added to the public’s fear of Mormons because, even though they did not believe in the origins of the religion, there was substantial belief in the concept of a coming dooms-day and the millennium to follow.

⁴⁴ Pratt, 1.

⁴⁵ Clark, 338.

⁴⁶ Albanes, 100.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 111.

Finally the old settlers had had enough and in 1833 they invaded Mormon settlement with a multitude of weapons, attacking the Mormons and driving them away.⁴⁹ This was the first but by no means the last act of violence surrounding Mormonism in Missouri.

The Mormons, expelled from Jackson County by force, began to settle in and around the region, mostly in Caldwell and Clay Counties. In 1836 Alexander William Doniphan managed to get Missouri officials to pass a bill allocating Caldwell County, where Mormons had already started building their headquarters at Far West, as the sole place for Mormon settlement.⁵⁰ As the Mormon community in Kirkland, Ohio, disintegrated, more and more Mormons poured into Missouri and began settling outside of Caldwell County. This is where the tensions in Missouri began to build again.

The reason there had been trouble in Kirkland was due to a disagreement between Joseph Smith and what became know as the “dissenters,” a group of church leaders in Kirkland including Joseph Smith’s “Three Witnesses”, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris.⁵¹ Sidney Rigdon gave a speech known as the Salt Sermon, condemning the dissenters and calling for them to be cast out of the community. This sparked the formation of a group of Mormons who called themselves the Danite Band, a secret Mormon society with the goal to drive out the dissenters and generally protect the Mormon community.⁵² In John Clark’s letter he refers to the Danite Band, saying, “The Danite Band, was formed by the members of the Mormon Church, the original object of which was, to drive from the county of Caldwell all who dissented from the Mormon Church.”⁵³ He goes on to write, “A paper was drafted by Sidney Rigdon against the dissenters from Mormonism. And signed by eighty

⁴⁹ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 140.

⁵¹ Ibid., 149.

⁵² Ibid., 151.

⁵³ Clark, 338.

four Mormons.”⁵⁴ This paper demanded that the dissenters leave Missouri and threatened violence if they did not, which shows that even within the Mormon community, violence was prevalent.

Although the Danite Band succeeded in driving away the dissenters it also made, unfortunately for the Mormons, the non-Mormon community uneasy. Their fears of this group of men who were not afraid to use force was confirmed on the 4th of July, 1838, when Sidney Rigdon gave a speech to his people that non-Mormons decided was a threat of war.

He said:

"And that mob that comes on us to disturb us, it shall be between us and them a war of extermination; for we will follow them until the last drop of their blood is spilled; or else they will have to exterminate us, for we will carry the seat of war to their own houses and their own families, and one party or the other shall be utterly destroyed..."⁵⁵

Rigdon's speech sparked a sharp rise in tensions between Mormons and non-Mormons and the situation began to escalate. In Davies County a group of Mormons who arrived in the town of Gallatin to vote on Election Day were met by an angry group of Missourians who refused to let them.⁵⁶ An argument ensued and when a Missourian struck a Mormon a fight between the two parties broke out. This started acts of aggression on both sides. Richard Albanes writes about non-Mormon vigilantes, "In one instance, a gang of fifteen men drove Asahal Lathrop from his home, and for over a week held his sick wife and children hostages," and adds, "The Mormons went on to dispatch raiding parties that scoured the countryside for vigilantes, all along the way, ransacking and torching any non-Mormon cabins they happened to find."⁵⁷ From this is seen that John Clark was correct when he wrote that there were two sides to the war in Missouri. Eventually, on October 27th, Governor of

⁵⁴ Ibid., 340.

⁵⁵ Albanes, 155.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 156.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 158.

Missouri Lilburn Boggs issued his famous “Extermination Order” which called for either the expulsion or extermination of Mormons from Missouri.⁵⁸

The Mormons would eventually be driven from Missouri, with over sixty of their leaders including Smith and Rigdon having been placed under arrest, in reference to which there is Reverend Clark’s mention of the trial on November 12th, 1838. This did not happen before more fierce fighting ensued. Without an order from state officials a group of Missourian militiamen attacked the little town of Haun Hill, and systematically murdered as many Mormons, including children, as they could. Eighteen Mormons were killed and some two-dozen more wounded.⁵⁹

Complete information on the violence that surrounds the early years of Mormonism and the Mormon war in Missouri would exceed the limits of this paper but as introduced by John Clark’s letter, the Mormon War included a large amount of violence from both sides.

John A. Clark’s *Gleanings by the Way* provides considerable insight into northeastern America in the early nineteenth century. Everything recorded in this volume can be opened up to gain more information, and it is in this way that Chapter Thirty-Two, his letter “The Mormon Prophet and His Three Witnesses,” provides important insight into the period. Not only does it depict the early years of Mormonism and the movement known as the Second Great Awakening, but it also refers to many people, places, and events that played key roles in the development of the religion. The letter also reflects the scale of anti-Mormon sentiment of the time, and provides an introduction to the violence surrounding the Mormons and their time in Missouri.

There is definitely more to the story of Mormonism in its early years of development, but it is a story that can be pieced together and combined, from sources like John Clark’s

⁵⁸ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 162.

Gleanings by the Way, to better understand different moments in history. Clark's letters on Mormonism are strong examples. They shed light on the moments surrounding the birth of this religion and should help non-Mormons and Mormons better empathize with each other's opinions and views.

In a world consisting of so many different religions, nationalities, races, and cultures, such an understanding is essential to bridging the gaps and tightening relations. Learning from experience is the essence of humanity, and this knowledge can be gained from the experiences of others as well as our own.

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