

**SOME DISTORTIONS
OF THE
CHRISTIAN
FAITH**

No. 3

*An
Enquiry
into*

Mormonism
or The
Latter Day
Saints

by
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*Published by the Methodist Church
of Australasia*

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THE MORMONS

(Also known as the Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints)

"THE PROPHET OF THE MOST HIGH"

Joseph Smith, born in Sharon, Vermont, U.S.A., in 1805, was the son of a farmer, who found it difficult to discipline his son because of the "fits" to which the boy was often liable. Young Joseph, however, despite little education and unstable health, believed himself called, at the age of fifteen, to be "the prophet of the Most High." He declared that a visitation of God the Father and God the Son had been vouchsafed to him.

He had not belonged to any Church, but had turned to the Bible with an untrained mind and, as is common in such cases, tended to regard the Old Testament as equal in importance to the New.

In 1823 he assured his friends that he had been visited by a glorious messenger from God: "He (the angel) called me by name and said that God had a work for me to do . . . He said there was a book deposited, written upon golden plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Saviour to the ancient inhabitants. Also that there were two stones in silver bows deposited with the plates, and the possession of these stones was what constituted seers in ancient and former times, and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book. . . . While he was conversing with me about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited, and that so clearly and distinctly that I knew the place again when I visited it."

FURTHER "VISITATIONS"

After several visitations from "the angel," on the night of 22nd September, 1827, the "angel of the Lord" delivered the plates into his hands on a hill in the county of Ontario; the said plates being thinner than ordinary tin, and about eight inches long by seven wide. The volume of gold plates was six inches in thickness, and the writing was made by engraved characters in the language known to the Mormons alone as "Reformed Egyptian."

A special instrument was also present, by means of which an unlettered young man like Smith could read this remarkable and hitherto unknown language. This peekstone he called "Urim and Thummim," and by means of the magic spectacles, he produced the BOOK OF MORMON, textbook for the sect, finally concluded in 1829.

Oliver Cowdery, Smith's scribe, wrote a copy, which is still preserved, with all its grammatical errors, but unfortunately for the proof of the authenticity of the story, the original gold plates have vanished, according to Smith's account, because an angel came and took them back to Heaven!

THE BOOK OF MORMON

We must credit Smith with a remarkable imagination, of which his "angel" was a mere figment. His "insight" propagated a belief that the original inhabitants of America were "Jaredites," who had come directly from the Tower of Babel; together with a second race which came from Jerusalem about 600 B.C., being principally descendants of Joseph. Both Jaredites and Israelites were destroyed, but the American Indians are remnants of the second race.

Jesus Christ Himself, according to Smith, had visited the American continent after His Resurrection. "He planted the Gospel here in all its fullness and richness, and power and blessing" (together with apostles, prophets, pastors and evangelists). "The people were

cut off in consequence of their transgressions; that the last of their prophets who existed among them was commanded to write an abridgement of their prophecies, history, etc., and to hide it in the earth, and that it should come forth and be united with the Bible for the accomplishment of the purposes of God in the last days." (Quoted from Smith's own article, *Mormonism*.)

Thus Mormon left this record before America was covered with ignorance, and Smith himself was divinely ordained to recover the lost truth! Moreover, this was to be united with the Bible as a necessary supplement!

And the elusive lost ten tribes of Israel were, of course, the American Indians! How disconcerting for the British Israelites!

GROWTH OF MORMON CHURCH

Subsequently, armed with this remarkable authority, Smith published several books setting forth commandments and doctrines for his believers. Stress is laid on miracles, the gift of tongues, faith healing, an American Zion, a coming Millennium, and the rebirth of the world under Christ's new rule.

One development, which aroused strong opposition, was that of polygamy. Even as late as 1953 police action had to be taken against some Mormons, still practising this custom, despite years of opposition by the legal authorities in the U.S.A., and a change of beliefs about polygamy by the Mormons themselves.

Strife with neighbours led the Mormons to migrate. They were, and are, an industrious people, and once having accepted the authenticity of Smith's revelation, they were able to argue forcibly for their creed. As usual, persecution and argument did not convert the Mormons themselves, but drove them to become more self-sufficient and independent. In Missouri Governor Ford imprisoned Smith and his brother, and in 1844 a mob of 150 men broke into the gaol and shot the two brothers dead. Mormonism was thought defeated, but a new leader arose.

BRIGHAM YOUNG

There was no excuse for the action of the mob, and Smith now became a martyr. Brigham Young was chosen President of the Church in 1844, and led the Mormons to Salt Lake City. They established a remarkably prosperous community in what had been almost virgin desert. The Mormons formed their own State and government, but were not admitted into the United States until 1895, after they had officially given up their practice of polygamy. Thus one of the most offensive aspects of early Mormonism has been officially given up through the pressure of Christians in America.

Before Brigham Young's leadership, the movement developed in numbers, there being 20,000 in Illinois alone. Even England witnessed successful missions by the Mormons as far back as 1837. This missionary enterprise has been continuous, and has spread to many countries, including Australia, where gullible persons have accepted this "new revelation."

Brigham Young is remembered most in the public mind because of the large number of wives he married. By the time of his death in 1877, his capable leadership had not only welded a strong community in Salt Lake City, but the organisation of the Church, and the rule of its people was on a very efficient basis. This organisation into presidents, apostles, high priests, patriarchs, elders, bishops and others still endures.

SOME OF THE DOCTRINES

Joseph Smith lived at a time of intense theological debate. He incorporated many ideas common to other Churches in his doctrine, while asserting claims for himself and his book which cannot be substantiated. "We believe in God, the eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost. We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression. We believe that, through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. We

believe that these ordinances are (1) faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; (2) repentance; (3) baptism by *immersion* for remission of sins; (4) laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. . . . We believe the Bible to be the Word of God, as far as it is translated correctly; *we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.* . . . we believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the ten tribes; that Zion will be built upon this (American) continent."

The distinctive "revelation" of the sect is the Book of Mormon, the author of which is reputed to have been ordained by John the Baptist, "and by Peter, James, and John . . . receiving . . . the keys of heaven with power to seal on earth so that it might be sealed in heaven."

All baptisms since the days of the early apostles are supposed to be invalid by the Mormons, but they kindly open a door for these "lost souls," for a living person of to-day may take the name of some dead person on his lips, and provided he is baptized by a true Mormon priest, having received authority traceable back to Joseph Smith, the soul can be "saved!" "As baptism is essential to the salvation of the living, it is likewise indispensable to the redemption of the dead" (Articles of Faith, Talmage, p. 152).

What a travesty this is of the teaching of Christ and the New Testament! Here is an intolerable conceit, without any foundation in the Bible or in history.

Likewise, what a change from the Christian idea of marriage to that proclaimed in Mormonism! "If any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent; and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then he is justified; he *cannot commit adultery*, for they are given to him. . . ." Orson Pratt, seeking to justify this un-Christian ordinance, wrote: "Celestial marriage opens the way for all women to marry to fulfil the measure of their creation. *The larger the progeny a man has, the greater will be the fullness of his eternal glory.*"

No wonder that, despite the official withdrawal of polygamy from the tenets of the Church, individuals, believing such rubbish, still practise polygamy in parts of the U.S.A.!

THE SOURCE OF "INSPIRATION"

Smith, of course, drew some ideas from the Old Testament, which records pre-Christian periods when polygamy was practised. He did not limit his "inspiration" to Biblical material. In the "wonderful" Book of Mormon, supposedly translated from "Reformed Egyptian," there is a speech by Nephi, who presumably lived before Jesus, which contains quotations, word for word, from the Westminster Confession of Faith, first drawn up in the seventeenth century. The last section of Nephi's speech is a palpable imitation of a Methodist Book of Discipline, which was not produced until the eighteenth century. Also, in the Book of Mormon, supposedly composed by the dead Mormon a few centuries after Christ, we have an exact verbal transcription of Luke 3: 4, and John 1: 26, 27, as given in the Authorized Version of the Bible published first in 1611!

Nephi likewise speaks about finding the ass and the horse in America about 500 B.C. We know that they did not exist in America until introduced by Europeans after 1492. To cap it all, Lehi uses some lines from William Shakespeare. Doubtless the next step will be the claim that Lehi was the real author of Shakespeare's plays!

MENACE OF MORMON MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

Any reasonable person will have read enough by this stage to doubt entirely Mormon inspiration, except insofar as Smith did incorporate some genuine Christian ideas into his system.

The tragedy is that so many people are ignorant of the Christian faith, and fall easy prey to fantastic error. The Mormons are eager missionaries, anxious to justify themselves, and to extend their influence.

To do them justice as individuals, they have built up a strong and prosperous community in Salt Lake City, and their loyal tithing for their Church has shown what can be achieved when people are generous in the support of their faith. People with sounder doctrine, and better history, should also practise their faith by generosity and missionary endeavour. Nevertheless, we do not need to turn the Church into a business, and we certainly do not want people exploited financially. Smith himself ruined thousands by a heartless bank scandal.

From the economic point of view, we may learn something from the hard work and efficiency shown at Salt Lake City; but from the Christian point of view, we cannot regard Mormonism as a true Church of Christ.

To Christians, belief and devotion centre in Jesus. He is first and last. To Mormons, the New Testament, central textbook of the Christian faith, needed the addition of a fake book, through which Jesus is seen as graciously preparing the way for Joseph Smith, himself the chosen one, the so-called "prophet of the Most High," destined to establish the new Jerusalem on earth.

"There is one God, one mediator also between God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2: 5); and we have no need of Joseph Smith or his Book of Mormon, to guide us in adoration and service for Christ.

On the contrary, we must deny the need of an additional Bible to the one we have. We can only regard the Book of Mormon as a spurious work, which, while it incorporates parts of the original Bible, places them in a false and unhistoric context.