

Qx23 – Ludicrous Ideas & Policies Promoted by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) – 3

Dear: Okay, okay... I'll try to pick up the pace. After two chapters, I've now managed to get most of the way through the first three pages of the Book of Mormon (BoM). [☺] For this chapter, in a single sweep, let me see if I can get through all four pages of the "testimonies" in the BoM. [☺]

THE "TESTIMONIES"

These four pages of "testimonies" (following the *Introduction*) were allegedly demanded by God and sworn before him by eleven "witnesses" plus Smith. Notice, Dear, that in total, this number of witnesses sums to a nice, neat twelve, which (by some strange coincidence) is the same as the number of New Testament (NT) "apostles", the number of Old Testament (OT) "Tribes of Israel", and the number of signs of the Zodiac. Isn't that amazing? Surely that's proof enough that the good godie was directing the whole affair. [☺]

Oh – I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that it was all "cooked" by a bunch of con artists. How did you get to be so skeptical and cynical? I wouldn't be surprised if it's from all that horrible stuff about the scientific method with which your terrible grandfather has been polluting your precious mind. Never mind all that scientific stuff; ya just gotta believe; ya just gotta have faith; ya just gotta listen to your heart to learn what's true; ya just gotta... Sorry, Dear.

Anyway, these twelve "testimonies" contain the following claims:

- 1) In *The Testimony of Three Witnesses*, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris claim: "that we... have seen the plates which contain this record...", "that an angel of God came down from heaven and he brought and laid before our eyes", "that we beheld and saw the plates and the engravings thereon..." and that "the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it..."
- 2) In *The Testimony of Eight Witnesses*, five other members of the Whitmer clan (Hiram Page was married to one of the Whitmer daughters) plus three other members of the Smith clan claim: "that Joseph Smith, Jun., the translator of this work has shown unto us the plates... we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon...", and

- 3) In *The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, there's a rambling three-page "testimony" in which Smith informs the reader about multiple visits from an angel, whose name was allegedly Moroni (but elsewhere he says it was the angel Nephi), who eventually told Smith how to find the plates and appropriate translation tools.

ON THE RELIABILITY OF "TESTIMONIES"

In general in the case of witnesses (and in particular in the case of these twelve "witnesses") a critical question is: Are they reliable – both in their reputation for honesty and in their competence to serve as witnesses? A notorious liar or, say, a blind person or someone prone to hallucinations would be an unreliable "eye witness". Further, for all of us knowing something about human nature, then even for competent and usually honest people, we commonly question their reliability if our acceptance of their testimonies would lead to their profit. Thereby, we always place more trust in testimonies not only from competent witnesses known for their honesty but also from witnesses known to be disinterested observers.

For example, consider the following testimony from someone who appears to be a disinterested observer. This testimony was reported in the 1882 pamphlet¹ entitled *Who Wrote The Book of Mormon?* by Robert Patterson, Jr. (the son of the owner of the print shop in Pittsburgh where Solomon Spalding submitted his manuscript for consideration of its publication). The testimony was given by Mrs. R. J. Eichbaum ("the regular clerk" in the Pittsburgh post office), deals with the possibility that Sidney Rigdon could have obtained a copy of Spalding's manuscript (which allegedly was used as the historical framework to which Rigdon's religious ideas were incorporated to form the BoM), and reports that Rigdon was friendly with the printer at the shop where Spalding's manuscript was submitted.

My father, John Johnston, was postmaster of Pittsburgh for about eighteen years, from 1804 to 1822. My husband, William Eichbaum, succeeded him, and was postmaster for about eleven years, from 1822 to 1833. I was born Aug. 23, 1792, and when I became old enough I assisted my father in attending to the post-office, and became familiar with its duties. From 1811 to 1816, I was the regular clerk in the office, assorting, making up, dispatching, opening, and distributing the mails. Pittsburgh was then a small town, and I was well acquainted with all the stated visitors at the office who called regularly for their mails. So meagre at that time were the mails that I could generally tell without looking whether or not there was anything for such persons, though I would usually look in order to satisfy them. I was married

¹ Available at <http://www.solomonspalding.com/docs/1882PatA.htm#pg433b>.

in 1815, and the next year my connection with the office ceased, except during the absences of my husband.

I knew and distinctly remember Robert and Joseph Patterson [the owner's of the publishing house], J. Harrison Lambdin [the printer], Silas Engles, and Sidney Rigdon. I remember Rev. Mr. Spaulding [the expected author of the "historical" part of the BoM] but simply as one who occasionally called to inquire for letters. I remember that there was an evident intimacy between Lambdin and Rigdon. They very often came to the office together. I particularly remember that they would thus come during the hour on Sabbath afternoon when the office was required to be open, and I remember feeling sure that Rev. Mr. Patterson knew nothing of this, or he would have put a stop to it. I do not know what position, if any, Rigdon filled in Patterson's store or printing-office, but am well assured he was frequently, if not constantly, there for a large part of the time when I was clerk in the post-office. I recall Mr. Engles saying that "Rigdon was always hanging around the printing-office." He was connected with the tannery before he became a preacher, though he may have continued the business whilst preaching.

Now, Dear, your first reaction to the above may be that it seems to be a fairly reliable testimony, but I trust that you've learned to be careful – to be skeptical. This postal clerk may have had some hidden agenda: maybe she was vehemently anti-Mormon, maybe she was "in cahoots" with Spaulding's heirs and was promised some portion of any financial settlement with the Mormon Church, maybe... whatever! And no, Dear, I have no information about such possibilities – all I'm trying to do is to remind you to be careful before you accept a testimony from anyone, even from someone who appears to be a disinterested observer, because in reality, they might have some vested interest in your accepting their testimony as "true".

As another example of a testimony from someone who would seem to be a disinterested observer, consider the following quote from the 1977 book² by Davis et al. entitled *Who Really Wrote The Book of Mormon?* (almost the same title as the 1888 book by Patterson, referenced above!):

Dr. Cephas Dodd was Spaulding's physician... and was by his side at his death in 1816. Dodd early declared his knowledge of the subject, and never once through the years wavered in this testimony concerning Rigdon and Spaulding. On June 6, 1831, only a year after the founding of Mormonism, Dr. Dodd received a copy of The Book of Mormon and inscribed its flyleaf with the following terse indictment of Rigdon:

"This work I am convinced by facts related to me by my deceased patient, Solomon Spaulding, has been made from writings of Spaulding, probably by

² Available (at least partially) at <http://thedigitalvoice.com/enigma/wrw/1977DavB.htm>.

Sidney Rigdon, who was suspicioned by Spaulding with purloining his manuscript from the publishing house to which he had taken it; and I am prepared to testify that Spaulding told me that his work was entitled, *The Manuscript Found in the Wilds of Mormon; or Unearthed Records of the Nephites*. From his description of its contents, I fully believe that this Book of Mormon is mainly and wickedly copied from it.”

Similar to your reaction to the postal clerk’s testimony (i.e., the first testimony above), your first thought about this testimony from Spaulding’s doctor may be that there’s a “fair probability” (maybe in the range of 50 – 90%, depending on your natural inclination to be skeptical!) that this Dr. Dodd may be a reliable, disinterested observer and, therefore, that his testimony could be trusted. It’s hard to imagine why he would write what he did on his own copy of the BoM (i.e., apparently he didn’t inform anyone about his assessment) for any other reason than that he wanted his perception of “the truth” to be recorded.

In the case of the above testimony by “Dr. Dodd, however, there are claims that his “testimony” is a total fraud, i.e., a forgery! Now, Dear, I haven’t taken the time (and don’t intend to take the time!) to investigate such claims and counterclaims. If you want to dig into details, you may want to start by reading Dale R. Broadhurt’s “Review of Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s *Mormon & Anti-Mormon Forgeries* in the Oct. 1989 issue of *The Salt Lake City Messenger*.” Here, I’ll quote just a little from Broadhurt’s detailed review.³

The same text [i.e., of Dr. Dodd’s “testimony”] was reprinted by Charles A. Shook, in 1914, but Shook, too, fails to tell where, when and how this alleged fly-leaf testimony was obtained. On pages 1086–88 of their *Spaulding Enigma* CD-ROM [reference provided], the authors [the Tanners] effectively demonstrate that the purported 1831 Dodd note is a forgery, probably made during the first years of the 20th Century. In support of this conclusion they cite a letter written by Dr. Dodd to Col. Thomas Ringland, Mar. 2, 1857, in which Dodd says he has “no knowledge” on the assertion of Solomon Spaulding having written the Book of Mormon, “which would be of any avail.”

So, Dear, even in the case of apparently disinterested witnesses, be careful: they might be incompetent witnesses, they might not be disinterested, and what’s offered as their “testimony” might be a fraud!

³ Available at <http://sidneyrigdon.com/wht/WhitRev1.htm>.

ON THE RELIABILITY OF THE MORMON “WITNESSES”

And so, with that introduction out of the way, now consider the “testimonies” of the twelve witnesses – as given in the BoM. First, Dear, notice that not one of the twelve (of course including Smith) was an otherwise disinterested observer: all profited from their testimonies (both financially and from gaining power) at the expense of those who accepted their testimonies as “true”. In particular, Smith went from a penniless “money digger” to being called “the American Muhammad”, complete with umpteen wives. Second is a huge number of damning assessments of the characters of every one of the witnesses – and many of these condemnations are not by critics of Mormonism but by subsequent Mormon leaders!

Unfortunately, however, it would take me “umpteen” pages to justify the preceding sentence. If you want to examine character assessments of these twelve witnesses (if you have hundreds of hours with nothing better to do!), then search on the internet yourself or go directly to sites such as:

<http://www.exmormon.org/file9.htm>

<http://www.irr.org/mit/bomwit2.html>

<http://www.bible.ca/mor-witness-book.htm>

<http://www.xmission.com/~country/chngwrlld/chap5a.htm>

http://www.calvarytucson.org/LDS_BoM_Credibility.htm#Section5.

Here, I’ll list just a half-dozen summary comments with some illustrations that I found particularly interesting.

1) Maybe it’s a rather minor point, Dear, but (as you can find on the internet) in the 1830 version of the BoM, *The Testimony of Eight Witnesses* states “...that Joseph Smith, Jr., the Author and Proprietor of this work...”, whereas in the most recent edition of the BoM, this wording in this *Testimony* has been changed to “...that Joseph Smith, Jun., the translator of this work...” And, Dear, in case no one ever told you, let me point out: any change to any testimony that isn’t at least initialed by all participants invalidates the testimony – not to dwell on the fact that it’s illegal to change the text of any testimony after it’s been sworn to and signed!

2) More significantly, all the witnesses except Martin Harris were members of the Smith and Whitmer families (Hiram Page married one of the Whitmer daughters, Oliver Cowdery was Joseph Smith’s second cousin, began

boarding with the Smith family in 1828, apparently met David Whitmer in 1828, and in 1832 married another of the Whitmer daughters), both these families were apparently notorious in their neighborhoods (as I'll show you immediately below) for being superstitious “money diggers”, conning simpleton farmers into digging for buried treasures, and all members of both families (plus Martin Harris) “struck it rich” with Mormonism.

Illustrative of opinions about the reliability of these twelve “witnesses” are the following 1833 “declarations” by New York residents who knew them. Both of these declarations (and more that are similar) are given in Howe's 1834 book *Mormonism Unveiled* (already referenced).

We, the undersigned, being personally acquainted with the family of Joseph Smith, sen., with whom the celebrated Gold Bible, so called, originated, state: that they were not only a lazy, indolent set of men, but also intemperate; and their word was not to be depended upon; and that we are truly glad to dispense with their society.

Signed on 3 November 1833 by 11 residents of Manchester, NY.

We, the undersigned, have been acquainted with the Smith family, for a number of years, while they resided near this place, and we have no hesitation in saying, that we consider them destitute of that moral character, which ought to entitle them to the confidence of any community. They were particularly famous for visionary projects, spent much of their time in digging for money which they pretended was hid in the earth; and to this day, large excavations may be seen in the earth, not far from their residence, they used to spend their time in digging for hidden treasures. Joseph Smith, Senior, and his son Joseph, were in particular, considered entirely destitute of moral character, and addicted to vicious habits.

Martin Harris was a man who had acquired a handsome property, and in matters of business his word was considered good; but on moral and religious subjects, he was perfectly visionary – sometimes advocating one sentiment, and sometimes another. And in reference to all with whom we were acquainted, that have embraced Mormonism from this neighborhood, we are compeled to say, were very visionary, and most of them destitute of moral character, and without influence in this community; and this may account why they were permitted to go on with their impositions undisturbed. It was not supposed that any of them were possessed of sufficient character or influence to make any one believe their book or their sentiments, and we know not of a single individual in this vicinity that puts the least confidence in their pretended revelations.

Signed on 4 December 1833 by 51 residents of Palmyra, NY.

I find such declarations to be amazing and their aftermaths to be puzzling. From Mormon publications of the time, it's clear that the Smith and Whitmer families and Martin Harris were aware of Howe's book. If the

above declarations were fabricated (i.e., fraudulent), then why didn't the offended parties sue the book's author and publisher, Howe (e.g., for "defamation of character")? If the above declarations weren't fabricated and if Smith *et al.* felt that they had been defamed by their neighbors, then why didn't they sue the people who made such statements? And with the wide availability of such unchallenged declarations that would be expected to be severely damaging to the credibility of the BoM witnesses, then why would anyone who could read ever become a Mormon?! Yah, Dear, I know: ya just gotta believe...

3) The three principal witnesses (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris), who along with Smith claimed that "an angel of God" was kind enough to drop in to show them "the engravings which are upon the plates", were subsequently condemned not just by neighbors but by LDS Church leaders (including "profit Joe", himself). To illustrate, I'll quote from the 1902 book *The Story of the Mormons* by W.A. Linn (already referenced), to which I've added the notes in "square brackets". Someone else (I assume it was Linn) added the notes in "squiggly braces", {...}.

Smith thus referred to him [Martin Harris] in the *Elders' Journal*, July, 1837, one of his publications in Ohio: "There are negroes who wear white skins as well as black ones... and others who acted as lackeys, such as Martin Harris..." [Recall that Smith was a white-supremacist racist.]

[In Missouri] The prophet [Joe] employed a good deal of his time in jail in writing long epistles to the church... In one of his letters to the church he thus speaks of some of his recent allies, "This poor man {W. W. Phelps}, who professes to be much of a prophet, has no other dumb ass to ride but David Whitmer..."

On April 11 [1838], Elder Bronson presented nine charges against Oliver Cowdery to the High Council, which promptly found him guilty of six of them, viz. urging vexatious lawsuits against the brethren, accusing the prophet [i.e., Joe, Jr.] of adultery [which turned out to be true], not attending meeting, returning to the practice of law "for the sake of filthy lucre" [i.e., money – although why such a charge would be grounds for dismissal I haven't a clue – when that's what they were all after!], "disgracing the church by being connected with the bogus {counterfeiting} business, retaining notes after they had been paid", and generally "forsaking the cause of God." On this finding he was expelled from the church. Two days later David Whitmer was found guilty of unchristianlike conduct and defaming the prophet, and was expelled...

By the time Smith took his final departure to Missouri, Cowdery and David and John Whitmer had lost caste entirely, and in June, 1838, they fled to escape the Danites [a Mormon secret "police", similar to the Nazi's Gestapo and Moses' murdering

henchmen] at Far West [Missouri]. The letter of warning addressed to them and signed by more than eighty Mormons, giving them three days in which to depart, contained the following accusations:

Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Lyman E. Johnson, united with a gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars and blacklegs of the deepest dye, to deceive, cheat and defraud the Saints out of their property...

Which, let me add, Dear, is quite amazing: how could Smith approve expelling a “Saint” for deceiving, cheating, and defrauding people out of their property, when...? I mean... Duh.

4) Character assessments of specific witnesses given by non-Mormons were similar. I’ll show you some examples by again quoting from Howe’s 1834 book (already referenced). In a few places, I’ve added some notes in square brackets and italicized some phrases to emphasize them.

(i) The undated (but presumably 1833) testimony of Henry Harris (no relation to Martin Harris):

I, Henry Harris, do state that I became acquainted with the family of Joseph Smith, Sen. about the year 1820, in the town of Manchester, N. York. They were a family that labored very little – the chief they did, was to dig for money. Joseph Smith, Jr. the pretended Prophet, used to pretend to tell fortunes; he had a stone which he used to put in his hat, by means of which he professed to tell people’s fortunes.

Joseph Smith, Jr., Martin Harris and others, used to meet together in private, a while before the gold plates were found, and were familiarly known by the name of the “Gold Bible Company.” They were regarded by the community in which they lived, as a lying and indolent set of men and no confidence could be placed in them.

The character of Joseph Smith, Jr. for truth and veracity was such, that I would not believe him under oath. I was once on a jury before a Justice’s Court and the Jury could not, and did not, believe his testimony to be true. After he pretended to have found the gold plates, I had a conversation with him, and asked him where he found them and how he come to know where they were. He said he had a revelation from God that told him they were hid in a certain hill and he looked in his stone and saw them in the place of deposit; that an angel appeared, and told him he could not get the plates until he was married, and that when he saw the woman that was to be his wife, he should know her, and she would know him. He then went to Pennsylvania, got his wife, and they both went together and got the gold plates – he said it was revealed to him, that no one must see the plates but himself and wife. [Who never reported seeing them.] I then asked him what letters were engraved on them, he said italic letters written in an unknown language, and that he had copied some of the words and sent them to Dr. Mitchell and Professor Anthon of New York. By looking on the

plates he said he could not understand the words, but it was made known to him that he was the person that must translate them, and on looking through the stone was enabled to translate.

(ii) Testimony of Isaac Hale, father of Emma (Hale) Smith, father-in-law of Joseph Smith, Jr.:

About this time, Martin Harris made his appearance upon the stage; and Smith began to interpret the characters or hieroglyphics which he said were engraven upon the plates, while Harris wrote down the interpretation. It was said, that Harris wrote down one hundred and sixteen pages, and lost them. Soon after this happened, Martin Harris informed me that he must have a greater witness, and said that he had talked with Joseph about it – Joseph informed him that he could not, or durst not show him the plates, but that he (Joseph) would go into the woods where the Book of Plates was, and that after he came back, Harris should follow his track in the snow, and find the Book, and examine it for himself. Harris informed me afterwards, that he followed Smith's directions, and could not find the Plates, and was still dissatisfied.

The next day after this happened, I went to the house where Joseph Smith Jr., lived, and where he and Harris were engaged in their translation of the Book. Each of them had a written piece of paper which they were comparing, and some of the words were "my servant seeketh a greater witness, but no greater witness can be given him." There was also something said about "three that were to see the thing" – meaning I supposed, the Book of Plates, and that "if the three did not go exactly according to the orders, the thing would be taken from them." I enquired whose words they were, and was informed by Joseph or Emma [Smith's wife and Harris' daughter] (I rather think it was the former [i.e., Joseph Smith]) that they were the words of Jesus Christ. I told them, that I considered the whole of it a delusion, and advised them to abandon it. The manner in which he pretended to read and interpret, was the same as when he looked for the money-diggers, with the stone in his hat, and his hat over his face, while the Book of Plates were at the same time hid in the woods!

After this, Martin Harris went away, and Oliver Cowdery came and wrote for Smith, while he interpreted as above described. This is the same Oliver Cowdery, whose name may be found in the Book of Mormon. Cowdery continued a scribe for Smith until the Book of Mormon was completed as I supposed and understood.

Joseph Smith Jr. resided near me for some time after this, and I had a good opportunity of becoming acquainted with him, and somewhat acquainted with his associates, and I conscientiously believe from the facts I have detailed, and from many other circumstances, which I do not deem it necessary to relate, that *the whole "Book of Mormon" (so called) is a silly fabrication of falsehood and wickedness, got up for speculation, and with a design to dupe the credulous and unwary – and in order that its fabricators may live upon the spoils of those who swallow the deception.*

Affirmed to and subscribed before me, March 20th, 1834.

CHARLES DIMON, J. Peace. State of Pennsylvania, Susquehanna County

We, the subscribers, associate Judges of the Court of Common Pleas, in and for said county, do certify that we have been many years personally acquainted with Isaac Hale, of Harmony township in this county, who has attested the foregoing statement; and that he is a man of excellent moral character, and of undoubted veracity. Witness our hands.

WILLIAM THOMPSON.

DAVIS DIMOCK.

I hope, Dear, that should you ever have a father-in-law, he won't have cause to write a similar statement about your writings, i.e., "a silly fabrication of falsehood and wickedness, got up for speculation, and with a design to dupe the credulous and unwary – and in order that its fabricators may live upon the spoils of those who swallow the deception"!

5) Whereas Martin Harris was the only "witness" who wasn't related by blood or marriage to the Smith and Whitmer families and whereas Harris was the first (of many!) who Smith managed to swindle money from, to promote the hoax, the following additional information (again from Howe's book) seems especially relevant.

(i) From the letters⁴ by Ezra Booth, who early joined and then quit the Mormons.

Joseph Smith, Jun., Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris, may be considered as the principals in this work; and let Martin Harris tell the story, and he is the most conspicuous of the four. He informed me, that he went to the place where Joseph resided, and Joseph had given it up, on account of the opposition of his wife and others; but he told Joseph. *"I have not come down here for nothing, and we will go on with it."* Martin Harris is what may be called a great talker, and extravagant boaster; so much so, that he renders himself disagreeable to many of his society. The money he has expended, and the great things he has done, form a considerable topic of his conversation; he understands all prophecies, and knows every thing by the spirit, and he can silence almost any opposer by talking faster, and louder than he can or by telling him, *"I know every thing and you know nothing: I am a wise man and you are a fool..."*

⁴ Copies are available at, e.g., http://www.saintswithouthalos.com/dirs/d_booth.phtml, at <http://www.solomonspalding.com/NEWSP/HOWE/PTeleIdx.htm>, and in Howe's book.

(ii) The 1833 testimony of G.W. Stoddard (from Howe's book):

Having been called upon to state a few facts which are material to the characters of some of the leaders of the Mormon sect, I will do so in a concise and plain manner. I have been acquainted with Martin Harris, about thirty years. As a farmer, he was industrious and enterprising, so much so, that he had (previous to his going into the Gold Bible speculation) accumulated, in real estate, some eight or ten thousand dollars. Although he possessed wealth, his moral and religious character was such, as not to entitle him to respect among his neighbors. He was fretful, peevish and quarrelsome, not only in the neighborhood, but in his family. He was known to frequently abuse his wife, by whipping her, kicking her out of bed and turning her out of doors &c. Yet he was a public professor of some religion. He was first an orthodox Quaker, then a Universalist, next a Restorationer, then a Baptist, next a Presbyterian, and then a Mormon. By his willingness to become all things unto all men, he has attained a high standing among his Mormon brethren. The Smith family never made any pretensions to respectability.

(iii) The 1833 testimony of Lucy Harris, wife of Martin Harris (from Howe's book):

When he [her husband, Martin Harris] found out that I was going to Mr. Putnam's, in Marion, he said he was going too, but they had sent for him to pay them a visit. On arriving at Mr. Putnam's, I asked them if they had sent for Mr. Harris; they replied, they knew nothing about it; he, however, came in the evening. Mrs. Putnam told him never to strike or abuse me any more; he then denied ever striking me; she was however convinced that he lied, as the marks of his beating me were plain to be seen, and remained more than two weeks. Whether the Mormon religion be true or false, I leave the world to judge, for its effects upon Martin Harris have been to make him more cross, turbulent and abusive to me. His whole object was to make money by it. I will give one circumstance in proof of it. *One day, while at Peter Harris' house, I told him he had better leave the company of the Smiths, as their religion was false; to which he replied, if you would let me alone, I could make money by it.*

(iv) Testimony of Abigail Harris, who seems to have been Peter Harris' wife (and therefore Martin Harris' sister-in-law), also from Howe's book:

In the second month following, Martin Harris and his wife [Lucy] were at my house. In conversation about Mormonites, she observed, that she wished her husband would quit them, as she believed it was all false and delusion. To which I heard Mr. Harris reply: *"What if it is a lie; if you will let me alone I will make money out of it!"* I was both an eye and an ear witness of what has been stated above, which is now fresh in my memory, and I give it to the world for the good of mankind. I speak the truth and lie not, God bearing me witness.

(v) Finally re. Harris, consider the following from the 1902 book by W.A. Linn, already referenced.

Harris's natural shrewdness in a measure overcame his fanaticism, and he continued to press Smith for a sight of the plates. Smith thereupon made one of the first uses of those "revelations" which played so important a part in his future career, and he announced one (*Section 5, Doctrine and Covenants*), in which "I, the Lord" declared to Smith that the latter had entered into a covenant with Him not to show the plates to any one except as the Lord commanded him. Harris finally demanded of Smith at least a specimen of the writing on the plates for submission to experts in such subjects. As Harris was the only man of means interested in this scheme of publication, Joe supplied him with a paper containing some characters which he said were copied from one of the plates. This paper increased Harris's belief in the reality of Joe's discovery, but he sought further advice before opening his purse. Dr. Clark describes a call Harris made on him early one morning, greatly excited, requesting a private interview. On hearing his story, Dr. Clark advised him that the scheme was a hoax, devised to extort money from him, but Harris showed the slip of paper containing the mysterious characters, and was not to be persuaded.

Seeking confirmation, however, Harris made a trip to New York City in order to submit the characters to experts there. Among others, he called on Professor Charles Anthon. His interview with Professor Anthon has been a cause of many and conflicting statements, some Mormons misrepresenting it for their own purposes and others explaining away the professor's accounts of it. The following statement was written by Professor Anthon in reply to an inquiry by E. D. Howe:

NEW YORK, February 17, 1834.

DEAR SIR: I received your favor of the 9th, and lose no time in making a reply. The whole story about my pronouncing the Mormon inscription to be "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics" is perfectly false. Some years ago a plain, apparently simple-hearted farmer called on me with a note from Dr. Mitchell, of our city, now dead, requesting me to decypher, if possible, the paper which the farmer would hand me, and which Dr. M. confessed he had been unable to understand. Upon examining the paper in question, I soon came to the conclusion that it was all a trick – perhaps a hoax.

When I asked the person who brought it how he obtained the writing, he gave me, as far as I can recollect, the following account: A "gold book" consisting of a number of plates fastened together in the shape of a book by wires of the same metal, had been dug up in the northern part of the state of New York, and along with the book an enormous pair of "spectacles"! These spectacles were so large that, if a person attempted to look through them, his two eyes would have to be turned toward one of the glasses merely, the spectacles in question being altogether too large for the breadth of the human face. Whoever examined the plates through the spectacles, was enabled, not only to read them, but fully to

understand their meaning. All this knowledge, however, was confined to a young man who had the trunk containing the book and spectacles in his sole possession. This young man was placed behind a curtain in the garret of a farmhouse, and being thus concealed from view, put on the spectacles occasionally, or rather, looked through one of the glasses, decyphered the characters in the book, and, having committed some of them to paper, handed copies from behind the curtain to those who stood on the outside. Not a word, however, was said about the plates being decyphered “by the gift of God.” Everything in this way was effected by the large pair of spectacles.

The farmer added that he had been requested to contribute a sum of money toward the publication of the “golden book,” the contents of which would, as he had been assured, produce an entire change in the world, and save it from ruin. So urgent had been these solicitations, that he intended selling his farm, and handing over the amount received to those who wished to publish the plates. As a last precautionary step, however, he had resolved to come to New York, and obtain the opinion of the learned about the meaning of the paper which he had brought with him, and which had been given him as part of the contents of the book, although no translation had been furnished at the time by the young man with the spectacles.

On hearing this odd story, I changed my opinion about the paper, and, instead of viewing it any longer as a hoax upon the learned, I began to regard it as a part of a scheme to cheat the farmer of his money, and I communicated my suspicions to him, warning him to beware of rogues. He requested an opinion from me in writing, which, of course, I declined giving, and he then took his leave, carrying his paper with him.

This paper was in fact a singular scrawl. It consisted of all kinds of crooked characters, disposed in columns, and had evidently been prepared by some person who had before him at the time a book containing various alphabets. Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses and flourishes, Roman letters inverted, or placed sideways, were arranged and placed in perpendicular columns; and the whole ended in a rude delineation of a circle, divided into various compartments, decked with various strange marks, and evidently copied after the Mexican Calendar, given by Humbolt, but copied in such a way as not to betray the source whence it was derived. I am thus particular as to the contents of the paper, inasmuch as I have frequently conversed with my friends on the subject since the Mormonite excitement began, and well remember that the paper contained anything else but “Egyptian Hieroglyphics.”

Some time after, the farmer paid me a second visit. He brought with him the golden book in print, and offered it to me for sale. I declined purchasing. He then asked permission to leave the book with me for examination. I declined receiving it, although his manner was strangely urgent. I adverted once more to the roguery which had been, in my opinion, practised upon him, and asked him what had

become of the gold plates. He informed me that they were in a trunk with the large pair of spectacles. I advised him to go to a magistrate, and have the trunk examined. He said “the curse of God” would come upon him should he do this. On my pressing him, however, to pursue the course which I had recommended, he told me he would open the trunk if I would take “the curse of God” upon myself. I replied I would do so with the greatest willingness, and would incur every risk of that nature provided I could only extricate him from the grasp of the rogues. He then left me.

I have thus given you a full statement of all that I know respecting the origin of Mormonism, and must beg you, as a personal favor, to publish this letter immediately, should you find my name mentioned again by these wretched fanatics.

Yours respectfully,

CHARLES ANTHON.

John D. Lee, in his *Mormonism Unveiled*, mentions the generally used excuse of the Mormons for the professor’s failure to translate the writing, namely, that Anthon told Harris that “they were written in a sealed language, unknown to the present age.” Smith, in his autobiography, quotes Harris’s account of his interview as follows:

I went to New York City and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof, to Prof. Anthon, a man quite celebrated for his literary attainments. Prof. Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic, and he said they were the true characters.

Harris declared that the professor gave him a certificate to this effect, but took it back and tore it up when told that an angel of God had revealed the plates to Joe, saying that “there were no such things as ministering angels.” This account by Harris of his interview with Professor Anthon will assist the reader in estimating the value of Harris’s future testimony as to the existence of the plates.

6) Many of the witnesses admitted that they saw the plates, angels, etc., only in their imagination, and several of them eventually abandoned the LDS church. To illustrate, I’ll first quote from “Ezra Booth’s Third Letter”:⁵

You have probably read the testimony of the three witnesses appended to the Book of Mormon. These witnesses testify that an angel appeared to them, and presented them

⁵ As already mentioned, Booth’s letters are available at, e.g., http://www.saintswithouthalos.com/dirs/d_booth.phtml, at <http://www.solomonspalding.com/NEWSP/HOWE/PTeleIdx.htm>, and in Howe’s book.

the golden plates, and the voice of God declared it to be a divine record. To this they frequently testify, in the presence of large congregations. When in Missouri, I had an opportunity to examine a commandment given to these witnesses, previous to their seeing the plates. They were informed that they should see and hear these things by faith, and then they should testify to the world, as though they had seen and heard, as I see a man, and hear his voice: but after all, it amounts simply to this – that by faith or imagination, they saw the plates and the angel, and by faith or imagination they heard the voice of the Lord.

(ii) The following was written by an unknown “ex-mormon” who submitted his assessment to <http://www.exmormon.org/file9.htm>.

[A]ccording to their own testimonies, all three witnesses [i.e., the first three witnesses] describe a mystical, visionary, almost dreamlike experience in which they claim they saw an angel with the gold plates. And, contrary to the LDS church’s portrayal, David Whitmer is the only one who saw the plates for the first time that day in the woods, since Oliver and Martin had apparently already seen them in a vision before that day. According to his own testimony, Martin Harris didn’t see the angel with plates until he was alone in the woods three days later. This does not appear to be the factual, unquestionably objective event the Mormon church often portrays it to be.

The testimony of the eight other witnesses, who claimed they handled actual plates, also has problems in several areas. The Mormon church always pictures all eight of them standing together in the woods, with Joseph showing them the plates. But according to the testimony of John Whitmer who was one of the eight witnesses, Joseph showed them to four people at one time in his house, and then later to four other people (*Deseret Evening News*, 6 August 1878, Letter to the Editor from P. Wilhelm Poulson, M.D., typed transcript, p. 2). It is notable that these eight men fall naturally into two groups of four. The first group is comprised of four brothers of David Whitmer, who himself was one of the three witnesses: Christian, Jacob, Peter jun., and John Whitmer. The second four are Joseph Smith’s father, Joseph’s two brothers (Hyrum and Samuel) and Hiram Page, who was married to the Whitmer’s sister, Catherine. Another sister, Elizabeth, married Oliver Cowdery. So, all the witnesses, except Martin Harris, were closely related to one another.

Another significant historical point regarding the eight witnesses comes from a letter dated April 15, 1838. It was written by a former Mormon leader named Stephen Burnett. In that letter, Burnett told how he heard Martin Harris state in public that Harris never saw the plates with his natural eyes but only in vision or imagination, and the same was true for Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer. Martin Harris went on to say that the eight witnesses never actually saw the plates either, and therefore, were hesitant to sign the statement, but were persuaded to do so...

One of the problems with relying on the Witnesses for the authenticity of Mormonism is the testimony of David Whitmer given later in life. In his *Address to All Believers in Christ*, page 27, Whitmer declares:

If you believe my testimony to the Book of Mormon; if you believe that God spake to us three witnesses by his own voice, then I tell you that in June, 1838, God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens, and told me to “separate myself from among the Latter-day Saints, for as they sought to do unto me, so should it be done unto them.” In the spring of 1838, the heads of the church and many of the members had gone deep into error and blindness. I had been striving with them for a long time to show them the errors into which they were drifting, and for my labors I received only persecutions.

This quote creates a quandary. If we accept Whitmer’s testimony regarding his experience with the angel and the gold plates, then we must also accept his testimony that God also declared the current Mormon church is in a fallen state. To disavow the revelation he received stating that the Mormon church since 1838 has “gone deep into error and blindness” means we must hold as suspect his testimony to the Book of Mormon. Whitmer inseparably links the two events...

Even if the majority of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon did not deny their testimony of the book itself, this does little to support Mormonism today. Current Mormon doctrine on the nature of God, the priesthood, use of temples, baptism for the dead, and men becoming gods, is nowhere contained in the Book of Mormon. By 1847 not a single one of the surviving eleven witnesses was part of the Mormon church. Five of these witnesses joined The Church of Christ started by William McLellin, and Oliver Cowdery indicated he was supportive of this group, though he never joined. (D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy – Origins of Power*, Signature Books, 1994, p. 188). If these men were alive today, they would be considered apostates who had turned their back on the Spirit of God. They would be cut off from the LDS church and condemned to outer darkness, regardless of whether or not they still believed in the Book of Mormon.

What are the facts? Eleven men claimed to witness the existence of plates they believed were the source for the Book of Mormon. Three of these men admitted the experience was subjective and visionary. Each of the first three witnesses saw the plates in a vision for the first time in a different place and time. The other eight witnesses were closely related to Joseph Smith either by blood or marriage. Only three of them claimed to see and handle that which had the appearance of being plates of gold, and could testify Joseph did have something that resembled plates with etchings after signing their name to the testimony document. Many of these witnesses left Joseph Smith and the organization that he started, believing at best that he was a fallen and false prophet. Joseph Smith himself, called into question the general character and reliability of several of these men. This, in spite of the fact that they were close friends and family of Joseph Smith.

These historical facts highlight another thread of Mormon history that has been misrepresented by LDS Church leaders. The witnesses' testimonies as a whole are presented as objective, solid, and irrefutable, but upon close examination are seen to be subjective, ambiguous and, at times, contradictory. The traditional portrayal of a tightly woven story of Mormon origins is slowly being unraveled by the historical evidence, much of which is now being compiled and published within the Mormon community itself.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SOURCE OF SMITH'S TESTIMONY

Now, Dear, turning to Smith's three-page "Testimony" given in the BoM, it has unsurprisingly resulted in a flood of criticism, especially dealing with his background as a con artist, his lies, and his ruthless drive for power. If you're interested, you can explore such criticism by yourself. I wouldn't be surprised if you could find a hundred books written on the subject and thousands of web pages. Here, I plan to mention only three aspects of such criticism, aspects that maybe others haven't given so much attention as may be appropriate.

i) What Was the Source of Smith's Testimony?

The similarity between a part of Smith's "testimony" and what Spalding wrote seems especially revealing. Thus below, Dear, first is Smith's description (given in his "Testimony" in the BoM) of how he was finally led to the plates.

Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario county, New York, stands a hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood. On the west side of this hill, not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. This stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges [Rather similar to one of your classic stones!], so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth. [Joseph: Does the reader really need all this detail?!] Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked in and there indeed did I behold the plates...

And now, Dear, for contrast to Smith's description, consider the following quote from the *Introduction* to the Solomon Spalding unfinished story that has been found (probably called *Manuscript Story*).⁶ And let me remind you, Dear (and if it interests you, let me encourage you to explore further details on the internet), that witnesses state Spalding used this story

⁶ Available at <http://www.angelfire.com/az2/arizonadry/truth/spalding.html>.

(*Manuscript Story*) as a draft of another book, possibly called *Manuscript Found* but possibly called *The Book of Mormon* (which he set in earlier times, which he read to neighbors as he wrote it, and which he delivered to the print shop where Rigdon had access). Yet, I wouldn't be surprised if the *Introduction to Manuscript Found* was similar to the *Introduction to Manuscript Story*, in which you can read the following totally (and by the author an admittedly!) fictitious account [in which I've made no spelling or other corrections]:

Near the west bank of the Coneaught River there are the remains of an ancient fort. As I was walking and forming various conjectures respecting the character, situation, & numbers of those people who far exceeded the present Indians in works of art and ingenuity, I hapned to tread on a flat stone. This was at a small distance from the fort, & it lay on the top of a small mound of Earth exactly horizontal. The face of it had a singular appearance. I discovered a number of characters which appeared to me to be letters, but so much effaced by the ravages of time, that I could not read the inscription. With the assistance of a leaver I raised the stone. But you may easily conjecture my astonishment when I discovered that its ends and sides rested on stones & that it was designed as a cover to an artificial Cave. I found by examining that its sides were lined with stones built in a connical form with - - - - down, & that it was about eight feet deep. Determined to investigate the design of this extraordinary work of antiquity, I prepared myself with necessary requisites for that purpose and decended to the Bottom of the Cave. Observing one side to be perpendicular nearly three feet from the bottom, I began to inspect that part with accuracy. Here I noticed a big flat stone fixed in the form of a doar. I immediately tore it down and Lo, a cavity within the wall presented itself it being about three feet in diamiter from side to side and about two feet high. Within this cavity I found an earthen Box with a cover which shut it perfectly tite. The Box was two feet in length one & half in breadth & one & three inches in diameter. My mind filled with awful sensations which crowded fast upon me would hardly permit my hands to remove this venerable deposit, but curiosity soon gained the assendancy & the box was taken & raised to open it. When I had removed the Cover I found that it contained twenty-eight rolls of parchment -- & -- that when - - - appeared to be manuscripts...

I trust, Dear, that you're struck by the similarity between Spalding's fictional account of how he found his manuscript and Smith's "testimony" of how he found the original of the Book of Mormon!

Actually, in his book⁷ *SIDNEY RIGDON, A Portrait of Religious Excess*, Richard S. Van Wagoner suggested a source even of Spalding's account:

⁷ Available at <http://sidneyrigdon.com/RigHist/RigHist2.htm>.

If Spalding's and Smith's recountings have a common antecedent, it seems to be the Masonic *Legend of Enoch*. In this saga, Enoch, the seventh patriarch, the son of Jared, and the great-grandfather of Noah, according to Masonic tradition, became disgusted with wickedness surrounding him. Fleeing to the "solitude and secrecy of Mount Moriah" he became engaged in prayer and contemplation. Here the Shekinah (sacred presence) appeared to him with instructions to preserve the wisdom of the antediluvians to their posterity. He then made a gold plate and engraved in characters the true, ineffable name of Deity. The plate was then placed in a specially prepared subterranean vault, along with other treasure, and covered with a stone door. Enoch was then only allowed to visit the site once a year. After his death all knowledge of this sacred treasure was lost. Years later when King Solomon and his masons were excavating in Jerusalem to build the great temple they discovered the treasure trove. Hiram Abif (also Abiff), a widow's son, was killed defending the spot. Solomon's temple received these treasures, including the gold plate and the Urim and Thummin...

And I trust that you know, Dear, that both Joe-Jr.'s father and older brother were Masons, with his father reaching the rank of "Master Mason" in 1818.

(ii) What Motivated Smith and Rigdon?

A second aspect of criticisms of Smith's BoM testimony that doesn't seem to have received so much attention as might be appropriate is to address the following as-far-as-I-know unanswered questions. After Smith allegedly "translated" the BoM from "Reformed Egyptian" (a nonexistent language!), why did he (or Rigdon) proceed to continue such "translations" (to yield the *Book of Moses*, *The Book of Abraham*, etc., contained in *The Pearl of Great Price* = PGP)? What were their motivations? In the case of *The Book of Abraham* (BoA), in particular, was Smith's motive vanity: to show that not only Rigdon but also he could produce "divine scripture"?

Now, Dear, I plan never to try to answer such questions. Thank you very much, but I feel that I have more important things to do with my limited time remaining – e.g., almost anything! Yet, because they might help you understand the junk in which you've been indoctrinated, I'll provide some speculations and a little evidence to support them, which maybe you might decide are worth investigating (if you're having trouble ridding your mind of Mormon pollution).

If you will have a look at *The Pearl of Great Price* (PGP), you'll see that it claims to be "a selection from the revelations, translations, and narrations of Joseph Smith..." It contains *The Book of Moses* (BoMo), *The Book of Abraham* (BoA), three "Facsimiles" (or papyri from which Smith allegedly

derived the BoA), *Joseph Smith – Matthew*, *Joseph Smith – History*, and *The Articles of Faith*. I'll now comment on most of these "books" within the PGP, and within these comments, I'll speculate on their origins.

The *Book of Moses* (BoMo) is bizarre! I suspect that it was entirely written by Rigdon and that he wrote it for three purposes: 1) To try to understand why his God would have made the world, 2) To promote his version of Christianity (by inventing the farce that Moses was a Christian (!) and thereby to accuse the wicked Jews of denigrating Christianity), and 3) To surpass his teacher, Alexander Campbell, who had suggested that he, too, would like to provide the world with an "improved" version of the Bible.

Below, I'll quote a little from the BoMo to illustrate at least the first two of those three points; the third point (re. Campbell's intention and Rigdon's desire to surpass his mentor) is derived from what others have written (e.g., the books by Whitsitt and Howe, already referenced). As for my expectation that Rigdon wrote the entire BoMo, I provide no supporting evidence, but I suspect that such evidence could be found (e.g., by contrasting the literary and religious contents of the BoMo to those of the BoA, which I suspect was dictated by Smith).

As to why God allegedly made the world (and the universe and people!), here is the author's (presumably Rigdon's) response (starting from *BoMo* I, 30):

And it came to pass [Spalding's "came to pass" was apparently still on Rigdon's mind!] that Moses called upon God, saying: "Tell me, I pray thee, why these things are so, and by what thou madest them?" And behold, the glory of the Lord was upon Moses, so that Moses stood in the presence of God, and talked with him face to face. And the Lord God said unto Moses: "For mine own purpose have I made these things. Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me... For behold, this is my work and my glory – to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."

Who but a blithering idiot could accept that statement either as God's purpose or as an explanation of God's purpose?! God made the universe "for mine own purpose... Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me." Thanks a lot: with that explanation and \$2, I might be able to buy a cup of coffee!

Then, after saying that God won't tell anyone his purpose, Rigdon goes on to describe God's alleged purpose: "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man". If ever there were any gods, if that really were the

purpose of one of them, and if that god felt so deficient that he had to have a purpose, then why in the Bible was that possibility specifically excluded and even feared, according to *Genesis 3, 22*:

He [God] said, “The man [Adam] has become like one of us [gods], knowing good and evil; what if he now reaches out his hand and takes fruit from the tree of life also, eats it, and lives for ever?” So the Lord God drove him [Adam] out of the garden of Eden...

Of course Rigdon might have responded “That’s all part of the Jewish lie”, but if so, then it would have seemed appropriate for Rigdon to address the obvious question: Couldn’t your stupid god have figured out a simpler way “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man”? For example, how about bypassing the whole earthly-test bit and just leave the “eternal souls” of man to be eternal! Such craziness!

As to why Rigdon decided that a new version of Genesis should be written, we find at *BoMo 1, 41*:

And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and take many of them from the book which thou [Moses] shalt write, behold, I will raise up another like unto thee [i.e., a new Moses, aka Rigdon, who would have his own Aaron to speak for him, i.e., Joseph Smith]...

So, according to Rigdon, too many people considered the old Book of Moses (e.g., allegedly, *Genesis*) to be “naught” and furthermore, it’s been corrupted because so many of God’s word “were taken from the book”. Therefore, Rigdon started writing his own version.

Because Rigdon claimed that words “were taken from” the old Book of Moses (e.g., from *Genesis*, although it’s essentially certain that Moses didn’t write *Genesis*), it might be expected that more words and therefore ideas would be found in Rigdon’s BoMo than in the Bible’s *Genesis* – and as I’ll show you below, that is the case. But for reasons that I’ll also show you below, it’s useful to first mention that most of what Rigdon did was just to rephrase King James text. Thus, Rigdon’s production contains all the same idiocies that Ezra and co-authors copied from Ancient Mesopotamian, Persian, and Egyptian genesis myths about how God allegedly made the universe in six periods, etc. (which I’ve reviewed in earlier chapters, e.g., **Ix3** and **Ix5**), but Rigdon’s phrasing is different from what’s in the KJV.

* Go to other chapters via

For example, at *BoMo* 2, 2, we find:

And the earth was without form, and void;
 and I caused darkness to come up upon the face of the deep;
 and my Spirit moved upon the face of the water; for I am God.
 And I, God, said: Let there be light; and there was light.
 And I, God, saw the light; and that light was good.
 And I, God, divided the light from the darkness.
 And I, God, called the light Day; and the darkness, I called Night;
 and this I did by the word of my power,
 [Rigdon probably meant to write “the power of my word”!]
 and it was done as I spake;
 and the evening and the morning were the first day...

As you may find if you read the rest, Dear, the phrase “**And I, God...**” in Rigdon’s *BoMo* can drive you to as much distraction as Spalding’s phrase in the *BoM* “**And it came to pass...**” Yet, Dear, I would have you notice the phrase “**And I, God...**”, because that repeated claim (that the world was created by a single god) is so dramatically different from what’s written in the *BoA*.

But that difference aside for a while, we finally do find something new in Rigdon’s genesis “story”, e.g., at *BoM* 5, 11 there is:

And Eve... heard all these things and was glad, saying: “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.”

That’s dramatically different from what the Jews were taught for thousands of years – and surely Rigdon must have been very pleased that God relayed to Joseph Smith that even Eve was aware of Rigdon’s views about redemption! [☹] And ‘lo and behold it came to pass [☺] that, starting at *BoMo* 6, 52 and 58, we find God preaching Rigdon’s version of the doctrines of the Disciples Church of Ohio:

And he [God] also said unto him [Moses aka Rigdon]: “If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, asking all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be given you.”

“Therefore I give unto you a commandment, to teach these things freely unto your children, saying: That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory...”

Ain't it neat that all this Christian junk was taught before “the flood”, thousands and thousands of years before Jesus was allegedly born?! [☹]

And as for all who don't believe Rigdon's “revelation”, well, they're just those horrible unbelievers who deserve to die. How? Well, funny you should ask, cause Rigdon just happens to answer that, by having poor-old Noah preaching Rigdon's version of Disciple doctrine, e.g., at *BoM* 8, 23:

And it came to pass [☹] that Noah continued his preaching unto the people, saying: Hearken, and give heed unto my words; Believe and repent of your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, even as our fathers, and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost, that ye may have all things made manifest; and if ye do not this, the floods will come in upon you; nevertheless they hearkened not.

And then... that's all! That is: Rigdon gave it up – without even fixing his text, e.g., by adding quotation marks! I expect that Rigdon's plan was to rewrite the whole Bible, but after finally getting through the first 9 pages of the Old Testament (OT), he (similar to Noah!) abandoned ship – almost! What that “almost” means, Dear, is that having apparently given up on his plan to rewrite the OT, Rigdon then apparently tried to rewrite the New Testament – but managed to “rewrite” only a portion of one chapter of only the first “synoptic gospel” (specifically, *Matthew 24*, dealing with “prophecies and warnings”). And if all this silliness wasn't enough, when Rigdon had the chance to correct one of the silliest prophecies allegedly made by Jesus, namely (from the KJV)

“Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled...”

Rigdon left it essentially the same

“Verily, I say unto you, this generation [,] in which these things shall be shown forth, shall not pass away until all I have told you shall be fulfilled.”

And with this pathetic attempt to rewrite the Bible, Rigdon quit!

Without new information, of course it's essentially impossible to know why Rigdon abandoned his attempt to rewrite the Bible. I expect that highest probability should be assigned to the possibility that the magnitude of the task overwhelmed him; next may be the possibility that he became too busy with tasks associated with setting up the new church; still lower probability may be appropriate for the following possibility, but I find it sufficiently intriguing to want to mention it.

In particular, Dear, and as you might recall from the previous chapter, in Rigdon's response to his friend's question about what was new in the BoM, he admitted that it prescribed nothing more than the Bible in regard to characteristics of the alleged gods or with how people were to live their lives. He did claim, however, that the BoM gave prescriptions for how to organize the church "in these final days". Without dwelling on the silliness of that concept (that American descendants of the lost Israelites went to all that trouble to record the organization of a church – especially when the concept of "church" was an invention of the "translators" who produced the King James Version of the Bible!), let me instead note that maybe Rigdon abandoned his rewrite of the Bible (and exactly where he did), because he finally saw that it stipulated that Jesus said that the "later days" occurred ~2,000 years ago: "**This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled...**"! I can't help wondering if, when Rigdon re-read that line, he might have realized that all the work he had put into creating the BoM was for naught, whereupon he threw up his hands in disgust, stammering: "**Oh, no... I give up!**"

Meanwhile, the PGP's *Book of Abraham* (BoA) is an "entirely different animal" – but I suspect that Rigdon had nothing to do with it, that it's Smith's concoction, and that Smith produced it primarily to demonstrate that he didn't need Rigdon's help to rule the Mormon roost. Now, Dear, I don't plan to provide you with my reasons for suggesting that the BoA was entirely Smith's concoction; you can research the matter by yourself and come to your own conclusions. In Yx, I'll show you that there's absolutely no doubt that the BoA is a complete hoax: it's not a book by or about the patriarch Abraham but Smith's mistranslation of a portion of the Egyptian Book of the Dead -- or actually, a total fake, because Smith could translate nothing! Here, though, I'll just devote the following, long paragraph to Smith's possible motivations for concocting such a hoax.

* Go to other chapters *via*

Thus, during the ~10 years after 1833, when Rigdon “completed” the “inspired revision” of the Bible (outlined above, claimed to be revealed to Smith by God, but almost certainly composed by Rigdon and providing a good “revelation” of Rigdon’s techniques of plagiarizing!), until when Smith foisted on the world the hoax⁸ known as the BoA, Smith grew in power (and corruption) and Rigdon deteriorated: Smith, who started out with barely a religious bone in his body, became what he himself described as the “American Muhammad” [he had a small army under his control plus a band of murders (the Danites) to do his bidding, ruled the administration of his town, was a candidate for president of the U.S., and of course had umpteen wives (three or four dozen) – although, in that respect, he didn’t match Muhammad, because whereas Muhammad’s youngest wife with whom he had sex was nine, Smith’s youngest was a relatively-old fourteen year old!). Meanwhile, Rigdon, who started out and continued to be a religious fanatic, deteriorated so pathetically that he whimpered for forgiveness when Smith almost ex-communicated him, and he continued to be subservient to Smith (although, surreptitiously, he may have supplied Smith’s enemies with some ammunition) even after Smith attempted to induce Rigdon’s oldest daughter into his harem (and then, Smith attacked her character when she refused). But in spite of Smith’s power and corruption, I suspect he still felt insecure relative to Rigdon’s knowledge of religion – and that, I suspect, provided the motive for the BoA: I suspect that, in his vanity, Smith produced the BoA to demonstrate to the world that not only Rigdon but also that he, Smith, could create a new religion.

If you’ll read the BoA, Dear, I suspect you’ll see why I say that Smith attempted to “create a new religion”. Contrary claims by the current LDS president notwithstanding, Smith’s BoA plus his associated pronouncement on polygamy describe a religion radically different from (and even incompatible with) Rigdon’s BoM and his “revisions” to the Bible such as the BoMo: in his BoM, Rigdon promoted the familiar speculation that there’s a single god and, for example, that polygamy is a terrible sin (see *Jacob 2*, 6); in contrast, in his BoA, Smith describes how multiple gods made the world, and then in his “revelation” re. polygamy (D&C 132), Smith informs the world that to become gods themselves, Mormons must practice polygamy – just as he had been doing for years.

⁸ Dear: to determine for yourself that the *Book of Abraham* is a hoax, then proceed via Google (using, e.g., “Book of Abraham” +hoax), or go directly to such websites as <http://www.foxgrape.com/deveria.htm>, <http://www.watchman.org/lds/abraham2.htm>, or <http://www.helpingmormons.org/abraham.htm>.

As just as single example of the discrepancy between Rigdon's and Smith's religions, Dear, consider the following from Smith's BoA (Chapter 5, which is the last chapter of Smith's BoA), in which Abraham is allegedly retelling one of the genesis myths and to which I've added the underlining:

And the Gods took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden, to dress it and to keep it. And the Gods commanded the man, saying: Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the time that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die. Now I, Abraham, saw that it was after the Lord's time, which was after the time of Kolob; for as yet the Gods had not appointed unto Adam his reckoning. And the Gods said: Let us make an help meet [sic] for the man, for it is not good that the man should be alone, therefore we will form an help meet [sic] for him. And the Gods caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam; and he slept, and they took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in the stead thereof; And of the rib which the Gods had taken from man, formed they a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said: This was bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; now she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man; Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Meanwhile, as I showed you in earlier chapters in this **Qx**, the Bible's *Genesis* does begin by describing the actions of many gods; thereby, Smith's version probably illustrates that he finally started studying the Bible (probably with the aid of a Jewish tutor he had hired) – even incorporating into the BoA the anachronism (i.e., incorrect time sequence) that Abraham started out from Chaldea (which didn't exist until ~1,000 years after Abraham died).

And what, you might wonder, was the purpose of the handiwork of the gods? Well, according to what Smith concocted in his BoA, he has his gods say (Chapter 3, 24):

And there stood one among them [the gods] that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down [to the “neck of the woods” near where our Sun is!], for there is space there [as if there weren't enough space elsewhere in the universe!], and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith [i.e., we will test the people as follows] to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.

So there, Dear, in the “gospel according to Smith” (i.e., his BoA), you have a clear statement of God’s purpose: to determine if humans will do whatsoever God [now Smith!] commands. And sure enough, Smith proceeded to test his followers: any Mormon male was to do whatever Smith wanted (out to and including giving Smith his wife and even killing for him) and should Smith be so inclined, any Mormon female (married or not and regardless of her age) was to be his sex slave.

And yes, Dear, of course I agree that it’s all soooooo ludicrous and that Smith was a monster, but on the other hand, I’d also submit that his followers got pretty much what they deserved. It was their choice to be followers. Meanwhile, though, pity the poor children who have been indoctrinated with this junk ever since they were babies!

(iii) Did They Really Believe Their Silliness about the Supernatural?

Finally, Dear, to convey my third and most important poignant criticism of Smith’s testimony given in the BoM, I’ll begin with the following quotation, from an unknown author, criticizing Smith’s testimony.⁹

On September 21, 1823 after retiring to bed, Joseph prayed to know his standing before the Lord. In the official account that is used today, the angel Moroni appeared to give Joseph further instructions concerning the Church. Joseph relates the following. “He [the angel] called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do...” (PGP, J.S. 1:33)

However, the 1838 Joseph Smith manuscript, the 1842 *Times & Seasons*, and the original edition of the *Pearl of Great Price* (1851, page 41) all state that the angel who appeared three times to Joseph Smith in 1823 was Nephi, not Moroni. The current canonized account of the history of Joseph Smith is from this same manuscript (with a few editing changes, i.e., the name Moroni is used, not Nephi).

Further documentation supporting Joseph’s use of the name of Nephi is found in the 1st edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s biographical sketches of Joseph Smith the prophet and his progenitors for many generations, 1853.

To Mormons who are familiar with the Book of Mormon there is a great difference between the two characters, and surely such an error would have been unique. Yet four separate earlier sources indicate it was Nephi who appeared, while today it is taught [e.g., in the testimony in the BoM] that it was Moroni who appeared to Joseph.

⁹ From http://www.exmormon.org/journey/journey_e.htm.

But, Dear, to people who demand reliable data, such criticisms are entirely irrelevant. They contain the same silliness, the same potential humor, the same ludicrousness as the idiocy of arguing about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin!

Let me put it this way. Dear, if sometime you decide to invest the time to investigate criticisms of the reliability of the BoM “witnesses”, you’ll find that most of these criticisms (maybe somewhere ~90% of them) have been written by Christians, apparently trying to convince Mormons to return to the folds of the faithful, to the one “true religion”, i.e., Christianity; the remaining ~10% of the criticisms have been written by “atheists” or scientists or free thinkers or “Brights”, such as your old grandfather, who demand to see the data.

The Christian critics (and some Muslim critics, as well) are merciless in their attacks of the characters of all twelve of the witnesses, but unsurprisingly, none of them questions the possibility of miracles or the possibility that people can have nice little chats with angels, hear the voice of God, and so on. The thrust of their criticism is basically: “It’s not that God and the angels don’t visit people and can’t perform miracles, but none of the ‘witnesses’ of the BoM are sufficiently worthy of such a high honor.”

Of course I agree that the reliability of all twelve BoM “witnesses” (i.e., the eleven plus Smith) is highly doubtful. I wouldn’t trust a single one of them to reliably inform me what time it was – or even what day it was! And although available criticisms of all twelve “witnesses” are probably sufficient to cast grave doubts in most people’s minds about the reliability of the twelve “testimonies”, all such assessments pale in significance compared to something else, namely, the reliability of the testimony of anyone who claims to have seen magical plates, had nice little chats with angels, and heard the voice of God.

Seriously, Dear: have you ever witnessed a miracle, had visions of an angel, or heard the voice of God? And yes, Dear, I know that, in the past, many people have claimed to have had various types of “angelic visions”, including the insane “Saint” Paul, the mad “profit” Muhammad, and even my mother (when, in the early 1900s, she was medicated – probably with some cocaine-based pain-killer). In the future, too, no doubt many people will continue to make such claims.

But as far as I'm concerned, the only relevant point to make to you is to urge you, Dear, to seek psychiatric help if ever you have such a vision. If you haven't taken any psychotic drugs (either intentionally or accidentally) and if you haven't suffered from a severe head injury (as reportedly did Rigdon when he was a child), then such visions are symptomatic of something seriously wrong in your brain, requiring attention: hearing voices, seeing visions, and so on, are classic symptoms of schizophrenia. And don't worry about the money, Dear: I'll pay for all your medical expenses. If Joseph Smith truly had such a vision and wasn't just promoting a con game "**in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family**" (as he states in his "Testimony"), then I'm truly sorry for his mental state – but I see no reason (other than mental slothfulness of his followers) why his insanity should contaminate the minds of my grandchildren!

Dear, as near as I can guarantee you anything, I guarantee you that there never have been, never are, and never will be any such thing as miracles, angels, and gods (in the religious sense of those words). All such are figments of immature minds and damaged or designing brains. And if you should want proof of the "truth" of those statements, Dear, then I'm sorry, but first I'll need to show you (in T, dealing with "Truth") that there never has been, never is, and never will be proof of the "truth" of anything in "the real world"! In this universe, Dear, the best that we can obtain are demonstrations of the probability that any proposition about reality is more likely to be "true" than "false". That's what the scientific method provides. In particular, relative to miracles and the supernatural, all scientific investigations have found that the probability of any claim about "the supernatural" is almost certainly false – or stated in unscientific terms, everything about the supernatural is pure bunk!

The claims in the BoM about miracles, conversations with angels, revelations from God, and so on, reveal a second major and faulty policy promoted in Mormonism (and in all similar "revealed religions"). The first such major, faulty policy (addressed in the previous chapter) is to promote reliance on "faith" rather than on data. The second is (in a sense) a special case of the first: not only to rely on faith rather than data but specifically to start from the premiss (based solely on faith) that "supernatural happenings" (such as miracles, angelic visions, communications from God) can and do occur! Show me the data!

In earlier chapters (e.g., those labeled with **I**) I've already addressed some of the foolishness in the ideas that miracles can occur, that the supernatural is real, and similar. In later chapters (e.g., in **S** dealing with Science and **T** dealing with Truth), I'll show you more. Therefore, Dear, here I'll be brief, mostly just trying to remind you of what I've already written. For example, Dear, remember what the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) wrote about miracles, which you find at several sites on the internet. The following is from his Section X, entitled “On Miracles”, of his book entitled *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*:

... a weaker evidence can never destroy a stronger... The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention): *No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact that it endeavors to establish.*

Now, Dear, without proposing to pick on the twelve witnesses any more, let me just ask: Do you really think that their telling falsehoods would be more miraculous than the miracles to which they testified? Knowing as much as you do about human nature, have you ever met anyone – even certain grandparents – whom you think it would be a “miracle” if they lied?! Further, although I have enormous respect for what Hume wrote (and I urge you, Dear, to read his Section X in its entirety), I should point out that, in a way, his “maxim” is really just an application of Ockham’s razor, which basically is: *first try the simplest explanation*. Thus, in the case of the foundation of Mormonism, rather than accept the hypothesis of finding “golden plates” courtesy visitations by angels and communications from God, how about first trying the simpler explanation that it’s all a hoax, concocted by a bunch of con artists who would rather con people out of their money than work for a living?! After all, the data clearly show that as a result of his enterprise, Smith managed to go from poverty (“*in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father’s family*”) to relatively enormous wealth and power as the head of an organization that became America’s first horrible experiment in theocracy.

In any event, Dear, please be careful. If someone asks you to accept something on faith, maybe tell him or her that you will – have faith in yourself and in the scientific method. If someone asks you to believe in miracles, maybe tell them that you do – in the miracle of your existence and your ability to think for yourself in spite of the attempts by others to get you to conform to their views. And if someone asks you if you got any exercise today, then...