

EXCOMMUNICATION

Mormon Leader Expelled After Charging Church With Racism

On September 2, 1989, the *Salt Lake Tribune* made this startling announcement:

The only American Indian general authority in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was excommunicated Friday after claiming church leaders are perpetrating a “silent, subtle scriptural and spiritual slaughter” of his race.

George P. Lee, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy since 1975, was stripped of his membership by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles for “apostasy” and “other conduct unbecoming a member of the church.” He is the first Mormon general authority excommunicated in 46 years. . . .

His excommunication is significant because Dr. Lee, a Navajo, was considered a church “success story,” himself a product of the LDS program that places impoverished and disadvantaged Indian children with Mormon families.

He claimed church leaders have “turned their backs” on Native Americans and, in pride and arrogance, are discriminating against the very people Mormon scriptures say they must rely on for salvation.

“There is a racist attitude I could just no longer stand,” Dr. Lee, 46, said in an interview . . . “It is aimed at the poor, at the Indians . . .

“They have washed their hands of their responsibilities to the Lamanites,” he said. “My conscience would not allow me to go on.” . . .

Dr. Lee was called to the church leadership by President Spencer W. Kimball, who felt he had a “special assignment” from God to help Native Americans. He said Friday he believes the current church administration has betrayed the dead prophet’s trust. . . .



George P. Lee

Church leaders have set themselves up as interpreters of the gospel, rather than its followers, he said. It has resulted in pride, Dr. Lee claims.

“I have heard a few of you declare that you are greater than ancient apostles such as Moses, Abraham, Noah, Isaiah, Isaac, Jacob. . . . This reflects the attitude of all of you,” Dr. Lee said in the letter. “I have heard one or more of you declare that you can change anything Jesus had said or taught. This also reflects the attitude of all of you.” . . .

On September 10, 1989, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported the following concerning how the church authorities reacted to his letter to them:

After reading in person a 23-page letter detailing his concerns, Lee said he was astounded at the speed with which he was ousted. Within minutes, two officials came to his office and told him to turn over all church property, including a credit card and a signed pass with which faithful Mormons gain entry to their temples. “I was stripped of everything,” said Lee, 46, a father of seven who is without pension or immediate job prospect. “It was just absolutely cold.”

In a letter that he read to the church hierarchy (photographically repinted in our booklet, *Excommunication of a Mormon Church Leader*), Dr. Lee charged church leaders with materialism, pride and having “an attitude of superior race, white supremacy, racist attitude, pride, arrogance, an[d] love of power, and no sense [of]

BOOK CONTAINING LEE’S CHARGES

Prior to his excommunication, George P. Lee made some very serious charges against the Mormon leaders in two letters. We have obtained copies of both letters written by Lee to the LDS First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles (38 pages in all) and have printed them under the title, *Excommunication of a Mormon Church Leader*. In addition, we have included a 16-page introduction reviewing the LDS Church’s attitude toward Indians and other races. This booklet sells for only **\$1.00 — 5 for \$4.00 — 10 for \$6.00** (Minimum mailing charge \$1.00)

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obligation to the poor, needy and afflicted. . . . You are loving the Indians and other Lamanites at a distance . . . you are telling the Lamanites that you are No. 1 and they are second class. . . . 6. Love of Money. The rich seem to get richer and the poor get poorer . . . In fact you told me to not talk about [the] poor nor pray for them. . . . A lot of our Priesthood leaders depend on being paid to attend important priesthood meetings . . . Of course most of these Brethren would go anywhere in the name of ‘The Lord’s Work’ as long as they are being paid and as long as all of their expenses are being paid. Brethren this would include your board memberships and meetings, royalty from written books, and all donations and gifts from friends, speaking engagements and etc.”

Dr. Lee’s charge of racism is certainly not new. From its earliest days, Mormonism has had some very unusual teachings with regard to race, skin color and blood. When George P. Lee was called to be a member of the First Quorum of Seventy in 1975, the Mormon leaders had a doctrine which denied blacks the priesthood and marriage in the church’s temples. Indians, on the other hand, were permitted to hold the priesthood, and this made it possible for President Spencer W. Kimball to elevate Lee to the position of a General Authority in the Mormon Church.

In 1978 the Mormon Church leaders announced that their prophet, Spencer W. Kimball, had received a revelation which opened up the priesthood to blacks. The doctrine which the Mormon leaders formerly taught concerning blacks was clearly set forth in a letter written by the First Presidency in 1947: “From the days of the Prophet Joseph even until now, it has been the doctrine of the Church, never questioned by any of the Church leaders, that the Negroes are not entitled to the full blessings of the Gospel” (Letter from the First Presidency of the Mormon Church, July 17, 1947, as cited in *Mormonism and the Negro*, by John J. Stewart, 1960, pages 46-47).

Bruce R. McConkie, who later served as an Apostle in the church, made this statement in 1958:

Negroes in this life are denied the priesthood; under no circumstances can they hold this delegation of authority from the Almighty. . . . The gospel message of salvation is not carried affirmatively to them . . .

The negroes **are not equal with other races where the receipt of certain spiritual blessings are concerned**, particularly the priesthood and the temple blessings that flow therefrom, but this inequality is not of man’s origin. It is **the Lord’s doing**. . . . (*Mormon Doctrine*, 1958, page 477)

After the anti-black doctrine was altered, Apostle McConkie’s book was revised to reflect the change of doctrine (see 1979 *Mormon Doctrine* printing, page 529).

Although the church has never had a doctrine forbidding Indians from holding the priesthood, Mormon theology has always taught that a dark skin is a sign of God’s displeasure. This teaching comes directly from Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon. In 2 Nephi 5:21, we read that the Lamanites, who were supposed to be the ancestors of the American Indians, were cursed with a black skin: “And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity . . . wherefore, as they were **white**, and exceeding fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause **a skin of blackness to come upon them.**” In Alma 3:6 we read: “And the skins of the Lamanites were **dark**, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which **was a curse** upon them because of **their transgression** . . .”

Joseph Smith claimed that the Lamanites eventually destroyed the white skinned people (Nephites) and that the American Indians are the descendants of the ancient Lamanites.

Although Mormon theology taught that anyone born with a dark

skin was inferior, the Negro was considered to be at the bottom of the scale and therefore could not hold the priesthood. To really understand the anti-black doctrine, however, a person must know something about the Mormon doctrine of pre-existence. One of the basic teachings of the church is that the spirit of man existed before the world was created. From this doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul emerged the idea of some spirits being more noble than others. The Mormon leaders teach that the “more noble” or choice spirits are born as Mormons.

At the time George P. Lee was called to be a General Authority in the Mormon Church, Mark E. Petersen was serving as one of the Twelve Apostles. Apostle Petersen, who died in 1984, held some very strong views concerning Indians and other dark-skinned races. In a speech given at the church’s Brigham Young University, Apostle Petersen gave the following information concerning the doctrine of pre-existence and how it affected the various races:

We cannot escape the conclusion that because of performance in our pre-existence some of us are born as Chinese, some as Japanese, **some as Indians**, some as Negroes, some as Americans, some as Latter-day Saints. These are rewards and **punishments** . . . Is it not reasonable to believe that less worthy spirits would come through less favored lineage? Does this not account in very large part for the various grades of color and degrees of intelligence we find in the earth? . . .

Now let’s talk **segregation** again for a few moments. Was segregation a wrong principle? When the Lord chose the nations to which the spirits were to come, determining that some would be Japanese and some would be Chinese and some Negroes and some Americans, He engaged in an act of segregation. . . . In placing a curse on Laman and Lemuel [i.e., the ancestors of the Indians in Mormon theology], He engaged in segregation. . . . When He forbade inter-marriages . . . He established segregation. . . . Who placed the Chinese in China? The Lord did. It was an act of segregation. . . . in the cases of the Lamanites [Indians] and the Negroes we have the definite word of the Lord Himself that **He placed a dark skin upon them as a curse—as a punishment and as a sign to all others. He forbade intermarriage with them** under threat of extension of the curse. (2 Nephi 5:21) . . .

Let us consider the great mercy of God for a moment. A Chinese, born in China with a **dark skin**, and with all the handicaps of that race seems to have little opportunity. But think of the mercy of God to Chinese people who are willing to accept the gospel. In spite of whatever they might have done in the pre-existence to justify being born over there as Chinamen, if they now, in this life, accept the gospel and live it the rest of their lives they can have the Priesthood, go to the temple and receive endowments and sealings, and that means they can have exaltation. Isn’t the mercy of God marvelous?

Think of the Negro, **curled as to the Priesthood** . . . This negro, who, in the pre-existence lived the type of life which justified the Lord in sending him to the earth in the lineage of Cain with a **black skin** . . . **In spite of all he did in the pre-existent life**, the Lord is willing, if the Negro accepts the gospel . . . he can and will enter the celestial kingdom. He will go there **as a servant**, but he will get celestial glory. (*Race Problems—As They Affect The Church*, address by Apostle Mark E. Petersen at the Convention of Teachers of Religion on the College Level, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, August 27, 1954)

Ezra Taft Benson, who is now serving as the thirteenth president of the church [1989] and apparently approved the excommunication of George P. Lee, openly opposed the civil rights movement in the 1960’s. The church’s newspaper, *Deseret News*, December 14, 1963, reported:

Former agriculture secretary Ezra Taft Benson charged Friday night that the civil rights movement in the South had been “fomented almost entirely by the Communists.”

Elder Benson, a member of the Council of the Twelve of the Church . . . said in a speech at a public meeting here that the whole civil rights movement was “phony.”

As we have shown, Mark E. Petersen felt that there should be no intermarriage between “Caucasians” and Indians because there would be an “extension of the curse.” The Book of Mormon itself contains this statement: “And the skins of the Lamanites were **dark**, . . . which was **a curse** . . . whosoever did **mingle his seed** with that of the Lamanites did bring **the same curse** upon his seed” (Alma 3:6, 9). It is interesting to note, however, that Joseph Smith had predicted in the Book of Mormon that after the Indians received Mormonism they would eventually become “a white and delightsome people.” He apparently became so concerned about the Indians becoming “white” that he encouraged intermarriage to speed up the process. Although the church suppressed the fact for well over a century, Joseph Smith even claimed to have a revelation from God encouraging Mormons to marry Indians so that they would eventually become “white.” The important part of the revelation reads as follows:

Verily, I say unto you . . . it is my will, that in time, ye should take wives of the Lamanites and Nephites, that their posterity **may become white, delightsome** and just, for even now their females are more virtuous than the gentiles.

In 1976 we were able to examine a microfilm of the original revelation, which is in the Church Historical Department, and sometime later obtained a photocopy of it (appears in *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* page 230-B). Finally, in 1979 Church Historian Leonard Arrington and his assistant Davis Bitton published the important portion of the revelation in *The Mormon Experience*, page 195.

While President Young never released the 1831 revelation, there is evidence that he was familiar with its teaching that the Indians should be made white through intermarriage. In a book published in 1852, William Hall gave the “substance” of a speech delivered by Young:

“ . . . We are now going to the Lamanites, to whom we intend to be messengers of instruction. . . . We will show them that in consequence of their transgressions a curse has been inflicted upon them—in the darkness of their skins. We will have intermarriages with them, they marrying our young women, and we taking their young squaws to wife. By these means it is the will of the Lord that the **curse of their color shall be removed** and they restored to their pristine beauty . . .” (*The Abominations of Mormonism Exposed*, pp. 58-59)

Although Joseph Smith’s 1831 revelation commanding Mormons to marry Indians to make them “white” was suppressed, recent leaders have continued to teach the Book of Mormon doctrine that the Indians become white when they tam to Mormonism. President Spencer W. Kimball, the church prophet who appointed George P. Lee, strongly endorsed that teaching. In the October 1960 LDS General Conference, Kimball observed:

I saw a striking contrast in the progress of the Indian people today . . . they are fast becoming . . . white and delightsome, as they were promised. . . . The children in the home placement program in Utah are often **lighter** than their brothers and sisters in the hogans. . . . These young members of the Church are changing to whiteness and to delightsomeness. One white elder jokingly said that he and his companion were donating blood regularly to the hospital in the hope that the process might be accelerated. (*Improvement Era*, December 1960, pp. 922-923)

The reader will notice that Spencer W. Kimball used the Book of Mormon phrase, “a white and delightsome people.” This is actually a quotation from 2 Nephi 30:6. Nephi prophesied that in the last days the gospel would be declared to the Indians, and “many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and delightsome people.” Mormon critic Gordon H. Fraser, who worked among the Indians for many years, did not accept the claim that the Indians were becoming white. He maintained that the “skin color” of the Indians “has not been altered in the least because

of their adherence to the Mormon doctrines” (*What Does the Book of Mormon Teach?* p. 46). The Mormon leaders were obviously embarrassed about this Book of Mormon doctrine, and three years after President Kimball gave the revelation removing the curse from the blacks, the very verse President Kimball used to support the idea that the Indians were becoming white was altered. As we have shown, the verse originally stated that the Indians “shall be a white and delightsome people.” In 1981 this embarrassing statement was changed to read that the Indians “shall be a pure and delightsome people.”

Although this one passage has been altered, the doctrine that God cursed the Lamanites with a black skin is still found in a number of other verses (see 1 Nephi 12:23, 2 Nephi 5:21 and Jacob 3:8). In addition, in 3 Nephi 2:15 we read this concerning some of the Lamanites: “And their curse was taken from them, and their **skin became white** like unto the Nephites.”

In the 1979 printing of his book, *Mormon Doctrine*, pages 428-429, Apostle Bruce R. McConkie proclaimed that in the resurrection righteous Lamanites would have their “skin of blackness” changed to “white”:

. . . a twofold curse came upon the Lamanites . . . “they became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations” (1 Ne. 12:23). So that they “might not be enticing” unto the Nephites, “the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them” (2 Ne. 5:20-25; Alma 3:14-16). . . . when groups of Lamanites . . . turned to the Lord, the curse was removed from them. . . . a group of Lamanite converts . . . became white like the Nephites (3 Ne. 2:15-16). . . . in our day . . . the “scales of darkness” shall fall from their eyes; “and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and delightsome people” (2 Ne. 30:6). Finally, before the judgment bar of God . . . Lamanites and Nephites alike, will be free from the curse of spiritual death and the skin of darkness (Jac. 3:5-9).

In recent years there has been very little discussion concerning the curse of a black skin. The church no longer seems to be proud of its teaching that “a black skin is a mark of the curse of heaven placed upon some portions of mankind” (*Juvenile Instructor*, vol. 3, p. 157).

One of the most serious problems George P. Lee seems to have had with church authorities related to the question of who possesses the true blood of Israel. From the time of Joseph Smith until the present there has been a great deal said on this subject. In the *History of the Church*, vol. 3, page 380, we find these puzzling comments by Joseph Smith concerning a heavenly blood transfusion that the Gentiles must have: “. . . as the Holy Ghost falls upon one of the literal seed of Abraham, it is calm and serene; and his whole soul and body are only exercised by the pure spirit of intelligence; while the effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to purge out the old blood, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham. That man that has none of the blood of Abraham (naturally) must have a new creation by the Holy Ghost. In such a case, there may be more of a powerful effect upon the body, and visible to the eye, than upon an Israelite, while the Israelite at first might be far before the Gentile in pure intelligence.”

Brigham Young, the second prophet of the church, declared:

Take a family of ten children, for instance, and you may find nine of them purely of the Gentile stock, and one son or one daughter in that family who is purely of the blood of Ephraim. It was in the veins of the father or mother, and was reproduced in the son or daughter, while all the rest of the family are Gentiles. You may think that is singular, but it is true. . . . Joseph Smith was a pure Ephraimite . . .

Again, if a pure Gentile firmly believes the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and yields obedience to it, in such a case I will give you the words of the Prophet Joseph— “When the Lord pours out the Holy Ghost upon that individual he will have spasms, and you would think that he was going into fits.”

Joseph said that the Gentile blood was **actually cleansed out of their veins**, and the blood of Jacob made to circulate in them; and the revolution and change in the system were so great that it caused the beholder to think they were going into fits. . . . we are of the House of Israel, of the royal seed, of the royal blood. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, pp. 268-269)

The Book of Mormon makes it very clear that Indians are literal descendants of the house of Israel and that they will perform a mighty work in the last times. The Gentiles, on the other hand, are threatened with destruction at the hands of the Indians if they do not repent: "And my people who are a remnant of Jacob [i.e., the Lamanites] shall be among the Gentiles, yea, in the midst of them as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he go through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver" (3 Nephi 21:12). Instead of playing the major role, the Gentiles who repent will "assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem" (3 Nephi 21:23).

George P. Lee believed the Book of Mormon prediction that his people will play the major role in the last days and felt that the Mormon Church leaders were deliberately trying to circumvent what God had ordained. In the letter which he presented to the hierarchy the day he was excommunicated, he wrote the following:

1. You have set yourself up as a literal seed of Israel when the Lord Jesus designated you as Gentiles or 'adopted Israel[.]' You have set yourself up as [the] true seed of Ephraim thereby displacing the true seed of Israel[.]

You have shoved true Israel out of his own home or house and have given great importance and status to your own role as Ephraim . . . Gentiles or "adopted Israel" have set themselves up as true Ephraimites with little or no obligation or sense of responsibility to the Lamanites and other true seed of Israel. This kind of teaching runs counter to the instructions of the Lord Jesus and collides with the will of God. I cannot be a party to this type of policy or doctrine. It is not God's but man-inspired[.] It is getting to the point where every Gentile that is baptized is told and taught that he is literal seed of Ephraim unless he is a Jew, Indian or Black. This type of teaching encourages an attitude of superior race . . . I cannot be a party to false teaching, teachings which are man-inspired. . . . You have come very close to denying that the Book of Mormon is about Lamanites. You have cut out Indian or Lamanite programs and are attempting to cut them out of the Book of Mormon." (pp. 13-16)

While George P. Lee is probably correct with regard to the teachings of the Book of Mormon concerning Lamanites and Gentiles, from a Biblical perspective both his view and that held by the Mormon leaders seems to be out of step with the teachings of Jesus. In Mark 9:33-37, we read that some of the Lord's disciples had been arguing over "who should be the greatest." Jesus, therefore, "called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." In the book of Matthew 18:1-4, we find that Jesus answered the question of who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven by calling "a little child unto him." He "set him in the midst of them" and then said: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Apostle Paul made it clear that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). To waste time debating over who has the "royal blood" seems to be an exercise in futility. It is unlikely that either the Mormon leaders or the Lamanites have the blood of Israel.

While it is undoubtedly true that George P. Lee and his people have suffered a great deal because of the racist views held by some of the present church leaders, Dr. Lee must face the fact that a great deal of the prejudice against Indians originated from the Book of Mormon itself. It is that book which tells of God putting a "curse" on the Lamanites and causing "a skin of blackness to come upon them" so that they would be segregated from those with a "white" skin.

Removing More Seventies

The Mormon leaders claim that they have Seventies because Jesus "appointed seventy" to preach the gospel (see *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, 1979, pp. 144-145). At the 159th general conference of the LDS Church, held April 1-2, 1989, Thomas S. Monson declared that because of the "continued rapid growth of the Church," it had become necessary "to take additional steps to provide for the expansion and regulation of the Church. We announce, therefore, the organization of the Second Quorum of the Seventy . . ." (*The Ensign*, May 1989, p. 17). Instead of appointing 140 members (2 times 70), only "a total of 78 Seventies" were initially called to "Both Quorums of the Seventy" (*Ibid.*, p. 1).

One would certainly think that the church would have replaced George P. Lee and filled the two quorums at the October 1989 general conference. Instead, however, 16 other members of the two quorums were either "excused from active service" i.e., put on emeritus status—or completely released. The *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 1, 1989, reported: "Eight members of the First Quorum of the Seventy were granted emeritus status because of age or health. . . . Eight members of the Second Quorum of the Seventy were released after completing five years . . ." No new members were called to either quorum. While the Second Quorum of the Seventy was supposed to be set up "to provide for the expansion and regulation of the Church," the church now seems to have only **sixty-one functioning Seventies!** Why the church would cut down the number of Seventies at this time is certainly a mystery.

Another curious thing about this matter is the fact that Paul H. Dunn, who once served as one of the seven members of the "Presidency of the First Quorum of Seventy" was "excused from active service" because of age or health. Some people seem to feel that this was not the real reason. They, in fact, believe it was for the "health" of the church. As far as age is concerned, there appear to be sixteen Seventies older than Mr. Dunn who were not put on emeritus status, and while he may have some problems with his health, many of the other General Authorities are not in good health. Apostle Bruce R. McConkie died of cancer, but was never put on emeritus status, and President Spencer W. Kimball had cancer, heart trouble and other problems but remained president of the church. The current president, Ezra Taft Benson, is 90 years old and very feeble, yet he remains in office.

It is suspected that the church leaders felt that Dunn would eventually become a liability to the church because of some investigative reporting which had been done by Lynn Packer. Mr. Packer, a nephew of Apostle Boyd Packer, at one time worked for the church's television station, KSL. He was working with that station when the Hofmann story broke but was later fired. Packer felt that his aggressive reporting on the Hofmann affair and his earlier work on the Afco scandal played a role in his dismissal. The church simply did not want all the truth to come to light.

Although he was never indicted for any crime, Paul H. Dunn's reputation suffered because of the Afco affair. The *Wall Street*

Journal for November 9, 1983, reported:

... Paul H. Dunn ... whose church salary is \$40,000 a year, was a director of Afco Enterprises, a real-estate venture until 1978. Afco collapsed four years later; and its owner, Grant C. Affleck, was recently indicted for mail fraud, securities fraud and bankruptcy fraud. Despite Mr. Dunn's 1978 resignation, records in a U. S. District Court civil suit here show that he continued to have ties with Afco until it entered bankruptcy proceedings in 1982. ... and gave advice to directors after he resigned. ... A few days before Afco entered bankruptcy proceedings, Mr. Dunn wrote a disgruntled Afco investor a letter calling Mr. Affleck, a fellow Mormon, "fair and Christlike." U. S. Attorney Brent Ward ... says that about 650 investors lost over \$20 million through Afco investments.

From what we can learn, Lynn Packer continued to investigate this subject after he was dismissed from KSL and found that Dunn's involvement in Afco was far deeper than was previously reported. In addition, he came to believe that some of Dunn's statements

concerning his earlier life were not true. We contacted Mr. Packer on October 2, 1989, and he informed us that he could make no statement for the *Messenger* concerning these matters. Packer also refused to discuss a report that he had been threatened with retaliation if he published the story.

Notwithstanding Mr. Packer's refusal to confirm these matters, we have very good reason to believe that he has been investigating Mr. Dunn. We do not know whether the charges can be proven, but we are very concerned that there may have been an attempt to suppress the truth concerning the Afco scandal. In any case, the church's release of Paul Dunn from active service at this critical time does look suspicious. If the charges should prove true, it would raise another question: is it fair to merely retire Dunn with full honors while publicly humiliating George P. Lee with excommunication?



MORMON AND ANTI-MORMON FORGERIES

Over thirty years have passed since the editors of this newsletter (Jerald and Sandra Tanner) began studying the doctrine and history of the Mormon Church. Not long after starting our research, we began to realize that those who would make a serious examination of Mormonism must pass through a dangerous mine field of false statements, incorrect theories and even falsified or forged documents. Researchers, therefore, have to be extremely careful that they do not put their weight down upon some idea or document that might explode under their feet. While it was shocking enough to learn that Mormon works were filled with a great deal of false information, changes and even outright forgery, we were thoroughly disgusted when we later found that a number of Mormon critics had also resorted to the idea that "the end justifies the means." Because they firmly believed that Mormonism was built on sand and therefore dangerous to the people who accepted it, they seemed to feel that they had the right to twist the facts to make their arguments stronger. In some cases documents were actually altered to suit their purposes, and in at least a few cases the forgery of entire documents was perpetrated.

A Bad Experience!

Unfortunately, we know from first-hand experience the devastating effect one of these "land mines" can have on those who really want to present the truth. Early in our ministry, we encountered a copy of a pamphlet entitled, *Defence in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself From the Latter Day Saints*, purported to have been written by Oliver Cowdery, one of the three special witnesses to the Book of Mormon. In this publication, "Cowdery" related that the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith had given false revelations and had led the church into error. Mr. Cowdery even claimed that "the Redeemer Himself, clothed in glory, stood before" him and said:

"After reproving the Latter Day Saints for their corruption and blindness in permitting their President, Joseph Smith, Jr., to lead them forth into errors, where I led him not, nor commanded him, and saying unto them, 'Thus saith the Lord,' when I said it not unto him, thou shalt withdraw thyself from among them."

We felt that this publication was very significant and should be in the hands of those investigating the truthfulness of Mormonism. As far as we knew at that time, no historian questioned the authenticity of this work. In fact, B. H. Roberts, who was probably the most famous Mormon historian, accepted the *Defence* as Oliver Cowdery's work. He claimed that it was published by "Oliver Cowdery" at "Norton, Ohio" in "1839" (see *Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 1, page 163, footnote 11). Since Roberts had access to the documents in the Mormon Church Archives, we felt that he never would have accepted this document if there was any reason to doubt its validity. In addition, Yale University claimed in 1960 that it had a photographic copy "of the original of Oliver Cowdery's 'Defence . . .'" (Letter dated November 15, 1960).

On the basis of this information, we published the *Defence* in the early 1960's. Later, however, Wesley P. Walters tracked down the very copy from which Yale University's photocopies were obtained. Unfortunately, a careful examination of this copy revealed that it was not the original 1839 publication but a printing put out by R. B. Neal in 1906. According to a letter written by Pastor Walters on April 25, 1967, the photocopies which had been sent to Yale University did not have "the identifying words *Title Page of Cowdery's tract*." Because of this omission, the librarian at Yale was unable to recognize that it was only the Neal printing of the tract. Since B. H. Roberts had mentioned the 1906 printing as well as that done in 1839 we did not think that this invalidated the *Defence*. Some time after Walters' discovery, Professor Richard L. Anderson, a Mormon

scholar, mentioned to us that he had some reservations about the authenticity of the document. We felt that it would be easy to refute Anderson's arguments and began an intensive study of the Cowdery *Defence*. To our dismay, however, we discovered that there was no evidence to support the claim that it was written in 1839. We could not find any mention of the *Defence* in any publication or diary written during Cowdery's lifetime. In fact, the first statement we found concerning the tract was published more than fifty years after Cowdery's death when R. B. Neal printed it in 1906.

Even Oliver Cowdery's close friend David Whitmer (also a witness to the Book of Mormon who became alienated from the Mormon Church) never mentioned the *Defence* in his *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, published in 1887. Since Whitmer held views almost identical to those expressed in the *Defence*, it seems hard to believe that he would not even mention it.

The 1839 printing of Cowdery's *Defence* was supposed to have been done at "Pressley's Job Office," in Norton, Ohio, but we could find no evidence that this establishment ever existed.

All of the evidence we could find pointed to the conclusion that the pamphlet was a forgery. On April 7, 1967, we published the evidence against the *Defence* in a booklet entitled, *A Critical Look—A Study of the Overstreet "Confession" and the Cowdery "Defence."* In the same booklet, we also printed evidence against the so-called Overstreet "Confession." This document relates to the Mormon leaders' claim that Oliver Cowdery returned to the church in 1848—some ten years after his excommunication. In this confession, a man by the name of Oliver Overstreet claimed that he "personated Oliver Cowdery" at a Mormon conference held in "Council Bluffs, Iowa." He maintained that "Bro. R. Miller," acting under the direction of "Bro. Brigham Young," gave him a "\$500.00" bribe to pretend that he was Oliver Cowdery. At the conference, Overstreet posing as Cowdery—gave a speech in which he defended the Book of Mormon and reaffirmed that the church was true and that the priesthood had been restored through angels.

Oliver Overstreet was supposed to have written the confession with his own hand, and three witnesses went before Judge Elias Smith in 1857 and certified to the fact that the original document was in the handwriting of Oliver Overstreet. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Overstreet was supposed to have died "a few days after he penned the confession," and all that we could locate was a typed copy of the "Confession." While the document maintained that Oliver Cowdery did not come to Council Bluffs and address the Latter-day Saints, all of the evidence we could find indicated just the opposite. Cowdery's own sister, in fact, spoke with him at Council Bluffs and his close friend David Whitmer later admitted that in the "winter of 1848, after Oliver Cowdery had been baptized at Council Bluffs, he came back to Richmond to live . . ." (*An Address To Believers in the Book of Mormon*, April 1, 1887, p. 1). In *A Critical Look*, pages 2-4, we presented conclusive evidence that Cowdery did, in fact, return to the Mormon Church. The evidence, however, does indicate that after Cowdery's rebaptism he again became disenchanted with the Mormon leaders, and, according to David Whitmer, although he still believed the

Book of Mormon, he died "rejecting the Book of Doctrine and Covenants"—i.e., Joseph Smith's revelations to the church.

In any case, we concluded that although "Oliver Cowdery may not have died in full fellowship with the Church, we do not feel that there is any real evidence to prove that the purported Overstreet 'Confession' is a genuine document." (*A Critical Look*, p. 6)

Our work on the Cowdery *Defence* and the Overstreet "Confession" was not convincing to all historians. Two of the most prominent, Fawn Brodie and Juanita Brooks, both of whom are now deceased, felt we had not proved our case. Although Mrs. Brodie said that she had "read several of your pieces now with great interest, and much admire your scholarship," she made this comment concerning the *Defence*: "I regret very much to say that I cannot agree with you about the Cowdery *Defence*. After the most careful reading, I still believe it to be genuine. . . . I cannot see a forger fabricating this kind of thing . . ." (Letter dated May 10, 1967). Mrs. Brodie had no comment to make concerning the authenticity of the Overstreet "Confession."

Juanita Brooks disagreed with our work on both documents. Concerning the *Defence*, she commented:

You have convinced me that the item is genuine and that it was really written by Oliver Cowdery. You did for me what I had intended to do with the *Messenger and Advocate* letter myself, and the result is clearly that Cowdery was really the author. . . . The language is his, the incidents are his, the message is his. To me, all this pathetic "straining at a gnat while you swallow a camel" is entirely without point. . . . This is CLEARLY the work of Cowdery. . . . To assume that because you cannot find it, such a thing did not exist, is being pretty silly, I think. (Letter dated July 13, 1968)

Before she ever saw our work with regard to the Overstreet Confession, Mrs. Brooks wrote:

I have been told that you consider the Oliver Overstreet confession a hoax? Would you mind telling me how you arrived at this conclusion? The men who testified were all living at the time, all highly respected men, none of them bitter anti-Mormons. And Judge Elias S. Smith was certainly to be trusted! (Letter dated June 27, 1968)

In the letter of July 13, cited above, Mrs. Brooks maintained that the Overstreet "Confession" had been "proved true."

In *A Critical Look*, we presented a long list of parallels between wording found in material Cowdery wrote for the *Messenger and Advocate* and the *Defence* (see pages 22-26). In most cases parallels would help to establish common authorship, but in this case we felt that it proved just the opposite. We noted that "Some of the phrases taken from the *Messenger and Advocate* appear unnatural in the *Defence*. The whole thing, we think, looks like the work of an impostor. If we had found parallels in the letters which are in the Huntington Library, we would be more inclined to think that the *Defence* is genuine. But since almost all of the parallels are found in the letters published in the *Messenger and Advocate*, which were available to the general public, we are led to believe that the *Defence* is spurious"

(*A Critical Look*, p. 27). While Mrs. Brooks felt that the parallels proved common authorship, the noted Mormon critic Wesley P. Walters recognized the real problem. In a letter dated April 13, 1967, he wrote:

While reading through your list of comparisons of phrases I thought at first that you were going to conclude that the parallels proved Cowdery's authorship, and as I was reading these, the nearly verbatim agreement of the phrases made me feel that they showed copying rather than common authorship. I was very much in agreement with your conclusions therefore when I arrived at the end and found that you too had drawn this same conclusion.

New Discoveries

Although we felt that we had a very good case against both documents in 1967, we have recently completed some research which throws important new light on the *Defence* and completely destroys the Overstreet "Confession."

With regard to the Overstreet document, we have already quoted Juanita Brooks statement that the purported witnesses to the "Confession" and the Judge "were all living at the time." In another letter to Professor Richard Anderson, dated April 26, 1968, Mrs. Brooks stated that "the men who signed it were alive in 1857, all three prominent and active citizens, men to be trusted, and good-old Elias Smith without imagination or malice enough to swear to a fraud." She also noted in the letter of June 27, 1968, that "The Overstreet name is quite common in our records," but had apparently not found anyone with the name "Oliver Overstreet": "He did not come before the 1850 census, but there is no reason why he should not have come later."

We did not question Mrs. Brooks' information concerning the fact that the witnesses and Judge Smith were really historical people. (We respected her as one of the best authorities on the early history of early Utah.) We did, however, question the fact that this proved that the document was genuine. Our reasoning was that a clever forger also could have found the names and used them to give credibility to the document. We felt that it was possible that these names might be found in books on the history of Utah. The names of the witnesses which are given in the Overstreet "Confession" are "John M. Bowlwinkle," "Jesse W. Fox" and "H. McEwan." The Judge was listed as "E. S. Smith." As Mrs. Brooks indicated, this would have to be Elias Smith, who was Judge of the Probate Court at that time.

We had always felt that it did not ring true for the witnesses to bring such a devastating anti-Mormon document before a devout Mormon Judge for his signature. (Smith at one time even served as editor of the church's official organ, *Deseret News*.) Those who are familiar with early Utah history know that it would have been dangerous enough for these witnesses to have been engaged in a plan to undermine Brigham Young at that critical time, but to bring the document before one of Young's most trusted followers to obtain his signature would be asking for trouble.

In any case, we felt that it was possible that some type

of document prepared by Judge Elias Smith could have been used to help create the forgery. We began to search in books about early Utah for a document signed by Smith and for the names of the three witnesses. Most books mentioned Elias Smith and some also referred to Jesse W. Fox, but the other names appeared to be difficult to find. It seemed very unlikely, therefore, that we would find all four names in one book. A few weeks ago, however, we struck pay dirt. We not only discovered all of the names in one book, but we also found that they originally appeared in one document! This document is reproduced on pages 501-502 of T. B. H. Stenhouse's book, *The Rocky Mountain Saints*, which was published in 1873.

In the Overstreet "Confession," we find that after completing his statement, Mr. Overstreet signed the document. This is followed by the names of the three witnesses ("John M. Bowlwinkle," "Jesse W. Fox" and "H. McEwan") certifying to his handwriting, and last of all the signature of "E. S. Smith" appears. In the document reproduced in *The Rocky Mountain Saints*, we find that "Jesse W. Fox" signed the original document. Following this appear the signatures of two witnesses, "Henry McEwan" and "John M. Bollwinkel." At the very bottom of the document we find the name "E. Smith." The reader can hardly imagine our surprise when we found this document.

It was very clear from this that someone had merely borrowed the names from this document to create the Overstreet "Confession." Moreover, the bottom portion of the document reproduced by Mr. Stenhouse was obviously used to forge the end of the "Confession." It reads as follows:

Territory of Utah, County of Great Salt Lake.

"I, E. Smith, Judge of the Probate Court for said county, certify that the signer of the above transfer, personally known to me, appeared this second day of April, A. D. 1857, and acknowledged that he, of his own choice, executed the foregoing transfer. E. SMITH." (*The Rocky Mountain Saints*, p. 502)

The reader will notice in the quotation which follows from the Overstreet "Confession" that most of the words are identical with what we have quoted above. There have been a few changes to fit the type of document the Judge was signing. Notice, for instance, that in the genuine document Elias Smith was only certifying to the signature of "Jesse W. Fox," whereas in the forgery he was referring to three witnesses. This, of course, made it necessary to use the plural form of certain words in the purported Overstreet document:

Territory of Utah
County of Great Salt Lake

I, E. S. Smith, Judge of Probate Court, for the County aforesaid certify that the signers of the above certificate, all three are personally known to me, appeared before me this (7) day of April, A. D. 1857, and severally acknowledged their respective signatures as attached by themselves to the same.

E. S. Smith.

The reader will notice that the two documents are dated only five days apart. The Stenhouse reproduction gives a date of April 2, 1857, whereas the “Confession” bears a date of April 7, 1857. A comparison of the content of the two documents reveals how ludicrous the “Confession” really is. While the “Confession” indicates that Brigham Young was very dishonest (using bribery to fool his own people and encouraging plans for “Milking the Gentiles”), the original document reveals a blind faith in Brigham Young. It is, in fact, a document in which Jesse W. Fox consecrated his property to the Mormon Church! It says:

... I, JESSE W. FOX, ... for and in consideration of the sum of One Hundred (\$100) Dollars, and the good will which I have to the CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, give and convey unto BRIGHAM YOUNG, Trustee in trust for said Church, his successor in office, and assigns, all my claim to the ownership of the following described property, to wit: ... together with all the rights, privileges, and appurtenances thereunto belonging ... and will warrant and for ever defend the same unto the said TRUSTEE IN TRUST, his successor in office, and assigns, against the claims of my heirs, assigns, or any person whomsoever.

Henry McEwan and John M. Bollwinkel signed their names as witnesses and Elias Smith verified that Jesse W. Fox was “the signer of the above transfer.” The list of property which Mr. Fox turned over to the church included a house, lots, cows, clothing, beds and household furniture. The total value was listed at \$2,127. In 1857 this was a great deal of money. From the list, it would appear that Fox consecrated all of his property. T. B. H. Stenhouse comments concerning this matter:

... when they [the early Mormons] have increased in faith “the Lord” will afford them the opportunity of “consecrating” to him all that they possess. Their houses and lands, their chairs and tables, their horses and pigs, their hammers and saws, their buggies and wagons, and all and everything that they own or hope to own, to be deeded over to “the Lord’s” Trustee in Trust—Brigham Young; ... The preaching in the Tabernacle and in the ward meetings throughout Utah, at the date of Mr. Fox’s consecration, was almost wholly devoted to the Order of Enoch, and many believing souls placed all they possessed for ever beyond their own personal control and robbed their children of their rightful inheritances. (*The Rocky Mountain Saints*, pp. 501-502)

While the Fox document completely destroys the Overstreet “Confession,” it does not provide any structural material for the first part of the forged document. We feel, however, that there is convincing evidence that pages 79-80 of George Reynolds’ *The Myth of the “Manuscript Found,”* or *the Absurdities of the “Spalding Story”* was an important source for this part of the “Confession.” Reynolds’ book, printed in 1883, contains an article reprinted from the *Deseret News* which had Reuben Miller’s report of what Oliver Cowdery said when he returned to the church. (Those who believed the Overstreet “Confession,” of course, maintained that these were really the words of Oliver Overstreet, the man who supposedly “personated Oliver Cowdery.”)

The account found in *The Myth of the “Manuscript Found,”* page 79, contained this information: “At a special conference at Council Bluffs, Iowa, held on the 21st of October, in the year 1848 ... Brother Orson Hyde presided ...” In the “Confession,” this same information is included, although the words are slightly rearranged: “. . . at Council Bluffs, Iowa, on the 21st day of October, 1848, in a conference at which Brother Orson Hyde presided.”

The Reynolds account indicates that “Brother Reuben Miller” was at the conference. The “Confession” also says that “Bro. R. Miller” was present. The Reynolds account says that Reuben Miller made “a verbatim report of his remarks . . .” The “Confession” likewise speaks of “a verbatim record of my remarks . . .” The following short sentence appears in the Reynolds account: “This is true.” In the “Confession” we also find the sentence: “This is true.”

At the top of page 79 of *The Myth of the “Manuscript Found,”* a statement which did not originally appear in the *Deseret News* is found: “Oliver Cowdery is the first of the three witnesses.” In the “Confession” we find an almost identical expression: “Oliver Cowdery, the first of the three Witnesses . . .”

The fact that the Overstreet “Confession” uses a legal document printed by Stenhouse in 1873 seems to indicate that it could not have been written prior to that time, and that it seems to rely on Reynolds’ book makes it very unlikely that it was written before 1883. We actually do not know when the “Confession” first appeared, but in our pamphlet, *A Critical Look*, page 2, we said that we had “heard that it began to be circulated shortly after the turn of the century.”

One Author?

After we wrote *A Critical Look*, we began to feel that there was a strong possibility that both the *Defence* and the Overstreet “Confession” came from the same source. Since there has been so much material plagiarized from other sources in both documents, it is unlikely that stylistic analysis can throw much light on the subject. Nevertheless, there are three important similarities between the documents that seem to indicate the documents originated in the same mind.

One, both forgeries relate to Book of Mormon witness Oliver Cowdery. The *Defence* contains views which Cowdery may have held but never put down on paper. The “Confession,” on the other hand, was written to destroy the idea that Cowdery returned to the LDS Church and bore his testimony to the restoration of the priesthood by angels.

Two, the “Confession” reveals the very method that was used to forge the *Defence*. As we have shown in *A Critical Look*, a series of articles which Oliver Cowdery wrote for the *Messenger and Advocate* were used to make the document sound like Cowdery. In the Overstreet “Confession,” Mr. Overstreet claims that to enable him “to know what to say and do, Bro. Miller had me read **some articles written by Cowdery . . .**”

Three, both documents could leave the reader with the impression that an impersonation had taken place. The Overstreet “Confession” plainly states that Mr. Overstreet “personated Oliver Cowdery.” In the Cowdery *Defence*, the possibility of Sidney Rigdon impersonating “John the Baptist” seems to be strongly hinted at, although “Cowdery” turned right around and said he was sure that Rigdon “had no part in the transactions of that day. As the Angel was John the Baptist . . .” Notwithstanding the denial, it seems clear that the forger was trying to give the impression that an impersonation had, in fact, taken place. Furthermore, both forgeries discussed the matter of the similarity of the “voice” of a personage who delivered a message. In the *Defence*, we find the following:

. . . from his [Joseph Smith’s] hand I received baptism by the direction of the Angel of God, whose voice, as it has since struck me, did most mysteriously resemble the voice of Elder Sidney Rigdon . . . When I afterward first heard Elder Rigdon, whose voice is so strikingly similar, I felt that this “dear” brother was to be . . . the herald of this church . . .

In the Overstreet “Confession” we read:

“He insisted that I resembled Cowdery so much in form and features, notwithstanding our differences in tone of voice that I could easily personate him . . . Bro. Miller . . . also gave me some voice drill . . .”

New Evidence on Forgeries

While we felt that the evidence against the *Defence* and the Overstreet “Confession” which we printed in 1967 completely disproved both documents, some have continued to hold to the hope that one or both of these writings might be authentic. The Mormon scholar Marvin S. Hill acknowledged that there was a question with regard to the authenticity of the *Defence*, but still seemed to hold the door open to the possibility that it might be genuine: “Cowdery’s views may be contained in *Defence in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints . . .*” (*Quest For Refuge—The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism*, 1989, p. 200, footnote 68)

In *A Critical Look*, pp. 27-31, we suggested that the author of Cowdery’s *Defence* depended upon David Whitmer’s pamphlet—which is unquestionably a genuine document—for a great deal of the material in his forgery. We noted, for instance, that Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer claimed that God Himself spoke to him “from the heavens, and told me to ‘separate myself from among the Latter Day Saints . . .’” (*An Address To All Believers In Christ*, 1887, page 27) The words “Separating Myself From The Latter Day Saints” are used as part of the title of the Cowdery *Defence*. We also pointed out that David Whitmer’s claim that God spoke to him and told him to leave the Mormons probably suggested the vision in the *Defence* where “the Redeemer Himself” told Cowdery that he should “withdraw thyself from among them.” We listed many other important parallels between the forgery and Whitmer’s pamphlet; and, as we stated earlier, we noted that Whitmer never mentioned Cowdery’s work—a pamphlet which was

supposed to have been printed 48 years earlier. It seemed almost inconceivable that Whitmer would not even mention it if it really existed.

Richard Anderson has recently presented some new evidence which tends to confirm our theory that Whitmer’s pamphlet was used to create the *Defence*. On page 28 of *A Critical Look*, we related that David Whitmer told of a revelation Joseph Smith gave which commanded some of “the brethren” to go to “Toronto, Canada” and sell the copyright of the Book of Mormon. When the revelation turned out to be false, it caused “great trouble” among the brethren. They wanted to know why it was that God had given them a revelation to sell the copyright in Canada and yet they “had utterly failed in their undertaking.” Whitmer claimed that “Hiram page [*sic*] and Oliver Cowdery went to Toronto . . .” Professor Anderson, however, has demonstrated that Whitmer made a mistake with regard to the city in which they were supposed to sell the copyright. It was really Kingston. This is verified in a letter written by Hiram Page, the Book of Mormon witness who actually went with Cowdery on the journey (see *Quest For Refuge*, page 20). In addition, W. Wyl printed a letter from “Mr. Traughber” (probably J. L. Traughber, the man who preserved the McLellin diaries) which corroborated the essential elements of David Whitmer’s statement about the Canadian revelation but also made it very clear that Page and Cowdery went to Kingston (*Joseph Smith The Prophet—His Family And His Friends*, 1886, page 311). The forger of the Cowdery *Defence*, not realizing the problem, slavishly followed Whitmer’s pamphlet into the error.

With regard to the authorship of the forgeries, some new evidence has come to light which has affected our view regarding who wrote the two documents relating to Cowdery. We originally felt that “the author of the *Defence* was probably a believer in the Book of Mormon who had become disillusioned by David Whitmer’s pamphlet and was not sure what to believe” (*A Critical Look*, page 27). While we are even more convinced that Whitmer’s pamphlet was used, the evidence which we have recently examined now leads us to believe that it was probably a dedicated “anti-Mormon” rather than a mixed-up believer in the Book of Mormon who forged the *Defence*.

One thing that has caused us to revise our position is a manuscript entitled, “Sidney Rigdon—The Real Founder of Mormonism,” by William H. Whitsitt. Professor Whitsitt donated the original manuscript to the Library of Congress in 1908. Fortunately, Byron Marchant has made a typescript of about 500 pages of this manuscript, and it is available through Metamorphosis Publishing in Salt Lake City. According to Mr. Marchant there are 1,306 pages in the entire manuscript. In the material that follows we have used Byron Marchant’s typescript and have followed the page numbering of the original manuscript which Mr. Marchant has supplied in his typescript. We have also examined photocopies of many pages of the manuscript in the Dale Broadhurst Collection at the University of Utah Library, Special Collections.

When one of the editors of this newsletter (Sandra) was examining some of the pages which Mr. Marchant had given us, she made a startling discovery. She found that some

twenty-one years before the Cowdery *Defence* was published, William H. Whitsitt had suggested that Sidney Rigdon impersonated John the Baptist. In his manuscript, Whitsitt wrote the following:

In case Oliver had not encountered Mr. Rigdon on any other previous occasion, he had certainly received baptism at his hands on the 15th of May, 1829, and it was entirely natural that when a person of so much consequence should exhibit himself a second time, Cowdery should be in a situation to recognize his features. When in the subsequent progress of the movement he was introduced to Sidney, it is perfectly natural that he should have been confirmed in the conclusion that the person who had baptized him and exhibited the plates was none other than Rigdon. (“Sidney Rigdon—The Real Founder of Mormonism,” p. 392-b)

But the name by which Rigdon was most commonly and openly designated was that of “John the Baptist.” (*Ibid.*, p. 232)

The reader will note how similar this idea is to the Cowdery *Defence*:

... from his [Joseph Smith’s] hand I received baptism, by the direction of the Angel of God, whose voice, as it has since struck me, did most mysteriously resemble the voice of Elder Sidney Rigdon . . .

Now, if Cowdery’s *Defence* had been available in 1885, Whitsitt certainly would have cited it to prove his position that Rigdon impersonated the angel. In any case, this parallel between the Whitsitt manuscript and the *Defence* is remarkable and certainly raises the question as to whether Whitsitt’s idea was incorporated into the *Defence*.

The Mormon Church has always maintained that Sidney Rigdon did not become converted to the church until the fall of 1830 (see *History of the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 121-124). William Whitsitt, however, felt that he needed Sidney Rigdon on the scene much earlier because he believed that Rigdon was the “real founder” of Mormonism. Whitsitt’s manuscript reveals that he was a very strong believer in the Spalding theory concerning the origin of the Book of Mormon. This theory holds that early in the 19th century a minister by the name of Solomon Spalding wrote a manuscript entitled, “Manuscript Found.” Sidney Rigdon in some way obtained this document and it eventually was used by Rigdon and Smith to create the Book of Mormon. (Those who are interested in this theory and the attempt to revive it in the 1970’s should read our book, *Did Spalding Write the Book of Mormon?* This work includes a reprint of Spalding’s “Manuscript Story.”)

William H. Whitsitt felt that Sidney Rigdon was revising the Spalding manuscript long before Joseph Smith was supposed to have received the gold plates. He maintained that Rigdon “made two separate redactions of the Book of Mormon, the first of these being performed at Pittsburgh and Bainbridge from January 1823 to the autumn of 1826, and the second in or near Harmony township, Pennsylvania in the summer of 1829” (“Sidney Rigdon—The Real Founder

of Mormonism,” p. 205-a). Whitsitt professed to be able to tell which parts of the Book of Mormon were written by Spalding and which came from Rigdon. On pages 212-213 of his manuscript, he claimed that when Sidney Rigdon first examined “the volume of Mr. Spaulding,” he found that it was “entirely . . . devoted to the external history of the Nephites and Lamanites . . . to render it suitable for the chiefly religious purpose he had in mind it would be indispensable that he should rewrite the whole of it, leaving out the ‘more history part’ . . .” He started to do this; however, he “was a lazy scamp,” and when he came to the “close of the Book of Omni his industry failed him . . .” From that point on, he “returned to the text of Spaulding, only inserting here and there larger or shorter religious harangues set down on separate sheets of paper for the purpose of imparting a religious character to the story.”

Professor Whitsitt had a very active imagination. Like the originator of the Overstreet “Confession” and the Cowdery *Defence*, Whitsitt seems to have been obsessed with the idea of impersonations. He not only had Sidney Rigdon impersonating John the Baptist, but he also had him posing as the angel who showed the gold plates to the witnesses to the Book of Mormon. The first set of Book of Mormon witnesses was composed of David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris. On page 392 of his manuscript, Professor Whitsitt commented:

It is suspected that Mr. Rigdon was somewhere present in the undergrowth of the forest where the little company were assembled, and . . . could easily step forward at a signal from Joseph, and exhibit several of the most faded leaves of the manuscript, which from having been kept a series of years since the death of Spaulding would assume the yellow appearance that is well known in such circumstances. At a distance . . . the writing on these yellow sheets of paper would also appear to their excited imagination in the light of engravings; Sidney was likewise very well equal to the task of uttering the assurances which Smith affirms the angel was kind enough to supply concerning the genuineness of the “plates” and the correctness of the translation.

The reader will notice that Whitsitt not only had Rigdon impersonating the angel, but he also had him showing the Spalding manuscript in lieu of the gold plates. On page 181, Whitsitt observed: “Whatever secrets Oliver might have acquired or suspected on the occasion of the exhibition of the plates, he kept his own counsels . . . the trial which Joseph had feared so highly, succeeded beyond expectation.” Whitsitt carried the matter even further by claiming that Rigdon fooled the second set of eight witnesses in much the same way. Whitsitt’s imagination seems to have been especially active here because “The Testimony of Eight Witnesses,” which appears in the Book of Mormon, says nothing about an angel being present, only that “Joseph Smith, Jun. . . . has shown unto us the plates . . .” Professor Whitsitt, however, wrote the following on pages 393-395 of his manuscript:

This second exhibition came to pass only a few days after the one just now described. . . . [the] place was likely the cave that is mentioned by Pomeroy Tucker . . .

In such a cavern it would be easy for Sidney to secrete himself. . . . When the eight fresh witnesses were duly assembled in this favorable situation, Mr. Rigdon would experience no special embarrassment in playing the role of an angel to which he had grown accustomed. The “plates” which on the previous display did not seem to resemble gold, would easily take on the “appearance of gold” (Testimony of Eight Witnesses), in the far dimmer light to which they were now exposed . . .

A number of things could make one suspicious that William Whitsitt had something to do with the Cowdery *Defence* and the Overstreet “Confession.” We have already pointed out that he had a vivid imagination and was obsessed with the idea of impersonations. It is interesting to note that in the sentence just before Whitsitt spoke of Rigdon’s impersonation of John the Baptist (an idea strongly hinted at in the *Defence*), he quoted from “*Myth of the Manuscript Found*, page 79” (see Whitsitt’s manuscript, page 392-a). The reader will remember that this is the very page which seems to be the basis for part of the Overstreet “Confession.” Moreover, in an article published in *The Concise Dictionary of Religious Knowledge and Gazetteer*, 1893, William H. Whitsitt recommended a number of books to his readers. Among them was “T. B. H. Stenhouse, *Rocky Mountain Saints*, New York, 1873 . . .” This, of course, is the book that contains the last part of the Overstreet “Confession.”

The creator of the Overstreet “Confession” apparently wanted to destroy the idea that Oliver Cowdery returned to the Mormon Church and bore his testimony to the Book of Mormon and the restoration of both the Aaronic and Melchisedek priesthoods by angels from heaven. Professor Whitsitt was strongly committed to the position that no angels came from heaven to bring the Book of Mormon or to restore either priesthood. On pages 553-554 of his manuscript, Whitsitt emphatically wrote:

By this introduction of Peter, James and John, Mr. Smith also placed himself on a more advantageous footing with relation to Rigdon. Under the character of “John the Baptist,” Sidney [*sic*] had ordained the prophet to the Aaronic priesthood But Peter, James and John [who were supposed to have restored the Melchisedek priesthood] were manifestly above “John the Baptist” . . .

The Mormons have vexed their ingenuity not a little to decide at what place and time Peter, James and John appeared to the prophet and bestowed the apostleship upon him . . . but the inquiry is entirely futile, since the occurrence never took place in any form, but was merely pretended by Joseph in order to guard himself against possible embarrassments.

It is our belief that one of the major reasons that the Overstreet “Confession” was written was to destroy a statement concerning the Spalding-Rigdon theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon which was attributed to Oliver Cowdery when he returned to the church in 1848. According to the report in *The Myth of the “Manuscript Found,”* page 80,

Oliver Cowdery proclaimed that the Book of Mormon “is true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it. Mr. Spaulding did not write it.”

This statement would have been objectionable to anyone who believed that Spalding wrote the Book of Mormon, but William Whitsitt, who had written a large manuscript debunking Mormonism and promoting the Spalding theory, would have found it exceptionally abhorrent. Since he already believed that Rigdon had impersonated angels to convince Cowdery of the truthfulness of Mormonism, he probably would have felt that these words attributed to Cowdery were also spurious. Whether he would go so far as to resort to forgery in an attempt to eradicate the statement is of course another question.

While the Overstreet “Confession” tries to completely destroy the credibility of the attack on the Spalding theory attributed to Cowdery, the *Defence* takes the matter even further by having Cowdery say that the voice of the angel “did most mysteriously resemble the voice of Elder Sidney Rigdon . . .” The effectiveness of this subtle suggestion in the *Defence* cannot be overstated. Although we have never placed much stock in the Spalding theory, at the time we accepted the Cowdery *Defence* as genuine, we felt that this was one of the best evidences for that theory because it came from within Mormonism from a person who really could have known what was going on.

View on Forgery

The first part of William H. Whitsitt’s manuscript would certainly give one the impression that he was very opposed to forgery. He, in fact, severely castigated a minister for being involved in producing a document which he felt was a “clumsy fabrication.” This document, which promoted the Spalding argument, turned out to be very embarrassing to those who endorsed that theory. It purported to be a letter written by Solomon Spalding’s widow, Matilda Davison, and was published in *The Boston Recorder* in 1839. The letter charged that Solomon Spalding was trying to get his manuscript published at a printing establishment in Pittsburgh where Sidney Rigdon was employed. This, of course, supplied the “missing link” between Spalding and Rigdon and made it clear that Rigdon could have copied Spalding’s manuscript while it was in the printing office. The Mormons referred to the letter as a “bogus affidavit.” Professor Whitsitt seemed to agree and expressed very strong feelings against it:

In the face of proofs so strong as those that have just been supplied to the effect that Sidney’s handicraft in Pittsburgh was that of a tanner . . . the statement has been so often repeated that he engaged in a printing office at Pittsburgh . . .

Nothing was ever heard of Rigdon as being employed in the printing office of Patterson and Lambdin at Pittsburgh until the first day of April 1839. The document containing this singular assertion was subscribed by Matilda Davison . . . this was to turn to a very inferior source, Mrs. Spaulding (Davidson [*sic*]) had imparted all the information she could command to Mr. Howe in the year 1834, and it is marvel to perceive how

meager was her store . . . she had heard of the “Manuscript Found” by name, but was not aware of its contents; she could not be positive that it had ever been carried to the office of Patterson and Lambdin, and was just as much in the dark to decide whether it had ever been returned; of Sidney Rigdon she knew nothing in the world.

But when her certificate dated the 1st of April 1839 was given to the public, she had meanwhile acquired a considerable access to her knowledge regarding all these topics and especially touching Mr. Rigdon. She affirms: “Sidney Rigdon, who was figured so largely in the history of the Mormons, was at that time connected with the printing office of Mr. Patterson, as is well known in that region, and as Rigdon himself has frequently stated. Here he had ample opportunity to become acquainted with Mr. Spaulding’s manuscript and to copy it, if he chose. . . .”

It is **not probable** that Mrs. Spaulding (Davison) should have been the author of assertions of this nature. She was too honestly ignorant of these concerns in 1834 to have expressed herself in the above strain in the year 1839. . . . it is absolutely certain that he was **not** an apprentice in a printing office as early as she intimates. . . . Almost every important allegation that she supplies in the certificate which is presumed to have been composed by Messrs. Ely and Austin is **incorrect and misleading**. A comparison of the two separate utterances will suggest two conclusions, one or the other of which must be accepted. The first is that the good lady is an unfaithful witness, and the second is that her innocency was employed by some person who wished to do evil that good might come of it.

But no real good has ever come of it; the certificate of 1839, besides introducing a large amount of error into this history, has steadily brought aid and comfort to the Mormons.

...
If the certificate . . . be rejected as the clumsy invention of the parties who were using her simplicity to accomplish their own ends—and no other course lies open to the student of the subject—the public will be deprived of the only evidence it ever possessed to the effect that Sidney was at any time engaged in a printing office . . . (“Sidney Rigdon—The Real Founder of Mormonism,” pages 153-157)

On page 197 of the same manuscript, William Whitsitt charged that if Mrs. Spaulding “had been left to her private devices that clumsy ‘April Fool’ would never have vexed the soul of the student. All the blame of this transaction must be laid at the door of other people who abused her simplicity to accomplish purposes of their own. The parties who seem to be directly responsible for this fraud, are the Rev. John Storrs, Pastor of the Congregational Church in Holliston . . . and Mr. D. R. Austin, Principal of the Monson Academy.”

It is interesting to note that the very statement by Spaulding’s widow which Professor Whitsitt condemned so strongly became a very important part of a recent attempt to revive the Spaulding theory. It is reproduced twice in the book, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* by Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis and Donald R. Scales, 1977, pages 42-47, 201-209. On page 207 we read: “Our examination of the so-called ‘problems’ in Mrs. Davison’s testimony show that they can all be answered easily . . . the basic facts of her affidavit will stand careful examination.”

In any case, although Professor Whitsitt seemed so adamant against forgery or fraud in the case of Spaulding’s widow, when he came to “The Question of Rigdon’s Sincerity” in chapter eleven of his manuscript, he seemed surprisingly tolerant:

The Book of Mormon sincerely if not effectually aims to “make for righteousness.” . . . Mr. Rigdon pursued a purpose which he candidly believed would promote the honor of the Lord . . . His own impulse and plan were to his thinking unquestionably good, and with as little question he supposed that both had come from the Lord. . . . the fact remains that notwithstanding what the world conceives to be his evil behavior he kept a good conscience which had no trouble to excuse the conduct of its owner . . . To his mind the truth and authority of this production were entirely independent of Joseph’s connection with it. He was sensible that he had only employed young Mr. Smith as a kind of tool . . . The great position that “Jesus is the Christ,” . . . would stand firm no matter what kind of fate might befall Joseph Smith. . . .

But the allegation will be still laid against the honesty of Mr. Rigdon that he perpetrated a pious fraud. The history of the religious world abounds with instances of pious fraud. In the Old Testament the number of Apocryphal and of pseudepigraphical books is far too large to recount in this place. The same remark also applies to the New Testament. . . . The man who out of hand asserts the knavery, all and singular, of the authors of these productions argues nothing so much as his own imbecility. . . . every man of sober reflection must suspend his judgment touching the conduct of Rigdon until he has weighed all the conditions that may be involved. . . . those who will persist in the conclusion that Mr. Rigdon was nothing else than a roguish knave must be content to forego every kind of hope to find a right understanding of his career and character . . . If they relish their voluntary imbecility they are welcome to the benefits it may bring them, but when Sidney is judged, as he has a fair right to be, by the facts, and by his own productions, it becomes probable that he was an honest fanatic. . . .

The question is not whether the production of Rigdon actually “makes for righteousness”; but did he intend that it should “make for righteousness”? The inquiry must be answered in the affirmative; it was not his purpose to earn money or fame from its circulation; he desired to promote the interests of Christ and of the “ancient order of things.” (“Sidney Rigdon—The Real Founder of Mormonism,” pages 466-471)

The question naturally arises as to whether the person who wrote the above might himself commit “a pious fraud” to save the Mormon people from their delusions? Since he already believed that Rigdon and Smith had used impersonation to lead the people into error, would he consider it wrong to create something that might reclaim them? If it was done to “make for righteousness” with no desire “to earn money or fame from its circulation,” would it really be evil to produce such a work? We do not really know the answer to those questions. The circumstances look very suspicious, but it is certainly possible that someone else might have taken advantage of Professor Whitsitt’s ideas to produce forgeries.

Neal's Role

As we indicated earlier, R. B. Neal was the first to print the Cowdery *Defence* in 1906. Neal claimed to have received his copy of the original in 1905. In a letter dated June 3, 1905, he wrote: "I have before me 'Oliver Cowdery's *Defence*;' just got it yesterday." This letter is printed in *Wingfield Watson's Prophetic Controversy*, No. 6, or 'Facts' for the Anti-Mormons . . . Mr. Neal certainly realized the importance of the *Defence* in his work with the Mormons. In a later publication, Neal commented: "No more important document has been unearthed since I have been engaged in this warfare . . ." ("Sword of Laban" Leaflets, No. 11).

Because Neal had a ministry which published "Anti-Mormon" tracts and was the first to bring the *Defence* to light, a number of Mormons suspected that he really wrote it. Another theory, of course, would be that someone else wrote it and had it typeset and printed by a publisher who had no interest in Mormonism. Since it would have only been sixty-six years since Oliver Cowdery was supposed to have printed it, it would have been easy to make a copy of the pamphlet appear that old by exposing it to the sun, water and dirt. A copy created in this manner could have been sent to Mr. Neal without much fear of exposure.

Like William Whitsitt, R. B. Neal was dedicated to proving the Spalding-Rigdon theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon and felt that the statement about Sidney Rigdon in the *Defence* was very significant:

. . . we are not surprised that Cowdery says: "The voice of the angel did most mysteriously resemble the voice of Elder Sidney Rigdon." This statement of Cowdery's, solves in a large measure the problem as to the "fine Italian hand" behind ignorant Joseph Smith in this Mormon conspiracy (*Oliver Cowdery's Defence and Renunciation*, Anti-Mormon Tracts, No. 9, 1906, pages 17-18).

One very interesting thing about the *Defence* is that it seems to reflect and even directly quote some material written by R. B. Neal six years before the pamphlet fell into Neal's hands. In a pamphlet published in 1899, Neal had argued that there was an important contradiction with regard to the restoration of the Mormon priesthood. He demonstrated that one of Joseph Smith's revelations published in the *Doctrine and Covenants* (Section 7), and the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 28: 6-40) affirm that the Apostle John and three members of the Council of Twelve among the Nephites were to remain on earth and "never taste of death."

R. B. Neal noted that because of this claim, "we must revise the stereotyped answer given by the child to the question of who was the oldest man. Methuselah is nowhere. John and the three nameless Nephites are over 1,800 years old. . . . These apostles have the keys to both 'Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods'—the 'right to baptize' and 'to impart the Holy Ghost.'" Mr. Neal then commented that the *Pearl of Great Price*, one of the four standard works of the church, contained

an account of the restoration of the priesthood by Cowdery which said that at the time Joseph Smith began his work, "none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the Gospel" (*Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith — History, 1981 edition, p. 59).

Joseph Smith claimed that "John the Baptist" came from heaven to restore the Aaronic priesthood. R. B. Neal, however, pointed out that one of the "four apostles" who remained on earth should have restored the priesthood and, according to the Mormon Church's own theology, it was wrong to say that "none" on earth had the authority from God:

Joseph! Oliver! what do you mean? Where, oh, where were the four apostles who held these keys, the keys to both priesthoods? They were on earth, if Joseph and Oliver and the Book of Mormon are not monumental liars. Who took them from earth? Or, who took the right to baptize and to impart the Holy Ghost from them? (*The Stick of Ephraim vs. The Bible of the Western Continent; or, The Manuscript Found vs. The Book of Mormon*, Part 1, 1899, page 28)

The *Defence* presents exactly the same argument. It has Cowdery recognizing his error with regard to this matter and claims that he said:

(1) But I certainly followed him [Joseph Smith] too far when accepting, and reiterating, that none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the Gospel, as I had then forgotten that John, the beloved disciple, was tarrying on earth and exempt from death.

By comparing the quotation below, the reader will notice that a number of words (set in bold type for easy comparison) used in the *Defence* are identical to wording printed six years earlier by Neal! Although many of these words are borrowed from the *Pearl of Great Price*, that they would be followed by words concerning John the beloved still being on earth seems too close to be a coincidence.

We learn that none on earth "had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the gospel." I am quoting Oliver now. This confirms Joseph. John the beloved was on earth . . . (*The Stick of Ephraim*, p. 28)

It would be very difficult to believe that the parallels in thoughts and wording could have happened by chance. While it does throw a shadow of suspicion on R. B. Neal, there is another possible explanation. It could very well be that someone who read Neal's *The Stick of Ephraim* used it to write the *Defence*. People are far more likely to fall for a forgery if it supports their own beliefs. The noted forger Mark Hofmann demonstrated this within the last few years. One of his customers indicated that he would like to have a letter written by Joseph Smith from the Carthage Jail. While this would be a very rare item, within a short time Hofmann was able to "find" such a letter.

A forger who had read some of R. B. Neal's writings would certainly be wise to frame the document as near to Mr. Neal's theories as possible. This would insure that Neal would

give it his full support and a wide distribution. It is interesting to note that Mr. Neal recognized that the document supported his position with regard to “John the Beloved.” When he first published the “Cowdery” tract in *Oliver Cowdery’s Defence and Renunciation*, pages 15-16, he commented:

We made the same argument years ago that Oliver here makes. It is unanswerable. . . . No wonder Oliver says: “I followed Joseph too far when accepting and reiterating that none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the Gospel, &c.”

It is hard to believe that Neal himself would bring the matter to light if he was the one who forged the document. Such a statement might make people want to compare Neal’s earlier writings and possibly lead to the discovery that the *Defence* was forged. On the other hand, however, we have to acknowledge that people who forge documents and commit other crimes do not always use the same type of logic that normal people do.

Looking for Tracks

During our research on these forged documents we have kept our eye open for any connection between William H. Whitsitt and R. B. Neal. At the present time we have no evidence to show that Professor Whitsitt ever provided Neal with information. Nevertheless, it does seem possible that these two men could have known about each other. In the Dale Broadhurst Collection at the University of Utah Library, we did find a photocopy from a book which has some interesting information on William Whitsitt. Although the photocopy does not reveal the name of the book, it seems to be a book concerning important religious leaders. In any case, on page 170 we find this information:

Whitsitt, William Heth (Nov. 25, 1841-Jan. 20, 1911), Baptist minister, church historian, and theological seminary president . . . he accepted (1872) the chair of ecclesiastical history in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Greenville, S. C. . . . In 1895 he was elected president of the seminary, which in 1877 had been moved to Louisville, Ky. Under his administration the enrollment surpassed that of any other American theological seminary, and his thorough scholarship and courageous devotion to truth commanded the unstinted admiration of his students.

A statement made by Whitsitt in his article upon the Baptists published in *Johnson’s Universal Encyclopaedia* (1896) precipitated what was known as “the Whitsitt controversy.” . . . the controversy lasted for four years, increasing in bitterness as the weakness of th[e] arguments of the church successionists becam[e] more evident. Many who recognized the principle of academic freedom became convinced tha[t] denominational concord could be gained onl[y] through Whitsitt’s withdrawal from the inst[itu]tion, and the trustees of the seminary at lengt[h] accepted his resignation (1899). After a year[’s] rest he accepted the chair of philosophy in Richmond College, Richmond, Va. . . .

While Whitsitt was serving as president of the seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, R. B. Neal was publishing “Anti-

Mormon” tracts in Grayson, a town in the eastern part of Kentucky. Only about 150 miles separated the two Mormon critics at that time. Professor Whitsitt later served at Richmond College, which was about 375 miles east of Neal’s home. Since R. B. Neal printed a vast number of tracts, it would seem likely that some would reach the seminary at Louisville or Richmond College in Virginia. On the other hand, in 1891, an article on Mormonism by Whitsitt was published in *The Concise Dictionary of Religious Knowledge and Gazetteer*. This book was reprinted in 1893. In this article, Professor Whitsitt strongly advocated his views on the Spalding theory. At the end of his selection of books on Mormonism (page 622), Whitsitt indicated that he had written a book about Sidney Rigdon. He referred to, “W. H. Whitsitt, *Life of Sidney Rigdon*, 1891 (in which will be found the proof of the statements made about the Book of Mormon, etc.)” If R. B. Neal ever saw this article, it probably would have aroused his interest in the manuscript Whitsitt had written.

As it turned out, Whitsitt’s manuscript was never published and in his letter to the Library of Congress, he sadly wrote, “I suppose it will never be in my power to issue the work in print, but I should be glad to leave it in some library where it might be consulted in manuscript . . .” (Letter dated August 28, 1908, Byron Marchant’s transcript). In the same letter, Whitsitt indicated that when his article was published in 1891, he received letters from “many persons in differing portions of the country who had perused it.” Because of their common interests in refuting Mormonism and establishing the Spalding theory it is possible that these two men met or corresponded at some time.

An anthropologist once noted that when just a few scattered fragments of bone from an ancient fossil man are found, some scientists tend to be more dogmatic than when there are a large numbers of bones discovered. This is because there is not a great deal of evidence available to refute any conclusions they might arrive at. This same thing is undoubtedly true with regard to historians. It is easy to write sweeping statements about things that happened long ago when we know there is little to contradict what we set forth as “truth.” In the present case, it would be very easy to pronounce William H. Whitsitt the forger of the Overstreet “Confession” and the Cowdery *Defence*, and it would probably be very difficult for anyone to disprove the accusation. When it comes right down to it, however, we must admit that we do not have enough pieces to complete the puzzle.

While we can now be certain that the *Defence* and the “Confession” are forgeries, we must be very careful about jumping to conclusions. The evidence, however, seems to indicate that the Cowdery *Defence* was written sometime between 1899 and June 3, 1905. A number of things seem essential for its production: One, William Whitsitt’s idea that Sidney Rigdon impersonated John the Baptist. His manuscript containing this idea was written in 1885. Although we are not aware of any other source for this theory, we cannot state for certain that Whitsitt did not hold to the idea at an earlier time or that it could not have come from some other source we are not familiar with. Two, David Whitmer’s *An Address to*

All Believers in Christ, which was not published until 1887. Three, R. B. Neal's 1899 printing of *The Stick of Ephraim* (the pamphlet that maintained that the priesthood should have been restored by the Apostle John rather than John the Baptist).

The Oliver Overstreet "Confession" is more difficult to date. We do know that it was necessary for the forger to have *The Rocky Mountain Saints*, printed in 1873, and *The Myth of the "Manuscript Found,"* which appeared in 1883. Whitsitt's idea of a number of impersonations in early Mormonism, set forth in his 1885 manuscript, cannot be overlooked with regard to this document. Since the "Confession" describes the very method used in producing the *Defence*, i.e., Overstreet's use of "some articles written by Cowdery" to imitate his style, it seems reasonable to believe that it was forged after the *Defence* was written. This, of course, would be sometime after June 3, 1905.

We feel that there are three theories with regard to the authorship of the Cowdery *Defence* and the Overstreet "Confession":

One, that they were forged by R. B. Neal. Mr. Neal was a firm believer in the Spalding theory and had the ability to write both documents. Furthermore, in his position with an organization which printed "Anti-Mormon" tracts he could have had access to the printed books necessary to produce the forgeries. For instance, in his booklet, *The Stick of Ephraim*, page 26, he cited a quotation from "Myth of the Manuscript Found, p. 80." As we have already pointed out, pages 79-80 of this book were used in creating the "Confession." We have also noted that Neal wrote a pamphlet in 1899 concerning the restoration of the priesthood and that the same argument was incorporated into the *Defence*. In this publication, however, Mr. Neal did not refer to the idea that John the Baptist was impersonated by Sidney Rigdon. He, of course, could have later learned of that theory from William Whitsitt or someone who read Whitsitt's manuscript, but so far we have no evidence to that effect. If our theory is correct that the *Defence* and the "Confession" were forged by the same individual, it would raise the question as to why Neal never printed the Overstreet "Confession." He printed many tracts after the *Defence*, but as far as we have been able to determine, he did not publish the "Confession." It would seem that a man who played such a prominent role in an organization which printed Anti-Mormon tracts would rush the "Confession" into print if he was, in fact, the author of that document. This would lead us to believe that Neal was merely the "tool" used by a very clever forger.

Two, that the documents were forged by William H. Whitsitt. Professor Whitsitt, like R. B. Neal, had the ability to write the documents in question. Moreover, he had a very active imagination. He was obviously fascinated by the idea of impersonations, and his manuscript contains accounts of three different impersonations by Sidney Rigdon. The "Confession" begins with the words: "I personated Oliver Cowdery . . ." The *Defence* also hints concerning Rigdon impersonating John the Baptist.

According to this theory, Whitsitt would not have to be personally acquainted with R. B. Neal. He would just have to know that Neal had an extensive Anti-Mormon tract ministry. He would, however, need to have access to a copy of Neal's booklet, *The Stick of Ephraim* to use in writing the *Defence*. Whitsitt could have some copies of the "Cowdery" pamphlet printed, have one "aged" and send it to Mr. Neal. Neal, of course, would be very vulnerable to a tract which supported his own beliefs about Mormonism.

Like R. B. Neal, Professor Whitsitt held tenaciously to the Spalding theory about the origin of the Book of Mormon. He had, in fact, written a 1,306-page book dedicated to proving that theory. In his letter to the Library of Congress he said that he found that "such a large amount of money was required to produce the work that I was compelled to desist, . . ." It could be argued that the frustration of never having his masterpiece published led him to seek some other way of getting the message out to the world that Mormonism originated and grew through deceit and impersonations.

William Whitsitt, as we have shown, was familiar with the two books which were used to produce the Overstreet "Confession," and would have wanted the report of the remarks made by Oliver Cowdery when he returned to the church undermined because it contradicted the Spalding theory and his firm belief that the restoration of the Melchizedek priesthood "never took place."

Three, that the documents were forged by an unknown person who had access to the Whitsitt manuscript, the writings of R. B. Neal and all of the other writings necessary to commit the forgeries. This explanation, of course, would clear both Whitsitt and Neal of any responsibility for the forgeries.

While it may never be known for certain who forged the Oliver Cowdery *Defence* and the Oliver Overstreet "Confession," one thing is very obvious: there was a forger on the loose around the turn of the century who was extremely interested in promoting the Spalding manuscript theory. Because of this, we must be especially cautious of any documents relating to that matter which were "discovered" during the latter part of the 19th century or the early part of the 20th century.

While some anti-Mormon writers have been guilty of deceit and forgery, a far greater problem exists in documents printed by the church itself. Joseph Smith and other early Mormon leaders created literally hundreds of pages of forged documents. At the present time, we are working on a book that will demonstrate conclusively that the Book of Mormon is not a translation of an ancient record written on gold plates.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

No Fool!

Jim Elliot, who later gave his life in an attempt to bring the Christian message to the Auca Indians, wrote the following:

*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep
to gain what he cannot lose.*

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