

A Critical Look

A Study of the Overstreet "Confession"
and the Cowdery "Defence."

By Jerald and Sandra Tanner

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1967
(Digital version 2022)

Utah Lighthouse Ministry
www.utlm.org



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INTRODUCTION

One of the most serious problems facing a student of Mormon history today is the fact that those who have gone before us have not always been honest. Both Mormon and anti-Mormon writers have sometimes been guilty of deceit. This makes it very difficult to determine what the truth is with regard to some issues.

The two purported documents which we will deal with in this study are entitled “A Confession of Oliver Overstreet” and “Defence in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints.” The “Defence” was supposed to have been written by Oliver Cowdery in 1839. The purported confession of Oliver Overstreet was supposed to have been written before April 7, 1857. Both documents are connected with the life of Oliver Cowdery—one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon.

We have spent a good deal of time trying to learn the truth concerning these documents, and although we are not pleased with the results of our research, we feel that it would be dishonest and unfair to the Mormon people to suppress our findings.

In Part 1 of this pamphlet we will deal with the “Overstreet Confession.” In Part 2 we will deal with the “Defence.”

April 7, 1967

PART I

THE OVERSTREET "CONFESSION"

The following is taken from a typed copy of the Oliver Overstreet "Confession":

A CONFESSION OF OLIVER OVERSTREET THE OVERSTREET LETTER

I personated Oliver Cowdery at Council Bluffs, Iowa, on the 21st day of October, 1848, in a conference at which Brother Orson Hyde presided.

The circumstances need not all be detailed, as the very memory of them has become bitter to me. The facts are these: Bro. R. Miller came to me with an offer from Bro. Brigham Young, of \$500.00 cash in hand paid, to pose as Oliver Cowdery, the first of the three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon.

He told me there were many Saints who set much store on his (Cowdery's) testimony, who owing to his apostacy, had become disaffected themselves, and that nothing would reassure these like the conviction that Cowdery had reaffirmed his calling as a **Witness** to the Holy Priesthood and the Book of Mormon.

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 without danger of being caught and exposed, and told me that Bro. Brigham regarded such a piece of state as exceedingly well warranted as a plan for "Milking the Gentiles," who had so wrongfully slain the Prophet Joseph and driven his people from Nauvoo, Ill. The presence of the money, \$500.00, helped to quell my scruples.

To enable me to know what to say and do, Bro. Miller had me read some articles written by Cowdery and also gave me some voice drill, assuring me that he would make a **verbatim record** of my remarks, while personating Mr. Cowdery to be preserved for future use under Bro. Brigham Young's direction; and that my part in the matter he was confident would never be known or suspected.

I received the money and carried out the device and allowed my conscience to be lulled to sleep until I found that Bro. Brigham Young and his Elders were handling out as Mr. Cowdery's words, since his death, **what I was Bribed to say**, in his name at Council Bluffs and then my conscience began to trouble me. This is true. It is a pitiful confession to make. I hope for forgiveness from One higher than man. But my inability to silence my conscience after years of trial shows that duty is plain.

I confess the fraud and that I received five hundred dollars for it. Bro. Miller told me that Bro. Brigham Young furnished the money. I have no doubt he did. You are at liberty to use this confession in whatever way it seems best

to you, taking care to not so implicate yourselves to put yourself in any peril of Bro. Brigham's vengeance, which I think will never be able to reach me.

Oliver Overstreet.

CERTIFICATE OF CHIROGRAPHY

We the undersigned who are familiar with the handwriting of Oliver Overstreet from having corresponded with him state that the above confession, (shown to us by its recipient in strict confidence that we will not disclose his identity without first obtaining his permission) it is Mr. Overstreet's own handwriting.

Having heard of Mr. Overstreet's death a few days after he penned the confession given above, we certify to his chirography as well known to us.

John M. Bowlwinkle
Jesse W. Fox
H. McEwan

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.

Mormon writers claim that the Oliver Overstreet "Confession" is a spurious document, and that Oliver Cowdery did return to the Church and died in full fellowship. We have not taken any position in regard to this issue since we were not sure who was telling the truth.

We have known several people who have been interested in the Overstreet "Confession," but no one has been able—to our knowledge—to find the original copy. We have heard that it began to be circulated shortly after the turn of the century. We do not know of any early reference to it.

The research we have done has led us to the conclusion that Oliver Cowdery did return to the Mormon Church, although he may not have died in full fellowship.

The Mormon writer Francis W. Kirkham quotes two letters which were published during Oliver Cowdery's lifetime which indicate that he returned to the Church. One of the letters was written by Wilford Woodruff and was published in the *Millennial Star* on February 1st, 1849. In this letter we find the following:

Dear Brother Pratt—I received a letter from Elder Hyde saying that Oliver Cowdery had come to the Bluffs with his family; and made satisfaction to the Church who had voted to receive him into the Church by baptism; and Elder Hyde expected to baptize him the next day. . . . I was truly glad to hear he had returned to the fold. (*Millennial Star*, vol. 11, page 43, as quoted in *A New Witness For Christ in America*, 1951, pages 72-73)

There are at least three other references which, we feel, seem to show that Oliver Cowdery did return to the Church at Council Bluffs.

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The first is by David Whitmer. In an interview with Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith he stated Oliver Cowdery had told him that he returned to the Church:

Upon inquiry, Mr. Whitmer informed us that Oliver Cowdery had told him **all about his visiting the Church** at Council Bluffs and of his **having been rebaptized**. (*Millennial Star*, vol. 40, page 774)

It may be argued that this is from a Mormon source, but David Whitmer published a pamphlet in 1887 which shows that he believed that Cowdery did return to the Church. In this pamphlet he stated:

In the winter of 1848, **after** Oliver Cowdery had been baptized at Council Bluffs, he came back to Richmond to live, and lived here until his death, March 3, 1850. (*An Address to Believers in the Book of Mormon*, April 1, 1887, page 1)

It must be remembered that David Whitmer was very opposed to the teachings of the Mormon Church at the time he made this statement. He would have had no reason to make this statement unless he really believed that Cowdery was rebaptized at Council Bluffs.

The leaders of the Reorganized Church of Latter-day Saints are also opposed to the teachings of the Utah Church, yet in 1884 they admitted that Oliver Cowdery did go to Council Bluffs. In the *Saints' Advocate* for June, 1884, they quoted both David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery's sister as saying that he was at Council Bluffs. We quote from this article:

The writer is in possession of facts which show Elder Cowdery to have been, up to the hour of his death, sternly and uncompromisingly opposed to the peculiar doctrines, policy, and practices endorsed and advocated by the Utah leaders.

David Whitmer, Sen., of Richmond, Mo., said to the writer and a company of near twenty, at his own house, April 4th, 1883, when questioned as to why Elder Cowdery was baptized by some of the Utah ministers in 1847 at Council Bluffs, Iowa, that he did so in order to reach his relatives and others among the Brighamites, and redeem them from the errors and evils of polygamy, etc., etc. He said Elder Cowdery "did not endorse their peculiar doctrines—did not believe in polygamy nor anything like it—but he died like a man of God." (This we take from notes made at the interview. Ed.)

In a letter said to have been written by Elder Cowdery to Daniel Jackson, and Phebe, his (Cowdery's) sister, from Tiffin, Ohio, July 24th, 1846, he said alluding to polygamy:

I can hardly think it possible that you have written us the truth; that, though there may be individuals who are guilty of the iniquities spoken of—yet no such practice can be preached or adhered to as a public doctrine. Such may do for the followers of Mahomet; it may have been done some thousands of years ago; but no people professing to be governed by the pure and holy principles of the Lord Jesus can hold up their heads before the world at this distance of time, and be guilty of such abomination. It will blast, like a mildew, their fairest prospects, and lay the ax at the root of their future happiness — *Saints' Advocate*, vol. 1. pps. 112, 113.

In this Elder Cowdery uses almost the exact language against polygamy found in the Book of Mormon, page 116, which he penned nearly twenty

years previous. This makes it highly improbable that he would indorse and heartily unite with a polygamic church.

Besides this, a sister of O. Cowdery, **now living, says that O. Cowdery, when at Council Bluffs**, previous to his death, expressed, **in her presence** his regret and sorrow over the base doctrines and corrupt practices of the Brighamite leaders. (*Saints' Advocate*, June, 1884, pages 453-455)

The *Gospel Herald*, a publication of the Strangites, seems to contain evidence that Oliver Cowdery did return to the Mormon Church. The *Gospel Herald* was published at Voree, Wisconsin. The issue for January 13, 1848, stated that Oliver Cowdery "lives only 12 miles from Voree." In the issue for October 5, 1848, this statement appeared:

On the whole, Oliver seems to be in good demand and first rate standing. Even Phineas Young is here, telling that brother Cowdery is going with him to Council Bluffs. We don't doubt he does so with just as much truth as McLellin told that he was going with him. A short time ago all were against him; now all crying him up, and bragging that he will go with them. Don't think they will lift him high enough to make him dizzy. If they should, they would let him fall very hard. (*Gospel Herald*, October 5, 1848)

Apparently, Phineas Young was successful, for on June 7, 1849, this statement appeared in the *Gospel Herald*:

We learn by private correspondence from St. Louis that large numbers of Brighamites are passing through that city, both to and from Council Bluffs. Also that Phineas Young, who figured in this region **in persuading Oliver Cowdery off to the Bluffs**, has been down to Texas on a similar errand to Lyman Wight, which appears not to have been quite so successful.

Under the date of November 1, 1849, this statement appeared in the *Gospel Herald*:

You will observe also that they make no mention of Oliver Cowdery in filling up their organization. The truth is, he is not the sort of man for them. It was a singular mania by which he was led off after them, and seems to have lasted him **but a few weeks**. I understand he is now in Crab Orchard, Mo., and do not consider it by any means certain that he has anything whatever to do with them. In their organization of a State government he would have been better than they all, but they would not trust power in his hands a single moment. (*Gospel Herald*, November 1, 1849, microfilm copy at the Utah State Historical Society)

The references above—from three different sources—seem to show that Oliver Cowdery did return to the Mormon Church. This would seem to place the Oliver Overstreet "Confession" on rather shaky ground.

Still, there are some things that need explaining. Hosea Stout made this entry in his journal on December 3, 1848:

Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmore & W. E. McLelland were trying to raise up the kingdom again. also William Smith. But the "Sound of their grinding is low." They are all waiting **for the Twelve & Presidency to fall**. (*On the Mormon Frontier, The Diary of Hosea Stout*, edited by Juanita Brooks, vol. 2, page 336)

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This entry was made in Hosea Stout's diary after Oliver Cowdery returned to the Church, but Hosea Stout was in Salt Lake City, Utah, at the time, and it took a long time for news to travel from Council Bluffs. Oliver Cowdery had written a letter which was published in the *Ensign of Liberty* in which he seemed to support William E. McLellin who was declaring the Mormon leaders in error and trying to establish another church. Perhaps Hosea Stout was referring to this letter when he stated that Cowdery, Whitmer and McLelland were "**all waiting for the Twelve & Presidency to fall.**" At any rate, the Mormons claim that in a meeting held November 5, 1848, Oliver Cowdery stated that he had changed his views on the subject. (See *Improvement Era*, March, 1911, page 393)

R. N. Baskin quotes the Mormon Apostle John Henry Smith as giving the following testimony in court:

Witness: Your Honor, I would like to make one statement right here, and that is this: That Oliver Cowdrey, the immediate friend and associate of Joseph Smith, apostatized from the Mormon church. He was never killed. He knew all that Joseph Smith knew. David Whitmore and Martin Harris, who were his immediate associates, apostatized from the church. They were never hurt, in any degree. **Every one of them died outside of the church.** (*Reminiscences of Early Utah*, 1914, page 97)

This testimony has been used as evidence that Oliver Cowdery did not return to the Church. The Mormons would, of course, have to say that Apostle John Henry Smith was in error, and that Oliver Cowdery died within the Church. David Whitmer, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, claimed that Oliver Cowdery did come back into the Church, but he insisted that after Cowdery was baptized at Council Bluffs, he came to Richmond to live and died believing that Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet and that his revelations in the *Doctrine and Covenants* must be rejected:

I did not say that Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer had not endorsed the *Doctrine and Covenants* in 1836. They did endorse it in 1836; I stated that they "*came out of their errors (discarded the *Doctrine and Covenants*), repented of them, and died believing as I do to-day,*" and I have the proof to verify my statement. If any one chooses to doubt my word, let them come to my home in Richmond and be satisfied. In the winter of 1848, after Oliver Cowdery had been baptized at Council Bluffs, he came back to Richmond to live, . . . Now, in 1849 the Lord saw fit to manifest unto John Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery and myself nearly all the remaining errors **in doctrine** into which we had been led by the **heads of the old church**. We were shown that the *Book of Doctrine and Covenants* contained **many doctrines of error**, and that it must be **laid aside**; . . . They were led out of their errors, and are upon record to this effect, rejecting the *Book of Doctrine and Covenants*. (*An Address to Believers in the Book of Mormon*, 1887, pages 1-2)

Although David Whitmer claimed that Oliver Cowdery rejected the *Doctrine and Covenants*, he stated that he still believed in the Book of Mormon. This would mean that he believed that Joseph Smith was a true prophet at first but later fell into error. This position would definitely be out of harmony with the beliefs of the Mormon Church. Many people have been excommunicated for

less than this. If what David Whitmer says is true, Oliver Cowdery died rejecting many of the things that Mormons consider to be most important. This would certainly mean that he did not die in full fellowship with the Mormon Church. If this is the case, it would help to explain why the Mormons paid little tribute to Oliver Cowdery at the time of his death. Juanita Brooks states:

Another letter in the same issue of the *Millennial Star*, page 43, also contains word of the confession of Oliver Cowdery. Signed by Wilford Woodruff . . . it says: “Dear Brother Pratt: I received a letter from Elder Hyde, saying that Oliver Cowdery had come to the Bluffs . . . He was assisting Elder Hyde to put the press in operation for printing, expecting to send forth the *Frontier Guardian* soon. . . . I was truly glad to hear he had returned to the fold.”

Yet on December 11, 1848, Orson Hyde himself wrote directly to Orson Pratt in England and made no mention either of the confession or the baptism. The *Frontier Guardian* (Kanesville, Iowa) made its appearance on February 7, but no mention of the Cowdery visit, confession, or baptism. Nor did it record his death some fifteen months later though it normally printed death notices.

On June 15, 1850, the *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), on a back page and without any striking headline did record the death: “We are informed that Oliver Cowdery, Esq., died at Richmond, Ray County, Missouri on the 3rd day of March last of consumption.” (*On the Mormon Frontier; The Diary of Hosea Stout*, vol. 2, page 337, footnote number 8)

CONCLUSION. 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. On the contrary, all evidence which we have found seems to show that Oliver Cowdery was at Council Bluffs at the time the Mormons claim.

PART 2

THE "DEFENCE"

The pages which follow contain a photographic reproduction of "Defence in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints." This document was purported to have been written by Oliver Cowdery in 1839.

When we wrote to the L.D.S. Church Historian's Office requesting a copy of this pamphlet we were answered as follows:

I am sorry but I am not in a position to furnish you with copies of any material from our office. The two dollars which you enclosed with your letter of April 22 is herewith returned. (Letter from the L.D.S. Church Librarian, April 24, 1961)

The Yale University Library, however, allowed us to have photocopies of their copy. The pages which follow are photographically reproduced from the Yale copy.

[Since some of the photos are hard to read, we added the typescript on pages A8 to A13.]

DEFENCE
 IN A
Rehearsal of My Grounds
 FOR
Separating Myself
 FROM THE
LATTER DAY SAINTS
 BY OLIVER COWDERY

Second Elder of The Church of Christ.

This Defence is not protected by a copyright, as I wish no man, to be confined alone to my permission in printing what is meant for the eyes and knowledge of the nations of the earth. 37

God doth not walk in crooked paths;
 Neither doth he turn to the right hand,
 Nor to the left; neither doth he vary
 From that which he hath said.

Presley's Job Office,
 Newton, Ohio,
 1892.

DEAR PEOPLE OF GOD:—I offer you a "De-
fence" which I am grieved to make, but my oppo-
sers have put me to the necessity, and so far as my
memory serves, I pledge my veracity for the cor-
rectness of the account. 39

I deny that I have ever conspired with any, or
ever exerted any influence to destroy the reputation
of the "First Elder," although evidence which is to
be credial assures me that he has done every-
thing he could to injure my standing, and his
influence has been considerably exerted to destroy
my reputation and, I fear, my life. 38

You will remember in the meantime, that those
who seek to vilify my character have been con-
stantly encouraged by him. There was a time
when I thought myself able to prove to the satis-
faction of every man that the translator of the "Book
of Mormon," was worthy of the appellation of a
"Seer" and a "Prophet of the Lord," and in which he
held over me a mysterious power which even now
I fail to fathom; but I fear I may have been de-
ceived, and especially so fear since knowing that
Satan has led his mind astray. 38

(1) When the Church of Christ was set up by
revelation, he was called to be "First Elder," and I
was called to be the "Second Elder," and whatever
he had of Priesthood (about which I am beginning
to doubt) also had I.

(2) But I certainly followed him 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 be-
loved disciple, was tarrying on earth and exempt
from death.

I am well aware that a rehearsal of these things
at this day will be unpleasant reading to the "First
Elder," but it is wisdom that it should
be so. Without rehearsing too many things that
have caused me to lose my faith in Bro. Joseph's
sincerity, I regard his frequent prediction that no
himself shall tarry on the earth till Christ shall
come in glory, and that neither the rage of devils
nor the malice of men shall ever cause him to
fall by the hand of his enemies until he has seen
Christ in the flesh at his final coming, as little short
of a piece of blasphemy; and it may be classed with
that rebellion, that come among you will remem-
ber, which sent Bro. Page and me, so unwisely, to (3)

Toronto, with a prediction from the Lord by "Urim and Thummim," that we would there find a man anxious to buy the "First Elder's copyright." I well remember we did not find him, and had to return surprised and disappointed. But so great was my faith, that, in going to Toronto, nothing but calmness pervaded my soul, every doubt was banished, and I as much expected that Bro. Page and I would fulfill the revelation as that we should live. And you may believe, without asking me to relate the particulars, that it would be no easy task to describe our desolation and grief.

Bro. Page and I did not think that God would have deceived us through "Urim and Thummim," exactly as came "the Book of Mormon;" and I well remember how hard I strove to drive away the foreboding, which seized me, that the "First Elder" had made tools of us, where we thought, in the simplicity of our hearts, that we were divinely commanded.

And what served to render the reflection most expresson in his bitterness to me, was, that from his 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, who, I am sure had no part in the transactions of that day, as the Angel was John the Baptist, which I doubt not and deny not. When I afterward first heard Elder Rigdon, whose voice is so strikingly similar, I felt that this "dear" brother was to be, in some sense, to me unknown, the herald of this church as the Great Baptist was of Christ.

(4) I never dreamed, however, that he would influence the "Prophet, Seer and Revelator to the Church of the Latter Day Saints," into the formation of a secret band at Far West, committed to deprivations upon Gentiles and the actual assassinations of apostates from the church, which was done in June last, and was only one of many wrong steps.

These are facts which I am rehearsing, and if they shall be called in question, I am able to establish them by evidence which I can bring forward in abundance.

Still, although favored of God as a chosen witness to bear testimony to the divine authority of the Book of Mormon, and honored of the Lord in being permitted, without money and without price, to serve as scribe during the translation, of the Book of Mormon. I have sometimes had seasons

Darius

of skepticism, in which I did seriously wonder whether the Prophet and I were men in our sober senses, when he would be translating from plates, through "the Urim and Thummim," and the plates not be in sight at all. 2

But I believed both in "the Seer" and in the "Seer Stone," and what the First Elder announced as revelation from God, I accepted as such, and committed to paper with a glad mind and happy heart and swift pen; for I believed him to be the soul of honor and truth, a young man who would die before he would lie.

Man may deceive his fellow man, deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may seduce the unstable, untaught in the ways of righteousness and peace, for I felt a solemn awe about me, being deep in the faith, that "the First Elder" was a Seer and Prophet of God, giving the truth unaltered through "Urim and Thummim," a

4 dictated by the will of the Lord, and that he was persecuted for the sake of the truth which he loved. Could I have been deceived in him? 26

I could rehearse a number of things to show either that I was then deceived, or that he has since fallen from the lofty place in which fond affection had deemed him secure.

I remembered his experience as he had related it to me, and lacking wisdom, I went to God in prayer. I said: "O Lord, how dark everything is! Let thy ~~eyes~~ lighten it, and make bright the path for me. Show me my duty. Let me be led of thy Spirit."

Shall I relate what transpired? I had a message 3. 20 from the Most High, as from the midst of eternity; 3 for the veil was parted and the Redeemer Himself, clothed in glory, stood before me. And He said:

"After reproving the Latter Day Saints for their corruption and blindness in permitting their President, Joseph Smith, Jr., to lead them forth into error, 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." 2/

And I testify that Jesus, whose words I have been rehearsing, hath even so commanded me in an open vision. 24 26.

The Lord revealed to me that the "First Elder" is leading the Saints astray, and ordered me to

quit them after delivering the message which this "Defence" delivers. I shall ever remember this expression of the Saviour's grace with thanksgiving, and look upon his amazing goodness to me with wonder.

When I had sufficiently recovered my self-possession to ask in regard to the errors into which Joseph Smith, Jr., was taking the Saints, the Recorder instructed me plainly: "He hath given revelations from his own heart and from a defiled conscience as coming from my mouth and hath corrupted the covenant and altered words which I had

spoken. He hath brought in high priests, apostles and other officers, which in these days, when the written Word sufficeth, are not in my church, and some of his deeds have brought shame to my heritage by the shedding of blood. He walketh in the vain imaginations of his heart, and my Spirit is holy and does not dwell in an unholy temple, nor are angels sent to reveal the great work of God to hypocrites."

I bowed my face in shame, and said: "Lord! I entreat thee, give me grace to bear thy message in print, where I fear to take it by word of mouth." And he said, "The grace is given thee," and he vanished out of my sight.

40 Prepare your hearts, O ye Saints of the Most High, and come to understanding. The prophet hath erred and the people are gone astray through his error. God's word is open. We may read it. There is no "First Presidency" there, no "High Priesthood" save that of Christ himself, no Patriarch to the church, and wonderful to tell, the "First Elder" hath departed from God in giving us these things, and in changing the name of the church.

30 Oh, the misery, distress and evil attendant upon giving heed unto the "doctrines of men!" The Gospel has been perverted and the Saints are wandering in darkness, while a full cup of suffering is poured upon them. A society has been organized among them to inflict death upon those who are deemed apostates, with the knowledge and sanction of the First Elder.

18 This, I confess, is a dark picture to spread before those whom I am to warn, but they will pardon my plainness when I assure them of the truth of what I have written. 2

Bearing this message to them is the hardest work of my life, although many have been the privations and fatigues which have fallen to my lot to endure for the Gospel's sake since April 5th, 2

1829.

It is disgraceful to be led by a man who does not scruple to follow his own vain imagination, announcing his own schemes as revelations from the Lord.

and I fear he is led by a groundless hope, no better than the idle wind or the spider's web. 12
Having cleared my soul by delivering the message, I do not deem it necessary to write further on the subject now.

Jesus has saved men in all ages and saves them now, and not by our Priesthood either. The "First Elder" errs as to that. The Lord has said, long since, and his word remains steadfast as the eternal hills, that to him who knocks it shall be opened, and whosoever will, may come and partake of the waters of life freely; but a curse will surely fall upon those who draw near to God with their mouths, and honor him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him.

I no longer believe that all the other churches are wrong.

Get right, O! ye people, get right with God, and may the Lord remove his judgments from you, preserve you in his kingdom from all evil, and crown you in Christ. Amen.

O. COWDERY.

March 3, 1839.

4, 9, 12, 15, 19, 24, (30, 39), 8. 40

(p. 1)

DEFENCE
IN A
Rehearsal of My Grounds
FOR
Separating Myself
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Second Elder of The Church of Christ

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(1) When the Church of Christ was set up by revelation, he was called to be First Elder, and I was called to be the Second Elder, and whatever he had of Priesthood (about which I am beginning to doubt) also had I.

(2) But I certainly followed him 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.

I am well aware that a rehearsal of these things at this day will be unpleasant reading to the First Elder; yet so it is, and it is wisdom that it should be so. Without rehearsing too many things that have caused me to lose my faith in Bro. Joseph’s seership, I regard his frequent predictions that he himself shall tarry on the earth till Christ shall come in glory, and that neither the rage of devils nor the malice of men shall ever cause him to fall by the hand of his enemies until he has seen Christ in the flesh at his final coming, as little short of a piece of blasphemy; and it may be classed with that revelation that some among you will remember which sent Bro. Page and me so unwisely to

(3) Toronto, with a prediction from the Lord by Urim and Thummim that we would there find a man anxious to buy the First Elder's copyright. I well remember we did not find him, and had to return surprised and disappointed. But so great was my faith, that, in going to Toronto, nothing but calmness pervaded my soul, every doubt was banished, and I as much expected that Bro. Page and I would fulfill the revelation as that we should live. And you may believe, without asking me to relate the particulars, that it would be no easy task to describe our desolation and grief.

Bro. Page and I did not think that God would have deceived us through "Urim and Thummim," exactly as came the Book of Mormon; and I well remember how hard I strove to drive away the foreboding which seized me, that the First Elder had made tools of us, where we thought, in the simplicity of our hearts, that we were divinely commanded.

And what served to render the reflection past expression in his bitterness to me, was, that from his 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, who, I am sure had no part in the transactions of that day, as the Angel was John the Baptist, which I doubt not and deny not. When I afterward first heard Elder Rigdon, whose voice is so strikingly similar, I felt that this "dear" brother was to be in some sense, to me unknown, the herald of this church as the Great Baptist was of Christ.

(4) I never dreamed however, that he would influence the Prophet, Seer and Revelator to the Church of the Latter Day Saints, into the formation of a secret band at Far West, committed to depredations upon Gentiles and the actual assassination of apostates from the church, which was done in June last and was only one of many wrong steps.

These are facts which I am rehearsing, and if they shall be called in question, I am able to establish them by evidence which I can bring forward in abundance.

Still, although favored of God as a chosen witness to bear testimony to the divine authority of the Book of Mormon, and honored of the Lord in being permitted, without money and without price, to serve as scribe during the translation of the Book of Mormon, I have sometimes had seasons

of skepticism, in which I did seriously wonder whether the Prophet and I were men in our sober senses when he would be translating from plates through “the Urim and Thummim” and the plates not be in sight at all.

But I believed both in the Seer and in the “Seer Stone,” and what the First Elder announced as revelation from God, I accepted as such, and committed to paper with a glad mind and happy heart and swift pen; for I believed him to be the soul of honor and truth, a young man who would die before he would lie.

Man may deceive his fellow man, deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may seduce the unstable, untaught in the ways of righteousness and peace, for I felt a solemn awe about me, being deep in the faith, that the First Elder was a Seer and Prophet of God, giving the truth unsullied through “Urim and Thummim,” dictated by the will of the Lord, and that he was persecuted for the sake of the truth which he loved. Could I have been deceived in him?

I could rehearse a number of things to show either that I was then deceived, or that he has since fallen from the lofty place in which fond affection had deemed him secure.

I remembered his experience as he had related it to me, and lacking wisdom, I went to God in prayer. I said: “O! Lord, how dark everything is! Let thy glory lighten it, and make bright the path for me. Show me my duty. Let me be led of thy Spirit.”

Shall I relate what transpired? I had a message from the Most High, as from the midst of eternity; for the vail was parted and the Redeemer Himself, clothed in glory, stood before me. And He 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.”

And I testify that Jesus whose words I have been rehearsing, hath even so commanded me in an open vision.

The Lord revealed to me that the First Elder is leading the Saints astray, and ordered me to

quit them after delivering the message which this “Defence” delivers. I shall ever remember this expression of the Saviour’s grace with thanksgiving, and look upon his amazing goodness to me with wonder.

When I had sufficiently recovered my selfpossession to ask in regard to the errors into which Joseph Smith, Jr., was taking the Saints, the Redeemer instructed me plainly: “He hath given revelations from his own heart and from a defiled conscience as coming from my mouth and hath corrupted the covenant and altered words which I had spoken. He hath brought in high priests, apostles and other officers, which in these days, when the written Word sufficeth, are not in my church, and some of his deeds have brought shame to my heritage by the shedding of blood. He walketh in the vain imaginations of his heart, and my Spirit is holy and does not dwell in an unholy temple, nor are angels sent to reveal the great work of God to hypocrites.”

I bowed my face in shame and said: “Lord! I entreat thee, give me grace to bear thy message in print where I fear to take it by word of mouth.”

And he said, “The grace is given thee,” and he vanished out of my sight.

Prepare your hearts, O ye Saints of the Most High, and come to understanding. The prophet hath erred and the people are gone astray through his error. God’s word is open. We may read it. There is no “First Presidency” there, no “High Priesthood” save that of Christ himself, no Patriarch to the church, and wonderful to tell, the “First Elder” hath departed from God in giving us these things, and in changing the name of the church.

Oh, the misery, the distress and evil attendant upon giving heed unto the “doctrines of men!” The gospel has been perverted and the Saints are wandering in darkness, while a full cup of suffering is poured upon them. A society has been organized among them to inflict death upon those who are deemed apostates, with the knowledge and sanction of the First Elder.

This, I confess, is a dark picture to spread before those whom I am to warn, but they will pardon my plainness when I assure them of the truth of what I have written.

Bearing this message to them is the hardest work of my life, although many have been the privations and fatigues which have fallen to my lot to endure for the Gospel's sake since April 5th, 1829.

It is disgraceful to be led by a man who does not scruple to follow his own vain imagination, announcing his own schemes as revelations from the Lord.

And I fear he is led by a groundless hope, no better than the idle wind or the spider's web. Having cleared my soul by delivering the message, I do not deem it necessary to write further on the subject now.

Jesus has saved men in all ages and saves them now, and not by our Priesthood either. The "First Elder" errs as to that. The Lord has said, long since, and his word remains steadfast as the eternal hills, that to him who knocks it shall be opened, and whosoever will, may come and partake of the waters of life freely; but a curse will surely fall upon those who draw near to God with their mouths, and honor him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him.

I no longer believe that all the other churches are wrong.

Get right, O! ye people, get right with God, and may the Lord remove his judgments from you, preserve you in his kingdom from all evil, and crown you in Christ. Amen.

O. COWDERY.

March 3, 1839

This “Defence” has been used to prove a number of things. The Whitmerites have used it to show that Oliver Cowdery believed in the Book of Mormon but believed that Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet. Anti-Mormon writers have used it to show that Cowdery “had seasons of skepticism” about the Book of Mormon and that he had a revelation showing that Joseph Smith was a deceiver. One Mormon leader quoted the words “I remembered his experience as he had related it to me, and lacking wisdom, I went to God in prayer” as evidence that Joseph Smith’s First Vision was an authentic story. There are many other things which this document has been used to support.

For a number of years we accepted this document as being the work of Oliver Cowdery. Many other people—including some of the most noted historians—have accepted this “Defence” as a genuine publication. The Mormon writer John J. Stewart lists it under “Primary Sources” in his “Selected Bibliography” in the book *Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*. B. H. Roberts, who was probably the most famous Mormon historian, accepted the “Defence” as Oliver Cowdery’s work. In the *Comprehensive History of the Church*, B. H. Roberts made this statement concerning the revelation to go to Canada to sell the copyright to the Book of Mormon:

Oliver Cowdery also alludes to this circumstance but in a casual and indefinite way (See *Cowdery’s Defense in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter-day Saints*, published at Norton, Ohio 1839. Republished in *Anti-Mormon Tract, No. 9*, by R. B. Neal, Grayson, Ky., 1906) . . . (*A Comprehensive History of the Church*, by B. H. Roberts, vol. 1, page 163, footnote 11)

Since B. H. Roberts accepted the “Defence,” we felt that it must have been a genuine publication. Who would be in a better position to know than the man who had access to the documents in the Church Historian’s Library? We felt that B. H. Roberts would not have accepted this document if there was any reason to doubt its validity.

On page 471 of her book, *No Man Knows My History*, Fawn M. Brodie made this statement concerning Cowdery’s “Defence”:

Apparently there are **no copies of the original extant**. For reprints see *Saints Herald*, March 20, 1907, and *Anti-Mormon Tract No. 9*, Ashland Independent Publishing Co., 1909.

On November 15, 1960, however, Pauline Hancock received a letter from the Yale University Library which contained the statement that they had obtained a photographic copy of the original of Oliver Cowdery’s “Defence”:

We do have a copy of the original of Oliver Cowdery’s “Defence . . .” and would be pleased to have a reproduction made for you. Could you please let us know what kind of reproduction you wish— negative or positive photostat, or microfilm?

We are sorry that we cannot give you any information as to the location of the original copy since our accession record does not tell us. (Letter from Yale University Library, dated November 15, 1960)

Mrs. Hancock told us that the original copy was located in or near Independence, Missouri. Wesley P. Walters later located and examined this copy. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a reprint. In the publication *Revealing Statements by the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon*, we made this statement:

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In this pamphlet we are reproducing Oliver Cowdery's Defense from photocopies furnished by the Yale University Library. In a letter dated Nov. 15, 1960, an employee of the Yale University stated that they had "a copy of the original." Wesley P. Walters (an authority on early Mormon documents) stated that he examined the copy and that he believed it to be the 1906 reprint. After examining other photocopies of the 1906 reprint we are inclined to agree with Mr. Walters. This should make no difference, however, since B. H. Roberts (the Mormon Historian) refers to both the 1839 printing and the 1906 reprint. (*Revealing Statements by the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon*, Introduction)

Wesley P. Walters stated that the pages of the 1906 reprint had been cut up and pasted into a bound book. This was apparently done to preserve them. Unfortunately, however, the title page—which would have identified it as the 1906 reprint—was apparently not sent to the Yale University Library. If the title page had been furnished, the Yale University Librarian would have been able to identify it as a reprint rather than the original.

Thus it appears that Fawn M. Brodie was right after all when she stated: "Apparently there are no copies of the original extant."

Charles A. Davies, who was the Reorganized Church Historian, was asked concerning Cowdery's "Defence." In his reply he stated:

There is no original of this document existing to the best of our knowledge. Attempts to locate one have ended in discovering only an alleged reprint. There are serious doubts as to the complete accuracy of the reprint. It appears to have been worded over and interpolations made. Oliver Cowdery affirms the truth of his spiritual experiences in the tract referred to, although questioning later revelations and actions of Joseph Smith. (*Saints' Herald*, July 1, 1964, page 25)

Of course, the fact that an original copy of the "Defence" has not been located does not necessarily prove that it was not a genuine document, nor does it mean that a copy will not be located sometime in the future. It is interesting to note that Oliver Cowdery edited a paper entitled *The Northern Times*, but the original copies of this paper have been very difficult to locate. In fact, Charles A. Davies, who was quoted above, made this statement:

Very little information is available regarding this periodical, since **no known copies are extant today**. One searches in vain for references to *The Northern Times* in the current papers of the 1830's. (*Saints' Herald*, September 15, 1964, page 23)

Stanley R. Gunn, however, quotes a statement which shows that at least a "small fragment" of one of the issues was in existence in 1870:

Article from Journal of History, II, p. 384 published in the *Deseret News*, Jan. 19, 1870. "A RELIC. While making a short call on President Albert Smith a few days ago, he showed us the tattered remnant of an old number of weekly newspapers one published by the Church which few of the Saints have heard, and still fewer seen. It is entitled the *Northern Times* and was published in Kirtland, Ohio in 1835-36. Its publisher, we believe, was Elder F. G. Williams, and its editor, Oliver Cowdery. The number of which he handled a small fragment, was No. 42, Vol. 1 . . . As the **only relic**

of the *Northern Times* which the president knows of being in existence now, this small remnant is interesting and valuable.” (*Oliver Cowdery, Second Elder and Scribe*, by Stanley R. Gunn, 1962, page 140, footnote 24)

By 1966, however, Max Parkin had located two issues of the *Northern Times* at the Connecticut State Library at Hartford. He even has a photograph of the October 9, 1835, issue in his book, *Conflict at Kirtland*. Most of the issues, however, are still missing.

Joseph Smith’s brother, William, published a pamphlet against the Church in 1845. But the historian Dale L. Morgan states that “No copy of this pamphlet has yet appeared.” In the *Temple Lot Case*, William Smith admitted that he had printed 500 copies but that he did not have even one copy left for himself:

I left Nauvoo in 1845 . . . After I left I published an account of my separation from the church . . . and [it] contained a statement of the apostasy of the leaders of the church at Nauvoo. . . . I haven’t a copy of it myself. (*Temple Lot Case*, page 98)

Oliver H. Olney published a pamphlet in 1845 entitled *Spiritual Wifery at Nauvoo Exposed*, but Dale L. Morgan states that “No copy” of the original has been located.

Dale L. Morgan states that the “eighty-two titles which comprise the literature of ‘the Churches of the Dispersion’ are certainly among the rarest works known to Mormon bibliography. Not even specimen copies are to be found of many of them, . . .” (*Western Humanities Review*, Summer 1953, page 266)

Thus we see that it does not mean that a publication is not genuine just because the original has not been located. But if there are other things which tend to show that a publication is spurious, then this could be used as evidence against it.

With the “Defence,” however, we are faced with a problem which we do not encounter with many of the other “lost” publications. The problem is that we have been unable to find the “Defence” mentioned in any publication prior to 1906. In other words, we have found no contemporary reference to it in either Mormon or anti-Mormon publications.

Although most of the issues of the *Northern Times* have not been located, it was mentioned in other newspapers at the time of its publication. According to Max Parkin, both the *Painesville Telegraph* and the *Chardon Spectator* mentioned the *Northern Times* as early as February, 1835. Therefore, we know that the *Northern Times* was a genuine publication even though most of the issues were lost.

All of the original copies of William Smith’s pamphlet seemed to disappear, but Dale L. Morgan claims that it was reprinted in the *Warsaw Signal* on October 29, 1845. Even the Mormon publication, the *Millennial Star*, mentioned it. In a letter written by James Kay in 1845, we find the following:

Doubtless you will have heard of Wm. Smith’s apostasy, he is endeavouring to “make a raise” in this city. After he left Nauvoo he went to Galena, when he published a “proclamation” to the church, calling upon them to renounce the twelve as an unauthorised, tyrannical, abominable, blood-thirsty set of scoundrels. (*Millennial Star*, vol. 7, page 134)

Although Dale L. Morgan has been unable to locate an original copy of *Spiritual Wifery at Nauvoo Exposed*, he claims that “extracts are printed in the *St. Louis*

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Missouri Reporter, Nov. 7, 1845, the *Burlington [Iowa] Hawkeye*, Nov. 20, 1845, and the *Warsaw Signal*, Nov. 26, 1845” (*A Bibliography of the Churches of the Dispersion*, page 179).

We have felt that we would find some mention of the “Defence” in early Mormon or anti-Mormon writings, but so far we have not been able to locate anything that would show that it was printed in 1839. The Utah State Historical Society allowed us to obtain a microfilm copy of the *Ensign of Liberty* which began publication in 1847. We felt that we would find some mention of the “Defence” in this publication, but we were disappointed. The *Ensign of Liberty* contained a letter from Oliver Cowdery stating that the Twelve Apostles did not have the authority and revelations from David Whitmer showing that the Mormon Church was in error, but there was no mention of the “Defence.”

Instead of finding evidence for the “Defence,” we found evidence that could be used against it. In the issue for March, 1847, we found this statement:

Martin Harris has retired to his little farm, in Kirtland, Ohio, . . . Oliver Cowdery settles in Tiffin, Ohio, and pursues his favorite profession of the Law, **but lifts not his sharpened pen against his vile calumniators.** (*Ensign of Liberty*, March, 1847, page 11)

If Oliver Cowdery had written his “Defence” in 1839, why would the *Ensign of Liberty* print this statement in 1847?

David Whitmer published his book, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, in 1887, yet he did not mention Oliver Cowdery’s “Defence.” This is especially strange when we consider that David Whitmer held almost exactly the same views that are expressed in the “Defence.” If such a publication did exist, why did he not refer to it? Oliver Cowdery entrusted the Book of Mormon manuscript with David Whitmer. Wouldn’t it seem logical that he would have given him a copy of the “Defence”? The title page of the “Defence” stated that it was “meant for the eyes and knowledge of the nations of the earth,” yet Oliver Cowdery’s friends didn’t seem to know anything about it. This is all very strange.

On the title page of the “Defence” the following statement appears:

This Defence is **not** protected by a copyright, as I wish no man, to be confined alone to my permission in printing what is meant for the eyes and knowledge of the nations of the earth.

If the “Defence” had been protected by a copyright, it would have been possible to check the copyright records to see if it was actually Oliver Cowdery’s work. But if someone made up the “Defence” at a later date, it is very possible that they would have made a statement like the one quoted above to cover up the fact that there would be no record of a copyright in 1839. We must admit that the statement looks rather suspicious.

Although we have found no contemporary evidence that Oliver Cowdery wrote the “Defence” in 1839, there is evidence that he was on the verge of publishing something against the Mormon Church at that time. In a letter dated January 21, 1838, Oliver Cowdery accused Joseph Smith of adultery:

When he [Joseph Smith] was there we had some conversation in which in every instance I did not fail to affirm that what I had said was strictly true. **A dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Alger’s** was talked over

in which I strictly declared that I had never deserted from the truth in the matter, and as I supposed was admitted by himself. (Letter dated January 21, 1838, recorded by Warren Cowdery, original located in Huntington Library, San Marino, California, microfilm copy at the Utah State Historical Society)

On February 4, 1838, Oliver Cowdery wrote a letter to his brothers. Warren and Lyman, in which he stated:

You will have received an answer to the matter of Mr. Smith's accusation against me in publick ere this arrives. Matters in the church here are assuming a form to be looked at by the candid candidly: The radical principles taught when Messrs. **Smith & Rigdon** were here, have given loose to the enthusiastick, and there seems to be a disposition prevalent to carry forward those **damning doctrines** to the subversion of the liberties of the whole church. . . . The council have concluded they have nothing to do with **me**. So I am not drawn in question; but calculate to attend one meeting, say what I think wisdom and leave them to their own **damnation**. My soul is sick of such scrambling for power and self-aggrandizement, by a pack of fellows more ignorant than Balaams Ass! . . . Our hearts are encouraged, for we believe in Gods holy word—we believe in enjoying equal rights and equal privileges and we believe it to be our duty to separate ourselves from all who are disposed to fulminate, **pretend revelation** and uphold corruption **by lying**. . . . By yours I learn that some of the brethren have finally come out against impunities &c. and **declared the "Church of Christ."**

In a postscript to the same letter Oliver Cowdery added:

Give me my freedom or take my life! I shall no longer be bound by the chains of hell; I shall speak out when I see a move to deceive the ignorant. We do not expect the great body of the church here to unite in our views— We do not ask—we want none but independent men—not the ragmuffians who believe in **man** more than God!

In a letter to his brothers dated February 24, 1838, Oliver Cowdery wrote:

Judge Phelps received a letter also from Messrs. Rigdon & Smith, . . . I know not what will follow their arrival here, but I fear that a blast like that which has fallen on the devoted town of Kirtland, will come after time sufficient to test the impropriety of those plans advocated by some in this church. . . . There is a great stir here, and so far as I am able to learn, the names of all who refuse to confess those **disorganizing doctrines** lately introduced into the church, to be correct, are denounced as wicked, devilish, and more than **all** with them "not friendly to Joseph." I am certainly sick of such perfect foolery—there is no God in it! There is no alternative in my mind, but those desperate and hot headed power seeking, ignorant men, here, will drive the intelligent and independent to **declare their belief to an astonished world!** From what I learn I have long been **pointed out for a victim**, to receive the displeasure of men who profess to hold the connecting link between earth and heaven! and of course if I believe it, **I am in danger:** but I don't fear. I have heretofore written but little in my letters . . . on the subject of your divisions, but have thought the more—in due

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time you will hear me speak. I want to say, however, that if those who have taken a stand against those wicked doctrines, heretofore taught, they may be instrumental in preserving the **Church of Christ** on Earth. But if they do it will be by a holy walk and Godly conduct—not by following those wild enthusiastic slandering examples set before us for a few months past. (Letter dated February 24, 1838, located in Huntington Library, microfilm copy at the Utah State Historical Society)

Speaking of Oliver Cowdery's letters, the Mormon writer Leland H. Gentry made this statement:

Cowdery's personal bitterness toward Joseph Smith shines forth in each of his letters written at this time. (*A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri From 1836 to 1839*, published at the Brigham Young University, 1965, page 129, footnote 65)

In a footnote on page 139 of the same book, Leland Gentry stated:

For evidence of Cowdery's dislike for Joseph Smith at this time, see "Cowdery Letters," January 21, February 4, and February 24, 1838.

Leland Gentry even claims that Oliver Cowdery was preparing to print his "dissenting views":

Oliver then removed to Far West where he presented these notes claiming that they were long overdue. He also made plans to use **the press to spread his dissenting views**. (*A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri From 1836 to 1839*, page 147)

Even though Oliver Cowdery seemed to hold some of the views expressed in the "Defence," there is one item which does not sound like it was written by Cowdery. This is the part which states that Joseph Smith predicted that he would live until the coming of Christ. Oliver Cowdery supposedly stated this was "little short of a piece of blasphemy." It does not seem reasonable that Cowdery would make such a statement since he himself had predicted that at least one of the Apostles would live until the coming of Christ. Concerning the Apostle Orson Hyde, Oliver Cowdery had prophesied: ". . . he **shall** stand on the earth and bring souls till Christ comes" (*Millennial Star*, vol. 15, page 206). Oliver Cowdery made this statement in 1835, but, of course, he could have changed his mind by 1839. At any rate, if the "Defence" was written after Joseph Smith's death—i.e., after 1844—such a prophecy would appear as "little short of a piece of blasphemy."

PRESSLEY'S JOB OFFICE. On the title page of the "Defence" the statement is made that it was printed at Pressley's Job Office in Norton, Ohio. Oliver Cowdery was familiar with the town of Norton—which was then in Medina County and later became part of Summit County—as he attended a conference held there on April 21, 1834 (see *History of the Church*, vol. 2, pages 52-53). Oliver Cowdery was also in Norton on September 7, 1834, for he wrote a letter from there which was published in the *Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 1, pages 13-16. According to the Ohio census report, Oliver Cowdery was living in Tiffin, Ohio, in 1840. Since this was not too far from Norton, it is possible that Cowdery could have printed the "Defence" at Norton, Ohio, in 1839.

Although the town of Norton, Ohio, is easy to locate, Pressley's Job Office is another matter. Richard L. Anderson, of the Brigham Young University, told us that he has been unable to locate such an establishment. We took up the search, but so far we have been unsuccessful.

In our search we found that there were two Nortons in Ohio in 1839, and both of them were rather close to Tiffin. Therefore, the "Defence" could have been printed at either location. Unfortunately, however, we have been unable to locate any Pressleys in either area. On May 6, 1966, we received a letter from the Ohio Historical Society, in Columbus, Ohio. In this letter the following appeared:

Unfortunately, we are unable to help you on Pressley's Job Office—would this have been a small private publisher? There were probably a good many which are difficult to trace.

At this period, there was a Norton in Delaware County (Marlborough Township). We do not have the 1840 Ohio census here in our library, but this should be in Salt Lake City. You might check this to see if any Pressleys are listed in Delaware County. It may provide a clue. There was a Norton Township in Medina County (later it became part of Summit County). I do not know if a check here might also turn up something. We have no newspapers or other sources from Norton.

On May 27, 1966, Wesley P. Walters received a letter from the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio. We quote from that letter:

Checking our Summit County histories, we find no mention of "Pressley's Job Office" in Norton. We have also checked the 1840 census, Norton Twp. but the name *Pressley* does not appear.

. . . The *Cowdery* item is the only imprint in 1839 in our file with the Norton address.

We checked the census reports for 1830 and 1840 for both Nortons but were unable to find any Pressleys in either area. There were Pressleys in the State of Ohio, and there were some people who spelled their last name "Presley." In fact, a John Presley owned property in Kirtland—Kirtland was not far from the Norton in Medina County—in 1837.

Of course, the fact that no Pressleys were in either Norton in 1830 or 1840 does not prove that they were not there on March 3, 1839. People and presses were moving all over in Ohio at that time. In the *History of Summit County* the following statement appears:

Since Laurin Dewey set up a hand press in Middlebury in 1825 . . . it is recorded that Akron and Summit County have had nearly 100 somewhat similar ventures. . . . Laurin Dewey was a "practical printer," and came to Middlebury from Ravenna. . . . Mr. Dewey saw an opportunity, and seized it. Second-hand materials were . . . brought to Middlebury in two wagons, and the first issue appeared September 28, 1825, . . . In 1826 it passed into the hands of McMullen & Mason, then was again transferred to Alvah Hand, who discontinued it in 1829.

The first paper was unsuccessful, financially. This was perhaps unfortunate, as a precedent, for the same might be said of the most of the ninety odd newspaper and magazine publications which have followed, in the years from 1825 to 1907. . . . In 1836, Akron was incorporated.

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Immediately thereafter Madison H. White, of Medina, came over and established the *Akron Post*, . . . it died in November of the same year. Its equipment was purchased by Constant Bryon, . . . who established the *Akron Journal*, December 1, 1836. The *Journal* gave up the ghost six months later. . . . Horace K. Smith and Gideon J. Galloway brought forth the first issue of the *American Balance*, August 19, 1837; suspended August 9, 1838; age one year. (*History of Summit County*, pages 224-225)

In another book we read:

The Middlebury newspaper survived less than four years. It was followed by three newspapers . . . each of which lived only about one-half a year, their suspension being caused by lack of support. . . . more than a score of other newspapers were started . . . The majority were printed as sort of a side issue for job printing plants. But even with their job printing, the publishers had great difficulty in making enough money to survive and few of the papers lived more than a few years. (*Akron and Summit County*, page 594)

In the *History of Seneca County*, page 320, we find this statement concerning an “itinerant press”:

The press used on this occasion was taken beyond the Alleghenies to Washington, Penn., about the year 1800, . . . thence to several localities in Virginia and Ohio by J. P. McArdle, who located his office at Mt. Vernon, Ohio, in 1816, and published the *Register*. On the establishment of a printing office at Clinton, Ohio, this itinerant press was present, next it appears at Norwalk, then at Sandusky City, afterward at Tiffin, finally settling at Toledo.

The press used to print the *Messenger and Advocate*—a Mormon publication—was also used for job printing. It had several different owners within a very short period of time. In October of 1834 it was owned by “F. G. Williams & Co.” A notice in the August, 1836, issue stated that “Oliver Cowdery had purchased the entire establishment” (*Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 2, page 364). A notice in the February, 1837, issue, however, stated: “The late firm of O. Cowdery & Co. is this day dissolved by mutual consent. The entire establishment is now owned by Joseph Smith, Jr. and Sidney Rigdon” (*Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 3, page 458). By April, 1837, it had “been transferred to Wm. Marks of Portage, Allegany County N.Y.” A short time later the Mormons left Kirtland; therefore, they would not be found in Kirtland at the time of the 1840 census. Notice that William Marks was not even living in the State of Ohio at the time he owned the printing company.

The facts given above are sufficient to show that the census reports in themselves cannot be used to completely disprove that there was a “Pressley’s Job Office.” Still, it could be used as circumstantial evidence against the validity of the purported “Defence.”

PARALLELS. Baffled by our inability to find an original “Defence” or “Pressley’s Job Office” in Norton, Ohio, we decided to apply another test to this purported document. It is a well known fact that two different documents written by the same person will contain similar words and expressions. We decided to see if we could find parallels between the “Defence” and other writings of Oliver Cowdery.

Besides the letters found in the Huntington Library, Oliver Cowdery wrote articles and letters which were published in the *Evening and Morning Star*, the *Messenger and Advocate* and the *History of the Church*. We compared all of these sources with the purported “Defence” and the results of this study are rather interesting. In the letters found in the Huntington Library we found no parallels of any importance; likewise, the *History of the Church* contained no significant parallels. In the *Evening and Morning Star* we found only one important parallel—i.e., both the “Defence” and an article published in the *Evening and Morning Star* contain the words “by the shedding of blood.”

On the other hand, we found that the *Messenger and Advocate* contains many important parallels. Because of the importance of these parallels in determining the validity of the “Defence,” we will present them below. Quotations from the “Defence” will be presented on the left hand side and those from the *Messenger and Advocate* on the right hand side. The title page of the “Defence” will be referred to as page 1.

<u>Defence</u>	<u>Messenger & Advocate</u>
a Rehearsal of (p. 1)	a rehearsal of (v. 1, p. 112)
confined alone to (p. 1)	confined alone to (v. 2, p. 203)
the eyes and knowledge of the nations of the earth (p. 1)	the eyes and knowledge of the nations of the earth (v. 2, p. 203)
Norton, Ohio, 1839 (p.1)	Norton, Medina co. Ohio (v. 1, p. 13)
my opposers have put me to the necessity (p. 2)	my opposers have put me to the necessity (v. 2, p. 201)
so far as my memory serves, I pledge my veracity for the correctness of the account (p. 2)	so far as my memory serves, though I shall not pledge my veracity for the correctness of the account (v. 2, p. 201)
influence to destroy the reputation of (p. 2)	influenced . . . to destroy the reputation of (v. 2, p. 200)
to be credited (p. 2)	was credited (v. 2, p. 201)
his influence has been considerably exerted to destroy my reputation (p. 2)	their influence has been considerably exerted to destroy the reputation (v. 2, p. 201)
my reputation and, I fear, my life (p. 2)	your reputation and . . . your life (v. 2, p. 199)
You will remember in the meantime, that those who seek to vilify my character (p. 2)	You will remember in the mean time, that those who seek to vilify his character (v. 2, p. 201)
I thought myself able to prove to the satisfaction of every man that the translator of the Book of Mormon, was worthy of the appellation of a Seer and a Prophet of the Lord (p. 2)	I . . . shall prove to your satisfaction, and to that of every man, that the translator of the book of Mormon is worthy the appellation of a seer and a prophet of the Lord (v. 2. p. 201)

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a mysterious power (p. 2)	an invisible power (v. 2, p. 197)
knowing that Satan has led his mind astray (p. 2)	knowing that satan would thus lead his mind astray (v. 2, p. 200)
none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the Gospel (p. 2)	none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the gospel (v. 1, p. 15)
I am well aware that a rehearsal of these things at this day (p. 2)	I am aware, that a rehearsal of visions of angels at this day (v. 1, p. 95)
so it is, and it is wisdom that it should be so (p. 2)	so it is, and it is wisdom that it should be so (v. 1, p. 95)
Bro. Joseph's (p. 2)	brother Joseph (v. 1, p. 14)
shall tarry (p. 2)	to tarry (v. 1, p. 16)
Christ in the flesh (p. 2)	Messiah, in the flesh (v. 1, p. 96)
a piece of blasphemy (p. 2)	a piece of blasphemy (v. 1, p. 95)
you will remember (p. 2)	You will remember (v. 1, p. 95)
nothing but calmness pervaded my soul (p. 3)	nothing but calmness pervaded the soul (v. 1, p. 79)
doubt was banished (p. 3)	fear was banished (v. 1, p. 79)
you may believe (p. 3)	you will believe (v. 1, p. 16)
to relate the particulars (p. 3)	to relate the particulars (v. 1, p. 79)
that it would be no easy task to describe (p. 3)	that it is no easy task to describe (v. 1, p. 79)
And what served to render the reflection past expression in its bitterness to me, was, that from his hand I received baptism, by the direction of the Angel of God (p. 3)	And what serves to render the reflection past expression on this point is, that from his hand I received baptism, by the direction of the angel of God (v. 1, p. 14)
“dear” brother (p. 3)	dear brother (v. 1, p. 15)
the Church of the Latter Day Saints (p. 3)	the church of the Latter Day Saints (v. 1, p. 28)
These are facts (p. 3)	these facts (v. 1, p. 15)
bring forward in abundance (p. 3)	bring forward abundance of (v. 1, p. 112)
favored of God (p. 3)	favored of the Lord (v. 1, p. 158)
the divine authority (p. 3)	its divine authenticity (v. 3, p. 385)
being permitted (p. 3)	to be permitted (v. 1, p. 14)

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men in our sober senses (p. 4)	men in their sober senses (v. 1, p. 15)
he would be translating from plates through “the Urim and Thummim” (p. 4)	he translated, with the Urim and Thummim (v. 1, p. 14)
happy heart (p. 4)	thankful heart (v. 2, p. 202)
and truth, a young man (p. 4)	a young man of truth (v. 2, p. 200)
Man may deceive his fellow man, deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may seduce the unstable, untaught (p. 4)	Man may deceive his fellow man; deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may . . . seduce the foolish and untaught (v. 1, p. 16)
the ways of righteousness (p. 4)	the way of righteousness (v. 1, p. 1)
the truth unsullied (p. 4)	the truth unsullied (v. 1, p. 16)
dictated by the will of the Lord (p. 4)	dictated by the will of God (v. 1, p. 16)
Could I have been deceived in him (p. 4)	could not have been deceived in (v. 1, p. 156)
was then deceived (p. 4)	Was he deceived (v. 1, p. 156)
to God in prayer (p. 4)	to the Lord in prayer (v. 2, p. 198)
a message from the Most High (p. 4)	a message from the Most High (v. 1, p. 15)
as from the midst of eternity (p. 4)	as from the midst of eternity (v. 1, p. 15)
the veil was parted and the Redeemer Himself, clothed in Glory (p. 4)	the veil was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory (v. 1, p. 15)
stood before me (p. 4)	stood before him (v. 1, p. 79)
“After reproving the Latter Day Saints for their corruption and blindness (p. 4)	After reproving them for their corruption and blindness (v. 1, p. 110)
Jesus whose words I have been rehearsing (p. 4)	Moroni, whose words I have been rehearsing (v. 1, p. 112)
an open vision (p. 4)	an open vision (v. 1, p. 112)
the message (p. 5)	a message (v. 1, p. 111)
I shall ever remember this expression of the Saviour’s grace with thanksgiving (p. 5)	I shall ever look upon this expression of the Saviour’s goodness with . . . thanksgiving (v. 1, p. 16)
look upon his (p. 5)	look upon this (v. 1, p. 16)

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his amazing goodness (p. 5)	his goodness (v. 2, p. 199)
goodness to me with wonder (p. 5)	goodness with wonder (v. 1, p. 16)
I had sufficiently recovered (p. 5)	I had hardly recovered (v. 3, p. 387)
instructed me (p. 5)	instructing him (v. 1, p. 156)
my Spirit is holy and does not dwell in an unholy temple, nor are angels sent to reveal the great work of God to hypocrites (p. 5)	the Holy Spirit does not dwell in unholy temples, nor angels reveal the great work of God to hypocrites (v. 1, p. 95)
Prepare your hearts, O ye Saints of the Most High (p. 5)	Prepare your hearts. O ye saints of the Most High (v. 2, p. 204)
come to understanding (p. 5)	come to understanding (v. 2, p. 204)
hath erred (p. 5)	had erred (v. 1, p. 120)
wonderful to tell (p. 5)	Wonderful to tell (v. 2, p. 203)
Oh, the misery, distress and evil attendant upon (p. 5)	O the misery, distress and evil attendant on (v. 1, p. 159)
The gospel has been perverted and the Saints are wandering in darkness (p. 5)	This gospel has been perverted and men have wandered in darkness (v. 1, p. 96)
full cup of suffering (p. 5)	the cup of suffering (v. 1, p. 96)
poured upon them (p. 9)	poured upon them (v. 1, p. 110)
This, I confess, is a dark picture to spread before those whom I am to warn, but they will pardon my plainness when I assure them of the truth (p. 5)	This, I confess, is a dark picture to spread before our patrons, but they will pardon my plainness when I assure them of the truth (v. 1, p. 14)
many have been the privations and fatigues which have fallen to my lot to endure for the Gospel's sake since (p. 6)	Many have been the fateagues and privations which have fallen to my lot to endure, for the gospel's sake, since (v. 1, p. 14)
April 5th, 1829 (p. 6)	April 5th, 1829 (v. 1, p. 14)
vain imagination (p. 6)	vain imagination (v. 1, p. 78)
a groundless hope, no bet[t]er than the idle wind or the spider's web (p. 8)	a groundless hope, no better than the idle wind or the spider's web (v. 1, p. 78)
I do not deem it necessary to write further on the subject (p. 6)	I do not deem it to be necessary to write further on the subject (v. 1, p. 78)
in all ages (p. 6)	in all ages (v. 1, p. 15)

The Lord has said, long since, and his word remains steadfast as the eternal hills, that to him who knocks it will be opened, and whosoever will, may come and partake of the waters of life freely (p. 6)

those who draw near to God with their mouths, and honor him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him (p. 6)

O! ye people (p. 6)

may the Lord (p. 6)

the Lord remove (p. 6)

his judgments (p. 6)

preserve you in his kingdom from all evil, and crown you in Christ. Amen (p. 6)

O. Cowdery (p. 6)

The Lord has said, long since, and his word remains steadfast, that to him who knocks it shall be opened, & whosoever will, may come and partake of the waters of life freely (v. 1, p. 78)

those who draw near to God with their mouths, and honor him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him (v. 1, p. 80)

O ye nations (v. 1, p. 111)

may the Lord (v. 1, p. 112)

the Lord has removed (v. 1, p. 111)

his afflicting judgments (v. 1, p. 110)

preserve you from evil . . . and crown you in Christ. Amen. (v. 1, p. 112)

O. Cowdery (v. 1, p. 16)

After examining these parallels, we came to the conclusion that whoever wrote the “Defence” used the *Messenger and Advocate*. Now, it is normal for a writer to use something that he has previously written to write something else. For instance, in 1961, John J. Stewart published a book in which he stated:

. . . qualify men and women to be candidates for the Celestial Kingdom, on the road to eventual godhood and goddesshood, and plural marriage is the patriarchal order of marriage lived by God and others who reign in the Celestial Kingdom. (*Brigham Young and His Wives*, page 41)

Five years later (1966), John J. Stewart wrote the following in his book, *Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*:

. . . a worthy man and woman can progress in the Celestial Kingdom to eventual godhead and goddesshood, . . .

Plural marriage, explained the Prophet, is the patriarchal order of marriage lived by God and others who reign in the Celestial Kingdom; . . . (*Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, page 69)

We could cite many other examples where writers used something they had previously written in a later work. But even though this is true, we must admit that the parallels between the “Defence” and the *Messenger and Advocate* are of such a nature that they arouse suspicion. Most of the parallels are taken from a series of eight letters which Oliver Cowdery wrote for publication in the *Messenger and Advocate*. These letters were written in defense of Joseph Smith and the Mormon religion. Now, why would Oliver Cowdery use this material as a source for a pamphlet in which he condemns Joseph Smith? It is also interesting to note that many of the parallels

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which are found in the first part of the “Defence” are taken from the last of the series of eight letters published in the *Messenger and Advocate*. Although it is possible, it seems unlikely that Oliver Cowdery would have turned to the last letter (found in volume two) first. On the other hand, if a person was making up the “Defence” after Cowdery’s death, it is very likely that he would use parts of the last letter first so that his deception would not be easily detected.

It is also interesting to note that Oliver Cowdery’s first letter was written from Norton, Ohio. Could this have been the source for the statement on the title page of the “Defence” which states that it was published in Norton, Ohio? Also the name William H. Presley is found among a list of Elders published in the *Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 2, page 383. It is possible that this could have been the source for the statement that the “Defence” was printed at “Pressley’s Job Office.” At any rate, it is interesting that all these things are found in the *Messenger and Advocate*. At the turn of the century there were probably a number of sets of the *Messenger and Advocate* available. Also the letters written by Oliver Cowdery were reprinted by both the Utah Mormons and the Reorganized Church. Even the Strangites reprinted them; therefore, they were readily available.

In looking at Oliver Cowdery’s writings, we have come to the conclusion that he had a natural gift for writing, and it seems very unlikely that he would have had to go back to the *Messenger and Advocate* for phrases to include in the “Defence.” 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. If the Oliver Overstreet “Confession” appeared before the “Defence” it may have suggested the use of Cowdery’s letters to the person who wrote the “Defence.” In the “Confession” we read: “To enable me to know what to say and do, Bro. Miller had me read some articles written by Cowdery . . .”

A POSSIBLE SOLUTION. It has been suggested that the “Defence” was made up by R. B. Neal who published it in 1906. We cannot accept this explanation. R. B. Neal was against the Book of Mormon and even published a poem which indicated that Oliver Cowdery had denied his testimony to the Book of Mormon. Since the “Defence” is written as if Oliver Cowdery believed the Book of Mormon, but felt that Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet, we feel that R. B. Neal was not the author. If he had written it, he would probably have made Cowdery deny the Book of Mormon completely.

We feel 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. David Whitmer’s pamphlet probably had a real influence upon him. For instance, in his pamphlet David Whitmer states that God “told me to ‘separate myself from among the Latter Day Saints’” (*An Address to All Believers in Christ*, Richmond, 1887, page 27). The words “Separating Myself From the Latter Day Saints” are used as part of the title of the “Defence.” In fact, David Whitmer’s revelation may have been the source for the vision reported on page 4 of the “Defence.” David Whitmer stated:

... if you believe that God spake to us three witnesses by his own voice, then I tell you that in June, 1838, God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens, and told me to “separate myself from among the Latter Day Saints, for as they sought to do unto me, so should it be done unto them.” (*An Address to All Believers in Christ*, page 27)

In the “Defence” we read:

... the Redeemer Himself, clothed in glory, stood before me. And He said: “After reproving the Latter Day Saints for their corruption and blindness . . . thou shalt withdraw thyself from among them.”

On page 31 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer tells that Joseph Smith had a revelation commanding some of “the brethren” to go to Canada to sell the copyright of the Book of Mormon. He then states:

Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery went to Toronto on this mission, but they failed entirely to sell the copy-right, returning without any money. Joseph was at my father’s house when they returned. I was there also, and am an eye witness to these facts. Jacob Whitmer and John Whitmer were also present when Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery returned from Canada. Well, we were all in great trouble; and we asked Joseph how it was that he had received a revelation from the Lord for some brethren to go to Toronto and sell the copy-right, and the brethren had utterly failed in their undertaking. Joseph did not know how it was, so he enquired of the Lord about it, and behold the following revelation came through the stone: “Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil.”

We feel that this could be the source for the following statement found on pages 2 and 3 of the “Defence”:

... it may be classed with that revelation, that some among you will remember which sent Bro. Page and me, so unwisely, to (3) Toronto, with a prediction from the Lord by Urim and Thummim, that we would there find a man anxious to buy the First Elder’s copyright. I well remember we did not find him, . . .

Bro. Page and I did not think that God would have deceived us through “Urim and T[h]ummim,” exactly as came the Book of Mormon; . . .

David Whitmer states that when Sydney Rigdon joined the Mormons they thought he was a “great and mighty man,” but in “a few years we found out different.” He stated that he believed that Rigdon was the “instigator of the secret organization known as the ‘Danites’ which was formed in Far West Missouri in June, 1838” (page 35). In the “Defence” we find this statement concerning Rigdon:

... I felt that this “dear” brother was to be in some sense, to me unknown, the herald of this church as the Great Baptist was of Christ.

(4) I never dreamed however, that he would influence the Prophet, Seer and Revelator to the Church of the Latter Day Saints, into the formation of a secret band . . . which was done in June last . . . (*Defence*, page 3)

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On page 12 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer makes a point of the fact that Joseph Smith “put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat” to translate the Book of Mormon. On page 4 of the “Defence” we read:

... I did seriously wonder whether the Prophet and I were men in our sober senses, when he would be translating from plates, through “the Urim and Thummim,” and the plates not be in sight at all.

On page 49 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer claimed that Joseph Smith’s revelations have been changed:

You have changed the revelations from the way they were first given . . . to support the error of Brother Joseph in taking upon himself the office of Seer to the church. You have changed the revelations to support the error of high priests. . . . You have altered the revelations to support you in going beyond the plain teachings of Christ in the new covenant part of the Book of Mormon.

In the “Defence” (page 5) the Lord is supposed to tell Oliver Cowdery that Joseph Smith “altered words which I had spoken.”

On page 31 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer states: “. . . I could tell you other false revelations that came through Brother Joseph as mouthpiece, . . .” On page 65 he relates the following:

Brother John’s history of the church says as follows: “He (Joseph) laid his hands upon Lyman Wight . . . And the spirit fell upon Lyman, and he prophesied concerning the coming of Christ. He said that there were some in this congregation that should live until the Savior should descend from Heaven with a shout, with all the holy angels with him, etc.” The early future will determine as to whether this prophecy was true or false.

Perhaps this could have suggested the statement that Joseph Smith predicted that he would live until the coming of Christ—found on page 2 of the “Defence.”

On page 73 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer objects to the fact that the name of the Church was changed:

In June, 1829, the Lord gave us the name by which we must call the church, . . . We obeyed His commandment, and called it The Church of Christ until 1834, when, through the influence of Sydney Rigdon, the name of the church was changed to “The Church of the Latter Day Saints,” dropping out the name of Christ entirely, . . .

On page 3 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer states: “I am an elder in ‘the Church of Christ.’” The title of the “Defence” also seems to emphasize the fact that the name of the church was changed: “Defence in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself From the Latter Day Saints by Oliver Cowdery Second Elder of The Church of Christ.” On page 5 of the “Defence” we read: “. . . the ‘First Elder’ hath departed from God in giving us these things, and in changing the name of the church.”

On page 16 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer claims that the “church drifted in errors by giving heed to revelations what were given by Joseph Smith after he had translated the Book of Mormon.” On page 36 he states: “Brother Joseph would listen to the persuasions of men, and inquire of the Lord concerning different things, and the revelations would come just as they desired and thought in their hearts. . . . Brother Joseph belonged to the class of men who could fall into error and blindness. From the following you will see that Brother Joseph belonged to the weakest class . . .” On page 42 David Whitmer makes this statement:

Soon after Brother Joseph finished the translation, he gave up the stone, and all his revelations after that—including the one on polygamy—he gave by his own mouth. . . . Brother Joseph had drifted into error and blindness. . . .

When a prophet, or any other man, prays to God and asks wisdom concerning a matter, his conscience will reveal an answer to him just according to the desires of his heart. If his desires are in any way carnal, he being deceived, an answer will be revealed to him accordingly; . . .

In the “Defence” (page 5) Oliver Cowdery was supposed to have received a vision in which the Lord told him that the Mormons permitted Joseph Smith “their President, . . . 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, . . .” On the next page we find this statement: “‘He hath given revelations from his own heart and from a defiled conscience as coming from my mouth . . .’” This sounds very much like David Whitmer’s description of the way Joseph Smith gave false revelations.

On page 64 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer made this statement concerning Priesthood:

This matter of “priesthood,” since the days of Sydney Rigdon; has been the great hobby and stumbling-block of the Latter Day Saints. Priesthood means authority; and authority is the word we should use. I do not think the word priesthood is mentioned in the New Covenant of the Book of Mormon. Authority is the word we used for the first two years in the church—until Sydney Rigdon’s days in Ohio. This matter of the two orders of priesthood in the Church of Christ, and lineal priesthood of the old law being in the church, all originated in the mind of Sydney Rigdon.

On page 2 of the “Defence” the writer seems to be confused concerning Priesthood:

(1) When the Church of Christ was set up by revelation, he was called to be First Elder, and I was called to be the Second Elder, and whatever he had of Priesthood (about which I am beginning to doubt) also had I.

On page 35 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer states: “The next grievous error which crept into the church was in ordaining high priests in June, 1831.” On page 62 David Whitmer says that “Christ himself is our great and last High Priest.” In the “Defence” (page 5) we find this statement: “. . . there, [is] no ‘High Priesthood’ save that of Christ himself, . . .” On the same page the Lord is supposed to have told Cowdery that Joseph Smith had deceived the people when he brought “high priests” into the Church.

On page 59 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer states: “Through the influence of Sydney Rigdon, Brother Joseph was led on and on into receiving revelations every year, to establish offices and doctrines which are not even mentioned in the teachings of Christ in the written word.” Whitmer objected to a First Presidency and Apostles being in the Church, also any office above an Elder. David Whitmer also states that God told them to “rely upon the written word” (page 30). In the “Defence” we find the Lord telling Cowdery that Joseph Smith “hath brought in high priests, apostles

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and other officers, which in these days, when the written Word sufficeth, are not in my church, . . .” Further down on the same page we read: “There is no ‘First Presidency’ . . . no Patriarch . . . and wonderful to tell, the ‘First Elder’ hath departed from God in giving us these things. . . .”

On page 34 of his pamphlet, David Whitmer states: “We had all confidence in Brother Joseph, thinking that as God had given him so great a gift as to translate the Book of Mormon, that everything he would do must be right.” The same thought is found on page 4 of the “Defence”: “. . . I believed him to be the soul of honor and truth, a young man who would die before he would lie.” On page 2 we read: “. . . but I fear I may have been deceived, and especially so fear since knowing that Satan has led his mind astray.”

It may just be a coincidence, but David Whitmer states that Oliver Cowdery died “March 3d, 1850” (page 8), and the “Defence” is dated “March 3, 1839.” Be this as it may, there are several other things that lead us to believe that the person who wrote the “Defence” had read David Whitmer’s pamphlet.

CONCLUSION. After carefully examining the evidence, we have come to the conclusion that the “Defence” is probably a spurious work, written sometime after 1887—i.e., after David Whitmer’s pamphlet appeared. Until an original copy or a contemporary reference to it is found, we must regard it as spurious.

Perhaps some of our readers will have some information concerning the “Defence” or the Overstreet “Confession” which we are not aware of. If so, they can write us at: Box 1884, Salt Lake City, Utah.



Sandra and Jerald Tanner

Utah Lighthouse Ministry
www.utlm.org