

## The Mormons

Today there is a crisis of faith. In it many children of the Church have shown themselves to be disloyal. They seem to be anxious to find fault. They are tilting against the only source of certainty in the world. It seems incredible in these days of literacy that such people have not read history and learned from it what happens the moment one forsakes the Rock of Peter. A steady drift, equivalent to that of an avalanche, sets in. It cannot be stopped and it goes to every extreme of fantasy and folly. And the final end is chaos, the abandonment of everything that could reasonably be called faith.

I am going to give you an example of this. It is the case of the Mormons, or as they prefer to call themselves: The Latter Day Saints. As a preliminary I give you the general religious set-up in America, the framework in which the Mormons were born. After the revolution, the country took a dive into irreligion. The nation was founded on dissent, and therefore, the decision was to have no recognised Church. Yet in the hearts of men the need for religion was felt. Many set up as prophets and proceeded

to preach to the people, all of them claiming to base their revelations on the Bible and to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Incredible were the products. Preachers rode around on horseback announcing all their sensations. These were called circuit-riders. But the idea in the mind of each one was the setting up of a conventicle or a temple of some kind.

All those outpourings had a common feature. They announced the end of the world as being very near; it was imperative to make immediate preparation for it. They described Hell as if they were looking in through a window at it. They all claimed to be directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and many of them went much further even than this. They poured out revelations which they claimed had been given to them. The people flocked to hear them and manifestations of an uncanny sort took place.

In order to show what was at stake, and at the same time try to prove how necessary it is for us to hold tight to the Church, I am going to give a few examples of that revivalist stuff.

Jemima Wilkinson claimed to be Christ and simply poured out her revelations to the crowd who followed her around. One of her specialties was that she would never die. However, she did and this shook her movement.

Isaac Bullard wore nothing but his own hair and a bearskin girdle. His teaching was a species of Communism, all goods held in common and free love.

Anna Lee called herself the Reincarnated Christ. She founded the Shakers. The special characteristic of these was their dervish dancing, and their talking in what they called divers tongues – which when analysed proved to be nothing but gibberish.

Joseph Dylks boldly proclaimed himself to be God. His slogan was: 'I am God and there is no other. In me the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are met. All who put their trust in me shall never taste death.' Crowds grovelled before him, and his shouts and snorts terrified them and positively shook the roof of his tabernacle. The ordinary people of Ohio finally rebelled against this abomination and rode him out of the country on a pole.

William Miller, who founded the Seventh Day Adventists indulged in false prophecies of the coming of Our Lord. He foretold this as to take place in 1843 and then in 1845. This cost him a lot of credit but did not prevent his movement extending widely.

Robert Matthias strode around New York brandishing a sword and a seven-foot ruler and shouting that he had come to redeem the world.

Abel Sargent talked with angels, mouthed revelations, toured the state with his twelve women apostles pretending to raise the dead. He preached that when one became holy, one could live without food. Some of his disciples tried this and died – which ruined the sect.

The characteristics of all these lunacy creeds were much the same. I give some aspects. Remember that all these people were claiming to be filled with the Holy Spirit and that their actions were a consequence of his holy presence. Now listen: Hundreds fell to the earth senseless. Elegantly dressed women lay in the mud beside ragged trappers. Some were seized by jerks, their heads and limbs snapped back and forward, their bodies grotesquely distorted. Those who caught the barks would fall on all fours growling and snapping like camp dogs fighting over garbage. Looking at the convulsed limbs and apparently lifeless bodies strewn around them, these preachers would

cry out that the gods were among the people. But how they could see the operations of God in all that uncouth performance is a mystery. Those revivalist conversions were notoriously short-lived and the reactions from them were drastic. One very prominent person returning to the scene of one of those manifestations after three months, issued his judgment as to what he saw: He found everybody sad, frigid, carnal, contentious, and of the opinion that religion was a mere delusion.

The established sects, such as the Baptists and the Methodists, shared largely in the foregoing and split into many subdivisions.

Out of the thousands of these prophets and their sects which spawned from unrestrained religious lawlessness, only one was destined to a sort of glory: This was Joseph Smith who founded the Mormons. In what I tell about him, I am much indebted to Fawn Brodie's biography of him, entitled *No Man Knows My History*. This title represents a saying of his own. An amusing commentary on those words of his is that he wrote a six-volume autobiography which talks much but tells little. He was born in Vermont in 1805.

Joseph reflected the irreligion and cynicism of his own father. He is described as being a likable ne'er-do-well, notorious for his tall stories. America at that time was full of legends of gold and other treasures hidden away by the Indians. Joseph thought that this was a good way of getting rich quick. His operations went further than that, leading around a band of idlers and digging for the buried wealth. He utilised all the apparatus of magic, crystals, stuffed toads, mineral rods and seer-stones. The procedure would be that when the foregoing implements had located a supposed treasure, a circle of wooden stakes would be



driven in around the spot. One man would march around with a drawn sword to guard against Satan's counter attacks. Then a black sheep would be led around and its throat cut to appease the evil spirits – the guardians of the place. Then would follow a furious but futile digging.

Eventually, this conduct ended in a prosecution. At that time, he was 21 years of age. The court record shows that he was charged with being a disorderly person and an impostor. He admitted to practising magic and organising hunts for buried gold. The court found him guilty of disturbing the peace. He gave up the money-digging then, but we must connect that pursuit of his with what subsequently occurred.

He later claimed that when he was 14 he had a vision of the Lord in which it was revealed to him that all the existing religions were false and that he must not touch any of them. It is peculiar that he had kept quiet about this. Not a word about it until considerably later! This is unlike the behaviour of a boy.

Then in 1823, on the night of 21 September, the great revelation took place. The angel Moroni indicated to Joseph the spot where certain gold plates lay buried. Inscribed on these was the story of the first settlers in America. It is odd that Joseph did not go there until four years later. Then he went and Moroni gave him a strong box containing a volume, six inches thick, made of thin gold plates eight inches by seven, fastened together by three gold rings. These plates were covered with small writings in reformed Egyptian. This remarkable find was accompanied by two crystals, joined together after the manner of a pair of spectacles. These crystals were named Urim and Thummim. Using them, he was enabled to decipher the plates.

As Joseph was unable to read and write fluently, he employed a friend called Oliver Cowdery to whom, from behind a curtain, he dictated a translation.

This translation was printed in 1830 under the title of *The Book of Mormon*. It was accompanied by a sworn statement by Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris that an angel had shown them the plates. This testimony was subsequently repudiated as false by the three of them, but they went back on this again. Subsequently, when a clamour arose that the gold plates be produced, they most mysteriously disappeared. So nobody ever saw them except Joseph and the three hesitating ones.

The story told by those plates was truly a strange one. The first settlers to arrive in America were the Jaredites. They came directly from the Tower of Babel.

They multiplied but were destroyed about the time of the second settlement. These were Israelites from Jerusalem who arrived in 600 BC. They were alleged to be descendants of the Patriarch Joseph. They were called the Nephites. They were annihilated about the year AD 400 in a battle at Cumorah, in the State of New York. Among the handful who escaped were Mormon and his son Moroni. The former collected the sixteen books of their records into one volume. At his death this was supplemented by his son Moroni and buried in that hill at Cumorah, destined to be discovered one day by God's chosen prophet. The descendants of the Nephites were the Indians. I need not tell you that there is not a word of truth in this genealogy.

The Book of Mormon states that Jesus made his appearance in America immediately after his Resurrection and planted the gospel in all its fullness, precisely as in the other continent. The doctrines, the priesthood, the evangelists, the gifts, were all the same. But the unbelief

and the misconduct of the Nephites cut them off from this inheritance. Mormon was the last of their prophets. When the record on the gold plates would be brought forth in later days, it would be united with the Bible and would be its supplement and equal to it. It is to be noted that our Bible has no pre-eminence over the Book of Mormon and the other two documents, which contain the Mormon religion. These latter, i.e. the doctrine, covenant and the pearl of great price, are the work of Joseph Smith.

In the Book of Mormon, Joseph is constituted the prophet of the Revelation with fullest powers.

It is possible that of all forms of belief in the whole world those of the Mormons, as purveyed by Joseph Smith, are the most irrational. The Mormons do not claim to be a Christian sect – no more than Mohammedanism does. The Holy Trinity is repudiated. The Holy Spirit is not a person but only a sort of divine fluid or influence poured out by the Father. Christ, Mohammed, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young are all prophets and partake of divinity. There are passages in the Mormon writings which convey the notion that they believe in a plurality of gods. There are statements as to the gods performing creative functions and organising the earth.

They teach that Adam was God and the only God that they know. The following is the declaration of Brigham Young who succeeded Joseph Smith: 'When our father Adam came into the Garden of Eden, he came with a celestial body and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He is our father and our god, and the only one with whom we have to do.' Joseph Smith states: 'The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's.'

The fall in the Garden of Eden of this Adam-god is declared to have taken place. God thus submitted to



falling in order that the Redemption of the human race would be accomplished. Subsequently the Father begot Jesus Christ by the Virgin Mary. As all know, one of the special inclinations of Mormonism was subsequently towards polygamy. Therefore they had to put Our Lord Jesus Christ into this category. They assert positively that he was a polygamist; Martha, Mary and Magdalene being among his wives. They state that the marriage feast at Cana was his own wedding.

The Mormons lay great stress on baptism as essential to salvation. But what exactly salvation means is not so clear. Because everyone is to be saved except a very small handful of un-regenerates called the Sons of Perdition. These must be very bad; one would be curious to know who they are! Smith divides Heaven into three sections: The Celestial for the members of the true church. The Terrestrial for those who have never known the gospel! The Telestial for a third kingdom, whose glory is that of the stars, to be peopled by those who had refused the law of God. So there does not seem to be much gain in being saved as a Mormon!

One of the extraordinary tenets governs the baptism of the dead. The Mormons make no distinction between the living and the dead in this matter. They make a special feature of these proxy baptisms, running as part of their system a genealogical department. Members are enjoined to discover the names of their ancestors so that they may receive this benefit.

Let me remark that this procedure is based upon their interpretation of St Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, (15:29), which is as follows: 'Else what shall they do who receive baptism for the dead? If the dead do not rise at all, why then do people receive baptism for them?'



I here give the Catholic commentary on the foregoing abstruse text: 'From this it seems that the Christians were accustomed to receive baptism externally as substitutes for the Catechumens who had received it only in desire. It did not have sacramental effect but was tolerated as being the performance of an act which the Catechumens desired but could not themselves receive. It showed a belief in the Resurrection.'

The drinking of alcohol in any form is prohibited to the Mormons, as is also tea, coffee and tobacco. Here as an aside, I mention that Joseph Smith in his hey-day as a prophet opened a bar in his own home. On various occasions it was stated that all the brethren were drunk except himself. The Smith family fought and boxed each other. The same took place among the elders, and even Rigdon, second after Joseph, was assaulted by Joseph himself.

After initially declaring an equality with the Negroes, Joseph was turned in the opposite direction by the violent clamour which ensued. Ever since that, the Mormon doctrine has taught that the Negroes are the cursed sons of Ham. They may become Mormons but they are ineligible for the priesthood. This law is at present causing great trouble among the Mormons because it has become untenable in the present state of affairs in the USA. Even the Mormons themselves say that it will have to be changed, but there is no other way of changing it except through a positive revelation. The present head of the Mormons says that there will not be any revelation.

Such is the amazing medley which issues from the *Book of Mormon* and its accompanying documents. The first Mormon Church was organised in 1830. The history of the movement after that is one of migration and

struggle. Various locations were tried by Joseph Smith for the building of his great city, but each of these had to be abandoned in turn. Needless to say, the doctrines of his Church, and still more perhaps the behaviour of those who held those doctrines, stirred the ordinary easy-going settlers into a frenzy. There was abundant persecution of the brethren, and in the course of these Joseph Smith and his brother were shot dead by a mob in 1844. In dying, he declared himself to be a Master Freemason. Some claim that his death constituted a martyrdom, and that it made him great and his religion a success. It started the Smith legend from which all evidences of deception and human frailty were gradually eliminated by his followers. Today, the personal side of Joseph Smith is forgotten by the Mormons. His writings are not read by the average Mormon. What survives is a spirit of conquest and zeal for the building of their Kingdom of God. They have a great zest for knowledge, and they identify God with material progress. The communistic ideas, which were a feature of the earlier days are now totally disavowed. It has been said that they beatify big business.

One of the very troubled aspects of Mormonism was its polygamy. This was based on a revelation of Joseph Smith and was practiced determinedly. However, the Federal Government declared themselves against the practice and an era of a semi-war followed. Later on, the Mormons abandoned this ground. After Joseph's death, a dozen women signed affidavits that he had taken them as wives in the full sense of that word. And there were, of course, many others who did not present themselves publicly.

One of the best ways of countering Mormonism would certainly lie in making its followers read their own historical records. These are now proved to contain an

absolute tissue of fabrications, errors and inconsistencies. For instance, Smith produced what he called the *Book of Abraham* and exhibited as his source for it a papyrus alleged to have been recovered from an Egyptian tomb. This has been seen to be a ghastly fraud. Not a single word in it is true. Experts have pronounced it to be a total collection of fancies and nonsense. This document has been rejected by the modern Mormon Church.

Though unpossessed of the slightest qualification for the work, Joseph Smith had the audacity to undertake a new edition of the Bible. Into the Book of Genesis he inserted a prophecy about himself. On the lips of Joseph, the son of Jacob, he placed the following: 'Thus saith the Lord God of my Fathers to me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins, and he shall be called Joseph, and it shall be after the name of his father.'

It is to be wondered if the history of the entire world affords a greater case of duplicity and impiety than that one where Joseph Smith seeks to smuggle himself into the Bible 4,000 years after it was written.

A kindred forgery was his introduction into the Book of Isaiah of references to the Book of Mormon and the return of the gold plates to the Lord. Let it be mentioned that the modern Mormon Church has availed of the fact that Smith's fantastic production was unfinished to put it aside. They use the ordinary King James Bible.

Of course, Joseph Smith, like all others of that type, tried his hand at prophecy. He assured various followers of his that they would stand on earth until Christ came. That misfired, as we know. He also proclaimed that fifty-six years would wind up the world. This prediction was inserted in his *History of the Church* but was subsequently deleted. It is good to be able to cancel false prophecy like that.

It worked out well for the Mormons that the world did not end thus before 1900, for they have multiplied and prospered. Today they number on their own estimate 2,600,000. Lest, however, this growth be thought to be utterly prodigious and supernatural, I point to the fact that, at the common rate of population increase, a figure of 150,000 in 1840 would amount to 2½ million today. Even if the Mormons in 1840 fell far short of 150,000, still this would take any marvellous or supernatural flavour out of their growing; more especially as few of them have drunk or smoked themselves to death. Moreover, determined addiction to polygamy for many years should have greatly increased the normal rate.