The *Letter to a CES Director* expresses multiple concerns about the truthfulness of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If the Church is true, its history and teachings can withstand scrutiny. The *CES Letter* contains a handy compilation of the latest critiques of the Church. In the pages below, these concerns are addressed one-by-one so that readers can decide whether the issues have been accurately represented and constitute valid evidence against the Church or whether they are heavily biased with multiple half-truths and misrepresentations. Some problems in the letter grow out of information lost to history or perceived weaknesses in early Church leaders. As such, complete explanations may not be available. However, no evidences or observations demonstrate undeniably that the Church is false and any that might appear to be so are not fully represented. Click here.

From the scholars at FairMormon and *The Interpreter*.

Lengthy rebuttals to *The CES Letter* have already been posted by several authors. Also FairMormon.org has compiled a remarkably detailed response. Click here.

This response will focus on this version. As *The CES Letter* is revised or expanded, additional pages (with associate links) will be added to this version. By leaving previous claims that the author of *The CES Letter* has eliminated, readers will be able to examine the allegations that were once deemed useful, but were later discarded.
To my beautiful young children...that you may one day understand.

We appreciate the author's willingness to allow us to reproduce his entire *CES Letter* for critique.

To access the digital PDF copy containing the URL links:

www.cesletter.com

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"If we have the truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed."

– President J. Reuben Clark –

The truth cannot be "harmed," but it can be misrepresented. Click here.

The CES Letter and other similar literature present alternative explanations for Joseph Smith's teachings and behaviors that unbelievers may embrace as truth. Yet, when the alternate explanations are put together historically and doctrinally, the resulting drawing is more like a Picasso than a Rembrandt. That is, when placed together the claims are generally disjointed, contradictory, and / or implausible. Click here.
While the number of topics is impressive, the apparent significance of the individual concerns is quite uneven. Please continue reading.
None of the questions or problems raised here are new. *The CES Letter* is essentially a compilation or compendium of popular criticisms that have been raised and answered in other venues over the past hundred years. To those genuinely interested in learning the truth, we hope to provide additional context and insight.

Introduction

[Name of CES Director Removed],

Thank you for responding to my grandfather’s request to answer my concerns and questions and for offering your time with me. I appreciate it.

I’m interested in your thoughts and answers as I have been unable to find official answers from the Church for most of these issues. I’m hoping you’re going to have better answers than many of the ones given by unofficial apologists such as FAIR and Neal A. Maxwell Institute (formerly FARMS).

I’m just going to be straightforward and blunt in sharing my concerns. Obviously I’m a disaffected member who lost his testimony so it’s no secret which side I’m on at the moment. All this information is a result of over a year of intense research and an absolute rabid obsession with Joseph Smith and Church history. With this said, I’d be pretty arrogant and ignorant to say that I have all the information and that you don’t have answers. Like you, I put my pants on one leg at a time and I see through a glass darkly. You may have new information and/or a new perspective that I may not have heard or considered before. This is why I’m genuinely interested in what your answers and thoughts are to these troubling problems.

I’ve decided to lay down just about all the major concerns that I have. I went through my notes from my past year of research and compiled them together. It doesn’t make sense for me to just lay down 5 concerns while I also have 20 other legitimate concerns that are keeping me from believing the truth claims of the LDS Church.

A quick background might be helpful as to where I’m coming from. I was an active and fully believing member my entire life up until around the summer of 2012. My grandpa already outlined my life events to you in his email so I think you get the idea that I accepted and embraced Mormonism.

In February of 2012, I was reading the news online when I came across the following news article: *Mormonism Besieged by the Modern Age*. In the article was information about a Q&A meeting at Utah State University that LDS Church Historian and General Authority, Elder Marlin K. Jensen gave in late 2011. He was asked his thoughts regarding the effects of Google on membership and people who are “leaving in droves” over Church history.

Elder Marlin K. Jensen’s response:

“Maybe since Kirtland, we’ve never had a period of – I’ll call it apostasy, like we’re having now; largely over these issues…”

This truly shocked me. I didn’t understand what was going on or why people would leave “over history.” I started doing research and reading books like LDS historian and scholar Richard Bushman’s *Rough Stone Rolling* and many others to try to better understand what was happening.

The following issues are among my main concerns:

Richard Bushman has recently observed: “The closer you get to Joseph Smith in the sources, the stronger he will appear, rather than the reverse, as is so often assumed by the critics.”

In the April 2015 General Conference, Elder Quentin L. Cook affirmed that the Church “has never been stronger.” In the last 5 years, 272 new stakes have been created and 22 have been discontinued.

Elder Jensen later urged that his comments not be taken out of context.
There is an undeniable relationship between portions of the Book of Mormon and the King James Bible. The origin and significance of the similarities can be interpreted in different ways. Click here

The foremost scholar on the language of the Book of Mormon says that it isn't really written in King James English, but in an older variant dating from the 1500s and 1600s. Click here

There is a plausible basis from the ancient world for referring to the sea as the Red Sea. On the other hand, if Joseph were relying on his knowledge of the Bible and fabricating the text, changing "sea" to "Red Sea" would make no sense. What would motivate a Bible literate fabricator to make such a change? Click here

The CES Letter fails to provide a plausible explanation that takes into account available historical evidences regarding how a 24-year-old farm boy with perhaps a year of frontier schooling could have produced the Book of Mormon. Click here

These are good questions, but the presence of biblical passages is not an indictment against Joseph Smith. Fully half of the biblical verses have changes. We only know that the translation process occurred by the "gift and power of God." Although no witnesses reported that Joseph consulted any books during the translation process, some scholars believe that it is still a possibility that he did consult a Bible. If so, then he could have copied the relevant passages whenever he reached a point in the translation which he knew matched material in the Bible. Click here
In the above example, the KJV translators added 7 italicized words not found in the source Hebrew manuscripts to its English translation. Why does the Book of Mormon, completed 1,200 years prior, contain the exact identical seven italicized words of 17th century translators?

3. The Book of Mormon includes mistranslated biblical passages that were later changed in Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible. These Book of Mormon verses should match the inspired JST version instead of the incorrect KJV version that Joseph later fixed. An explicit example of the differences between the BOM, the KJV, and the JST:

3 Nephi 13:25-27:
25: …Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor Yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?
26: Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not more better than they?
27: Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

Matthew 6:25-27 (from the King James Version Bible – not the JST):
25: Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?
26: Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not more better than they?
27: Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

The above Sermon on the Mount passages are identical, which is understandable as Christ may have said the same thing to both groups of people in the Old as well as the New world. Let’s look at the JST version of the above identical passages:

Joseph Smith Translation of the same passages in the LDS Bible for Matthew 6:25-27:
25: And, again, I say unto you, Go ye into the world, and care not for the world: for the world will hate you, and will persecute you, and will turn you out of their synagogues.
26: Nevertheless, ye shall go forth from house to house, teaching the people; and I will go before you.
27: And your heavenly Father will provide for you, whatsoever things ye need for food, what ye shall eat; and for raiment, what ye shall wear or put on.

Christ’s Sermon on the Mount in the Bible and the Book of Mormon are identical. Joseph Smith corrected the Bible. In doing so, he also corrected the same identical Sermon on the Mount passage in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is “the most correct book” and was translated a mere decade before the JST. The Book of Mormon was not corrupted over time and did not need correcting. How is it that the Book of Mormon has the incorrect Sermon on the Mount passage and does not match the correct JST version in the first place?
Valid contradictory evidences exist for the alleged anachronisms in the Book of Mormon. Click here

Some of the "Limited Geography Models" theorize that the Hill Cumorah in the Book of Mormon in not the same hill where Joseph Smith found the gold plates. This idea has been discussed for many decades and continues to be refined by scholars and archaeologists. It is not a recent invention and is very defensible. Click here

Ferguson was an attorney and amateur archaeologist. He was not BYU's archaeology (NWAF) founder, but one of three organizers of a private archaeology association. His enthusiastic but ultimately incorrect conclusions published in the 1950s and 1960s differ greatly than the careful research of professional anthropologists. Click here

Scientists have shown that DNA analysis has no relevance to the Book of Mormon population. Click here

Many remarkable archaeological evidences have been found that are surprisingly consistent with descriptions found in the Book of Mormon. Click here

This is a false comparison. Civilizations have continually inhabited the European continent while areas of the Americas were abandoned for centuries. Abundant evidence of large societies in Mesoamerica are found today. Click here
These maps propose that Joseph Smith sifted through thousands of names in a 5-state region to find eleven obscure places to generate ideas for the Book of Mormon. Of these eleven, five were not mapped and one did not exist in Joseph Smith’s time. An additional three seem unrelated to the Book of Mormon or are not unique. This leaves just two as possible modified names, and these are shown to be in the wrong locations.

These geographic locations are misrepresented on this map. Click here

These city names were not found on the best maps available in the 1820s. Current locations: Kiskimenetas, Shiloh, Rama Road, Jerusalem, Jacobsburg. FairMormon

The town Alma has never existed in this location. Alma, New York, 280 miles away, was first named in 1854, 24 years after the Book of Mormon was published.

There is no official Book of Mormon geography. The text does not include a description of all of spacial relationships of the lands. Instead, the book includes occasional references to places and sometimes describes the travels of people. All of these separate geographic references are internally consistent. Most scholars, beginning in at least 1917, agree that Mesoamerica is a better match to the text, though many possibilities have been proposed. Click here

This map has never existed in real life and has no connection to Joseph Smith’s time. Of the eleven locations shown, six were not found on the best maps available in Joseph’s time. Three places are not unique or are not proposed as sources for the Book of Mormon: Palmyra, and Jacobsburg, Lehigh County (Jacob and Lehi are in the Bible).

This first proposed map misplaces almost all the cities, according to internal comparisons in the Book of Mormon.
The Book of Mormon contains 337 proper names of which 188 are unique. The CES Letter uses two paragraphs to allege a relationship between "Tecumseh" to "Teancum" and "Kishkimenetas" and "Kishkumen." The chart contains an additional 20 alleged parallels, six of which did not exist on maps in Joseph Smith's time, and eight are names in the Bible, leaving just 5 possible parallels. Even if this entire list of 20 were accurate, this would account for only 11% of the total distinct names found in the Book of Mormon.

These place names did not exist on the best maps of the 1820s. FairMormon

Vernal Holley is entitled to his opinion, but his theories manifest multiple blatant inconsistencies and inaccuracies. His ideas do not represent official Church teachings and are repudiated by many LDS and non-LDS scholars. Click here

After eliminating non-existent and Biblical places, only 6 possible parallels remain out of thousands of place names in a 5-state region.

Names such as Antioch, Boaz, Jerusalem, Jordan, Lehigh, Noah Lakes, Sodom, and Shiloh are much more prominent as Biblical locations than as obscure towns hundreds of miles from Joseph Smith.

This is the first of several observations in The CES Letter that present Joseph Smith as a "sponge" who absorbed information from a variety of sources and was thereafter capable of producing the Book of Mormon. Here The CES Letter posits that Joseph borrowed names that he knew or that he had read on maps. However, available historical evidences provide little or no support for the idea that in the years prior to the printing of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith sought information from maps or books or produced texts that might have prepared him to dictate the book length narration. Instead, it appears the Book of Mormon burst forth from his mouth without any evidence that he personally possessed the gifts and experiences that would have allowed its creation from his own mind.
Hill Cumorah:

Off the eastern coast of Mozambique in Africa is an island country called "Comoros." Prior to its French occupation in 1841, the islands were known by its Arabic name, "Camora." There is an 1808 map of Africa that refers to the islands as "Camora."

The largest city and capital of Comoros (formerly "Comora")? Moroni? "Comora" and settlement "Moroni" were common names in pirate and treasure hunting stories involving Captain William Kidd (a pirate and treasure hunter) which many 19th century New Englanders – especially treasure hunters – were familiar with.

In fact, the uniform spelling for Hill Cumorah in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon is spelled as "Camorah."

Pomeroy Tucker was born in Palmyra, New York in 1802, three years before Joseph Smith. He is considered to be a contemporary source. This is what he said about Joseph Smith:

"Joseph ... had learned to read comprehensively ... [reading] works of fiction and records of criminality, such for instance as would be classed with the 'dime novels' of the present day. The stories of Stephen Buroughs and Captain Kidd, and the like, presented the highest charms for his expanding mental perceptions."

— Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress, p.17

Some apologists say that Tucker’s Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress is anti-Mormon and thus anything in the book cannot be trusted. The problem with this premise is that LDS scholar and Church history compiler B.H. Roberts quoted Tucker for background information on Joseph and FairMormon has an article where they quoted Tucker 4 times from his book as support for Joseph and even referred to Tucker as an “eye witness” to Joseph and his family. Is Tucker’s peripheral information only useful and accurate when it shows Joseph and the Church in a positive and favorable light?

"We are sorry to observe, even in this enlightened age, so prevalent a disposition to credit the accounts of the marvellous. Even the frightful stories of money being hid under the surface of the earth, and enchanted by the Devil or Robert Kidd

Tucker has repeatedly been shown by historians to be an unreliable source concerning details of Joseph Smith's early life. Lucy Mack Smith described Joseph as "much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of the children."

The contents of Tucker’s book demonstrate that he was capable of over-the-top allegations that had little connection to reality.

Click here
This is the first accusation based upon parallelism or the idea that demonstrating a similarity or possible parallel constitutes undeniable evidence of influence, collaboration, and/or authorship. Nevertheless, correlation is not causation.

It is curious that The CES Letter spends three pages discussing the View of Hebrews. While this chart appears to provide a detailed comparison to the Book of Mormon, it is really very superficial and there are far more dissimilarities in the two texts. Importantly, there is no historical evidence connecting them. Click here

Acknowledging that respectable citizens knew of Captain Kidd is not evidence that Joseph Smith knew of the remote island off the coast of Africa named Comoros or its largest city, Moroni.

The CES Letter attempts to make a case for a connection between Ethan Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Ethan was 45 years older than Oliver, who was just 17 when View of the Hebrews was published. Oliver's family were members of Ethan's congregation, but other than that single observation, no historical documentation exists showing the two ever met or were acquainted. Click here
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>View of the Hebrews</th>
<th>Book of Mormon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encounter a valley of a great river</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A unity of race (Hebrew) settle the land and are the ancestral origin of American Indians</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew the origin of Indian language</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian hieroglyphics</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Indian records</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Indian records</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A set of “yellow leaves” buried in Indian hill. Elder B.H. Roberts noted the “leaves” may be gold.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith claimed the gold plates were buried in Hill Cumorah.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breastplate, Urim &amp; Thummim</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man standing on a wall warning the people saying, “Wo, wo to this city...to this people” while subsequently being attacked.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus, son of Ananus, stood on the wall saying “Wo, wo to this city, this temple, and this people.”</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Came to preach for many days</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Went upon a wall</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cried with a loud voice</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Preached of destruction of Jerusalem</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Had stones cast at him</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: View of Hebrews, p 20</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel the Lamanite stood on the wall saying “Wo, wo to this city” or “this people”.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Came to preach for many days</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Went upon a wall</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cried with a loud voice</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Preached of destruction of Nephites</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Had stones cast at him</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Helaman 13:16</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophets, spiritually gifted men transmit generational records</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gospel preached in the Americas</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes whole chapters of Isaiah</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good and bad are a necessary opposition</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride denounced</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polygamy denounced</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred towers and high places</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observers who may suspect that the *View of the Hebrews* could have served as a basis for the *Book of Mormon* can read the two texts and decide for themselves:

*View of the Hebrews*

*Book of Mormon*
The information in this chart is from B. H. Roberts' research. In 1923 he wrote: “This report herewith submitted is what it purports to be, namely a ‘study of Book of Mormon origins,’ for the information of those who ought to know everything about it pro et con.” Quoting only his “con” (or negative) assessments misrepresents him. His position was “Our faith is not only unshaken but unshakable in the Book of Mormon, and therefore we can look without fear upon all that can be said against it.” [Click here](#)

The story of Joseph Smith's father's dream was written many years after the Book of Mormon was published. It is more likely that Joseph's elderly mother was influenced by the Book of Mormon when she wrote about the dream rather than the opposite. [Click here](#)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Messiah visits the Americas</th>
<th>Quetzalcoatl, the white bearded &quot;Mexican Messiah&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idolatry and human sacrifice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrews divide into two classes, civilized and barbarous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilized thrive in art, written language, metallurgy, navigation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government changes from monarchy to republic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil and ecclesiastical power is united in the same person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long wars break out between the civilized and barbarous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive military fortifications, observations, &quot;watch towers&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbarous exterminate the civilized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discusses the United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elder B.H. Roberts noted: "Ethan is prominently connected with the recording of the matter in the one case, and Ether in the other."


Reverend Ethan Smith was the author of *View of the Hebrews*. Ethan Smith was a pastor in Poultney, Vermont when he wrote and published the book. Oliver Cowdery – also a Poultney, Vermont resident – was a member of Ethan’s congregation during this time and before he went to New York to join his cousin (third cousin) Joseph Smith. As you know, Oliver Cowdery played an instrumental role in bringing forth the Book of Mormon.

IDS General Authority and scholar Elder B.H. Roberts privately researched the link between the Book of Mormon, the *View of the Hebrews*, Joseph’s father having the same dream in 1811 as Lehi’s dream, etc. that were available to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and others before the publication of the Book of Mormon. Elder Roberts’ private research was meant only for the eyes of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve and was never intended to be

The time line described here in *The CES Letter* is murky. Oliver moved away from Ethan's congregation in 1826, but did not meet Joseph Smith until three years later. Other than observing that Oliver was in Ethan's congregation, there is no evidence connecting Oliver to Ethan or his book. [Click here](#)
Available to the public. Roberts’ work was later published in 1985 as Studies of the Book of Mormon. At the conclusion of his research, Elder B.H. Roberts came to the following conclusion:

9. The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain: This was an 1819 textbook written in King James Version style language for New York state school children, one of them very likely being Joseph Smith. The first chapter alone is stunning as it reads incredibly like the Book of Mormon:

1. Now it came to pass, in the one thousand eight hundred and twelfth year of the Christian era, and in the thirty and sixth year after the people of the provinces of Columbia had declared themselves a free and independent nation;
2. That in the sixth month of the same year, on the first day of the month, the chief Governor, whom the people had chosen to rule over the land of Columbia;
3. Even James, whose sir-name was Madison, delivered a written paper to the Great Sanhedrim of the people, who were assembled together.
4. And the name of the city where the people were gathered together was called after the name of the chief captain of the land of Columbia, whose fame extendeth to the utmost parts of the earth; albeit, he had slept with his fathers...

Along with the above KJV language style presence throughout the book, what are the following Book of Mormon phrases, verbatim, themes, and storylines doing in a children’s school textbook that was used in Joseph Smith’s own time and backyard? A mere decade before the publication of the Book of Mormon?

- Devices of “curious workmanship” in relation to boats and weapons.
- A “stripling” soldier “with his “weapon of war in his hand.”
- “A certain chief captain…was given in trust a band of more than two thousand chosen men, to go forth to battle” and who “all gave their services freely for the good of their country.”
- Fortifications: “the people began to fortify themselves and entrench the high Places round about the city.”
- Objects made “partly of brass and partly of iron, and were cunningly contrived with curious works, like unto a clock; and as it were a large ball,”
- “Their polished steels of fine workmanship.”
- “Nevertheless, it was so that the freeman came to the defence of the city; built strong holds and forts and raised up fortifications in abundance.”

In another example of alleged parallelism, Chris and Duane Johnson compared the texts of 135,270 books published between 1500 and 1830 to the Book of Mormon. The authors report that their studies identified a few books that are similar in style, including The Late War. However, there is no evidence Joseph Smith ever saw a copy or even knew they existed. Neither is there a plausible explanation for how any of them might have influenced the creation of the Book of Mormon. While intriguing, without a believable explanation connecting its text to the Book of Mormon, its inclusion here seems a bit odd.
While the author of *The CES Letter* alleges "astounding," "staggering," and even "devastating" parallels and similarities between *The Late War* and the Book of Mormon, neither he nor those performing the computer analyses have proposed a theory to describe how these alleged similarities actually influenced the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. [Click here](#)

A second book out of the 135,270 in the Johnsons' study, but with fewer reported parallels than *The Late War*, is *The First Book of Napoleon*. *The CES Letter* tells us it is "shocking" but fails to note that the Johnsons had to use the first 25 pages of the book in order to find enough words or phrases to make it appear similar to the Book of Mormon. [Click here](#)

*Additional computer analysis demonstrates that regarding non-contextual words, archaic words, structure of the language, unusual words, distinguishing phrases, and content topics, the Book of Mormon is more similar to King James style than *The Late War*. In fact, *The Late War* is similar to King James style only in a contorted pseudo-biblical exaggerated caricature. So, if Joseph Smith was influenced by *The Late War*, his imitation of King James style was better than Gilbert J. Hunt's.* [Click here](#)

The staggering parallels and similarities to the Book of Mormon are *astounding*. This outstanding web page outlines very clearly and simply just how devastating the *Late War* is to the Book of Mormon and its claims.

Rick Grunder states in his paper:

> "The presence of Hebraisms and other striking parallels in a popular children's textbook (*Late War*), on the other hand -- so close to Joseph Smith in his youth -- must sober our perspective." – p.770

10. Another fascinating book published in 1809, *The First Book of Napoleon*, is shocking. The first chapter:

1. And behold it came to pass, in these latter days, that an evil spirit arose on the face of the earth, and greatly troubled the sons of men.
2. And this spirit seized upon, and spread amongst the people who dwell in the land of Gaul.
3. Now, in this people the fear of the Lord had not been for many generations, and they had become a corrupt and perverse people; and their chief priests,
and the nobles of the land, and the learned men thereof, had become wicked in the imagines of their hearts, and in the practices of their lives.
4. And the evil spirit went abroad amongst the people, and they raged like unto the heathen, and they rose up against their lawful king, and slew him, and his queen also, and the prince their son; yea, verily, with a cruel and bloody death.
5. And they moreover smote, with mighty wrath, the king's guards, and banished the priests, and nobles of the land, and seized upon, and took unto themselves, their inheritances, their gold and silver, corn and oil, and whatsoever belonged unto them.
6. Now it came to pass, that the nation of the Gauls continued to be sorely troubled and vexed, and the evil spirit whispered unto the people, even unto the meanest and vilest thereof…

…and it continues on. It's like reading from the Book of Mormon.

When I first read this along with other passages from The First Book of Napoleon, I was floored. Here we have two early 19th century contemporary books written at least a decade before the Book of Mormon that not only read and sound like the Book of Mormon but which also carry so many of its parallels and themes as well.

The following are a side-by-side comparison of the beginning of The First Book of Napoleon with the beginning of the Book of Mormon:

The First Book of Napoleon:
Condemn not the (writing)…an account…the First Book of Napoleon…upon the face of the earth…it came to pass…the land…their inheritances their gold and silver and…the commandments of the Lord…the foolish imaginations of their hearts…small in stature…Jerusalem…because of the perverse wickedness of the people.

Book of Mormon:
Condemn not the (writing)…an account…the First Book of Nephi…upon the face of the earth…it came to pass…the land…his inheritance and his gold and his silver and…the commandments of the Lord…the foolish imaginations of his heart…large in stature…Jerusalem…because of the wickedness of the people.

The Book of Mormon taught and still teaches a Trinitarian view of the Godhead. Joseph Smith’s early theology also held this view. As part of the over 100,000 changes to the Book of Mormon, there were major changes made to reflect Joseph’s evolved view of the Godhead.

Examples:
11. The Book of Mormon taught and still teaches a Trinitarian view of the Godhead. Joseph Smith’s early theology also held this view. As part of the over 100,000 changes to the Book of Mormon, there were major changes made to reflect Joseph’s evolved view of the Godhead.

This common criticism has been challenged by multiple scholars. Click Here

At this point The CES Letter has alleged that Joseph Smith borrowed names from obscure maps, and/or used View of the Hebrews as a basis for the Book of Mormon and/or was influenced by The Last War and the First Book of Napoleon. Yet, no attempt has been made to contextualize these claims with available documentary evidences. Without a historical correlation, The CES Letter’s arguments are less persuasive. Click here
This is a puzzling criticism. In LDS teachings, Jesus Christ has always been both "God" and the "Son of God." Consequently, the additions do not change the meaning, but only clarify it. They were made by Joseph Smith and published in the 1837 printing of the Book of Mormon.

Click here

The author of The CES Letter alleges that these references to Christ as the Father support that the Book of Mormon still teaches a Trinitarian view of the Godhead, which the Church has never embraced. The Book of Mormon teaches that Christ created the heavens and the earth and so He is the Father of the creation. Our physical bodies are of the earth and so Christ is our Father in that way also. The Christian Trinitarian doctrine is not taught in any LDS scripture.

Click here

While some statements in the Book of Mormon may seem to promote a Trinitarian view, others contradict it. Importantly, no teachings from Joseph Smith, whether early or late, declare a belief in the Christian Trinitarian creed of the Godhead. His revelations and teachings have consistently taught of a Godhead that is one in purpose, not one in body. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost may each be referred to as God. However, their united purpose allows them to be collectively referred to as one God without meaning one entity or personage.

Click here
Selectively quoting Joseph Smith's early statements and revelations can create the illusion that his teachings about God changed between 1829 and 1838. However, a comprehensive evaluation of the Prophet's declarations during that same period makes it clear that he believed that the Father and the Son were physically separate beings but one in purpose. 

Click here

Boyd Kirkland was an American television director of animated cartoons who published several journal articles discussing LDS teachings. He is entitled to his opinion but would not be considered authoritative by most religious scholars.

Richard Bushman wrote this assessment of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon:

"I think the Book of Mormon is a marvel. I don't think you can make a case based on historical evidence that Joseph Smith could have written the book. It is entirely too complicated and produced with so little experience. In my opinion that does not allow you to jump immediately to the conclusion that the book was divine. I tell people it was either a work of genius or it was inspired. By genius we mean something that exceeds normal human capacities. That is certainly true for the Book of Mormon."
This is not a complaint against Joseph Smith or a criticism of the Book of Mormon. This is an accusation that does not focus on the Church but rather on artists who drew pictures that the Church later used in their publications. Click here

Dozens of references to the translation of the Book of Mormon have been compiled, but the description most available to artists was Oliver Cowdery's statement: "Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, 'Interpreters.'" Oliver did not mention a hat or how the interpreters were used. Click here

The usage of biased and loaded language demonstrates that the author of The CES Letter is highly biased and less inclined to present an accurate and balanced view.

This talk was given to over a hundred newly called mission presidents in 1992 and then published in the Ensign, the most widely distributed and official publication of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If the Church was trying to cover this up, it undoubtedly would have never published this talk. Click here
This drawing is inaccurate. One account describes that Joseph would "sit in a different room, or up stairs," but none of the references describe Joseph sitting on a staircase.

This drawing is inaccurate according to Oliver Cowdery's accounts, which states that Joseph used the interpreters and did not mention a hat.

This drawing is inaccurate according to David Whitmer who stated that "Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating."

The drawings on this page contain several inaccuracies that, strictly speaking, could raise questions whether the author of The CES Letter has been honest and transparent. The same standard that the author uses to judge the Church's artistic renderings should, likewise, be used with the renderings that he provides. Using one standard for someone else (the Church) and a different standard for one's self (his artwork of what "actually happened") is called a double standard.

Regarding the allegations of deception, there is no evidence of a cover-up or that the drawings used in Church publications were deliberately intended to deceive. A drawing of a man looking at a seer stone in a hat is not inherently sinister. The artists simply did not have access to the historical details.
First Vision Concerns & Questions:

“Our whole strength rests on the validity of that [First] vision. It either occurred or it did not occur. If it did not, then this work is a fraud. If it did, then it is the most important and wonderful work under the heavens.”

– Gordon B. Hinckley, The Marvelous Foundation of Our Faith

1. There are at least 4 different First Vision accounts by Joseph Smith:
   - 1832 account
   - Two 1835 accounts
   - 1838 account (official version)
   - 1842 account

2. No one, including Joseph Smith's family members and the Saints – had ever heard about the First Vision for twelve to twenty-two years after it supposedly occurred. The first and earliest written account of the First Vision in Joseph Smith's journal was written 12 years after the spring of 1820. There is absolutely no record of a First Vision prior to 1832.

3. In the 1832 account, Joseph said that before praying he knew that there was no true or living faith or denomination upon the earth as built by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. His primary purpose in going to prayer was to seek forgiveness of his sins.

4. In the official 1838 account, Joseph said his “object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join”...”for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong.”

   This is a direct contradiction to his 1832 First Vision account.

5. Other problems:
   - The dates / his ages: The 1832 account states Joseph was 15 years old when he had the vision in 1821 while the other accounts state he was 14 years old in 1820 when he had the vision.
   - The reason or motive for seeking divine help – Bible reading and conviction of sins, a revival, a desire to know if God exists, wanting to know which church to join – are not reported the same in each account.
   - Who appears to him – a spirit, an angel, two angels, Jesus, many angels, the Father and the Son – are all over the place.
   - The historical record shows that there was no revival in Palmyra in 1820. There was one in 1817 and there was another in 1824. There are records from his brother, William Smith, and his mother Lucy Mack Smith, both stating that the family joined Presbyterianism after Alvin's death in November 1823 despite Joseph Smith claiming...
This is inaccurate. Joseph Smith consistently rejected the Trinitarian view of the Godhead.
Click here

This is a deceptive chart because the comparisons are crafted to create an illusion of disagreement when ambiguities are present. Click here

This assessment of the 1832 account contains many errors. Click here

This account is a November 14, 1835, entry in Joseph's journal comprising only nine words. It unavoidably contains less information. Click here

By greatly exaggerating both the significance and number of differences in the accounts, the author of The CES Letter highlights contradictions that exist only in the narrowest of interpretations. Click here

This chart misrepresents the November 9, 1835, account. Click here

The allegation that the story of the First Vision evolved is misleading. There are no versions, only different historical accounts related by Joseph to different audiences at different times. The minor differences are not unexpected and are easily explained. Click here

To create the appearance of contradiction in the 1838 account, this chart considers "pillar of light" and "pillar of fire" to be different. Click here
The phrase "by his own hand, upon papyrus" refers to the original record, which may have been recopied multiple times. It needn’t refer to anything more than original authorship. Click here

There is no definitive historical evidence that Joseph Smith penciled in the missing portion. Who made the change and when it was made remains unknown. Click here

With or without the penciled-in additions, this drawing is unique among lion couch scenes found in Egyptian papyri. Click here

The Church has long acknowledged that the recovered fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri are not the Book of Abraham but instead are copies of the Book of Breathings and the Book of the Dead. The discovery was celebrated on the cover of *The Improvement Era*, January, 1968. Click here

Claiming to know the missing details of Facsimile 1 "based on Egyptology" is deceiving because Egyptology is a broadening field with new discoveries coming every year. *The CES Letter's* claim would be strengthened by supplying a copy of even one similar lion couch vignette. Click here
This assumes that Joseph Smith translated the papyri in the same way as modern Egyptologists, which is a false assumption. The differences shown on these graphics only validate that reality and are not unexpected. Joseph could only translate through the "gift and power of God" and his revelatory translations may require time to understand. For example, many things in the Book of Revelation are not completely understood, even by the best Biblical scholars today. Click here

The Book of Abraham is not "A common funerary document." This misrepresentation ignores the fact that we do not have the papyri associated with the translation of the Book of Abraham. Nor does it consider the possibility it was a revelation. Click here

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joseph Smith's Interpretation</th>
<th>Translated Correctly?</th>
<th>Modern Egyptological Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Angel of the Lord.</td>
<td>Facsimile #1, Book of Abraham</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham, seated upon an altar</td>
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<tr>
<td>The high priest of Elenahan</td>
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<td>The god of Elenahan.</td>
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<td>Abraham in Egypt.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In all five of these drawings, the figure on the lion couch is not living, but is a sarcophagus. This is a glaring contrast to Facsimile 1. Click here

Figure #3 is supposed to be the jackal-headed Egyptian god of mummification and afterlife, Anubis, not a human. The following images show similar funerary scenes which have been discovered elsewhere in Egypt. Notice that the jackal-headed Egyptian god of death and afterlife Anubis is consistent in every funerary scene.
As noted above, Joseph Smith did not translate as modern Egyptologists do but by the "gift and power of God." His interpretations of the facsimiles encompass an eternal view, including his own revelatory insights. [Click here](#)

An understanding of the character of the ancient deity Min actually vindicates Joseph Smith's interpretation. [Click Here](#)
The following is a side-by-side comparison of what Joseph Smith translated in Facsimile 3 versus what it actually says according to Egyptologists and modern Egyptology:

**Facsimile 3:**

The issue of identifying the figures in Facsimile 3 is more complicated than this infographic makes it seem. Click Here

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**The Book of Abraham**

**Facsimile #3, The Breathing Permit**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Abraham sitting upon Pharaoh's throne, by the poiteness of the king, with a crown upon his head, representing the Priesthood, as emblematical of the grand Presidency in Heaven, with the scepter of justice and judgment in his hand.</strong></td>
<td><strong>This is Osiris.</strong> Writing above figure: &quot;Revolution of Osiris, Foremost of the Westerners.&quot; The &quot;atef&quot; crown also identifies him as Osiris.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>King Pharaoh, whose name is given in the characters above his head.</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong> This figure is female not male. Writing above figure: &quot;Isis, the great, the god's mother.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signifies Abraham in Egypt as given also in Figure 10 of Facsimile No. 1.</strong> Prince of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, as written above the hand.</td>
<td><strong>3</strong> This is a tablet figure (jane, sib, etc.). This is female not male. Writing above figure: &quot;Most, mistress of the god.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ismael, one of the king's principal waiters, as represented by the characters above his hand.</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong> This is the deceased individual wearing the traditional dress of perfume and lotus flower on his head. Writing above figure: &quot;The Osiris Hör, justly honored.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Osmiel, a slave belonging to the prince.</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong> Not a slave, this is Anubis, guide of the dead, who is there to support the deceased. Writing above figure: &quot;Protection for Anubis, who makes protection!&quot; (foremost of the remaining boos.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3. Egyptologists state that Joseph Smith’s translation of the papyri and facsimiles are gibberish and have absolutely nothing to do with what the papyri and facsimiles actually are and what they actually say. Nothing in each and every facsimile is correct to what is written in the papyri. This claim, repeated several times throughout *The CES Letter*, is demonstrably false. There are correlations between some of Joseph’s explanations and modern Egyptological understanding. However, comparing Joseph Smith’s interpretations, which came by the “gift and power of God,” to those of modern Egyptologists is not expected to always yield agreement. By assuming there should be total agreement and then showing disagreements, the author of *The CES Letter* attempts to show Joseph Smith was a fraud, but it is an irrelevant comparison. Click Here
Joseph Smith claimed they said.

- **Facsimile 1**
  1. The names are wrong.
  2. The Abraham scene is wrong.
  3. He names gods that are not part of the Egyptian belief system, of any known mythology or belief system.

- **Facsimile 2**
  1. Joseph translated 11 figures on this facsimile. None of the names are correct as each one of these gods does not even exist in Egyptian religion or any recorded mythology.
  2. Joseph misidentifies every god in this facsimile.

- **Facsimile 3**
  1. Joseph misidentifies the Egyptian god Osiris as Abraham.
  2. Misidentifies the Egyptian god Isis as the Pharaoh.
  3. Misidentifies the Egyptian god Maat as the Prince of the Pharaoh.
  4. Misidentifies the Egyptian god Anubis as a slave.
  5. Misidentifies the dead Hor as a waiter.
  7. The Book of Abraham teaches a Newtonian view of the universe. Its Newtonian astronomy concepts, mechanics, and models of the universe have been discredited by 20th century Einsteinian physics.

What we find in Abraham 3 and the official scriptures of the LDS Church regarding science reflects a Newtonian world concept. The Catholic Church's Ptolemaic cosmology was displaced by the new Copernican and Newtonian world model, just as the nineteenth-century, canonized, Newtonian world view is challenged by Einstein's twentieth-century science.

Keith Norman, an LDS scholar, has written that for the LDS Church, "It is no longer possible to pretend there is no conflict."

Norman continues: "Scientific cosmology began its leap forward just when Mormon doctrine was becoming stabilized. The revolution in twentieth-century physics precipitated by Einstein dethroned Newtonian physics as the ultimate explanation of the way the universe works. Relativity theory and quantum mechanics, combined with advances in astronomy, have established a vastly different picture of how the universe began, how it is structured and operates, and the nature of matter and energy. This new scientific cosmology poses a serious challenge to the Mormon version of the universe."

This quotation from Keith Norman is from Sunstone magazine 30 years ago. It is not authoritative, current, and is at best the author's opinion. It is a questionable assumption to believe the Book of Abraham intended to represent modern cosmology. Click here for more information.

The Book of Abraham does not teach modern cosmology, Newtonian or otherwise. Its cosmology fits nicely in the ancient Near East and has parallels to Egyptian and Israelite cosmology. Click here for more information.
Many of the astronomical and cosmological ideas found in both Joseph Smith’s environment and in the Book of Abraham have become out of vogue, and some of these Newtonian concepts are scientific relics. The evidence suggests that the Book of Abraham reflects concepts of Joseph Smith’s time and place rather than those of an ancient world.

Grant Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, p. 25

5. 86% of Book of Abraham chapters 2, 4, and 5 are King James Version Genesis chapters 1, 2, 11, and 12. Sixty-six out of seventy-seven verses are quotations or close paraphrases of King James Version wording.

An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins, p. 19

The Book of Abraham is supposed to be an ancient text written thousands of years ago “by his own hand upon papyrus.” What are 17th century King James Version text doing in there? What does this say about the book being anciently written by Abraham?


7. Facsimile 2, Figure 5 states the sun receives its “light from the revolutions of Kolob.” We now know that the process of nuclear fusion is what makes the stars and suns shine. With the discovery of quantum mechanics, scientists learned that the sun’s source of energy is internal and not external. The sun shines because of thermonuclear fusion, not because it gets its light from any other star as claimed by the Book of Abraham.

8. There is a book published in 1830 by Thomas Dick entitled *The Philosophy of the Future State*. Joseph Smith owned a copy of the book and Oliver Cowdery quoted some lengthy excerpts from the book in the *December 1836 Messenger and Advocate*.

Klaus Hansen, an LDS scholar, stated:

“The progressive aspect of Joseph’s theology, as well as its cosmology, while in a general way compatible with antebellum thought, bears some remarkable resemblances to Thomas Dick’s ‘Philosophy of a Future State’.”

Hansen continues:

“Some very striking parallels to Smith’s theology suggest that the similarities between the two may be more than coincidental. Dick’s lengthy book, an ambitious treatise on astronomy and metaphysics, proposed the idea that matter is eternal and indestructible and rejected the notion of a creation ex nihilo. Much of the book dealt with the infinity of the universe, made up of innumerable stars spread out over immeasurable distances. Dick speculated that many of these stars were peopled by “various orders of intelligences” and that these intelligences were “progressive beings” in various stages of evolution toward perfection. In the Book of Abraham, part of which consists of a treatise on astronomy and cosmology, eternal beings of various orders and stages of development likewise populate numerous stars. They...”

Grant Palmer’s publications about Joseph Smith and plural marriage generate questions about his reliability. Any of Palmer’s claims and conclusions would benefit from peer review or a secondary validation.

The appearance of apparent anachronisms could also mean there is a rich textual history. Since the source of the Book of Abraham is not specifically known, criticisms and explanations can only result from the assumptions an observer is willing to make.

There are far more differences between the teachings of Thomas Dick and Joseph Smith than there are similarities.
too, are called “intelligences.” Dick speculated that “the systems of the universe revolve around a common centre… the throne of God.” In the Book of Abraham, one star named Kolob “was nearest unto the throne of God.” Other stars, in ever diminishing order, were placed in increasing distances from this center.”

– Mormonism and the American Experience, Klaus Hansen, p.79-80, 110

9. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland was directly asked about the papyri not matching the Book of Abraham in a March 2012 BBC interview:

- Sweeney: Mr. Smith got this papyri and he translated them and subsequently as the Egyptologists cracked the code something completely different…
- Holland (Interrupts) All I’m saying… all I’m saying is that what got translated got translated into the word of God. The vehicle for that, I do not understand and don’t claim to know and know no Egyptian.

Is it don’t know and I don’t understand but it’s the word of God” really the best answer that a “prophet, seer, and revelator” can come up with to such a profound problem that is driving many members out of the Church?

The following are respected Egyptian scholars/Egyptologists statements regarding Joseph Smith and the Book of Abraham:

“…these three facsimiles of Egyptian documents in the Pearl of Great Price depict the most common objects in the Mortuary religion of Egypt. Joseph Smith’s interpretations of them as part of a unique revelation through Abraham, therefore, very clearly demonstrates that he was totally unacquainted with the significance of these documents and absolutely ignorant of the simplest facts of Egyptian writing and civilization.”
– Dr. James H. Breasted, University of Chicago

“It may be safely said that there is not one single word that is true in these explanations…”
– Dr. W.M. Flinders Petrie, London University

“It is difficult to deal seriously with Joseph Smith’s impudent fraud…Smith has turned the goddess [Isis in Facsimile #3] into a king and Osiris into Abraham.”
– Dr. A.H. Sayce, Oxford professor of Egyptology


Of all of the issues, the Book of Abraham is the issue that has both fascinated and disturbed me the most. It is the issue that I’ve spent the most time researching on because it offers a real insight into Joseph’s modus operandi as well as Joseph’s claim of being a translator. It is the smoking gun that has completely obliterated my testimony of Joseph Smith and his claims.

It is surprising The CES Letter would include these statements which are over 100 years old. Newer scholarship demonstrates a wider variety of interpretations by Egyptologists today and important similarities that Egyptologists struggle to explain.

The author of The CES Letter reports the Book of Abraham "is the smoking gun that obliterated [his] testimony." It is unfortunate that he embraced such a narrow understanding of Joseph Smith as a translator. Had he recognized that the Prophet never claimed to know what Egyptologists know, his expectations might not have exceeded reality. He might have been grateful for the revealed insights and patient with those things we do not now understand.
Polygamy/Polyandry Concerns & Questions:

One of the things that really disturbed me in my research was discovering the real origins of polygamy and how Joseph Smith really practiced it.

- Joseph Smith was married to at least 34 women.
- Polyandry: Of those 34 women, 11 of them were married women of other living men. Among them being Apostle Orson Hyde who was sent on his mission to dedicate Israel when Joseph secretly married his wife, Marinda Hyde. Church historian Elder Marlin K. Jensen and unofficial apologists like FairMormon do not dispute the polyandry. The Church now admits the polyandry in its October 2014 Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo essay.
- Out of the 34 women, 7 of them were teenage girls as young as 14-years-old. Joseph was 37-years-old when he married 14-year-old Helen Mar Kimball, twenty-three years his junior. Even by 19th century standards, this was shocking.
- The Church now admits that Joseph Smith married Helen Mar Kimball “several months before her 15th birthday” in its October 2014 Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo essay.
- Among the women was a mother-daughter set and three sister sets. Several of these women included Joseph’s own foster daughters.

Some of the marriages to these women included promises by Joseph of eternal life to the girls and their families, threats of loss of salvation, and threats that he (Joseph) was going to be slain by an angel with a drawn sword if the girls didn’t marry him.

I have a problem with this. This is Warren Jeffs territory. This is not the Joseph Smith I grew up learning about in the Church and having a testimony of. This is not the Joseph Smith that I sang “Praise to the Man” to or taught others about two years in the mission field.

Alleging a parallel between Joseph Smith and Warren Jeffs may create effective propaganda, but it requires ignoring an overwhelming number of differences.

This extreme interpretation is false and demonstrates a lack of understanding of the basic teachings of D&C 132.

For an overview of Joseph Smith’s teachings on polygamy [Click here]

These were not typical marriages but sealings, many just for the next life. [Click here]

This audio excerpt is an example of how The CES Letter misrepresents polyandry to its readers. [Click here]

The CES Letter intimates Joseph Smith married some women becoming their second genuine husband. This is false. Polyandry was adultery. There is no evidence that the Prophet practiced or would have permitted others to do so. [Click here]

Both of these statements go beyond the evidence. [Click here]

Section 132 does not contain “specific and bizarre rules” for plural marriage. It includes a doctrinal discussion with verses addressing specific issues then affecting Joseph an Emma. [Click here]
Although we assume today that this is what was meant.

D&C 132 is unequivocal on the point that polygamy is permitted only “to multiply and replenish the earth” and “bear the souls of men.” This would be consistent with the Book of Mormon prohibition on polygamy except in the case where God commands it to “raise up seed.”

Again, looking at how polygamy was actually practiced by Joseph Smith:

- Joseph married 11 women who were already married. Multiple husbands = Polyandry.
  These married women continued to live as husband and wife with their first husband after marrying Joseph.

- Joseph’s polygamy also included:
  - Unions with teenagers as young as 14-years-old.
  - Unions without the knowledge or consent of first wife Emma.
  - Unions without the knowledge or consent of the husband, in cases of polyandry.
  - A union with Apostle Orson Hyde’s wife while he was on a mission (Marinda Hyde).
  - A union with a newlywed and pregnant woman (Zina Huntington).
  - Promises of salvation and exaltation for the girls’ entire families.
  - Threats that Joseph would be slain by an angel with a drawn sword if they did not enter into the union (Zina Huntington, Almera Woodard Johnson, Mary Lightner).
  - Threats of loss of salvation if the woman didn’t agree to the union with Joseph Smith.
  - Dishonesty in public sermons, 1835 D&C 101:4, denials by Joseph Smith denying he was a polygamist, Joseph’s destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor that exposed his polygamy and which printing press destruction started the chain of events that led to Joseph’s death.
  - Marriages to young girls living in Joseph’s home as foster daughters (Lawrence sisters, Partridge sisters, Fanny Alger, Lucy Walker).
  - Joseph’s marriage to Fanny Alger was described by Oliver Cowdery as a “dirty, nasty, filthy affair” — Rough Stone Rolling, p.323
  - Joseph was practicing polygamy before the sealing authority was given. LDS historian, Richard Bushman, states: “There is evidence that Joseph was a polygamist by 1835” — Rough Stone Rolling, p.323
  - Plural marriages are rooted in the notion of “sealing” for both time and eternity. The “sealing” power was not restored until April 3, 1836 when Elijah appeared to Joseph in the Kirtland Temple and conferred the sealing keys upon him. So, Joseph’s marriage to Fanny Alger in 1833 was illegal under both the laws of the land and under any theory of divine authority; it was adultery.

D&C 132:63 very clearly states that the only purpose of polygamy is to “multiply and replenish the earth” and “bear the souls of men.” Why did Joseph marry women who were already married? These women were obviously not virgins, which violated D&C 132:61. Zina Huntington had been married seven and a half months and was about six months pregnant with her first husband’s baby at the time she married Joseph; clearly she didn’t need any more help to “bear the souls of men.”

By ignoring the types of sealings between Joseph Smith and his plural wives, The CES Letter again seeks to create the appearance of sexual polyandry, without providing proof that it ever happened. Click here.

The Partridge sisters, Fanny Alger, and Lucy Walker were not foster daughters. Emma personally participated in four of these six sealings. Click here.

Since the ceremony uniting Fanny Alger to Joseph is undated, it is unclear whether sealing authority was used. Most scholars place the marriage prior to April 3, 1836 when the sealing keys were restored. If so, then priesthood authority would have been used created a plural matrimony for this life only. Click here.

This is absolutely untrue. D&C 132 gives four reasons for plural marriage. Multiply and replenish the earth is only one. Click here.

Most of these complaints were already mentioned on page 31, but Click here for a chart showing the multiple errors and weaknesses of these allegations.

Joseph Smith could truthfully deny practicing legal polygamy (the plural unions were not sanctioned by the state), polygamy as practiced by Turkish sultans, and any connection with John C. Bennett’s adulteries. Click here.

D&C 132:63 is unequivocal on the point that polygamy is permitted only “to multiply and replenish the earth” and “bear the souls of men.” This would be consistent with the Book of Mormon prohibition on polygamy except in the case where God commands it to “raise up seed.”
This argument assumes that destroyed means being killed on earth. The 1830 Webster's Dictionary defines destroyed as "to put an end to." For unexalted beings, familial relationships will end at death and that will constitute their being destroyed.

Click here

The following 1835 edition of Doctrine & Covenants revelations bans polygamy:

1835 Doctrine & Covenants 101:4:
"Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have

Click here
This is a misrepresentation of the evidence. The 31 signatories were not witnesses even if The CES Letter twice claims they were. Their statement was a response to "Dr. J. C. Bennett's 'secret wife system'' (see entire quote). Only a few of the 31 knew of celestial marriage, which was not openly taught or practiced by the Church at that time and bore no resemblance to Bennett's system of spiritual wifery. Click here.

We do not know what Joseph said to Emma. The CES Letter makes assumptions and then condemns Joseph based on those assumptions. Emma remained true to Joseph throughout his life. Click here.

These scriptures support monogamy, but say nothing specifically about whether plural marriage could be sanctioned if commanded by the Lord. Click Here

The CES Letter employs the loaded language, "lie and perjure," to promote its view. Examining the circumstances reveals a different reality. Click Here

Dishonesty for 10 Years?
Joseph Smith's 1830s reputation did not include sexual impropriety. Click here

William Law wrote in 1839: "I have carefully watched [Joseph Smith’s] movements since I have been here, and I assure you I have found him honest and honourable in all our transactions. ... I believe he is an honest upright man."
It's when you take this snapshot of Joseph's character and start looking into the Book of Abraham, the Kinderhook Plates, the Book of Mormon, the multiple First Vision accounts, Priesthood restoration, and so on that you start to see a very disturbing pattern and picture. These topics continue to be mentioned, but The CES Letter misrepresents their actual significance. Click here or on each topic for addition information.

Jeffs' youngest polygamous unions were all consummated and constituted statutory rape. Joseph's sealing to 14-year-old Helen Kimball was equivalent to a betrothal, with no evidence of intimate relations. Click here

Jeffs treated polygamy as a license for sexual perversions. Plural Marriage was a religious practice Joseph Smith introduced, for several reasons including the need to allow all women to be sealed to an eternal husband. Evidence supports sexual relations were uncommon in his marriages. Click here

Warren Jeffs' plural marrying pattern indicates a propensity for young girls and he always consummated the marriage. Joseph Smith was sealed to women of all ages with evidence that his sealings to his younger wives were from a practical standpoint, more like engagements. The Utah policy that likely began with Joseph was to not consummate marriages until the brides were at least 18.

This conclusion employs the same method of evidence employed throughout The CES Letter. It relies on proposed parallels, but conveniently ignores the numerous non-parallel that would make the overall conclusion invalid.

This illustrates how Jeffs and Joseph Smith were very different. Joseph's sealing to the mother was a non-sexual, eternity-only union.

Warren Jeffs is more closely aligned to Joseph Smith Mormonism than the LDS Church is.
Fanny was much more likely 19 and should not be on this list. Click here

This is a classic example of "presentism." None of the wives–by the standards of the time–could be considered "under age." Click here

Emma Smith approved and participated in these four plural sealings. Click here

Many wives lived for decades and were strong defenders of Joseph Smith and plural marriage as a religious practice. Click here

This was likely not consummated. Practically speaking it was similar to a betrothal. Click here

Charts like these sensationalize Joseph Smith's marriages by providing only selected details. They can be very misleading.

Sylvia Lyon's sealing to Joseph Smith caused her legal marriage to Windsor Lyon to be done away. Sylvia never had more than one genuine husband at at time. Click here

Non-sexual "eternity only" sealings. Click here

Emma and the woman's parents specifically approved of this marriage. Click here

Ruth Vose Sayers sought out Joseph to be his eternity-only wife. Click here
Brigham Young also taught: “I want to tell you, each and every one of you, that you are well acquainted with God our heavenly Father, or the great Eloheim. ... There is not a person here to play but what is a son or a daughter of that Being.” By taking quotations out of context, the author of The CES Letter alleges that Brigham Young contradicted himself and Joseph Smith. Click here

**Prophets Concerns & Questions:**

1. **Adam-God:** President Brigham Young taught what is now known as “Adam-God theory.” He taught that Adam is “our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do.” Young not only taught this doctrine over the pulpit at the 1852 and 1854 General Conferences but he also introduced this doctrine as the Lecture at the Veil in the endowment ceremony of the Temple. Prophets and apostles after Young renounced Adam-God theory as false doctrine. President Spencer W. Kimball renounced Adam-God theory in the October 1976 Conference:

   “We warn you against the dissemination of doctrines which are not according to the scriptures and which are alleged to have been taught by some of the General Authorities of past generations. Such, for instance, is the Adam-God theory. We denounce that theory and hope that everyone will be cautioned against this and other kinds of false doctrine.” – President Spencer W. Kimball, Our Own Liahona

   Along with President Spencer W. Kimball and similar statements from others, Bruce R. McConkie made the following statement:

   “The devil keeps this heresy alive as a means of obtaining converts to cultism. It is contrary to the whole plan of salvation set forth in the scriptures, and anyone who has read the Book of Moses, and anyone who has received the temple endowment, has no excuse whatever for being led astray by it. Those who are so ensnared reject the living prophet and close their ears to the apostles of their day.” – Bruce R. McConkie, The Seven Deadly Heresies

   Ironically, McConkie’s June 1980 condemnation asks you to trust him and Kimball as today’s living prophet. Further, McConkie is pointing to the endowment ceremony as a source of factual information. What about the Saints of Brigham’s day who were following their living prophet? And what about the endowment ceremony of their day where Adam-God was being taught at the veil? Yesterday’s doctrine is today’s false doctrine and yesterday’s prophet is today’s heretic.

2. **Blood Atonement:** Along with Adam-God, Young taught a doctrine known as “Blood Atonement” where a person’s blood had to be shed to atone for their own sins as it was beyond the atonement of Jesus Christ.

   “There are sins that men commit for which they cannot receive forgiveness in this world, or in that which is to come, and if they had their eyes open to see their true condition, they would be perfectly willing to have their blood split upon the ground, that the smoke thereof might ascend to heaven as an offering for their sins; and the smoking incense would atone for their sins, whereas...”

   President Kimball was not denying Brigham Young’s teachings. He was teaching that the Adam-god theory as advanced by dissident groups is false. The CES Letter oversimplifies Brigham Young’s teachings and those of subsequent Church leaders. Click here

Discussions of "blood atonement" are made only in propaganda against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There is no record of any LDS leader directing that a person should be "blood atoned." Nor is there any account of a person being killed through a principle called “blood atonement.” Click here
The doctrine of blood atonement has reference to the great sacrifice made by Jesus Christ in the shedding of his blood upon the cross and is still a doctrine of the Church today. Click here

The new and everlasting covenant of marriage is not polygamy. D&C 132:7 describes the "conditions" of the law and polygamy is not mentioned. Verses 19-20 declare that a worthy monogamous couple sealed by proper authority will receive exaltation. Polygamy is not a law or a covenant or a ceremony. It is best referred to as a principle and a practice. The new and everlasting covenant of marriage is eternal marriage, which all must abide or they "shall remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity," which is damnation (v. 17). Click here

A new transcription of this discourse from the original shorthand shows that Brigham Young did indeed make this comment, but he clarified it twice saying that it applied only to men and women who have the privilege of practicing plural marriage. The CES Letter is wrong. The issue is obedience, not plurality. No presiding leader has ever stated that all exalted beings are polygamists. Click here

The idea that polygamy must always be practiced is not doctrinal. Take for example the Book of Mormon peoples who were all monogamists. President Hinckley was speaking the truth. Click here
We still have Doctrine & Covenants 132 canonized. We're still practicing plural marriage in the Temples. Apostles Elder Oaks and Elder Nelson are modern examples of LDS polygamists in that they're sealed to multiple women. Polygamy is doctrinal. Polygamy is not doctrinal. Yesterday's doctrine is today's false doctrine. Yesterday's prophets are today's heretics.

Polygamy is doctrinal. Polygamy is not doctrinal. Yesterday's doctrine is today's false doctrine. Yesterday's prophets are today's heretics.

Black Ban: As you know, for close to 130 years blacks were not only banned from holding the priesthood but black individuals and families were blocked from the saving ordinances of the Temple. Every single prophet from Brigham Young all the way to Harold B. Lee kept this ban in place. Presbyths, Seers, and Revelators of 2013 — in its December 2013 Race and the Priesthood essay— disavowed the “theories” of yesterday’s Prophets, Seers, and Revelators for their theological, institutional, and doctrinal racist teachings and “revelation.” Yesterday’s racist doctrine and revelation is today’s “disavowed theories.”

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The CES Letter demonstrates a lack of understanding regarding the complexities of Joseph Smith’s and Brigham Young’s views on race; in so doing, it fails to appreciate the deep and vexing history that has loomed over both the LDS community and the United States writ large.

The CES Letter displays a narrowness of vision by focusing on such a short list of factors, when in fact a wide array of forces prompted a revisiting of the priesthood restriction.

The CES Letter betrays a lack of knowledge of what the records do and do not say, citing only a private 1949 letter from the First Presidency.

Whatever President Kimball meant by this phrase, The CES Letter ignores the rest of the passages that criticizes activists seeking to overturn the restriction.

This dramatic statement misrepresents Church teachings.

The CES Letter goes too far in saying definitively that “Joseph Smith gave the priesthood to black men.” While it is true that Abel’s 1836 priesthood certificate has Joseph Smith’s name at the bottom authorizing the ordination, the certificate does not identify who ordained him.
The CES Letter seems to be concerned regarding Church leaders' lack of discernment. There is a difference between discernment and mindreading. Priesthood ordinations may grant the former without requiring the latter. The entire sequence unraveled within six years. It was fortunate that the forgeries were detected so quickly.

Click here

Because the author of The CES Letter has already dismissed any concept of divinely called prophets, he would be predisposed to view any first-hand explanations (which Church leaders offered) as "apologetic."

The CES Letter alleges that the Hofmann's forgeries undermined and threatened the Church's story of its origins, which is untrue and overly dramatic. Before they were discovered to be forgeries, their contents were dealt with like any new document would have been. Church leaders were excited to learn of purportedly new documents dealing with the Restoration.
Elder Oaks states: “Latter-day Saint readers should also be more sophisticated in their evaluation of what they read.” Ironically, this seems to be the very thing that the author of The CES Letter is championing—LDS being more sophisticated in their evaluation of what they read about prophets and history. It is good advice, and apparently Elder Oaks believes that such behavior will lead them to belief, not disbelief.

The Church immediately released the documents. The CES Letter’s allegation is based upon an assumption that they were not going to release them. There was no wrongdoing, but the author of The CES Letter alleges impropriety based upon its opinion of what would have happened.

Rather than going by what the author of The CES Letter was told, why not perform his own research into the Church's official teachings in order to reflect their doctrines accurately? It is accusation based upon hearsay and is less useful.

The CES Letter accuses President Hinckley of dishonesty based upon his assumption that the Church was going to sequester documents obtained from Hofmann. It is a reckless accusation because it is based purely upon speculation.

I'm told that prophets are just men who are only prophets when acting as such (whatever that means). I'm told that like all prophets, Brigham Young was a man of his time. For example, I was told that Brigham Young was acting as a man when he taught that Adam is our God and the only God with whom we have to deal with. Never mind that he taught it over the pulpit in not one but two General Conferences and never mind that he introduced this theology into the endowment ceremony in the Temples.

Never mind that Brigham Young made it clear that he was speaking as a prophet:

I'm told that prophets are just men who are only prophets when acting as such (whatever that means).
In this sermon, Brigham Young was talking about the privilege of having God's prophets ("oracles") walking among them. If people believed that the words recorded in scripture were "scripture," shouldn't they—by the same measure—believe that the words spoken by today's prophets are also scripture? That is a good principle. However, The CES Letter's usage of this particular quote has nothing to do with teachings aboutAdam-god. It was stated in a completely different context.

Click here

This declaration affirms that since Gordon B. Hinckley could not read Mark Hofmann's mind, and since earlier leaders failed to measure up to the narrow standards established by The CES Letter regarding a handful of issues, the author would not want his children singing "Follow the Prophet." It seems to be an inadequate process to assess the divine inspiration of the leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the past.

It could be argued that in every case the author of The CES Letter has misrepresented the historical record regarding these issues:

"Racism"
"Sexism"
Blood Atonement
Adam-god
Kinderhook Plates and Translator/Seer Claims Concerns & Questions:

1. **Kinderhook Plates:**

“Church historians continued to insist on the authenticity of the Kinderhook plates until 1980 when an examination conducted by the Chicago Historical Society, possessor of one plate, proved it was a nineteenth-century creation.” – LDS Historian Richard Bushman, Rough Stone Rolling, p. 490

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**Kinderhook Plates**

**History of the line of Ham or Hoax?**

This is an actual plate that is currently with the Chicago Historical Society. [1]

Plates were named after the town in which they were found.

State of Illinois

Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. [3]

Joseph Smith, translation.

Above are facsimiles of the 5 double-sided Kinderhook Plates

The plates turned out to be a hoax. Metallurgical tests revealed the plates to be of late 19th century construction. In addition, the script was created using a 19th-century chemical etch process.


Joseph couldn’t discern the fraud. The LDS church now concedes it’s a hoax. What does this tell us about Joseph Smith's gift of translation?
The Book of Abraham was addressed on pages 24-30.

The wording here makes it seem as if more than one Egyptologist is being quoted, while the link is to a single article in a 1995 issue of *Dialogue*. It ignores several other LDS Egyptologists who don't find enough evidence to discount Joseph's claims, and it ignores completely non-LDS scholars who say that Joseph got some things right, which is completely unexpected.

The author of *The CES Letter* might benefit from understanding how the word "translate" was used by Joseph Smith. A manuscript must be written before it can be translated, but God chooses the process through which it is translated. One hypothesis postulates the words appeared in the seer stone, but the only description we have from Joseph is that it was translated by the gift and power of God.

Here is another illustration that can have no other effect than to deceive its viewers. Joseph did not attempt to translate the Kinderhook Plates as he translated the Book of Mormon. It is deception to assert otherwise in light of scholar Don Bradley's research.
Critics often dismiss reports of spiritual claims by observing that such reports may be voiced by adherents of many different religious traditions. The Holy Spirit guides sincere followers to genuine ordinances and truth. The Book of Mormon promises that the Holy Ghost will manifest truth to those who ask with real intent and with faith in Christ. Click here

The Holy Spirit is not inefficient. Multiple scriptures predict that there will be few who gain exaltation (see for example Matt. 7:14, D&C 132:22). Joseph’s teachings reconcile the fact that most of earth’s inhabitants have not learned of Jesus Christ, but through spirit world missionary work and proxy ordinances, all may be judged according to their works. Click here

The author of The CES Letter seems convinced that the First Vision accounts are contradictory, but as reviewed above, the differences are minor and not unexpected. Click here

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit, on truth, or on good works. But its leaders do possess the only priesthood authority available on earth to perform valid saving ordinances. Joseph Smith taught there is "no salvation between the two lids of the bible without a legal administrator." Those administrators are in the Church. Click here

This is a manifestation of all-or-nothing thinking. People routinely embrace some truth and some false beliefs. As they exercise faith, God teaches them "line upon line." Click here

Learning that the Book of Mormon is true affirms Joseph Smith was God’s prophet. Additional study and faith brings more light and knowledge. Click here
4. Joseph Smith received a revelation, through the peep stone in his hat, to send Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery to Toronto, Canada for the sole purpose of selling the copyright of the Book of Mormon, which is another concern in itself (why would God command to sell the copyright to His word?). The mission failed and the prophet was asked why his revelation was wrong.

Joseph decided to inquire of the Lord regarding the question. The following is a quote from Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer’s testimony:

“…and behold the following revelation came through the stone: ‘Some revelations are of God; and some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil.’ So we see that the revelation to go to Toronto and sell the copyright was not of God, but was of the devil or of the heart of man.”

– David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ, p.31

How are we supposed to know what revelations are from God, from the devil, or from the heart of man if even the Prophet Joseph Smith couldn’t tell? What kind of a god and method is this if Heavenly Father allows Satan to interfere with our direct line of communication to Him? Sincerely asking for answers?

5. As a believing Mormon, I saw a testimony as more than just spiritual experiences and feelings. I saw that we had evidence and logic on our side based on the correlated narrative I was fed by the Church about its origins. I lost this confidence at 31-years-old when I discovered that the gap between what the Church teaches about its origins versus what the primary historical documents actually show happened, what history shows what happened, what science shows what happened…couldn’t be further apart.

I read an experience that explains this in another way:

I resigned from the LDS Church and informed my bishop that the reasons had to do with discovering the real history of the Church. When I was done he asked about the spiritual witness I had surely received as a missionary. I agreed that I had felt a sure witness, as strong as he currently felt. I gave him the analogy of Santa; I believed in Santa until I was 12. I refused to listen to reason from my friends who had discovered the truth much earlier…I just knew. However, once I learned the facts, feelings changed. I told him that Mormons have to re-define faith in order to believe; traditionally, faith is an instrument to bridge that gap between science, history and logic end, and what you hope to be true. Mormonism redefines faith as embracing what you hope to be true in spite of science, fact and history.”

6. Paul H. Dunn: Dunn was a General Authority of the Church for many years. He was a very popular speaker who told incredible faith-promoting war and baseball stories. Many times
Many Church members remember hearing Paul H. Dunn's entertaining discourses. His faith-promoting historical fictions were all unrelated to Christ's divinity and may have temporarily buoyed them up. However, building a testimony on those feelings would have been inappropriate.

Dunn shared these stories in the presence of the prophet, apostles, and seventies. Stories like how God protected him as enemy machine-gun bullets ripped away his clothing, gear, and helmet without ever touching his skin and how he was preserved by the Lord. Members of the Church shared how they really felt the Spirit as they listened to Dunn's testimony and stories.

Unfortunately, Dunn was later caught lying about all his war and baseball stories and was forced to apologize to the members. He became the first General Authority to gain "emeritus" status and was removed from public Church life.

What about the members who felt the Spirit from Dunn's fabricated and false stories? What does this say about the Spirit and what the Spirit really is?

7. The following are counsel from Elder Boyd K. Packer, Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Neil L. Andersen on how to gain a testimony:

"It is not unusual to have a missionary say, 'How can I bear testimony until I get one? How can I testify that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that the gospel is true? If I do not have such a testimony, would that not be dishonest?' Oh, if I could teach you this one principle: a testimony is to be found in the bearing of it!" – Boyd K. Packer, The Quest for Spiritual Knowledge

"Another way to seek a testimony seems astonishing when compared with the methods of obtaining other knowledge. We gain or strengthen a testimony by bearing it. Someone even suggested that some testimonies are better gained on the feet bearing them than on the knees praying for them."
– Dallin H. Oaks, Testimony

"It may come as you bear your own testimony of the Prophet...Consider recording the testimony of Joseph Smith in your own voice, listening to it regularly...Listening to the Prophet's testimony in your own voice will help bring the witness you seek."
– Neil L. Andersen, Joseph Smith

In other words, repeat things over and over until you convince yourself that it's true. Just keep telling yourself, "I know it's true...I know it's true...I know it's true" until you believe it and voilà! You now have a testimony that the Church is true and Joseph Smith was a prophet.

What about members and investigators who are on the other side listening to your "testimony"? How are they supposed to know whether you actually do have a testimony of

These leaders are simply paraphrasing a revelation given to Joseph Smith: "But a commandment I give unto you, that ye shall declare whatsoever thing ye declare in my name, in solemnity of heart, in the spirit of meekness, in all things. And I give unto you this promise, that inasmuch as ye do this the Holy Ghost shall be shed forth in bearing record unto all things whatsoever ye shall say. (D&C 100:7-8.)

This seems to be unacceptable to the author of The CES Letter. Click here
The author of *The CES Letter* does not mention the millions of people who have received genuine answers to their prayers, which is why they keep believing. While individuals can be deceived by their own feelings and by false spirits, we must not forget that the Spirit can and will lead us into trials so we can be tested. The Holy Ghost does not guide us to instant joy, but to eternal joy. Click here

Apparently, the author of *The CES Letter* cannot distinguish between the emotions he feels while watching specific movies and while hearing testimonies born regarding the truthfulness of the gospel. Inspirational and uplifting feelings can come from many sources. However, the Holy Spirit does much more. Joseph Smith taught: "No man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations. The Holy Ghost is a revelator." Elsewhere he explained that the Spirit leads us "to do good. . . to do justly, to walk humbly, [and] to judge righteously" (D&C 11:12-13). Warm feelings could be the Spirit, but its influence generally transcends those emotions. Click here

If the author of *The CES Letter* cannot "discern" between the emotions he felt while hearing a good story and the workings of the Spirit, then why should his opinions about history, science, and the Church be believed? What "spiritual authority" does someone have who rejects anything spiritual? If a person wants to learn about God, choosing a teaching who does not believe that God exists would be foolish and fruitless.

This thought-provoking video raises some profound questions and challenges to the Latter-day Saint concept of "testimony" and receiving a witness from the Holy Ghost or Spirit as being a unique, reliable, and trustworthy source to discerning truth and reality:

The Holy Spirit is very real to those who have experienced its influence. Click Here
Priesthood Restoration Concerns & Questions:

“The late appearance of these accounts raises the possibility of later fabrication.”
– LDS Historian Richard Bushman, Rough Stone Rolling, p. 75

1. Like the First Vision story, none of the members of the Church or Joseph Smith’s family had ever heard prior to 1834 about a priesthood restoration from John the Baptist or Peter, James, and John. Although the priesthood is now taught to have been restored in 1829, Joseph and Oliver made no such claim until 1834. Why did it take five years for Joseph or Oliver to tell members of the Church about the priesthood?

2. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery did not teach anyone or record anything prior to 1834 that men ordained to offices in the Church were receiving “priesthood authority.”

3. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery changed the wording of earlier revelations when they compiled the 1835 Doctrine & Covenants, adding verses about the appearances of John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John as if those appearances were mentioned in the earlier revelations in the Book of Commandments, which they weren’t.

4. Were the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood under the hand of John the Baptist recorded in the Church prior to 1833, it would have appeared in the Book of Commandments. It’s not recorded anywhere in the Book of Commandments.

5. It wasn’t until the 1835 edition Doctrine & Covenants that Joseph and Oliver backdated and retrofitted Priesthood restoration events to an 1829-30 time period – none of which existed in any previous Church records, including Doctrine & Covenants’ precursor, The Book of Commandments, nor the original Church history as published in The Evening and Morning Star.

6. David Whitmer, one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, had this to say about the Priesthood restoration:

“I never heard that an Angel had ordained Joseph and Oliver to the Aaronic Priesthood until the year 1834[,] [183]5, or [183]6 – in Ohio… I do not believe that John the Baptist ever ordained Joseph and Oliver…”
– Early Mormon Documents, 5:1137

By citing author Richard Bushman out of context, The CES Letter creates the appearance that Bushman agrees with him. The truth is that Bushman provides a counterpoint in the same paragraph. Click here

Editing and expanding earlier published revelations was a common practice for Joseph Smith. This was not an attempt to trick anyone, but simply prophetic prerogative. The CES Letter reflects a poor understanding of the nature of scripture. Click here

Technically speaking, one could charge the author of The CES Letter with "backdating and retrofitting" because the author has changed and updated The CES Letter over time so it resembles less and less the original that was sent to the CES administrator. If the author can somehow claim the right to make changes to his document over time, by what standard does he deny that right to others, including prophets?
Witnesses Concerns & Questions:

1. The testimony of the Three and Eight witnesses to the Book of Mormon is a key part to the testimonies of many members of the Church. Some even base their testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon on these 11 witnesses and their testimonies. As a missionary, I was instructed to teach investigators about the testimonies of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon as part of boosting the book’s credibility.

   There are several critical problems for relying and betting on these 19th century men as credible witnesses.

2. Magical Worldview: In order to truly understand the Book of Mormon witnesses and the issues, one must understand the magical worldview of people in early 19th century New England. These are people who believed in folk magic, divining rods, visions, second sight, peep stones in hats, treasure hunting (money digging or glass looking), and so on.

   Many people believed in buried treasure, the ability to see spirits and their dwelling places within the local hills and elsewhere. This is what Joseph was doing. Joseph, Smith, his father, and his brother (Hyrum) had a family business treasure hunting from 1820 – 1827. Joseph was hired by folks like Josiah Stowell, who Joseph mentions in his history. In 1826, Joseph was arrested and brought to court in Bainbridge, New York, for fraud. He was arrested on the complaint of Stowell’s nephew who accused Joseph of being a ‘disorderly person and an imposter.’

   It would not be unusual for a neighbor, friend, or even a stranger to come up to you and say, “I received a vision of the Lord!” and for you to respond, “What did the Lord say?”

   This is one of the reasons why 21st century Mormons, once including myself, are so confused and bewildered when hearing stuff like Joseph Smith using a peep stone in a hat or Oliver Cowdery using a divining rod or dowsing rod such as illustrated below:

The witnesses were very credible and practical men. The CES Letter ignores their personal efforts to test Joseph’s claims. Click here

It is historically inaccurate to say the Smiths had a “treasure hunting business.” They were farmers, and the amount of work they did was astonishing. Treasure digging was a small part of their work lives. Click here.

Joseph was not brought “to trial.” He came to a preliminary hearing. He was also discharged. Why doesn’t The CES Letter tell us he was not found guilty, and this hearing was never invoked in subsequent trials? Click here.

Joseph and Oliver’s culture was very different from that of the 21st century. The problem is that The CES Letter does not attempt to acknowledge the differences. It reflects significant amounts of presentism in its numerous critical interpretations.

The CES Letter does not tell us that Stowell testified in favor of Joseph. Stowell would go on to join the Church and die a faithful member in 1844. Multiple authors have debunked this charge. Click here.

Joseph Smith learned early that reporting his vision would bring persecution. It is unclear what The CES Letter is alleging here.

Treasure digging existed because people believed there was treasure, and they had objective evidence to back up that belief, including neighbors who sometimes found it. Click here.

Church members are taught to base their testimonies on the witness of the Holy Spirit after study and faith. Paul taught “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” Click here.

VIDEO Click here
The above divining rod is mentioned in the scriptures. In Doctrine & Covenants 8, the following reading provides context for the discussion:

Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to Oliver Cowdery, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 1829. In the course of the translation of the Book of Mormon, Oliver, who continued to serve as scribe, writing at the Prophet's dictation, desired to be endowed with the gift of translation. The Lord responded to his supplication by granting this revelation.

The revelation states, in relevant part:

6. Now this is not all they gift; for you have another gift, which is the gift of Aaron; behold, it has told you many things;
7. Behold, there is no other power, save the power of God, that can cause this gift of Aaron to be with you.
8. Therefore, doubt not, for it is the gift of God; and you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works; and no power shall be able to take it away out of your hands, for it is the work of God.
9. And, therefore, whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that I will grant unto you, and you shall have knowledge concerning it.
10. Remember that without faith you can do nothing; therefore ask in faith. Trifle not with these things; do not ask for that which you ought not.
11. Ask that you may know the mysteries of God, and that you may translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred; and according to your faith shall it be done unto you.

(D&C 8:6-11, emphasis added)

From the D&C 8 account, we don't really know much about what exactly the "gift of Aaron" is that Oliver Cowdery received. What is "the gift of Aaron"? The text provides several clues:

- Oliver has a history of using it, since "it has told [him] many things.
- It is "the gift of God."
- It is to be held in Oliver's hands (and kept there, impervious to any power).
- It allows Oliver to "do marvelous works."
- It is "the work of God."
- The Lord will speak through it to Oliver and tell him anything he asks while using it.
- It works through faith.
- It enables Oliver to translate ancient sacred documents.

With only these clues, the "gift of Aaron" remains very hard to identify. The task becomes much easier, however, when we look at the original revelation contained in The Book of Commandments, a predecessor volume to the Doctrine & Covenants, used by the LDS Church before 1835. Section 7 of the Book of Commandments contains wording that was

As evidence that Joseph Smith was not a prophet or that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could not be true, this would not be considered particularly strong or perhaps even relevant. Click here.

The CES Letter states that it is hard to identify whether these descriptions regarding Oliver and the gift of Aaron were fulfilled. Regardless, it appears that Oliver and others who knew of the revelation did not detect any problems. Oliver remained true to Joseph, receiving a vision of the Savior with him on April 3, 1836, in the Kirtland Temple. Even when out of the Church, he did not accuse the Prophet of deceiving him and was later rebaptized. Click here.
A "gift of working with the rod" may seem strange today, but apparently it was not to the early Saints who knew of the revelation. The original handwritten manuscript records "sprout" instead of "rod" and there is no mention of Aaron. Click here

Faced with the uncomfortable truth that the witnesses never denied their testimonies, The CES Letter resorts to attacking their character. Click here

Contrary to this claim, Martin Harris made multiple attempts to empirically test Joseph’s claims. He also sought an opinion from Charles Anthon. Click here

This is simply false. One 1831 report said of Harris: "He told all about the gold plates, Angels, Spirits, and Jo Smith. He had seen and handled them all, by the power of God!" The witnesses left many reports of seeing the plates (and often handling them) uncovered. Click here

The rod had nothing to do with the Church’s origins. Neither is there evidence that the Church was trying to whitewash its history. Such accusations reflect a lack of understanding. Click here

What drew them together is that they believed that Joseph received divine revelations and that his work was of God. Click here

In fact, Harris' neighbors called him honest, industrious, benevolent, and a worthy citizen. Click Here
accounts that show the superstitious side of Martin Harris:

“Once while reading scripture, he reportedly mistook a candle’s sputtering as a sign that the devil desired him to stop. Another time he excitedly awoke from his sleep believing that a creature as large as a dog had been upon his chest, though a nearby associate could find nothing to confirm his fears. Several hostile and perhaps unreliable accounts told of visionary experiences with Satan and Christ, Harris once reporting that Christ had been poised on a roof beam.”

“No matter where he went, he saw visions and supernatural appearances all around him. He told a gentleman in Palmyra, after one of his excursions to Pennsylvania, while the translation of the Book of Mormon was going on, that on the way he met the Lord Jesus Christ, who walked along by the side of him in the shape of a deer for two or three miles, talking with him as familiarly as one man talks with another.”
– John A. Clark letter, August 31, 1840 in Early Mormon Documents 2:271

“According to two Ohio newspapers, shortly after Harris arrived in Kirtland he began claiming to have ‘seen Jesus Christ and that he is the handsomest man he ever did see. He has also seen the Devil, whom he described as a very sleek haired fellow with four feet, and a head like that of a Jackass.’”

Before Harris became a Mormon, he had already changed his religion at least five times. After Joseph's death, Harris continued this earlier pattern by joining and leaving 5 more different sects, including James Strang (whom Harris went on a mission to England for), other Mormon offshoots, and the Shakers. Not only did Harris join other religions, he testified and witnessed for them. It has been reported that Martin Harris “declared repeatedly that he had as much evidence for a Shaker book he had as for the Book of Mormon” (The Braden and Kelly Debate, p.173).

In addition to devotion to self-proclaimed prophet James Strang, Martin Harris was a follower to another self-proclaimed Mormon prophet by the name of Gladden Bishop. Like Strang, Bishop claimed to have plates, Urim and Thummim, and that he was receiving revelation from the Lord. Martin was one of Gladden Bishop’s witnesses to his claims.

If someone testified of some strange spiritual encounter he had, but he also told you that he...

- conversed with Jesus who took the form of a deer
- saw the devil with his four feet and donkey head
- chipped off a chunk of a stone box that would mysteriously move beneath the ground to avoid capture
- interpreted simple things like a flickering of a candle as a sign of the devil
- had a creature appearing on his chest that no one else could see

Martin was a believer in the supernatural prior to becoming one of the Three Witnesses. Thereafter, his commitment to that witness never faltered. These later recollections are hostile hearsay. Click here

All but one of the later sects still accepted the Book of Mormon, which was Martin’s preoccupation. Click here

Harris’ mission to England focused mostly on testifying of the Book of Mormon, since it was clear that he did not wholly sympathize with Strang, the Strangites soon recalled him. Click here.

The Braden and Kelly debate is late and from a debater known to play fast-and-loose with the facts. Multiple evidences show Clark Braden was willing to fabricate testimony to win. Click here

Gladden Bishop, like Strang, still accepted the Book of Mormon—Martin's preoccupation.

These declarations are from less reliable and biased sources. They sharply contrast Martin's multiple attestations regarding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.
We are told that the witnesses were men of their times, who believed in things which readers today might fight strange. This is then used as an *ad hominem* attack to dismiss their witness of what they saw with their eyes and felt with their hands. 

**Click here**

Whitmer was crystal clear, and *The CES Letter* does not include the many other statements that are even clearer. *The CES letter* does not give its readers the explanation given by Moyle, which is provided in the same source cited. He was struggling to describe the divine power being manifest, not upset because the experience wasn't "real." 

**Click here**

There is no evidence that Oliver or his family used a rod to hunt for treasure. *The CES Letter* is distorting the historical record. 

**Click here**

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**David Whitmer:**

David claimed in early June 1829 before their group declaration that he, Cowdery, and Joseph Smith observed "one of the Nephites" carrying the records in a knapsack on his way to Cumorah. Several days later this trio perceived "that the Same Person was under the shed" at the Whitmer farm. – *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, p.179

In 1880, David Whitmer was asked for a description of the angel who showed him the plates. Whitmer responded that the angel "had no appearance or shape." When asked by the interviewer how he then could bear testimony that he had seen and heard an angel, Whitmer replied, "Have you never had impressions?" To which the interviewer responded, "Then you had impressions as the Quaker when the spirit moves, or as a good Methodist in giving a happy experience, a feeling?" "Just so," replied Whitmer. – Interview with John Murphy, June 1880, EMD 5:63

A young Mormon lawyer, James Henry Moyle, who interviewed Whitmer in 1885, noted if there was any possibility that Whitmer had been deceived. "His answer was unequivocal...that he saw the plates and heard the angel with unmistakable clearness." But Moyle went away "not fully satisfied...It was more spiritual than I anticipated." – Moyle diary, June 28, 1885, EMD 5:141

Whitmer’s testimony also included the following:

> If you believe my testimony to the Book of Mormon; if you believe that God spoke to us three witnesses by his own voice, then I tell you that in June, 1838, God spoke 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 it should be done unto them.’

– David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (promoting his Whitmerite sect)

If David Whitmer is a credible witness, why are we only using his testimony of the Book of Mormon while ignoring his other testimony claiming that God Himself spoke to Whitmer "by his own voice from the heavens" in June 1838 commanding Whitmer to apostatize from the Lord's one and only true Church?

**Oliver Cowdery:**

Like Joseph and most of the Book of Mormon witnesses, Oliver Cowdery and his family were treasure hunters. Oliver’s preferred tool of trade, as mentioned above.

**The CES Letter** does not disclose that Whitmer was furious about this report and how it had misrepresented him. He published a rebuttal and correction, which are not mentioned here. 

**Click here**

In April 1838, David Whitmer withdrew his membership and was excommunicated. Years later he reported that two months afterwards in June 1838, he heard the voice of God. Being excommunicated would have compromised his ability to hear the voice of God who gave revelations to Joseph Smith. But false spirits would have been ready to deceive him. 

**Click here**

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**CES Letter 50 to 65 Witnesses Continued**

VIDEO

**Click here**
There is no evidence describing how Oliver used his rod or sprout. This statement is going beyond the evidence. Click here

The logic presented here does not seem to be particularly strong. Click here

These quotes are from the same second-hand source, published after Harris' death, when he could not correct the record. Harris left many testimonies including one just before his death that contradict it. Click here

The CES Letter again ignores all aspects of the account that indicate that Whitmer saw it as a literal experience, despite also being visionary. Click here

Of course it was supernatural power. They described an angel and a vision. Click here

The Letter continues its ad hominem attack but provides no evidence that Oliver was credulous or dominated by a magical mindset. He was twice elected by non-Mormons to political office and regarded highly by his peers. Click here

Criticizing Oliver and Joseph for being distant cousins who did not know each other beforehand seems to demonstrate the extreme willingness of the author of The CES Letter to exploit minutia that, practically speaking, is meaningless. Click here

This is the first of three quotes from the same hostile witness, John H. Gilbert, giving the same information. Click here

These two quotes are the same —The CES Letter attempts to make them appear as if they are two pieces of evidence. Click here
repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them only as he saw a city through a mountain. And said that he never should have told that the testimony of the eight was false, if it had not been picked out of—–[him/me?] but should have let it passed as it was..."


The foreman in the Palmyra printing office that produced the first Book of Mormon said that Harris "used to practice a good deal of his characteristic jargon and 'seeing with the spiritual eye,' and the like."

– Mormonism: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress, p. 71

Two other Palmyra residents said that Harris told them that he had seen the plates with "the eye of faith" or "spiritual eyes"...

– EMD 2:270 and 3:22

John H. Gilbert, the typesetter for most of the Book of Mormon, said that he had asked Harris, "Martin, did you see those plates with your naked eyes?" According to Gilbert, Harris "looked down for an instant, raised his eyes up, and said, 'No, I saw them with a spiritual eye.'"

– EMD 2:548

If these witnesses literally really saw the plates like everyone else on the planet sees tangible objects...why strange statements like, "I never saw them only as I see a city through a mountain?" What does that even mean? I've never seen a city through a mountain. Have you?

Why all these bizarre statements from the witnesses if the plates were real and the event literal? Why would you need a vision or supernatural power to see real, physical plates that Joseph said were literally what he carried around? When Martin Harris was asked, "But did you see them clearly with your natural, your bodily eyes, just as you see this pencil-case in my hand? Now say no or yes to this." Martin answered, "I did not see them as I do that pencil-case, yet I saw them with the eye of faith; I saw them just as distinctly as I see anything around me, though at the time they were covered over with a cloth."

– History and Origin of the Mormons, p. 406

Why couldn't Martin just simply answer "yes"?

5. James Strang and the Voree Plates Witnesses:

It is surprising that The CES Letter would spend over three pages discussing James Strang.

This is hearsay evidence from a Presbyterian pastor. Click here

This is the third reference to John H. Gilbert's writings. Click here

This is a third reference to Stephen Burnett's claims regarding Martin Harris' statements. Click here

Martin, Oliver, and David all agreed they saw the angel and the plates as part of a vision. The Apostle Paul had trouble describing a visionary experience saying: "whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth" (2 Cor. 12:3) Click here
James Strang and his claims are absolutely fascinating. He was basically Joseph Smith 2.0 — but with a twist. Like Joseph, Strang did the following:

- Claimed that he was visited by an angel who reserved plates for him to translate into the word of God. "The record which was sealed from my servant Joseph. Unto thee it is reserved."
- Received the "Urim and Thummim."
- Produced 11 witnesses who testified that they too had seen and inspected ancient metal plates.
- Introduced new scripture. After unearthing the plates (the same plates as Laban from whom Nephi took the brass plates in Jerusalem), Strang translated it into scripture called the "Book of the Law of the Lord."
- Established a new Church: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangite). Its headquarters is still in Voree, Wisconsin.

Like the Book of Mormon, the Book of the Law of the Lord has the testimony of its Witnesses in its preface:

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, to whom this Book of the Law of the Lord shall come, that James J. Strang has the plates of the ancient Book of the Law of the Lord given to Moses, from which he translated this law, and has shown them to us. We examined them with our eyes, and handled them with our hands. The engravings are beautiful antique workmanship, bearing a striking resemblance to the ancient oriental languages; and those from which the laws in this book were translated are eighteen in number, about seven inches and three-eights wide, by nine inches long, occasionally embellished with beautiful pictures.

And we testify unto you all that the everlasting kingdom of God is established, in which this law shall be kept, till it brings in rest and everlasting righteousness to all the faithful.

SAMUEL GRAHAM,
SAMUEL P. BACON,
WARREN POST,
PHINEAS WRIGHT,
ALBERT N. HÖSSMER,
EBENEZER PAGE,
JEHIEL SAVAGE.

Undoubtedly Strang was trying to imitate Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. These men saw 18 plates that could have been fabricated in their time and place. The Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon saw many more plates of the appearance of gold. The Three Witnesses saw a vision with an angel. These experiences were very different. It is apparent that Strang could not duplicate an angelic visitation.

Since Joseph Smith’s story was well known, for an imitator to claim a similar experience is not unexpected or even noteworthy.

Strang claimed to have a Urim and Thummim, but provided no witnesses to substantiate that claim. In contrast, the Three Witnesses were promised to see Joseph’s Urim and Thummim (D&C 17:1) and later testified to the same.

Strang’s eleven witnesses experienced nothing supernatural. Several repudiated their testimonies and others reported they participated in fabricating the plates. None of the Book of Mormon witnesses recanted their testimonies. The Three Witnesses reported a vision where they saw an angel who presented the gold plates to them.

Many religionists then and now claim revelation. This is not singular or significant.

Many new churches were formed in the nineteenth century. This is insignificant.

Unlike Book of Mormon witnesses, Samuel P. Bacon eventually denounced Strang’s movement as mere human invention. Samuel Graham later claimed that he had actually assisted Strang in the creation of the plates.
In addition to the above 7 witnesses, there were 4 witnesses who went with Strang as they unearthed the Voree Plates:

TESTIMONY OF WITNESSES TO THE VOREE PLATES

1. On the thirteenth day of September, 1845, we, Aaron Smith, Jiriha B. Wheelan, James M. Van Nostrand, and Edward Whitcomb, assembled at the call of James J. Strang, who is by us and many others approved as a Prophet and Seer of God. He proceeded to inform us that it had been revealed to him in a vision that an account of an ancient people was buried in a hill south of White River bridge, near the east line of Walworth County; and leading us to an oak tree about one foot in diameter, told us that we would find it enclosed in a case of rude earthen ware under that tree at the depth of about three feet; requested us to dig it up, and charged us to so examine the ground that we should know we were not imposed upon, and that it had not been buried there since the tree grew. The tree was surrounded by a sward of deeply rooted grass, such as is usually found in the openings, and upon the most critical examination we could not discover any indication that it had ever been cut through or disturbed.

2. We then dug up the tree, and continued to dig to the depth of about three feet, where we found a case of slightly baked clay containing three plates of brass. On one side of one is a landscape view of the south end of Gardner’s prairie and the range of hills where they were dug. On another is a man with a crown on his head and a scepter in his hand, above is an eye before an upright line, below the sun and moon surrounded with twelve stars, at the bottom are twelve large stars from three of which pillars arise, and closely interspersed with them are seventy very small stars. The other four sides are very closely covered with what appear to be alphabetic characters, but in a language of which we have no knowledge.

3. The case was found imbedded in indurated clay so closely fitting it that it broke in taking out, and the earth below the soil was so hard as to be dug with difficulty even with a pickax. Over the case was found a flat stone about one foot wide each way and three inches thick, which appeared to have undergone the action of fire, and fell in pieces after a few minutes exposure to the air. The digging extended in the clay about eighteen inches, there being two kinds of earth of different color and appearance above it.

4. We examined as we dug all the way with the utmost care, and we say, with utmost confidence, that no part of the earth through which we dug exhibited any sign or indication that it had been moved or disturbed at any time previous. The roots of the tree stuck down on every side very closely, extending below the case, and closely interwoven with roots from other trees. None of them had been broken or cut away. No clay is found in the country like that of which the case is made.
5. In fine, we found an alphabetic and pictorial record, carefully cased up, buried deep in the earth, covered with a flat stone, with an oak tree one foot in diameter growing over it, with every evidence that the sense can give that it has lain there as long as that tree has been growing. Strang took no part in the digging, but kept entirely away from before the first blow was struck till after the plates were taken out of the case; and the sole inducement to our digging was our faith in his statement as a Prophet of the Lord that a record would thus and there be found.

AARON SMITH,
JIRAH B. WHEELAN,
J. M. VAN NOSTRAND,
EDWARD WHITCOMB.

Direct evidence is absent—The CES Letter has used second-and third-hand reports (or hearsay) against the Three Witnesses and ignored more credible contradictory accounts and here attempts to disguise the fact that there is considerable evidence of exactly what it claims did not happen. This is unfortunate and potentially deceptive. Click here

"Every single living Book of Mormon witness besides Oliver Cowdery accepted Strang's prophetic claim" is simply false. David Whitmer and Martin Harris, two of the Three Witnesses, and Hiram Page and John Whitmer of the Eight Witnesses briefly followed Strang, but it appears to have been more as a rejection of both Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon rather than an avid attachment to Strang.
The Three and the Eight Witnesses were granted singular experiences they were commanded to publish to the world. Thereafter, they operated by faith like anyone else. When Joseph died, a few of them temporarily followed Strang. They left him because he did not demonstrate the same prophetic gifts Joseph had manifested.

All of the Eight Witnesses knew their names had been published as signatories of the Testimony. None of them retracted, criticized, or suggested impropriety. David Whitmer reported that the Witnesses themselves instructed Oliver to sign for them on the Printer’s manuscript. This is discussed in a source cited by The CES Letter, but its readers are not told this detail.

Here the author of The CES Letter seeks to discredit the Eight Witnesses by observing that the original document is missing. Since it was afterwards published, circulated, and reinforced by additional new testimonies, this observation is insignificant concerning the validity of the Testimony of the Eight Witnesses. Click here

As discussed in detail on pages 55 and 56, the differences are minor and there are no contradictions. To read all 68 accounts: Click here

This is the third reference to Stephen Burnett's letter, which was written when he was a bitter anti-Mormon. Click here

This alleged mismatch ignores Martin's other statements, which were very clear. Click here

60
The author’s confusion about legally binding documents is his own error, not the Church’s. Historical evidence does not rely on legal affidavits, though affidavits can be evidence. The point was that these men were willing to publicly take the persecution and ridicule for their claims, and they did.

### Conclusion

1. "The Witnesses never recanted or denied their testimonies":
   - Neither did James Strang’s witnesses; even after they were excommunicated from the church and estranged from Strang. Neither did dozens of Joseph Smith’s neighbors and peers who swore and signed affidavits on Joseph and his family’s characters. Neither did many of the Shaker witnesses who signed affidavits that they saw an angel on the roof top holding the “Sacred Roll and Book” written by founder Ann Lee. Same goes with the thousands of people over the centuries who claimed their entire lives to have seen the Virgin Mary and pointing to their experience as evidence that Catholicism is true.

There are also thousands of witnesses who never recanted their testimonies of seeing UFO’s, Big Foot, the Loch Ness Monster, Abominable Snowman, Aliens, and so on.
It doesn’t mean anything. People can believe in false things their entire lives and never recant. Just because they never denied or recanted does not follow that their experience and claims are true or that reality matches to what their perceived experience was.

2. Problems:

- In discussing the witnesses, we should not overlook the primary accounts of the events they testified to. The official statements published in the Book of Mormon are not dated, signed (we have no record with their signatures except for Oliver’s), nor is a specific location given for where the events occurred. These are not eleven legally sworn affidavits but rather simple statements pre-written by Joseph Smith with claims of having been signed by three men and another by eight.

- All of the Book of Mormon witnesses, excepting Martin Harris, were related by blood or marriage either with the Smiths or Whitmers. Oliver Cowdery (married to Elizabeth Ann Whitmer and cousin to Joseph Smith), Hiram Page (married to Catherine Whitmer), and the five Whitmers were related by marriage. Of course, Hyrum Smith, Samuel Smith, and Joseph Smith Sr. were Joseph’s brothers and father.

Mark Twain made light of this obvious problem:

“…I could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified.” – Roughing It, p. 107-115

- Within eight years, all of the Three Witnesses were excommunicated from the Church. This is what Joseph Smith said about them in 1838:

“Such characters as…John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris, are too mean to mention; and we had liked to have forgotten them.” – History of the Church Vol. 3, Ch. 15, p. 232

This is what First Counselor of the First Presidency and once close associate Sidney Rigdon had to say about Oliver Cowdery:

“…a lying, thieving, counterfeiting man who was ‘united with a gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars, and blacklegs in the deepest dye, to deceive, cheat, and defraud the saints out of their property, by every art and stratagem which wickedness could invent…” – February 15, 1841 Letter and Testimony, p.69

Familial relationships could facilitate collusion in a deception, but they could also play a reverse role, especially as time passes and family members chose different life courses. The point of the Mark Twain reference is unclear.

The author seems willing to accept any ad hominem. If this charge were true, why did Cowdery not blow the whistle on the whole scheme? But he didn’t—despite abuse from Sidney and being estranged from Joseph. This strengthens Cowdery’s witness.

Not being “dated” is irrelevant. We know when the manuscript was produced (1829) and we know when the Book of Mormon was published (1830). We also have repeated affirmations of the testimony. The CES Letter is hung up on a legal document theory that the author mistakenly believes is necessary. Click here

Why was Joseph willing to excommunicate the men who could expose his alleged scam? Joseph was utterly confident that he could excommunicate them because he knew what kind of a witness they had and the penalty from God, which they believed they would receive if they lied. His confidence was not misplaced. This strengthens their witness. Click here
It is remarkably inaccurate to mention "31 witnesses to lie and perjure" themselves. They were not "witnesses." Only a few of the 31 likely even knew of celestial marriage on the day they signed the document. Only two had entered into it. The CES Letter's accusation that Joseph could influence and convince a large group of people is not proven and is based upon an assumption. Joseph's involvement with the creation of the document, if any, is unknown. Click here

Multiple references to Strang's witnesses in The CES Letter's cannot create a valid parallel. Numerous significant differences are demonstrated. Click here

What does it say about the witnesses and their characters if even the Prophet and his counselor in the First Presidency thought they were questionable?

As mentioned in the above "Polygamy/Polyandry" section, Joseph was able to influence and convince many of the 31 witnesses to lie and perjure in a sworn affidavit that Joseph was not a polygamist. Is it outside the realm of possibility that Joseph was also able to influence or manipulate the experiences of his own magical thinking treasure digging family and friends as witnesses? Mormon men who already believed in second sight and who already believed that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God?

Joseph Smith was not deceived by the Kinderhook plates. The CES Letter is repeating charges already discussed. Click here

- James Strang's claims and Voree Plates Witnesses are distinctive and more impressive compared to the Book of Mormon Witnesses:
  - All of Strang's witnesses were not related to one another through blood or marriage like the Book of Mormon Witnesses were.
  - Some of the witnesses were not members of Strang's church.
  - The Voree Plates were displayed in a museum for both members and non-members to view and examine.
  - Strang provided 4 witnesses who testified that on his instructions, they actually dug the plates up for Strang while he waited for them to do so. They confirmed that the ground looked previously undisturbed.

- The Shakers and Ann Lee:

The Shakers felt that "Christ has made his second appearance on earth, in a chosen female known by the name of Ann Lee, and acknowledged by us as

The Shakers felt that "Christ has made his second appearance on earth, in a chosen female known by the name of Ann Lee, and acknowledged by us as
This claim is misleading. An appendix at the back of a book A Holy, Sacred and Divine Roll and Book contains over 72 testimonies attesting to various convictions. The CES Letter author apparently searched through them to find one on page 304 (of 462) that mentions an angel in order to claim a parallel. In contrast, the Book of Mormon has only two testimonials, and they have a specific function. Interested observers can download the book for themselves and make the comparison. Click here

The CES Letter exaggerates the significance of Martin’s brief involvement with members of the Shaker faith. Click here

Clark Braden’s reputation included a willingness to misrepresent the facts if it would aid in his winning an argument. Click here

The differences between the Sacred Roll witnesses and the Book of Mormon Witnesses are numerous and a significant comparison. Click here

The criticisms in this summary statement do not seem very strong and are overly focused on Martin Harris. They seem less convincing when contrasted with numerous reliable statements demonstrating that witnesses Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer were well respected and very credible. Click here

In light of the James Strang/Voree Plates witnesses, the fact that all of the Book of Mormon Witnesses – except Martin Harris – were related to either Joseph Smith or David Whitmer, along with the fact that all of the witnesses were treasure hunters who believed in second sight, and in light of their superstitions and reputations…why would anyone gamble with their lives in believing in a book based on anything these men said or claimed or what’s written on the testimonies of the Witnesses page in the Book of Mormon?
The CES Letter seems to realize that it cannot directly discount the testimonies of the Three Witnesses, so it resorts to character assassinations and attempts to draw parallels from other religious movements. Apparently the testimonies of the Eight Witnesses were deemed unimportant (but they are not) or too difficult to rebut.

The mistake that is made by 21st century Mormons is that they’re seeing the Book of Mormon Witnesses as empirical, rational, nineteenth-century men instead of the nineteenth-century magical thinking, superstitious, and treasure digging men they were. They have ignored the peculiarities of their worldview, and by so doing, they misunderstand their experiences as witnesses.

At the end of the day? It all doesn’t matter. The Book of Mormon Witnesses and their testimonies of the gold plates are irrelevant. It does not matter whether eleven 19th century treasure diggers with magical worldviews saw some gold plates or not. It doesn’t matter because of this one simple fact:

Joseph did not use the gold plates for translating the Book of Mormon.

After spending almost 20% of its pages (50-65) attempting to debunk the Book of Mormon Witnesses, The CES Letter declares their testimonies are irrelevant. If so, why spend so much time trying to discredit them via selective citations and *ad hominem arguments* that seem minimally convincing or effective? The testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon remain formidable evidence regarding the validity of Joseph Smith’s declarations regarding the origin of the Book of Mormon.
Though the introduction of Freemasonry in Nauvoo helped prepare the Saints for the temple, many of the most significant elements of temple doctrines and ordinances were revealed to the Prophet a decade or more earlier.

The early Saints never claimed that contemporary Masonry had the original temple ceremony, only that some portions of it had come down from the beginning. Commonalities between Masonic ritual and the Nauvoo temple ordinances were adopted or adapted from the version of Masonry that Joseph Smith encountered in Nauvoo.

The items mentioned are not 100% pagan Masonic rituals, but rather are rooted in the Bible and elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern culture. Under proper authority, temple ordinances have undergone minor adaptations to accommodate different times and circumstances.

Many aspects of Latter-day Saint temple worship, including some that are in common with Masonry, are well attested in the Bible and elsewhere in antiquity.

Although the history of Masonry cannot be traced to antiquity, early Masons adapted portions of ancient rituals. The Bible documents' temple-based rites of kingship traditionally associated with David and Solomon.

The effectiveness of the saving ordinances depends as much on what we become as on what we know. Because earthly ordinances are themselves only models or reflections of heavenly ordinances, hyper-literality about correspondences between them and Masonry is not as relevant as it appears.

God, not man, sets the terms for salvation. That such terms include the performance of priesthood ordinances is clear, for example, in Jesus’ teachings about baptism.
The problem Mormonism encounters is that so many of its claims are well within the realm of scientific study, and as such, can be proven or disproven. To cling to faith in these areas, where the overwhelming evidence is against it, is willful ignorance, not spiritual dedication.

1. 

2 Nephi 2:22 and Alma 12:23-24 state there was no death of any kind (humans, all animals, birds, fish, dinosaurs, etc.) on this earth until the “Fall of Adam”, which according to D&C 77:6-7 occurred 7,000 years ago. It is scientifically established there has been life and death on this planet for billions of years. How does the Church reconcile this?

How do we explain the massive fossil evidence showing not only animal death but also the deaths of at least 14 different Hominin species over the span of 250,000 years prior to Adam?

2.

If Adam and Eve are the first humans, how do we explain the 14 other Hominin species who lived and died 35,000 – 250,000 years before Adam? When did those guys stop being human?

3. 

Science has proven that there was no worldwide flood 4,500 years ago. Do you really literally believe in the flood story where 600-year-old Noah built a massive ark with dimensions that equate to about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet deep? That Noah and his very small family took two of each unclean creature and seven of every clean creature and all the food and fresh water that would be needed on board for 6 months? And that after the flood, Noah and his family released the animals and they, along with Noah’s family of eight repopulated – via incest – the entire planet?

Simple mathematics show that there was insufficient room on the ark to house all the animal species found on the planet, let alone the food required to feed all of them.

How did the carnivores survive? There would not have been nearly enough herbivores to sustain the carnivores during the voyage and the months after the ark landed. What would the herbivores eat after the flood subsided?

There are a bunch of other problems with the global flood and Noah’s ark story but I find it incredible that this is supposed to be taken literally considering the abundance of evidence against it. Am I expected to believe in a god who would wipe out the entire planet like that? Kill millions of women and innocent children for the actions of others? What kind of a god is this?

The idea that scientific study can prove or disprove religion is absurd. Science, properly defined, cannot possibly conflict with religion, since it can say nothing one way or the other about the existence or nature of a supreme being.

The author of The CES Letter is not trying to understand the Church’s official position regarding Adam’s body. It is plainly stated in many sources. God has not revealed precisely how his mortal tabernacle was created, but it may have included processes that have produced the fossil record.

Other events/claims that science has discredited:

- Tower of Babel
- People living to be 600+ years old

We do not understand the details of Noah’s ark and the Flood. The official Church position is that it occurred, but there is definitely a plurality of opinion on the topic among scholars.
Humans and animals having their origins from Noah's family and the animals contained in the ark 4,500 years ago. It is scientifically impossible, for example, for the bear to have evolved into several species (Sun Bear, Polar Bear, Grizzly Bear, etc.) from common ancestors from Noah's time.

- Jonah and the whale
- People turning into salt in Sodom & Gomorrah
- As mentioned in Book of Abraham section, the sun receives its "light from the revolutions of Kolob."
- They carried honey bees across the ocean? Swarms of them? All manner of them which was upon the face of the land? (Ether 2:3). Putting a hole on the bottom and on the top of a submarine-like vessel that is tight like a dish so that when you're in need of air, you unplug one hole but make sure to plug it back in when you go back in the water? (Ether 2:19-20).

Many additional unexplainable examples could be provided. Christ declared: "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27). Hence, these criticisms are simply a reiteration of The CES Letter's author's disbelief in God. 

Click here

Currently we cannot claim to know all the details regarding the Flood of Noah. The Hebrew words used to describe it could have alternate meanings. It is not clear that the ancients held the concept of a spherical earth. The writers of Genesis would have written regarding what he learned or had seen in vision. 

Click here
These over-the-top accusations (rape, selling daughters into sex slavery, human sacrifice etc.) are misrepresentations of the scriptural text. By embracing a very literal view of the Old Testament text as we now have it, The CES Letter depicts a God selectively and negatively. The Bible is an ancient literary text written for the understanding of an ancient people. It contains allegories and has lost many "plain and precious parts" as now published. Click here
5. **Deuteronomy 21:18-21:**
   Got a rebellious kid who doesn’t listen? Take him to the elders and to the end of the gates and stone him to death!

6. **Exodus 35:1-2:**
   God commands death penalty for those who work on the Sabbath trying to support their families.

7. **Numbers 21:5-9:**
   God doesn’t like to hear whining and ingratitude so he sends out a bunch of snakes to kill the people. When the people had enough of the snakes, they ask Moses to tell God to quit it. God decides Moses is persuasive and tells Moses to put a snake on a pole and tell the people to look at the pole and they won’t die. So, the pole is built, the people look at it and they don’t die. The moral of the story? Don’t whine or God will send in the snakes.

8. **Judges 19:22-29:**
   After picking up his concubine from his father-in-law’s house, a certain Levite settles in Gibeah for the night. The men of the city attempt to sodomize him, but end up raping the concubine until her death. As a response, the Levite dismembers his wife’s corpse and sends her body parts throughout the land of Israel. Who needs R or X-rated movies when you got scripture like this?

As a believing Mormon, I tried to rationalize some of the craziness by saying, “Oh, this is in the crazy Old Testament when the Law of Moses was in force. Christ came and fulfilled the Law of Moses.”

The problem with this is that a crazy god in the Old Testament was Jehovah. Who’s Jehovah? The premortal Jesus Christ. So, Christ is the crazy god of the Old Testament. The Christ of the Old Testament and the Christ of the New Testament are eight years different. Again, I’m asked to believe in not only a part-time racist god and a part-time polygamous god but a part-time psychopathic schizophrenic one as well.

It is lamentable that *The CES Letter* employs such disrespectful terms regarding a Being who is worshiped as deity by others. It reflects a level of insensitivity and insincerity supporting that these claims are best classified as propaganda, rather than objective critiques.

Theses verses along with many others were written to explain the ancient world to ancient Israelites. Full understanding can be obtained through studying works of Old Testament scholars versed in ancient literary style and the history of the time. LDS doctrine does not require a literal reading of these culture-laden accounts.

Click here
Other Concerns & Questions:

These concerns are secondary to all of the above. These concerns do not matter if the foundational truth claims (Book of Mormon, First Visions, Prophets, Book of Abraham, Witnesses, Priesthood, Temples, etc.) are not true.

1. Church’s Dishonesty and Whitewashing Over Its History:

   Adding to the above deceptions of dishonesty and history (rock in hat translation, polygamy/polyandry, multiple First Vision accounts, etc.), the following bothered me:

   ▶ 2013 Official Declaration 2 Header Update Dishonesty:

   ▶ Offending text:
   
   "Early in its history, Church leaders stopped conferring the priesthood on black males of African descent. Church records offer no clear insights into the origins of this practice."

   The following is a 1949 First Presidency Statement:

   August 17, 1949.
   
   The attitude of the Church with reference to Negroes remains as it has always stood. It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord, on which is founded the doctrine of the Church from the days of its organization, to the effect that Negroes may become members of the Church but that they are not entitled to the priesthood at the present time. The prophets of the Lord have made several statements as to the operation of the principle. President Brigham Young said: 'Why are so many of the inhabitants of the earth cursed with a skin of blackness? It comes in consequence of their fathers rejecting the power of the holy priesthood, and the law of God. They will go down to death. And when all the rest of the children have received their blessings in the holy priesthood, then that curse will be removed from the seed of Cain, and they will then come up and possess the priesthood, and receive all the blessings which we now are entitled to.'

   President Wilford Woodruff made the following statement: 'The day will come when all that race will be redeemed and possess all the blessings which we now have.'

   The position of the Church regarding the Negro may be understood when another doctrine of the Church is kept in mind, namely, that the conduct of spirits in the premortal existence has some determining effect upon the conditions and circumstances under which these spirits take on mortality and that while the details of this principle have not been made known, the mortality is a privilege that is given to those who maintain their first estate; and that the worth of the privilege is

This is a puzzling accusation of dishonesty. The statement refers to early Church records and then The CES Letter quotes a 1949 text, which is not an early Church record.

This statement goes beyond previous declarations and comes from a private letter of the First Presidency to President Ernest L. Wilkinson of the Brigham Young University. Private letters do not express the official position of the Church. It seems The CES Letter might have quoted a more official source in its efforts to show the Church is dishonest or whitewashing its history.

Click here
so great that spirits are willing to come to earth and take on bodies no matter what the handicap may be as to the kind of bodies they are to secure; and that among the handicaps, failure of the right to enjoy in mortality the blessings of the priesthood is a handicap which spirits are willing to assume in order that they might come to earth. Under this principle there is no injustice whatsoever involved in this deprivation as to the holding of the priesthood by the Negroes.

The First Presidency:

Along with the above First Presidency statement, there are many other statements and explanations made by prophets and apostles clearly “justifying” the Church’s racism. So, the 2013 edition Official Declaration 2 Header in the scriptures is not only misleading, it’s dishonest. We do have records — including from the First Presidency itself — with very clear insights on the origins of the ban on the blacks.

December 2013 Update: The Church released a Race and the Priesthood essay which contradicts their 2013 Official Declaration 2 Header. In the essay, they point to Brigham Young as the originator of the ban. Further, they effectively throw 10 latter-day “Prophets, Seers, and Revelators” under the bus as they “disavow” the “theories” that these ten men taught and justified — for 130 years — as doctrine and revelation for the Church’s institutional and theological racism.

Finally, they denounce the idea that God punishes individuals with black skin or that God withhold blessings based on the color of one’s skin while completely ignoring the contradiction of the keystone Book of Mormon teaching exactly this.

Yesterday’s revelation and doctrine is today’s “disavowed theories.” Yesterday’s prophets are today’s disavowed heretics.

Zina Diantha Huntington Young:

The following is a quick biographic snapshot of Zina:

- She was married for 7.5 months and was about 6 months pregnant with her first husband, Henry Jacobs, when she married Joseph after being told Joseph’s life was in danger from an angel with a drawn sword.
- After Joseph’s death, she married Brigham Young and had Young’s baby while her first husband, Henry, was on a mission.
- Zina would eventually become the Third General Relief Society President of the Church.

If anyone needs proof that the Church is still whitewashing history in 2014 aside from the above-mentioned issues, Zina is it. The following are 100% LDS sources:

- Zina’s biographical page on LDS.org:

Here we once again encounter The CES Letter’s sound-bite couplet that misrepresents LDS teachings and confuses doctrines with Church policies and practices.
This is one of the more contrived arguments in *The CES Letter*. Whether through ignorance or a willful dismissal of credible historical documents, this timeline is unreliable. There is no evidence Zina had at any time two genuine husbands. Only by conflating the evidence can this reconstruction be promoted.  

Click here

This unfortunate misrepresentation was already discussed on page 38. A new transcription of George Watt’s shorthand shows that polygamy was required only of the men and women who had the privilege of practicing it. (Whether they personally felt it was a privilege or a burden is not addressed.) When plural marriage is not a privilege of Church members (like today), there is no condemnation for monogamy. Importantly, no presiding leader has ever stated that all exalted men are polygamists.  

Click here

The answer to this question is simply that Zina was sealed for eternity and was not Joseph’s wife during mortality. Sexual polyandry was never permitted and would have been adultery. There is no credible evidence to support the theory promoted by *The CES Letter* that Zina had two husbands during the same time period.  

Click here

This is inaccurate. The Church is not a publicly held company. Leaders are guided by inspiration, not consensus of it members. No scripture or other revelation requires leaders to expose financial expenditures.  

Click here

This is deceptive. The $1.4 billion of humanitarian aid was in cash contributions. *In-kind* contributions, the most common form of assistance the Church granted, were many times greater.  

Click here
Sacrifices by members to build temples is rewarded by God who encouraged the Nauvoo Saints saying: "Come ye, with all your gold, and your silver, and your precious stones ... and build a house to my name, for the Most High to dwell therein" (D&C 124:26-27).

- For an organization that claims to be Christ's only true Church, this expenditure is a moral failure on so many different levels. For a Church that asks its members to sacrifice greatly for Temple building, such as the case of Argentinians giving the Church gold from their dental work for the São Paulo Brazil Temple, this mall business is absolutely shameful.

- Of all the things that Christ would tell the prophet, the prophet buys a mall and says "Let's go shopping"? Of all the sum total of human suffering and poverty on this planet, the inspiration the Brethren feel for His Church is to get into the shopping mall business?

- Hinckley made the following dishonest statement in a 2002 interview to a German journalist:

  Reporter: In my country, the...we say the people's Churches, the Protestants, the Catholics, they publish all their budgets, to all the public.
  Hinckley: Yeah. Yeah.
  Reporter: Why is it impossible for your Church?
  Hinckley: Well, we simply think that the...that information belongs to those who made the contribution, and not to the world. That's the only thing. Yes.

- Where can I see the Church's books? I've paid tithing. Where can I go to see what the Church's finances are? Where can current tithing paying members go to see the books? The answer: we can't. Even if you've made the contributions as Hinckley stated above? Unless you're an authorized General Authority or senior Church employee in the accounting department with a Non-Disclosure Agreement? You're out of luck. Hinckley knew this and for whatever reason made the dishonest statement.

- Tithing: I found the following quote in the December 2012 Ensign very disturbing:

  "If paying tithing means that you can't pay for water or electricity, pay tithing. If paying tithing means that you can't pay your rent, pay tithing. Even if paying tithing means that you don't have enough money to feed your family, pay tithing. The Lord will not abandon you."

- The author of The CES Letter manifests no faith in God so it is understandable that he would question the actions of those who do.

The finances of the Church are another low hanging fruit for critics who seem less concerned with fiscal responsibility. Instead they appear frustrated they are denied access to another topic for criticism. Click here

For the entire story Click here
followed the above Ensign advice and gave your food money to the Church you’re now dependent on the Church for food money.

3. Names of the Church:
   - 1830: Church of Jesus Christ
   - 1834: The Church of the Latter Day Saints
   - 1838: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

After deciding “Church of Jesus Christ” on April 6, 1830, Joseph Smith made the decision on May 3, 1834 to change the name of the Church to “The Church of the Latter Day Saints.” Why did Joseph take the name of “Jesus Christ” out of the very name of His restored Church? The one and only true Church on the face of the earth in which Christ is the Head?

Four years later on April 26, 1838, the Church name was changed to “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints” and has remained ever since (except the hyphen was added about a century later to be grammatically correct).

Is it reasonable to assume that God would periodically change the name of his Church? If Jesus Christ is the central character of God’s religion on earth and all things are to be done in His name, is it reasonable to assume that God would instruct His Church leaders to entirely leave out the name of Jesus Christ from the period of May 3, 1834 – April 26, 1838? What possible reason could there be for the name changes?

Why would Christ instruct Joseph to name it one thing in 1830 and then change it in 1834 and then change it again in 1838? Why would the name of Christ be dropped from His one and only true Church for 4 whole years?

What does this say about a Church that claims to be restored and guided by modern revelation? If the Prophet Joseph Smith couldn’t even get the name right for eight years then what else did he get wrong?

There were several denominations that claimed the name Church of Christ, so, without revelation, a new name was adopted to avoid confusion.

As Christ told the Nephites: "ye shall call the church in my name" (3 Ne. 27:7). So in 1838 the Savior instructed the Church: "For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (D&C 115:4).

There were still many references to the Church as The Chruch of Christ during that period.
In light of the emphasis the Church places on education and in owning private universities, claims it is anti-intellectual do not seem well founded. Click here

Historical truths have varying levels of usefulness. The fact that something happened does not mean it should be published to the world. Click here

Historical evidences that are misinterpreted, misrepresented, embellished by biased writers, or falsified are not useful. Click here

These complaints have been mentioned multiple times.

The missing "rock in a hat" illustrations are the result of artists' errors and of little importance. Click here

There are no conflicting First Vision accounts, just a few minor ambiguities in the different narratives. Click here

Joseph Smith did not practice sexual polyandry. Click here

Accusations regarding the denials are the low hanging fruit for critics. Nauvoo polygamists tried to avoid lying by choosing careful language. Click here

Joseph did not translate the papyri as an Egyptologist would. This accusation is based upon false assumptions. Click here

There is no evidence that Joseph lied to Emma although he waited to teach her about plural marriage until she was ready. Click here
George Q. Cannon explained: "There is one thing that the Lord has warned us about from the beginning, and that is, not to speak evil of the Lord's anointed." Then President Cannon explained why: "He has told us that any member of the Church who indulged in this is liable to lose the Spirit of God and go into darkness. The Prophet Joseph said time and again that it was one of the first and strongest symptoms of apostasy."

Criticizing leaders:

- Dallin H. Oaks made the following disturbing comment in the PBS documentary, "The Mormons" (0:51):
  
  "It is wrong to criticize the leaders of the Church, even if the criticism is true."

Researching "unapproved" materials on the internet:

- Elder Quentin L. Cook made the following comment in the October 2012 Conference:
  
  "Some have immersed themselves in internet materials that magnify, exaggerate, and in some cases invent shortcomings of early Church leaders. Then they draw incorrect conclusions that can affect testimony. Any who have made these choices can repent and be spiritually renewed."

- Elder Dieter Uchtdorf said the following in his CES talk "What is truth" (33:00):
  
  "...Remember that in this age of information there are many who create doubt about anything and everything at any time and every place. You will find even those who still claim that they have evidence that the earth is flat. That the moon is a hologram. It looks like it a little bit. And that certain movie stars are really aliens from another planet. And it is always good to keep in mind just because something is printed on paper, appears on the internet, is frequently repeated or has a powerful group of followers doesn't make it true."

Who cares whether you received the information from a stranger, television, book, magazine, comic book, napkin, and even the scary internet? They're all mediums or conduits of information. It's the information itself, its accuracy, and its relevance that you need to focus on and be concerned with.

Elder Neil Andersen made the following statement in the October 2014 General Conference specifically targeting the medium of the Internet in a bizarre attempt to discredit the Internet as a reliable source for getting factual and truthful information:

The problem with the “scary Internet” is that it contains so much misinformation, misrepresentation, half-truths, and falsehoods about the Church, its leaders, and history. These deceptions generate doubt unnecessarily, and doubt is the opposite of faith. Truth from any source is desirable.
The issue here is to avoid things that are simply not true. There is no admonition to avoid being balanced.

This is simply false. The author of *The CES Letter* seems confident that truth is on his side, but if so, then why does he have to resort to so many extreme claims and so much redundancy? Joseph Smith taught "Truth will cut its own way." Why not simply teach truth without the emotional overlay and let the reader decide?

These topics have already been presented and addressed multiple times.

Whatever standard the author of *The CES Letter* is demanding of the Church, it would appear he has violated it multiple times in this letter.

Book of Mormon translation again. Click here

Polygamy and polyandry again.

Adam/god theory again. Click here

"And it is always good to keep in mind just because something is printed on paper, appears on the internet, is frequently repeated or has a powerful group of followers doesn't make it true." The exact same thing can be said of Mormonism and LDS.org.
Going after members who publish or share their questions, concerns, and doubts:

- **September Six:**
  “The September Six were six members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were excommunicated or disfellowshipped by the Church in September 1993, allegedly for publishing scholarly work on Mormonism or critiquing Church doctrine or leadership.”

  A few months before the September Six, Boyd K. Packer made the following comment regarding the three “enemies” of the Church:

  “The dangers I speak of come from the gay-lesbian movement, the feminist movement (both of which are relatively new), and the ever-present challenge from the so-called scholars or intellectuals.”

  - Boyd K. Packer, All-Church Coordinating Council, May 18, 1993

- **Strengthening the Church Members Committee (SCMC):**
  The spying and monitoring arm of the Church. It is secretive and most members have been unaware of its existence since its creation in 1985 after President Ezra Taft Benson took over. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland admitted it still exists (2:29) in March 2012. The historical evidence and the September Six points to SCMC’s primary mission being to hunt and expose intellectuals and/or disaffected members who are influencing other members to think and question, despite Holland’s claim that it’s a committee primarily to fight against polygamy.

- **“When the prophet speaks the debate is over”:**
  - N. Eldon Tanner, 1st Counselor in the First Presidency, gave a First Presidency Message in the August 1979 Ensign that includes the following statement:

    “When the prophet speaks the debate is over.”

    Some things that are true are not very useful + It is wrong to criticize leaders of the Church, even if the criticism is true + Spying and monitoring on members + Intellectuals are dangerous + When the prophet speaks the debate is over + The First Law of Heaven = Policies and practices you’d expect to find in a totalitarian system such as North Korea or George Orwell’s 1984; not from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

    As a believing member, I was deeply offended by the accusation that the Church was a cult. “How can it be a cult when we’re good people who are following Christ, focusing on family, and doing good works in and out of a church that bears His name? When we’re 14 million members? What a ridiculous accusation.” It was only after I lost my testimony and discovering, for the first time, the SCMC and the anti-intellectualism going on behind the scenes that I could clearly see the above cultish aspects of the Church and why people came to the conclusion that Mormonism is a cult.

The Church has MormonsAndGays.com and have cautioned all "alternate voices" regarding their need to not undermine the mission of the Church. Click here

Church leaders are commissioned to keep the teachings pure within the Church and to keep the temples undefiled as much as they are able (D&C 94:8-9). This committee had its beginnings in the 1830s (D&C 85:2, 123:4), but the concept is much older. Why would anyone with such doubts feel a loss at excommunication? There seems to be a contradiction here.

This vitriol seems out-of-place and inapplicable to a religious organization that can only excommunicate its members and otherwise holds no power over them.
Conclusion:

"Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. He was either a Prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground. If Joseph was a deceiver, who willfully attempted to mislead people, then he should be exposed, his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false...

– President Joseph Fielding Smith –

When I first discovered that Joseph Smith used a rock in a hat to translate the Book of Mormon, that he was married to 11 other men’s wives, and that the Book of Abraham has absolutely nothing to do with the papyri or facsimiles, I went into a panic. I desperately needed answers and I needed them 3 hours ago. Among the first sources I looked to for answers were official Church sources such as Mormon.org and LDS.org. I couldn’t find them.

I then went to FairMormon and Neal A. Maxwell Institute (formerly FARMS).

FairMormon and these unofficial apologists have done more to destroy my testimony than any anti-Mormon source ever could. I found their version of Mormonism to be alien and foreign to the Chapel Mormonism that I grew up attending Church, Seminary, reading Scriptures, General Conferences, EFY, mission, and BYU. Their answers are not only contradictory to the scriptures and teachings I learned through correlated Mormonism…they’re truly bizarre.

Why is it that I had to first discover all of this – from the internet – at 31-years-old after 20 years of high activity in the Church? I wasn’t just a seat warmer at Church. I’ve read the scriptures several times. I’ve read hundreds of "approved" Church books. I was an extremely dedicated missionary who voluntarily asked to stay longer in the mission field. I was very interested in and dedicated to the gospel.

How am I supposed to feel about learning about these disturbing facts at 31-years-old? After making critical life decisions based on trust and faith that the Church was telling me the complete truth about its origins and history? After many books, Seminary, EFY, Church history tour, mission, BYU, General Conferences, Scriptures, Ensigns, and regular Church attendance?

So, putting aside the absolute shock and feeling of betrayal in learning about all of this information that has been kept concealed and hidden from me by the Church my entire life, I am now expected to go back to the drawing board. Somehow, I’m supposed to rebuild my testimony on newly
discovered information that is not only bizarre and alien to the Chapel Mormonism I had a testimony of; it's almost comical.

I'm now supposed to believe that Joseph has the credibility of translating ancient records when the Book of Abraham and the Kinderhook Plates destroy this claim? That Joseph has the character and integrity to take him at his word after seeing his deliberate deception in hiding and denying polygamy and polyandry for at least 10 years of his adult life? How he backdated and retrofitted the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood restoration events as if they were in the Book of Commandments all along? And I'm supposed to believe with a straight face that Joseph using a rock in a hat is totally legit? Despite this being the exact same method he used to con people out of their money during his treasure hunting days? Despite this ruining the official story of ancient prophets and Moroni investing all that time and effort into gold plates, which were not used because Joseph’s face was stuffed in a hat?

I'm supposed to sweep under the rug the inconsistent and contradictory First Vision accounts and just believe anyway? I'm supposed to believe that these men who have been wrong about so many important things and who have not prophesied, seered, or revealed much in the last 169 or so years are to be sustained as "prophets, seers, and revelators"?

I'm supposed to believe the scriptures have credibility after endorsing so much rampant immorality, violence, and despicable behavior? When it says that the earth is only 7,000 years old and that there was no death before then? Or that Heavenly Father is sitting on a throne with an erect penis when all evidence points to it really being the pagan Egyptian god of sex, Min? The "most correct book on earth" Book of Mormon going through over 100,000 changes over the years? After going through so many revisions and still being incorrect? Noah's ark and the global flood are literal events? Tower of Babel is a literal event? The Book of Mormon containing 1769 King James Version edition translation errors and 1611 King James Version translators’ italics while claiming to be an ancient record?

That there’s actually a polygamous god who revealed a Warren Jeffs style revelation on polygamy that Joseph pointed to as a perverted license to secretly marry other living men’s wives and teenage girls barely out of puberty? That this crazy god actually threatened Joseph’s life with one of his angels with a sword if a newly married pregnant woman didn’t agree to Joseph’s marriage proposal? And like the part-time racist schizophrenic god, I’m supposed to believe in a god who was against polygamy before he was for polygamy but decided in 1890 that he was again against it?

I'm told to put these foundational problems on the shelf and wait until I die to get answers? To stop looking at the Church intellectually even though the “glory of God is intelligence”? Ignore and have faith anyway?

I’m sorry, but faith is believing and hoping when there is little evidence for or against something. Delusion is believing when there is an abundance of evidence against something. To me, it’s absolute insanity to bet my life, my precious time, my money, my heart, and my mind into an organization that has so many serious problematic challenges to its foundational truth claims.

The CES letter presents an abundance of misrepresentations and half-truths rather than evidence.
The author of *The CES Letter* is entitled to his opinion, but claims of "too many problems ... that undermine the very foundation of the LDS Church" is simply incorrect. It isn't as clear cut as portrayed in *The CES Letter*. Each accusation reflects enormous bias and has a valid response as seen from the numerous comments and links found here. Throughout *The CES Letter*, a handful of topics are referenced over and over, perhaps in an attempt to convince the reader (and the author?) that those points are indisputable evidence that the Church is false. However, in each case, an examination of the evidence demonstrates weaknesses in the allegations that cannot be overcome by simply restating the accusation multiple times.

The admonition to "Do what is right, let the consequence follow" introduces the question of what is "right." Without faith, what is right will be determined by an individual's own wisdom and used to chart a course by his own hand. Perhaps a better question is what is right with God and how do I conform my life to that?

Click here

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It is unfortunate that the CES Director did not respond to the author's original Letter. However, the amount of resources needed to expose the misrepresentations and half-truths promoted in The CES Letter is great. Multiple scholars and accomplished experts in the individual areas have contributed to this response.

By academic standards, The CES Letter is inadequate. It makes numerous non-peer reviewed claims that ignore what the actual peer-reviewed literature has said on these matters. Due to their biases and incomplete representations of the topics they address, such publications are often classified as spin or propaganda by scholars. Click here

The author of The CES Letter has shown himself to be reactive and aggressive in promoting his version of LDS history and teachings. Hence, a response to this response is anticipated and will be analyzed for truthfulness and accuracy with deviations noted publicly in (of course) another response. Click here
New LDS.org Essays:

From late 2013 to 2014, the Church has released several new essays on the various issues and topics mentioned in the CES Letter. The Church will be releasing new essays in the near future.

The following link contains an up-to-date list of all of the relevant new essays published by the Church in its Gospel Topics section of lds.org:  [www.cesletter.com/essays](http://www.cesletter.com/essays)

How You Can Help:

If the CES Letter has added value to your life, please pay it forward. Your support will allow us to continue to help the honest in heart seekers.