

Objections to the History of the Church

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1838), originally The Church of Christ (1830), and later The Church of the Latter-day Saints (1834), has continuously changed its claims, scriptures, and history since its founding by Joseph Smith Jr. At first, this is difficult to accept until one begins reviewing the numerous historical data available. A good start is to compare the *History of the Church* (originally published in seven volumes in 1902, including the canonized First Vision) with the original publications that comprise the main body of the work: *Evening and Morning Star* (1832), *Messenger and Advocate* (1834), *The Times and Seasons* (1839-1845), *The Millennial Star* (1840-1846), *The Deseret News* (since 1850), and finally Joseph Smith's diary [Fau89]. *Changes in Joseph Smith's History* [Tan65] provides a thorough examination of many of the changes. Other good references include D. Michael Quinn's *Origins of Power, Extensions of Power*, and *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, and a comparison of the current *Doctrine and Covenants* with the early 1835 edition and the *Book of Commandments* (1833). Historical material can also be found in Utah State University Library's Leonard J. Arrington Special Collections historical archives. Even comparisons of original General Conference talks, with their revisions as found in *The Ensign* magazine, provide rich sources of careful and deliberate revision for the sake of only providing faith promoting content. (The *Journal of Discourses* provides early conference talks. Also, see *L.D.S. Conference Report Extracts, 1852-1886* [Mur98].)

It seems clear that from its early inception the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been self-conscious about its image, wanting to remain consistent in its claims on the one hand, and to look good to possible converts on the other (especially to Christians). It has done this by knowingly sacrificing its historical integrity, and as Fawn Brodie commented in her book, *No Man Knows My History*, Joseph Smith dared to found a new religion in the age of the printing press.

References

- [Fau89] Scott H. Faulring (Editor), 1989, *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, Signature Books, 518 pages.
- [Tan65] Jerald D. Tanner, Sandra M. Tanner, 1965, *Changes in Joseph Smith's History*, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 88 pages.
- [Mur98] Steven M. Murphy, 1998, *L.D.S Conference Report Extracts, 1852-1886*, Peace Mountain Publishing, 848 pages.