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## The Three Witnesses

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**Abstract:** This article states how the Three Witnesses remained faithful to their testimonies of having seen the plates. While all three fell away from the Church, Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris returned and died as faithful members. David Whitmer never returned, but reaffirmed his testimony to his dying day.

# THE THREE WIT- NESSES

## YOUR QUES- TION

ANSWERED BY  
PRESIDENT  
JOSEPH  
FIELDING  
SMITH  
OF THE FIRST  
PRESIDENCY

*QUESTION: It has always been a mystery to me why the three witnesses of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon could turn away from the Church after having such a wonderful witness given to them and having stood in the presence of a heavenly messenger. The fact that they did, it seems to me, detracts in large measure from their solemn words expressed in their testimony that is published in every copy of the Book of Mormon, notwithstanding the fact that when separated from the Church they still maintained the truth of their story, as I understand it, until death. How much better it would have been had they remained true to the Church all during their mortal lives.*

**ANSWER:** In considering the attitude of these three witnesses, we have to take a number of circumstances into account. The great fact is that notwithstanding the loss of membership, each of them remained true to the death to that sacred testimony. There was no shadow of turning. That testimony was just as true to them in their later years as it was the day they signed their names to the document that is found in each copy of the Book of Mormon.

Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris found their way back again in the depth of humility and died faithful to the Church. David Whitmer, while he never returned to the Church, was true to that testimony and endeavored to build up a church of his own. Martin Harris in later years became a pioneer to the valleys of the mountains and died there among the Latter-day Saints. Oliver Cowdery died a faithful member of the Church, and David Whitmer, while he drew away feeling that the Church had gone astray, gathered around him an organization that he maintained was composed of the true followers of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Personally, I have had a great deal of sympathy for David Whitmer. I believe him to be an honest man but one who had become overcome by the persuasion of others. To his honor be it said that to his dying day he bore testimony to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and that he with Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris had voluntarily given his testimony. There were occasions when plotting individuals attempted to trip him on his testimony, but they failed entirely.

On one occasion Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F.

Smith, while visiting in Missouri, called to see him, and they had a long interview with him. He was glad to see them, and part of their conversation had to do with incidents of early church history. On this occasion David Whitmer bore his testimony as pertaining to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, which testimony never varied from the first and with which his signature appeared together with the signatures of Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris. In fact, while he never sought to be reinstated in the Church, he erroneously felt that he had a perfect right to form an organization of his own, which he did. It is unfortunate that he did not follow Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris, each of them dying as faithful members of the Church.

Permit me to call attention to these facts as I view them. If the story of the coming of the Book of Mormon had been a falsehood, that Moroni never existed and that Joseph Smith the Prophet had by trickery and fraud brought forth the Book of Mormon, then that production would have been so completely filled with errors, doctrinally and historically, that the fraud would have been apparent to every intelligent person who obtained a copy of it. I can challenge and even defy any man, no matter how greatly informed, to produce a work of fiction that could be compared with the Book of Mormon. I have read the Book of Mormon through many times, and each time I gain something to my advantage. Where can you go and find a more intelligent, far-reaching, and comforting doctrine than the words of Mormon? Moreover, when you read them, you cannot resist the feeling that they

*(Continued on page 652)*



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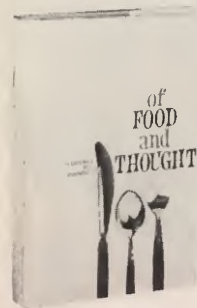
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## Your Question

(Continued from page 612)

were declared by the Spirit of Christ:

"For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil . . . [and] the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.

"But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him." (Moro. 7: 16-17.)

Such a sentiment as this could come only by and through the guidance of the Holy Ghost. There is also another fact that must be considered in relation to the testimonies of these three witnesses. If they had by any means entered into a fraud or had concocted a story in relation to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the fact appears perfectly clear that when they were at cross purposes with the Church,

they would have been the first to reveal the fraud. Moreover, the fact that each of them remained true to his testimony to the time of his death, notwithstanding he had problems to overcome that appeared to him as being difficult, is one of the strongest evidences that we have that the witnesses spoke the truth and their testimony is true.

## SAN JUAN

BY ALVIN J. SCHOW

*Down San Juan way  
There is a place  
I love to stand  
And watch the wild wind  
Beat against the sky—  
Down San Juan way.*

*Down San Juan way  
The cedar tree,  
The pinon pine,  
The canyon rim  
Are friends of mine—  
Down San Juan way.*

*Down San Juan way  
My spirit lifts,  
My thoughts are true,  
My soul's refreshed,  
My faith made new—  
Down San Juan way.*

## These Times

(Continued from page 607)

Some effects will be slow. In some places the change may not be profound. But the dialogue John XXIII called for among Christians, between Christians and Jews and others, as well as the dialogue *within* the Roman Catholic fold between clergy and laity and among the laity is beginning to take place. In the United States, in such circumstances and places as the one described on April 19, 1966, the results appear to be productive of greater friendship and the breaking of many old barriers that stood in the way of under-

standing. The Latin mass is replaceable now by the vernacular languages of Roman Catholic peoples. On the whole it can be estimated that the immediate, short-run effects will be to strengthen measurably the role and position of the Roman Catholic churches in America. In the longer term, cleavages of custom, doctrinal differences, practices affecting family life, and various religious practices may reveal wide differences. But John XXIII called for dialogue. Dialogue there now is in these times between Pope and Canterbury, among Protestant ministers speaking from Catholic pulpits, and vice versa.