The Three Witnesses

Author(s): Joseph Fielding Smith
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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.
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 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

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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 persuad-
eth 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 guid-
ance of the Holy Ghost. There is
also another fact that must be con-
sidered in relation to the testimoni-
es 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 Catho-
lic 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 pro-
ductive of greater friendship and
the breaking of many old barriers
that stood in the way of under-
standing. The Latin mass is re-
placeable 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, doc-
trinal differences, practices affect-
ing family life, and various reli-
gious practices may reveal wide
differences. But John XXIII called
for dialogue. Dialogue there now is
in these times between Pope and
Canterbury, among Protestant min-
isters speaking from Catholic pul-
pits, and vice versa.