

Accusations Against the Articles of Faith

Anti-Mormons have made several accusations against the LDS Church's Articles of Faith in a vain attempt to enshroud them in the fog of controversy. In this brochure I briefly examine several of these accusations in order to determine whether or not they have any merit.

Accusation 1: The Articles of Faith do not teach the deeper doctrines of Mormonism.

Why should they? The Prophet Joseph Smith stated very clearly when he published the Wentworth letter (in which the Articles of Faith are first found) that its contents represent only a "sketch of the...faith of the Latter-day Saints."¹ For those anti-Mormons who might be wondering, the word "sketch" is defined in the 1828 edition of *An American Dictionary of the English Language* as an "outline or general figure of a thing; to make a rough draught" or draft.²

Despite this official disclaimer, professional anti-Mormons Jerald and Sandra Tanner say that the Articles of Faith "seem to be an attempt to hide almost all of the LDS teachings which separate the Mormon Church" from those taught by other Christian denominations.³ They point out that plural marriage is not mentioned in Joseph Smith's 1842 Articles of Faith, but they neglect to tell their readers that this practice was, in fact, added to these Articles by Elder George A. Smith after it had been publicly announced.⁴ The Tanners also single out the doctrine that "men can become Gods," but they fail to inform their audience that this teaching had been published to the world ten years before the Wentworth letter was ever composed.⁵ What about the doctrine of the plurality of Gods? Well, that was published to the world a mere two weeks after the Wentworth letter went to press.⁶ And the doctrine that God is an exalted man? The Prophet Joseph Smith did not publicly teach this idea until two years after he wrote the Wentworth letter. Nevertheless, this doctrine was published only a few months later for the entire world to see.⁷

The Tanners protest: "The Articles of Faith are completely silent concerning the *Doctrine and Covenants* which contains many of Smith's revelations and distinctive doctrines."⁸ And why is that a problem? The *Doctrine and Covenants* had been available for public perusal since 1835, and many of the revelations found between its covers had been published in Church periodicals many years before the Prophet wrote his letter to John Wentworth.

Accusation 2: The 4th Article of Faith was changed after Joseph Smith's death to make it conform to current LDS teachings.

Jerald and Sandra Tanner claim that in Joseph Smith's fourth Article of Faith (written in March 1842) he said that "there were only four things required for salvation," but "not long after" writing that statement he "added a new doctrine" requiring those who seek exaltation to go through a "secret ceremony and be married in a Mormon temple."⁹ That is not an historically accurate statement. Anyone who has read section 124 of the *Doctrine and Covenants* knows that the

Nauvoo Temple ordinances were made known to the Saints by 19 January 1841. The existence of these ordinances was announced in a public newspaper nine months before the Prophet sent his letter off to Mr. Wentworth in Chicago.¹⁰

The Tanners further claim that in 1902 LDS Church leaders made a "major change" when they altered the wording of the fourth Article of Faith from "ordinances" to "first principles and ordinances"—in the Tanners' view because the temple ordinances were added to LDS theology after the Wentworth letter was written.¹¹ And this is where I raised my eyebrow and shook my head in bewilderment. On the Tanners' Website—where they discuss the "Changing Articles of Faith"—they refer to an article written by Lyndon W. Cook.¹² They do not bother to explain to their readership that the reason for the so-called "major change" in the fourth Article of Faith is plainly spelled out in Brother Cook's paper. Elder James E. Talmage asked that the change be made for semantic reasons, not doctrinal reasons (by his day the word "ordinance" was being used differently). Elder Talmage's emendation just happens to be supported by two early historical documents. In 1835 the Prophet Joseph Smith referred to faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost as "the first principles of the gospel."¹³ And in 1840 Orson Pratt referred to the very same items as "the first conditions of the gospel."¹⁴

Accusation 3: Orson Pratt's 1840 pamphlet called *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions* was the forerunner to the Prophet's 1842 Articles of Faith.

That might be the conclusion drawn by somebody who really hasn't studied this topic in much depth, but an analysis of the historical sources makes it clear that Joseph Smith patterned his 1842 Articles of Faith on the writing of Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Young (Brigham's brother), and himself.¹⁵ It is entirely possible that Orson Pratt was drawing from these earlier published sources when he penned his pamphlet.

Accusation 4: There used to be a 14th Article of Faith but it has now been deleted.

The so-called "fourteenth" Article of Faith (which speaks of the resurrection)¹⁶ first appeared in the 1849 pamphlet *Mormonism Triumphant*, written by James H. Flanigan. This pamphlet was published by the British Mission in Liverpool, England, and in it Elder Orson Pratt—the mission President—took Joseph Smith's Articles of Faith from the Wentworth letter and not only added an extra Article to the list but he also embellished what the Prophet had already written. Anti-Mormons try to give Pratt's modified Articles some kind of special 'authority' by pointing out that Elder Orson Hyde republished it in an LDS newspaper in 1850.¹⁷ But it must be remembered that only six months after Joseph Smith published the Wentworth letter Elder Hyde published his own set of sixteen "Articles of Faith and Points of Doctrine,"¹⁸ showing that even at this point in time a summary of LDS Church beliefs had not been set in stone.

When Elder Franklin D. Richards published the first edition of the *Pearl of Great Price* in 1851 he included the Articles of Faith from the Prophet's Wentworth letter, thus indicating its value over Pratt's expanded version.¹⁹ Private versions of the Articles of Faith continued to be circulated in various parts of the world²⁰ until they became obsolete in 1880 when the *Pearl of Great Price* was canonized and the Prophet's Articles from the Wentworth letter took precedence over all others.²¹



For more details on this topic see
<http://www.fairlds.org>

Written by Matthew B. Brown for the Foundation for
Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR),
Copyright © 2004. www.fairlds.org

¹ *Times and Seasons*, vol. 3, no. 9, 1 March 1842, 706, emphasis added. Anti-Mormons conveniently ignore the fact that the people who requested the letter in which the Articles of Faith are found were not primarily interested in receiving a doctrinal treatise from Joseph Smith (the issue of the Saints' "faith" was last on the list), instead they were gathering material for a "history" book (*ibid.*).

² Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. "sketch."

³ Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Flaws in the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1991), 27–28.

⁴ See *Deseret News Weekly*, 5 September 1854; reprinted in *Millennial Star*, 21 February 1857.

⁵ See *Evening and Morning Star*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 1832, 10–11.

⁶ See *Times and Seasons*, vol. 3, no. 10, 15 March 1842, 720–722.

⁷ See *Times and Seasons*, vol. 5, no. 15, 15 August 1844, 613–614.

⁸ Tanner, *Flaws in the Pearl of Great Price*, 27–28.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See *Times and Seasons*, vol. 2, no. 15, 1 June 1841, 425–429.

Information on eternal marriage was made public in the following periodicals: *Millennial Star*, vol. 5, no. 12, May 1845, 189–94; *Millennial Star*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1 July 1845, 23; *Times and Seasons*, vol. 6, no. 20, 1 January 1846, 1084.

¹¹ Tanner, *Flaws in the Pearl of Great Price*, 27–28.

¹² Lyndon W. Cook, "The Articles of Faith," *Brigham Young University Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, Winter 1977, 254–256.

¹³ *Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 12, September 1835, 180, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Orson Pratt, *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), 27–28, emphasis added.

¹⁵ See, respectively, *Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 1, October 1834, 2; John Hayward, *The Religious Creeds and Statistics of Every Christian Denomination in the United States* (Boston: Hayward, 1836), 139–140; *Elders' Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3, July 1838, 36–44. Note especially in this last source that the Prophet's statements correspond to Articles #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 13. The substance of Article #11 was already stated by Oliver Cowdery in his 1834 *Messenger and Advocate* editorial and the theme of Article #12 can be found in D&C 58:21 (1 August 1831). For further reading see John W. Welch and David J. Whittaker, "We Believe...": Development of the Articles of Faith," *Ensign*, September 1979, 51–55; Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:67–69; Edward J. Brandt, "The Origin and Importance of the Articles of Faith," in Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Studies in Scripture: Volume 2, The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 407–419.

¹⁶ At least as early as 1839 Joseph Smith insisted that missionaries preach the doctrine of resurrection "among the first principles of the gospel" (see Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* [Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991], 4; see also Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984], 421; B.H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church*, rev. ed. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–1951], 3:396). Perhaps this is the reason why Orson Pratt included a statement on the resurrection in his expanded version of the Articles of Faith.

¹⁷ *Frontier Guardian*, vol. 2, no. 2, 20 February 1850 (Kanesville [later called Council Bluffs], Iowa).

¹⁸ Orson Hyde, *A Cry from the Wilderness* [Frankfurt, Germany: Orson Hyde, 1842], Chapter 4.

¹⁹ H. Donl Peterson, "The Birth and Development of the Pearl of Great Price," in Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Studies in Scripture: Volume 2, The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Randall Books, 1985), 8–22.

²⁰ In the year 1853 Jesse Haven, who was serving as the President of the South African mission, offered no less than 33 Articles of Faith on his list (see Jesse Haven, *Some of the Principle Doctrines or Belief of the Church* [Cape Town, South Africa, 1853]).

²¹ Peterson, "The Birth and Development of the Pearl of Great Price," 19–20.