

Who Holds the Keys – Pope or Prophet?

**Eucharistic Convention 2004
Auckland, New Zealand
Saturday, April 17th, 2004**

In a pamphlet entitled *The Strength of the Mormon Position*, the late Elder Orson F. Whitney, of the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon), related the following incident under the heading "A Catholic Utterance":

Many years ago a learned man, a member of the Roman Catholic Church, came to Utah and spoke from the stand of the Salt Lake Tabernacle. I became well-acquainted with him, and we conversed freely and frankly. A great scholar, with perhaps a dozen languages at his tongue's end, he seemed to know all about theology, law, literature, science and philosophy. One day he said to me: "You Mormons are all ignoramuses. You don't even know the strength of your own position. It is so strong that there is only one other tenable in the whole Christian world, and that is the position of the Catholic Church. The issue is between Catholicism and Mormonism. If we are right, you are wrong; if you are right, we are wrong; and that's all there is to it. The Protestants haven't a leg to stand on. For, if we are wrong, they are wrong with us, since they were a part of us and went out from us; while if we are right, they are apostates whom we cut off long ago. If we have the apostolic succession from St. Peter, as we claim, there is no need of Joseph Smith and Mormonism; but if we have not that succession, then such a man as Joseph Smith was necessary, and Mormonism's attitude is the only consistent one. It is either the perpetuation of the gospel from ancient times, or the restoration of the gospel in latter days."

The Apostles failed in their mission. They neglected to properly appoint their successors. When the last Apostle died, the keys of the kingdom were lost from the earth. The Church given to them by Jesus lay in ruins, overcome by the forces of hell. The so-called Christian Church was no longer the Lord's Church. A new organization, a "great and abominable church," came into existence. This wicked church founded by the devil became known as the "Catholic Church". In her corruption, she took away many plain and precious parts of the gospel from the Bible, rendering it useless for conveying the full gospel plan. It remained an apostate church until the keys of the kingdom were once again restored to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon), I knew all this was true. I knew the Great Apostasy happened. I knew Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that he had been entrusted with the task of bringing to mankind the Book of Mormon, the divinely inspired Scriptures that were another testament of Jesus Christ. Most of all, I knew the Church Joseph Smith had restored and organized, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was true. I knew all this by the power of the Holy Spirit.

After all, we Mormons just knew these things we had been taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were true because we had complete and unquestioning trust in all that is Mormon.

The Mormon Claim

What is the basis for the Mormon theory of the Great and Total Apostasy? The LDS church claims to be a restoration of the original Church of Jesus Christ. In the 1820's a young man named Joseph Smith, Jr. claimed to have received a series of heavenly visitations in which he was told that all the sects of Christendom, including the Catholic Church, had fallen away from the truth, and none of them still retained the authority of God. He and an associate, Oliver Cowdery, were supposedly ordained to the Holy Priesthood and the Apostleship by heavenly messengers in 1829, and they organized the Church of Jesus Christ on April 6, 1830. According to the Mormons, living Prophets and Apostles, as well as the restored Apostolic authority, have continued in the LDS Church from that time until today.

The Catholic Response

How do we Catholics respond to this Mormon claim of a Great and Total Apostasy of the early Christian Church? Using the Holy Bible and the writings of the Early Church Fathers, we need to show our LDS brothers and sisters that Jesus Christ intended for His Church to continue teaching the Gospel with His authority until the end of time. We must explain how the early Christian Church was Catholic in its organization, doctrines, and practices. If we can clearly demonstrate that there was no "Total Apostasy" in the early Church and that the original Deposit of Faith with priesthood authority was carefully handed down to us through "Apostolic Succession", then there is no need for a restoration of that which was never lost. Obviously there was, and probably always will be, individual apostasy FROM the Church. However, in all of salvation history there has never been a TOTAL apostasy OF the Church.

The Four Standard Works of Mormonism

The Mormons rely upon the "Four Standard Works"; the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the King James Version of the Bible, as well as other official LDS church documents, for their explanation of the Total Apostasy theory. These "Four Standard Works" are considered a part of their canon of Sacred Scripture. For our purposes I will limit the Mormon argument to the Holy Bible and quotes from the Early Church Fathers. I will also provide a Catholic response to each of these claims.

The Mormon Argument

When Latter-day Saints speak of the "apostasy", they primarily mean that Priesthood authority was taken from the earth in response to rebellion. When no Priesthood keys were left on earth, the apostasy was "complete" or "total". This rebellion and loss of authority was accompanied by some rejection of various revealed truths. Christianity naturally drifted even farther from the revealed Word through the centuries. The evidence they use to support the Total Apostasy theory goes like this:

They say that Paul spoke of the apostasy when he told the elders at Ephesus:

Acts 20:29-30- I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

The fact is that all churches have dissidents from within their own membership, including the LDS church. Individual apostasy does not necessarily mean that the entire church is in TOTAL apostasy.

Mormons suggest that Paul had no illusions about the survival of the Church when he wrote to Timothy that the saints would turn away from sound doctrine:

2 Timothy 4:3-5- For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

The LDS apologist would say that this shows how Paul entreated Timothy to do his duty as an evangelist, but those in his charge would forsake the faith. When we read this passage in the proper context we can see that this refers to the last days before the Second Coming of Christ, not to the immediate days following the death of the last Apostle. These citations do not indicate that it will be a TOTAL apostasy, only that some people will wander into myths. In fact, Paul is encouraging those who actually listen to the truth to be steadfast in their work and endure the suffering which apostasy invariably inflicts on the faithful.

In the same letter Paul intimated that all the people in Asia rejected him.

2 Timothy 1:15- You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, and among them Phygelus and Hermogenes.

The Mormon apologist would have us believe that "Asia Minor was exactly where many, if not most, of the Christian converts lived". However, according to Isaiah Bennett in his book, "Inside Mormonism – What Mormons Really Believe", the "Asia" mentioned in the New Testament refers to a small Roman province (Asia Minor or Anatolia) at the western tip of what is now Turkey. It did not indicate the continent of Asia that we speak of today, so the scale of this localized apostasy is not nearly as large as the Mormon argument would suggest in modern language.

Mormons believe Peter also warned the saints of the impending apostasy:

2 Peter 2:1-2- But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies,

even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled.

This passage simply tells us that as there have been false prophets in Israel so there will also be false teachers among the Christian Church. "And many will follow" does not mean that ALL will follow, simply that MANY will follow these false teachers. No TOTAL apostasy here!

Timing of the Apostasy

Latter-day Saints believe that the apostasy was underway even while the apostles were alive, and that it inevitably completed its course after the last apostles were taken away. While the New Testament does not give many specifics about the timetable of the rebellion in its predictions, Mormons suggest it contains quite a few clues pointing to the fact that a massive rebellion was taking place in the Church, and according to them it appears there was not much time left.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4- Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

Paul warns the Thessalonians that the Second Coming of Christ is NOT at hand, even if they receive a letter purporting to be from one of the Apostles. Mormons claim that this "falling away" {Gr. Apostasia} indicates that the apostasy would soon overrun the Church. However, Paul does not say that it will be a COMPLETE or TOTAL falling away from the church. What he does say is that the son of perdition will be revealed at the same time as the "falling away". If the apostasy took place after the death of the last Apostle as the LDS suggest, then when was the "son of perdition" revealed and who was he? Also there is no indication that a restoration of the Gospel would be interjected between the apostasy and the revelation of the son of perdition and the Second Coming of Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:7-8- For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming.

The LDS claim that Paul intimated with this verse that the apostasy was already underway. However, it seems more likely that there will be SOME lawlessness at work but the lawless one will be restrained and will not be revealed until the Second Coming.

Mormons think that such references to an apostasy already underway are to be found throughout the New Testament. For instance, Paul rebuked the Galatians for turning to a perverted form of the Gospel:

Galatians 1:6-8- I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel-- not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.

Here is another passage in which Mormons imply that the apostasy was already underway. The "other gospel" that Paul is speaking of here is coming from "Judaizers", Hebrews who had become Christian but continued to assert that one must be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law in order to be saved. In the context of this passage it is interesting to note that an "angel from heaven" (the angel Moroni) allegedly brought the Book of Mormon (a.k.a. "Another Testament of Jesus Christ") to Joseph Smith, Jr.

Paul and Peter wrote in the 50's and 60's. Mormons see this as evidence that they were witness to serious troubles within the Church. However, later writings, such as Jude (ca. 80 A. D.) and John (late 90's), are used by Mormons to suggest that the situation had become critical.

Jude 3-4- Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Mormons use this verse to indicate that Jude wrote this epistle to combat the many false teachers who had crept into the Church. These are warnings against SOME who have fallen into apostasy. Jude does not predict that there will be a TOTAL apostasy, neither does he say that the faith will be lost and that it will need to be re-delivered in a later dispensation. Quite to the contrary, he says that the faith has been delivered once for all to the saints.

The Mormons sometimes use the Jerusalem Bible translation to show a more specific reference about the identity of these false teachers. "Certain people have infiltrated among you, and they are the ones you had a warning about, in writing, long ago." Who warned the saints "in writing" about the infiltration of false teachers? Jude goes on to explain that this warning came from the apostles, so it stands to reason in the Mormon mind that this was the apostasy foretold in the earlier New Testament writings.

Jude 17-18- But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; they said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions."

This verse is a parallel passage to 2 Peter 3:3.

2 Peter 3:3- First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions...

Mormons would like us to believe that the predictions of the apostles mentioned in these two passages points to an impending TOTAL apostasy. The prophecy of a total rejection of the promise of Christ's Second Coming by certain "scoffers" was not something that happened to the entire church after the death of the last apostle. Historic Christianity simply cannot be accused of completely rejecting the promise of the Second Coming. Again, no indication of a TOTAL apostasy.

In the last few years before John, the last apostle, was taken from the earth, he recorded what Mormons point to as more indications of the rebellion that was supposedly about to find its fulfillment. John complained that a certain local leader in the Church, Diotrephes, would not receive John's letters and turned out "the brethren" from the Church as well as those who would receive them:

3 John 9-10- I have written something to the church; but Diot'rephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, prating against me with evil words. And not content with that, he refuses himself to welcome the brethren, and also stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church.

Obviously, Diot'rephes has a bad attitude toward the church, but that certainly doesn't indicate a TOTAL apostasy of the entire church. In fact, in the previous verses (3 John 1-8) John addresses his letter to Ga'ius and commends him for his hospitality and encourages his future help.

Finally, John recorded "letters" from the Lord to seven churches in Asia in Revelation 2-3. These churches were obviously meant to represent the Church as a whole. The messages in the letters ranged from praise to rebuke, but it is instructive to look at the consequences the Lord promised for the actions of the Church members. In the cases where praise was given, the Lord said, "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Revelation 2:10) Where rebuke was given the Lord commanded them to "repent... or else I will... remove thy candlestick out of his place...." (Revelation 2:5) Earlier the Lord had stipulated that "the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." (Revelation 1:20) Therefore, Mormons say the faithful were promised a crown of life after their martyrdom, and the unfaithful were threatened with the expulsion of their entire churches. This was indeed a time of crisis for the Church.

Once again I must reaffirm that in all of salvation history there has never been a TOTAL apostasy OF the church, only apostasy FROM the church by individual members.

Mormons believe this pattern of rebellion continued into the second century, which has been dubbed "the age of heresy". Clement of Rome (ca. 96 A.D.) chastised the Corinthians for ejecting a righteous bishop who had been appointed by the apostles. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110 A.D.) rebuked some of the Magnesians for rebelling against their bishop in the first decade of the second century: "It is fitting, then, not only to be called Christians, but to be so in reality: as some indeed give one the title of bishop, but do all things without him...." Mormons suggest that there seems to have been some general problem in this area at the time, since Ignatius included exhortations to submit to the authority of the bishops in all but one of his six epistles to various churches. Apparently there had been some serious schism even in Ignatius' own church at Antioch, for he requested that the Smyrnaeans send a delegate to Antioch to "congratulate them that they are [now] at peace, and are restored to their proper greatness, and that their proper constitution has been re-established among them." Indeed, W.H. Wagner notes that Ignatius willingly gave himself up to be martyred as a sacrifice for problems within the whole church. "He prayed not for pagans to stop hounding Christians, but for Christians to stop fighting one another and for them to recover unity and harmony." In another passage Ignatius gave the familiar warning, "The last times are come upon us."

The Early Church Fathers

The facts of history, as handed down to us in the writings of the Early Church Fathers, present strong evidence to support the Catholic Church's claim to apostolic succession. Their writings do not give any indication that the Apostles were going about the business of shutting down the Church after the resurrection and ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ. To the contrary, according to the Early Church Fathers, the Apostles were going out to the whole world, preaching the gospel, teaching their disciples the same truth that was taught to them by Christ, and appointing bishops to be their successors to continue teaching Christian believers of future generations. All of the remaining Apostles, with the exception of John the Beloved Disciple, subsequently suffered horrible martyrdom for their unswerving belief in the teachings of Christ. Many of their disciples suffered the same type of persecution and death rather than deny the truth they had received from the Apostles and their successors. Through it all the Church remained steadfast in the faith and continued to grow. Here's what some of the Early Church Fathers had to say about apostolic succession:

The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians.

Now, the Gospel was given to the Apostles for us by the Lord Jesus Christ; and Jesus the Christ was sent from God. That is to say, Christ received His commission from God, and the Apostles theirs from Christ. The order of these two events was in accordance with the will of God. So thereafter, when the Apostles had been given their instructions, and all their doubts had been set at rest by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, they set out in the full assurance of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the coming of God's kingdom.

And as they went through the territories and townships preaching, they appointed their first converts - after testing them by the Spirit - to be bishops and deacons for the believers of the future. (This was in no way an innovation, for bishops and deacons had already been spoken of in Scripture long before that; there is a text that says, I will confirm their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith.)

The First Epistle of Clement is one of the earliest writings outside the New Testament (A.D. 96). Its author was the same Clement who is mentioned fourth (after Peter, Linus and Anencletus) in the most reliable lists of the Bishops of Rome. The letter is from the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth. It is written in order to address some local trouble they were having (the Church at Corinth had ejected its "blameless" leaders and installed other presbyters in their place). Staniforth mentions in his endnotes that the text referred to by Clement is from the Septuagint version of Isaiah 60:17, 'I will give thy rulers in peace and thy overseers [or bishops] in righteousness.' The writing of Clement clearly shows that the Christian ministry was established by Christ and handed down from the Apostles to the bishops they appointed.

Against Heresies by Irenaeus [inter A.D. 180/199].

It is possible, then, for everyone in every Church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the Apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the Apostles, and their successors to our own times: men who neither knew nor taught anything like these heretics rave about. For if the Apostles had known hidden mysteries which they taught to the elite secretly and apart from the rest, they would have handed them down especially to those very ones to whom they were committing the self-same Churches. For surely they wished all those and their successors to be perfect and without reproach, to whom they handed on their authority. (Jurgens, para 209)

But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the successions of all the Churches, we shall confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient Church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul, that Church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. For with this Church, because of its superior origin, all Churches must agree, that is all the faithful in the whole world; and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the Apostolic tradition. (Jurgens, para 210)

The true gnosis (knowledge) is the doctrine of the Apostles, and the ancient organization of the Church throughout the whole world, and the manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of bishops, by which successions the bishops have handed down the Church which is found everywhere; and the very complete tradition of the Scriptures, which have come down to us by being

guarded against falsification, and which are received without addition or deletion; and reading without falsification, and a legitimate and diligent exposition according to the Scriptures, without danger and without blasphemy; and the pre-eminent gift of love, which is more precious than knowledge, and more glorious than prophecy, and more honored than all the other charismatic gifts. (Jurgens, para 242)

Irenaeus was the second bishop of Lyons. In his youth he was a disciple of Polycarp, the famous bishop of Smyrna, who himself was a disciple of John the Apostle. In his *Refutation and Rejection of the False Gnosis*, Irenaeus not only exposes the doctrinal errors of Gnosticism in no uncertain terms, but he also gives us a presentation of the true, orthodox gnosis guaranteed by the Tradition of the Apostles. He tells us that the Apostles instituted bishops as their successors. He also states that the greatest and most ancient Church, superior in origin to all other Churches and founded by the Apostles Peter and Paul, is the Church at Rome. He goes on to say that the true gnosis is the doctrine of the Apostles. This doctrine was handed down to the Church, through the succession of bishops from the Apostles, and was protected from falsification, addition, or deletion. Through his writings we can get an idea of what the early Christian Church received directly from the Apostles. We should be able to compare this ancient organization described in the writings of Irenaeus to see if it more closely resembles the present-day Catholic Church or the "Restored" Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We have the Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church with their solid foundations in Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition. I challenge my LDS brothers and sisters to carefully examine the writings of Irenaeus, or any other Early Church Father, to find where the early Christian Church clearly taught and believed uniquely Mormon doctrines such as a pre-mortal existence, baptism for the dead, plural marriages, the plurality of gods, or that man may become a god of his own world.

Tertullian - The Demurrer Against the Heretics [ca. A.D. 200]

Moreover, if there be any [heresies] bold enough to plant themselves in the midst of the apostolic age, so that they might seem to have been handed down by the Apostles because they were from the time of the Apostles, we can say to them: let them show the origins of their Churches, let them unroll the order of their bishops, running down in succession from the beginning, so that their first bishop shall have for author and predecessor some one of the Apostles or of the apostolic men who continued steadfast with the Apostles. For this is the way in which the apostolic Churches transmit their lists: like the Church of the Smyrnaeans, which records that Polycarp was placed there by John; like the Church of the Romans where Clement was ordained by Peter. In just this same way the other Churches display those whom they have as sprouts from the apostolic seed, having been established in the episcopate by the Apostles. (Jurgens, para 296)

Tertullian wrote these comments during his Catholic period from 197 to 206 A.D. when his writings are still marked by orthodoxy of opinion. It is a clear statement on Tradition

and apostolic succession. Subsequently, Tertullian abandoned the Great Church of the Catholics in order to adhere to the heresy of Montanism.

There is nothing more convincing than the testimonies and writings of those who were the immediate successors of the Apostles. They received their knowledge of the teachings of Christ directly from the Apostles and/or the bishops appointed by them.

The Shepherd of Hermas

Some LDS scholars have suggested that final call to repentance just prior to the Total Apostasy was given in the early second century by Hermas, brother of Pope Saint Pius I and author of The Shepherd. In it he records a series of revelations, probably given over a period of a few decades in the first half of the second century. Mormons say that the key to interpreting Hermas' purpose is contained in the first section of his work, the Visions. Here the Church was represented as a tower being built of stone, the stones representing individual Christians. Hermas related:

"And I began to ask her about the times, if the end were yet. But she cried out with a loud voice saying, "Foolish man, do you not see the tower still being built? Whenever therefore the building of the tower has been finished, the end comes. But it will quickly be built up; ask me nothing more."

LDS apologists conclude that the impending completion of the tower was given as the reason for the urgent call to one more chance for repentance. When asked what was represented by some stones which had been cast away by the builders but left on the ground near the tower, the angel explained that these were Christians who had sinned, but could still become part of the tower if they repented immediately.

"For if the building be finished, there will not be more room for any one, but he will be rejected. This privilege, however, will belong only to him who has now been placed near the tower."

We must agree with Mormons that the tower is indeed the church, as the woman says. However, if you read it carefully you will see that the completion of the tower does not occur until the end of time! The message from Hermas is that those who hold off repentance until the end will be rejected - it will be too late. If, as the LDS assert, this is a reference to a looming total apostasy, then the Mormons face two huge problems:

First, a tower successfully completed is not a suitable metaphor for an apostasy. If the tower being built were to "apostatize", it would be described as falling into disarray or corruption. This is not the case! According to the writings of Hermas it is being built of solid stone, unified and complete:

"Hear now with regard to the stones which are in the building. Those square white stones which fitted exactly into each other, are apostles, bishops, teachers, and deacons, who have lived in godly purity, and have acted as bishops and teachers and deacons chastely and reverently to the elect of God. Some of them

have fallen asleep, and some still remain alive. And they have always agreed with each other, and been at peace among themselves, and listened to each other. On account of this, they join exactly into the building of the tower." "But who are the stones that were dragged from the depths, and which were laid into the building and fitted in with the rest of the stones previously placed in the tower?" "They are those who suffered for the Lord's sake." "But I wish to know, O Lady, who are the other stones which were carried from the land." "Those," she said, "which go into the building without being polished, are those whom God has approved of, for they walked in the straight ways of the Lord and practiced His commandments." "But who are those who are in the act of being brought and placed in the building?" "They are those who are young in faith and are faithful. But they are admonished by the angels to do good, for no iniquity has been found in them."

Notice that everything in the tower is pure and uncorrupted, whereas the weak elements are thrown away. It seems that the tower of Hermas is not the image of a soon-to-crumble church as the Mormon apologists would have us believe.

The second problem with seeing the completion of the tower as the prelude to apostasy is the actions of the builders when they have completed it:

"The building of the tower will be finished, and all will rejoice together around the tower, and they will glorify God, because the tower is finished."

If the completion of the tower were to be followed by immediate and total destruction, it would not be a time for rejoicing. We can clearly see that even these questionable texts cannot be forced to fit the LDS theory of a total apostasy in the early Christian Church. According to Hermas, the "completion" of the church will occur at the glorious end of the age, when there will be rejoicing and victory, not total apostasy and subsequent loss of the Gospel in a fledgling church.

Additionally, the woman who interprets the vision is also representative of the church, as the text states repeatedly. She appears in the first four visions. It's interesting that in vision one, she's an old, weak woman. Vision two shows her younger and stronger. Vision three, younger and stronger still. In vision four she is a bridal virgin, full of life and vigor. If she is the church, and if the church were about to apostatize, the order would be reversed. She would start out as a bridal virgin and end as an old, weak woman crumbling to the ground.

The Mormon apologists insist on twisting the visions of Hermas to supposedly be a prophecy that the wicked world was to continue, but not the church. This is not the case! Over and over again the woman in the visions tells Hermas that the completion of the tower (the church) would come at the end of the world. A careful look at the fourth vision (<http://newadvent.org/fathers/0201104.htm>) clearly shows that the foundational theme of the visions is purely eschatological (from the Greek word eschaton, meaning "last"). In this fourth vision we see the woman (the church) appear after Hermas has

passed by the beast of the tribulation. He is told to go back and tell the elect of the Lord that they too can escape the tribulation of the beast if they prepare themselves, repent, and turn to the Lord. There is absolutely nothing in the text that would suggest that the "inferior place" will replace or succeed the tower. Rather, they are spoken of as existing simultaneously. Most likely the "inferior place" is the process of penance that sinners would have to undergo before their eventual re-admittance into the church. This fits well with the context, which mentions the sinners suffering and being purified, and finally being "transferred." The overall theme of the Shepherd of Hermas is a call to repentance and living a righteous life in the church (tower). These writings were important to early Christians because of the ethical concepts they contained and their relationship to the Sacrament of Penance.

Conclusion

Throughout the past two thousand years of history, Christianity has been defined by a few basic truths. All who call themselves Christian have acknowledged these truths as fundamental to the faith. First is the belief in One God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. Before we can believe in anything else we must first believe in God. Secondly, the faith of all Christians depends on our belief in the Holy Trinity as the central mystery of Christianity. We believe that the One God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Three Persons sharing one divine nature. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, three Divine Persons really distinct and equal in all things, yet they are one and the same God, having one and the same divine nature and substance. The Trinity is a strict mystery because it could not be rationally conceived before the self-revelation of God, and cannot be rationally comprehended (fully understood) even since its revelation. Another basic tenet of Christianity is the belief that Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, was born of the Virgin Mary and became man. He suffered and died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven. He rose from the dead and He ascended into heaven. We also believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Furthermore, we believe in the mercy of God - that He will reward us for our good deeds. We also believe He is a God of Justice - that He will punish those who have sinned. Therefore in order to be saved we must have faith, we must obey the Commandments of God and of the Church He established, we must have an active prayer life (communicate with and listen to God), and we must put into practice what we have learned.

God chose to reveal Himself to the children of Israel. He inspired the prophets of old to write down and pass on their understanding of who God is and what He wants from us. The history of salvation starts with our first parents, Adam and Eve, using their free will to disobey God by allowing themselves to be tempted to sin by the serpent (Satan). They and their offspring were cursed with the stain of original sin, which is the absence of God's presence (restored in Baptism). But God provided hope for the future. The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

([Genesis 3:14-15](#)) "The woman" He spoke of was the Virgin Mary. "Her seed" was the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." ([1 Corinthians 15:22](#)) Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who was born of the Virgin Mary, the second Eve, came to redeem us from the sin of the first Adam and to reconcile us with God. In order to fulfill God's plan for our salvation, Jesus chose Twelve Apostles to receive the fullness of the Gospel teachings. He specifically chose Peter to be the first in authority among the apostles. It was upon "this rock" (Peter) that Christ promised He would build His Church. It was to Peter alone that Christ gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven. He also promised Peter infallibility (the inability to err when teaching in matters of faith and morals) when He said, "whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ([Matthew 16:18-19](#))

Jesus Christ intended for His Church to continue teaching the Gospel with His authority until the end of time. Jesus is like the wise man who built His house (the Church) on a rock (Peter), "...it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock." ([Matthew 7:24-27](#)) He promised the gates of hell would not prevail against it when He said, "...you are Peter (Kepha - Rock), and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." ([Matthew 16:18](#)) In [Matthew 18:15-18](#) Jesus commands His followers to take disputes involving religious matters to the Church for resolution. He would not instruct us to do such a thing if He knew that the Church would soon fall into total apostasy and become corrupted. The Church must, out of necessity, always exist in order for Jesus to give such a command. [Matthew 28:19-20](#) provides the undeniable statement from Jesus that He would be with His Church until the end of time. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." It is impossible for the Church to apostatize and become doctrinally corrupt, for Jesus promised He would always remain in His Church. Lastly, St. Paul tells us that the Church is the pillar and ground (bulwark or foundation) of the truth. ([1 Timothy 3:15](#)) These are very strong words used to indicate strength, stability, and permanence. In order to be the pillar and foundation Paul speaks of, the Church must be a permanent teacher of truth, not a temporary household built upon sand only to be rebuilt later.

The Twelve Apostles chose others to be bishops (Greek meaning "an overseer"). These bishops were appointed by the Apostles to continue their mission from Christ. The bishop has the authority and power of Christ to administer all the sacraments, including ordination of other men to the priesthood. Apostolic succession was first demonstrated in [Acts 1:20-26](#) when Matthias was chosen to replace Judas. Every validly ordained bishop in the Catholic Church can trace his priesthood authority back through history to one of the Twelve Apostles. This authority has been passed on in an unbroken chain of ordinations by the laying-on of hands from the Apostles to their successors, the bishops, and to their successors, other bishops, and so on down the line throughout all of Catholic Christian history. The bishops of the Catholic Church are the successors to the Apostles in a continuous line of apostolic succession. The

Catholic Church has existed continuously since the time of the Apostles, and it was founded as an earthly organization upon Peter, the rock.

My brothers and sisters, the choices are quite simple. Either there was a "Total Apostasy" in the early Christian Church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ was lost to the world for hundreds of years, or the Christian Church has survived intact for almost 2,000 years through "Apostolic Succession". If we accept the "Total Apostasy" theory then we must believe that the Gospel was lost and the promises of Christ set forth in the Bible are meaningless. For argument's sake, let's say that the Gospel was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Even if that were true we have no assurance that it will not be corrupted again. According to Mormon teaching, Jesus Christ founded what would eventually become an apostate church built upon sand, both in the Holy Land and in the New World, according to the Book of Mormon. So Jesus lied when He promised the gates of hell would not prevail! Since He failed to establish a lasting church twice before, we may reasonably question whether or not He will succeed this time. Thus, logically we cannot trust the Word of God to contain the fullness of truth, hence the Mormon need for continuing revelation which updates and changes the truth. However, if the "Total Apostasy" theory cannot be proven by biblical or historical evidence, then the Ancient Church is in fact the same Catholic Church that we see today. No other Christian church can trace its authority unbroken back to the original apostolic source other than the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church established by Jesus Christ. We can be confident that the original Deposit of Faith was carefully handed down to us through "Apostolic Succession". We can also be sure that Jesus Christ kept His promises, that His Church survived, and that it will continue to proclaim the fullness of truth until the end of time.