

## **FOREWARD**

An excellent essay by Rollo Tomasi at MDB analysing the Swedish Rescue Fireside etc. Shows that definite threats were made and inadequate answers given. I cannot post a link so I will copy the whole post below, after the excerpt.

It further demonstrates 'The Emperor has No Clothes' and the 'Man behind the Curtain' is a fraud.

Senior people from the Church Historian's Office (including a GA) sent by the big 15, have no different answers than the mopologists.

***Here is an excerpt from Rollo's essay:-***

Conclusions:

I don't know why this Swedish episode has bothered me so much. None of the questions raised by the Swedish members are new to me – I've studied them all at one time or another. Moreover, none of the so-called "answers" offered by Turley are new to me – I've heard a variation of each by the apologists. So why am I troubled enough to write this incredibly long essay? I'm not really sure. Perhaps it was because of the very sincere Hans Mattsson and his search for truth, no matter how painful. Perhaps it was the anger I felt at the way the Swedish saints were treated at the meeting, particularly the threats and ultimatum made at the end. Perhaps it was because I once held the Church's top two historians in much higher esteem than the typical Mormon apologist, only to find that they were unable to provide anything better than the dribble already espoused by classic-FARMS. Whatever it was, I know the Church is in trouble. The questions raised by the Swedes will not go away – thanks to the Internet, they will be magnified. What can the Church do? I honestly don't know. A real paradigm shift (that would include an admission of mistakes and errors by men once viewed as infallible) may not be possible. But I do know the Church cannot ignore this or other data (such as John Dehlin's survey of doubting/leaving members). As Hans said in the Times interview, these problems are causing the Church to lose some of its best and brightest. That is truly sad.

## **ESSAY and ANALYSIS**

Post subject: FWIW, my thoughts on the "Secret" Swedish Meeting ...PostPosted: Thu Jul 25, 2013 2:31 pm

As were many others, I was astounded by the front-page article in the New York Times entitled "Some Mormons Search the Web and Find Doubt," published in the Sunday edition for July 20, 2013. The article focused on Hans Mattsson, a former member of the 3rd Quorum of the Seventy (i.e., an Area Seventy) residing in Sweden, and his path from true believer to doubting, semi-active member. Mattsson spoke of meetings with Church leaders in an effort to receive answers to difficult questions about LDS history, and, in particular, a November 2010 meeting in Sweden attended by Elder Marlin K. Jensen, then a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and Church historian (Jensen has since been retired), and his assistant historian, Richard E. Turley,

Jr.

After reading the fascinating article, I poked around the Internet for more information and found a treasure trove at the Mormon Stories website: a 5-part interview of Mattsson and his wife, Birgitta, by John Dehlin, as well as the written transcript (hereinafter, “Transcript”) from an audiotape of the November 2010 meeting with Jensen and Turley (the Transcript has since been taken down by Dehlin, but can be found in several other places online). The Transcript was even more astounding than the Times article, and the Mattsson interview by Dehlin helped fill in some holes in the Transcript. I also listened to the audiotape of the actual November 2010 meeting, from which the Transcript was made. Taken together, these sources reveal how serious the problem has become in Sweden.

FYI, my citations here are to the version of the Transcript that can be found as a PDF copy at the following link: <http://www.roadkilldelight.com/NOM/SFMJRT.pdf>

### **How the Meeting Came to Pass:**

The 2010 meeting in Sweden was extraordinary – I had never heard of the Church sending the top two men in its historical department (one of whom was a GA at the time) to the other side of the world to speak with just 20-25 LDS members with troubling questions about LDS history. Elder Jensen explained why he came to meet with this small group of Swedish saints:

#### **Quote:**

*This situation in Sweden is a little bit unique because it seems to involve a group of you who are loosely networked everywhere across the world because of the Internet and the explosion of information that has come. (Transcript at 4) (emphasis added).*

I’m not sure what Elder Jensen meant by this – perhaps that this small group of Swedish saints was having a great influence on LDS members throughout Sweden (or the world)? Obviously it was serious enough to require such a rare meeting.

In his interview with Dehlin (specifically, Part 4), Hans Mattsson mentioned that his brother, a church leader in Sweden (who I believe to be Leif Mattsson, Hans’s twin and a former (perhaps he still is) stake president in Sweden) called Church headquarters in Salt Lake to express concern about what was going on in Sweden (Mattsson didn’t give any detail of the specific “concern,” but it could have been the growing influence of a Mormon Stories group that had been organized in Sweden, which had 500 – 600 participants). Hans Mattsson recounted that he was told that “someone high up [at Church headquarters] said that historians would be sent.”

We know from Elder Jensen (as shown in the Transcript) that shortly before the 2010 meeting, Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve, accompanied by Elder Rasband of the Seventy, had visited Sweden, and that “as a result of that visit and some other things ...” Jensen and Turley were sent to Sweden. (Transcript at 3) (emphasis added). I wonder if the “some other things” included the telephone call to headquarters by Mattsson’s brother.

In any event, the meeting was “secret” (according to Hans Mattsson) and held on Sunday

evening, November 28, 2010, in the Västerhaninge Chapel in Stockholm, Sweden. According to Mattsson, only 20 to 25 Swedish members were in attendance. In addition to Elder Jensen and Bro. Turley, the LDS Church was represented at the meeting by Area President Erich W. Kopischke of the 1st Quorum of the Seventy, Area Seventy R. Ingvar Olsson, and several local stake presidents and bishops. The meeting apparently lasted several hours; according to one attendee, Church leaders also held another meeting that night (but just amongst themselves).

### **The Meeting Began and Ended with Threats to the Questioning Members:**

Before giving my observations about the “meat” of the meeting, let me say that I was struck by how the two General Authorities in attendance (Elders Jensen and Kopischke) began and ended the meeting with veiled and express threats toward the 20 - 25 Swedish members. Before asking for questions, Elder Jensen began the meeting with a discourse in order “to just create a little framework for our discussion tonight ....” (Transcript at 4). He then went on to read scripture verses about good and evil. He talked about the spirit of Christ, but then spent considerable time focusing on “the spirit of the devil” and our right to choose good or evil. I understood this part of the sermon to be Jensen’s subtle suggestion to the members that their questions and doubts stemmed from their being under the influence of Satan. Elder Jensen is a very nice man (I’ve met him a couple of times), and it’s not his style to offer negative statements directly – he tends to ‘beat around the bush’ to avoid offending anyone, but I think this was an odd way for him to start the meeting.

His colleague, in contrast, Area President Erich W. Kopischke, had no problem issuing a very direct threat to the members at the end of the meeting. Kopischke’s threat is not included on the audiotape or in the Transcript of the meeting – I obtained my information about it from Hans Mattsson’s interview with Dehlin (Part 4), which has been confirmed by comments of other attendees posted on the Mormon Stories website. This is how one attendee described it, after complaining that Turley kept using the excuse of “not enough time” to avoid answering questions:

#### **Quote:**

*The paradox was that the Area general authority [i.e., Kopischke] took almost an hour at the end, sharing the Korihor story[,] telling us not to disturb our friends in the Church[,] and make a decision to stay or leave. (See Comment by Jonathan Bautista on Mormon Stories, 7/22/13).*

According to Hans Mattsson (Part 4 of Dehlin interview), President Kopischke prohibited the members from speaking with anyone about what had been discussed during the meeting. Kopischke also gave the members an ultimatum to decide whether to stay in or leave the Church. In addition, he later directed the members’ bishops and stake presidents to speak with each of the members in attendance and get his/her answer about staying in or leaving the Church, which Mattsson said did occur (Mattsson, when asked for his answer by his bishop, responded that he “needed time” – I don’t know if Mattsson ever gave his bishop an answer).

Kopischke’s ultimatum and required follow-up were confirmed by two other attendees, both of whom posted on Mormon Stories. One attendee wrote:

**Quote:**

*I attended the meeting 2010. In a way I feel like defending Jensen and Turley. What else could they do and say? We received credit that our questions were valid and not just anti-lies, but there are [n]o answers and they could not fabricate any. In the meeting there were several bishops and SP's that had never even heard of these questions, together with us dissidents. Sometime later Jensen said that they were terrified what those leaders would think when they heard about all these issues for the first time. For me personally the aftermath of the meeting was that I was contacted and asked to resign voluntary otherwise I would be excommunicated for apostasy. I resigned. (See Comment by Christina Hanke on Mormon Stories, 7/21/13) (emphasis added).*

**Another attendee wrote:**

**Quote:**

*After years of study I also attended the meeting with Elder Jensen and Bro. Turley. They both came across as very caring and genuine people. The big take away for me at this meeting was that the questions I was having were legit. The history that was troubling me were events that really happened.*

...

*I too had meetings with stake presidents and bishops as well as stake representatives. Overall however I was treated very well.*

...

*The paradox was that the Area general authority took almost an hour at the end, sharing the Korihor story[,] telling us not to disturb our friends in the church[,] and make a decision to stay or leave.*

...

*For me it was valuable as it forced me to make a decision I haven't regretted.*

*Me and my wife have removed our names from the LDS records. We have also removed our children's name from the records. (See Comment by Jonathan Bautista on Mormon Stories, 7/22/13) (emphasis added).*

Well, at least with these members, Pres. Kopischke accomplished his mission that night – to get rid of meddlesome members once and for all. In his interview with Dehlin, Mattsson said that 5 or 6 members decided to leave the Church after being given the ultimatum at the meeting.

I personally think a primary reason for the meeting was to ferret out troublemakers and push them out of the Church, and not necessarily to answer tough historical questions. I don't think the meeting would have been held unless the leaders had met beforehand and mapped out a strategy. In fact, at the beginning of the meeting Elder Jensen foreshadowed Pres. Kopischke's later role, saying:

**Quote:**

*I want to thank President [Kopischke] for being here tonight [i.e., he had traveled from*

*Germany] as your area president and I want to invite him to say anything he wants to say at any point during the meeting, but he mentioned that he'll at least say something at the end if not before. (Transcript at 3) (emphasis added).*

I can't imagine Elder Jensen sitting still if he hadn't known that Pres. Kopischke would go after the members the way he did. This is why I am very troubled by Elder Jensen apparently going along with the ambush at the end of the meeting.

During his opening remarks, Elder Jensen had gone out of his way to try and put the members in attendance at ease:

**Quote:**

*I feel like we're among friends, brothers and sisters. I don't feel like this is a meeting of adversaries, of us against you, of you against us. We're all Latter-day Saints. (Transcript at 3) (emphasis added).*

A short time later, Elder Jensen offered: "I just wanted to begin in the spirit of love and common understanding with you ...." (Id. at 4).

If Elder Jensen knew of the ambush that was to come at the end of the meeting, then these statements were lies, pure and simple. Because of my great respect for Elder Jensen, I hope he didn't know of Pres. Kopischke's plan, but my gut tells me he probably did.

**Preparation by Jensen & Turley:**

According to Elder Jensen, he and Turley were "given, in advance, some indication of what your questions have been." (Transcript at 9). So one would think that they would be prepared to answer the tough questions, right? Wrong. In answering the questions, Turley in particular seemed very ill-prepared and often used the "we're out of time" excuse to move along to the next topic. I was very surprised by the way the Church's top two historians struggled to give cogent answers. It made me realize why Mormon apologists often come across so badly – even Church leaders have no clue as to how to answer the tough questions.

**The Handout Given to Members at the Meeting:**

Before trying to answer the questions, a handout was given to the members, which Elder Jensen described as showing "the five very best websites for authentic answers to [their] questions." (Transcript at 20). This was probably the same list later used as part of the "Swedish Rescue" (see mormonthink.com). I imagine the list included links to FAIR, Maxwell, FARMS, etc. In lauding these websites, Elder Jensen also brought up so-called "anti" sites:

**Quote:**

*Let me just say if you spend as much time on these five websites as you spent on other websites [i.e., "anti"], cause I have visited as has Brother Turley some of these anti-Mormon websites. And they're very dark to me. And Brother Turley and I know many of the people who maintain these websites, and I can say to you they're not the people whose teachings I'm going to follow.*

*(Transcript at 20-21) (emphasis added).*

I'm curious as to who are the "people" he claims to "know." Is he referring to John Dehlin or Dr. Shades? I'd love to know.

As far as I know, this handout is the closest thing to what the Church has offered members as some sort of "answers" to tough questions. In the Times article, there was mention by Hans Mattsson of a visit to Sweden by an unnamed "senior apostle," who told a meeting of Swedish members "that he had a manuscript in his briefcase that, once it was published, would prove all the doubters wrong." According to Mattsson, the mysterious "manuscript" never appeared, and when Mattsson later asked the apostle about it, "he was told it was impertinent to ask." The Times article strongly suggested that this unnamed apostle was Elder L. Tom Perry -- a Church spokesman confirmed that Elder Perry did visit a branch in Sweden with skeptical members, to whom he gave a letter written by the Church's history department that, as he recalled, satisfied their questions. So, what was the "manuscript" and has it ever been published? And what was in the letter written by the Church history department and handed out to the Swedes? I have no idea.

In the Transcript, Elder Jensen also mentioned a special committee organized to come up with official answers to tough questions:

**Quote:**

*By and large, I'd like you to know that as a Church history department we have at President Packer's direction put together a committee to create answers to difficult gospel questions. We are working on these answers now and we're also giving thought to how we will disseminate these answers to the world. We don't want a website where people come to Mormon problems, obviously. (Transcript at 21).*

It's now been nearly 3 years since Elder Jensen said this, and I don't recall seeing anything "official" that answers the tough questions, from this "committee" or otherwise. What's taking so long? It seems as if the Church just wants to continue to rely on non-official apologist websites like FAIR, etc., to do the Church's job of coming up with answers. Turley admitted in the Swedish meeting that an official Church website with answers didn't exist at the time. (See Transcript at 21). I think this is still true today, which tells me the Church does not have answers to the tough questions.

**Some Questions and Attempts to Answer:**

The meat of the meeting involved the discussion of 15 questions raised by the members in attendance and the attempts (mostly by Turley) to answer them. Only the first two or three questions raised were discussed in depth – the others were mentioned very quickly due to "lack of time." I will only discuss in this post the four questions I thought received the most attention.

***These four questions are summarized as follows:***

1. Why does the Church not accurately depict the method by which the Book of Mormon was translated from the Gold Plates (i.e., the incorrect depiction of Joseph reading directly from the plates vs. the correct depiction of Joseph looking at a seer stone with his head buried in a hat)? As a corollary, why were the plates preserved for 1,500 years but never used in the translation process?
2. Was polygamy, and especially Joseph Smith's polyandry, a teaching from God? As a corollary, was it from God that Joseph pressured/forced many women to become his plural wives?
3. Why doesn't the Book of Abraham translation match up with Egyptologists' translations of the papyri?
4. Why does DNA evidence not support the historicity of the Book of Mormon?

### **Misrepresentation of the Book of Mormon translation process:**

As we have all seen, the many artistic depictions of the Book of Mormon translation process shown in Church magazines and manuals, temple visitor centers, etc., misrepresent what really occurred. These pictures always show Joseph at a table with the Gold Plates in front of him and he is reading the markings (some pictures show him placing a finger on the plates to keep his place). We now know, and Jensen and Turley admitted at the meeting, there is no evidence that Joseph ever used the physical plates to translate the Book of Mormon – all testimony from persons who would have known state that Joseph translated by placing a seer stone in the bottom of a hat and then placing his face fully in the hat to read the translation. But, yet, the Church continues to use false depictions of the process – I have NEVER seen the Church use any picture that suggested Joseph put his face in a hat to read a seer stone. I certainly can understand why the Church avoids showing this – sticking one's head in a hat to read a magic stone is a lot nuttier than one's using actual plates to translate. But it's still a fraud, which was the Swedish members' beef.

Turley tried to answer this question. He started off by blaming the artists because the false depiction was “their idea of what it must have been like.” (Transcript at 23). This is pretty lame, imo. The Church didn't have to use these pictures in its magazines, manuals, and visitor centers – the Church consciously chose to do so, knowing they were false depictions.

Turley went on to say that the Church is trying “to bring the curriculum in conformity with the sources.” (Id.). Does this mean the Church will soon replace the old pictures with a new rendition showing Joseph's face in a hat? That'll never happen.

As an example of changing the curriculum to be more historically accurate, Turley mentioned the story of Joseph and Oliver receiving the Aaronic Priesthood from John the Baptist (in D&C 13) on the “banks of the Susquehanna River,” which will soon be changed to reflect that the event actually occurred in the “woods” near the river. (Transcript at 24). “Banks” vs. “woods” – BFD! But officially teaching the “face in the hat” translation process? Now that would be a big

deal!

A Swedish member then asked how the translation of the Book of Mormon actually happened. Turley responded that the word “translation” in connection with the Book of Mormon is not used in the way most people would interpret the word (such as translating a text from one language to another). According to Turley, the word “translation” actually meant “revelation.” (Id.). In this way, Joseph could simply stick his head in a hat with the seer stone and the English version of the Book of Mormon text would be “revealed” to him – there would be no need to use the actual Gold Plates in the process.

This answer led to more questions from the members: why the need for the plates?, why the Urim and Thummim?, and why the hat? Turley said the physical plates were needed because they “were real and they were preserved and they were passed down from generation to generation.” (Transcript at 25). So what? We know that Joseph never used the plates to translate; moreover, we also know that the “face in the hat” method worked just fine to give us what Joseph described as “the most correct of any book on earth.” Turley’s “answer” was just stupid, and I can see why one Swede piped up shortly thereafter, “Can you see that we[] feel deceived?” (Id. at 26).

Turley went on to claim that the hat was necessary “to block light out so that Joseph ... could see what he was doing with the record.” (Id. at 25). Turley then added: “Sometimes the light, you know, affects your spirit.” (Id.). Huh? I always thought of light as having a positive effect on one’s spirit, and the dark just the opposite. And couldn’t Joseph have accomplished the same thing by reading his seer stone in a darkened room or doing it at night? The hat thing is just kinda creepy.

Turley then explained the need for a physical Urim and Thummim (as well as seer stones) by making a comparison to Moses’ “brass serpent on the rod” and the “Ark of the Covenant” – forms of “tangible manifestations that are used to focus faith.” (Transcript at 25). Again, so what? Turley related that Joseph didn’t need the Urim and Thummim (or seer stone) when he later translated the Bible because Joseph had matured spiritually enough that he no longer needed a physical aid to “focus [his] faith.” (Id. at 25-26). Whatever you say ....

At this point some members started to express their displeasure at how things were going, with one even stating: “But the thing is, we won’t get answers. They [i.e., Jensen and Turley] already said that. Then we need to choose one question and get all their answers.” (Transcript at 26).

This outburst caused Elder Jensen to step in and try to quell the rising rebellion. He essentially bore his testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and told the members the book exists and it’s up to them to obtain answers through the spirit. (Id. at 27). Turley, apparently grateful for the help, then jumped in with this old chestnut: Joseph translated the Book of Mormon over a period of 60-90 working days, and no author (including Turley) could do this without the help of the Lord. (Id.). This drew one of the more interesting responses by a member:

**Quote:**

*That is amazing. But those are not the questions [i.e., answers?] we want. (Transcript at 27)*



*(emphasis added).*

This must have spooked Turley, because he immediately said, “OK. We’ll move on.” (Id.). BUT the members wouldn’t let him. One quickly asked why the Church doesn’t “present about the seer stone more efficiently?” (Id.). Turley responded that the early Church did talk about the seer stones “often,” but that each successive generation talked about it less because “[e]ach generation retells the story according to their own circumstances.” (Id.).

This explanation led to one of the more interesting exchanges of the night. A member asked: “But we are led by revelation, the Church, so I mean, shouldn’t, then, the leaders correct so that not people [of] every generation change the story?” (Transcript at 28). Seems like a reasonable question to me. But Turley completely blew the answer:

**Quote:**

*Much of what you get about history comes from historians[,] from the people like me who do the best they can under the circumstances of their time. And then somebody else comes along, later, with new discoveries, new documents, and they rewrite it. OK? So it’s – Don’t put the responsibility on the prophet, but [put] it on ordinary people like me who do the best we know how to do it. But somebody will come along later and do it better. (Transcript at 28) (emphasis added).*

Wow. So why the hell do we need a prophet? Turley seemed to be saying that LDS history, which forms the basis for many testimonies (such as the First Vision, the Book of Mormon, angelic visitations to restore priesthood keys, etc.), is just one historian away from being changed. That sure is comforting.

**Joseph Smith’s Polygamy and Polyandry:**

If the discussion about the Book of Mormon translation was testy, the discussion about polygamy, particularly Joseph’s polyandry, was downright heated. And it wasn’t helped by Turley continually dodging questions.

Turley began by admitting that Joseph Smith did practice polygamy AND polyandry. (Transcript at 28). As for how many wives Joseph had, Turley didn’t have an answer but said that later publications of the Joseph Smith Papers will “answer that question in the future.” (Id.). Turley refused to go into specifics about why Joseph married women who were already married to other men, saying:

**Quote:**

*That actually boils down to a marriage by marriage statement. And it’s fairly complex but it’s an excellent question. We just don’t have the time tonight to answer it, but there are answers. (Id. at 29) (emphasis added).*

Since Turley didn’t have the time, perhaps he should have referred the members to Todd Compton’s excellent book, *In Sacred Loneliness*, which did perform a “marriage by marriage” analysis that Turley said was necessary to answer the question. And if, as Turley claims, “there

are answers,” WHERE are they? He, of course, doesn’t say.

A member then asked Turley if polygamy is a “principle” we believe in and could it be “practiced that way?” – which I believe was a reference to polyandry. Here was Turley’s very deft dodge:

**Quote:**

*I’m not a prophet so I can’t tell you about the future. I’ve said to people who have asked me this question, do you think this is going to come back, I say, I think I have a better chance of being hit by a meteorite from space than having this come back. (Transcript at 29) (emphasis added).*

Turley didn’t realize it, but he had just walked into a trap. A member quickly reminded Turley that polygamy is “still here now” and practiced by the LDS Church. The member was referring to the official policy in Handbook 1 that allows a living man who married his first wife in the temple (but is now either widowed or civilly divorced) to marry a second wife for time and all eternity in the temple, whereas a living woman who married her first husband in the temple (but is now either widowed or civilly divorced) cannot be sealed to a second husband unless the first sealing is cancelled. One-quarter of the Quorum of the Twelve (Elders Perry, Nelson and Oaks) practices this form of spiritual polygamy -- after being widowed, each married a second wife for time and all eternity in the temple.

This policy can be extremely cruel. For example, it is also official policy that if a woman who was married to a first husband in the temple (and is later widowed or civilly divorced, but the sealing is not cancelled), later marries a second husband, all children she has with her second husband will be turned over (with her) to the first husband in the hereafter. Yikes!

Turley tried to wiggle out of this by referring to D&C 132 and the promise that “you’ll be together. Do we know a lot about how that works? We really don’t.” (Transcript at 29). Umm, Rick, we really DO know a lot about how it works, which is why the Church has a very detailed and official policy about it in Handbook 1 (discussed above, and which members are not allowed to see).

One tenacious Swede could not accept Turley’s answer. This amazing colloquy followed:

**Quote:**

*MEMBER: But do we believe in it [i.e., polygamy]?*

*TURLEY: Do we believe in the 132nd section? Yes, we do.*

*MEMBER: So we believe in polygamy.*

*TURLEY: We don’t practice polygamy on earth.*

*MEMBER: Yes we do, we go to the temple and seal them.*

*TURLEY: But you know what I mean.*

*MEMBER: No.*

*TURLEY: One man, one wife at a time on earth.*

*MEMBER: Yeah, but if it was legal today, would we have two wives? Could I take another?*

*TURLEY: It would not change from the current position until the prophet said so. And as I said, I can't predict the future.*

*MEMBER: But you must answer, I think you can answer at least, do we believe in polygamy? We don't practice it, but we believe in it because we are sealing more wives to one man.*

*TURLEY: Well, we believe in the sealing of people. The reason I hesitate to say we believe in polygamy is if I say that then people will say, well then you have more than one wife, right? You don't, right? Nobody else here does, either, I believe. That's why I say it the way I say it, OK?*

*MEMBER: Is that your technical way ....?*

*TURLEY: No, nobody's telling me anything.*

*MEMBER: Do we believe in polygamy?*

*TURLEY: WE DO BELIEVE IN POLYGAMY; we don't practice polygamy. That's what I'm trying to say.*

*(Transcript at 29-30) (italics in original; bold and capitalization added).*

Turley must have been sweating bullets after that exchange. But it wouldn't get any easier. Another member then brought up Joseph's polyandry in scathing terms (the question is very long, so I tried to condense it):

**Quote:**

*Can you please try to convince us how this [i.e., polyandry] can be Christ-like, like Joseph Smith? To take the wives or have sex with wives that are already married to other men? ... I like to say they were extremely unhappy because they were forced by ... pure pressure. And they didn't do it because of love, they didn't do it because of infatuation, just it was they were forced into [the] situation. ... But we have this situation with a person who calls himself the second next to Christ, you know? And the founder of this church. ... To take other women in a secret way, force them into some kind of marriage, I would like to call it mistresses, or forcing 14-year old girls to marry him against her obvious will, I just don't understand. Behind his own wife, even the counselors in the Relief Society, Lavina Smith [ed. note: ? – may mean Eliza R. Snow, Emma's counselor], were his secret wives. The deeper you go on this the worse it becomes. This*

is true. (Transcript at 30-31).

Turley again looked for an ‘escape hatch’:

**Quote:**

*Let me just say, if we had more time we could dissect this wife by wife, which is pretty much what you have to do to get to the answers on this matter. We don’t have that kind of time. (Id. at 31) (emphasis added).*

Since there was not enough time, Turley again should have referred the member to Compton’s In Sacred Loneliness, which contained the very type of “wife by wife dissection” that Turley says is required to find the answer.

This questioner still wouldn’t let Turley off the hook. Despite the “lack of time,” the member asked: “Is it true in general? Or is it not true at all?” (Id.). Turley was cornered, so he finally admitted the obvious:

**Quote:**

*It’s true that Joseph Smith practiced plural marriage in that he had wives who were not married to anybody else[;] it’s true that he practiced polyandry and he did have wives who were married to somebody else. (Id.) (emphasis added).*

The member smelled blood, and went for the jugular: “14 years old? 16 years old?” (Id.). Poor Turley – yet another admission he didn’t want to make, but this time he at least tried to muster some explanation for Joseph’s inexcusable behavior:

**Quote:**

*He had a wife who was 14 years old, but remember, on the frontier in America, women married young, often as young as 12 years of age because the life span of people in those days wasn’t what it is today. On the frontier, not as much in the rest of America, but on the frontier, if you look at population studies, if you look at censuses of people across the American frontier at the time, they often married quite young. So marrying a 14 year old in those days was not the same – it was like marrying a 21 year old today. (Transcript at 32) (emphasis added).*

How lame was that answer? Utterly awful! As a “historian,” Turley is well aware that Helen Mar Kimball (the 14-year old wife in question) did not live “on the frontier” at the time she was pressured into marrying Joseph Smith. She lived in Nauvoo, which was a real city with brick homes, roads, a theater, and stores; in fact, Nauvoo for a time was bigger than Chicago! So what the hell is Turley talking about when he proffers a bogus “frontier” argument to excuse Joseph’s marriage to a 14-year old? Turley also failed to realize that even if a girl as young as 12 years old “on the frontier” did marry, this cannot be compared to a 14-year old girl marrying a man in his late 30’s and who already had a number of other wives. Turley’s “frontier” defense is embarrassing, particularly coming from the #2 guy in the LDS Church’s history department. Couldn’t he have come up with a better answer? No wonder the Swedish members were so pissed.

I think Turley knew he had given a crappy “answer,” because he quickly tried to move on:

**Quote:**

*My point is there was a different societal normalized age of marriage in those days. Let’s move on. This is a complicated one. (Transcript at 32) (emphasis added).*

You bet it was a “complicated one,” because this member was not willing to “move on,” and, instead, asked Turley:

**Quote:**

*You think that’s the most important question? Does the Church recognize this practice as being OK? Does the Church officially endorse this? Or do they recognize that it might actually have been in error? Do you have an opinion on that from the Church? (Id.) (emphasis added).*

This member wanted the answer now. And Turley just couldn’t give her one:

**Quote:**

*I’ve never seen a formal statement about that. (Id.).*

The member nevertheless kept at it, and, FINALLY, forced Turley to give a real answer:

**Quote:**

*MEMBER: The basic question here is of course then, was this a mistake done by Joseph Smith? And if it was, how could he continue to be a prophet? And if it was not a mistake, it must be endorsed by the Church, I guess.*

*TURLEY: What the Church does say on these questions about Joseph Smith in general is this: either Joseph was a prophet of God or wasn’t. Correct? And the way in which you decide that, not just intellectually, but spiritually, is the way that Elder Jensen talked about at the beginning. That’s the official Church statement on the matter. I’ve never seen an official Church statement that goes into the details. (Transcript at 32) (emphasis added).*

So there you have it. Turley had NO answer to give other than it’s up to the individual member to decide (both “intellectually” and “spiritually”) whether Joseph Smith was or was not a prophet of God. That’s the best answer the Church can give? So much for answering the tough questions.

This member still wouldn’t let Turley go, following up Turley’s last answer with this emotional plea for help:

**Quote:**

*But why does my spirit talks to me and screams wrong, wrong, wrong, even if it’s a prophet of God? Do I have the devil in me who’s talking to me and says I should understand this 14 and 16-year old girls marrying? I can’t – my spirit doesn’t – I can’t get it through my mind. Is it the devil speaks to me? That I should accept that because Joseph Smith is a prophet? So he did that*

*right, it was God told him to do that? Go behind Emma and take these wives? (Id. at 32-33) (emphasis added).*

This statement broke my heart. Here was a member who could not reconcile his spirit with Church history. He wanted help. He wanted answers, something to comfort his soul. Turley offered nothing; instead, Pres. Kopischke jumped in to bear his testimony that there are a lot of things in the scriptures that he does not understand (using as examples the stringent Law of Moses and Jesus breaking the Word of Wisdom by drinking wine), but that he believed that Moses was a prophet and that Joseph was a prophet. (Transcript at 33). This “testimony” comes across as pretty hollow now, since we know that this same man was planning to ambush the members with threats and an ultimatum at the end of the meeting.

### **Book of Abraham problems:**

Turley was relieved he could finally move on to problems with the Book of Abraham translation. Turley provided this “position” of the Church relating to the Book of Abraham:

#### **Quote:**

*The Church does believe that the Book of Abraham is the word of God and if you read the Book of Abraham, there are doctrines and principles you will understand that are important to you. That is the Church’s position. Exactly how Joseph Smith did it? There are lots of scholarly debates going on about that. But there’s excellent work going on at BYU that should be out in the next year. That’s all I have time to say about that. (Transcript at 34) (emphasis added).*

Turley then made these interesting admissions:

- a. The papyri in the Church’s possession are from the Egyptian Book of Breathings (Turley didn’t say this explicitly – he said: “The papyrus that we have we know what books those are from [in] Egyptian.”); and*
- b. The papyri in the Church’s possession are a copy of the original text (i.e., the fragment is 1,500 years old, the text much older). (See Transcript at 34-35).*

A Swedish member then raised the controversy surrounding the so-called “Kinderhook Plates,” which were a hoax intended to trap Joseph. Turley refused to concede that Joseph had been duped, saying:

#### **Quote:**

*[T]here’s clear evidence that Joseph wanted to translate them and never did. Why didn’t he? I think because they were a fraud. (Transcript at 35) (emphasis added).*

Of course, this statement does not jive with the evidence. William Clayton, Joseph’s private secretary, wrote this contemporary account in his journal:

#### **Quote:**

*I have seen 6 brass plates ... covered with ancient characters of language containing from 30 to*

*40 on each side of the plates. Prest J. has translated a portion and says they contain the history of the person with whom they were found and he was a descendant of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth. (William Clayton's Journal, May 1, 1843, as cited in Trials of Discipleship - The Story of William Clayton, a Mormon, p. 117) (emphasis added).*

In response to a member who brought up this evidence, Turley said that the statements showing that Joseph did try to translate the phony plates, such as the one above by William Clayton, were “so contradictory, they’re unreliable. OK. Let’s continue through very quickly.” (Id. at 35). When asked if this was the Church’s official position on the matter, Turley demurred:

**Quote:**

*Again there isn’t an official Church – these are scholarly debates, there’s no official Church thing on that. (Id. at 36).*

In other words, there is NO answer or position on the Kinderhook Plates, either.

**Lack of Book of Mormon evidence:**

The final question I’ll discuss here concerns Turley’s discussion of the Book of Mormon and the lack of evidence for its historicity. Turley focused on the DNA evidence and what it means for the Book of Mormon. Turley is a lawyer-turned-historian. He conceded he is not a scientist; however, this did not stop him from giving a long, drawn-out explanation for why DNA evidence is not relevant to the historicity of the Book of Mormon (See Transcript at 45-46).

I’m not a scientist, either, so DNA-speak is mostly mumbo-jumbo to me. However, I find Turley’s claim that DNA is irrelevant because “[w]e do not know what Lehi’s DNA was[,]” to be untenable. Lehi came from Jerusalem. Lehi is a descendant of Joseph of the House of Israel. So can’t we be confident that Semitic (i.e., Middle Eastern) blood flowed through Lehi and his family?

Simon Southerton, a real scientist and geneticist, seems to think so. In a direct response to Turley’s claim, Southerton recently wrote:

**Quote:**

*1. Lineage extinction through marriage:*

*Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA has very effectively told us that between 99.6% and 100% of the DNA of Native Americans is derived from Asia. LDS scholars have conceded this. The claim of lineage extinction through marriage is misleading. We also now have nuclear DNA studies that support the Y and MtDNA studies. Native American nuclear DNA is derived from Asia.*

## 2. We don't have Lehi's DNA:

*We do not need Lehi's DNA to be able to tell if Native American DNA came from Israel. LDS apologists have accepted the Asian origin of Native American DNA in the absence of any 3,000 year old Asian DNA. Lehi's DNA would have been Middle Eastern in appearance and we do not see Middle Eastern DNA in Native Americans. (Simon Southerton post at Mormon Stories on 7/22/13) (emphasis added).*

Turley was then asked at the meeting, "You don't think that he [i.e., Lehi] was from the House of Israel?" Turley gave this baffling answer: "Yes, but so is most of the world today." (Transcript at 46). I have no idea what Turley meant by this, but it sounds absurd. And the Swedish members thought so, too.

Turley must have realized he hadn't persuaded anyone, because he next pulled this out:

### Quote:

*I grew up with a Ph.D father who was a scientist, OK, he was a nuclear engineer and I was taught scientific method and statistics and the importance of recognizing the limitations of science. What I'm saying about DNA is it's an extremely important tool for finding out where peoples come from. Its limitation is, it can't tell us about all the people who used to exist, it can only tell us about some. Now, maybe someday, the technology will improve. But today, it can't. So, because of these limitations, for anybody who claims one position or another on Lehi's families is inconsistent with the science. That's all I'm saying. (Id. at 47) (emphasis added).*

This is a bunch of hooey. If Lehiters and Mulekites lived in America and eventually numbered in the millions (as suggested by the Book of Mormon text), and are among the ancestors of present-day Native Americans/Lamanites, then at least a trace of Semitic blood would be found today. Scientists are finding Neanderthal DNA in today's humans, and, yet, Turley thinks technology is not good enough to find Semitic blood in descendants just 1,500 years later? That's ridiculous.

## CONCLUSION

I don't know why this Swedish episode has bothered me so much. None of the questions raised by the Swedish members are new to me – I've studied them all at one time or another. Moreover, none of the so-called "answers" offered by Turley are new to me – I've heard a variation of each by the apologists. So why am I troubled enough to write this incredibly long essay? I'm not really sure. Perhaps it was because of the very sincere Hans Mattsson and his search for truth, no matter how painful. Perhaps it was the anger I felt at the way the Swedish saints were treated at the meeting, particularly the threats and ultimatum made at the end. Perhaps it was because I once held the Church's top two historians in much higher esteem than the typical Mormon apologist, only to find that they were unable to provide anything better than the dribble already espoused by classic-FARMS. Whatever it was, I know the Church is in trouble. The questions raised by the Swedes will not go away – thanks to the Internet, they will be magnified. What can the Church do? I honestly don't know. A real paradigm shift (that would include an admission of



mistakes and errors by men once viewed as infallible) may not be possible. But I do know the Church cannot ignore this or other data (such as John Dehlin's survey of doubting/leaving members). As Hans said in the Times interview, these problems are causing the Church to lose some of its best and brightest. That is truly sad.