MORMON PRIMER

An examination of controversial issues within Mormonism from multiple Perspectives
Purpose

The major aim of this article is to present some of Mormonism’s most controversial issues from various perspectives including mainstream, critical, and apologetic, as well as to suggest some ways the issues can be reconciled to faith. We acknowledge that individual belief is dynamic and varied, and as such, this is not meant to confine personal belief to any one perspective. Readers likely identify with elements of multiple perspectives. Helpful resources are provided as footnotes throughout and resources at the end of each section for further research.

Four Perspectives Utilized

- **Mainstream**: The perspective that members of the Church generally hold.

- **Critical**: The perspective of those who see the LDS Church’s truth claims as completely false.

- **Apologetic**: The perspective of those who know the critic’s argument and offer a counter argument.

- **Reconciled**: The perspective of Mormons who have integrated the historical facts or criticisms with their Mormon beliefs into a new faithful approach.
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Chapter 1:
Treasure Digging and Folk Magic of Joseph Smith and His Family

Mainstream View:

The view among Mainstream members is that Joseph Smith had only trivial involvement in treasure digging. The two quotes most often used within Church publications is Joseph Smith’s own third person statement about himself:

“Was not Joseph Smith a money digger? Yes, but it was never a very profitable job for him, as he only got fourteen dollars a month for it.” - Joseph Smith

And this quote by Joseph Smith:

“I continued to work for nearly a month, without success in our undertaking, and finally I prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it. Hence, arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money-digger.” - Joseph Smith

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1 Joseph Smith, Elders’ Journal of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [Kirtland, Ohio] 2 no. 3 (July 1838), 43. Also reproduced in Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 120; History of the Church 3:29; Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 271.
2 https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1.11?lang=eng
General membership has never had the term “treasure digging” defined\(^3\) at length and the explanations given leave much room for misunderstanding. The details are generally told in a way that implies Joseph was hired along with other men to use shovels to dig for treasure at the behest of others who direct where and how these digs take place. The following example is found in a Church periodical:

> His [Joseph Smith’s] judgment and good sense were continuing to develop, because in the year he turned twenty he was able to persuade his employer to quit digging for treasure. Joseph had gone to work for Josiah Stoal for fourteen dollars a month. Along with many people in this part of New York, Mr. Stoal (Josiah Stowell) dug for buried treasure.\(^4\)

This presents Joseph as just a hireling, while Josiah Stowell is the key figure pursuing treasure digging. The average member has little awareness of folk magic practices by the Smith family\(^5\) and, by extension, folk magic practiced by a number of individuals in the greater Palmyra area. There are only cursory mentions of any treasure diggers in the Palmyra area with the focus of such being on Sally Chase and her effort to locate the gold plates on the Smith property through the use of her “green glass through which she could see many wonderful things.”\(^6\) The general membership is left to think there is little noteworthy of Joseph’s treasure digging, the folk magic practices of the Smith family, or the Palmyra area in general.

**Critical View:**

The Critic argues that Joseph’s treasure digging was more vast and expansive. Dan Vogel, a scholar of Mormonism, reports at least 17 treasure digging sites in the Palmyra area\(^7\). Joseph Smith was involved with many of these sites. However, Joseph was not hired to shovel where directed, but rather, he was hired for his skill of locating treasure; which he did by placing a peep stone in a hat, burying his face into the crown of the hat, and telling others where to dig. These treasure digs were not small holes, but massive caves dug into the side of a hill\(^8\). In these treasure digs as the men directed by Joseph thought they were getting close to the treasure, Joseph would inform them he could see in

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\(^3\) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrying](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrying)  
\(^5\) [http://www.conchisle.com/magic.htm](http://www.conchisle.com/magic.htm)  
\(^6\) Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 150, 149.  
\(^7\) [http://undergroundnotes.com/graphics7/Dialogue_V27N03_211.pdf](http://undergroundnotes.com/graphics7/Dialogue_V27N03_211.pdf)  
the stone that the Spanish gold or silver they sought had slipped further into the earth becoming unattainable, and hence no treasure was ever recovered. Folk magic practices of that time dictated that hidden treasures were protected by guardian spirits who could be thwarted off by magic spells, incantations⁹, and animal sacrifices¹⁰. The Critic points out that Joseph got his first seer stone in 1819 at age 13, one year prior to the first vision¹¹. He later found his second seer stone, the one used for the Book of Mormon translation, in 1822, only one year before his first visit from Moroni. The Critic also would have it known that one of Joseph’s treasure digs, unrelated to the Nephite plates, took place on the Hill Cumorah. Joseph is also believed to have been mentored in treasure digging by a scryer named Luman Walters. One source says:

In 1822 and 1823, Luman Walter served as a seer for a treasure dig on the property of Abner Cole in Palmyra, Wayne County, New York. Joseph Smith, Sr., Alvin Smith, and Joseph Smith, Jr. reportedly participated in this dig. Walter possessed a magical book and a seer stone, which he used to locate buried treasure. Walter is said to have conducted three unsuccessful digs on the hill Cumorah, but later suggests that only Smith might be able to find the treasure there.

The Critic also points out that the Smith family was heavily involved in folk magic practices such as water witching, scrying and magic incantations, and as already discussed, treasure digging. There is no evidence that Joseph successfully found treasure using these methods. As a result, the Critic believes that Joseph was at best self-deluded and at worst knew he really couldn’t find treasure and was therefore deceiving others. Lorenzo Saunders, a neighbor of the Smiths, shared that Joseph Smith’s father, Joseph Smith Sr.:

“was always telling yarns, he would go to turkey shoots and get tight [i.e., drunk] and he would pretend to put spells on their guns and would tell them they could not shoot a turkey.”

The Critic uses all this information to show that Joseph’s story of Moroni and gold plates is simply a continuation of his pattern for deceiving others regarding buried treasure and the magical devices he used to try to locate that treasure. Moroni, gold plates, seer stones, and the Hill Cumorah show too much

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⁹ http://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/review/18/1/S00005-5176a9476bf735McGee.pdf
¹⁰ Emily Coburn, in Emily M. Austin, Mormonism; or, Life Among the Mormons, 1882, pp. 32-33
resemblance to the treasure digging culture of Joseph Smith’s youth, his family, and his community; as such it is too much to be a coincidence for the critic.

**Apologetic View:**

The Apologist suggests that the prevalence of treasure digging in Palmyra’s culture was not unusual or strange, in spite of one’s modern prejudices when first encountering this information. Such practices could be comparable to today’s gambling in a casino or buying a lottery ticket or superstitious practices such as divining rods used to find water and hence where to dig a well. The Apologetic view maintains that angels, gold plates buried in a hill, and a urim and thummim/seer stone are demonstrably different articles than hidden Spanish silver mines, peep stones, caves dug into hills, and spirit guardians of buried treasure.

**Reconciled View:**

The Reconciled viewpoint acknowledges that the similarities between Joseph’s earlier treasure digging and his experience with Moroni and the Gold Plates is discomforting. The Reconciled view is open to concerns that the Smith’s folk magic practices were superstitious and not based in religion or science and wonder how it influenced later experiences that were claimed to be from God. Some Reconciled perspectives would allow the possibility that Joseph, in his youth, was either self-deluded or outright deceiving people by letting them pay him to locate treasure, treasure he claimed to see with his seer stone, but never uncovered, and never was found to exist. Notwithstanding these events, the Reconciled would ask that we pause and recognize that God often works through the weak to bring about his purposes.\(^{12}\) We cannot expect a prophet to be a person of superior morality and righteousness.\(^{13}\) We can concede that our modern view of 19th century folk magic may be insensitive and judgmental of practices that were mostly common to the people of Palmyra, New York and an early 1800’s frontier culture. A Reconciled View could even allow for the treasure digging of Joseph’s youth to have been utilized by God to prepare him to act in faith regarding the angel Moroni and the Gold Plates. Joseph, as a

\(^{12}\) Alma 37:7  
\(^{13}\) D&C 1:24-28
young man who believes in things that are unseen, might more easily have the necessary faith for the work God was about to do.

**Resources for Personal Research**

http://en.fairmormon.org/Joseph_Smith/Money_digging

http://www.mormonthink.com/QUOTES/gold.htm


http://www.mormonstories.org/top10toughissues/peepstones.html

http://undergroundnotes.com/graphics7/Discourse_V27N03_211.pdf


http://richkelsey.org/joseph_smith_money_digging_accounts.html


Chapter 2:  
Joseph Smith’s First Vision

Mainstream View:

This view professes that there was religious excitement in Joseph’s neck of the woods and that he was wrestling with which church was true. Joseph came across James 1:5 and this scripture had a deep impact on him. This consequently led to him, at age 14, going into a grove of trees on spring morning in 1820 near his home and pleading to know which church was true. After a short interaction with the adversary, Joseph saw a pillar of light, and in that light, descended two personages, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. They spoke to him and informed him that none of the churches on the earth were true and that the creeds of those churches were an abomination to them, and forbade him to join any of them. In the end, the Mainstream View holds that what the official 1838 account says happened, is what happened. Any differences in other accounts are ignored or considered inconsequential.
Critical View:

The Critic of the First Vision points out that there are four separate firsthand accounts recorded, not to mention several second and thirdhand accounts. These firsthand accounts were written long after this seemingly important event and years apart from each other. While this is considered an essential part of the foundational narrative of the Church today, most early members were completely unaware of it. The Critic notes that these accounts contradict each other in ways that are irreconcilable. Joseph's environment, his motives, his experience, and even who appeared are all dramatically different in the four accounts. These contradictions and Joseph's late sharing of this experience confirm to the critic that Joseph nefariously altered the telling of his experience to match his changing theology and to establish his credibility in the midst of criticism that he had fallen; that in the end, his story of a spiritual experience in a grove is fiction.

Apologetic View:

One Apologetic View minimizes the differences between versions by suggesting two main reconciliations. The first is to simply state that the differences are not as serious as the critic purports. The second expands on the first with explanations for the differences. Explanations include false memories, differing audiences, and varying levels of comfortability sharing his experience over time. In the end, the Apologetic view recognizes there are differences in the four firsthand accounts, but finds ways to reconcile those differences with the 1838 account, which they generally consider to be the most accurate and authoritative description.

Reconciled View:

The Reconciled view accepts that Joseph had an encounter with the divine in the grove. A Reconciled member likely gives weight to the 1832 account over other accounts for several reasons. The 1832 account is the earliest recording of the experience, making it closest to the actual event. The 1832 account was written by Joseph's own hand, in his own personal journal. There was no

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14 http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision
19 https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/volume-12-number-1-2011/seekers-guide-historical-accounts-joseph-smiths-first-vision
audience to play up to, no need to embellish or frame in a particular way, no need to record it in any way other than how it actually occurred. The Reconciled View would argue that the 1832 account is the most authentic experience. Richard Bushman says the following about the 1832 account and many Reconciled members would say amen to such a perspective:

“I am very much impressed by Joseph Smith’s 1832 History account of his early visions. This is the one partially written in his own hand and the rest dictated to Frederick G. Williams. I think it is more revealing than the official account presumably written in 1838 and contained in the Pearl of Great Price. We don’t know who wrote the 1838 account. Joseph’s journal indicates that he, Sidney Rigdon, and George Robinson collaborated on beginning the history in late April, but we don’t know who actually drafted the history. It is a polished narrative but unlike anything Joseph ever wrote himself. The 1832 history we know is his because of the handwriting. It comes rushing forth from Joseph’s mind in a gush of words that seem artless and uncalculated, a flood of raw experience. I think this account has the marks of an authentic visionary experience. There is the distance from God, the perplexity and yearning for answers, the perplexity, and then the experience itself which brings intense joy, followed by fear and anxiety. Can he deal with the powerful force he has encountered? Is he worthy and able? It is a classic announcement of a prophet’s call, and I find it entirely believable.” - Richard Bushman

Resources for Personal Research

https://www.lds.org/topics/first-vision-accounts?lang=eng&old=true
http://www.mormondiscussionpodcast.org/2016/06/premium-first-vision-founding-event-restoration/
http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision
http://www.mormonthink.com/firstvisionweb.htm
http://en.fairmormon.org/Joseph_Smith%27s_First_Vision/Accounts
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Vision
https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/exploring-first-vision/1-earliest-documented-accounts-joseph-smith-s-first-vision
http://www.mormondiscussionpodcast.org/2016/06/premium-first-vision-founding-event-restoration/

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20 https://www.reddit.com/r/exmormon/comments/1sp4mi/ama_series_richard_bushman_dec_16_300_400_pm_est/
Chapter 3:
Witnesses of the Book of Mormon

Mainstream View:

One of the evidences for the Book of Mormon is its eleven witnesses. The Church teaches that three of those witnesses had a spiritual experience affirming to them the truthfulness of the scriptural text\(^2\). They were visited by the angelic messenger, Moroni, who showed them the Gold Plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, along with other items that were buried in the ground with the plates for over a thousand years prior to Joseph Smith's retrieving and translating them. Contrastingly, the eight witnesses met together with Joseph Smith in the woods, where they described a very physical experience of hefting the metal plates and viewing the reformed Egyptian characters upon the pages.

The Church teaches that these eleven men were consistent in their testimonies and never retracted their witness statements\(^2\). The average member is only aware of the witness statements found in the front of the Book of Mormon. The Church rarely exposes its members to the numerous statements made by some of the eleven witnesses, which leads many

to suppose there is little beyond the printed witness statements contained in the Book of Mormon.

**Critical View:**

The Critic of both the Book of Mormon witness statements and the narrative taught regarding the witnesses will point to several statements and quotes in which the witnesses contradict themselves.\(^{23}\) More than one witness contradicts himself or other witnesses on whether the experience was seen with his natural eyes or with spiritual eyes. The witnesses are also quoted contradicting themselves and each other on whether the experience was a physical experience or only visionary and whether they were permitted to hold the plates or only view them under a cloth or perhaps heft them while covered or in a box. The Critic would show the three witnesses to be inconsistent in their rationality and would point to the eleven witnesses all being related by family and/or marriage.\(^{24}\) The critic would also point out that these eleven men were as a general statement, very superstitious, involved to one degree or another in Folk Magic and/or Treasure Digging.

**Apologetic View:**

The apologist for the eleven witnesses would have us believe the contradictions only come about when we trust less credible second and third hand testimonies. That when the witnesses are seen in their totality, these men were seen as honest, upright, contributing members of their society. Many of them held public positions in their community and their word was trusted. The Apologist perspective would point out that many of these men, including the three witnesses who each were excommunicated, had times where they disagreed with the direction of the Church and the Prophet Joseph Smith himself while remaining faithful to their testimony of their witness experience.\(^{25}\)

**Reconciled View:**

The Reconciled perspective would acknowledge both sides have merit. Martin Harris for instance would be seen as constantly changing his belief system and faith community throughout his life.\(^{26}\) in 1844, after the death of Joseph Smith,

\(^{23}\) [http://www.mormonthink.com/vogelwitnesses.htm](http://www.mormonthink.com/vogelwitnesses.htm)

\(^{24}\) [http://www.mormonthink.com/witnessesweb.htm](http://www.mormonthink.com/witnessesweb.htm)


all the living witnesses, except Oliver Cowdery, placed their faith in James Strang (a convert who, just after the martyrdom, claimed he was Joseph’s Successor) for a season. These were people who were superstitious. They were involved in folk magic using seer stones, divining or witching rods, while at the same time being generally respected and found to be trustworthy men. Some of their statements are contradictory and the Reconciled perspective would validate that, while also acknowledging that these men may have struggled to understand the nature of their experience and may have vacillated in their understanding of what happened. In the end, as you will see by the following Chapter on the Book of Mormon historicity, this issue simply does not change the ground the Reconciled holds of the Book of Mormon being a sacred scriptural text.

Resources for Personal Research

http://www.mormonthink.com/witnessesweb.htm

http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon/Witnesses


http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/witnesses.html


Chapter 4:  
Book of Mormon Historicity

Mainstream View:

The Book of Mormon is believed by its general membership to be entirely an ancient document. That it contains the literal history of an ancient people who left Jerusalem and came to the Americas and split into two nations (Lamanites and Nephites) at war with each other. It speaks as a second witness of Christ as the resurrected Jesus visits these people in a miraculous recorded visit to the Americas within the book. It adds a second witness to some biblical events like the Tower of Babel and it confirms the Bible as a scriptural text with its authors quoting Isaiah along with other biblical themes.

Mormons hold the Book of Mormon as more trustworthy than the bible and a more accurate translation of its original text than the Bible. The general membership sees Joseph Smith, the book’s “translator”, as a facilitator only in translating the text from Reformed Egyptian to English by “the Gift and Power of God”.

Critical View:

The Critic sees the Book of Mormon as a complete 19th century fraud. They point to anachronisms like horses, swine, cattle, barley, wheat, chariots, silk,
windows and many others. They point to the Book of Mormon’s near word-for-word quoting of large sections of the 1769 KJV Bible, which Joseph Smith grew up with. They point to the theology within the Book of Mormon matching closely with the documented religious debates in Joseph Smith’s day and even in his own hometown. They point to the archaeology and how not one single discovery has been made that can be pointed to definitively as evidence of the Book of Mormon’s narrative and historicity. They point out how closely the Book of Mormon text matches the writing style and themes of 19th century books like The Late War, The First Book of Napoleon, View of the Hebrews, and others. They point to how the Book of Mormon contains chapters of Isaiah that were written definitively after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem. In the end, they see the evidence as overwhelming that the Book of Mormon comes from the 19th century or Joseph’s day. They explain the book’s origin as a combined mixture of Joseph Smith utilizing his own experiences and the very issues and details from his own milieu.

### Apologetic View:

Apologetists for the Book of Mormon point to data that makes space for faith that the Book of Mormon is an ancient document. Matching up early portions of the Book of Mormon that take place in the middle east to actual Arabian Peninsula geography, showing that within the Book of Mormon, some cultural practices match up closely with the practices of the Jewish culture at the time. They point to writing styles like chiasmus as evidence of an ancient document. They speak of Hebrew connections within the Book of Mormon narrative. In the end, they also hold up the importance of having a spiritual witness as the ultimate evidence of the book’s truthfulness.

### Reconciled View:

The Reconciled perspective would acknowledge that much within the Book of Mormon can only be explained as a 19th century product. They agree with the

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28 https://user.xmission.com/~research/central/2biblicaltexts.pdf
32 http://www.exmormonfoundation.org/files/BookofMormon07.PDF
33 http://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/10/2/S00008-50e5e94d04c218Aston.pdf
34 https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1129&index=8
35 http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3004&context=physics_facpub
critic that the Book cannot be explained as entirely an ancient document. For instance, renowned LDS Scholar Richard Bushman states:

"the fact that there’s phrasing everywhere, long phrases (in the Book of Mormon) that if you Google them, you’ll find them in 19th century writings. The theology of the Book of Mormon is very much 19th century theology, and it reads like a 19th century understanding of the Hebrew bible, as an Old Testament: that is, it has Christ in it, the way Protestants saw Christ everywhere in the Old Testament." - Richard Bushman

Some Reconciled viewpoints, like that of Bushman above, still maintain that at least some portions of the Book of Mormon are still of ancient origin and that it is a convergence of an ancient scriptural text and its prophetic translator. Other Reconciled viewpoints accept the Book of Mormon entirely as a 19th century product, and at the same time, still sustain it as scripture and binding on them and their community as a sacred text. They see it serving its purpose in connecting us to the divine as a communal holy writ, much in the same way that the Bhagavad Gita does for the Hindu tradition. They simply would argue as Adam Miller, LDS Scholar, does when he speaks of the idea of focusing on the concepts of the Book of Mormon rather than praying and worrying about the historicity of its proposed authors. That in doing so, he states that:

this transformation has also been profoundly ordinary and it has revolved around God trying to get me to stop speculating about other worlds and far off places and supernatural events and to, instead, pay attention to what’s happening right now, in this world, right in front of my own eyes. - Adam Miller

He also adds that:

Mormonism comes into focus as living and true only when we stop looking directly at it and, instead, aim our attention at what Mormonism is itself aiming at. If you aim right at Mormonism itself, you’ll miss seeing the thing that is crucial with respect to deciding whether it deserves your enduring fidelity. - Adam Miller

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38 http://www.timesandseasons.org/harchive/2014/10/letter-to-a-ces-student/
39 http://www.timesandseasons.org/harchive/2014/10/letter-to-a-ces-student/
The Reconciled would argue that whether the Book of Mormon is historical means little in terms of spiritual growth and development. What really matters is if the teachings of the Book are mediating an interaction between the reader and God.

Resources for Personal Research


http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon/Historicity


http://www.exmormonfoundation.org/files/BookofMormon07.PDF
Chapter 5:
The Book of Abraham

Mainstream View:

The Book of Abraham has been held by Latter-day Saints as scripture ever since becoming part of the Canon in 1851. It was later accepted as canon by common consent in 1880. More than that, Latter-day Saints have held the Book of Abraham as the literal writing of Abraham that were upon some Egyptian papyrus that came into Joseph Smith’s possession in 1835 in Kirtland. Joseph taught that one of these papyri contained the writings of the prophet Abraham, written by his own hand. Our canon includes Joseph’s translation of the facsimiles that were on the papyri. The Book of Abraham is part of Mormon scripture and holds deep value to mainstream Latter-day Saints as a literal translation straight from the papyri.

Critical View:

Critics of the Book of Abraham point to several translation problems. First, it should be noted that at least part of the papyrus that Joseph worked with still

40 http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Pearl_of_Great_Price
41 "The Book of Abraham" Times and Seasons 3 (1842): 704. KEPA 4
exists. It was thought to have been destroyed in the great Chicago fire of 1871, except it turned back up in the mid 20th century.\(^\text{42}\) With a portion of the papyri in existence and the advancement of being able to now translate Egyptian, scholars can make some verifiable conclusions. In Joseph Smith’s day Egyptian was seen as an unbreakable language. Some years earlier in 1799 a stone called the Rosetta Stone was discovered. This stone contained a text written in multiple languages and one of those was Egyptian hieroglyphics. But it wasn’t until 1832 that the Egyptian writings were deciphered and a Egyptian Dictionary published.\(^\text{43}\) Modern scholars agree that the papyrus currently in the Church’s possession, from which the Book of Abraham is derived, is not the writing of Abraham. Instead, it is a standard Egyptian funerary text dated long after Abraham would have lived. Scholars of Egyptian also agree that the text appears to be completely unrelated to Abraham and that the facsimiles were translated incorrectly by Joseph Smith.\(^\text{44}\) Critics also find it problematic that not only were the facsimiles translated incorrectly but that Joseph also canonized the translation. It should also be noted that several documents exist where Joseph’s English translations appear side by side with the Egyptian characters.\(^\text{45}\) Critics use these documents to pinpoint the section of the papyrus that Joseph is working from and which corresponds directly with portions of the papyrus in the Church’s possession. This, the critics say, prevents us from claiming that the scriptural Book of Abraham is on a missing piece of papyri. That instead we know the very portions Joseph is working from and can with certainty compare Joseph translation with that of Egyptologists.

**Apologetic View:**

Apologetics for the Book of Abraham acknowledge that, based on Egyptian scholarship, the general consensus is that Joseph got a lot wrong.\(^\text{46}\) They validate the fact that the papyrus is dated long after Abraham and is not in his handwriting, but account for this discrepancy by describing it as a possible copy of the original work. They acknowledge that, by Egyptian translation standards, Joseph got the facsimiles wrong, and that the “Kirtland Egyptian papers”\(^\text{47}\) are also translated incorrectly based on modern translation of Egyptian. They respond that while Joseph got dozens and dozens of things wrong with the

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\(^{44}\) For examples, see Abraham 1:14 which references the “figures at the beginning” or 1:6, which references the exact same gods as shown on facsimile number one.


\(^{47}\) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirtland_Egyptian_papers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirtland_Egyptian_papers)
papyri, there are two instances where he gets a “hit” regarding the interpretation of the four canopic jars on facsimile 2, along with the meaning of the crocodile god. Articles on the Church website, LDS.org, and a few LDS scholars also argue that parts of the papyri are likely still missing, since one witness recounts that the papyri was long enough to run from one end of the mansion house to the other, and what we have is much too small to be represented by that statement. It has also been theorized by some LDS scholars (and featured in a Gospel Topics Essay) that rather than Joseph translating the actual papyri, as he thought he was doing, God used the papyri as a “catalyst” for Joseph to produce the Book of Abraham via direct revelation. In other words, when Joseph encountered the papyri, despite the papyri not containing anything regarding Abraham, it inspired him to think about Abraham, and this led to a revelation of the text now contained in our canon as the Book of Abraham. Joseph himself assumed that this was a literal translation of the text, but was incorrect on this point; however, the text of the book is still inspired scripture.

Reconciled View:

Some Reconciled views would say that the data seems very clear that Joseph is translating the portion of the papyri that is known to exist; that Joseph seems to get a lot wrong in the translation, and even the “hits” that apologists bring up seem extremely flawed and weak. This perspective acknowledges the translation process is not without contradictions and complications, and prefers to focus on the result, the actual Book of Abraham text. Some Reconciled members would say that regardless of the translation issues and perhaps even in spite of issues with historicity, the Book of Abraham is still scripture. They are defining scripture in the sense that it is accepted as canon by our faith community through common consent and it inspires us and encourages us to have experiences with the Divine. One holding this Reconciled view would acknowledge the issues of historicity and translation with the Book of Abraham, while preferring to focus on what the scriptural text does for them spiritually.

Resources for Personal Research

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0hUjQEOqPAGc0hpOHd1YkVKZVk/view

48 http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ_Abraham2.shtml
Chapter 6: Prophetic Mantle

Mainstream View:

The Mainstream view holds that the Prophet of the Church speaks to Jesus Christ and more than that, that Christ directly speaks back. That the Prophets and Apostles of the Church are special witnesses of Christ because they have seen him and he has spoken to them just as God spoke to Moses face to face. They are Prophets in the same way that Moses, Noah, and Abraham are Prophets. One such quote that intimates as much is Harold B. Lee when he stated:

*I know that this is the Lord’s work. I know that Jesus Christ lives, and that he is closer to this Church and appears more often in holy places than any of us realize, excepting those to whom he makes personal appearance*\(^{51}\)

The Mainstream view is that it is never acceptable for a member of the church to disagree with the prophets, seers and revelators who currently lead the church, with regard to theological or doctrinal statements.\(^{52}\) Many members also hold that these men were chosen due to being more valiant or righteous than others of God’s children. Elder Neal A. Maxwell for example taught,

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\(^{51}\) Harold B. Lee, “Everlasting Covenant,” MIA conference address, 29 June 1969, 9–10

\(^{52}\) https://www.lds.org/ensign/1979/08/the-debate-is-over?lang=eng
It is not enough, therefore, to define the living prophet as merely the current prophet who is alive today, though that is correct enough. The living prophets were all close enough to God (before they came here) to be chosen by him then, and they will be close to him in the eternities.

Critical View:

The Critical view holds that these men have not seen or spoken directly to Christ. Since the death of the prophet Joseph, there has been a startling lack of claims to any prophetic gifts, or evidence that they have continued to exist. They point to it being more than 100 years since any revelation has been added to the cannon, and most claims of revelation are from other General Authorities claiming someone else had a revelation (ex. Elder Nelson claiming the policy change came via Revelation to President Monson). That these prophets don’t prophesy, these seers don’t see, and these revelators don’t share any revelation. That these men have committed serious mistakes that have caused serious harm and do so knowing the general membership holds a certain assumption of what their mantle is without making any effort to correct those assumptions. That in essence, they enjoy the deference and obedience given to them by members who hold the view that they interact directly with the personage of Jesus Christ while never adding clarity to such not occurring. They point to rare occasions when a leader seems to suggest as much as evidence that they have not seen Christ, such as when Elder Oaks in a local conference read D&C 107:23.

“The twelve traveling councilors are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world”

and then says:

“This is not to witness of a personal manifestation. To witness of the name is to witness of the plan, the work, or mission such as the atonement and the authority or priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which an apostle who holds the keys is uniquely responsible to do. Of course apostles are also witnesses of Christ just like all members of the church who have the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

53 Apostle Neal A. Maxwell, “Things As They Really Are,” pp. 80-81
54 https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/138.44
55 http://www.mormonthink.com/prophetsweb.htm
56 http://religionnews.com/2016/03/12/study-shows-link-teen-suicide-mormon-populations/
58 https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1_l1xQdDguBOGktRjFhajVLU2M/view
Apologetic View:

The Apologetic view seeks to show that whether they have spoken to Jesus or not is ambiguous. That many leaders have hinted at or worded their statements in way to leave room for them to have spoken to and seen the risen Christ. An example of such is this testimony by James E Faust who was an apostle and served in the first presidency.

Mine is the certain knowledge that Jesus is our divine Savior, Redeemer, and the son of God the Father. I know of his reality by a sure perception so sacred I cannot give utterance to it. I know and testify with an absolute awareness that Joseph Smith restored the keys of the fulness of times and that every President of the Church has held those keys, as does President Gordon B. Hinckley today.\(^{59}\)

They also make the argument that seeing Christ is not mandatory to be a prophet, seer, or revelator; nor required to be a special witness of the Savior.\(^{60}\)

Reconciled View:

A Reconciled perspective would validate that the top 15 leaders, including the prophet himself, appear to operate by the same spiritual promptings and spirit we all operate by, rather than direct interaction face to face with Jesus. They acknowledge that church leaders rather than being infallible, are prone to error and misunderstanding. This view also validates that factors like age, their need to be unified, and leaders being surrounded by those who are in loyal agreement may at times make their mistakes more serious, and solutions slow to be arrived at and implemented. That leaders are doing the best they can while trying to discern God’s will in ways that are open to mistakes, misunderstanding, and overreaching. The Reconciled takes to heart D&C 1: 24 - 28.

Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed; And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they

\(^{60}\) https://www.fairmormon.org/archive/publications/ask-the-apologist-must-all-apostles-literally-see-christ
might repent; And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time.

That in essence, God works with these men in their weakness, their own understanding, and their own language. This means they will struggle to understand the word of God, to interpret it, and to deliver it to us in a way that God comes through. It also notifies us they will sin and they will err and those sins and errors may be small at times, and at other times, they may be great and hurt, harm, and cause trauma. But we must remember the last point these scriptures make, which is when at times these men operate from a place of humility, they might from time to time receive some greater light and understanding. This perspective seems to hold up a much more human experience that is prone to mistakes and even harm being done at times. That every once in a while, further light and knowledge comes through the messiness of life. The Reconciled member feels that input from the collective church such as better utilizing the law of common consent as well as creating a safer healthier space for constructive discussion of various viewpoints would contribute to our leaders’ ability to be inspired by God.

Resources for Personal Research

http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_infallible

http://www.mormonthink.com/QUOTES/infallibility.htm

http://religiondispatches.org/the-mormon-version-of-infallibility/


http://www.jefflindsay.com/fallible.shtml

https://www.sixteensmallstones.org/watchmen-on-the-tower-on-the-limits-of-prophetic-fallibility/

http://www.churchistrue.com/blog/patrick-mason-on-proper-view-of-prophets/

http://www.mormondiscussionpodcast.org/2016/03/post-a-nuanced-view-of-prophets/
Chapter 7:
Science

Mainstream View:

While it seems to be slowly disappearing into the rear view mirror of history, there are still many Latter-day Saints who believe in a Earth that is only around 6,000 years old and who still hold deeply the idea that Humans having evolved from other hominids is false and is contrary to the Gospel and Church Doctrine. It should also be said that the Mainstream view holds that the Flood spoken about in connection to Noah was a Global Flood and that all the world’s languages diversified from one language at the Tower of Babel. Generally, members of the Church hold the stories of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Book of Mormon to be literal regardless of how implausible any individual story might stand in juxtaposition with science and logic as God is a God of miracles. The Mainstream member sees the Garden of Eden as an actual place and all mankind as literal descendants of Father Adam and Mother Eve.

Critical View:

The critic of such views holds that the archeological, geological, social sciences, and essentially any other area of science speaks strongly against such beliefs.
That a Global Flood covering the entire earth\textsuperscript{61} or all languages splitting from one language 4,500 years ago\textsuperscript{62} is not just implausible, but is demonstrably false to the point of being absurd. That science and the nature of what has been our human experience throughout recorded history imposes that much of what scripture deems as a supernatural experience (parting seas, global flood, Jesus ascending into the firmament, 6,000 year old earth, Enoch’s city being taken into heaven, and many other so-called miracles are either highly embellished exaggerated stories or simply myths in the same way as the stories of Zeus or Paul Bunyan or Beowulf. The critic sees the Garden of Eden and first parents story as nothing more than a fable and a Bronze Age explanation of human origins. The Flood Myth is present in many other cultures outside of the Abrahamic traditions, it was simply passed down to the Jews and added to the first written scriptures.

\textbf{Apologetic View:}

The Apologetic view might agree that a Global flood is unlikely and might suggest a more local catastrophic flood as the solution. That Noah when stating the Earth was covered likely only meant to him as far as the eye could see. The apologist might deal with the Tower of Babel by agreeing it is likely a place where only the local languages diversified and not all the languages of the planet. Some Apologists also suggest that later Book of Mormon authors who had access to the biblical myths on the Plates of Brass would have inserted those myths back into the Brother of Jared’s story not being aware that such a connection and narrative was almost certainly not part of their experience. Some Apologists would argue where the science says the story is absurd, that we should allow the authors of the story to mean something other than the literal meaning of what they wrote. Others would argue that God has intentionally made the evidence appear contradictory or made it disappear so as to make it a matter of faith. And still others would make allowances for the contradictions to be explained away, but allowing some embellishment where a contradiction appears, but otherwise to still be a historical figure having a historical experience rooted in reality.

\textsuperscript{61} \url{http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/faq-noahs-ark.html}
\textsuperscript{62} \url{http://www.linguisticsociety.org/sites/default/files/LanguageBegin.pdf}
Reconciled View:

Many Reconciled Mormons see Noah’s flood, Tower of Babel, 2000 stripling warrior youth all surviving a battle against a larger more experienced army, parted seas, and the numerous other miracles that seem larger than life as fables. These myths were told over centuries by oral tradition in order to give a community an identity and to help them see their place in the world and give deep meaning to the overall human story. The Reconciled in not taking these literally, need not be disappointed in God or His church when such miracles seem to have ceased. Rather the Reconciled Latter-day Saint realizes that it is natural for myths to grow in stature and that often God accomplishes His work through “small and simple” things. While the Reconciled is not closed off to miracles, he is comfortable with much of scripture being interpreted as myth, and yet also still finds value in such sacred stories.

Resources for Personal Research

http://www.mormonthink.com/scienceweb.htm
http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_science/Global_or_local_Flood
http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_science/Age_of_the_Earth
http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_science/Did_Adam_and_Eve_really_exist
http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_science/Dinosaurs
http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/science.shtml
http://www.sciencemeetsreligion.org/lds/bradshaw-evolution.php
https://wheatandtares.org/2015/05/31/figurative-literality/
http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/faq-noahs-ark.html

63 https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/060378P-front.pdf
Chapter 8:  
Tithing

Mainstream View:

Latter-day Saints believe the law of tithing is a commandment from God. Most members understand the law of tithing to be a lesser law which was given as a replacement for the law of consecration, after the early members failed to live that higher law. Many members feel the appropriate interpretation of a full tithe is 10% of one’s gross income, while some leave perhaps a slight bit of room to pay on net income instead. Many members would see anything less than 10% of gross as cheating the Lord. Among members with a mainstream view, there is still some diversity of opinion as to how to deal with non-wage income: gifts, gains derived from appreciation of property, etc.

Critical View:

The critic would point out that Church teachings about what constitutes a full tithe have shifted over time, with the shifts primarily moving in the direction of greater sacrifice from the members, with greater revenues for the Church. They would point out that tithing, as revealed in D&C 119, called for members to tithe on their “surplus properties.” After Joseph’s death, when the Quorum of the
Twelve decided to modify the law, they also voted to exempt themselves. Over time, changes continued to be made, until the dominant teaching became that a full tithe was 10% of gross, and should be paid by all, regardless of ability to pay. The critic would point out that the original definition of tithing came by way of direct revelation, canonized in the D&C. Subsequent changes have come without any specific claims to revelation. Furthermore, the critic finds it deeply concerning that when modern leaders quote older sources about tithing, they frequently will alter the original meaning of the quote by using ellipses or other means, to make it appear as though there has been no change in understanding regarding this law.

The critic would also point to other concerns with tithing: specifically, the way those tithing funds are used. D&C 119 lays out specific purposes for tithing funds, and the Lord also spelled out that these things were to be done by common consent of the members. However, for decades now, the Church has refused to actually release information, even to the members, about Church finances. Because of this, members cannot truly give informed consent. When the Church spends large amounts of money, such as with the construction of the luxurious City Creek Mall in downtown Salt Lake City, many find it difficult to justify using tithing money for such purposes, when they don’t fall in line with those outlined in revelation. Similarly, when members discover that though General Authorities have frequently condemned paid clergymen in other religions as participating in “priestcraft,” these same General Authorities are actually receiving large salaries under the name of a “modest living stipend”. The Critic would argue that there is “priestcraft” in demanding the poor Salvadoran family should pay tithing rather than feed their children, when that tithing is then going to be spent for a Seventy to have a base salary of $120,000/year, or to build a high end mall near the Church Office Building.

**Apologetic View:**

The Apologetic view would maintain that it matters little how the Church defined Tithing in the early days but rather how our present Prophets, Seers, and Revelators interpret god’s law today. With that said apologists make room that tithing may not be as straightforward as 10% of gross or net and that the official statement leaves room for members to use agency and make their own choice.

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They would also want to respect the local leaders stewardship and responsibility to discern the members faithfulness in on this issue.

**Reconciled View:**

The Reconciled viewpoint takes into account what the Church leadership has stated on the doctrine of tithing where in 1970 the First Presidency stated:

> "For your guidance in this matter, please be advised that we have uniformly replied that the simplest statement we know of is that statement of the Lord himself that the members of the Church should pay one-tenth of all their interest annually, which is understood to mean income. No one is justified in making any other statement than this. We feel that every member of the Church should be entitled to make his own decision as to what he thinks he owes the Lord, and to make payment accordingly."\(^{65}\)

The reconciled viewpoint is also aware of the history of tithing, knowing that various methods have been seen as an honest and full tithe and were much more widely used in early Church history, such as this quote by Bishop Edward Partridge (2nd Bishop of the Church):

> “If a man is worth a $1000, the interest on that would be $60, and one/10 of the interest will be of course $6. — thus you see the plan.”\(^{66}\)

A Reconciled Latter-day Saint will want to honor that every member is to make their own decision of what is an honest and full tithe and allow everyone their agency to decide such and will want others to know their options and not feel judged for their decision. That it truly is between them and the Lord. They would not want to impose a “proper” tithing in terms of gross, net, surplus, or some other way of formulating a full tithe. They would want to honor elder Dallin Oaks when he said:

> "Teachers who are commanded to teach “the principles of [the] gospel” and “the doctrine of the kingdom” (D&C 88:77) should generally forgo teaching specific rules or applications. For example, they would not teach any rules for determining what is a full tithing.... Once a teacher has taught the doctrine and the associated principles from the scriptures and the living prophets, such specific applications or rules are generally the responsibility of individuals and families.”\(^{67}\)

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\(^{65}\) [https://www.lds.org/ensign/1974/04/i-have-a-question?lang=eng]

\(^{66}\) [https://history.lds.org/article/the-tithing-of-my-people?lang=eng]

\(^{67}\) [https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1999/10/gospel-teaching?lang=eng]
Resources for Personal Research

http://www.i4m.com/think/intro/mormon-tithing.htm
http://puremormonism.blogspot.com/2012/12/are-we-paying-too-much-tithing.html
https://wheatandtares.org/2015/12/27/tithing-have-you-considered-paying-on-surplus/
http://www.mormondiscussionpodcast.org/2016/03/premium-tithing-part-1-surplus/
http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_church_finances/Tithing/How_is_tithing_calculated
Chapter 9: Word of Wisdom

Mainstream View:

The Mainstream view not only understands section 89 of the Doctrine & Covenants to be scripture and the official Word of God, but also any adaptation by the Church leadership between then and now to also be God’s word to the Saints. That as LDS Leaders have amended the Dietary restrictions of the Word of Wisdom, the Mainstream Latter-day Saint sees every amending change and shift as further light and knowledge from God to His children. Mainstream members recognize that obedience to the Word of Wisdom and all its amendments is one way that one shows God and the Church they are loyal, faithful, and obedient. That such adherence is part of the works that one must contribute towards exaltation and such obedience is required to enter the Lord’s Holy temples.

Critical View:

Coming Soon
Apologetic View:

Coming Soon

Reconciled View:

The Reconciled Latter-day Saint recognizes that Section 89 is the binding text on the Saints. They also recognize that the initial revelation didn’t come out of nowhere, but out of a growing temperance movement. Much of the amending that came after was also heavily influenced by the temperance and prohibition movements. Not that the Reconciled is setting aside said addendums and later interpretations, but rather the Reconciled takes a step back and is not as heavily focused on being commanded in all things. The Reconciled view understands well that Joseph Smith drank alcohol and that Brigham Young and other early leaders adhered to the Word of Wisdom very differently than we do today. They believe that section 89 was given as a revelation to be understood as a “word of wisdom”.

To be sent greeting; not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom, showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days - Section 89 of the D&C

The Reconciled Saint takes the Word of Wisdom seriously, in that, they sense that God is truly concerned for how we take care of our bodies and that we make informed decisions about what is healthy and what is not and avoid that which does our bodies harm. Reconciled Latter-day Saints are aware that saints across the globe navigate the keeping of the “Word of Wisdom” differently. That in some Asian countries, some forms of the tea plant are seen as permitted by the Word of Wisdom and have the approval of leaders, while within the United States, any form of the Tea plant is seen as a violation culturally. In some countries, they have unique foods or drinks that are seen as a violation while other countries have no mention of them. In the end, the Reconciled Saint recognizes that Agency is an important part of our mortal life and that God in honoring such agency has stated:

69 http://www.mormonismi.net/jamesdavid/postin13.htm
For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.- D&C Section 58:26

So while the Mainstream Saint sees a very rigid box of things that are allowed and things that are not, the Reconciled sees much more room for agency to make personal informed decisions regarding what is healthy and what is not and to act accordingly.

Resources for Personal Research

http://mit.irr.org/word-of-wisdom-it-divine-revelation
http://www.i4m.com/think/history/Historical%20Analysis%20of%20the%20Word%20of%20Wisdom.pdf
http://en.fairmormon.org/Word_of_Wisdom/History_and_implementation
http://www.mormonthink.com/wow.htm
Chapter 10: True and Living Church

Mainstream View:

The Mainstream view holds that the LDS Church is the “only True and Living Church with which the Lord is well pleased”.\(^71\) That Mormonism is the only Church with Priesthood Power, Priesthood Keys, Saving Ordinances, and that all other Churches are defunct… or in the words of Joseph Smith:

> “I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof." - Joseph Smith\(^72\)

The Mainstream view holds that because this is the only Church led by Jesus, followers therefore owe a loyalty to the church and its leaders and their pronouncements. Criticism is not appropriate.\(^73\)\(^74\)

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\(^71\) https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/1.30
\(^72\) https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng
\(^73\) https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2003/04/loyalty?lang=eng
\(^74\) https://www.lds.org/ensign/1979/08/the-debate-is-over?lang=eng
Critical View:

The Critical view holds that The LDS Church is a fraud. That there are so many contradictions within LDS history and theology, that it’s simply not what it claims to be. That it may have some good traits and behaviors and some positive effects in the World, but it also has a lot of unhealthiness and causes harm and trauma to many. That since it is not the one and only “True” Church and since it does cause harm, it is reasonable to walk away from the Church and it is also reasonable to be a voice of warning to others about it. The plan, some critics argue, would be so inefficient if the LDS church were truly the only way back to God. They would point to the idea that there is little unique about the church (given the question about any ongoing revelation, the questions about the historicity of the events such as the first vision, priesthood restoration, etc.) to justify the claim to being superior to all other churches.

Apologetic View:

The Apologetic view acknowledges that Mormonism has its complexities and paradoxes, but that for God’s plan to leave room for agency, that we should expect evidence on both sides and the truthfulness not to be clear cut. That the truth of Mormonism is not known by delving into its paradoxes or its complexities, but through the still small voice of the Holy Ghost which comes from exercising faith and through sincere prayer.

Reconciled View:

The Reconciled view takes this from a different angle. The Reconciled view honors that Mormonism has unique truth to contribute to the World. At the same time, it honors that other Churches also have truths, even perhaps unique truths. That Mormonism doesn’t have nor does it claim to have all truth or even all Priesthood keys for that matter. That the LDS Church is one instrument in the Orchestra and that other people outside Mormonism and even other Churches have a role to play in the all encompassing plan of our Heavenly Father to bring His Children home. The Reconciled would argue that such is

75 https://www.culteducation.com/warningsigns.html
76 https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/moro/10.5?lang=eng
79 https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2008/04/concern-for-the-one?lang=eng
part of our doctrine and point to such statements like following from former apostle Orson F Whitney.

*Perhaps the Lord needs such men on the outside of his Church, to help it along. They are among its auxiliaries, and can do more good for the cause where the Lord has placed them, than anywhere else. And the same is true of the priesthood and its auxiliaries inside the Church. Hence, some are drawn into the fold and receive a testimony of the Truth; while others remain unconverted—for the present; the beauties and glories of the gospel being veiled temporarily from their view, for a wise purpose. The Lord will open their eyes in his own due time.* - Apostle Orson F Whitney

81 Conference Report, April 1928, p.59-60

*God is using more than one people for the accomplishment of his great and marvelous work. The Latter-day Saints cannot do it all. It is too vast, too arduous, for any one people.* - Apostle Orson F Whitney

82 Conference Report, April 1928, p.59-60

*Again I say, the Lord’s Work has need of auxiliaries outside, as well as inside, to help it along. Because of their worldly influence—which would depart if they connected themselves with the Church—many are kept where they are, where the Lord has placed them, and can best use them for the good of all.* - Apostle Orson F Whitney

83 Conference Report, April 1928, p.59-60

As well as the following statement by President Kimball and the First Presidency in 1978.

*The First Presidency (Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, Marion G. Romney) Based upon ancient and modern revelation, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gladly teaches and declares the Christian doctrine that all men and women are brothers and sisters, not only by blood relationship from common mortal progenitors but as literal spirit children of an Eternal Father. The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God’s light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals. The Hebrew prophets prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who should provide salvation for all mankind who believe in the gospel. Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life to*

81 Conference Report, April 1928, p.59-60
82 Conference Report, April 1928, p.59-60
83 Conference Report, April 1928, p.59-60
come. We also declare that the gospel of Jesus Christ, restored to His Church in our day, provides the only way to a mortal life of happiness and a fulness of joy forever. For those who have not received this gospel, the opportunity will come to them in the life hereafter if not in this life. Our message therefore is one of special love and concern for the eternal welfare of all men and women, regardless of religious belief, race, or nationality, knowing that we are truly brothers and sisters because we are sons and daughters of the same Eternal Father. - “God’s Love for All Mankind,” First Presidency Statement, Feb. 15, 1978

The Reconciled viewpoint would acknowledge that Jesus seems to use the word Church in different ways. That sometimes he uses it to describe the earthly institution created to administer the saving ordinances (of which less than one fifth of one percent of God’s children presently alive claim membership within). At other times, Christ seems to be defining the word church in a more inclusive way. Such that anyone on the earth who is becoming something more or is reaching higher is included under the umbrella of the word. One example is D&C section 10 received in 1829 prior to any church in this dispensation even existing when the Savior says,

Behold, this is my doctrine—whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church. - D&C 10.

The Reconciled view would honor that the LDS Church is the guardian and administrator of Saving Ordinances, but that it also may have overreached some on just how unique it is and how it is “True” while every other Church isn’t. It may also have overreached to some extent on it emphasis of God’s servants within the Church leaving it membership not open to servants of God outside Mormonism who are called and authorized and helping Heavenly Father to carry out His plan.

Resources for Personal Research

https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/selected-articles/joseph-smith-and-only-true-and-living-church
http://www.mormondiscussionpodcast.org/2013/06/true-and-living-church/
http://www.mormondiscussionpodcast.org/2016/01/2197/

http://www.mormonmatters.org/2012/09/30/128-the-one-true-church/

http://puremormonism.blogspot.com/2017/02/misquoting-god.html
Chapter 11:
Joseph Smith’s Practice of Polygamy

Mainstream Position:

The Mainstream member is aware only vaguely that their founding prophet practiced polygamy. They likely can not name any of his plural wives nor any of the circumstances under which the said marriages took place or what they entailed. They believe that Joseph\(^5\) and his first wife Emma\(^6\) had a strong loving marriage\(^7\), unaware of any burden on their relationship incurred by Joseph’s involvement with polygamy. Those mainstream members aware of Joseph’s polygamy believe that Joseph Smith’s involvement in the practice was commanded of God, and hence, not reproachable. Mainstream believers often place little emphasis on learning any details beyond that.

Critical View:

The Critic points out that there is so much more to the story surrounding Joseph’s involvement in polygamy. Critics note that Joseph had approximately 32 other wives besides Emma.\(^8\) That Joseph was sealed to many of these

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\(^6\) https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/joseph-smith-prophet-man/9-religious-dimension-emma-s-letters-joseph
\(^7\) https://www.lds.org/ensign/1979/09/the-elect-lady-emma-hale-smith?lang=eng
\(^8\) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Joseph_Smith%27s_wives
women without Emma’s approval and often without her awareness.\textsuperscript{89} He was sealed to several young women, some as young as 14 and many of his young wives were working as maids in the Smith home or living in the Smith home when Joseph approached them.\textsuperscript{90} Joseph’s first known relationship with a woman other than Emma was Fanny Alger, a 16-year-old who was working in the Smith home as a maid.\textsuperscript{91} Joseph entered this relationship in 1833, over two years before sealing keys were restored\textsuperscript{92}, and both Emma his wife\textsuperscript{93} and Oliver Cowdery considered this relationship an affair.\textsuperscript{94} Joseph lied by publicly denying his practicing polygamy while he was in fact involved in it.\textsuperscript{95} Critics point out that Joseph was sealed to mothers and daughters at the same time.\textsuperscript{96} Even to sisters of the same family.\textsuperscript{97} At times, the other member of the family married to Joseph did not know of their family member’s relationship with Joseph.\textsuperscript{98} Joseph entered into polyandrous relationships, in other words being sealed to women who were already married to other men.\textsuperscript{99} Critics point out that Emma while being his first wife, was the 23rd woman sealed to him.\textsuperscript{100} And lastly, that at least some of these relationships were sexual. Even in the case of the younger girls, circumstantial evidence suggests a sexual dynamic as a possibility.\textsuperscript{101} The critic also points out that Joseph broke the very rules laid out in section 132 of the D&C that additional wives could only be taken with the approval of the first wife and they must be virgins (Emma was not giving her approval nor were many of the wives virgins as they were already married).\textsuperscript{102} The Critic would raise concerns of coercion and unethical pressure on these girls and women to enter these relationships.\textsuperscript{103} They would also raise concerns that some of the details point to Joseph approaching these women while their husbands were away from home, and at least, in one case away on a mission for the Church.\textsuperscript{104} Critics also state that church leaders attempted wrongly and simplistically to silence those pointing out the secret practice of polygamy by labeling them as apostates and anti-Mormons. The Critics conclusion is that Joseph Smith was motivated by sexual desire and preyed on girls and women he saw vulnerable and susceptible to his advances.

\textsuperscript{89} https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?lang=eng&old=true
\textsuperscript{90} https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?lang=eng&old=true
\textsuperscript{91} http://www.wivesofjosephsmith.org/PDFBooklet/PDFBooklet.pdf
\textsuperscript{92} http://mit.irr.org/joseph-smith-and-fanny-alger
\textsuperscript{93} William McLellin, Letter to Joseph Smith III, July 1872, Community of Christ Archives
\textsuperscript{94} Oliver Cowdery to Warren Cowdery, January 21, 1838. Original in Huntington Library
\textsuperscript{95} https://www.reddit.com/r/mormonscholar/comments/66qepx/response_to_hales_challenge_please_show_me_even/
\textsuperscript{96} http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/plural-wives-overview/patty-bartlett/
\textsuperscript{97} http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/plural-wives-overview/eliza-partridge/
\textsuperscript{98} http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_polygamy/Marriages_involving_mothers,_daughters_and_sisters
\textsuperscript{99} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Joseph_Smith%27s_wives
\textsuperscript{100} https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Joseph_Smith%27s_wives
\textsuperscript{102} http://www.mormonstories.org/dc-132-a-revelation-of-men-not-god/
\textsuperscript{103} http://cesletter.com/debunking-fairmormon/polygamy-polyandry.html#threats
\textsuperscript{104} http://cesletter.com/debunking-fairmormon/polygamy-polyandry.html#hyde
Apologetic View:

The Apologetic view acknowledges the number of wives, the ages of the women, and lack of awareness and approval by Emma and almost all the other data the critic puts forth as facts. Where the Apologist differs is on the conclusions. The Apologetic perspective for instance would suggests that sexual intimacy was part of some of the marriages, but that we have no solid evidence for sexuality\textsuperscript{105} with the women who are not of adult age\textsuperscript{106} and also within the polyandrous marriages (women already married to other men). The Apologetic view suggests that young brides were more normalized in that day and would not have been seen as immoral. That specifically, there is little to no evidence of any sexuality with the young women (other than Fanny Alger) nor with the polyandrous marriages.\textsuperscript{107} It should be said that in regard to Fanny Alger, the Apologetic view counters that there is evidence and testimony of a marriage ceremony of some sort occurring. Hence making in God’s eyes the marriage valid.\textsuperscript{108} 109 This perspective requires that section 132 of the Doctrine & Covenants be understood in a different way. For example, the Apologist would suggest D&C 132 does not limit additional wives to being virgins in spite of a surface reading seeming to indicate so.\textsuperscript{110} This view would also suggest that Joseph did not break the rules established in section 132 or it would argue that the rules did not apply to Joseph. The Apologist view is that Joseph did not lie in denying he was married to more than one woman because he was only legally married to one, hence that Joseph chose his words carefully as he was in a precarious position.

Reconciled Viewpoint:

The Reconciled perspective would validate that Polygamy caused a lot of hurt.\textsuperscript{111} That it may have been practiced by Joseph Smith in ways that God did not approve. That the possibility even exists that polygamy as a whole was not condoned by God and was a mistake. Most Reconciled members are deeply uncomfortable with the young ages of some of the wives and the secretive nature of the practice. A mother and daughter or sisters being sealed without

\textsuperscript{106} http://en.fairmormon.org/Joseph_Smith/Polygamy/Lustful_motives
\textsuperscript{107} http://toddmcompton.com/revhmk5.html
\textsuperscript{108} http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/common-questions/plural-marriages-sexual/
\textsuperscript{109} Levi Ward Hancock, “Autobiography with Additions in 1896 by Mosiah Hancock,” 63, MS 570
\textsuperscript{110} Eliza Jane Churchill Webb, letter to Mary Bond, April 24, 1876
\textsuperscript{111} https://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Lending-Clarity-to-Confusion.pdf (pg 20)
knowledge of each other is disturbing to some. There are Reconciled members who feel sadness and empathy towards Emma and how much of an emotional toll the history indicates she endured due to polygamy. That her marriage to Joseph was rocky at times and that she at times was strongly in dissent of polygamy and the way Joseph was practicing it. Many Reconciled members hope for a day when section 132 can be set aside as not binding on the saints. Where they can openly hold the personal perspective that it was not of God and can focus more on the parts of Canon and the Gospel that ultimately bring them peace and a strong connection to God.

Resources for Personal Research

http://www.mormonthink.com/joseph-smith-polygamy.htm
http://en.fairmormon.org/Joseph_Smith/Polygamy/Polyandry
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Joseph_Smith%27s_wives
https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/an-easier-way-to-understanding-joseph-smiths-polygamy/
Chapter 12:
Polygamy After Joseph Smith

Mainstream View:

The Mainstream perspective acknowledges that Brigham Young was a polygamist. This view has an inkling that a few leaders afterward also were polygamists. This segment has been taught and has perpetuated the idea that this polygamy occurred because the women far outnumbered the men or that as husbands died on the trek west or because of mob violence, that widows were absorbed as polygamous wives to be provided for.

Critical View:

The Critical view takes into account the historical reality of how polygamy was practiced by Brigham Young down to Wilford Woodruff and even beyond.\textsuperscript{112} Brigham Young when 45 married 16 year old Lucy Bigelow.\textsuperscript{113} When John Taylor was 78, he entered a polygamous marriage with Josephine Roueche

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{113}] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Brigham_Young%27s_wives
who was 26. When Wilford Woodruff was 45, he entered a polygamous marriage with Emma Smoot who was 15. And Lorenzo Snow when 57, married Sarah Ephramina who was 15. They would note that Brigham Young had 5 wives, who when he married them, were under the age of 18. Brigham, like Joseph Smith, also entered polyandrous relationships (where the women were already married to a living husband). He appears to have had several polyandrous wives. The critic takes this information and makes the conclusion that early Church leaders were practicing a sexual patriarchal abuse, including using their power and authority to secure relationships with young women. That for these leaders, the marriages were a behavior that contained motives that were anything but righteous and moral or commands of God.

Apologist View:

The Apologists view would make a space for how much more normalized such age differences were, and that when we step back into time, such differences in age would be seen as much more normal and acceptable within the society contrasted against our present day. Apologists would also make space for us to understand that while there are many young wives, there are also many of an older age as well. Lastly, they would point to any claim of sex, as a motive, is simply making an assumption that is without any evidence.

Reconciled View:

The Reconciled viewpoint recognizes that in some ways the polygamy after Joseph Smith was very different from how Joseph practiced polygamy. That there was a general trend that the older these early prophets got, the greater the differences in age between them and their young bride. That many of the comments these early leaders made are by the standard of our day very sexist and abusive. It would validate that polygamy was hard on many of these women, and that while some of the women’s voices would speak positively regarding polygamy and the blessing that came from it, that there was also a lot of hurt, pain, trauma, abuse, and emotional turmoil in the written statements

114 https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/champion-liberty-john-taylor/john-taylor-family-man
115 http://toddcompton.com/WWfamilies.htm
116 https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/within-these-prison-walls/introduction
117 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Brigham_Young%27s_wives
118 http://cesletter.com/debunking-fairmormon/pedophilia.html
119 https://www.gregtrimble.com/what-every-mormon-really-needs-to-know-about-polygamy/
120 http://pt.fairmormon.org/Joseph_Smith/Polygamy/Marriages_to_young_women
121 http://en.fairmormon.org/Joseph_Smith/Polygamy/Lustful_motives
of others. The Reconciled voice would validate that there is some data indicating that underage brides may have occurred slightly more often in the 1800’s. Though it would also make note that there is a moral and cultural difference between a standard marriage where two people fall in love and choose each other rather than a marriage that is encouraged by religious authority and religious expectations and perhaps even religious pressure. As stated in the previous chapter on Joseph Smith’s polygamy, Reconciled Latter-day Saints are extremely open to a theological shift where Section 132 and polygamy are set off to the side as an unknown rather than trumpeted as theological command from a loving Heavenly Father.

Resources for Personal Research

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Brigham_Young%27s_wives
http://www.mormonthink.com/QUOTES/polygamy.htm
Chapter 13:
The Cessation of Polygamy

Mainstream View:

The Mainstream view holds that Polygamy was practiced by the Church until 1890 when Wilford Woodruff received a revelation where God informed the Church that Polygamy can no longer be practiced without the consequence of the government coming down hard on the Church and thwarting the progress of God’s kingdom and hence commanded an end to Polygamy.

The Church has abstained from the practice in regards to living individuals ever since. Church leaders have distanced the church from polygamy and don’t preach it as doctrine.\textsuperscript{122, 123}

Critical View:

\textsuperscript{122} http://www.deseretnews.com/article/651068/Pres-Hinckley-speaks-out.html
\textsuperscript{123} https://www.lds.org/media-library/video/2012-08-1610-do-not-practice-polygamy?lang=eng
The Critical perspective would point us to the history which suggests a much different and messier transition. First that the Church neglects a revelation in 1886 where John Taylor seemingly had a voice to voice conversation with Jesus Christ, wherein the Savior confirmed to President John Taylor that Plural Marriage is the “New and Everlasting Covenant” and it is to never be taken off the earth as it applies to living members of the Church.\(^\text{124}\) And yet 4 years later, Wilford Woodruff is announcing a change that contradicts the very voice of Christ in a 180 degree turn from the Savior’s words.\(^\text{125}\) The critic points out that the 1886 revelation adds credibility to the fundamentalist break off groups that continued polygamy;\(^\text{126}\) They would point out that even after the 1890 Manifesto, the Church continued to authorize and perform plural marriages in secret.\(^\text{127}\) This public distancing of polygamy while privately continuing the practice, the critic would point out, was done to buy themselves some time in hopes that they could secure legislation and a kinder attitude publicly, that polygamy could be practiced publicly again without worry of government pressure and penalties. The Church leaders also sent out groups of saints to other countries like Mexico and Canada (where it was notably also illegal) to continue the practice in safer places in hopes to one day publicly reinstate plural marriage in the United States (many of these folks sent became the early members of the fundamentalist groups).\(^\text{128}\) Imagine being sent on an assignment by church leaders to live in another country to keep the practice of plural marriage alive, only to be abandoned a couple of decades later by the very Church that sent you. The critic notes that even as late as 1911, former Apostle John W. Taylor (Son of 3rd Church president John Taylor, the same John Taylor who received the 1886 revelation) communicated to the Quorum of the Twelve that he had just had a conversation with Church President Joseph F. Smith where it was understood that he was still authorized secretly and under sacred responsibility to continue the practice.\(^\text{129}\) This event comes even after the second manifesto of 1904.\(^\text{130}\) This shows that in the end, President Woodruff’s manifesto was anything but a revelation\(^\text{131}\) and was more of a chess move to buy time until the legalities of plural marriage could be worked out. Only once later leaders came to grips that it would be easier to abandon polygamy than to go back

\(^{124}\) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1886_Revelation \\
^{125}\) https://www.lds.org/topics/the-manifesto-and-the-end-of-plural-marriage?lang=eng&old=true \\
^{126}\) http://www.mormonfundamentalism.com/archive/NEWFILES/1886RevelationNew.htm \\
^{127}\) http://www.salamandersociety.com/library/plural_marriages_after_the_1890_manifesto-d_michael_quinn.pdf \\
^{130}\) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Manifesto \\
and that the saints distaste generally for polygamy had grown, was it finally discontinued once and for all.

**Apologetic View:**

The Apologetic view holds that the slow and drawn out ending of polygamy was appropriate and approved by God. That there was much confusion by Church members and even some leaders on whether the Church could or should distance itself from polygamy and that a drawn out method where the generation that practiced it could essentially not have to confront the issue and could “die off” and a younger generation that was not as strongly tied to it could make the final shift to ending the practice.¹³² The Apologetic view would state two possibilities. First, because John Taylor’s 1886 revelation was never accepted by common consent, it was not binding on the Church. Second, some would suggest we are completely misunderstanding what Jesus was telling President Taylor as it had little to do with the end of polygamy or that polygamy was directly and exclusively the “New and Everlasting Covenant”.¹³³ They would also submit that regardless of whether either of these reconciliations solve the issue, this revelation is of little importance to the Church today.

**Reconciled View:**

The Reconciled perspective validates that the Church had hopes to continue polygamy after 1890 and used the manifesto as a way to buy time. Some would agree that John Taylor truly had a legitimate document on his desk purported to be a revelation between him and Christ, where Christ is adamant that polygamy is to not be done away regardless of the pressure of the world. They would acknowledge that such a revelation adds some credibility to fundamentalist break off groups (while also still acknowledging very deep issues with their claims as well). This perspective would validate that while it doesn’t see the fundamentalist groups having legitimacy, it would validate that they were given an impossible task wherein they were asked to be the guardians of Plural Marriage as a principle. Then once those leaders who asked for such a sacrifice were replaced by others who wanted to abandon polygamy, these saints were shed off as collateral damage. Having been appointed as sacred guardians of the Principle, they had little choice but to create a theological

¹³² [http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_polygamy/Practiced_after_the_Manifesto](http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_polygamy/Practiced_after_the_Manifesto)
framing wherein they could continue polygamy outside the institutional church, and see doing so as having God’s approval. Again, the Reconciled view would want us to take a step back and consider the toll polygamy has had on hearts and minds of its members throughout its history. Reconciled Latter-day Saints are bothered deeply by the fact that polygamy continues in the church today for those men sealed to multiple women (living and dead). They sense and feel the heartache that polygamy continues to cause even in the here and now.  

Resources for Personal Research

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1886_Revelation

Chapter 14:
Role of Women throughout the Church History

Mainstream View:

The Mainstream perspective holds that men and women are not only taught by the Church to be equals, but that such is actually the reality in how Church life is lived out.\(^\text{135}\) They state that the Church has always treated women as having unique gifts and being invited to share those. They acknowledge that yes, men hold Priesthood offices and women do not, but that in God’s Plan of Happiness, it is intentional that men and women play different roles in the Kingdom of God.\(^\text{136}\) They point out that playing different roles and having different purposes does not create inequality, but rather a more complete whole. The Mainstream member sees this division of gifts and responsibilities as having existed as part of God’s plan since the beginning of time and having an eternal nature.\(^\text{137}\) When husbands and wives live the gospel, both partners feel loved, feel needed, and feel fulfillment from their gifts being utilized; this is the core of an eternal relationship.


Critical View:

The Critical view holds that women are secondary citizens in the Church. They point out that the Church is a heavily patriarchal system that minimizes a woman’s visibility and provides little space for her to advocate for her perspective, to be heard, or to be a voice for healthy and positive change. There is significant incongruity in the ratio of females to males in leadership on the stand for local and general meetings. Their diminished presence, and at times complete absence from leadership councils, leaves a diminished space to be heard, valued, and perceived as an important and equal voice. These are the serious flaws of a patriarchy. From a young age, girls within Mormonism are subjected to the experience that boys get more recognition, more visibility, more responsibility, more value in what they say, and their contribution is seen as being more important to the work of the Church. The Critical view would also impose the historical details of how Joseph envisioned the women of the Church is different from the Mainstream perspective of women’s roles and responsibilities in the Church today. That Joseph Smith gave the Relief Society a Priesthood Key, that he authorized them to give anointed blessings of healing and they went forth and did so, and that he taught the brethren to leave them be to do such things. That Relief Society in the early Church had more autonomy, and as an organization able to have women stand at its head without being under the Priesthood umbrella as an auxiliary, and hence, the major decisions of the Society were made by women without deferring to male Church leaders. The Critic would also point out that there is harm and trauma occurring in the Church and its culture in regards to the treatment of Women. Examples would include invisibility of women as spiritual leaders, lack of stewardship, no avenues for recourse in cases of abuse, young girls confessing sexual sins to adult males. Other difficult situations for women include counsel that she sacrifices her well-being to ensure her children’s needs are met, even to the extreme, and that she has limited value outside her role as mother and a wife. The critic would point to theology (based on our understanding of Heavenly Father’s role, and lack of understanding regarding a Heavenly Mother) that would make a woman’s role in eternity to be creating spirit children; she is

138 https://mormondom.com/letter-to-a-mormon-man-8d251aa11062
139 http://signaturebookslibrary.org/women-and-authority-08/
140 http://ordinwomen.org/mormon-male-privilege/
resigned to stay in the background of the grand work her husband will be performing. This view would point to the deep unhealthiness that comes from a patriarchal culture\textsuperscript{147} that is seen as having an unquestioning authority where obedience is seen as a virtue,\textsuperscript{148} because such a society is ripe for abuse and trauma.\textsuperscript{149}

**Apologetic View:**

The Apologetic view would validate that mistakes can be made by male leaders, but that largely, much good occurs within the Church structure and culture. That when God’s children adhere to gospel principles, these mistakes can be avoided. That women by and far in the Church report being happy and fulfilled and not desiring a different set of responsibilities.\textsuperscript{150} This view would validate that women in early Church history did give blessings and Relief Society did operate differently, but that in God’s Kingdom where His Church is led by revelation and a living God, we should expect changes to occur through his Church leaders as God sees fit, in His own time. They point out that much of the harm in and out of the Church is due to human nature, and that the Church provides a better and much more wholesome environment where human natures can change; any kind of hurtful or harmful behavior can have a light shined on it, and we as a people can become better.

**Reconciled View:**

The Reconciled view validates that Joseph had a bigger vision for the relief society and for women than what has been realized in today’s church. That Joseph’s death prevented him from continuing to encourage the relief society to grow into a quorum equal with its male counterpart. The Reconciled viewpoint is widely varied on priesthood ordination and offices: from arguing that women should hold priesthood offices just as men do\textsuperscript{151}, to suggesting a complementary set of callings and responsibilities for women.\textsuperscript{152} Either way, this view holds that the Church would be an improved and healthier space if women had a recognized authority, more visibility, greater input in decision making, and a safe space for their light and inspiration. The Reconciled perspective looks forward to a day when women will once again give anointed blessings and claim

\textsuperscript{147} https://www.lds.org/ensign/1973/02/strengthening-the-patriarchal-order-in-the-home?lang=eng
\textsuperscript{148} http://www.mormonstories.org/stories-of-women-who-feel-they-have-been-harmed-by-mormon-patriarchy/
\textsuperscript{149} http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/39004/GeorgeJulieA2013.pdf;sequence
\textsuperscript{150} www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/10/08/big-majority-of-mormons-oppose-women-in-priesthood-including-women/
\textsuperscript{151} http://ordainwomen.org/
\textsuperscript{152} http://www.mormonstories.org/alternative-feminist-approaches-to-ordain-women/
back their spiritual power as an eternal gift from God. The Reconciled validates that humans will always make mistakes that hurt others while acknowledging that patriarchy often magnifies this tendency. The Reconciled also recognizes at the same time that the church also does some things much better than the world. While there is a space where unhealthy attitudes and behaviors can exist, there is also a space from which much good sprouts.

Resources for Personal Research

http://signaturebookslibrary.org/women-and-authority-17/
http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/39004/GeorgeJulieA2013.pdf;sequence
http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/39004/GeorgeJulieA2013.pdf;sequence
Chapter 15:
Temples and Freemasonry

Mainstream Position:

The Mainstream Position holds that the temple endowment ceremony in all its forms, comes from God. That the clothing, the rituals, the wording, the covenants, the symbols, the signs and tokens, and the thematic depiction were all revealed by God through revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith. To the mainstream member this was a restoration of an ancient endowment that was either identical or very similar, going back to ancient times. When Mainstream members learn of the connection between the Temple Endowment and Masonic rituals, many hold that Masonry goes back to Solomon’s temple and that Masonry is a corrupted form of the original endowment. They believe Joseph corrected this corrupted ceremony when he delivered the Temple Endowment.

154 http://www.shields-research.org/General/Masonry.html
Critical View:

The Critical view puts forth that much of what we call the endowment ceremony comes very directly through Masonry. That Joseph Smith and early church leaders were Masons, and that much of the Endowment Ceremony strongly coincides with the wording, symbols, signs, tokens, clothing, and covenants of Masonic rituals. The Critical view holds that Masonry is not an ancient set of rituals, pointing to scholarship that suggests Masonry got its start in the late 1600’s. The Critical perspective holds that while Joseph claimed to be restoring a corrupt form of the endowment by utilizing Masonry, it appears that Masonic practice has little to nothing to do with anything attached to early Christianity or any historical ancient ceremony. The Critical view also suggests that the changes and different versions over the years logically demonstrates that the ceremony was and is not an exact restoration of any ancient temple ceremony.

Apologetic View:

The Apologetic view acknowledges that the best evidence points to Masonry originating in the late 1600’s, though this view would argue that many of the principles and symbols used in Masonry go back much further. For example, some Apologetic perspectives claim that craft workers or trades people in ancient times had to prove their credentials as they went from town to town by sharing secret signs and tokens to those who wished to hire them. There is also an Apologetic response to separate the “Endowment” or the spiritual enlightenment being relayed by God through the ceremony with the “presentation of the endowment” or ceremony itself. In other words, Joseph utilized the ceremony from Masonry to provide a thematic vehicle by which the endowment could be conveyed. The Apologetic perspective argues that it matters little what mode Joseph used to convey the Endowment, what is much more important is that people experience God in the House of the Lord.

156 http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/masonicsymbolsandthedidstemple.htm
158 http://en.fairmormon.org/Question:_Did_Joseph_Smith_copy_Masonic_material_in_order_to_create_the_LDS_temple_rites%3F
Reconciled View:

The Reconciled view validates that Joseph utilized Masonic rituals as the foundational basis for the Endowment ceremony. The Reconciled view acknowledges that some of the early leaders and members knew full well that Smith was utilizing Masonic rituals. The Reconciled perspective acknowledges that early leaders including Joseph Smith believed that Masonic rituals were tied to ancient Christianity. Some Reconciled members set aside the question of whether there is any historicity or connection to Solomon's temple, seeing it as Joseph Smith's attempt to help members receive an Endowment of power, a connection with God, using symbols readily available and familiar to both himself and the members. In this way, the value of the temple comes from their personal experiences in the temple, rather than focusing on the origins of the ceremony. Some Reconciled views even set aside whether the ceremony comes from God, or allow the possibility that Joseph completely fabricated the ceremony. This perspective believes they can still treasure the Endowment Ceremony. That despite the lack of historicity or connection with King Solomon’s Temple, the temple for some still facilitates an experience with the divine. Other reconciled Saints see a lack of divine inspiration in the ceremony, and see it primarily as an adaptation from Masonry, which has and still does contain elements which they find toxic or harmful for many members, especially as regards to the subjugation of women. While they applaud some of the changes that have been made to the ceremony over the years, they still find it on the whole to be of little value. Though for some it may be toxic or harmful, the Reconciled Saint would validate for others that the Temple rituals facilitate spiritual experiences where they encounter the divine in a way that is unique to this sacred space.

Resources for Personal Research

http://www.mormonthink.com/temple.htm
http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Freemasonry_and_the_Temple
http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_temples/Endowment/Freemasonry
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLQMXmP-C1o
http://www.salamandersociety.com/library/mormonism_and_masonry-s_h_goodwin.pdf
http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/masonicsymbolsandtheldstemple.htm
http://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/review/17/1/S00003-5176abb50dfd22Literski.pdf
Chapter 16: Scripture

Mainstream View:

The Mainstream perspective holds that the scriptures are the literal Word of God. That these are God’s words spoken to prophets directly with the instructions to then write these words down for later readers. Latter-day Saints apply this framework to the Book of Mormon and other Restoration Scripture. They also grant such to the Old and New Testament with the caveat that many errors found their way into the Holy Bible during the transmission process (scribes copying by hand, as well as translation issues). They even allow that some with corrupt religious motives have altered the sacred book for their own selfish purposes, and that these alterations contaminated portions of the Word of God. It should be noted as well that the Mainstream views sees a discernable difference between LDS scripture and the other sacred texts of the world, In that LDS Canon (the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine & Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price) is of God and is “real” scripture, while the sacred texts of other traditions only put themselves forward as scripture. The Mainstream view would hold that in reality, these other texts considered sacred by other faiths are counterfeits, and do not lead to salvation. It is also important to note that with regard to the LDS Canon, the Mainstream view takes a strong stand on the historicity of the events contained therein. Generally, Latter-day Saints hold these stories to be literal throughout. Adam and Eve were in a literal Garden
partaking of literal fruit; there was no death before the fall; Noah truly built a boat that got him and his family through a global flood, Jonah was literally swallowed by a whale, and the Brother of Jared had eight real barges with literal stones touched by the literal finger of God to light the way. Latter-day Saints also generally hold that any action attributed to God in scripture is God’s doing; if it says that God in his anger committed genocide against a people, then God really did so. If Abraham heard God’s voice commanding him to kill his son, or if Nephi heard God’s voice commanding him to cut off someone’s head, then that’s how it happened. These stories represent the literal wishes and behaviors of God. We are to learn from these stories that it is our responsibility to avoid doubting and questioning such requests, and simply obey God’s command. That scriptures are there to inform us of God expectations, what He requires, and what He will do if we obey, as well as what He will do if we reject His command and counsel.

**Critical View:**

The Critic of Scripture points out that many of these stories are mythical fables created to help a people in a certain time develop an identity and a sense of importance in the World. They point out that even the stories with some historical basis are most assuredly embellished and made to seem larger than life.\(^{160}\) That whenever people have struggled to understand why something happens, a god is often brought into the picture to give explanations.\(^{161}\) Such is the nature of oral tradition throughout World History, and we should not expect anything different here. The Critic senses the harmful behavior of basing one’s decisions of morality on fables. They would point to the problem in taking these stories literally; that in the extreme, if one hears the voice of God telling them to kill someone, that it is deeply unethical to carry it through just because one has been taught to trust such a voice as the Word of God. Rather, one should question one’s own sanity, as the statistical chance God really speaking is practically void in the face of a better explanation of mental illness or hallucination in cases where one hears a voice to take extreme measures. In lesser examples, the Critic would suggest that to treat groups of people who are different than you (those of a different Race, Gender, Religion, Sexual Identity, etc.) as less than your group (The Chosen People of God) is to overreach on the reality of what scripture is and not comprehend its limitations. That to assume God is really speaking directly in these instances and that such

\(^{160}\) [http://moses.law.umn.edu/darrow/documents/Absurdities_of_the_Bible_Darrow_OCR_OPT.pdf](http://moses.law.umn.edu/darrow/documents/Absurdities_of_the_Bible_Darrow_OCR_OPT.pdf)

\(^{161}\) [https://www.whitehorsemEDIA.com/docs/futurisms_gap_fable.pdf](https://www.whitehorsemEDIA.com/docs/futurisms_gap_fable.pdf)
statements reflect His actual motives imposes that God holds the ‘Us vs Them’ mentality that the scriptural authors impose. That putting one’s ethnocentric view as God’s mind and will misses the mark of what scripture is and isn’t. The critic would say that scripture is full of the imperfect views of men imposed as being the voice of God. That following such views with unquestioning obedience has led to much of the harm, hurt, trauma, and damage of individuals and groups of people throughout history. Steven Weinberg sums up the idea when he stated,

“good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil — that takes religion.”

Apologetic View:

The Apologetic view admits that within the scriptures, there are some parts that contain deep conflicts with science and logic and must be interpreted differently so as to be reconciled. These may in fact be figurative or allegorical, or in some rare instances even mistakes. This view also admits that there can be some distortion of God’s word as it is transmitted through imperfect beings. That at times, the Lord’s chosen servants have made errors in interpreting and recording God’s word. With that said, they would also emphasize that God is in charge, and He allows these imperfections to occur. While a teaching of a prophet in or out of scripture may be incorrect, it is up to God to fix it. God is allowing such imperfections to exist, and it is not our place to seek correction of such things. Instead, we should wait in patience for the Lord to do so in His own due time. Where there are not deep conflicts with science or logic, the Apologetic view maintains space for a literal view. Where there is no contradiction and no proof a literal perspective must shift, the apologist sees no reason to give up any ground on interpretation or historicity.

Reconciled View:

Some Reconciled perspectives validate all the concerns the critic raises. They agree that scripture contains much in way of mythical fable; that we have overreached by interpreting these sacred texts as literal stories. That many of

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162 https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/060378P-front.pdf
163 http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31885/31885-h/31885-h.htm
164 http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon/Lamanites/Curse/What_was_it
165 http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_infallible
166 https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2013/10/come-join-with-us?lang=eng
these stories were transmitted from generation to generation over thousands if not tens of thousands of years through oral tradition. Given all this, and the lack of verifiable history suggests strongly that many, if not most of these stories have been largely made up. That they are, at best, highly embellished to the point they would be barely recognizable when compared to the actual people and events as they occurred. That said, the Reconciled Latter-day Saint still understands these texts as Scripture. The Reconciled would argue that a literal interpretation is the interpretation with the least amount of value. That it is when we set aside the discussion of literal or not that we get to the more important spiritual truths. They would say that discussing whether the garden of Eden was real or not misses out on an opportunity to discuss the deeper truths that lie just below the surface. These deeper truths get lost when the focus is on literalness. Reconciled Latter-day Saints sustain the Holy Bible and Restoration Scripture as being Sacred Texts to which they and their community are bound. But they also grant that other sacred texts in the World, that are valued by other faith traditions, are also Scripture in the same sense as our Sacred Texts. Most Reconciled members would argue that God is using multiple avenues to draw His children to Him, and to bring them home. The Reconciled Latter-day Saints sees scriptural value in the Koran, Bhagavad Gita, the Dhammapada for example. The Reconciled view might at times even go so far as to see the writings of C.S. Lewis, Nietzsche, or others as having a sort of scriptural value. The Reconciled feels no disloyalty for searching for truth outside of his own faith tradition, within the writings and sacred texts of the world. They are open to truth regardless of where it was discovered; they find the search for truth, be it within or outside one’s faith community, to be at the core of Mormonism. Finding deep truth within any of these writings, they find it enlightens their minds and connects them to the divine; and that is scripture in its purest form.

Resources for Personal Research

https://wheatandtares.org/2016/08/02/multireading-scriptures/
http://www.newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/commentary/reverence-for-the-bible

167 http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/when-a-sacred-text-is-not-so-much-the-word-of-god-as-the-word-of-man-8163653.html
168 https://bible.org/article/taking-bible-literally
Chapter 17: Race Based Priesthood and Temple Ban

Mainstream View:

For generations, the LDS church historically limited black members from receiving the priesthood or receiving temple ordinances. The Mainstream view holds that the Priesthood and Temple ban against members of color was instituted by God, even though it may seem racist or bigoted to the outside world. Prophets, Seers, and Revelators throughout this dispensation have proclaimed that people of color had brought this restriction upon themselves, through a lack of valiancy in the premortal life.\(^\text{171}\) They also taught that if whites intermarried or “mixed seed” with blacks, they would bring the judgement of God upon them and their posterity. Many of these teachings haven’t been taught officially for years, yet these teachings still find support among many mainstream members. In 2014, the LDS Church released its “Race and the Priesthood” gospel topic essay\(^\text{172}\), which disavowed as racist theories, the past teachings of Church leaders who taught these things as Doctrine. The reality is that very few members have been directed to the essays and encouraged to

\(^{171}\) [http://www.mormonthink.com/QUOTES/blacks.htm](http://www.mormonthink.com/QUOTES/blacks.htm)

wrestle with these false Doctrines taught by Prophets and Apostles in the past.\textsuperscript{173} This has the Mainstream view continuing to be held and even perpetuated today. This is in spite of the Church in the present moment having statements like the following:

\textit{Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form. - Race and Priesthood Gospel Topic Essay}

And:

\textit{Early in its history, Church leaders stopped conferring the priesthood on black males of African descent. Church records offer no clear insights into the origins of this practice. - Heading to Official Declaration 2 in LDS Canon}

\textbf{Critical View:}

The Critical view would raise awareness that while current leaders paint the statements of past church leaders as “Theories,” the reality is that those leaders of the past framed those teachings as “Doctrine”\textsuperscript{174} and said as much both privately\textsuperscript{175} and publicly.\textsuperscript{176} For example, President of the Church, George Albert Smith, was adamant that those of color were cursed, had been less valiant in the pre-mortal life, and that inter-racial marriage being sin, were all eternal doctrines. His First Presidency stated as much both in private correspondences,\textsuperscript{177} as well as in public Church statements.\textsuperscript{178} The Critical view would impose the ineffectiveness of the Holy Ghost when the members of church in the past knew by the Holy Ghost that such “false Doctrines” were “true Doctrines”. How can present leaders today be certain they have attained the mind and will of God when past Leaders thought they had attained the same mind and will of God only to be wrong and to have imposed racist theories as “true Doctrine”. They would point to the idea of just how wrong leaders can be even in the midst of “knowing“ they are right with certainty and just how wrong

\textsuperscript{173} http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_racial_issues/Blacks_and_the_priesthood/Statements
\textsuperscript{174} http://www.mormonstories.org/other/Lowry_Nelson_1st_Presidency_Exchange.pdf
\textsuperscript{175} http://www.mormonstories.org/other/Lowry_Nelson_1st_Presidency_Exchange.pdf
\textsuperscript{176} http://www.mormonstories.org/other/Lowry_Nelson_1st_Presidency_Exchange.pdf
\textsuperscript{177} http://www.mormonstories.org/other/Lowry_Nelson_1st_Presidency_Exchange.pdf
\textsuperscript{178} http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_racial_issues/Blacks_and_the_priesthood/Statements
the members can be to believe those leaders. That once we see such fallibility, then we have to get a whole lot more vulnerable with just how fallible the Church, its leaders, and its members are in discerning the mind and will of God. They would also point out on this issue, like so many other social issues, the Church seems to always adapt its Doctrine and Policies to conform closer to where the World is moving on such issues. That in other words, the Church has a history of holding conservative social ground. That the World at one time held a similar view on such issues. That as the World slowly progressed to a more inclusive view, the Church gave resistance and held that the World was becoming more accepting of sin. This entrenching would pervade for decades only to get more in line with the World’s view once the discrepancy became so large that it was hurting the Church’s image and progress. That such shifts on polygamy
women’s rights, birth control, mental health issues and beliefs on suicide, issues of race, all involved entrenching on a position only to eventually change its stance once the divide between the World and the Church became too big. While still early, we are seeing in our day, there has begun to be shifts on the perceived causes of and policies surrounding LGBT issues, and that in time we will see acceptance of this issue as another evidence of the Church’s own recognition of its struggle to discern truth ahead of the World.

**Apologetic View:**

The Apologetic view would make the argument that leaders in the past may have conflated words like policy, principle, belief and doctrine at times. Though they would validate that past leaders did indeed call past teachings “Doctrine”, we should grant them charity that, had they known their words would be scrutinized, they may have chosen another word in the place of Doctrine. The Apologetic view also offers that we as a people may have misunderstood themes within scripture that we attributed to race, that when the Book of Mormon speaks of skin color, it might be speaking allegorically of unrighteousness, so that skin color doesn’t actually mean skin color. They would say that the racial attitudes of their culture played into how past leaders

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180 [http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/39004/GeorgeJulieA2013.pdf;sequence](http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/39004/GeorgeJulieA2013.pdf;sequence)
182 [www.heraldextra.com/news/local/church-teachings-on-suicide-have-changed-through-the-years/article_ff35e8c9-2c8d-5a57-8fa4-ad635bbe1f0.html](http://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/church-teachings-on-suicide-have-changed-through-the-years/article_ff35e8c9-2c8d-5a57-8fa4-ad635bbe1f0.html)
185 [http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_doctrine](http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_doctrine)
186 [http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_infallible](http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_doctrine/Prophets_are_not_infallible)
evaluated ideas, based on the limited understanding of that day, That we should expect Brigham Young to hold racist views while living in a racist culture.\textsuperscript{188} Given that culture, we should not be surprised that past leaders interpreted scriptures literally that were intended to be understood allegorically. The Apologetic view also suggests that while the Church does seem in at least some ways to play catch up with society on social issues, that there is a faithful framing for such. That these men are bound to hold the doctrine and protect the Church from having God’s way of doing things from being corrupted. Hence, whenever an issue arises where the World begins to see an issue very differently, we should expect hesitancy, and perhaps resistance and even defensiveness as they take their time to discuss and think about such issues, their repercussions and the far reaching effects. Having issues in one’s culture that encourage one to ask questions they had never considered before does not diminish one from being a Prophet. Instead, we should look to the scriptures and how prophets within scripture have had to encounter a problem first and react after the problem arises in working out a solution and or reconciliation between them and the Lord.

**Reconciled View:**

The Reconciled Perspective admits that Church leaders do make mistakes, and are fallible. They recognize that leaders are capable of making serious mistakes that hurt, marginalize, and harm others needlessly. This view would validate that how past leaders understood Race was one of these instances. The Reconciled view would validate that regardless of whether one is a Church leader or a lay member, that ascertaining the mind and will of God is messy and problematic. On this issue and many others, it might help to hear the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie when he stated:

\begin{quote}
I do not know all of the providences of the Lord, but I do know that he permits false doctrine to be taught in and out of the Church and that such teaching is part of the sifting process of mortality - Bruce R McConkie\textsuperscript{189}
\end{quote}

It adds insight to know that Elder McConkie was referring to Brigham Young’s teaching of a false Doctrine regarding the basic nature of God. That he isn’t speaking of false Doctrine among the membership, but rather among the Prophets, Seers, and Revelators, and specifically the President of the Church.

\textsuperscript{188} https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2014/shouldering-the-cross
\textsuperscript{189} http://www.mrm.org/bruce-mcconkies-rebuke-of-eugene-england
Recognizing the fallibility of prophets, and acknowledging some of the specific mistakes they have made, Reconciled saints suggest that we need to adjust our expectations of what it means to be a Prophet, and what the limitations are of those who hold such callings. We should be careful not to set a bar so high that when these men sin or err, we lose faith in them and/or in God. In terms of the race issue specifically, we see that how we spoke about and framed race in the past is no longer part of our current perspective. That for instance, we recognize the following specific statements made about race and skin color from the Church:

“During Joseph Smith’s lifetime, a few black male members of the Church were ordained to the priesthood. Early in its history, Church leaders stopped conferring the priesthood on black males of African descent. Church records offer no clear insights into the origins of this practice.” - Heading to Official Declaration 2 in the D&C\textsuperscript{190}

And:

Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form. - LDS Gospel Topic Essay “Race and The Priesthood”\textsuperscript{191}

The Reconciled view is that the Church would become more sensitive and loving if we would apologize for past racist practices and teachings. They believe the disavowals made in the essay should be stated by church leaders in speeches or attributed articles instead of an unsigned essay. That we should be actively helping general membership recognize and overcome the mistakes we as a church made in the past. The Reconciled view is that the stories of faithful members who called on Church leaders to consider changes to this practice and as a result were put down, ostracized or excommunicated is a lesson for us today. Member’s sensitivity to how we treat our fellow-men in our church practices and policies should be allowed to be expressed and discussed in a safe way without punishment.\textsuperscript{192 193 194}

\textsuperscript{190} https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/od/2
\textsuperscript{191} https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng&old=true
\textsuperscript{192} http://thoughtsonthingsandstuff.com/dr-lowry-nelson-on-racism/
\textsuperscript{193} http://www.timesandseasons.org/harchive/2010/03/remembering-stewart-udall/
\textsuperscript{194} https://www.newspapers.com/clip/4237266/lds_scoutmaster_byron_marchant/
Resources for Personal Research

https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng&old=true

http://elarsen.net/ldsbc/misc/Revelation%20of%201978,%20Edward%20L%20Kimball.pdf


http://pt.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_racial_issues/Blacks_and_the_priesthood/Origin_of_the_priesthood_ban

http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/pdfilesystem/newsletters/118saltlakecitymessenger.pdf

http://www.mormonismi.net/pdf/race_in_brazil.pdf


http://www.uvu.edu/religiousstudies/docs/2017_msc/janan_graham_russell.pdf

http://www.mormonthink.com/blackweb.htm


http://www.mormonstories.org/other/DispellingtheCurseofCain.pdf

https://www.dialoguejournal.com/2012/mormonisms-negro-doctrine-an-historical-overview/
Chapter 18:
Homosexuality and the Church

Mainstream View:

Until very recently, most Mainstream members held that homosexuality was a choice, that it was mental/spiritual disorder or sexual deviancy, and that it could be changed through repentance and righteous living (including by marrying someone of the opposite sex). This view was primarily based on the teachings of Spencer W. Kimball who was the church’s primary voice on this subject from the 1960s through the 1980s. For instance, President Kimball stated in his book, The Miracle of Forgiveness:

Many have been misinformed that they are powerless in the matter, not responsible for the tendency, and that ‘God made them that way.’ This is as untrue as any other of the diabolical lies Satan has concocted. It is blasphemy. Man is made in the image of God. Does the pervert think God to be ‘that way’? After consideration of the evil aspects, the ugliness and prevalence of the evil of homosexuality, the glorious thing to remember is that it is curable and forgivable…Certainly it can be overcome…
In the last five to 10 years the church has reversed its position from these earlier teachings. Here are examples of its current position on choice and mutability:

- *Even though individuals do not choose to have such attractions, they do choose how to respond to them.* (Ballard, “The Lord Needs You Now,” Ensign, Sep 2015)

- *While same-sex attraction is not a sin, it can be a challenge. While one may not have chosen to have these feelings, he or she can commit to keep God’s commandments.* (mormonandgay.org, “Church Teachings”)

- …*a change in attraction should not be expected or demanded as an outcome by parents or leaders.* (mormonandgay.org FAQ)

- *I must say, this son’s sexual orientation did not somehow miraculously change—no one assumed it would.* (Holland, Oct 2015 Gen Conf)

As more Mainstream members have come to know LGBT people personally, they have also become aware of and agree with the church’s current shift to the position that the gender one is attracted to is not a choice. However, there are many, particularly among older generations, who are only aware of the church’s past teachings and still believe homosexuality is a choice and a mental/spiritual disorder (see the comments section of any Deseret News article on the subject or any Mormon online forum discussing the subject). While the church no longer teaches that being homosexual is a sin, it holds that acting on one’s homosexual orientation, even in a legal, monogamous marriage relationship, is a grievous sin. For Mainstream members who still hold to the old view of homosexuality as a mental/spiritual defect, this position makes perfect sense. For younger Mainstream members, especially those who personally know gay people, this position may pose some inner conflict. However, because obedience to God’s prophet is the ultimate test of one’s faithfulness and righteousness, Mainstream members generally support the church’s position, even if it seems unfair or doesn’t quite make sense with their observed experience.
Critical View:

The Critical View holds that the church has been completely out of touch on this issue and, while making some progress, is still decades behind sound scientific and medical understanding of homosexuality. Critics hold that the Church’s teachings cause LGBT people to suffer unnecessary guilt, depression, anguish and even suicide. They maintain that the Church’s doctrines on homosexuality are toxic, that gay youth should not be exposed to teachings that compare their core being and innate romantic desires to a susceptibility to alcoholism or drug addiction. They believe it is inhumane for the Church to require gay people to shut down a basic part of their humanity, the desire for human affection, touch and intimacy, or be labeled apostate.

Apologetic View:

Apolologists come largely from Mormon LGBT groups that encourage love and support of LGBT people but affirm that the church’s position is the only path that leads to happiness and, ultimately, eternal life. Mormon LGBT apologists hold that anything that departs from the Church’s position on homosexuality will only bring sin and sorrow. They believe that Mormon LGBT people should strive to repress their sexual orientation and attractions to a point where they might be able to marry someone of the opposite sex, but if not possible in this life, they must remain single and celibate. Despite the great challenge this path poses, they maintain that if LGBT people remain faithful to Church teachings, all will be made right in the next life where their natures and desires will be changed so that they can be eternally happily married to someone of the opposite sex.

Reconciled View:

The Reconciled view sees how the Church position on various issues has been wrong or misguided in the past and could be wrong on this issue. They see that happily married gay couples are no different from happily married straight couples and appear to qualify for all the same blessings marriage affords straight people. Reconciled members desire to see the Law of Chastity applied equally to gay and straight members (no sexual relations outside of lawful marriage). Reconciled members hope and pray that Church leaders will seek greater light and knowledge on this subject, including a revelation that
will make gay people equal to straight people within the Church, just as the 1978 revelation on the priesthood did for black members of the Church.

Resources for Personal Research

https://mormonandgay.lds.org

https://affirmation.org

https://mormonlgbtquestions.com

http://ldswalkwithyou.org/

https://www.facebook.com/mamadragons/

http://mormonsbuildingbridges.org/


https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fraternal_birth_order_and_male_sexual_orientation


https://labs.psych.ucsb.edu/roney/james/other%20pdf%20readings/Blanchard%2520201%2520Fraternal%2520Birth%2520Sexual%2520Orientation%2520Study%2520files/Blanchard%2520201%2520Fraternal%2520Birth%2520Sexual%2520Orientation%2520Study%2520files/Ngun.pdf
Chapter 19: Spiritual Witness as a Mode of Knowing Truth

Mainstream View:
The Mainstream view holds that spiritual truth can only be known through the Holy Ghost, and that while the world will try to complicate things, one can know the truth of all things through the power of the Holy Ghost.\(^{195}\) There may be ambiguous issues in Church history and/or we may assume with our limited view that something was a mistake, but in the end we can know the truth from error through the Spirit. The Mainstream view is that any inspiration received by people in or out of the Mormon church on religious topics will always be harmonious with what is taught by the current Mormon church leaders and that any claimed inspiration that is not cannot be real inspiration from God. The Mainstream view will sometimes dismiss or ignore what others perceive as problems or contradictions within LDS teachings because the mainstream member feels their understanding cannot be wrong or questioned since it originated was taught to them by the Church. They at times accomplish this by stating they know by the Spirit that said thing is true, hence, it must be right and accurate. Any perceived contradiction or problem simply would not be a problem if we had all available information.\(^{196}\) This view would suggest that the Spirit is a far more accurate and trustworthy way at knowing the things of God than any other means. That any discovered truth by other means is less credible and less important than that truth known by the Holy Ghost through personal inspiration or confirmation of what a Church leader has taught. This mode of operation allows the Mainstream member to dismiss scholarship and data when it conflicts with their sacred beliefs.

**Critical View:**

The Critical view imposes that spiritual experiences are a completely ineffective way to know truth. The Critic shows many evidences for such. We will list a few: First, that people of all faiths record receiving an answer that their belief system is true and they know such through an answer to a prayer, a peaceful feeling in their heart, and/or by the power of the Holy Ghost that their belief system is the right one and approved by God.\(^{197}\) Due to these spiritual experiences, people join religious groups every day that our culture generally views as unhealthy or abusive; and demonstrable great harm (sometimes including even death) befalls these folks.\(^{198}\) The Critic would argue that this destroys “knowing through the Holy Ghost” as a reliable means of coming to the truth of a matter. Second, the Critic would also point to examples of LDS members believing something to

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\(^{195}\) https://www.lds.org/topics/holy-ghost?lang=eng&old=true

\(^{196}\) https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2004/10/be-not-deceived?lang=eng

\(^{197}\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lwkh_allF3E

\(^{198}\) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heaven%27s_Gate_(religious_group)
be true from the Holy Ghost, only to find out later that it was actually inaccurate and false (ex: see the Race & Priesthood section); this again argues against being able to truly Know something via the Holy Ghost.\(^{199}\) Third, the Critic would point out also that many of the members of the break-off churches from the LDS faith (Fundamentalist and other restoration branches) describe and share their testimony in exactly the same fashion that LDS members do.\(^{200}\) How do we reconcile an untrue testimony and untrue spiritual experience with a true testimony and true experience when they look identical, were received in the same way, and are expressed in the same terms? If Satan can conjure up counterfeit experiences, and those experiences are so similar as to be convincing to those who have them, how then can we know our LDS experiences are not among the counterfeit? The critic would argue that we can’t, because feeling the Spirit is not a reliable enough way to discern truth.

**Apologetic View:**

The Apologetic view would argue that there are several responses to such a criticism. That the Holy Ghost may lead an individual to a place other than Mormonism as a stepping stone on the path, but that Mormonism is the most advanced stepping stone. The Apologetic view may argue that while those of other faiths are having real spiritual experiences, that the LDS experiences are in some discernible way different and therefore more reliable.\(^{201}\) The Apologist would also point out that while some faiths have members who seek to know the truth of their belief system through spiritual experience, most religious communities do not. For example, one who is attending a local Methodist church might pray to know if this is the best congregation for them and their family, but they are not as likely to pray about Methodism generally as the one “true” religion. The Apologetic view would completely uphold that one can know, and many do, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord’s only “True and Living Church” upon the Earth; that regardless of the issues raised above, one can know these things by the power of the Holy Ghost.

**Reconciled View:**

The Reconciled perspective would validate that people all across the world from various walks of life and belief systems have very deep and profound spiritual

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199 http://www.mormonthink.com/QUOTES/adamgod.htm  
200 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBVnsOEdv-I  
201 https://www.fairmormon.org/archive/publications/can-we-trust-our-feelings
experiences. That for some these experiences indicate the truthfulness of their Church or belief system and that their experiences are just as valid as those answers received within a Mormon context. The Reconciled view would also acknowledge that spiritual experiences not only lead people into the LDS faith, but also lead them out, and such experiences should not be discounted. The Reconciled view would see the use of a spiritual experience to determine absolute truth of a historical event or to know with certainty one is right and another wrong as overreaching. For the Reconciled viewpoint, reaching absolute truth is a lifelong journey. 202 The Reconciled view appreciates combining multiple tools like logic, science, and study along with spiritual practices like faith, meditation, and prayer to help one to reach new discoveries and new insights. One holding a Reconciled view also realizes that a new experience tomorrow may dramatically shift what one knows to be true today. One Reconciled view has been put forth that Truth is better discovered through scientific methodologies, and that Spiritual methods are better for connecting to beauty and goodness. 203 The Reconciled member sees a conflict between their promptings from the Holy Ghost to minister to and love others; and the policies, practices, or doctrines which result in ostracizing and marginalizing people.

Resources for Personal Research

http://en.fairmormon.org/Holy_Ghost/Burning_in_the_bosom
http://www.mormonthink.com/testimonyweb.htm
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwk_haliF3E
http://zelphontheshelf.com/i-bear-my-testimony-that-the-holy-ghost-is-broken/
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confirmation_bias
http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Backfire_effect
https://mormonbandwagon.com/bwv549/testimony-spiritual-experiences-truth-careful-examination/
Chapter 20:
Historical Jesus

Mainstream View:

The Mainstream view holds that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus. That all four gospels are consistent and corroborate each other. The Mainstream view holds that all the stories told in the scriptures are historically accurate and a representation of the actual life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Critical View:

The Critical view holds that the Four Gospel accounts were written much later than the Mainstream position had assumed. That Mark is written about 70 AD, Matthew and Luke around 80AD independent of each other, but borrowing from Mark to formulate their narrative, and John is written around 100 AD.\(^{204}\) That these are 2 to 4 generations removed from the actual life of Christ. That there is no historical evidence these accounts were written by the people later Christians attributed them to. That there are numerous contradictions regarding whether events occurred, the order of those events, the nature of the Savior's

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\(^{204}\) [https://carm.org/when-were-gospels-written-and-by-whom](https://carm.org/when-were-gospels-written-and-by-whom)
miracles, and even the personality of Jesus.\textsuperscript{205} The Critical view points out the serious scholarship here recognizes that the four gospels are not consistent and contradict each other so much that there are very few things we can say safely about the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. Herod’s killing of the First born is likely a fictional myth based on scholarship.\textsuperscript{206} Jesus family fleeing into Egypt is likely a fictional myth based on scholarship. Mark and Luke do not agree on the nativity story to the degree that their stories cannot be reconciled.\textsuperscript{207} Mark and John paint a very different Jesus, with Mark having him be humble, quiet, and reserved; and John having him declaring his divinity in the streets from the beginning of his ministry to the end. That almost everything we thought we knew about Jesus is up for grabs once we are willing to accept the data.

**Apologetic View:**

The Apologetic view validates the approximate dating of the writers of the four gospels by scholars as entirely possible. They also validate these other concerns, but they point to the Book of Mormon and why this second witness is so important. That when we see the Book of Mormon as a second witness, we can take comfort in the things both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon agree on. That both books witness together that Christ is the Son of God, they witness of his crucifixion and his resurrection, his birth, and even witness of some of the specifics of his teaching. That once we know the Book of Mormon is true, we need not be uneasy about the small details that lie outside these mutually testified items as such details are inconsequential.\textsuperscript{208}

**Reconciled View:**

The Reconciled view accepts the general premise of the Scholarship. That much of what is contained in the four gospels is in fact inconsistent and at times contradicting. The Reconciled view already has an adjusted framing on issues like Book of Mormon Historicity (Chapter 4) and on Scripture (Chapter 16) generally, that they have already created a nuanced space for belief on the Historical Jesus. This view does not feel compelled to accept a “Virgin Birth” as necessarily historical. The same with any specific detail within Christ’s life and ministry. Some Reconciled views even reframe in more mystical ways, events

\textsuperscript{205} http://www.biblicalcatholic.com/apologetics/ShreddingTheGospels.htm


\textsuperscript{207} http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rfst-152

\textsuperscript{208} http://www.ldsperspectives.com/2016/09/19/episode-1-historical-jesus/
like the Crucifixion and Resurrection, to the extent that these particular items need not be forced into a literal interpretation. In the end though, the Reconciled would agree that the specifics like the Crucifixion, Atonement, and Resurrection and more generally that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Son of God who made an atonement for mankind are truly matters of faith. That there simply is not enough data available for the critic to completely dispel these. So with such an understanding, Reconciled Latter-day Saints move forward reducing their focus on the need for these events to be literal and historical and instead focus on the Grace, Mercy, and the Power that a life dedicated to the Christ of Faith has to change and empower their lives. The Reconciled states there is much to be gained with wrestling with the life and teachings of the Christ of Faith and that there is much value to be gained from the mystical, mythological and deeply human aspects of the gospel narratives.

Resources for Personal Research

http://www.mormondiscussionpodcast.org/2016/12/premium-historical-jesus-pt-2-gospel-g/
http://www.mormondiscussionpodcast.org/2016/12/premium-historical-jesus-pt-3-gospel-mathew/
http://www.mormondiscussionpodcast.org/2016/12/premium-historical-jesus-pt-4-gospel-luke/
http://www.mormondiscussionpodcast.org/2016/12/premium-historical-jesus-pt-6-conclusion/
http://www.sunypress.edu/pdf/53771.pdf
http://www.thefishersofmenministries.com/The%20Quest%20of%20the%20Historical%20Jesus.pdf
http://www.crivoice.org/synoptic.html
http://cdn.bakerpublishinggroup.com/processed/esource-assets/files/775/original/hyperlink-04-06.pdf?1417381813
https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/historicity-and-latter-day-saint-scriptures/8-historical-jesus-latter-day-saint-perspective
http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/Pdfs/TheissenJesus.pdf
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