



This is my first post so I should introduce myself. I met my wife to be, in the last year of high school and married her when we were both 19. My wife came from an LDS family with her father serving as Bishop at the time. I was baptized into the church about 6 months after our marriage and started our life journey together as active members of the church. I am now almost 59 and have served in most callings particularly in Young Mens, Elders Quorum President, High Priests Group Leader, various Bish-
oprics, several occasions as a High Councilor, and most recently as a Bishop. You could say I am well rounded in the LDS Church.

My life was going along with the normal ups and downs up until in searching for answers to LDS Church history questions raised by 2 of my children and their spouses, I came across the Church Es-
says in the Gospel Topics section of LDS.org.

Here is my recent letter to my current Bishop and Stake President that will show you the difficulty that I am experiencing.

Dear Bishop and Stake President,

I write to you both as my ward and quorum leaders. I speak for both myself, and my wife, however the following letter is entirely my thoughts and personal struggles over the last 18 months.

**My wife and I are the parents of 5 wonderful and unique children and 8 joyful grandchil-
dren (so far). All of our children were born in the covenant and entered the Temple with
their spouses, with 4 children (2 sons and 2 daughters) serving missions.**

**About 18 months ago, my eldest son and eldest daughter's husband were struggling with
their testimonies of the church. Needless to say, their struggles were affecting their eter-
nal companions. Their struggles were based around fundamental beliefs that we have,
such as Joseph Smith and the Restoration, Book of Mormon and other revealed scripture,
Race and the Priesthood. Prayerfully I counseled with them and shared my love and testi-
mony with them. In my endeavor to seek further knowledge I began my journey to search
for answers to their difficulties.**

**As I began my research, I somehow came across the "Church Essays" found on lds.org in
the Gospel Topics section. As I read some of them I started to get an uneasy feeling. Here
was information that up until now I would have expected to find on anti-Mormon sites. As
I read through them rather than getting answers to questions, I was getting more ques-
tions that needed answering. It was like pulling a loose thread and realizing that my**

“Gospel fabric” was starting to unravel.

As I read through the various topics in the “Essays” I realized that there was more information needed than what was offered. The church was providing this information to assist those members struggling with historical information as well as being an attempt to become “more transparent”, however this information was only superficial and even vague in areas. Unfortunately rather than finding answers to those questions, I was beginning to sense a feeling of sadness and loneliness and a breaking down of my own “testimony”.

I needed more help, but where do I go? If I go to non-church sites then there is a bias, which would not be helpful. I have tried where possible to research LDS based sites especially those that refer to various personal diaries of leaders and prominent people of early Church history, which are in fact quoted as reliable sources by our leaders today. A valuable site for me has been Mormon History Association, which is a great source of information on the church’s history. You can find it at:

<http://mormonhistoryassociation.org>

Just over 12 months ago my wife and I along with our youngest daughter (25) relocated to our new Ward. In my first interview with Bishop, I expressed my concerns with regards to the “Essays” only to find out that he was aware of them and that others in his ward also had challenges. He suggested I read “Rough Stone Rolling”, an LDS based biography of Joseph Smith. I have yet to obtain a copy, however I have read various quotes and it’s interesting to note that even Bushman uses certain references that if researched by the reader will provide further information that, in my opinion, is damaging to the church.

During this period, my wife had been very supportive and loving to me and of course to our children. She had been faithful in attending to her calling as RS teacher and trying to be strong in her testimony, however she has now also started to struggle with aspects of church history, so much so, that when we unexpectedly, were extended a call to serve as Multi Stake Public Affairs Directors for our region, we realized that as Directors, we would have to defend the Church, both publicly and in the various committees that we would need to attend. This was too much for us and with sadness offered our apologies to the Area Seventy and declined the call. In regards to my wife’s RS calling she also has informed the RS President of her decision to no longer perform her role as teacher.

The last months have been difficult for us both to sit in Church meetings and listen to testimonies about the “truthfulness of the Church” or that “Joseph Smith and others were true prophets”. These have come about because of the unresolved questions raised by the “Essay” topics.

We love the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we understand it. What we have difficulty in, is how to reconcile the historical facts and the teachings of the early prophets and our current beliefs today. I know we have known about such things as polygamy, race and the Priesthood etc. before, but we never knew them in detail, and the essays, in trying to be more “transparent” have only skimmed over the difficult questions. The more I have now researched, the more disturbing the information has become.

Just last month I came across Elder M Russell Ballard address (see lds.org - There is Absolutely Nothing Wrong with Asking Questions) September 13, 2015. Here are some extracts:

“To the Saints in the Utah South Area

Let me make sure that you are hearing my epistle and that you understand this important point. There is absolutely nothing wrong with asking questions or investigating our history, doctrine, and practices. The Restoration began when Joseph Smith sought answers to his sincere questions.

We have heard stories where someone asking honest questions about our history, doctrine, or practice were treated as though they were faithless. This is not the Lord's way. As Peter said, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man [or woman] that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you."

We need to do better in responding to honest questions. Although we may not be able to answer every question about the cosmos or about our history, practices, or doctrine, we can provide many answers to those who are sincere."

Elder Ballard continues by relating a story of a young elder who served with then Mission President Ballard in Canada:

"One of our outstanding missionaries that served with us in the Canada Toronto Mission years ago, came to my office in Salt Lake City. During our visit, he told me that he was losing his faith and his testimony and that he had many questions. I asked him to write down his questions and promised to find answers to them, certainly as many as I could. As he was about to leave, he had his hand on the doorknob of my office, I said, "Elder, how long has it been since you have studied the scriptures, specifically how long has it been since you have read from the Book of Mormon? He lowered his head and said he had not been doing that. I gave him an assignment to begin reading the Book of Mormon for an hour each day while I worked to prepare answers to his questions. He agreed to do so.

Two weeks later, he came back to my office, and as he entered in and sat down he said, "President, I don't need answers to those questions anymore. I did what you asked—I know the Book of Mormon is true and I know Joseph Smith is a prophet of God." I was very happy to hear that, but said, "Elder, I spent a long time answering your questions so you will have to sit down and hear the answers!" What a joy! The Spirit and light of the gospel had returned to him. I commended him and gave him a big hug before he left."

He further stated the following:

"When I have a question that I cannot answer, I turn to those who can help me. The Church is blessed with trained scholars and those who have devoted a lifetime of study, who have come to know our history and the scriptures. These thoughtful men and women provide context and background so we can better understand our sacred past and our current practices."

I can hear you saying "yes, the answer to our struggles is to read the scriptures daily, particularly the Book of Mormon" as recommended by Elder Ballard. But isn't it interesting that he says:

"When I have a question that I cannot answer, I turn to those who can help me ... trained scholars ..."

So does he need more than the scriptures? What about Apostolic revelation? If even he needs to turn to scholars etc. then that would also apply to me. I have thought about the young elder reading the Book of Mormon. We all do that to get in a "comfortable and warm feeling" zone. One that we are familiar with, one that we have turned to for most of our lives. But is that feeling of comfort and warmth only a "familiar feeling"? The young man said he was OK, but it's also interesting that Elder Ballard continued with answering his questions. Those questions or answers are not stated. They would have been helpful for me.

The following are some of the difficulties that have affected me in reading the Essays.

PLURAL MARRIAGE

Revelation on plural marriage D&C 132 (12th July 1843) - known to Joseph since 1831 following his reading about Abraham in the scriptures.

Although the sealing keys were not restored till April 3 1836 (Kirtland Temple) - Joseph secretly marries Fanny Alger (a maid in his house) without restored sealing keys and before the revelation on plural marriage?

Louisa Beaman becomes the first of many plural wives sealed to Joseph in Nauvoo April 1841. Joseph also marries/seals himself to married women, even some whose husbands are on missions. No explanation is given.

The most damning example of Joseph's and Brigham Young's practice of "Celestial Marriage" was with Zina D Huntington Jacobs Smith Young. She was propositioned by Joseph to be his plural wife and even after she married Henry Jacobs, Joseph continued to pursue Zina and eventually sealed her to himself. Following Joseph's death, Brigham decided he was a better man for her than her legal husband Henry and had her sealed to himself for time without a divorce from Henry and went on to having children with her. Is this Gods "plan of happiness"?

The Church Essay states the following:

"When God commands a difficult task, He sometimes sends additional messengers to encourage His people to obey. Consistent with this pattern, Joseph told associates that an angel appeared to him three times between 1834 and 1842 and commanded him to proceed with plural marriage when he hesitated to move forward. During the third and final appearance, the angel came with a drawn sword, threatening Joseph with destruction unless he went forward and obeyed the commandment - fully."

Joseph would use this statement of the destroying angel to coerce some of the women to accept his marriage proposal. He would also state that he had received by revelation that the specific woman was to be sealed to him.

The essay further states the following in trying to answer the cases of polyandry:

"He may have believed that sealings to married women would comply with the Lord's command without requiring him to have normal marriage relationships."

This is not consistent with one of the reasons for the practice of polygamy which was to "raise up seed unto the Lord". If Joseph didn't have "normal marriage relationships" then what seed would have been raised?

Another excerpt:

"The revelation on plural marriage, recorded in [Doctrine and Covenants 132](#), emerged partly from Joseph Smith's study of the Old Testament in 1831. Latter-day Saints understood that they were living in the latter days, in what the revelations called the "dispensation of the fullness of times."⁵ Ancient principles—such as prophets, priesthood, and temples—would be restored to the earth. Plural marriage, practiced by ancient patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, was one of those ancient principles."

This has been a very perplexing statement. Logic says that if Joseph had to restore all as at first, including plural marriage, why isn't it a necessary principle today? (The Woodruff Manifesto is another topic of discussion). Thinking about this some more, if Joseph restored Christ's church, then who in Christ's time practiced polygamy and if not why not? And if the doctrine of polygamy is to raise seed unto God then why did Adam only have

Eve and not other wives, or even Noah after the flood?

And again:

“Emma approved, at least for a time, of four of Joseph Smith’s plural marriages in Nauvoo, and she accepted all four of those wives into her household. She may have approved of other marriages as well. But Emma likely did not know about all of Joseph’s sealings. She vacillated in her view of plural marriage, at some points supporting it and at other times denouncing it.”

This doesn’t sound like Emma was thrilled about polygamy and what about Joseph being honest with his wife?

Here’s an interesting quote:

“The revelation on marriage required that a wife give her consent before her husband could enter into plural marriage. Nevertheless, toward the end of the revelation, the Lord said that if the first wife “receive not this law”—the command to practice plural marriage—the husband would be “exempt from the law of Sarah,” presumably the requirement that the husband gain the consent of the first wife before marrying additional women. After Emma opposed plural marriage, Joseph was placed in an agonizing dilemma, forced to choose between the will of God and the will of his beloved Emma. He may have thought Emma’s rejection of plural marriage exempted him from the law of Sarah. Her decision to “receive not this law” permitted him to marry additional wives without her consent.”

Well a convenient out for Joseph. He could marry anyone without Emma’s permission because he was only following God’s command.

Let’s look at Helen Mar Kimball, Heber C Kimball’s 14 year old daughter (see BYU Religious Education):

https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/no-weapon-shall-prosper/subject-can-bear-investigation-anguish-faith-and-joseph-smiths#_edn12

“Joseph ... came next morning & with my parents I heard him teach & explain the principle of Celestial marriage—after which he said to me, ‘If you will take this step, it will ensure your eternal salvation and exaltation & that of your father’s household & all of your kindred. This promise was so great that I willingly gave myself to purchase so glorious a reward.’ Neither a starry-eyed nor love-struck proposal, Joseph Smith’s to Helen resembles others recorded by the Prophet’s wives; each reported that he couched his proposal in the language of revelation, obedience to God’s law, and the promise of eternal rewards.”

I can’t help but feel for Helen, a 14 year old girl who had so much pressure put on her by the Prophet and her father. Can you imagine if you had a 14 year old daughter? Would you feel comfortable in submitting to the proposal?

Pres Gordon B Hinckley in an interview with Larry King said this of the practice of polygamy:

“I condemn it, yes, as a practice, because I think it is not doctrinal.”

The church essay states this about the doctrine of plural marriage:

“Church members no longer practice plural marriage.⁵⁴ Consistent with Joseph Smith’s teachings, the Church permits a man whose wife has died to be sealed to another woman when he remarries.”

So it is indeed still a doctrine of the church. Perhaps Pres Hinckley was confused?

Here is a quote from “Official Declaration 1” (D&C) — Scripture: (is this an example of the

accepted principle of “lying for the Lord”?)

I, therefore, as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, do hereby, in the most solemn manner, declare that these charges are false. We are not teaching polygamy or plural marriage, nor permitting any person to enter into its practice, and I deny that either forty or any other number of plural marriages have during that period been solemnized in our Temples or in any other place in the Territory.

Here is an “out” for Pres Woodruff as given by the author of the essay:

“The Manifesto declared President Woodruff’s intention to submit to the laws of the United States. It said nothing about the laws of other nations. Ever since the opening of colonies in Mexico and Canada, Church leaders had performed plural marriages in those countries, and after October 1890, plural marriages continued to be quietly performed there.³⁴ As a rule, these marriages were not promoted by Church leaders and were difficult to get approved. Either one or both of the spouses who entered into these unions typically had to agree to remain in Canada or Mexico. Under exceptional circumstances, a smaller number of new plural marriages were performed in the United States between 1890 and 1904, though whether the marriages were authorized to have been performed within the states is unclear.”

I just want to understand what are exceptional circumstances? If Joseph had to follow God’s command to marry other women, what exceptional circumstance were there for members to break God’s command following the Manifesto?

From the essay:

“The exclusion of B. H. Roberts opened Mormon marital practices to renewed scrutiny. Church President Lorenzo Snow issued a statement clarifying that new plural marriages had ceased in the Church and that the Manifesto extended to all parts of the world, counsel he repeated in private. Even so, a small number of new plural marriages continued to be performed, probably without President Snow’s knowledge or approval. After Joseph F. Smith became Church President in 1901, a small number of new plural marriages were also performed during the early years of his administration.”

Here again after a Prophet of God publicly stating that plural marriage had ceased and by God’s command, yet more marriages were performed. Again what special circumstance allows a faithful member and indeed the Lord’s anointed Apostle/Prophet to break not only the Law of the land but also God’s command?

BOOK OF MORMON TRANSLATION

Another difficult fact is the use of the “seer stone” in translating the gold plates.

The essay states the following:

“The other instrument, which Joseph Smith discovered in the ground years before he retrieved the gold plates, was a small oval stone, or “seer stone.” As a young man during the 1820s, Joseph Smith, like others in his day, used a seer stone to look for lost objects and buried treasure. As Joseph grew to understand his prophetic calling, he learned that he could use this stone for the higher purpose of translating scripture”.

The Urim and Thummim was only used to translate the first 116 pages (the lost ones). After Joseph regained the plates he then only used the “seer stone”. This seer stone was the one found on Willard Chase property while digging in a well. There is no mention anywhere that it was given to Joseph by God to help him translate, or even any mention that God “touched” the stones (see Bro of Jared). So this stone and other stones certainly were not “gifts” from God.

It's also interesting that now we have numerous statements on Joseph putting the stone in a hat. Prior to this the process of translating with the seer stone was mentioned obscurely in a Friend article of 1979 and some years ago by Elder Nelson.

I would like to hear anyone's thoughts on the October 2015 Ensign article entitled "Joseph the Seer". Here is the link:

<https://www.lds.org/ensign/2015/10/joseph-the-seer?lang=eng>

I have further difficulty in understanding the fact that the church has had this "seer stone" since Brigham Young and only now disclosed that fact. And since Joseph, no other Prophet has used it, or felt the need to use it? I would think today would be a perfect time to receive further revelation to answer all the unknown facts as touched upon in the essays.

RACE AND THE PRIESTHOOD

The Essay is detailed, however no one can find where the "doctrine" of banning blacks from the Priesthood came from, only that Brigham Young publicly announced in 1852 that:

"men of black African descent could no longer be ordained to the priesthood, though thereafter blacks continued to join the Church through baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. Following the death of Brigham Young, subsequent Church presidents restricted blacks from receiving the temple endowment or being married in the temple. Over time, Church leaders and members advanced many theories to explain the priesthood and temple restrictions. None of these explanations is accepted today as the official doctrine of the Church".

So it wasn't a doctrine and no revelation was given by God to his Prophet, yet we had to wait till President Spencer Kimball received revelation from God to allow blacks the privilege. The theme running through the Essay is that it was the culture of the time, meaning that society had a particular view of the Negro and therefore the Church was of the same opinion. How does one consider that, when we compare the practice of Polygamy. It certainly wasn't an accepted view of society, yet the church members were so obedient to that practice even though it not being accepted by society.

I have just scratched the surface in regards to the church essays and the history of the church.

Reuben Clark is quoted as having said "If we have truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not truth, it ought to be harmed". I would think that the "truth" found in the essays has harmed me. I certainly have come to the conclusion that I have been taught "the philosophies of men - mingled with scripture".

Needless to say I simply announce to you both, that Anne and I will no longer be regular attenders to future church meetings. We have shared our difficulties (briefly) with our 2 "active" children and their spouses. Although heartbreaking for them and us, we could no longer pretend that all is well in Zion. We have for now decided to not seek formal removal of our membership, as that would show to them a finality in our "eternal family unit", as the church doctrines teaches, and at this stage we do not wish that heartache upon them.

Finally, if there is one thing that I would ask of you both, it is that you would read the church essays in full, concentrating on Plural Marriage, Race and the Priesthood, Book of Abraham, and when you have read and pondered them, ask yourselves in all honesty, if they do not cause some doubt to come into your minds. I am still perplexed at the fact

that the church has published them thinking that they would be helpful to members. And it bothers me greatly that anyone, especially the Brethren, would say “don’t doubt”.

Sincerely,

John Krok

They both responded to my letter, with the Bishop offering to meet with my wife and me, to see what he could do. The Stake President replied by stating that he had read in detail my letter, but didn't know the answers and hoped that I would find them as I faithfully followed the Spirit's direction.

What I really wanted from both brethren was their thoughts / opinions on what is found in the Church Essays, but it seems that they would prefer to stay clear of them.

What also saddens me, is that when I have raised questions with other members of the LDS Church regarding the Church Essays, none of them have a knowledge about them and certainly don't want to know more.