

I considered titling this “Too Big to Fail?” But no, with billions in assets, millions of Saints tithing ten percent, and catastrophic cultural implications, like Chase Manhattan and Goldman Sacks, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints *is* too big to fail.

While fiscal failure of the Mormon church portends economic shockwaves beyond reckoning, such a collapse would mean dollars in the pockets of rank-and-file members: No more ten percent to the Prophet. No more \$10,000 to bankroll an offspring on a mission. No more thousands for Church-related programs.

Nevertheless, for millions of the Faithful, collapse of their Church would trigger emotional and cultural devastation to beggar economics. Hearing their “Prophet Seer and Revelator” declare Joseph Smith’s story and Book as frauds, Mormons and Mormonism would experience personal and societal shockwaves akin to Catholics hearing the Pope denounce God.

Despite disastrous economic and cultural implications, twenty-first century technology and inquiry throw Church validity into serious question. Historical research, absence of *any* artifact to support the *Book of Mormon*—metal implements, the wheel, a scrap parchment, a rusty pin—and genetic *proof* that Native American roots lie *not* in the Near East but *Asia*, convince “Ex-Mos” and others that Joseph Smith’s Church is bogus as the clichéd three-dollar bill. Challenged by fact and social media, what stratagem might the General Authorities employ to precluding a meltdown of Mormonism?

Not to worry. Faced by a cacophony of inquiry and challenge, with bottomless pockets and a legion of attorneys, bankers, and MBA’s minding the store, the Board of Directors will never allow LDS Inc. to go under. So how might The Elders keep Mormonism afloat?

With past as prolog, query and critique from outside The Fold receive a boiler-plate response: Silence.

Members with questions—members in general—are nurtured like mushrooms: Feed ‘em manure and keep ‘em in the dark. Those stubborn or foolhardy enough to persist in pesky questions stand before their Bishop, head bowed hat in hand, like a truant third grader. When intimidation fails, Mormons who refuse to recant are booted out!

No Man Knows My History, a researched inquiry into Joseph Smith’s and the *Book of Mormon*’s roots led to—an historian and niece of Church President David O. McKay—Fawn Brodie’s excommunication. - For *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, a member with impeccable credentials, Grant H. Palmer was likewise sanctioned. With Ex-Mo presses rolling and shelves of heretical publications expanding, excommunication tribunals would seem at hazard of becoming overtaxed.

Surely General Authorities, Stake Presidents, Bishops, and BYU professors, see the writing on their desktops and laptops. But how to respond? Can nineteenth century stonewalling and intimidation hold against twenty-first century technology and inquiry?

Religions are organic; they change over time — Mormonism not excepted. From incremental grass-roots shift to stunning reversals of Doctrine, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints adapts and adjusts.

At the prosaic level, when I was a lad face-cards were anathema in Mormon households. The Sabbath was for Sunday School, Sacrament Meeting, and Fireside Chats. Apart from “Sunday Funnies” in the Salt Lake Tribune, Sunday entertainment was verboten. My observation is, today, except for the most straight-laced Saints, face-cards, Sunday movies and TV watching are far from uncommon in LDS homes.

The Word of Wisdom counsels members not to drink tea or coffee. For decades this sanction extended to cola drinks, on the assumption I presume that caffeine is the culprit. Recently this restriction lifted. Did Coke and Pepsi stocks find their way into the Church’s portfolio?

At the institutional level, folks who have been “through the Temple” report ceremonies sacrosanct since the Prophet Joseph’s time have changed or been dropped.

Dramatic shifts in doctrine are documented in Church canon:

Doctrine and Covenants, Section 132, Verse 4, recorded July 12, 1843,

For behold, I (God) reveal unto you a new and *everlasting* covenant; and *if ye abide not* that covenant, then are ye *damned*; for *no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory.*” (my emphasis)

After exhaustive rambling, Verse 61 gets to the “covenant”:

“if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another . . . he cannot commit adultery.”

While Verse 62 extends the number of virgins to ten. With the Prophet leading, Mormon Elders expanded their priestly prerogative to as many virgins (non-virgins?) as practicality allowed.

Fast forward 47 years: When Utah’s statehood hinged on the issue of polygamy, *Doctrine and Covenants*, “Official Declaration I” reversed course:

After receiving revelation, President Wilford Woodruff issued the following Manifesto, which was accepted by the Church as authoritative and binding on October 6, 1890. This led to the end of the practice of plural marriage in the Church.

Further on, the President fessed up that persisting with plural marriage would lead to,

“imprisonment of the First Presidency and Twelve and the heads of families in the Church, and the confiscation of personal property of the people.”

Did the Big-Guy-Up-Stairs change His mind? Or, did the Elders trade being “damned” and barred from “my glory” for political clout and to dodge the ‘ol Slammer? In any case, January 4, 1896, Utah became the 45th State. The “everlasting covenant” lasted less than a half-century.

A second surprising instance of Mormonism adapting and adjusting revolves on the Church’s view of dark-skinned people. From inception, black men were barred from the Priesthood. In Sunday School I was taught black people are descendants of Cain and/or angels who straddled the fence in a celestial war between God and Satan.

The Book of Mormon’s and hence the Church’s position regarding dark-skinned folks is unequivocal:

1 Nephi 12:23

they became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations.

Alma 3:6

And the skins of the Lamanites (Native Americans) were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression and their rebellion against their brethren . . .

Mormon 5:15

for this people shall be scattered, and shall become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people . . .

Do such scurrilous indictments reflect Divine wisdom or nineteenth century American ignorance and bigotry?

According to its Introduction, *The Book of Mormon*:

is a record of God's dealings with ancient inhabitants of the Americas . . . written by ancient prophets *by the spirit of prophecy and revelation* . . . on plates (which) were delivered to Joseph Smith, who *translated by the gift and power of God*. (my emphasis)

further on,

Concerning this record the Prophet Joseph Smith said: "I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."

Such assurance, backed by references to "Jesus Christ," "God, the Eternal Father," and "the Holy Ghost," make it clear Nephi, Alma, and Mormon speak for Almighty God Himself!

Fast forward again: *Doctrine and Covenants* "Official Declaration 2":

(a) revelation came to Church President Spencer W. Kimball and was affirmed to other Church leaders in the Salt Lake Temple on June 1, 1978 (which) removed all restrictions with regard to race that once applied to the priesthood.

Did God again change his mind? Or, Civil Rights Hounds at their heels, did the Elders make another politically savvy call?

Regarding gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites, questioning (LGBTQ) folks, the Church is clear--think California Proposition 8. At least one in twenty-five Americans--probably many more--experience other-than-heterosexual feelings. If Mormons fall in the range, with a reported fifteen-million-plus, members, upwards of half-a-million do not share "normal" sexual proclivities. At the average LDS Sunday School, Priesthood, and Relief Society meeting, straight men, women, and children sit, sing, and pray alongside twenty LGBTQ family and friends.

With Civil Rights and sexual closet doors bursting, legislators, jurists, and the grass-roots recognize the injustice in forcing second-class citizenship to folks who, through no fault of their own, experience--some would argue God-given--minority sexual interests. In America, pressure for moral and legal change regarding attitudes around sexual preference can only increase. Faced with this groundswell, will the Church continue forcing men and women to choose between acting on their feelings and excommunication?

With the Elders seeking more politically favorable ground could "Official Declaration III" be in the offing? Out of the question! Like the notion only decades back of black men blessing the sacrament.

Pragmatic implications demand the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints *not fail*. At the same time twenty-first century technology, investigation, and communication pose dilemmas for the General Authorities to cross Solomon's eyes:

A cosmos of investigation refutes the black hole of physical evidence to support the *Book of Mormon*. Science *proves* that Lamanite or Native America genes derive *not* from the Near East but Asia! A growing chorus of argument challenges the validity of "Church History" and Doctrine.

In short, evidence and rationale that Joseph Smith's story and Book are a lie seem irrefutable.

What to do? Stonewall? Doublespeak? Adjust? Adapt? Retire Shepherd Joe while somehow keeping his flock penned? Grant H. Palmer suggests Mormonism might morph into a less problematic Christian model--Not 'til the old guard dies off!

For the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, these are interesting times.