What the Gospel Topics Essays Establish That Church Leadership Knows

Duty of Candor

The Gospel Topics Essays are important not because they prove that senior Church leaders privately disbelieve the Church's truth claims. They do not establish anyone's private state of mind. Their evidentiary importance is different and, for the present inquiry, more useful.

They establish **institutional knowledge**.

The Church states that these essays were approved by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and were intended to gather "accurate information" so members and others could more easily study difficult subjects. We are therefore justified in treating facts acknowledged in these essays as facts the governing institution knows well enough to approve for publication.

Contents

The Structure of This Inquiry

This Supplement borrows several terms from legal procedure—**indictment, bill of particulars, and counts**—as an organizing framework. They are used analogically, not to allege a criminal offense or to present a legal pleading.

The **indictment** states the general ethical charge: an institution claiming extraordinary religious authority, possessing materially greater historical knowledge than the people whose reliance it solicits, assumes a corresponding Duty of Candor. The Gospel Topics Essays establish that Church leadership possesses substantial knowledge that qualifies important representations historically made to members, missionaries, investigators, and Temple participants. The question is whether that knowledge is disclosed with adequate candor before consequential reliance and commitment are obtained.

The **Bill of Particulars** identifies the specific subjects upon which that general charge can be examined rather than merely asserted. Each **Count** takes one historically important claim or practice and asks substantially the same questions:

> **What does the Church now acknowledge? What was previously represented? What continues to be represented? What material qualification is disclosed, omitted, delayed, compartmentalized, or redefined? And what reliance is sought from the person receiving the representation?**

The Counts therefore do not begin with a verdict of intentional deception. They test a narrower and more defensible proposition: whether the institution's own acknowledged knowledge, measured against the representations through which it continues to seek religious reliance, satisfies the Duty of Candor developed in Part I.

Evidence of deliberate deception, where independently established, remains relevant. But the ethical case does not depend upon proving the private intent of present Church leaders. A failure of candor can be established by the disparity between what the institution knows, what it communicates, when it communicates it, and what commitment it obtains while that disparity remains.

PART I — THE DUTY OF CANDOR: THE STANDARD AND THE INDICTMENT

The Essays establish institutional knowledge. The Church asks for extraordinary reliance—belief, tithing, missionary service, Temple covenants, sacrifice, consecration, and obedience. This document then argues that this combination creates a heightened Duty of Candor. That proposition is already stated particularly well:

> **"The greater the authority an institution claims over another person's life, the greater its Duty of Candor about the evidence supporting that authority."**

Then the present "Ethical Indictment" supplies the general charge: leadership possesses information materially qualifying representations upon which others are asked to rely, while material information may remain compartmentalized, euphemistically characterized, apologetically framed, delayed, or absent when commitment is solicited. That is my **Indictment**.

An important methodological caution is necessary.

> **The essays are evidence of what the Church admits. The essays are not neutral descriptions of what those admissions mean.**

For this Supplement, I state the methodological rule explicitly:

> **Because official Church literature has expressly disclaimed an obligation to present both sides, I do not treat Church or Church-sponsored historical writing as presumptively complete or neutral where the institution's own conduct is under examination. I use such sources primarily for facts, documents, and admissions that can be independently evaluated. Institutional interpretations are treated as advocacy and accepted only to the extent the evidence supports them.**

The same caution applies to Church-employed and Church-sponsored scholarship. Historians and scholars working within institutions controlled or substantially supported by the Church do not occupy the same position as historians institutionally independent of the organization whose conduct is being examined. Their scholarship may be excellent, and institutional affiliation does not establish that any particular conclusion is false. But the relationship creates a conflict of interest that this inquiry cannot properly ignore.[1]

Accordingly, Church and BYU scholarship will not ordinarily be relied upon here as independent validation of the Church's own historical position. Where such scholarship identifies a primary document, archival record, or independently verifiable fact, this inquiry will attempt whenever practical to examine the underlying evidence itself. Church-sponsored sources remain particularly useful for a different evidentiary purpose: establishing what the institution possesses, publishes, acknowledges, or now concedes.

This distinction is fundamental. An institutional source may constitute powerful evidence of an admission without thereby becoming an independent authority upon the meaning or ethical significance of that admission. The Church may supply evidence in the case concerning itself; it does not thereby become the neutral judge of that evidence.

This caution is especially necessary where the institutional record already demonstrates prior concealment or materially misleading history, for example, its histories of the Mountain Meadows Massacre.[2] A later Church account does not become reliable merely because it corrects part of an earlier false account. The proper question remains: what does the surviving evidence most probably establish, including evidence the institution itself may now admit but still interpret in its own favor?

> **A Church source may be particularly valuable when it makes an admission contrary to institutional interest, without thereby being treated as an independent or presumptively objective historical authority.**

The Duty of Candor developed here is an ethical standard, not a description of the Church's acknowledged practice. Indeed, senior Church leadership has expressly defended institutional advocacy that does not undertake to present both sides. The question in this Supplement is therefore not whether the Church accepts the standard. It does not. It is whether its conduct, nonetheless, satisfies it.

Terms such as *translation*, *plural marriage*, *sealing*, *revelation*, *carefully worded denials*, and *among the ancestors* can contain interpretations favorable to the institution. This inquiry will therefore distinguish, wherever possible, between:

---

[1] All church historians and all BYU employees' livelihood depends on their remaining in the good favor of the church hierarchy. BYU professors and historian like D. Michael Quinn, have been fired and excommunicated who fail to preserve their good standing. Quinn was a former BYU historian and was excommunicated in 1993 as one of the September Six; his historical work included controversial research on post-Manifesto plural marriage. More broadly, the history of Church discipline involving scholars and the institutional constraints surrounding Church historical work provide legitimate reasons not to treat Church-sponsored scholarship as independent of the institution whose history is being evaluated.

[2] Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1922), chap. 44, pp. 511–17. Apostle, Church Historian, and future Prophet, Smith mis-characterized the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Juanita Brooks's *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (1950), p. 160. Criticized Smith's statement that Mountain Meadows was the crime of a single individual. Brooks responded that in the collections of the LDS Church Historian's Office—records of which Joseph Fielding Smith himself was custodian—there was: "ample evidence that this was definitely not the crime of a single individual, nor the responsibility of only one man."

- **the underlying historical fact,**
- **the Church's characterization of that fact,**
- and, **the ethical significance of the fact.**

That distinction is essential to a Duty of Candor inquiry.

What the Church Now Knows

Taken collectively, the Gospel Topics Essays establish that senior Church leadership knows or officially accepts a body of information substantially more complicated than the familiar Restoration narrative.

The Book of Mormon

The Church continues to describe Joseph Smith as having "translated" an ancient record written on gold plates. But the detailed historical evidence concerning the dictation process requires greater precision.

Joseph used a seer stone—the same brown stone associated with his activities before acquiring the plates—for substantial portions of the Book of Mormon production. Detailed eyewitness descriptions predominantly describe Joseph placing the stone or the interpreters into a hat, placing his face over the opening to exclude light, and dictating English text.

Emma Smith's description is particularly important because she actually served as a scribe: the plates could remain wrapped on the table while Joseph dictated from the stone in the hat. "Therefore, the conventional phrase 'Joseph translated the Book of Mormon from the gold plates' states more than the detailed historical evidence establishes if it is understood to mean an ordinary linguistic translation from visible characters on the plates." The historical evidence does not establish an ordinary process of:

> **visible plates → examined characters → linguistic translation → English text.**

The plates figure prominently in the founding narrative, but the principal detailed descriptions of dictation do not establish Joseph visibly reading the English text from them.

This creates a material question:

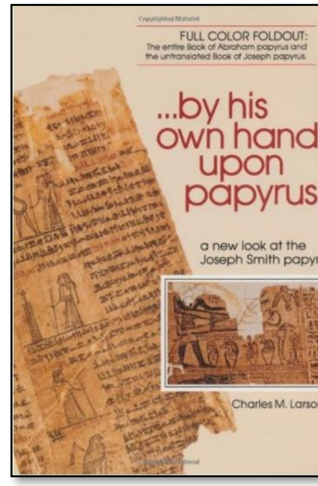
> **If the English text was dictated from words appearing through a seer stone while the plates could remain covered, what was the plates purpose since the plates actually were often not used in producing the English Book of Mormon?**

And if their function was not necessary to the dictation, why has their physical presence been so central to the traditional representation of *translation*?

The Duty of Candor requires that the historical process be described before the institution supplies its theological interpretation of that process.

The Book of Abraham

The same caution applies even more strongly to the Book of Abraham. The Church acknowledges that the surviving Egyptian papyri do not translate into the English Book of Abraham in the ordinary linguistic sense. Yet the Church preserves the term *translation* by allowing possibilities in which the papyri functioned as a catalyst for revelation.



That may constitute a theological explanation. It does not constitute evidence of linguistic translation.

The distinction is fundamental:

> **Source text → linguistic rendering into another language**

is translation in the ordinary sense.

> **Ancient object → revelatory stimulus → unrelated English scripture**

is something else, even if one believes the resulting text came from God. The institutional knowledge is therefore important: Church leadership knows that Egyptology does not produce Joseph Smith's English Book of Abraham from the surviving papyri.

The Duty of Candor question becomes whether retaining the familiar word **translation** adequately communicates that fact to the ordinary member.

The Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham should eventually be examined together. In both cases, a physical ancient artifact authenticates the story presented to the believer, while the relationship between that artifact and the resulting English text becomes increasingly difficult to describe as ordinary translation. That recurring contradiction deserves attention.

Joseph Smith's Secret Relationships With Women

Here our terminology must be particularly disciplined. The Church describes Joseph Smith as having practiced **"plural marriage."** Indeed, the essay begins by assuming that God commanded the practice and then interprets the evidence within that theological classification.

For purposes of an independent ethical inquiry, however, *marriage* is one of the matters requiring examination. We should therefore begin with conduct.

Joseph Smith entered numerous clandestine marital, sexual, or purported marital relationships with women other than Emma Smith. The Church characterizes these relationships collectively as plural marriages or sealings.

The Church itself acknowledges that the practice was introduced secretly, participants were instructed to keep their involvement confidential, and the historical record is consequently thin.

The relationships included women already married to other men, very young women, women within Joseph's household and social circle, and women whose relationships with Joseph were unknown to Emma.

Those circumstances cannot ethically disappear into the antiseptic category **“plural marriage.”**

For each relationship the relevant questions are more elementary:

- **Who was the woman?**
- **How old was she?**
- **Was she already married?**
- **What relationship of trust existed between Joseph and her husband or family?**
- **Was she employed by or dependent upon Joseph's household?**
- **Did Emma know?**
- **Did the woman's husband know?**
- **Did her parents know?**
- **What religious representations did Joseph make to obtain consent?**
- **Did he invoke revelation, prophetic authority, eternal salvation, or divine command?**
- **Is there contemporaneous evidence of a ceremony?**
- **Was the relationship lawful?**
- **Was it publicly acknowledged?**
- **Was it sexual?**

Only after establishing those facts should the historian decide whether *marriage* adequately describes the relationship.

Fanny Alger: The Danger of Retrospective Classification

Fanny Alger illustrates the problem particularly well. The Church calls her Joseph Smith's first plural wife. But its own essay admits that the evidence is **“fragmentary,”** that the reports describing a marriage were written decades afterward, and that little is known about the relationship.

Fanny lived and worked in the Smith household. The existence of a clandestine relationship between Joseph and Fanny is much less contested than the retrospective classification of that relationship as a marriage. Oliver Cowdery, one of Joseph Smith's closest associates and one of the principal witnesses of the Book of Mormon, described the relationship as scandalous sexual misconduct rather than solemn matrimony.

Later Mormon reminiscences supplied evidence for a religious ceremony.[3] Those two categories of evidence should not be collapsed. The appropriate historical statement is therefore not simply:

> **“Joseph Smith married Fanny Alger.”**

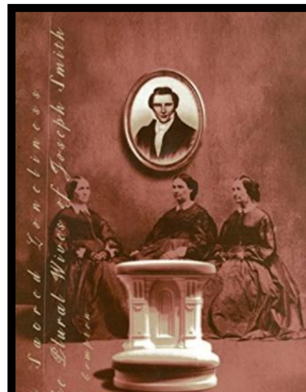
[3] The relationship itself is generally dated somewhere around 1835–36, or as early as 1833. Mosiah Hancock's 1896 second hand account was written approximately **60 years after the alleged event**. Oliver Cowdery's much earlier private letter describes the relationship in language consistent with scandalous sexual misconduct rather than solemn matrimony.

It is closer to:

> **Joseph Smith had a clandestine relationship with his teenage household employee Fanny Alger. Later Mormon recollections characterized that relationship as a religious marriage; contemporary evidence includes Oliver Cowdery's hostile characterization of it as an affair or "scrape."**

Whether the relationship is ultimately classified as marriage, adultery, or something else is a historical and ethical conclusion. The Church's retrospective designation of the relationship as a marriage does not itself establish that conclusion.

A Pattern of Betrayed Trust



In Sacred Loneliness:
The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith

The same principle becomes more significant when Joseph's relationships are examined collectively rather than individually. Joseph was not merely an unattached private citizen seeking unconventional romantic relationships.

He was:

> **prophet, pastor, employer, friend, counselor, community leader, and claimant to direct revelation from God.**

Women and families trusted him within those relationships. The historical record therefore requires examination of possible **betrayals of trust**.

- The Nancy Rigdon episode involves Joseph propositioning the teenage daughter of one of his closest counselors.
- William Law's break with Joseph involved, among other matters, allegations concerning Joseph's marital system and Joseph's approach to Law's wife Jane.
- The Sarah Pratt episode, wife of Orson Pratt sent on a mission, belongs within the same field of inquiry rather than being assumed away.
- And independently of these cases, the Church acknowledges that Joseph entered relationships it calls sealings with women already married to other men.

This produces a question substantially more serious than:

> **"How many plural wives did Joseph Smith have?"**

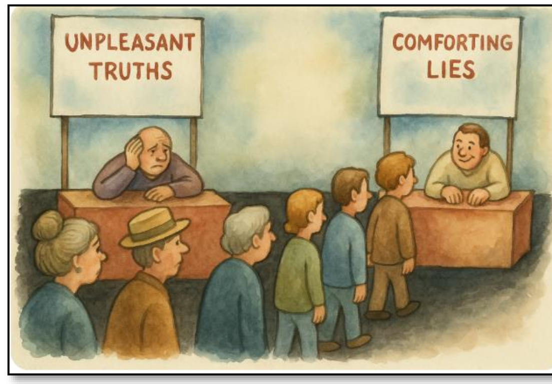
The question is:

> **Did Joseph Smith repeatedly use pastoral, familial, economic, marital, and religious relationships of trust to obtain intimate relationships that would otherwise have constituted profound betrayals of the people who trusted him?**

William Law becomes especially important under this analysis. The *Nauvoo Expositor* was destroyed after being condemned as libelous. Yet the Church now acknowledges the underlying secret system of additional relationships that Law and his associates were attempting to expose.

The word *libel* therefore cannot substitute for examining whether their material allegations were true. An accusation can be hostile. It can be personally motivated. It can be inflammatory. **And it can still be substantially true.**

"Carefully Worded Denials"



The Church's own essay contains one of the most consequential admissions in the entire Gospel Topics collection. As rumors spread, Church leaders issued what the essay calls **"carefully worded denials."** Those statements denounced "spiritual wifery" and "polygamy" while remaining silent about relationships Joseph and his associates classified as divinely authorized celestial marriages. The essay further acknowledges that statements emphasized monogamy while implicitly leaving an exception for individuals acting under the prophet's direction.

The phrase *carefully worded denials* should itself be examined critically. It describes the technique. It does not resolve the ethics.

If leaders knew that ordinary listeners would understand:

> **"Joseph Smith and Church leaders are not secretly taking additional wives,"**

while the speakers internally distinguished between condemned *polygamy* and authorized *celestial marriage*, the relevant ethical description may be:

> **a technically constructed but materially misleading denial.**

Candor asks more than:

> **Could the words be defended under an undisclosed definition?**

It asks:

> **What did the audience reasonably understand the speaker to be saying?**

If the speaker intentionally exploits the difference between those two meanings, literal defensibility does not cure the deception.

Consent Under Claimed Divine Authority

The Church's Utah essay produces another revealing juxtaposition. The institution says women were free to choose whether to enter plural unions. Yet the religious system simultaneously taught that the practice came from God and that Saints were expected to accept the principle as revelation. The Church's current essay continues to frame the practice as instituted by revelation and controlled through authority held by the Church President.

This exposes a continuing confusion between:

the physical ability to choose

and

freedom of conscience.

A person can technically possess the power to say no while believing that God has already declared what the morally faithful answer must be. That distinction reaches directly into the Temple. Mormonism strongly affirms Free Agency. It also elevates obedience to divinely authorized leadership.

Those propositions coexist without difficulty until conscience reaches a conclusion contrary to institutional expectation. At that point:

- **Free Agency says: Make your conclusion.**
- **Conscience says: Follow what you conclude is right.**
- **Obedience says: God has already identified the faithful conclusion.**

If obedience prevails merely because authority has spoken, conscience has not been exercised freely even though formal choice remains. This may be one of the enduring ethical errors embedded by Joseph Smith into the Temple system.

Emma Smith and the Law of Consent

The Church's own plural-marriage essay exposes this problem dramatically. Doctrine and Covenants 132 appears to require the first wife's consent. Yet the essay explains that if the wife rejects "this law," Joseph may have regarded himself as exempt from the requirement to obtain her consent. Consider what this does to the meaning of consent.

- **If she agrees, her consent authorizes the additional relationship.**
- **If she refuses, her refusal may eliminate the requirement for her consent.**

That is not meaningful consent. It creates a procedure in which the authority demanding consent can ultimately nullify the refusal. This resembles the larger obedience problem. Choice is formally offered. But only one answer is permitted to control the outcome.

The Manifesto: Public Renunciation and Continuing Practice

The same problem of terminology appears at the other end of the polygamy era. The Church now acknowledges that the 1890 Manifesto **began** rather than immediately completed the termination of new plural relationships. Its current material estimates approximately 200 plural marriages after the Manifesto and identifies the 1904 Second Manifesto as a further decisive step. The Church's own Manifesto essay describes the ending as a **process rather than a single event**.

Again, the institutional knowledge is now clear. Therefore the uncomplicated statement:

"The Church ended polygamy in 1890"

is inadequate. The relevant Duty of Candor concerns what government officials and the public reasonably understood had been promised, especially as Utah sought statehood.

Frank J. Cannon's account[4] is useful as testimony from a participant deeply involved in the political process who believed commitments had been made to the nation and subsequently violated. The Church's modern admission of post-Manifesto relationships makes Frank Cannpn's charge impossible to dismiss merely by asserting that no such continuation occurred.

Race: Institutional Responsibility Cannot Be Reduced to "Theories"

The Church now acknowledges that Black men were ordained during Joseph Smith's lifetime, that Brigham Young publicly instituted the restriction in 1852, and that later presidents extended the restrictions to Temple ordinances. It also acknowledges that numerous explanations subsequently advanced for the restrictions are no longer accepted.

Again, terminology matters. Calling former racial explanations **"theories"** can obscure who taught them and with what institutional standing.

There is an ethical difference between:

- **an ordinary member speculating**
- and, **a prophet or apostle teaching from the position of claimed divine authority.**

If authority increases the credibility of a teaching when the institution wants obedience, that same authority cannot disappear retrospectively when the teaching becomes indefensible.

Authority magnifies responsibility in both directions.

The Duty of Candor therefore requires not merely repudiating former racial explanations but identifying sufficiently:

- **what was taught,**
- **who taught it,**
- **how authoritatively it was presented,**
- **what consequences followed,**
- and, **what the reversal teaches about the reliability of prophetic claims.**

Native Americans and the Book of Mormon's Racial Theology

The racial issue does not end with the Black priesthood and Temple restrictions. The Book of Mormon contains another racialized theology involving Lamanites. For generations Mormonism identified Native

[4] Frank J. Cannon, son of First Presidency counselor George Q. Cannon and Utah's first United States senator, gave an important participant's account of the 1890 Manifesto and Utah statehood settlement in *Under the Prophet in Utah: The National Menace of a Political Priestcraft* (1911), written with Harvey J. O'Higgins. Cannon had participated in negotiations and political efforts in Washington leading toward Utah statehood. He maintained that Church representatives assured federal officials that the doctrine and practice of polygamy were being abandoned, and that the Manifesto, federal amnesty, restoration of Church property, Utah's Enabling Act and Constitution, and ultimately statehood embodied that understanding. Cannon believed Wilford Woodruff and his father George Q. Cannon initially acted in good faith. His later indictment was that post-Manifesto plural unions—particularly under Joseph F. Smith—constituted a breach of the commitments upon which the nation had relied in granting Utah statehood. Cannon regarded this as especially personal because, as a Church representative in Washington, he had pledged his own credibility in communicating those assurances. Frank J. Cannon and Harvey J. O'Higgins, *Under the Prophet in Utah* (1911), especially chs. IV–VII, XVII, and XX

Americans with these Book of Mormon peoples. The Book of Mormon associates Lamanite ancestry with divine cursing, dark skin, separation, attractiveness, intermarriage, and inherited identity.

Modern genetics, meanwhile, strongly establishes ancient Asian ancestry for Indigenous Americans. The Church has consequently retreated from the formerly broad ancestral formulation. The Book of Mormon introduction changed from describing Lamanites as the **"principal ancestors"** of American Indians to **"among the ancestors."**

That change matters. **Principal ancestors** is a broad empirical proposition. **Among the ancestors** can survive even if the hypothesized contribution becomes extremely small.

The Church is entitled to correct its historical understanding. The ethical question is whether the correction is acknowledged as a correction.

DNA: Possibility Is Not Evidence

The Church's DNA essay argues that population genetics cannot decisively disprove Book of Mormon historicity. The current essay index itself summarizes its conclusion that DNA cannot decisively affirm or reject historical authenticity.

That proposition requires careful handling. Population genetics cannot prove that no tiny undocumented Near Eastern group ever reached ancient America.

But:

> **"cannot be absolutely excluded"**

does not mean:

> **"supported by the evidence."**

The overwhelming scientific evidence concerning Indigenous American ancestry points to ancient Asian populations. The Church's defense relies upon scientifically real possibilities—genetic drift, founder effects, population bottlenecks and admixture—to preserve the possibility that a sufficiently small Israelite population might leave no detectable genetic signature. The scientific mechanisms are real. The evidentiary inference is different.

Adequate candor requires distinguishing positive evidence for Israelite ancestry among Native Americans from the inability to exclude every conceivable hypothesis by which a very small Israelite contribution might have disappeared genetically.

Otherwise normal scientific caution can be used as it is here to manufacture disproportionate uncertainty.

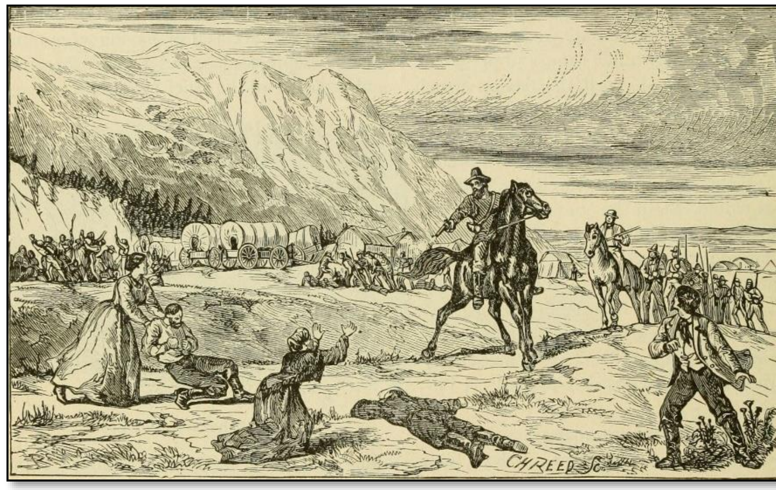
First Vision: Evidence and Interpretation Must Remain Distinct

The Church acknowledges multiple First Vision accounts. This case does not establish that the First Vision did not occur. Nor should we substitute our interpretation for the Church's and call that history. The institutional admission is that the surviving accounts differ.

The Church interprets those differences as complementary descriptions created for different audiences and purposes. That is an interpretation. A believer may accept it. A historian may understand the differences as normal memory development.

Another reader may consider later embellishment possible. The Duty of Candor requires that the underlying documents remain sufficiently visible that the individual—not the institution—may judge among those possibilities.

Mountain Meadows: Responsibility Is Larger Than the Question of an Explicit Order



The Church's modern historical treatment acknowledges Mormon perpetrators, militia involvement, inflammatory rhetoric, deception of the emigrants, mass killing, and subsequent efforts to shift responsibility.

This represents significant modern candor. But concentrating the inquiry on whether Brigham Young issued a direct order can artificially narrow the ethical question.

Leadership responsibility also includes:

- **the ideological environment leaders create,**
- **the authority structures they establish,**
- **the rhetoric they employ,**
- **the obedience they cultivate,**
- and, **the foreseeable actions followers may take within that environment.**

The Temple Oath of Vengeance is relevant to that environment and should not be excluded merely because no document proves that it constituted a direct operational order for Mountain Meadows.

Likewise, the fact that local ecclesiastical leaders simultaneously held militia authority is not incidental. The massacre must be examined within the authority culture in which it occurred.

Compartmentalization Conceals the Cumulative Evidence

Perhaps the most important discovery from examining the essays together is that their organization itself affects what the reader sees. Each essay can remain comparatively defensible by limiting itself to one subject. The DNA essay can discuss genetics without fully confronting the racial theology historically attached to Lamanite identity. The race essay can discuss the African priesthood restriction without confronting the Book of Mormon's Native American racial narrative.

The women-and-priesthood essay can discuss Temple authority without integrating Joseph Smith's secret relationships with women. The Book of Mormon essay can discuss the stone and hat without asking why physical plates were necessary to the production of the English text. The Book of Abraham essay can defend a catalyst theory without placing it alongside Joseph's other claimed translation projects.

The violence essay can discuss inflammatory rhetoric without integrating every relevant Temple covenant or obedience structure. The individual essay therefore asks:

> **Can this particular historical difficulty be reconciled with faith?**

Our inquiry asks something different:

> **What happens when all the admitted facts are placed on the same table?**

That is where the cumulative evidentiary force appears.

The Pattern of Retrospective Redefinition

Across the essays a recurring pattern becomes visible:

- **Translation** can cease requiring linguistic correspondence with the source.
- **Marriage** can describe clandestine relationships unlawful under civil law oro unknown to an existing wife.
- **Consent** can exist even where refusal may be overridden by claimed divine authority.
- **Denial** can be called carefully worded even when the ordinary audience receives a materially false impression.
- **Ending polygamy in 1890** can become a process continuing through 1904.
- **Principal ancestors** can become merely among the ancestors.
- **Prophetic racial teachings** can become theories no longer accepted.

Each change can be individually defended. But collectively they raise a question about institutional language itself.

> **Does the vocabulary clarify difficult history, or does it sometimes preserve continuity by redefining terms after the underlying historical claim becomes difficult to defend?**

That question belongs squarely within the Duty of Candor.

Knowledge Creates Responsibility

We can now return to the central proposition. The Church says the essays were approved by its highest governing leadership and intended to make accurate information more accessible. Therefore the Church cannot reasonably be treated as institutionally unaware of the historical difficulties the essays acknowledge.

Knowledge creates responsibility. And the magnitude of that responsibility depends partly upon what the institution asks from the person relying upon it. The Church asks for far more than casual affiliation.

It asks people to give:

- **belief,**
- **testimony,**

- **tithing,**
- **missionary labor,**
- **time,**
- **behavioral conformity,**
- **Temple covenants,**
- **marriage commitments,**
- **sacrifice,**
- **consecration,**
- **obedience to continuing prophetic influence.**

Those commitments affect money, sexuality, marriage, family, identity, conscience, and imagined eternal destiny. Therefore:

> **The greater the authority an institution claims over another person's life, the greater its Duty of Candor concerning the evidence supporting that authority.**

The Information Asymmetry

The governing institution has enormous informational advantages. It has historians, archives, attorneys, academics, primary documents, financial resources, institutional memory, and access to scholarship accumulated across generations.

- The prospective convert does not.
- The teenage missionary does not.
- The first-time Temple participant does not.

Yet those less-informed people bear much of the personal consequence.

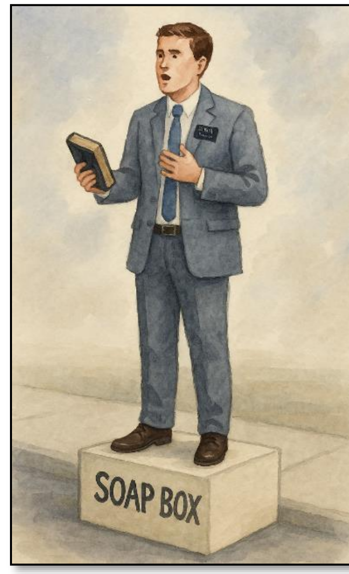
- **The institution possesses the greater knowledge.**
- **The individual bears the greater risk.**

That asymmetry creates the ethical duty.

The Missionary Is Also Owed Candor

- The young missionary is treated as the Church's representative. But the missionary is also a relying party.
- Missionaries did not investigate Joseph Smith's historical claims independently.
- They did not examine Church archives.

- They did not write the Gospel Topics Essays.
- They were taught the Church's narrative and then asked to testify that they know it is true.



Thus:

- **Senior leadership supplies the narrative.**
- ↓
- **The missionary sincerely internalizes and testifies to it.**
- ↓
- **The investigator relies upon the missionary's apparent certainty.**

If leadership possesses material information that substantially qualifies what the missionary has been taught, the Duty of Candor runs first **toward the missionary** and then through the missionary toward the investigator. The missionary's sincerity cannot repair an informational defect originating above him or her. Indeed, sincerity may make the errant communication more persuasive.

Availability Is Not Disclosure

Publishing the Gospel Topics Essays represents genuine progress. That should be acknowledged. But placing information on a website does not by itself satisfy a Duty of Candor.

The relevant question is not:

> **Could the person have found it?**[5]

It is:

> **The relevant question is not whether a sufficiently motivated person could eventually locate The Essays somewhere on the Church's website. It is whether disclosure happened before the Church obtained the commitment it wanted, when disclosure mattered.**

If favorable claims are actively taught while adverse qualifications are passively available, the information environment remains asymmetric. This is especially important because disclosure after commitment occurs under radically different psychological conditions.

A person who has already:

- **converted,**
- **testified publicly,**
- **served a mission,**

[5] The Church states that the Gospel Topics Essays were begun in 2013 to gather difficult historical information in one place where it could be "more easily accessed and studied." The essays remain available as a separate "Gospel Topics Essays" collection on ChurchofJesusChrist.org. However, the Church subsequently replaced the former Gospel Topics navigation with the broader "Topics and Questions" structure, which contains many categories and resources; the Essays are therefore available but are not themselves the ordinary front door through which members encounter Church teaching. This distinction illustrates the difference between information being technically available and being affirmatively disclosed at the point where it is material to belief or commitment. Here is the hard to find link to: Official Gospel Topics Essays collection

- **paid tithing,**
- **married within the Church,**
- **entered Temple covenants,**
- **raised children in the religion,**
- **built family and community around belief**

does not encounter disconfirming information as an uncommitted investigator. The cost of reconsideration has become enormous. Therefore delayed disclosure is not equivalent to prior disclosure.

Timing is part of candor.

Sincerity Does Not Eliminate the Duty

Nothing in this argument requires us to prove that the First Presidency or Twelve privately believe Mormonism is false. They may sincerely believe every theological reconciliation offered in the essays. They may sincerely believe that Joseph received revelation through a stone, that the papyri catalyzed revelation, that his clandestine relationships were divinely authorized marriages, that Native American DNA remains compatible with a small Israelite migration, and that apparently contradictory historical evidence can be harmonized through continuing revelation.

Their sincerity matters. But it does not answer the Duty of Candor question. A sincere person can still fail to disclose a material fact.

The objective questions remain:

- **What did the institution know?**
- **When did it know it?**
- **What did it disclose?**
- **What terminology did it use?**
- **What impression did that terminology reasonably create?**
- **What material qualification remained undisclosed?**
- **And what commitment was obtained while the informational disparity remained?**

The Institutional Conflict of Interest

The Church is not a neutral historian examining someone else's claims. It is simultaneously:

- **the claimant,**
- **the custodian of much of the evidence,**
- **the interpreter of the evidence,**
- **the authority defining approved terminology,**
- **the organization requesting belief,**
- **the recipient of tithing,**
- **the beneficiary of missionary and volunteer labor,**
- **the administrator of Temple covenants,**

- **the institution whose divine legitimacy is being evaluated.**

That conflict of interest does not prove dishonesty. It does something else.

It raises the required standard of candor.

Possession of the greater information does not confer the ethical right to withhold materially adverse facts from the less-informed person whose reliance is being solicited.

The Duty of Candor Protects Conscience

We have therefore arrived at something larger than historical criticism. The ultimate object being protected by candor is **conscience**. A person cannot exercise meaningful moral judgment concerning information he or she has never been given. And the problem becomes more serious when the institution that controls important information simultaneously teaches obedience to itself as a religious virtue.

That creates the dangerous sequence:

> **Incomplete information → trust → commitment → covenant → obedience → later disclosure.** By the time the person receives the qualifying evidence, obedience and identity may already influence how conscience is permitted to evaluate it.

That is why the proper sequence must be:

- **Material disclosure → independent judgment → voluntary commitment.**
- Candor must precede obedience.
- Otherwise obedience can become the mechanism by which inadequate disclosure perpetuates itself.

The Ethical Indictment

The Gospel Topics Essays do not prove that Church leaders secretly know Mormonism is false. They establish something both narrower and more defensible:

> **The governing Church possesses substantial institutional knowledge of historical facts that materially qualify many of the representations upon which members, missionaries, investigators, and Temple participants are asked to rely.**

The Church deserves credit for making much of that information more available. But availability alone does not satisfy the ethical obligation. Where material information remains compartmentalized, euphemistically characterized, apologetically framed, or absent from the point at which commitment is solicited, the Duty of Candor remains unsatisfied.

The ethical failure, where established, need not be an outright fabricated statement. It can consist of:

- **material omission,**
- **misleading terminology,**
- **carefully constructed ambiguity,**
- **delayed disclosure,**

- **retrospective redefinition,**
- **the preservation of a materially false impression through technically defensible language.**

And because the institution claims divine authority, the consequences exceed an ordinary historical dispute. The Church asks the believer to entrust something to it. Not merely money. Not merely time. Not merely reputation. **Conscience.**

Part I Conclusion — The Ethical Indictment

The Gospel Topics Essays therefore constitute an extraordinary institutional evidentiary record. They establish what the Church now knows well enough to admit. But they also reveal the importance of separating **fact from institutional characterization**.

- The stone and hat dictation came before "translation" as the theological characterization.
- Joseph Smith's clandestine relationships must be established from the evidence before the word "marriage" is allowed to morally characterize them.
- The audience's actual understanding determines whether a "carefully worded denial" communicated a materially false impression.
- The consequences of refusal determine whether formal choice constituted meaningful consent.
- The evidence exists independently of the institution's explanation that revelation accounts for it.

Only after those distinctions are preserved does the central ethical question become unavoidable:

> **Having acquired and formally acknowledged this knowledge, has the Church changed the way it asks other people to trust it?**

Where it has, that progress deserves acknowledgment. Where it has not, the historical problem becomes a contemporary ethical problem. The governing institution possesses the greater information.

That question cannot be answered adequately in the abstract. It must now be tested against particular representations. The following **Bill of Particulars** therefore examines the principal subjects upon which the Church's present acknowledged knowledge can be compared with the representations through which it has obtained—and continues to seek—religious reliance.

PART II — BILL OF PARTICULARS[6]

At the most charitable level, the Essays represent institutional correction: the Church has learned more, recognizes that earlier presentations were inadequate, and is attempting to repair them. Even then, Duty of Candor asks whether the corrections are reaching people before reliance, rather than merely becoming technically available afterward. Your document already recognizes genuine progress rather than denying it.

At the intermediate level, which I think is the principal case, the Essays demonstrate that leadership now possesses materially qualifying information while the Church continues to seek belief and commitment

[6] A bill of particulars is a written statement that provides extra details in a legal case. When an indictment is too broad or general a bill of particulars spells out specific facts so the defendant knows what they are fighting.

through simpler representations that do not adequately communicate those qualifications. Count I already gives us a remarkably clean example: detailed Church materials acknowledge the stone and hat while the current missionary presentation retains the simpler gold-plates-to-translation narrative.

<u>At the strongest level</u>, repeated omission, euphemism, retrospective redefinition, "carefully worded denials," delayed disclosure, and preservation of advantageous impressions could support an inference of intentional institutional deception. But we need not prove that strongest proposition to establish the ethical indictment.

That is, I think, the intellectual center we have been searching for:

> **The indictment does not require proof that Church leaders know Mormonism is false, nor even proof that every incomplete representation is intentionally deceptive. It requires showing that the institution possesses material qualifying knowledge, solicits consequential reliance, and does not adequately communicate that knowledge when the reliance is obtained.**

That is a considerably stronger argument precisely because it claims less. And it leaves the evidence free to become more damaging where a particular Count warrants it. For example, the Church's own phrase **"carefully worded denials"** raises an intent question quite differently from a historical curriculum that merely failed to keep pace with scholarship. That distinction is already made effectively:

> **the phrase describes the technique but "does not resolve the ethics."**

I therefore do not make "the Essays have changed what Mormonism is" the formal indictment. That may become an important *finding* at the end—especially if the cumulative admissions substantially alter the historical propositions upon which earlier Mormon certainty rested—but it is broader and harder to establish.

Failure of the Duty of Candor is cleaner, narrower, and demonstrable from the Church's own admissions. I think your intuition here has substantially improved the architecture of the entire Supplement. Part I establishes the standard and general charge; the Counts constitute the Bill of Particulars and evidentiary testing in Part II; and Part III, after Count VII, is a genuine cumulative finding telling the reader what survived that testing.

Bill of Particulars

Count I — The Book of Mormon Translation Narrative

The allegation

The Church's highest leadership now acknowledges a Book of Mormon production process materially different from the ordinary understanding created by the longstanding statement that Joseph Smith "translated" an ancient record inscribed upon gold plates. Yet the Church continues to use that traditional formulation in its current missionary teaching while omitting the seer stone, the hat, Joseph's earlier use of the stone, and the fact that the plates need not have been visible during dictation.

This count is strong because we can compare **current Church source against current Church source**. No hostile historian is necessary.

---

1. What the Gospel Topics material establishes Church leadership knows

The Church's Gospel Topics Essay begins conventionally. Moroni told Joseph about a book written on gold plates and charged him to translate it from its ancient language. The essay says Joseph received the plates and "began translating them in earnest."

But the Church's fuller current Gospel Topics material acknowledges substantially more. It acknowledges Joseph's use of a **seer stone**, and acknowledges that eyewitnesses described him placing a seer stone in a **hat**. It further acknowledges that Church representations during much of the twentieth century concentrated on the interpreters associated with the plates and that, as a consequence, **"memory of the seer stones faded among many Latter-day Saints."**

That last admission is especially important to Duty of Candor. The Church is effectively acknowledging that generations of members acquired an incomplete understanding of the process.

The Church's historical material also identifies the chocolate-colored stone ultimately donated to the Church as matching descriptions of the stone Joseph used in producing the Book of Mormon. The stone passed from Joseph to Oliver Cowdery and eventually into Church possession.

I have already stated the central historical problem well: the detailed eyewitness descriptions predominantly describe Joseph using the stone/interpreters and hat, while Emma reported that the plates could remain wrapped on the table.

So leadership knows at least these material facts:

1. **Joseph possessed and used a seer stone before obtaining the plates.**
2. **He used a seer stone during production of the Book of Mormon.**
3. **Witnesses describe a stone or interpreters being placed inside a hat.**
4. **The plates did not necessarily need to be exposed for dictation to proceed.**
5. **For much of the twentieth century, ordinary Latter-day Saints largely lost awareness of the seer-stone history.**

That is our institutional-knowledge side of the comparison.

---

2. What missionaries are instructed to tell investigators today

This is where Count I becomes much more interesting. I checked the **current 2023 edition of *Preach My Gospel*** rather than relying upon what either of us remembers missionaries teaching.

The current Restoration lesson tells missionaries:

- "Joseph Smith was directed by a heavenly messenger named Moroni to a hill where an ancient record had been buried for centuries."
- It identifies that record as being **"inscribed on gold plates"**, then immediately says:
- "Joseph Smith translated this record by the gift and power of God."

That is current missionary instruction. Notice what is absent from the account presented at the very point where an investigator is learning how the Book of Mormon came into existence:

- **No brown seer stone.**
- **No hat.**
- **No explanation that the stone predated the plates.**
- **No treasure-seeking context.**
- **No indication that the plates could remain covered while Joseph dictated.**
- **No explanation of what "translation" means if Joseph was not examining the characters during dictation.**

Instead the narrative sequence is:

- **ancient record → gold plates → Joseph Smith → translated this record.**

That sequence naturally invites the ordinary meaning of translation. And this is not an old missionary manual whose defects the Gospel Topics Essays have subsequently corrected.

It is the **current missionary manual**. That matters enormously.

---

3. The Church simultaneously possesses a more complicated account

This is perhaps the most important discovery in Count I. The Church is currently maintaining **two levels of explanation**. For a person who reaches the more detailed Gospel Topics material, the Church discusses the seer stone, hat, incomplete twentieth-century representations, and revelatory rather than conventional translation.

For the investigator receiving the missionary Restoration lesson, the account remains:

- **ancient record written on gold plates → Joseph translated the record by God's power.**

That does not make the missionary statement literally false if *translated* is defined according to the Church's theological usage. But **literal falsity is not our standard**. Our standard is candor. The question is:

- **What understanding would a reasonable uninformed listener acquire from the words used?**

That is a much harder question for the Church.

---

4. The Church's own older teaching demonstrates the ordinary understanding

There is unusually good evidence for what *translated from the plates* historically communicated. A Church Primary manual taught children:

> **"Joseph Translated the Plates"**

and explained that the Urim and Thummim were like special glasses through which Joseph could look in order to translate the ancient writing. It then said Joseph translated the words **"on the gold plates"** into understandable words. That is almost exactly the mental picture generations of Latter-day Saints acquired:

> **Joseph + plates + characters + special spectacles → English Book of Mormon.**

Likewise, a Church history teaching manual still describes Oliver Cowdery arriving to help Joseph with the **"translation of the golden plates."** The older representation was therefore not something critics merely imagined. **The Church taught it.**

And the Church's current Gospel Topics material effectively acknowledges the resulting historical incompleteness when it says twentieth-century accounts concentrated on the interpreters and that memory of the seer stones faded.

---

5. The Church has begun correcting the representation—but inconsistently

Fairness requires including evidence against our indictment. The Church has made genuine changes.

A **2025 *Friend*** article for children explicitly says Joseph used both a seer stone and interpreters. Even more significantly, the **2025 Doctrine and Covenants Seminary Teacher Manual** tells teachers that Joseph used a seer stone discovered **several years before obtaining the gold plates** and that witnesses described him placing either the interpreters or seer stone into a hat so he could see words appearing on the instruments.

That is important exculpatory evidence. We should include it. It means the charge cannot fairly be:

> **"The Church continues universally to conceal the seer stone and hat."**

That would now be false. The evidence supports a more precise charge:

> **The Church now discloses the historically unfamiliar translation method in specialized historical materials and increasingly in youth curriculum, while its principal missionary presentation—the communication specifically designed to obtain belief and baptismal commitment from an uninformed investigator—continues to present the simpler gold-plates-to-translation narrative without those material qualifications.**

That is much stronger because it is demonstrable.

---

6. The plates themselves present an unresolved problem

The Church's newest Gospel Topics material attempts to address precisely the question we have raised:

> **"What role did the gold plates play in the translation of the Book of Mormon?"**

Its answer says that some eyewitness accounts describe Joseph looking at a seer stone in a hat, while other cases describe him looking through the interpreters **at the plates**. This prevents us from responsibly saying:

> **"Joseph never used the plates."**

The Church has historical evidence it interprets otherwise. But it does **not** remove the central Duty of Candor problem. The detailed evidence demonstrates that substantial dictation occurred without Joseph visibly reading characters from the plates. Therefore the question remains:

> **If Joseph could produce the English text while looking into a hat rather than at the plates, in what ordinary linguistic sense was he translating the characters inscribed upon those plates?**

The Church's theological answer is essentially that the English text came through revelation. Its current Gospel Topics page says exactly that: **"The text of the Book of Mormon came by revelation."** That is an extraordinarily important admission. It suggests a more accurate description would be:

> **Joseph Smith dictated the English Book of Mormon through a revelatory process that he and the Church call translation.**

That allows the believer to retain the miracle while accurately describing the historical process.

---

7. Why the difference is material

This is where we must avoid making too much of the hat merely because it looks like a long abandoned superstitious practice to modern readers.

The hat itself is not the ethical issue. To the family of superstitious practitioners, if God wishes to reveal scripture through a brown stone in a hat, the unusual mechanism does not make the revelation false.

The material issue is evidentiary. The traditional narrative connects the English Book of Mormon directly to a tangible ancient artifact:

- **There were plates.**
- **The plates contained ancient writing.**
- **Joseph translated that writing.**
- **Therefore the English Book of Mormon represents the contents of an ancient American record.**
- But if the actual production process can proceed without consulting the visible source document, that evidentiary chain changes.

Now the proposition becomes:

- **There were reportedly plates.**
- **Joseph possessed a stone he had used before obtaining them.**
- **He looked into a hat containing that stone.**
- **English words were dictated.**
- **The Church believes those English words represented the ancient record through divine revelation.**

The last proposition is a **faith claim**, not something established by the mechanics of translation. That distinction is highly material to someone deciding whether Joseph Smith demonstrated the ability to translate an ancient language.

---

8. Why the Three and Eight Witnesses do not resolve this issue

The witnesses to the plates potentially provide evidence for **the existence of an object resembling the described plates**. Their testimony does not independently establish:

- **what language was inscribed upon them,**
- **what the characters meant,**
- **that the English Book of Mormon was linguistically derived from those characters.**

Those are separate propositions. Therefore:

> **Evidence that plates existed is not, by itself, evidence that the English text was translated from the writing on them.**

This distinction becomes more important once the Church acknowledges a production method in which the physical plates need not be consulted during dictation.

---

9. The commitment being requested

Preach My Gospel does not present the Book of Mormon merely as an interesting historical proposition.

Missionaries are instructed to present it as another testament of Jesus Christ, invite investigators to read and pray about it, and use it as evidence of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling and the Restoration.

The eventual commitments include:

- **belief in Joseph Smith as prophet,**
- **acceptance of the Restoration,**
- **baptism,**
- and ultimately the larger obligations of Church membership.

Therefore the production history is not peripheral trivia. It concerns the evidentiary foundation of the invitation itself.

---

10. The Church's strongest defense

We should state it fairly. The Church could answer:

> **Joseph never claimed ordinary linguistic competence. He consistently said the translation occurred by the "gift and power of God." The plates remained the ancient source record even if God revealed their English meaning through supernatural instruments. The missionary lesson is necessarily concise; investigators cannot be taught every historical detail in an**

> **introductory discussion. Furthermore, the Church now publicly provides the seer-stone information to anyone who wishes to study it and increasingly teaches it to young members.**

That is a substantial defense. Part of it succeeds. Missionaries obviously cannot disclose every historical detail. And the Church deserves genuine credit for its increasing openness about the stone and hat.

But the defense does not fully answer the materiality problem. The omitted fact is not merely peripheral detail concerning *how* a supernatural translation happened. It potentially changes what **translation from an ancient source document** means.

And the institution itself knows that its earlier representations produced a materially incomplete understanding among its members.

---

11. Preliminary Duty of Candor Finding

I would presently rate Count I:

PARTIALLY ESTABLISHED — STRONG ENOUGH TO RETAIN, BUT IT REQUIRES CAREFUL WORDING

We have **not** established that the Church currently lies when it says Joseph translated the Book of Mormon. We **have** established something narrower:

> **The Church's governing leadership officially knows that Joseph Smith's production of the Book of Mormon included use of a preexisting seer stone placed in a hat, and that substantial dictation did not necessarily require visible consultation of the plates. The Church also acknowledges that generations of members acquired only a partial understanding of this history. Yet its current missionary Restoration lesson continues to tell uninformed investigators simply that Moroni led Joseph to an ancient record inscribed on gold plates and that Joseph "translated this record by the gift and power of God," without explaining the stone, hat, or revelatory character of the production process.**

And then the ethical finding:

> **Because the Book of Mormon is presented as evidence for Joseph Smith's prophetic authority and the Restoration, the actual relationship between the claimed ancient source and the English text is material. Merely making the fuller history available elsewhere does not necessarily satisfy the Duty of Candor at the point where reliance and commitment are being solicited.**

The most important discovery from Count I

This first count has already taught us something I did not want to assume beforehand. **The Church is correcting the old narrative.**The 2025 Seminary material and *Friend* article matter.

So our indictment should give them credit for that. But it has also uncovered something potentially more significant:

> **The fuller disclosure has reached historical materials and youth education while the current missionary conversion narrative remains materially simpler.**

That gives us an empirical question we can pursue across every count:

> **Is the difficult information disclosed where people study Church history after joining—or is it disclosed before the Church asks them to commit?**

That is much closer to the specific evidence I believed was missing. Thus on **Count I**, evidence is found. And, the individual bears the greater consequences. Therefore:

> **The institution bears the greater Duty of Candor.** And because the Temple Law of Obedience can displace independent judgment once trust has been obtained, the duty must be satisfied **before** the commitment is made.

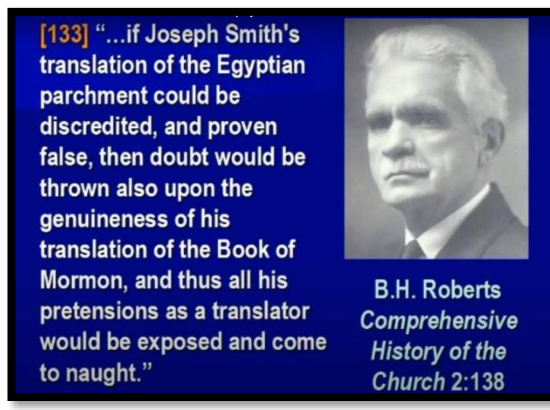
Candor is not an optional correction offered after belief has been secured.

Candor is the information conscience requires before consent can properly be called free.

Bill of Particulars

Count II — The Book of Abraham Translation Claim

The allegation



The Church's governing leadership now acknowledges that the surviving Egyptian papyri associated with Joseph Smith do not contain the Book of Abraham, that their characters do not correspond to Joseph Smith's English text, that Joseph-associated attempts to interpret Egyptian characters do not correspond to modern Egyptology, and that the surviving material consists of ordinary Egyptian funerary texts dating long after Abraham. Yet the Church continues to canonize the work under the heading "Translated from the Papyrus, by Joseph Smith" and permits ordinary instructional language that describes it as an "inspired translation of the writings of Abraham."

This count is stronger than Count I because here we possess part of the purported source material and can read it independently.

---

1. What the Church itself admits

The official Gospel Topics Essay is remarkably explicit. It acknowledges that the surviving papyri associated with Joseph Smith have been translated by modern Egyptologists and states:

> **"None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham's name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham."**

More importantly, the essay acknowledges agreement across believing and nonbelieving Egyptologists that:

> **“the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham.”**

The Church further acknowledges that scholars identify those fragments as portions of **standard Egyptian funerary texts** placed with mummified bodies and dates them between roughly the third century BCE and first century CE—far later than the traditional lifetime of Abraham.

These are extraordinary admissions. They establish beyond reasonable dispute that Church leadership knows:

> **The surviving Egyptian source material does not say what Joseph Smith said the Book of Abraham says.**

That sentence needs one qualification: the Church argues that substantial portions of the original papyri are missing. Therefore it can contend that the Book of Abraham might have come from a now-lost section.

But that defense does not eliminate what is known about the surviving material.

---

2. Joseph Smith really did claim to be dealing with Egyptian characters

This is important because a retrospective defense might otherwise suggest that *translation* always meant simply revelation. The Church's essay itself prevents that simplification. It acknowledges that when Joseph examined the papyri in 1835, his history records that he began:

> “the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics” and concluded that one roll contained Abraham's writings.

Even more significantly, the Church acknowledges Joseph's involvement in what became the **Egyptian Alphabet Documents** and the **Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language**.

The essay states that Joseph was reportedly working on an alphabet to the Book of Abraham and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language. It acknowledges surviving documents containing Egyptian characters followed by English explanations or translations. Then comes another important admission:

> **“Neither the rules nor the translations in the grammar book correspond to those recognized by Egyptologists today.”**

So the historical evidence is not simply:

> **Joseph contemplated an Egyptian artifact and suddenly received unrelated revelation.**

There is documented evidence of an attempt to associate Egyptian characters with English meanings.

Whatever exact role those documents played in producing the Book of Abraham—and that remains debated—the Church itself acknowledges that those attempted Egyptian interpretations do not work as Egyptology.

---

3. What the Church's canonized scripture still tells the reader

Now compare those admissions with the Book of Abraham as it appears **today** in the Church's canonized Pearl of Great Price. The title remains:

> **"The Book of Abraham — Translated from the Papyrus, by Joseph Smith"**

and the introductory statement still describes it as:

> **"A Translation of some ancient Records"**

and identifies them as the writings of Abraham "written by his own hand, upon papyrus."

That is not merely an obsolete nineteenth-century document preserved in an archive. It is the **current canonized scripture** presented to members. An ordinary reader encountering those words without the Gospel Topics Essay would naturally understand:

- **There was an Egyptian papyrus containing Abraham's writings.**
- **Joseph Smith translated those writings.**
- **The English Book of Abraham is the resulting translation.**

That is the ordinary meaning of the words. Yet Church leadership now knows that the surviving papyri nor the copies of the papyri replicated in the Book of Abraham itself, do not yield that English text. This creates the core discrepancy in Count II.

---

4. The Church now offers two fundamentally different explanations

The Church's modern material essentially leaves open two principal possibilities.

Defense A — The missing-papyrus hypothesis

The Church argues that only a fraction of Joseph's original papyri survives. Estimates vary widely, and eyewitnesses referred to longer scrolls. Therefore, it remains possible that the Book of Abraham text came from a portion now lost. That possibility cannot simply be dismissed. If the relevant source text disappeared, the surviving fragments cannot conclusively demonstrate what every missing fragment contained. But notice exactly what this defense establishes:

> **Possibility.**

It does not establish that the missing portion contained Abraham. And it does not explain away the surviving Joseph-associated character interpretations that fail to correspond with Egyptology. So the proper evidentiary statement is:

> **A missing source corresponding to the Book of Abraham remains possible but has not been demonstrated.**

That is quite different from positive evidence that such a source existed.

---

5. Defense B changes "translation" into revelation

The second Church explanation is more revealing. Its current material says Joseph's study of the papyri may merely have **prompted revelation** concerning Abraham. Under this model, the physical papyri operated as a **catalyst**. The Church explicitly acknowledges what that entails:

> **"This view assumes a broader definition of the words translator and translation."**

And then it states that under this model Joseph's work:

> **"was not a literal rendering of the papyri as a conventional translation would be."**

That may be the most important institutional admission in Count II. The Church is acknowledging that one of its principal defenses requires the word **translation** not to mean translation in the conventional sense. The physical Egyptian text need not say what the English Book of Abraham says. That creates our Duty of Candor question.

---

6. The Church's current condensed explanation is revealing

The Church has subsequently produced an even more concise current Gospel Topics treatment.It says some Saints believe the Book of Abraham text existed on now-missing papyri. Others believe studying the papyri prompted revelation:

> *Subsequent Church Book of Abraham Essay publications have become still more explicit. The newer Church and Gospel Questions treatment, "Origins of the Book of Abraham," states that the relationship between the Egyptian papyri and the Book of Abraham text "is not known," that Joseph "did not translate the book by conventional means," that the surviving Egyptian characters do not match the Book of Abraham translation, and that most of Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles do not match modern Egyptological interpretations. The original Gospel Topics Essay nevertheless remains published alongside this newer treatment. The development is significant because the Church's own explanations have progressively moved away from an ordinary source-text meaning of "translation" while the canonized scripture continues to identify the work as "Translated from the Papyrus, by Joseph Smith."*

Then the Church says: **"The Church does not take a position on these theories."** Instead, it simply affirms that the translation occurred by revelation.

Notice what has happened evidentially. The institution no longer commits itself to the proposition:

> **This Egyptian document linguistically contained the Book of Abraham.**

It commits itself instead to:

God revealed the Book of Abraham to Joseph Smith.

Those are materially different propositions. The first is historically and linguistically testable. The second is a theological proposition largely outside ordinary historical testing. Thus the claim has moved:

source-document translation → revelatory production

while retaining the word:

translation.

---

7. That is not merely a semantic quibble

Suppose someone says:

"I translated this French letter into English."

The claim carries an ordinary empirical implication:

The French text contains substantially the same meaning as the English output.

If a French scholar reads the original and discovers that it is actually a grocery receipt, the speaker cannot ordinarily preserve the claim by saying:

"By *translate* I meant that contemplating the grocery receipt inspired me to receive an unrelated English revelation."

He may sincerely believe the revelation occurred. But the activity being defended has changed.

The same distinction applies here. The catalyst theory might preserve **revelation**. It does not preserve ordinary **translation**. That is why terminology matters to candor.

---

8. The Church's own ordinary instructional material illustrates the problem

This is not merely theoretical. An Old Testament Seminary manual introduces the Book of Abraham by saying:

"The book of Abraham is an inspired translation of the writings of Abraham."

The Pearl of Great Price teacher material similarly tells instructors that:

"The book of Abraham contains writings of the Old Testament prophet Abraham."

And the canonized text itself continues to announce:

"Translated from the Papyrus, by Joseph Smith."

Those formulations naturally communicate something much stronger than:

Joseph contemplated Egyptian funerary material and may thereby have received an independent revelation concerning Abraham.

The fuller explanation exists. But the simple formulation remains. Again we encounter our distinction:

> **availability versus adequate disclosure.**

---

9. There is an additional problem in older Church instructional material

A Pearl of Great Price student manual addressed the problem of the papyri's dating. It argued that Joseph Smith never claimed the papyri themselves were written during Abraham's lifetime and explained that copies can be made long after an original author's lifetime.

There is nothing unreasonable about that argument. A copy of Abraham's writings made centuries later could still contain Abraham's text.

But **dating is not the strongest problem**. The stronger problem is **content**. The papyri are not merely too young. The Church itself acknowledges that the surviving characters:

- **do not mention Abraham,**
- **do not contain the events in the Book of Abraham,**
- **do not match Joseph's translation.**

Thus explaining how an ancient work could survive in a later copy addresses a weaker objection while leaving the more consequential linguistic problem untouched.

That is exactly the kind of distinction a Duty of Candor analysis should expose.

---

10. The facsimiles substantially weaken the missing-papyrus defense

This part deserves particular attention. The missing-papyrus hypothesis can say:

> Perhaps Abraham's actual text was on a portion now lost. But the Book of Abraham also contains **three Egyptian facsimiles that are not lost**.

Joseph supplied explanations for figures within them. Those explanations remain printed with the canonized Book of Abraham.

The Church's essay acknowledges that Egyptologists had already concluded that Joseph's interpretations of the facsimiles did not correspond with their interpretations and that the rediscovered papyri allow the surrounding Egyptian writing to be examined.

This creates a different evidentiary situation. One cannot respond to a surviving facsimile simply by saying:

> **the relevant document may be missing.**

The image Joseph interpreted is present. His interpretation is present. Modern Egyptological interpretation can be compared with it.

The Church attempts to defend portions of Joseph's interpretations symbolically or by finding ancient traditions that resemble Book of Abraham themes. Those arguments may be considered.

But they are not the same as demonstrating that Joseph correctly translated the Egyptian.

---

11. The Church itself ultimately removes the question from empirical adjudication

Near the beginning of the essay, the Church says that the Book of Abraham's status as scripture ultimately rests upon faith and the witness of the Holy Ghost rather than historical evidence.

Its historical topic page likewise says the book's truth ultimately comes through study, prayer, and spiritual confirmation. That is a legitimate religious position. But notice the epistemological movement:

Originally:

- **Joseph has Egyptian papyri.**
- **The papyri contain Abraham's writings.**
- **Joseph translates them.**

Then Egyptology becomes available. Now:

- **The surviving papyri do not contain Abraham.**
- **Their characters do not correspond to Joseph's English text.**
- **The relevant text may have existed on missing papyri.**

or:

> **The papyri may merely have catalyzed revelation.**

Finally:

> **The book's truth is ultimately established spiritually rather than by translation evidence.**

Each step may have a possible theological defense. But cumulatively the claim has moved away from its original empirical foundation.

---

12. Why this is material to Joseph Smith's credibility

This is not an incidental historical curiosity. The Book of Abraham provides one of the rare circumstances in Joseph Smith's prophetic career where we possess physical material related to a claimed translation and can independently read the language. he result matters enormously to evaluating his credibility.

A reasonable person might conclude:

> **The catalyst theory is plausible and Joseph was genuinely receiving revelation.**

Another might conclude:

> **Joseph sincerely believed he could translate Egyptian but could not.**

Another might conclude:

> **Joseph falsely claimed translation ability.**

Those are materially different judgments. Presenting only the faith-preserving interpretation is inadequate for the person being asked to believe even though it satisfies the institutional goal. Adequate candor requires disclosure of the evidence from which the individual can judge for himself or herself.[7]

---

13. The Book of Abraham and Book of Mormon now illuminate one another

This is one reason Count II is stronger when placed immediately after Count I.

Book of Mormon

A physical ancient record is claimed. Joseph lacks conventional knowledge of the source language. The English text is produced through a revelatory mechanism. The physical source need not necessarily be visibly consulted during substantial dictation.

Book of Abraham

A physical ancient record is claimed. Joseph lacks conventional knowledge of Egyptian. An English scripture is produced. Where surviving source material fails to correspond, the Church permits *translation* to mean revelation that need not linguistically correspond to the source. The common structure is striking:

> **A physical source document establishes the initial appearance of translation, but the theological defense ultimately makes linguistic dependence upon the source document unnecessary.**

That does not prove fraud. But it makes the ordinary word **translation** increasingly misleading unless substantially qualified.

---

14. What commitment is being obtained?

Unlike the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham is not ordinarily central to the first missionary lesson. That weakens this count somewhat as a **convert-disclosure** case. We should admit that. But it remains important after conversion because the Book of Abraham is canonized scripture and is used to teach:

- premortal existence,
- priesthood concepts,
- the council in heaven,

[7] Dallin H. Oaks explicitly rejected any obligation of official Church literature to present both sides of a historical controversy. Speaking to Church educators in 1985, he stated: "Balance is telling both sides. This is not the mission of the official Church literature or avowedly anti-Mormon literature. Neither has any responsibility to present both sides." Dallin H. Oaks, "Reading Church History," Ninth Annual Church Educational System Religious Educators' Symposium, Brigham Young University, Aug. 16, 1985. This principle is especially relevant to a Duty of Candor analysis. An institution may understandably produce literature that explains and defends its own beliefs; however, when that same institution asks readers to rely upon its historical representations in making consequential religious commitments, disclaiming an obligation to present materially adverse evidence creates the very informational asymmetry at issue here.

- creation,
- exaltation-related theology,
- and Joseph Smith's prophetic capacity.

Church instructional material has explicitly described the Book of Abraham as a **powerful witness of Joseph Smith's prophetic call**. Thus the evidentiary discrepancy bears directly upon the prophetic credibility Church members are expected to accept. And because members later undertake Temple covenants, tithing obligations, service, and obedience based partly upon their acceptance of Joseph's prophetic legitimacy, the issue remains material.

---

15. The Church's strongest defense

We should state it as strongly as possible. The Church could say:

> **Only part of Joseph Smith's papyri survives. Therefore Egyptologists cannot know what the missing material contained. Joseph never claimed conventional scholarly competence in Egyptian. His translation occurred through revelation. God can reveal an ancient text through an artifact without requiring conventional linguistic translation. Furthermore, the Book of Abraham contains themes with parallels in ancient Abrahamic traditions unavailable or little known to Joseph Smith. Ultimately scripture is authenticated through revelation rather than secular scholarship.**

Some elements of that defense are legitimate. The missing papyri create genuine uncertainty. Religious revelation cannot be ruled out by linguistic analysis. And historical parallels deserve evaluation on their merits. But the defense does not eliminate the central fact:

> **The physical Egyptian material that survives and can actually be tested does not validate Joseph Smith as a translator of Egyptian.**

And the catalyst explanation explicitly abandons the requirement that it should.

---

16. Preliminary Duty of Candor Finding

I would presently rate Count II:

The factual portion is unusually firm. The Church itself acknowledges:

- **The surviving papyri do not mention Abraham.**
- **Their characters do not match the Book of Abraham translation.**
- **They are ordinary Egyptian funerary texts.**
- **The Joseph-associated Egyptian grammar and translations do not correspond with modern Egyptology.**

- **One accepted faithful explanation requires a broader meaning of "translation" under which the English text need not correspond to the Egyptian source.**

Yet the current canonized text still tells the ordinary reader:

> **"Translated from the Papyrus, by Joseph Smith."**

That comparison produces a very specific Duty of Candor finding:

> **When an institution knows that the ordinary linguistic meaning of a foundational claim is unsupported by the surviving testable evidence, adequate candor requires more than retaining the familiar terminology while providing a substantially different definition elsewhere.**

I would put the count even more simply: **What leadership knows**

- **The surviving Egyptian does not translate into the Book of Abraham.**
- **What the canonical text still says: "Translated from the Papyrus, by Joseph Smith."**
- **What the Church's modern defense permits: The papyrus may not have contained the revealed English text at all.**
- **The material discrepancy: The ordinary meaning of "translation" and the meaning necessary to preserve the claim are no longer the same.**

Duty of Candor finding: The Church has disclosed the problem in specialized materials, which deserves acknowledgment. But retaining the conventional translation language in canonized scripture and ordinary instruction without equally prominent qualification risks leaving members with a materially different understanding from the one senior leadership knows is required by the evidence.

Count II may be considerably stronger than Count I

Count I required us to be cautious because there is some evidence connecting the plates and interpreters to the process, and the Church has recently improved its teaching about the stone and hat.

Count II gives us something more concrete:

- **We have Egyptian.**
- **Egyptologists can read it.**
- **The Church admits what it says.**
- **It is not the Book of Abraham.**

The Church's principal escape routes are therefore no longer straightforward translation defenses. They are:

- **the actual source is missing**
- or, **translation did not require textual correspondence.**

Both remain conceivable. But neither is equivalent to evidence that Joseph translated Abraham from Egyptian. That distinction, I think, is precisely what an adequately informed member ought to know before deciding what Joseph Smith's Book of Abraham says about his prophetic credibility.

Bill of Particulars

Count III — Joseph Smith's Clandestine Relationships: "Plural Marriage," Secrecy, Consent, and Misleading Denials

The allegation

The Church's Gospel Topics Essay acknowledges that Joseph Smith secretly entered numerous relationships with women other than Emma Smith; that some women were already married to other men; that Emma did not know about all of Joseph's relationships; that one girl was fourteen; that participants kept the practice confidential; and that Church leaders publicly issued what the Essay calls "carefully worded denials" while the practice continued. Yet the Essay begins by classifying these relationships as divinely commanded "plural marriages," thereby supplying the theological and moral conclusion before examining the conduct that requires judgment.

This count is different from Counts I and II. With the Book of Abraham, the question was whether *translation* continues to describe adequately what the evidence establishes. Here the disputed word is **marriage**. And the ethical issue is larger because the evidence concerns actual women, existing marriages, family relationships, pastoral influence, secrecy, consent, and public representations.

---

1. The Essay begins by deciding the central disputed question

The official Essay begins:

> "After receiving a revelation commanding him to practice plural marriage, Joseph Smith married multiple wives..."

It presents the practice as one of the ancient principles restored by God and says Joseph proceeded after an angel repeatedly commanded him, finally appearing with a drawn sword and threatening Joseph with destruction.

This is not neutral historical description. Before the reader encounters the difficult evidence, several crucial conclusions have already been supplied:

- **God commanded it.**
- **Joseph was reluctant.**
- **Joseph obeyed.**
- **The women became wives.**
- **The relationships therefore constituted marriages.**

Those propositions may represent sincere Church belief. But they are precisely the propositions an independent reader should be allowed to evaluate from the evidence.

For our purposes, therefore, we begin with *Joseph Smith's plural marriages*:

> **Joseph Smith's clandestine relationships with women other than Emma Smith, relationships the Church retrospectively characterizes as divinely authorized plural marriages or sealings.**

Then we examine whether the evidence warrants that characterization.

---

2. The Church acknowledges that secrecy was integral to the system

The Essay acknowledges that participants pledged to keep their involvement **confidential**. That matters. This was not simply an unconventional marital system practiced openly against prevailing social standards.

The secrecy operated within Joseph Smith's own religious community. Ordinary Church members did not possess the information necessary to evaluate what their prophet was actually doing. Emma herself did not possess all of it. The current Church treatment acknowledges:

> **"Emma likely did not know about all of Joseph's sealings."**

It also acknowledges that Emma approved, temporarily, of four such relationships while vacillating more generally between acceptance and denunciation. That admission alone substantially changes the ethical inquiry. The question is no longer simply:

> **Did nineteenth-century Americans accept polygamy?**

It becomes:

> **Did Joseph Smith's own wife know what her husband was doing?**

If she did not, cultural relativism does not dispose of the problem.

---

3. Fanny Alger exposes the danger of allowing the Church to supply the word "marriage"

The Essay states:

> "Fragmentary evidence suggests that Joseph Smith acted on the angel's first command by marrying a plural wife, Fanny Alger..."

It then acknowledges that the reports describing Alger as married to Joseph came from Latter-day Saints **"decades later."** Fanny had lived and worked in the Smith household.

This is important evidence against treating *wife* as an established starting point. The Joseph Smith Papers describes the documentary record as **"fragmentary and contradictory."** More importantly, Oliver Cowdery supplied evidence much closer to the event.

Cowdery was not an uninformed outsider. He had been Joseph's close associate, Book of Mormon scribe, and one of its Three Witnesses. The Joseph Smith Papers states that Cowdery regarded Joseph's relationship with Alger as **adulterous**, while later Church members characterized it as Joseph's first plural marriage.

In the 1838 disciplinary record, the Joseph Smith Papers preserves Cowdery's characterization of Joseph's relationship with Fanny as a:

> "dirty, nasty, filthy affair"

and notes that Joseph himself discussed what the record called the "girl business." That creates a significant chronological disparity:

- **Relationship:** mid-1830s.
- **Cowdery's condemnatory evidence:** 1837–1838.
- **Detailed retrospective marriage evidence:** decades later, including Mosiah Hancock's account around 1896.

The Church's own Joseph Smith Papers notes that it is unclear exactly what Joseph told Cowdery and acknowledges conflicting later accounts concerning the alleged ceremony. Therefore the responsible conclusion is not:

> **Fanny Alger unquestionably was Joseph Smith's first plural wife.**

Nor must we leap to:

> **Fanny Alger unquestionably was an adulterous affair.**

The evidence supports something more precise:

> **Joseph Smith had a clandestine relationship with the teenage Fanny Alger, who lived and worked in his household. Evidence close to the event includes Oliver Cowdery's characterization of the relationship as adulterous and an "affair." Evidence characterizing the relationship as a religious marriage comes substantially from later recollections. The existence of the relationship is considerably better established than its retrospective classification as a marriage.**

That is enough for our Duty of Candor inquiry.

---

4. The classification "marriage" materially changes the moral judgment

Consider what happens linguistically. If the Church says:

> **Joseph married Fanny Alger,** the sexual question largely disappears. Sex between husband and wife is expected.

But if the historically neutral statement is:

> **Joseph secretly entered an intimate relationship with his teenage household employee while married to Emma,**

then the reader naturally asks:

- **Was this adultery?**
- **Did Emma know?**

- **What authority did Joseph have over Fanny?**
- **What did Fanny understand was happening?**
- **Was there actually a contemporaneous ceremony?**
- **Who authorized it?**

The noun **marriage** therefore performs enormous apologetic work. It does not merely describe the conduct. It can morally legitimize it. That is precisely why we should not allow the Church's terminology to decide the issue before presenting the evidence.

---

5. The age issue should be stated without euphemism

The Church acknowledges Joseph's sealing to Helen Mar Kimball when she was fourteen—its instructional material phrases this as **"several months before her 15th birthday."** That wording is factually defensible. But it illustrates how framing affects perception.

> **"Several months before her fifteenth birthday"**
> and
> **"fourteen years old"**

describe the same fact. The latter communicates it more directly.

We should use:

> **Helen Mar Kimball was fourteen years old.**

Then the reader can decide its significance. The Church also says that Helen later described the sealing as being "for eternity alone," which argues against assuming a sexual relationship in her particular case.

We should include that evidence because our purpose is not to maximize accusation. It is to identify what can actually be established.

---

6. Women already married to other men

The Church also acknowledges that Joseph was sealed to women who already had husbands. Again, its explanation deserves to be heard.

The Church suggests several possible explanations, including creating eternal bonds between families and Joseph's possible desire to obey the plural-marriage command without necessarily establishing ordinary marital relations with those women.

But notice the epistemic status. These are **possible explanations**. The underlying fact is:

> **Joseph entered relationships the Church calls sealings with women who were already married to other men.**

The proposed purposes are interpretations. That distinction should remain visible.

And it raises a question that the antiseptic word *polyandry* can conceal:

What did the existing husband know, and what duty did Joseph owe him as prophet, pastor, friend, or associate?

That is where the issue of **betrayed trust** enters.

---

7. The recurring relationships of trust matter

Joseph Smith occupied multiple positions simultaneously:

- **prophet,**
- **pastor,**
- **employer,**
- **friend,**
- **counselor,**
- **community leader,**
- **claimant to direct divine authority.**

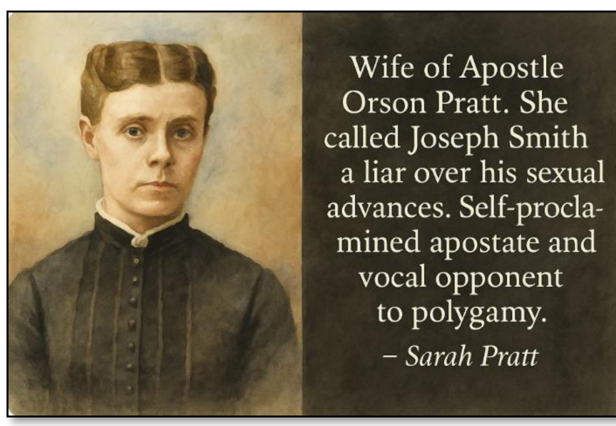
Therefore these relationships cannot be evaluated exactly like private romantic relationships between people possessing approximately equal power. The historical pattern deserves examination.

Nancy Rigdon was the daughter of Sidney Rigdon, one of Joseph's closest counselors.

Jane Law was the wife of William Law, another counselor and, shortly before the final rupture, a man who could still say publicly that Joseph had no better friend and that he was prepared to defend him. The Joseph Smith Papers records Law saying in January 1844:

> "I am Josephs friend, he has no better friend in the world" and that he was prepared to lay down his life for him.

The *Nauvoo Expositor* subsequently published affidavits from William and Jane Law concerning Joseph's revelation authorizing multiple wives. The Joseph Smith Papers confirms that the *Expositor* specifically opposed Joseph's practice of marrying women as "spiritual wives."



Sarah Pratt's allegation requires qualification but cannot reasonably be dismissed as merely a late hostile accusation. In 1842, while her husband Apostle Orson Pratt[8] was returning from missionary service, Sarah apparently accused Joseph Smith of having propositioned her in Orson's absence. The allegation precipitated a documented crisis between Orson Pratt and Joseph Smith.

---

[8] Orson Pratt wasn't some distant husband whose wife later made an accusation against Joseph. **He was an Apostle.** Joseph was allegedly approaching the wife of one of his own Twelve while that Apostle was away serving the Church in England.

Orson wrote that if his wife's testimony and that of others were true, he had been deceived for twelve years; he subsequently refused to endorse a public declaration of Joseph Smith as a “good, moral, virtuous” man and resisted efforts by fellow apostles to make him retract his position.

Joseph denied Sarah's allegation. No contemporaneous written account from Sarah herself survives, and her detailed published recollection came decades later. The allegation therefore cannot be treated as conclusively established. But neither can it responsibly be dismissed—particularly because evidence unavailable to ordinary Church members at the time now establishes that Joseph was secretly entering and proposing precisely such relationships with other women during this same period.

The broader question survives:

> **Did Joseph repeatedly exploit relationships created by religious, familial, pastoral, employment, and personal trust in pursuing women?**

That is a legitimate historical and ethical question. Calling all resulting relationships **plural marriages** does not answer it.

---

8. Emma and the extraordinary logic of “consent”

The Church’s own Essay produces one of the strongest admissions in this entire count. It acknowledges that Doctrine and Covenants 132 appears to require the first wife’s consent before the husband takes another wife.

Then it explains that the revelation also says that if the first wife refuses to “receive this law,” the husband becomes **“exempt from the law of Sarah”**—which the Essay interprets as possibly exempting him from obtaining her consent.

The Church says Joseph **“may have thought Emma’s rejection of plural marriage exempted him”** from that requirement. That deserves to be translated into ordinary moral language.

The arrangement becomes:

- **If Emma consents, Joseph may proceed.**
- **If Emma refuses, Joseph may nevertheless proceed because her refusal releases him from needing her consent.**

Whatever theological explanation may be supplied, that does not constitute meaningful consent in the ordinary ethical sense. A right of consent that cannot prevent the action is not an effective right of consent. This is highly relevant to the larger Exit Statement because it exhibits the same confusion we have repeatedly identified between:

> **choice**

and

> **obedience.**

Emma can choose. But only one choice controls the outcome.

9. Claimed divine authority radically affects consent

The Essay also acknowledges that Joseph told associates an angel repeatedly commanded him to practice plural marriage and ultimately appeared with a drawn sword threatening his destruction unless he obeyed. This is normally presented as evidence that **Joseph himself was reluctant**. But there is another ethical dimension. If Joseph tells a prospective partner:

- **God commanded this practice,**
- **I am God's prophet,**
- **an angel threatens destruction if the command is disobeyed,**

then the proposal is not equivalent to an ordinary request between equals. The religious claim changes the consent environment. This does not prove that every woman acted under duress. Some women later defended the practice sincerely and vigorously. But it means we cannot evaluate consent merely by asking:

- **Did she eventually say yes?**

The relevant questions include:

- **What did she believe would happen if she said no?**
- **Did she believe she was refusing Joseph—or refusing God?**
- **Was eternal salvation implicated?**
- **Did prophetic authority define the morally acceptable answer before she chose?**

Those questions are especially important when the prospective partner was young or dependent upon Joseph's religious authority.

---

10. The "carefully worded denials" may be the strongest admission in Count III

The Essay acknowledges that rumors spread. It then says Church members and leaders issued:

> **"carefully worded denials"**

that condemned "spiritual wifery" and "polygamy" but remained silent concerning what Joseph and his associates considered divinely authorized celestial plural marriage. The current Church treatment goes still further in its footnote. It explains that in these denials **"polygamy" was understood** as multiple marriage **without Church sanction**. That is an extraordinary semantic maneuver. To the ordinary listener:

> **polygamy = a man having more than one wife.**

Under the internal definition:

> **polygamy = a man having more than one wife without the prophet's authorization.**

Thus Joseph could be secretly involved with multiple women while Church statements denied "polygamy," because Joseph's relationships belonged to a different internally authorized category.

That is precisely the difference between **technical wording** and **candor**.

---

11. An actual public denial makes the problem concrete

This is where we move beyond general advice. The 1835 statement on marriage, subsequently included in the Doctrine and Covenants, declared the Church's belief that:

> "one man should have one wife" except in the event of death.

The Joseph Smith Papers now acknowledges that later evidence indicates Joseph's relationship with Fanny Alger may have existed before or shortly after publication of that statement. It further notes that the statement's explicit disavowal of polygamy ultimately led to its removal from the Doctrine and Covenants in 1876, when the 1843 plural-marriage revelation replaced it. That is highly significant.

The exact chronology of Alger remains uncertain, so we should not overclaim that Joseph personally authored a knowingly false statement while already involved with her. But institutionally, we have something remarkable:

> **The Church canonized an explicit monogamy statement.**

Later it canonized Joseph's secret plural-marriage revelation. And the earlier statement disappeared. That history belongs in our Duty of Candor analysis.

---

12. The Nauvoo Expositor transforms the "libel" question

The *Nauvoo Expositor* is especially important because Joseph and the Nauvoo City Council condemned it as libelous and ordered its press destroyed. But what did it actually allege concerning this issue?

The Joseph Smith Papers now says the newspaper opposed, among other things:

> Joseph Smith's "marrying women as spiritual wives."

It published affidavits from William Law, Jane Law, and Austin Cowles attesting to a revelation authorizing **"a plurality of wives."** William Law specifically swore that Hyrum Smith had shown him a revelation said to come from God that authorized certain men to have more than one wife and commanded Joseph to enter the practice and administer it to others. We now know such a revelation existed. It is Doctrine and Covenants 132.

The Joseph Smith Papers confirms that the revelation circulated privately among a small group and was used to support plural marriage. Therefore the central *Expositor* allegation concerning secret multiple-wife doctrine cannot simply be dismissed as libel.

That does not establish that every accusation in the newspaper was true. It establishes something narrower and devastating:

> **On the central issue for which the newspaper is remembered—Joseph Smith's secret multiple-wife system—the supposedly libelous publication was exposing conduct and doctrine that the Church itself now acknowledges were real.**

That deserves considerable weight.

---

13. The Church's strongest defense

Again, we should give it its strongest form. The Church could say:

> **Joseph sincerely believed God had restored an ancient biblical form of marriage. Because nineteenth-century American law and culture rejected the practice, secrecy was necessary to protect participants and the Church. Religious marriages need not depend upon civil recognition to be genuine. Many participating women later testified that they regarded the relationships as sacred and divinely authorized. Some sealings were apparently nonsexual and concerned eternal kinship rather than ordinary marriage. Joseph himself resisted the command and practiced it only after divine pressure. The carefully worded denials distinguished legitimate celestial marriage from unauthorized sexual relationships being practiced by impostors.**

That defense deserves consideration. But notice what it depends upon. Almost every morally exculpatory proposition ultimately depends upon accepting Joseph's own central claim:

> **God authorized Joseph to do this.**

If that proposition is removed, the conduct looks radically different. That is precisely why the institution cannot reasonably use the claimed revelation itself as sufficient evidence that the conduct was morally legitimate. The authority claim is part of what is under examination.

---

14. The circularity is the heart of the problem

The structure becomes:

> **Why was Joseph permitted to have relationships with additional women?**

Because God authorized plural marriage.

> **How do we know God authorized plural marriage?**

Because God's prophet Joseph Smith said God revealed it.

> **How do we know Joseph Smith was acting as God's prophet rather than rationalizing his own conduct?**

Because the relationships were divinely authorized plural marriages. The conclusion begins to authenticate its own premise. An independent ethical inquiry must break that circle.

It must first describe what Joseph actually did. Only then may it ask whether the evidence supports his theological explanation.

---

15. Why this count is material to credibility

This is not merely a question about nineteenth-century sexual morality. It concerns **Joseph Smith's use of claimed revelation when his own interests were directly implicated.** That makes it especially probative of credibility.

A prophet announces that God authorizes him to enter relationships otherwise forbidden by his existing marriage, law, prevailing religious morality, and the expectations of many followers.

- He keeps those relationships secret.
- His wife does not know about all of them.
- Some women are already married.
- One is fourteen.
- A teenage household worker becomes his earliest known clandestine relationship.
- Public statements deny polygamy through definitions unknown to the audience.
- Critics who expose the secret system are denounced.
- A newspaper publishing affidavits concerning the system is declared a nuisance and its press destroyed.
- Those facts do not mathematically prove Joseph was a fraud.

They do something more relevant to moral judgment:

> **They provide evidence from which a reasonable person may judge his credibility.**

And here I think your changed posture becomes important. You do not bear a burden to prove beyond every conceivable theological possibility that God did **not** command Joseph Smith.

> **Joseph Smith made the extraordinary claim that God did.**

The evidentiary burden belongs to that claim.

---

16. Preliminary Duty of Candor Finding

I would rate Count III:

> **STRONGLY ESTABLISHED — ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT COUNTS**

Not because every disputed allegation against Joseph Smith is proven. We should explicitly reject that approach. The count is strong because **the Church's own admissions establish enough without the disputed material**:

1. **Joseph secretly entered numerous relationships with women other than Emma.**
2. **Emma did not know about all of them.**
3. **Some women were already married.**
4. **Helen Mar Kimball was fourteen.**
5. **Fanny Alger's classification as a marriage rests importantly upon later evidence, while near-contemporary evidence characterized the relationship as immoral.**
6. **The practice was confidential.**

7. **Public statements denied "polygamy" using an internal definition that excluded prophet-authorized multiple marriage.**
8. **The Church itself calls these statements "carefully worded denials."**
9. **The Nauvoo Expositor exposed a secret multiple-wife doctrine that the Church now acknowledges actually existed.**

The Duty of Candor finding therefore can be quite specific:

> **The principal ethical failure was not merely that Joseph Smith practiced an unconventional form of marriage. It was that conduct materially affecting Emma Smith, other husbands, families, followers, and the Church membership was concealed while public representations were constructed to preserve an understanding materially different from the private reality. Calling the resulting relationships "plural marriages" does not cure that failure; where the legitimacy of the relationships is itself disputed, the term risks assuming the very conclusion that the historical evidence requires the reader to judge.**

And I would add this as the closing finding because I think it belongs eventually in the mainline Exit Statement:

> **The issue is not whether Joseph Smith could devise a theological explanation under which his conduct became permissible. He did. The issue is whether his claim of divine authorization deserves greater evidentiary weight than the conduct it was invoked to justify. I see no moral obligation to grant it that privilege. Religious authority cannot authenticate itself merely by declaring that God authorized what otherwise requires justification.**

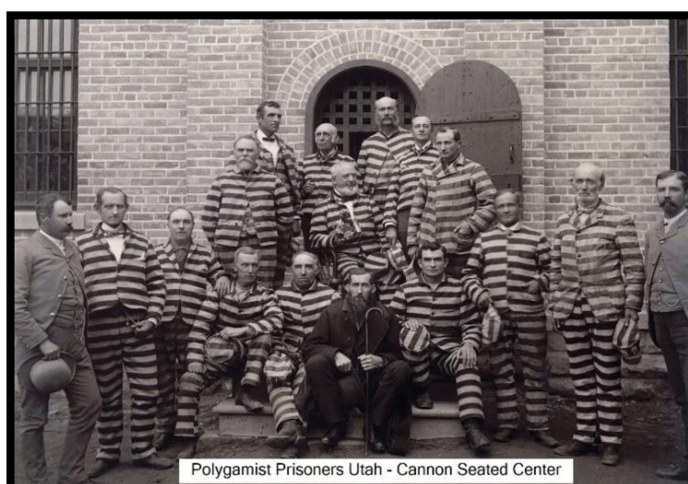
That, I think, is where **Count III lands considerably harder than either Count I or Count II**.

Bill of Particulars

Count IV — The Manifesto: Public Renunciation, Continuing Practice, Nation's Reliance

The allegation

The Church publicly represented the 1890 Manifesto as ending its promotion and authorization of plural marriage and used that change to help resolve its conflict with the United States and clear the path toward Utah statehood. Yet the Church now acknowledges that new plural marriages continued after the Manifesto, including marriages involving senior Church leaders; that some post-Manifesto marriages required approval from a member of the First Presidency; that Church leaders disagreed over what the Manifesto actually prohibited; and that only the Second Manifesto of 1904 clearly made new plural marriages punishable by Church discipline.



Polygamist Prisoners Utah - Cannon Seated Center

This count is especially important because it does not concern merely what ordinary members were taught. It concerns **representations made while the Church was seeking relief from federal pressure and Utah was seeking admission to the Union.**

The relying party included the United States government and the American public.

---

1. What the Church now admits

The current Gospel Topics Essay **"The Manifesto and the End of Plural Marriage"** makes an important concession in its opening paragraphs:

> **"The end of the practice was a process rather than a single event."**

That formulation materially qualifies the familiar statement that plural marriage ended in 1890. The Essay acknowledges that after the Manifesto:

- many Church leaders initially believed it merely **"suspended"** plural marriage;
- new plural marriages continued in Mexico and Canada;
- some new plural marriages also occurred within the United States;
- post-Manifesto marriages for a period required approval from a member of the First Presidency;
- some men authorized to perform sealings later acted independently;
- senior leaders disagreed over the Manifesto's actual scope;
- and the Church did not make new plural marriage unequivocally punishable until the **Second Manifesto of 1904**.

That is already sufficient to establish that:

> **1890 did not mean internally what a simple public declaration that "the Church ended polygamy in 1890" naturally communicates.**

---

2. The Church acknowledges new plural marriages after 1890

This point should not be softened. The Essay expressly says:

> "after October 1890, plural marriages continued to be quietly performed" in Mexico and Canada. It also acknowledges that under exceptional circumstances **new plural marriages occurred inside the United States between 1890 and 1904**.

Its separate Church History topic likewise states:

> "A small number of plural marriages continued to be performed in Mexico and Canada under the sanction of some Church leaders."

and:

> "On an exceptional basis, a smaller number of plural marriages were performed within the United States between the years 1890 and 1904."

Thus continuation is not an allegation by hostile historians. **The Church admits it.**

---

3. This was not merely rank-and-file disobedience

The institutional character of the continuation is crucial. The Gospel Topics Essay states:

> "For a time, post-Manifesto plural marriages required the approval of a member of the First Presidency."

That alone prevents the history from being reduced to:

> **The prophet ended plural marriage; rebellious members continued anyway.**

Even more strikingly, the Essay's own footnote says that among nineteen members of the Quorum of the Twelve who served between 1890 and 1904:

> **eight married new plural wives during those years.**

That is extraordinarily important evidence. Nearly half of the apostles serving during the period entered new plural unions after the Manifesto.

The named apostles include Brigham Young Jr., George Teasdale, John W. Taylor, Abraham H. Cannon, Marriner W. Merrill, Matthias F. Cowley, Abraham O. Woodruff, and Rudger Clawson. Therefore post-Manifesto plural marriage was not simply a fringe misunderstanding at the margins of the Church.

It extended into the governing Quorum of the Twelve. That considerably strengthens Count IV.

---

4. The Manifesto had a strong public meaning

The historical context matters. By 1890 the Church had lost major legal battles over polygamy. Federal legislation threatened Church property and increasingly punished unlawful cohabitation. The Manifesto publicly declared President Wilford Woodruff's intention to obey the laws of the United States and advised members to refrain from marriages prohibited by law.

At the October 1890 General Conference, the Manifesto was presented immediately after the Articles of Faith declaration that Latter-day Saints believe in:

> **"obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law."**

The Manifesto was then sustained as **"authoritative and binding."** The reasonable public meaning was powerful:

> **The Church was ending unlawful plural marriage.**

That representation mattered because the Church desperately needed reconciliation with the United States.

---

5. But internally the meaning remained different

The Church's current Essay acknowledges that many leaders did **not** initially understand the Manifesto as an absolute prohibition. Some regarded it merely as suspension.

George Q. Cannon compared it to a temporary release from an otherwise divine commandment. Heber J. Grant later said the Church had reached its eventual interpretation only **"by degrees."** That creates an important discrepancy:

- **Public understanding**
- **The Church has renounced new polygamous marriage and will obey the law.**
- **Internal understanding among some leaders**
- **The divine command may merely be suspended, and exceptional new plural marriages may still be authorized.**

That is precisely the kind of difference to which a Duty of Candor applies.

---

6. The Church's modern explanation admits that approval continued

The Essay says that for a period approval for new plural marriages came from **a member of the First Presidency**, although the exact process is unclear. It specifically says Wilford Woodruff often referred requests to George Q. Cannon for Cannon's personal consideration.

That is not trivial. The First Presidency was the very governing body publicly responsible for the Manifesto. Therefore:

> **The same senior institutional structure publicly communicating the end of plural marriage still contained mechanisms through which new plural marriages could be considered and approved.**

The Essay can explain this as uncertainty over the scope of continuing revelation. but the historical fact remains.

---

7. The public did not initially know

The Church's own Essay states:

> **"At first, the performance of new plural marriages after the Manifesto was largely unknown to people outside the Church."**

That sentence is central to Count IV. We therefore do not have merely:

> **public declaration + isolated exceptions.**

We have:

> **public declaration + continued internal practice + outside ignorance of the continuation.**

That is exactly the informational asymmetry our investigation is about.

---

8. When outsiders learned, they regarded the issue as material

The Essay itself supplies evidence of materiality. When reports emerged that new plural marriages might still occur in Mexico and Canada, Americans reacted strongly.

B. H. Roberts was elected to Congress but was refused his seat after the public learned that he had three wives, one of whom he had married after the Manifesto. The Essay notes that a petition bearing **seven million signatures** demanded that he not be seated. Congress complied.

Then Reed Smoot's election to the Senate triggered extensive hearings because Americans questioned whether a Mormon apostle could simultaneously honor Church obligations and the laws of the United States. This proves something important:

> **The continuation was material to the relying public.**

Once the information became known, it produced major political consequences.

---

9. Joseph F. Smith's Senate testimony provides one of the clearest examples of technical truth versus candor

This may be the strongest single portion of Count IV. In March 1904, Church President Joseph F. Smith testified before the United States Senate. Asked about plural marriages after the Manifesto, he said:

> "There never has been a plural marriage by the consent or sanction or knowledge or approval of the church since the manifesto."

The modern Church Essay then explains what he meant. It says:

> **"In this legal setting, President Smith sought to protect the Church while stating the truth."**

It continues:

> "His testimony conveyed a distinction Church leaders had long understood."

That distinction was between:

- **acts officially sanctioned by "the Church" collectively**
- **acts undertaken by individual Church members or leaders as matters of religious conscience.**

This is exceptionally important. The Senate naturally wanted to know whether Mormon religious authority continued permitting plural marriage. Smith's answer depended upon a narrower definition of **"the Church."**

Under that definition:

- An apostle could perform a plural marriage.

- A member of the First Presidency could approve one.
- A Church leader could enter one.

Yet Smith could still deny that the marriage occurred with the sanction or approval of **“the Church”** if the institution had not formally acted through its collective councils.

That is technically constructed language. Whether it satisfied candor is another question.

---

10. The Church's own explanation inadvertently identifies the ethical problem

The phrase:

> **“protect the Church while stating the truth”**

is revealing. Institutional protection is understandable. But the Duty of Candor asks:

> **Did the listener receive the material truth necessary to understand the situation?**

Suppose the Senate understood Smith's testimony to mean:

> **Church authority has not approved any new plural marriages since 1890.**

Yet informed leaders knew that:

- apostles had entered post-Manifesto plural unions;
- some senior leaders had performed such unions;
- approval had sometimes been obtained from a member of the First Presidency;
- and internal interpretation had permitted individuals to continue the practice.

Then the central ethical question is not:

> **Can Smith's sentence be defended under a technical institutional definition?**

It is:

> **Did his answer leave the Senate with a materially accurate understanding of the Church's actual conduct?**

That is candor.

---

11. The Second Manifesto demonstrates that the First Manifesto was not prohibitory in the later sense

The Church's Essay is extraordinarily explicit here. In 1904 Joseph F. Smith issued what became known as the **Second Manifesto**, declaring that anyone entering or performing a new plural marriage would be subject to Church discipline and possible excommunication. Francis M. Lyman, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, later explained:

> the 1890 Manifesto "simply gave notice to the Saints that they need not enter plural marriage any longer,"

whereas the 1904 action:

> **"made that manifesto prohibitory."**

That is perhaps the cleanest institutional admission in the entire count. If 1904 **made the Manifesto prohibitory**, then the 1890 declaration was not internally understood as a complete prohibition in the way later historical shorthand frequently implies. The Church itself calls the Second Manifesto:

> **"a watershed event."**

Thus the ordinary statement:

> **"The Church stopped polygamy in 1890"**

is historically inadequate.

---

12. Utah statehood makes the discrepancy much more serious

The timing is crucial. Utah became a state in **1896**, between the First Manifesto of 1890 and the Second Manifesto of 1904.

The Church Essay itself states that the Manifesto marked a new relationship with the federal government, prosecutions declined, President Benjamin Harrison issued general amnesty in 1893, and three years later Utah became a state under a constitution prohibiting polygamy. So the sequence is:

1. **1890 — Manifesto presented as authoritative and binding.**
2. **1893 — Federal amnesty.**
3. **1896 — Utah admitted as a state with constitutional prohibition of polygamy.**
4. **1890–1904 — New plural marriages nevertheless continue under some Church authority.**
5. **1904 — Second Manifesto finally makes new plural marriage disciplinarily prohibitory.**

That chronology alone makes the question of public reliance unavoidable.

---

13. Frank J. Cannon supplies evidence from the relying side

Frank J. Cannon was not merely a subsequent critic. He had been deeply involved in Utah's statehood politics and had personally communicated assurances in Washington.

His later account in *Under the Prophet in Utah* was that Church representatives had represented the doctrine and practice of polygamy as being abandoned and that federal amnesty, return of Church property, the Utah Enabling Act, Utah's Constitution, and eventual statehood were all bound up with that understanding.

Cannon regarded post-Manifesto plural unions as a betrayal of the commitments upon which the nation relied. His testimony should not stand alone as proof.

But the modern Church's own admissions substantially corroborate the central historical premise upon which Cannon's indictment rested:

> **New plural unions did continue after the Manifesto.**

That removes the easiest way of dismissing him.

---

14. George Q. Cannon complicates the story in a useful way

Frank Cannon believed his father George Q. Cannon and Wilford Woodruff initially acted in good faith. That is important. It prevents Count IV from degenerating into:

> **The Manifesto was fraudulent from the beginning.**

The evidence does not require that conclusion. A more defensible finding is:

> **Some senior leaders may have sincerely intended to move the Church away from plural marriage while simultaneously retaining theological and practical exceptions that were not apparent to the public relying upon the renunciation.**

That is enough for a Duty of Candor problem. Bad faith is not required. Information asymmetry is.

---

15. The Church's strongest defense

We should state it fully. The Church can argue:

> **The Manifesto genuinely changed the direction of the Church. New plural marriages declined dramatically. Most post-Manifesto unions occurred outside the United States, and leaders believed the Manifesto specifically concerned obedience to U.S. law. The precise implications of a profound theological reversal could not be worked out instantly. Leaders sincerely sought continuing revelation. The practice diminished substantially, and in 1904 the Church unequivocally prohibited new plural marriages and subsequently disciplined violators.**

That defense has real force. The modern Essay supplies evidence that plural marriage was declining and that many leaders acted sincerely according to their understanding of the Manifesto. We should grant that. But it does not eliminate the discrepancy between:

1. **what the outside world reasonably understood had been renounced**
2. vs **what informed Church leaders privately understood might still be permissible.**

That difference is precisely what adequate candor discloses.

---

16. The Church's own numbers undermine the idea of isolated exceptions

The Church carefully describes post-Manifesto unions as relatively few. Numerically that is true compared with all marriages in the Church. But the institutional distribution matters more than raw percentage. The Essay's footnote says **8 of 19 apostles serving between 1890 and 1904 entered new plural marriages.** That is not an inconsequential statistic. The relevant question is not:

> **What percentage of all Mormon marriages remained plural?**

It is:

> **How deeply did post-Manifesto plural marriage remain embedded within the very leadership charged with interpreting and implementing the Manifesto?**

By that measure, the continuation was institutionally significant.

---

17. This count gives us another example of redefinition

Count III gave us:

> **"polygamy"** internally redefined to exclude prophet-authorized multiple marriage.

Count IV gives us:

> **"the Church"** narrowly defined so that conduct by apostles or individually authorizing leaders might not count as conduct sanctioned by "the Church."

The structure is similar.

- **Ordinary meaning**
- **Church leaders are permitting plural marriage.**
- **Defensive institutional meaning**
- **No formal act of the Church collectively authorized the marriage.**

Again, the technical definition protects the institution. The Duty of Candor asks whether it accurately informs the audience.

---

18. Why this count is material

The stakes were enormous.

The Church was seeking:

- cessation of federal prosecution;
- restoration of political participation;
- protection of institutional property;
- federal amnesty;
- acceptance of Mormon citizens into national political life;
- and Utah statehood.

Those benefits depended substantially upon public confidence that the polygamy conflict had been resolved. Thus this was not merely an internal theological nuance.

The institution benefited materially from the public understanding that plural marriage was ending.

That considerably strengthens the duty to communicate accurately what continued internally.

---

19. Preliminary Duty of Candor Finding

I would rate Count IV:
STRONGLY ESTABLISHED — PARTICULARLY STRONG AS A HISTORICAL CANDOR CASE

The Church's own Essay establishes that:

1. **The 1890 Manifesto did not immediately make all new plural marriage prohibitory.**
2. **Senior leaders disagreed about its meaning.**
3. **New plural marriages continued after 1890.**
4. **Some required approval from a member of the First Presidency.**
5. **Eight of nineteen apostles serving during 1890–1904 entered new plural unions.**
6. **The continuation was initially largely unknown outside the Church.**
7. **Joseph F. Smith later distinguished formally sanctioned acts of "the Church" from acts of individual leaders and members.**
8. **The Church itself says Smith sought to "protect the Church while stating the truth."**
9. **The Second Manifesto of 1904 finally made new plural marriage unequivocally subject to Church discipline.**

The specific Duty of Candor finding is therefore:

> **The ethical problem is not that the 1890 Manifesto instantly failed to erase a deeply rooted religious practice. The problem is that the Church received substantial public, legal, and political benefit from a representation understood as renunciation while informed leaders retained interpretations and authorization practices under which new plural marriages continued. Where the public relied upon the broader meaning and leadership operated under a narrower one, technical compliance did not necessarily constitute candor.**

And I would close Count IV with this:

> **The Church's modern Essay now acknowledges enough of the post-Manifesto history that the issue can no longer responsibly be described as a simple story of "the Church ended polygamy in 1890." The more accurate history is that the Church publicly renounced the practice in 1890, continued to permit or tolerate some new plural unions under contested internal interpretations, received the political benefits of the apparent renunciation, and did not make the prohibition unequivocal and disciplinarily enforceable until 1904. Whether those leaders acted sincerely does not remove the Duty of Candor owed to those who relied upon the public representation.**

I think Count IV survives our more demanding particularized test **very well**. In one respect it is cleaner than Count III: much of the most consequential evidence comes directly from the Church's own modern Essay, including the extraordinary **8-of-19 apostles** admission.

Bill of Particulars

Count V — Race: Prophetic Teaching, Institutional Responsibility, and Retrospective Disavowal

The allegation

For more than a century, Church presidents and apostles maintained a racial restriction denying Black members of African descent priesthood ordination and Temple ordinances, while senior Church leaders supplied religious explanations for that restriction involving premortal conduct, divine curses, and lineage. The Church now disavows those explanations as racial "theories" while declining to identify any revealed origin for the restriction itself. This creates a Duty of Candor question larger than the historical existence of racism: whether an institution may teach propositions through men sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators, require members to accommodate themselves to those teachings, and later distance the institution from them by reclassifying the teachings as products of their historical environment.

There is also a second racial problem that the Essay itself does not adequately encompass:

> **The Book of Mormon contains a separate racialized narrative involving Lamanites, skin color, divine curse, and ancestry—teachings historically applied to Indigenous Americans.**

That deserves inclusion because otherwise "Race and the Priesthood" can leave the impression that Mormonism's racial problem was confined to African ancestry and ended in 1978.

---

1. The Church makes an unusually important admission

The Essay acknowledges plainly: "for much of its history—from the mid-1800s until 1978—the Church did not ordain men of black African descent to its priesthood" and also denied Black men and women Temple endowment and sealing ordinances. That latter fact is crucial. This was not merely a restriction upon ecclesiastical office. Within Mormon theology, Temple ordinances concern **exaltation and eternal family relationships**. Therefore Black women were affected despite never being candidates for priesthood ordination.

Calling this simply the **"priesthood ban"** understates what actually happened. A more candid description is:

> **The Church imposed a race-based priesthood and Temple restriction.**

---

2. The Essay acknowledges that the restriction did not originate with Joseph Smith

This is one of its strongest admissions. The Church says that during Joseph Smith's lifetime Black men were ordained to the priesthood and that:

> "There is no reliable evidence that any black men were denied the priesthood during Joseph Smith's lifetime."

It identifies Elijah Abel as a Black priesthood holder and Temple participant and notes Brigham Young's favorable description of another Black elder, Q. Walker Lewis. Then comes the critical transition:

> **"In 1852, President Brigham Young publicly announced that men of black African descent could no longer be ordained to the priesthood."**

That means the Church now acknowledges something historically consequential:

> **The restriction cannot simply be projected backward as an established revelation through Joseph Smith.**

The identifiable institutional imposition occurs under **Brigham Young**.

---

3. Yet the Essay does not identify a revelation establishing the restriction

This asymmetry is striking. The Church says a revelation was necessary in 1978 to **remove** the restriction. But it identifies no revelation that originally **created** it. Instead, it says subsequent leaders continued the restriction and developed explanations for it. That produces a difficult question:

> **Why was revelation required to stop racial discrimination for which the Church can identify no corresponding revelation requiring it to begin?**

That question belongs squarely in our Duty of Candor inquiry. If Brigham Young introduced the restriction without a demonstrable revelation, subsequent presidents inherited not merely a doctrine requiring divine reversal but a **human institutional decision they treated as though divine authorization were required to change it**.

---

4. Calling the explanations "theories" risks minimizing who taught them

The Essay says:

> "Over time, Church leaders and members advanced many theories to explain the priesthood and temple restrictions."

and then:

> "None of these explanations is accepted today as the official doctrine of the Church."

That is true as a description of the Church's present position. But **"leaders and members advanced many theories"** substantially flattens the hierarchy of responsibility.

An ordinary member speculating in Sunday School and a Church President explaining racial restriction from the position of prophetic authority are not institutionally equivalent. The Duty of Candor therefore requires us to ask:

1. **Who taught these "theories"?**
2. **In what office?**

3. **In what venue?**
4. **How authoritatively?**
5. **Were members encouraged to regard those leaders as God's authorized interpreters?**

Calling a discarded prophetic teaching a **theory** after its abandonment does not tell us what epistemic status the institution gave that teaching when members were expected to accept it.

---

5. The Church now expressly repudiates the former explanations

This deserves genuine credit. The Essay says unequivocally:

- "Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past"

including claims that:

- Black skin was a sign of divine disfavor or curse;
- Black people had behaved unrighteously in premortal life;
- interracial marriage was sinful;
- or Black people were inferior to other races.

It also condemns racism. That is morally important. We should not diminish it merely because it came late. But repudiation creates another historical question:

> **If these teachings were sufficiently wrong to be disavowed today, what does their former propagation by prophetic leadership tell us about the reliability of prophetic authority?**

The Essay primarily answers:

> **what the Church believes now.**

Our investigation asks the additional question:

> **who was responsible for what the Church believed then?**

---

6. Historical context explains; it does not transfer responsibility

The Essay spends substantial space explaining nineteenth-century American racism, slavery, segregation, and prevailing racial assumptions. That context is legitimate. Brigham Young lived in a profoundly racist society. But contextual explanation creates a theological difficulty of its own. The Church claims prophets possess special access to divine guidance. If prophetic teaching merely reproduces the serious moral errors of the surrounding culture, then historical context explains the error **at the cost of weakening the claim that prophetic guidance protects the institution from such error.** In other words:

> **“They were men of their time” is a reasonable historical explanation. It is a much more consequential defense when those same men are presented as prophets uniquely authorized to communicate God's will.**

The stronger the prophetic claim, the less exculpatory ordinary cultural conformity becomes.

---

7. The 1978 reversal intensifies rather than eliminates that question

The Essay recounts the 1978 revelation received by Spencer W. Kimball and the First Presidency and Twelve opening priesthood and Temple ordinances without racial restriction. Again, the change deserves recognition. But consider the institutional structure:

1. **A Church president institutes the restriction.**
2. **Successive Church presidents maintain it.**
3. **Members are taught religious explanations for it.**
4. **Another Church president receives revelation ending it.**
5. **The institution later disavows the explanations previously supplied.**

The problem is therefore not merely:

> **Mormon leaders once held racist ideas.**

Millions of people did. The specifically Mormon problem is:

> **What mechanism permits a member to distinguish a genuine revelation from a serious moral error taught or maintained through the same prophetic offices?**

That question cannot be answered simply by saying that living prophets supersede dead prophets. That establishes institutional succession. It does not establish epistemic reliability.

---

8. And here the Essay's scope becomes too narrow

This is where my earlier observation becomes important that the Church's racial history did **not** begin and end with Black Africans. The Book of Mormon contains the Lamanite narrative. The Church's newer **“Race and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”** material now directly confronts the passage describing a:

> **“skin of blackness”**

coming upon the Lamanites after their separation from the Nephites.

The Church now says the nature and appearance of this mark are **“not fully understood”** and emphasizes that such passages should never be used to justify racial prejudice.

That is a significant development. But the scriptural text remains. The problem is therefore deeper than a discarded Brigham Young policy.

---

9. The Book of Mormon connects wickedness, curse, separation, and skin

We should be exact here rather than simply calling the Book of Mormon racist. The narrative associates Lamanite wickedness with being cut off from God's presence and describes a “skin of blackness” as distinguishing them from Nephites.

The modern Church now attempts to distinguish:

> **the curse itself** — separation from God,

from

> **the mark** — the described skin difference.

That distinction deserves to be acknowledged. But it does not remove the ethical problem. Within the narrative, God still produces or permits a physical distinction associated with separating one population from another after wickedness. And historically, Latter-day Saints did not treat Lamanite identity as merely an abstract scriptural category. They identified Indigenous Americans with the peoples of the Book of Mormon.

---

10. The DNA Essay demonstrates how far that identification has retreated

This connects Count V with our earlier DNA discussion. The Church's DNA Essay now acknowledges:

> **“the majority of Native Americans carry largely Asian DNA.”**

It further acknowledges that the older Book of Mormon introduction had identified Lamanites as the **“principal ancestors”** of American Indians, whereas the 2006 revision changed this to **“among the ancestors.”**

That is a significant retreat in the ancestry claim. The Essay now argues that Book of Mormon peoples may have represented only a small fraction of the population and that their DNA might therefore have disappeared or become undetectable.

Whatever one thinks of that scientific defense, the historical movement is unmistakable:

> **broad identification → increasingly limited possible ancestry.**

That matters because earlier Mormon racial theology treated Native American identity as known much more confidently than the modern evidence permits.

---

11. The DNA Essay contains an admission we should not overlook

It says: “most early Latter-day Saints assumed” that the Near Eastern migrants described by the Book of Mormon were the first, largest, or only settlers of the Americas. Again we encounter a familiar rhetorical structure:

> **“Latter-day Saints assumed.”**

But our Duty of Candor question asks:

> **Did ordinary members independently invent this understanding, or was it taught and reinforced by prophets, missionaries, scripture headings, patriarchal lineage declarations, Church programs, and official publications?**

That requires further documentation before we make the charge. But the distinction is important. If leadership taught the identification authoritatively, it should not later be described merely as something **members assumed**.

---

12. Ephraim and Manasseh require more careful treatment

You raised this earlier, and I think our discussion produced an important distinction. Mormonism's identification of members with the House of Israel—often Ephraim—and Indigenous peoples with Lamanite/Manasseh ancestry is not automatically **racism** merely because it involves lineage.

Jewish identity and Israelite lineage are not inherently racial-supremacist concepts. The ethical problem arises where lineage becomes associated with:

1. **superior or inferior divine standing,**
2. **skin color as a divine marker,**
3. **wickedness inherited or physically marked,**
4. or, **hierarchies of spiritual privilege.**

So I would **not** write: “Every bit of this is Jewish racism.” That would overstate our evidence and unnecessarily broaden the accusation. I would write instead:

> **Mormon theology racialized sacred lineage by assigning modern populations to ancient Israelite identities and, in the Book of Mormon narrative, associating one population's rebellion with a divinely imposed physical mark. The ethical problem is not Israelite lineage itself but the use of lineage and skin distinction to explain divine favor, disfavor, identity, and historical destiny.**

That is harder to rebut.

---

13. There are therefore two different racial failures

I think this distinction is important enough to preserve.

> **African ancestry**

The racial restriction was **institutional policy and prophetic teaching** that the Church subsequently abandoned and whose supporting explanations it now disavows.

> **Indigenous ancestry**

The difficulty is embedded more deeply because the **scriptural narrative itself remains canonized**. The Church cannot simply say:

> **Brigham Young was a nineteenth-century man influenced by his culture.** The “skin of blackness” language is in the Book of Mormon attributed to Nephi.

Therefore the modern Church must reinterpret what the text means rather than merely repudiate a dead leader's explanation. That makes the Native American issue conceptually distinct.

---

14. The Church's strongest defense

The strongest defense would be:

> **The Church has never taught that all races are inherently unequal before God. Its foundational scripture explicitly says all are alike unto God. The nineteenth-century priesthood restriction developed in a culture saturated with racism, and the Church now unequivocally repudiates racist explanations for it. The precise origin of the restriction is uncertain. Revelation in 1978 corrected the practice. Regarding the Book of Mormon, the curse was separation from God, not skin color itself; the meaning of the “skin of blackness” passage is uncertain, and scripture repeatedly depicts righteous Lamanites receiving God's full blessings. Modern Church teaching explicitly condemns using scripture to justify racial prejudice.**

That defense has considerable merit. Especially important is the Church's present repudiation of racial inferiority. We should acknowledge it without qualification. But it leaves one question unanswered:

> **How did men sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators teach and perpetuate a race-based exclusion from sacred ordinances for more than a century if prophetic authority is supposed to provide morally superior access to God's will?**

Present repentance or correction does not answer that historical credibility question.

---

15. The Duty of Candor problem is retrospective institutional distancing

This may be the strongest finding from Count V. The Church now says:

> **“Church leaders and members advanced many theories.”**

That formulation distributes responsibility horizontally. But Church authority operates vertically. Members do not sustain one another as prophets, seers, and revelators. They sustain the First Presidency and Twelve.

When teachings flow downward under prophetic authority, institutional responsibility should not later flow outward into the generalized category **“leaders and members.”** I would formulate the principle this way:

> **An institution cannot fairly invoke prophetic authority when a teaching is being accepted and then invoke ordinary human fallibility when responsibility for that teaching must be assigned. Authority and accountability travel together.**

That sentence may eventually deserve extraction into your mainline Exit Statement.

---

16. Preliminary Duty of Candor Finding

I would rate Count V:
STRONGLY ESTABLISHED AS AN INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROBLEM

But I would **not** indict the current Church for continuing to teach Black racial inferiority. It explicitly does not. Indeed, its present repudiation is important evidence in its favor. The indictment is more precise:

> **The Church now disavows racial explanations once advanced through its own leadership while describing them retrospectively as "theories" arising among "leaders and members." That framing insufficiently distinguishes ordinary speculation from teachings propagated by men exercising the highest claimed prophetic authority. The institution has corrected the teaching but has not equivalently accounted for the authority by which the error was maintained.**

And the Native American side adds:

> **The repudiation of past Black racial teachings does not exhaust Mormonism's racial history. The Book of Mormon itself retains language associating Lamanite rebellion with a "skin of blackness," while modern Church teaching now says the nature of that mark is not fully understood and warns against racial interpretations. At the same time, genetic evidence has forced a substantial narrowing of the formerly broad identification of Indigenous Americans as Lamanite descendants. These developments should be presented together because they demonstrate not merely changing social attitudes but changing institutional confidence about claims once taught much more concretely.**

And I think Count V gives us another mainline-quality conclusion:

> **The moral question is not whether a church can correct itself. Of course it can, and correction should be welcomed. The question is what happens to the claim of prophetic authority when the correction repudiates teachings previously propagated through that same authority. A prophet cannot be made authoritative when obedience is sought and merely human when accountability is due.**

That last distinction—**authoritative when obedience is sought, merely human when accountability is due**—may be one of the most useful things this entire Gospel Topics investigation has produced for the Second Generation Exit Statement.

Bill of Particulars:

Count VI — Mountain Meadows: Religious Authority, Vengeance, and the Management of Historical Responsibility

The allegation

The Church's Gospel Topics Essay now acknowledges that senior Church leaders used inflammatory rhetoric, that blood-atonement preaching was intended in part to frighten members into conformity, that Brigham Young and other leaders helped create an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, that local ecclesiastical and militia authority overlapped, that Latter-day Saint militiamen deliberately deceived and murdered approximately 120 emigrants, and that participants attempted to conceal responsibility afterward. Yet the Essay frames the massacre primarily as the result of local decisions within a wartime atmosphere and omits a potentially material part of the religious environment: endowed Latter-day Saints had participated in a Temple covenant concerning vengeance for the blood of the prophets.

This count should **not** allege that Brigham Young ordered the massacre unless stronger evidence establishes that. The Church's own current historical treatment says he did not, and his instruction not to interfere with the emigrants arrived after the killings.

The stronger issue is different:

> **What responsibility belongs to a religious institution for cultivating the beliefs, rhetoric, authority structure, and obedience environment in which subordinate Church leaders could come to regard mass violence as justified?**

That is the ethical question Count VI should prosecute.

---

1. The Church now admits that Mormon militiamen carried out the massacre

The Gospel Topics Essay is quite candid about the immediate crime. It says that the attacking militia branch was composed **entirely of Latter-day Saints**, assisted by Paiutes whom they recruited. It identifies Isaac C. Haight simultaneously as a **stake president and militia leader**, and John D. Lee as a militia major. Haight sent Lee to lead the initial attack.

The Essay then states that Latter-day Saint militiamen eventually planned and carried out a **deliberate massacre**. They induced the surviving emigrants to leave their fortified wagon circle under a **false flag of truce** and then slaughtered them.

Approximately 120 men, women, and children died. Only small children thought too young to report what happened were spared. These are no longer allegations from critics. **The Church admits them.**

---

2. The Church acknowledges that ecclesiastical and military authority overlapped

This is institutionally important. Isaac Haight was not merely a militia officer who happened privately to be Mormon. He was a **stake president and militia leader**.

The Church's Essay later generalizes the point, saying that the local Church leaders responsible for the massacre also held important civic and militia positions.

That overlapping authority creates a fundamentally different obedience environment from that of an ordinary secular militia. A subordinate could encounter the same superior as:

1. **ecclesiastical leader,**
2. **community leader,**
3. **military commander.**

That matters because Mormonism attached religious significance to obedience. The question therefore cannot stop at:

> **Who held military rank?**

It must also ask:

> **What religious influence did those same men exercise over the consciences of the men under them?**

---

3. The Essay acknowledges senior-leadership rhetoric helped create the environment

This admission is particularly important. The Church says:

> **"Defiant sermons given by President Young and other Church leaders ... helped create an environment of fear and suspicion in Utah."**

Later it says that heated rhetoric from Church leaders toward dissenters:

> **"may have led these Latter-day Saints to believe that such actions were justified."**

That goes well beyond admitting that some local men made bad decisions. The Church itself acknowledges a causal path:

> **leadership rhetoric → followers' moral perceptions → possible violence.**

That is highly consequential to an Exit Statement concerned with obedience and conscience.

A leader does not escape ethical responsibility merely because he did not dictate the final criminal act if he helped create the ideological conditions in which followers believed such conduct could be righteous.

---

4. Blood atonement was not merely invented by anti-Mormon critics

The Essay acknowledges that during the Mormon Reformation Brigham Young, Jedediah Grant, and other leaders preached that certain sins were so grave that the sinner's own blood might have to be shed for forgiveness.

The footnote goes farther. It says that although many nineteenth-century accusations about "blood atonement" were exaggerated:

> **"it is likely that in at least one instance, a few Latter-day Saints acted on this rhetoric."**

And it approvingly cites historian Paul Peterson's conclusion that such sermons were designed, at least in part, to **frighten Church members into conformity** and encourage those who would not conform to leave Utah.

That is an extraordinary admission for our larger project. The Church is acknowledging the use of **threatening religious rhetoric as an instrument of conformity**. That brings Mountain Meadows into direct contact with the larger themes of:

> **obedience, fear, authoritarian influence, and suppression of independent moral judgment.**

---

5. The massacre itself required betrayal of trust

The manner of the final killing matters ethically. The emigrants were not simply defeated in combat. The militia used a false promise of safe conduct to induce them to surrender their defensive position. They were then separated and murdered. Thus the crime involved more than killing. It involved:

1. **deception,**
2. **induced reliance,**
3. **betrayal of that reliance,**
4. and, **mass murder.**

For a Duty of Candor project, that mechanism deserves particular attention. The victims were destroyed partly because they believed the representation made to them.

---

6. The perpetrators then attempted to falsify responsibility

The Essay acknowledges that after the massacre:

> **"The militiamen sought to cover up the crime by placing the entire blame on local Paiutes."**

Again, the facts give us three separate ethical episodes:

> **1. Planning and committing the massacre.**
>
> **2. Obtaining the victims' cooperation through deception.**
>
> **3. Concealing responsibility afterward.**

The third event is especially relevant to the Duty of Candor. The massacre did not merely happen. **An effort followed to construct a false historical account of who had done it.**

---

7. Brigham Young's lack of a direct massacre order does not resolve institutional responsibility

The Church emphasizes that Brigham Young's letter instructed local leaders not to interfere with the emigrants and arrived after the massacre. It simultaneously acknowledges that Young and other leaders:

- preached inflammatory sermons;
- helped create fear and suspicion;
- promoted rhetoric concerning shedding blood;
- declared martial law;

- cultivated resistance to perceived enemies;
- and influenced followers' judgments concerning when violence might be justified.

Thus two questions must remain separate:

1. **Direct command responsibility**
2. **Did Brigham Young send an order to massacre the Fancher party?**

Current evidence says no.

Institutional and moral responsibility

> **Did Brigham Young and other senior Church leaders help create the religious and political environment in which subordinate Church leaders could come to regard violence against perceived enemies as justified?**

The Church's own Essay says substantially yes. That second question is the more important one for this investigation.

---

8. The Oath of Vengeance and Law of Obedience Belong in the Causal Environment

Two Temple obligations deserve consideration, but for different reasons. The Oath of Vengeance potentially bears upon motive: endowed Saints had been ritually reminded of the blood of Joseph and Hyrum Smith and of vengeance associated with their deaths. The Law of Obedience potentially bears upon conduct: it placed obedience within the sacred covenant structure of the Temple. Where ecclesiastical and militia authority overlapped—as it did in southern Utah—the historical inquiry should therefore ask not only what participants feared or wished to avenge, but what role religiously cultivated obedience may have played when Church and militia superiors directed subordinate men toward conduct their individual consciences should have rejected.

This is where Joseph Fielding Smith observation of Missourians among the immigrants becomes particularly important. The Oath of Vengeance may help explain why violence could be perceived as righteous; the Law of Obedience may help explain why men participated in violence they might not independently have chosen. The modern Gospel Topics Essay discusses:

1. **persecution,**
2. **the murder of Parley P. Pratt,**
3. **blood atonement,**
4. **fear of the United States government,**
5. **hostility toward outsiders,**
6. and, **leadership rhetoric.**

Yet the Essay does not mention the nineteenth-century Temple covenant commonly called the **Oath of Vengeance**.

There is strong historical evidence that the endowment included an obligation to continue praying for divine vengeance for the blood of the prophets. Even FAIR, defending the Church, acknowledges that until 1927 the Temple endowment very likely contained such an oath.

Federal Senate records from the Reed Smoot proceedings preserve testimony about the covenant and differing recollections concerning whether the obligation contemplated personal action or prayer for God to avenge the prophets. That distinction matters.

We should **not** characterize the covenant simplistically as:

- "Temple members swore personally to murder Joseph Smith's enemies."
- The evidence does not justify that formulation.

The safer and stronger proposition is:

> **Endowed Latter-day Saints participated in a Temple covenant concerning continuing vengeance for the blood of murdered prophets, commonly understood at least in later forms as an obligation to pray for divine vengeance and transmit that obligation to succeeding generations.**

That is enough to make the covenant historically relevant to an inquiry into Mormon ideas about vengeance.

---

9. Joseph Fielding Smith's own Church history makes the vengeance connection harder to dismiss

This is where the modern Essay's silence becomes especially interesting. Joseph Fielding Smith's *Essentials in Church History* devoted a chapter to Mountain Meadows. The Church itself now describes that book as enormously influential: it went through twenty reprintings, remained a bestseller into the 1970s, and strongly influenced later Church manuals.

Smith characterized the perpetrators as having taken **"vengeance into their hands."** He also framed the emigrant company in relation to Arkansas, Missouri, alleged prior hostility toward Mormons, and claims that some accompanying men were "Missouri Wild Cats."

Whether those allegations concerning members of the wagon train were accurate is a separate historical question. For our purpose, something else matters. Joseph Fielding Smith's own institutional history interpreted the massacre through the conceptual vocabulary of:

> **historic enemies + Missouri persecution + murdered Saints + vengeance.**

That is very close to the conceptual world of the Temple vengeance obligation. We do not need to prove that Smith consciously intended to invoke the Temple covenant. The more objective point is:

> **A major Church historian and later Church President himself regarded vengeance arising from alleged connections to past persecutors as relevant to explaining the massacre.**

That makes the modern Essay's failure even to disclose the existence of the Temple vengeance covenant harder to treat as obviously irrelevant.

---

10. The relevant question is not "Did the Oath cause the massacre?"

That would place an unnecessarily high burden on the evidence. Historical causation rarely works that simply. The better question is:

> **Would knowledge that endowed Latter-day Saints had covenanted concerning vengeance for the blood of murdered prophets materially assist a reader trying to understand the religious psychology of 1857 Utah?**

I think the answer is clearly yes. The reader may ultimately conclude that the Oath played little or no causal role. Another may conclude that it reinforced an existing vengeance culture.

But the **individual should be given the evidence**. That is the Duty of Candor principle. The institution whose Temple ritual contained the covenant should not decide its historical irrelevance silently on behalf of the reader.

---

11. Obedience belongs in the inquiry for the same reason

The modern Essay also does not substantially investigate the Temple and ecclesiastical culture of obedience as a causal factor. Again, omission alone does not prove evasion. But consider the facts already admitted:

1. **stake presidents also commanded militia;**
2. **local Church leaders planned violence;**
3. **followers acted collectively;**
4. **leadership rhetoric could influence what followers considered justified;**
5. **religious threats had been used to produce conformity.**
6. Against that background, obedience is not an extraneous theological concept.

The central psychological question becomes:

> **What allowed ordinary religious men to participate collectively in the murder of women and children after those people had surrendered under a promise of protection?**

A historical account focused chiefly upon local quarrels, Utah War fear, and individual bad decisions risks describing the circumstances without fully examining the **authority psychology** that converted those circumstances into obedience to atrocity.

That is directly relevant to the larger Exit Statement.

---

12. "A series of tragic decisions" may understate the institutional structure

The Church's Essay summarizes the massacre as resulting from:

> **"a series of tragic decisions by local Church leaders."**

That statement is not false. But *tragic decisions* is an extraordinarily mild phrase for:

1. **planning an attack,**
2. **recruiting Indigenous auxiliaries,**
3. **conducting a siege,**
4. **deciding to kill witnesses,**
5. **offering a fraudulent truce,**
6. **separating victims,**
7. **murdering approximately 120 people,**
8. and, **attempting to conceal responsibility.**

Language affects moral perception. These were not merely unfortunate misjudgments whose consequences accidentally became tragic.

> **They were deliberate decisions culminating in mass murder.**

A Duty of Candor includes using language proportionate to conduct.

---

13. “Relatively few Latter-day Saints” answers the wrong question

The Essay concludes by emphasizing that the actions of **“relatively few Latter-day Saints”** caused death and damaged the Church’s reputation. Numerically, that is obviously correct. Most nineteenth-century Mormons murdered no one. But this can distract from the institutional question. The relevant inquiry is not:

> **What percentage of Mormons participated in Mountain Meadows?**

It is:

> **How could a sufficiently large organized body of believing Mormon men—including Church and militia leaders—collectively execute approximately 120 surrendered civilians?**

The small percentage of total membership tells us very little about that causal problem. Indeed, highly authoritarian misconduct rarely requires participation by an entire population. It requires enough obedient participants within the relevant chain of influence.

---

14. The Church deserves significant credit for its modern disclosure

This evidence cuts against our indictment and should be included. The modern Essay is substantially more candid than older institutional histories. It openly acknowledges:

- Mormon perpetrators;
- Haight’s dual Church and militia role;
- the false truce;
- deliberate killing;

- approximately 120 victims;
- the cover-up;
- blood-atonement preaching;
- leadership rhetoric contributing to hostility;
- and the possibility that rhetoric encouraged members to believe violence was justified.

The Church's decision to open important Mountain Meadows archival holdings to historical examination represents meaningful progress toward institutional candor. The modern Essay likewise acknowledges facts that earlier institutional histories obscured or misrepresented. That progress should be credited. But present disclosure does not discharge responsibility for the period during which materially contrary evidence was already in institutional custody.

Count VI therefore should **not** accuse the contemporary Church simply of hiding the massacre. The stronger criticism concerns what its explanation still excludes or softens.

---

15. Correction Does Not Discharge Responsibility for Earlier Misrepresentation

Joseph Fielding Smith's *Essentials in Church History* matters not merely because later historians produced a more accurate account of Mountain Meadows. Smith was an Apostle and Church Historian. His history therefore carried both ecclesiastical authority and the implied authority of the institution charged with preserving the historical record.

Smith nevertheless characterized Mountain Meadows principally as the work of “enraged Indians aided by a number of white men,” concentrating identifiable Mormon responsibility upon John D. Lee. That representation concealed the organized participation of southern Utah Mormon militiamen and ecclesiastical leaders.

Juanita Brooks directly confronted the institutional significance of this history. In *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*[9] she pointed out that records already held in the LDS Church Historian's Office contained “ample evidence that this was definitely not the crime of a single individual, nor the responsibility of only one man.”

That observation is critical to the Duty of Candor. The contrary evidence did not first appear with the Gospel Topics Essays or with modern Church historians. Government investigations, the John D. Lee prosecutions, participant testimony, and records gathered by the Church's own historical office had long made a one-man explanation untenable.

Joseph Fielding Smith therefore wrote from within the institution that possessed evidence contradicting the materially exculpatory account he published. Whether Smith personally examined every relevant

[9] Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1950), p. 160. Brooks specifically challenged Joseph Fielding Smith's treatment in *Essentials in Church History* and emphasized that evidence contradicting individual responsibility was already contained in the LDS Church Historian's Office. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1922), chap. 44, pp. 511–17.

document does not eliminate the ethical problem. If he knew the contrary evidence, the representation was materially misleading. If he failed adequately to examine records held by the historical office for which he was responsible, he published an institutionally exculpatory history without adequately examining evidence available within his own institutional custody.

Either possibility presents a serious failure of historical responsibility.

The later correction therefore cannot properly be described merely as historical knowledge improving with time. The institution possessed evidence capable of correcting the story while an authoritative Church history continued to transmit a materially different impression.

The Duty of Candor requires more than silently replacing an institutionally useful false or materially misleading account with a more accurate one after the former account can no longer be sustained. It requires acknowledging that the institution itself taught the earlier account, benefited from it, and thereby formed the beliefs of those who trusted it.

Correction is ethically important. **But correction without acknowledgment of responsibility can leave the original deception itself concealed.**

---

16. The strongest Church defense

The Church could answer: Nineteenth-century Utah existed under extraordinary conditions. Latter-day Saints had been violently expelled from Missouri and Illinois; Joseph and Hyrum had been murdered; a federal army was approaching; Parley P. Pratt had recently been killed in Arkansas; inflammatory rhetoric was common throughout nineteenth-century America; the Fancher party allegedly made threats; and local leaders made catastrophic unauthorized decisions before Brigham Young's instruction to leave the emigrants alone arrived. The Oath of Vengeance was principally a prayer that God, not individual Saints, would execute justice, and there is no evidence establishing that the oath caused Mountain Meadows. The modern Church has candidly acknowledged the perpetrators and unequivocally condemned the crime.

Much of that defense is historically relevant. Especially important is the absence of evidence that Brigham Young ordered the massacre. But contextual explanation does not eliminate institutional causation.

The Church's own Essay admits that leadership rhetoric helped create hostility and may have caused followers to regard violence as justified. Thus the defense itself concedes an important part of our charge.

---

17. What this count establishes about Duty of Candor

Count VI is unusual because the **modern Church is comparatively candid about many underlying facts**. The remaining Duty of Candor problem is principally one of **causal framing**. The Church tells the reader:

- **what happened,**
- **who locally participated,**
- and **that Brigham Young did not order it.**

But a fuller ethical inquiry must also ask:

- **What beliefs made it possible?**
- **What role did obedience play?**
- **What influence did prophetic rhetoric exert?**
- **What did overlapping ecclesiastical and militia authority do to independent conscience?**
- **What significance did a Temple culture of vengeance possess?**
- **How did a system capable of threatening members toward conformity affect moral independence?**

Those are not anti-Mormon digressions. The Church's own admissions make them necessary questions.

---

18. Preliminary Duty of Candor Finding

I would rate Count VI: **STRONGLY ESTABLISHED AS AN INSTITUTIONAL-INFLUENCE CASE; PARTIALLY ESTABLISHED AS AN OMISSION CASE**

We can establish from Church sources that:

1. **Latter-day Saint militiamen committed the massacre.**
2. **Church and militia leadership overlapped.**
3. **Isaac Haight was both stake president and militia leader.**
4. **Church leaders used inflammatory and blood-atonement rhetoric.**
5. **Such rhetoric was used partly to frighten members into conformity.**
6. **Brigham Young and other leaders helped produce an atmosphere of fear and suspicion.**
7. **Leadership rhetoric may have caused some members to believe violence was justified.**
8. **The victims were deliberately deceived before being murdered.**
9. **The perpetrators attempted to conceal responsibility afterward.**
10. Separately, strong historical evidence establishes the existence of a Temple vengeance covenant during the nineteenth century.

What we **cannot yet establish** is that the Oath of Vengeance directly caused the massacre. We should therefore say exactly that. The Duty of Candor finding is:

> **The modern Church deserves credit for substantially correcting older representations of Mountain Meadows and acknowledging Mormon perpetrators and leadership influence. But its analysis remains incomplete if it treats the episode primarily as a sequence of unauthorized local decisions without fully examining the religious authority system within which those decisions were made. When the institution itself acknowledges that prophetic**

> **rhetoric could make followers believe violence justified, obedience and religious authority become part of the causal evidence, not merely theological background.**

This closing paragraph is worthy of extracting into the Exit Statement:

> **The absence of an explicit order from Brigham Young answers one question but not the most important one. Moral responsibility in an authoritarian system does not begin only when the supreme leader dictates the final act. Leaders also bear responsibility for the fears they cultivate, the enemies they identify, the rhetoric they normalize, the obedience they demand, and the moral permissions their followers reasonably infer. Mountain Meadows is therefore not merely evidence of what a few Mormon men did. It is evidence of what can happen when religious conscience becomes subordinate to institutional authority.**

That last proposition places Count VI directly inside the central argument of the Second Generation Exit Statement.

Bill of Particulars:

Count VII — The First Vision: A Developing Narrative Presented as a Fixed Foundational Event

The allegation

The Church now acknowledges that Joseph Smith left multiple First Vision accounts; that the earliest surviving account differs materially in emphasis and detail from the later canonical account; that the 1832 account was not widely known until the 1960s; and that Church leaders and manuals "almost always" relied upon the later 1838 account. Yet the current missionary lesson continues to present the 1838 version as the foundational event establishing the separate appearance of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, Joseph's prophetic calling, and the Restoration, while the developmental nature of the historical record remains secondary.

This count is not as strong as Counts III, IV, or VI because the Church today is substantially more open about the multiple accounts. Its significance lies less in current concealment and more in **historical selectivity and institutional framing**.

---

1. What the Church now admits

The Gospel Topics Essay acknowledges four firsthand First Vision accounts produced under Joseph Smith's direction:

- **1832**
- **1835**
- **1838**
- **1842**

The Church also acknowledges several secondhand accounts. The 1832 account is especially important because it is:

the earliest surviving account

and

the only one substantially written in Joseph Smith's own handwriting.

That makes it unusually probative.

---

2. The earliest account is materially different from the canonical one The Church's own Essay acknowledges the differences. In the **1832 account**, Joseph emphasizes:

- **his own sins,**
- **his search for personal forgiveness,**
- **his conclusion that existing churches had departed from the New Testament,**
- and **the appearance of "the Lord," who forgives his sins.**

The familiar **1838 account**, by contrast, emphasizes:

- **religious confusion among competing denominations,**
- **Joseph asking which church was true,**
- **two distinct personages,**
- **one introducing the other as "My Beloved Son,"**
- and, **the instruction that Joseph join none of the existing churches.**

Those are not identical narratives. They may be reconcilable. But **reconcilability is an interpretation, not the underlying historical fact**.

---

3. The number and identity of the heavenly beings develop over time

The Church itself states:

1. Joseph's First Vision accounts "describe the heavenly beings with greater detail over time."
2. The 1832 account says in substance that **the Lord** appeared.
3. The 1835 account describes one personage followed shortly by another.
4. The 1838 account clearly presents **two personages**, with one introducing the other as his Son.
5. That chronology is important because the later version became doctrinally consequential.

The Church uses the First Vision as evidence that:

- **Heavenly Father and Jesus are separate beings.**

The current missionary manual explicitly says that Joseph learned this truth through the vision. Thus the development from a less explicit 1832 account to the clearly differentiated Father-and-Son account of 1838 is not a trivial variation. It bears directly upon doctrine.

---

4. The Church's interpretation should not be confused with the evidence

The Gospel Topics Essay immediately supplies a harmonization. It argues that three of four firsthand accounts clearly describe two personages and that the 1832 account can potentially be read as referring to either one or two.

That is a possible reading. But the historical evidence itself establishes only:

1. **1832: less explicit.**
2. **1835: two sequential personages.**
3. **1838: two clearly identified personages central to the story.**

The Church's conclusion that these accounts are fundamentally harmonious is **an interpretation of those facts**. The documentary evidence and the Church's harmonization of that evidence are not the same thing. The former belongs to the historical record; the latter is the institution's defense of that record.

---

5. Embellishment is a reasonable hypothesis, not an established fact

Restraint is retained. The chronological pattern permits several interpretations. Given full disclosire a believer may conclude:

> **Joseph remembered and understood the same genuine experience more fully over time.**

A historian may conclude:

> **ordinary memory reconstruction and changing audience account for the differences.**

A skeptic may conclude:

> **the narrative became embellished as Joseph's theology and institutional claims developed.**

The evidence does not conclusively prove which explanation is correct.

But it does establish **development**. Therefore I would write:

> **The later embellishment of the First Vision is a reasonable historical possibility, but not one the surviving evidence permits us to state as demonstrated fact. What is demonstrated is that the story became more detailed and more institutionally consequential over time.** That is enough.

---

6. The First Vision was not initially the central Restoration narrative it later became

This point is important. The Church now acknowledges that Joseph **did not emphasize or speak frequently about the vision publicly for many years** and that early members more commonly emphasized Moroni and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. That means the First Vision's later status as the obvious opening event of the Restoration is itself historically developed.

The event may have occurred exactly as Joseph later described it. But its **institutional importance increased substantially over time**. Individuals are entitled to disclosure of that distinction.

---

7. The Church acknowledges that the earliest accounts were not widely known

The current Church FAQ is unusually candid. It says:

> **"Church leaders and manuals have almost always drawn from"** the 1838 account.

It further acknowledges that the 1832 and 1835 accounts **were not widely known before the 1960s**. This is significant institutional evidence. Generations of members were therefore taught essentially one version of the event. That version was:

> **the later, most detailed, most institutionally useful account.**

The earlier account—Joseph's earliest surviving version in his own hand—was largely absent from ordinary Church instruction. That is not speculation. **The Church now admits it.**

---

8. Joseph Fielding Smith's handling of the 1832 account creates a more serious candor question

The Church's current FAQ goes further. It acknowledges that while Joseph Fielding Smith served as Church Historian, he **"appears to have limited access"** to the 1832 account for a period.

Another current Church FAQ acknowledges something more concrete:

> **the pages containing the 1832 history were physically removed from the bound letter book sometime between 1930 and 1965**, probably by someone in the Church Historian's Office.

The Church supplies a benign possible explanation: archival reorganization. But note the epistemic status. That is a **possible explanation**. The physical fact is:

> **The earliest First Vision account was removed from its bound record while under institutional custody, during Joseph Fielding Smith's tenure, and access was restricted for some period.**

Eventually the pages were restored and researchers gained access. We should not claim that Smith removed them specifically to conceal discrepancies unless evidence proves that. But neither should the Church's speculative archival explanation be accepted as established fact. This episode plainly belongs within a Duty of Candor investigation.

---

9. The current missionary lesson still privileges the 1838 account

The present 2023 *Preach My Gospel* is important because it shows what investigators are actually taught today. The missionary lesson tells investigators:

1. **Joseph wanted to know which church was God's true church.**
2. **Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him.**
3. **Jesus told him not to join any of them.**
4. **Through the vision Joseph learned that Heavenly Father and Jesus are separate beings.**

Missionaries are explicitly instructed to memorize and use **Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17**, the 1838 account:

- “I saw two Personages…”
- and to: **“Bear sincere testimony of its truth.”**

That is particularly relevant to our larger Duty of Candor argument. The missionary is being asked to testify confidently to the **later canonical version**.

---

10. To its credit, the missionary manual now introduces the 1832 account

This is meaningful exculpatory evidence. The current *Preach My Gospel* now quotes Joseph’s 1832 account concerning forgiveness of sins and links to the Joseph Smith Papers.

That is genuine progress. Moreover, an earlier missionary text now includes the sentence:

> **“We have four different accounts of what followed…”**

before presenting the familiar 1838 narrative. So it would be unfair to say:

> **“The modern Church hides the multiple First Vision accounts from missionaries.”**

It increasingly does not. The stronger finding is:

> **The Church acknowledges the existence of multiple accounts while continuing to use the 1838 version as the authoritative narrative missionaries memorize, teach, and testify to as historical fact.**

That distinction is important.

---

11. The apologetic interpretation accompanies the disclosure

This is where Oaks’s “no responsibility to present both sides” principle becomes relevant. The Church now reveals the documents—but usually within a prescribed interpretive frame.

The Gospel Topics Essay begins by dismissing the proposition that variation itself proves fabrication and proceeds to explain differences through:

1. **audience,**
2. **purpose,**
3. **memory,**
4. and, **expanding understanding.**

There is nothing improper about the Church offering its interpretation. But if the Church acknowledges that official literature is advocacy rather than an obligation to present both sides, the reader should understand that:

> **the documents are evidence; the Church’s harmonization is a defense.**

They should not be treated as the same thing.

---

12. The chronology creates a credibility question even without proving fabrication

This count matters because the First Vision is not peripheral Mormon folklore. The current missionary lesson makes it the pivotal event in:

1. **Joseph's prophetic calling,**
2. **the Restoration,**
3. **the apostasy of existing Christianity,**
4. **the nature of God,**
5. and, **the legitimacy of the modern Church.**

Therefore a reasonable investigator might want to know:

1. **Why is the earliest account different?**
2. **Why is the Father not unmistakably distinguished from the Son in 1832?**
3. **Why does the institutional function of the vision become clearer in later versions?**
4. **Why did the event initially receive much less emphasis?**
5. **Why was the later 1838 account almost exclusively taught for generations?**

Those questions are material even if none proves fabrication.

---

13. The Church's strongest defense

The Church can argue: **People naturally recount the same experience differently for different audiences and purposes. The accounts share a consistent core: Joseph prayed, received a heavenly manifestation, was forgiven, learned existing religion was deficient, and was prepared for his prophetic role. Three of the four firsthand accounts describe two personages. The 1832 account is abbreviated and need not list every participant in the vision. Joseph's developing understanding does not imply invention. Moreover, the Church now publishes all the accounts openly and increasingly teaches their existence to members and missionaries.**

That is a substantial defense. Unlike the Book of Abraham, there is no surviving external physical evidence capable of independently testing whether the event occurred. So Count VII cannot properly become:

> **The different accounts prove Joseph invented the First Vision.**

They do not. But the defense also does not prove that the accounts are harmoniously recollecting one unchanged experience. Again: **possibility is not proof.**

---

14. The Duty of Candor question is narrower and stronger

We do not need to decide whether Joseph fabricated the vision. The relevant question is:

> **When an institution asks an investigator to accept a later, developed account as foundational evidence for its prophetic authority, does adequate candor require disclosing**

> **that the earliest surviving account differs materially in emphasis and detail and that the later account became dominant only through subsequent institutional selection?**

I think the answer is yes. And the Church's own modern movement toward greater disclosure suggests that it increasingly recognizes this.

---

15. Preliminary Duty of Candor Finding

I would rate Count VII: **MODERATELY ESTABLISHED — HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT, BUT NOT ONE OF THE STRONGEST COUNTS**

The Church itself establishes that:

1. **Joseph left multiple accounts.**
2. **The 1832 account is the earliest and only one substantially in his handwriting.**
3. **The accounts become more detailed concerning heavenly beings over time.**
4. **The 1838 account is significantly more institutional in purpose and content.**
5. **Joseph did not emphasize the vision publicly for many years.**
6. **The 1832 and 1835 accounts were not widely known to members before the 1960s.**
7. **Church leaders and manuals almost always relied upon the 1838 account.**
8. **Joseph Fielding Smith appears to have restricted access to the 1832 account for a period.**
9. **The pages containing it were physically removed from the bound volume while in Church archival custody.**
10. **The current missionary lesson still centers upon the 1838 account and instructs missionaries to memorize it and testify of its truth.**

But the contemporary Church also now publishes the accounts openly and has begun integrating them into missionary and youth material. That significantly mitigates the current Duty of Candor charge. The strongest finding is therefore historical:

> **For generations, the Church presented the later 1838 First Vision account as though it were simply the historical event, while ordinary members were largely unaware that Joseph's earliest surviving account differed from it. The modern Church has substantially corrected that informational deficiency. What remains ethically important is that the harmonization of the accounts should be recognized as the Church's interpretation rather than confused with the documentary evidence itself.**

And I think one sentence from Count VII may be worth extracting into the Supplement's eventual Part III conclusion:

> **The First Vision accounts do not require me to conclude that Joseph Smith fabricated the story. They require something more modest: recognition that the story developed. Whether that development reflects fuller memory, developing theology, or embellishment is a judgment the evidence leaves to the reader—not one the institution is entitled to settle by presenting its preferred interpretation as the history itself.**

That is where I think Count VII properly lands.

PART III — CUMULATIVE FINDINGS

The Evidence Has Now Reached a Conclusion

The preceding Counts were deliberately constructed not to assume their verdict. Church admissions were distinguished from Church interpretations; alternative explanations were considered; genuine improvements in disclosure were credited; and allegations of deliberate deception were withheld where the evidence did not establish intent.

That restraint does not require suspension of judgment indefinitely.

Evidence exists to permit conclusions, and intellectual fairness applies to the evidence as well as to the institution being examined. Excessive qualification can itself become misleading when it refuses to acknowledge the explanation made overwhelmingly more probable by the accumulated facts.

Counts I and II alone create a profound credibility problem.

Joseph Smith represented two canonical works as translations connected with ancient physical records. In the case of the Book of Mormon, the Church now acknowledges a production process centered substantially upon dictation through a seer stone placed in a hat—a process in which the plates need not have supplied the visible text being rendered into English. In the case of the Book of Abraham, the problem is more decisive because Egyptian became independently readable. The surviving papyri do not contain the Book of Abraham narrative, and professional Egyptology does not sustain Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles.

The Book of Abraham problem was not newly discovered by twenty-first-century Church historians. Professional Egyptologists publicly challenged Joseph Smith's interpretations of the facsimiles in 1912, producing an institutional response in the *Improvement Era* in 1913 involving prominent Church intellectuals and President Joseph F. Smith himself. The recovery of surviving Joseph Smith papyri in 1967 supplied still more direct evidence.

The ethical problem is therefore not merely that earlier Church leaders possessed less historical knowledge than leaders possess today. On the Book of Abraham, the central evidentiary problem had confronted senior Church leadership for generations before the Gospel Topics Essay formally acknowledged facts that materially qualify the traditional translation claim.

The Gospel Topics Essays consequently cannot be understood merely as the discovery of unfortunate historical information. They are also evidence of **institutional knowledge**. The institution now formally acknowledges facts that previous generations of members were generally not given when being asked to accept Joseph Smith as a prophet, these books as ancient scripture, and the Church deriving from his claims as possessing divine authority.

That produces the Duty of Candor finding.

An institution cannot obtain extraordinary religious reliance through a simpler historical representation, possess materially qualifying evidence for generations, and discharge its ethical obligation merely by eventually placing that evidence in specialized essays while continuing to preserve the advantageous theological conclusion.

The Essays deserve credit for disclosure. But disclosure does not erase the history preceding it. Late correction establishes present knowledge; it does not retroactively supply candor at the time earlier reliance was obtained.

On these foundational claims, the Church has forfeited the presumption of institutional candor.

That conclusion does not require proving that every present Church leader privately disbelieves Mormonism, nor that every historical omission was consciously fraudulent. It follows from something demonstrable: the institution possessed materially adverse information, continued obtaining consequential reliance under materially simpler representations, and delayed adequate disclosure long after the information became relevant to an informed judgment.

Once that history is established, institutional credibility cannot reasonably be restored by asking the member simply to trust the institution's newest interpretation of the evidence that its earlier representations failed adequately to disclose.

What I think our evidence permits us to say is:

> **Credibility cannot be presumed; it would now have to be earned.** And that connects directly with one of the deepest propositions of my larger Exit Statement: **Authority is earned.**

There is another conclusion I am reaching that deserves its own subsection.

The Essays Cannot Be Historically Reversed. Once the Church has formally acknowledged:

- the stone and hat,
- the Book of Abraham's Egyptological problem,
- multiple First Vision accounts,
- clandestine relationships and already-married women,
- post-Manifesto polygamy,
- the historical problems surrounding race,
- and Mormon responsibility at Mountain Meadows,

Those facts cannot ethically be put back into the institutional closet. Future leadership may change their interpretation. It cannot legitimately return to the former informational state. That means the Gospel Topics Essays have changed Mormonism in at least one permanent respect:

> **The institution has formally entered evidence into its own historical record that future leaders can no longer claim the institution does not know.**

That may be the truly revolutionary consequence of the Essays. And it brings the entire Supplement back to its title. The Essays are not merely apologetics. They are admissions against future ignorance. From this point forward, the question is no longer:

> ***Did Church leadership know?***

The Church's own Essays increasingly answer that question. The question becomes:

> **Knowing this, what does the Church tell the next investigator, missionary, bride or groom entering the Temple, tithe payer, parent, and child before asking for their trust?**

A third major cumulative finding to Part III is severe, it is not simply that nineteenth-century Mormonism contained racist ideas. It is the **present institutional contradiction**. The Book of Mormon itself retains narratives in which skin darkness is explicitly associated with a divine curse and separation of the Lamanites.

The Racial Contradiction Cannot Be Confined to the Priesthood Ban

The *Race and the Priesthood* Essay creates a problem extending beyond the former exclusion of Black members from priesthood and Temple ordinances. The Church now repudiates explanations that identify dark skin as evidence of divine disfavor or curse. That repudiation is ethically necessary—but it cannot coherently be confined to African ancestry while substantially similar racial theology remains embedded in the canonized Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon does not merely contain an incidental nineteenth-century remark about race. The distinction between Nephites and Lamanites belongs to the structure of the narrative itself. The text associates the Lamanites with a divinely imposed curse and describes a change involving their skin as part of the separation. Later passages continue connecting righteousness, curse, lineage, and skin coloration.

The ethical contradiction is therefore institutional and present: the Church repudiates divine dark-skin explanations when addressing its history concerning Black people while continuing to canonize a scripture in which divine curse and skin coloration remain part of the foundational explanation of the Lamanites.

The Church cannot resolve that contradiction merely by repudiating racist explanations surrounding the priesthood restriction. The central story of Lamanite origins in the Book of Mormon itself is threatened.

The Lamanite Claim Cannot Simply Disappear

This becomes especially important because, the Lamanites aren't an optional appendage to the Book of Mormon. Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Mormon, and Moroni repeatedly understand the record in relation to their descendants and the descendants of their brethren. The latter-day recovery of the record is intertwined with that lineage story.

Nor can the historical Lamanite claim simply be allowed to recede as scientific evidence makes its former application to Native Americans increasingly difficult to sustain. The identity and survival of Lamanite descendants are integral to the Book of Mormon's own explanation of why the record exists. If the people historically identified by Church leaders as Lamanites are no longer confidently identifiable as such, that is not a peripheral adjustment. It bears upon the historical narrative and stated purpose of the book itself.

The Book of Mormon cannot simultaneously depend upon Lamanites as a real ancient people whose descendants survive into the latter days while institutional teaching retreats indefinitely from identifying who those descendants actually are.

And the DNA Essay compounds rather than solves it

And there is a particularly revealing interaction between the two Essays:

1. **Race and Priesthood:** rejects dark skin as divine disfavor.
2. **Book of Mormon/DNA:** seeks to preserve the historical possibility of the people whose scriptural origin includes precisely such a divine skin narrative.

Those Essays shouldn't be analyzed entirely in isolation. One institutional admission can create problems for another institutional claim.

The Essays Must Be Read Against One Another

The Church wrote the Essays topically. But an ethical audit need not respect those compartments.

When combined:

- **Book of Mormon Translation + Book of Abraham** raises the repeated translation/source-document problem.
- **Race and Priesthood + Book of Mormon + DNA** raises the racial/Lamanite contradiction.
- **Polygamy + carefully worded denials + post-Manifesto polygamy** reveals a recurring problem of public representation versus private practice.
- **Mountain Meadows + institutional historical correction** raises the problem of institutional control of damaging history.
- **First Vision + translation narratives** raises the larger problem of later canonical narratives becoming more definite than the earliest historical evidence.

This is precisely what Part III should do that the individual Counts cannot:

> **The Counts separated the evidence for examination. Part III recombines it.**

And when recombined, the Book of Mormon becomes much more problematic than Count I alone suggested. The racial problem is not peripheral to the Book of Mormon. It is embedded in the book's foundational peoples, its explanation of their division, its covenant history, and its claimed relationship to surviving descendants. Consequently, repudiating racial theology elsewhere while leaving the Lamanite narrative substantially uninterrogated does not resolve the contradiction; it relocates it into canonized scripture.

For me, that contradiction is fatal to the Book of Mormon's claim to represent the moral instruction of an all-knowing God.

Our emerging Part III now has at least three cumulative findings that transcend the individual Counts:

Translation credibility collapses when the Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham are considered together; the Church's racial repudiation conflicts with the racial theology remaining in its foundational scripture; and the Essays collectively establish institutional knowledge that makes continued simplified representations an ongoing Duty of Candor issue rather than merely a historical mistake.

--- The End ---

Appendix I — From "Anti-Mormon" Allegation to Institutional Admission

The term "anti-Mormon" is used here historically, not as my characterization of the evidence. For generations, historical claims that complicated the correlated Church narrative were often associated with critics, dissidents, apostates, or "anti-Mormon" literature. The Gospel Topics Essays now acknowledge many of the underlying facts. Inclusion here does not mean that every interpretation previously advanced by critics was correct. It means that the factual proposition itself—once marginalized, denied, minimized, or largely absent from ordinary Church instruction—is now substantially acknowledged by the institution.

1. The Seer Stone and Hat

Formerly associated with critical history: Joseph Smith produced substantial portions of the Book of Mormon by placing a seer stone in a hat and dictating words while the gold plates need not have been visible.

Now acknowledged by the Church: Current Church historical material acknowledges Joseph's use of a seer stone, eyewitness descriptions of the stone or interpreters being placed in a hat, and that awareness of the seer stones largely faded among twentieth-century Latter-day Saints. Your Count I further documents the contrast between this fuller account and the simpler current missionary narrative.

What the critics were substantially right about: The familiar image of Joseph visibly consulting characters on exposed gold plates did not adequately describe the principal eyewitness accounts of dictation.

Remaining Church defense: The Church continues to call the process "translation by the gift and power of God" and maintains that some evidence connects the interpreters with the plates.

Significance: What once sounded like hostile folklore—the stone and hat—is now part of the Church's own historical account.

---

2. The Book of Abraham Does Not Translate From the Surviving Papyri

Formerly associated with critical history: Egyptologists do not find the Book of Abraham in Joseph Smith's Egyptian papyri, and Joseph-associated interpretations of Egyptian do not correspond with the language.

Now acknowledged by the Church: The Church admits that none of the surviving characters mention Abraham or the events in the Book of Abraham, that the characters do not match Joseph's English text, and that Joseph-associated Egyptian grammatical interpretations do not correspond with modern Egyptology.

The Church has since become still more explicit, allowing that the papyri may merely have prompted revelation and acknowledging that Joseph did not translate the book "by conventional means."

What the critics were substantially right about: The surviving Egyptian material does not linguistically translate into the Book of Abraham.

Remaining Church defenses: Missing papyri, catalyst revelation, and a broader theological meaning of "translation."

Significance: The empirical criticism once treated as hostile is now admitted; the dispute has moved from **what the Egyptian says** to **whether revelation can preserve the scripture despite what the Egyptian says**.

---

3. Multiple First Vision Accounts

Formerly associated with critical history: Joseph Smith left multiple accounts of the First Vision that differ in important details, and the earliest account was not the familiar version historically taught to members.

Now acknowledged by the Church: The Church recognizes four firsthand accounts and acknowledges that the earlier accounts were generally unknown to ordinary members until the twentieth century. The 1832 account is the earliest surviving account and is substantially in Joseph's own handwriting. Your current Count VII documents that the later 1838 account became the version almost universally used in Church instruction.

What the critics were substantially right about: There was not one unchanging documentary account corresponding exactly to the later canonical narrative.

Remaining Church defense: The differences reflect audience, purpose, memory, and expanding understanding rather than fabrication.

Significance: The existence of differing accounts is no longer an "anti-Mormon" allegation. The dispute is now over their interpretation.

---

4. Joseph Smith Secretly Entered Relationships With Numerous Women Other Than Emma

Formerly associated with critical history: Joseph Smith secretly pursued or entered relationships with numerous women while publicly associated with monogamy.

Now acknowledged by the Church: The Church acknowledges numerous relationships it calls plural marriages or sealings, the confidential nature of the practice, Emma's incomplete knowledge, women already married to other men, and very young participants. Your present synthesis deliberately separates those admitted facts from the Church's retrospective classification of all such relationships as marriages.

What the critics were substantially right about: Joseph maintained a secret system of additional relationships concealed from much of the Church and, in some instances, from Emma.

Remaining Church defense: These were divinely commanded "plural marriages" or "sealings," sometimes primarily eternal rather than conventional marital relationships.

Significance: The dispute is no longer whether Joseph practiced the secret system. The dispute is whether his claimed divine authorization morally and historically legitimizes it.

---

5. Fanny Alger

Formerly associated with critical history: Joseph Smith had a clandestine relationship with the teenage household worker Fanny Alger, regarded by Oliver Cowdery as immoral.

Now acknowledged by the Church: The Church identifies Alger as Joseph's first plural wife but admits that the evidence is fragmentary and that reports describing a marriage came decades later. Your present analysis notes that the existence of the relationship is considerably better established than its retrospective classification as a marriage.

What the critics were substantially right about: A secret Joseph–Fanny relationship occurred and was scandalous enough to produce serious contemporary conflict.

Remaining Church defense: Later reminiscences describe a religious ceremony and therefore support classification as an early plural marriage.

Significance: The factual dispute has narrowed from **"Did this happen?"** to **"Was it legitimately a marriage rather than adultery?"**

---

6. "Carefully Worded Denials" of Polygamy

Formerly associated with critical history: Joseph Smith and associates publicly denied polygamy while secretly practicing it.

Now acknowledged by the Church: The Church itself calls some public statements **"carefully worded denials"** and explains that condemnations of "polygamy" could exclude relationships regarded internally as prophet-authorized celestial marriage.

What the critics were substantially right about: Public representations and private practice were materially different.

Remaining Church defense: The denials distinguished unauthorized sexual relationships from divinely authorized celestial marriage.

Significance: The historical question is no longer whether carefully constructed denials occurred. It is whether technically restricted language that predictably conveyed a false broader impression satisfied candor.

---

7. Polyandrous Relationships — Women Already Married to Other Men

Formerly associated with critical history: Joseph Smith entered relationships with women who already had living husbands.

Now acknowledged by the Church: The Church acknowledges sealings to women already married to other men. Your Count III properly distinguishes the admitted relationship from speculative explanations concerning eternal kinship or nonsexual purposes.

What the critics were substantially right about: The practice was not simply one unmarried woman joining an already married man.

Remaining Church defense: Some relationships may have been dynastic or eternal rather than conventional sexual marriages.

Significance: The admitted fact forces examination of existing husbands, their knowledge, Joseph's relationship of trust with them, and what the word "marriage" means in these cases.

---

8. Plural Marriage Continued After the 1890 Manifesto

Formerly associated with critical history: The Manifesto did not immediately end new plural marriages; senior Church leaders continued participating in or authorizing them.

Now acknowledged by the Church: The Church acknowledges that ending plural marriage was a process, that new plural unions occurred after the Manifesto, and that the 1904 Second Manifesto made the prohibition clearer and disciplinarily enforceable. Your present analysis also records the Church's striking admission that eight of nineteen apostles serving between 1890 and 1904 entered new plural unions.

What the critics were substantially right about: 1890 was not a clean termination.

Remaining Church defense: Leaders understood the Manifesto differently, many marriages occurred outside U.S. jurisdiction, and the Church was gradually working through a major theological transition.

Significance: What was once susceptible to dismissal as anti-Mormon accusation is now official history.

---

9. Black Priesthood and Temple Restrictions Originated After Joseph Smith

Formerly associated with critical history: The racial restriction was not clearly instituted by Joseph Smith but developed under Brigham Young.

Now acknowledged by the Church: The Race and the Priesthood Essay acknowledges Black priesthood holders during Joseph Smith's lifetime and identifies Brigham Young's 1852 public announcement of the restriction. Your analysis also notes that the Church identifies no corresponding revelation establishing the restriction.

What the critics were substantially right about: The restriction cannot simply be treated as an unbroken revealed policy originating with Joseph Smith.

Remaining Church defense: The precise historical origin is uncertain, while revelation in 1978 definitively removed the restriction.

Significance: The Church has moved from defending the restriction through theological explanations to disavowing those explanations.

---

10. Former Racial Explanations Are Now Repudiated

Formerly associated with critical history: Prophets and apostles taught racial explanations involving curses, premortal conduct, interracial marriage, and racial hierarchy.

Now acknowledged by the Church: The Church now explicitly disavows such explanations.

What the critics were substantially right about: These racial teachings existed within Mormonism and cannot be dismissed merely as inventions of enemies.

Remaining Church framing: The Essay describes them broadly as "theories" advanced by "leaders and members."

Significance: Today's Church repudiates propositions that earlier members encountered within an institution claiming prophetic authority.

---

11. Native American Ancestry Claims Have Narrowed

Formerly associated with critical history: Genetic evidence conflicts with the traditional broad identification of Indigenous Americans as descendants of Book of Mormon Israelites.

Now acknowledged by the Church: The Book of Mormon introduction was changed from **"principal ancestors"** to **"among the ancestors,"** while the DNA Essay acknowledges the predominantly ancient Asian genetic ancestry of Indigenous American populations. Your current analysis shows how this substantially narrows the earlier empirical claim.

What the critics were substantially right about: Modern genetics does not support the formerly broad Lamanite ancestry narrative.

Remaining Church defense: A small Israelite population may have left no detectable genetic signature.

Significance: The argument has moved from broad ancestry to the inability of genetics to exclude every possible tiny undocumented contribution.

---

12. Mountain Meadows Was Carried Out by Mormon Militia, Followed by a Cover-Up

Formerly associated with critical history: Mormon militia and ecclesiastical leaders organized and committed the Mountain Meadows Massacre and attempted to transfer blame to Native Americans.

Now acknowledged by the Church: Modern Church history acknowledges Mormon perpetrators, overlapping ecclesiastical and militia leadership, deliberate deception of the emigrants, mass killing, and the attempt to blame Paiutes. Your Count VI also records the Church's acknowledgment that inflammatory leadership rhetoric helped create fear and may have led followers to consider violence justified.

What the critics were substantially right about: The massacre was not simply an Indian attack assisted by a few rogue whites.

Remaining dispute: Brigham Young's degree of prior and subsequent knowledge and responsibility remains contested.

Significance: The modern institutional account is substantially closer to conclusions for which independent historians such as Juanita Brooks were once condemned or marginalized.

What Appendix I demonstrates

I would close the appendix with a short synthesis rather than another argument:

> **The significance of these examples is cumulative. The Gospel Topics Essays do not validate every allegation ever made by a critic of Mormonism. They do something more historically precise: they acknowledge numerous factual propositions that for generations were associated principally with critical, dissident, or so-called "anti-Mormon" literature rather than ordinary correlated Church instruction. In many instances the factual dispute has largely disappeared. The controversy has moved to interpretation—whether a stone-in-hat process remains "translation," whether secret relationships were divinely authorized "marriages," whether differing accounts are harmonious, whether post-Manifesto unions were understandable exceptions, or whether failed racial teachings merely reflected historical culture.**

This shift matters to institutional credibility. A member once had to decide whether to trust the critic or the Church concerning the existence of many of these facts. Today, the Church itself acknowledges them. The critics were not necessarily right about every conclusion they drew. But on many consequential factual questions, they were right about evidence that the institution either denied, minimized, compartmentalized, or failed adequately to teach.

I think that gives us the **first working draft of Appendix I**.

The next improvement would be to make it even more evidentiary by adding a fourth element to each entry: **"Representative pre-Essay critical source."** For example, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Fawn Brodie, Juanita Brooks, D. Michael Quinn, *Sunstone*, *Dialogue*, etc. Then each row would literally demonstrate:

> **Critic said it → Church resisted/minimized it → Church now admits it.**

That would convert this from a persuasive summary into a historical comparison that is much harder to dismiss.

--- The End ---

Notice Regarding Terminology and Affiliation

This document is a personal statement of religious history, opinion, and commentary. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The terms "LDS," "Mormon," and "Mormonism" are used in their common historical and descriptive sense.

Duty of Candor

https://www.temple-temptations.com/

Exit Statement of Francis Nelson Henderson

https://www.fnhenderson.us/