

A Crisis of Doubt in the Internet Age

“...since Kirtland, we’ve never had a period of, I’ll call it, apostasy like we’re having now.”

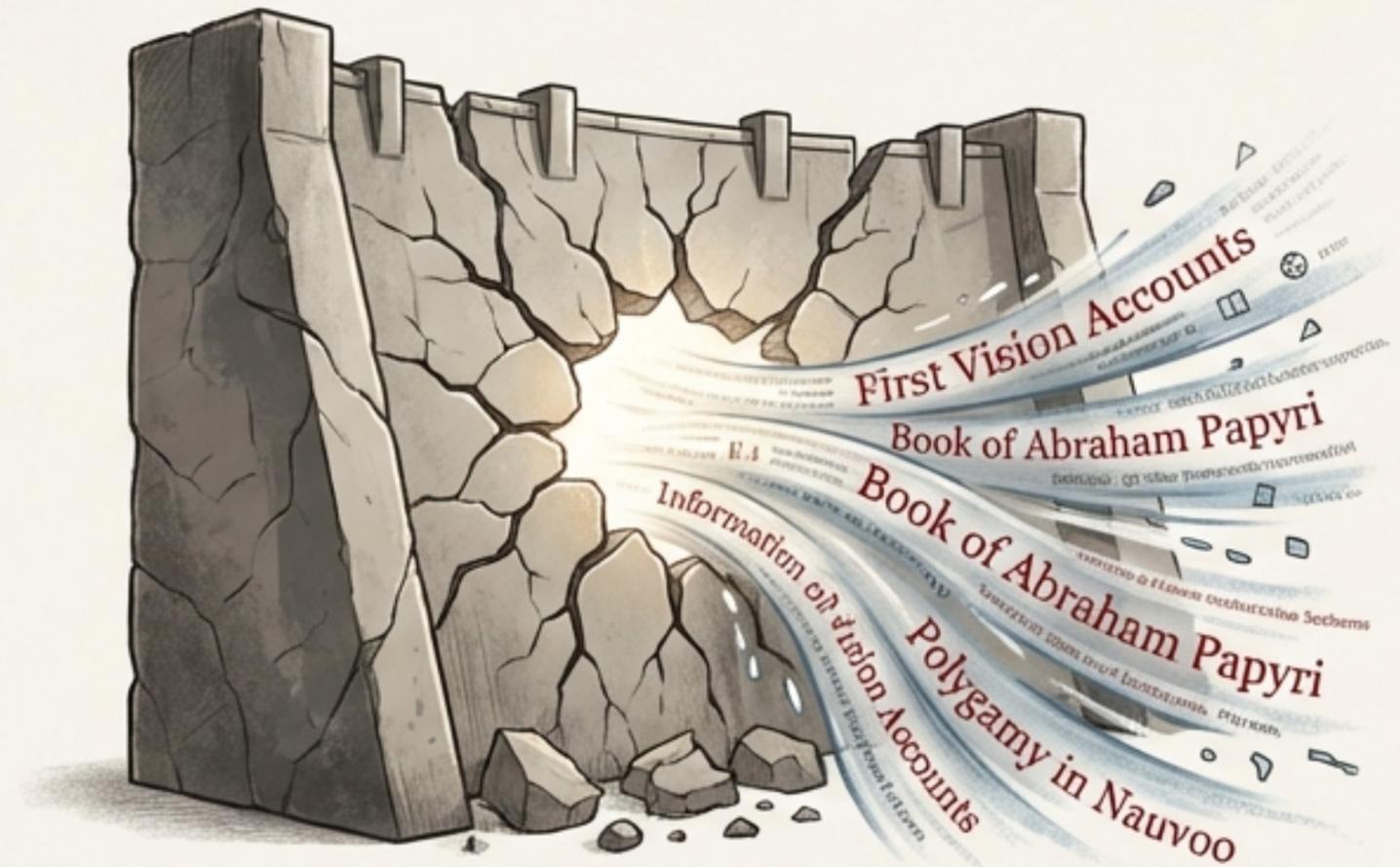
– Marlin Jensen, Former LDS Church Historian

Then: Information Monopoly



Doubt was managed by demonizing and excommunicating critics (e.g., Fawn McKay Brodie, the Tanners, the 'September Six'). These methods were largely effective.

Now: Monopoly Broken



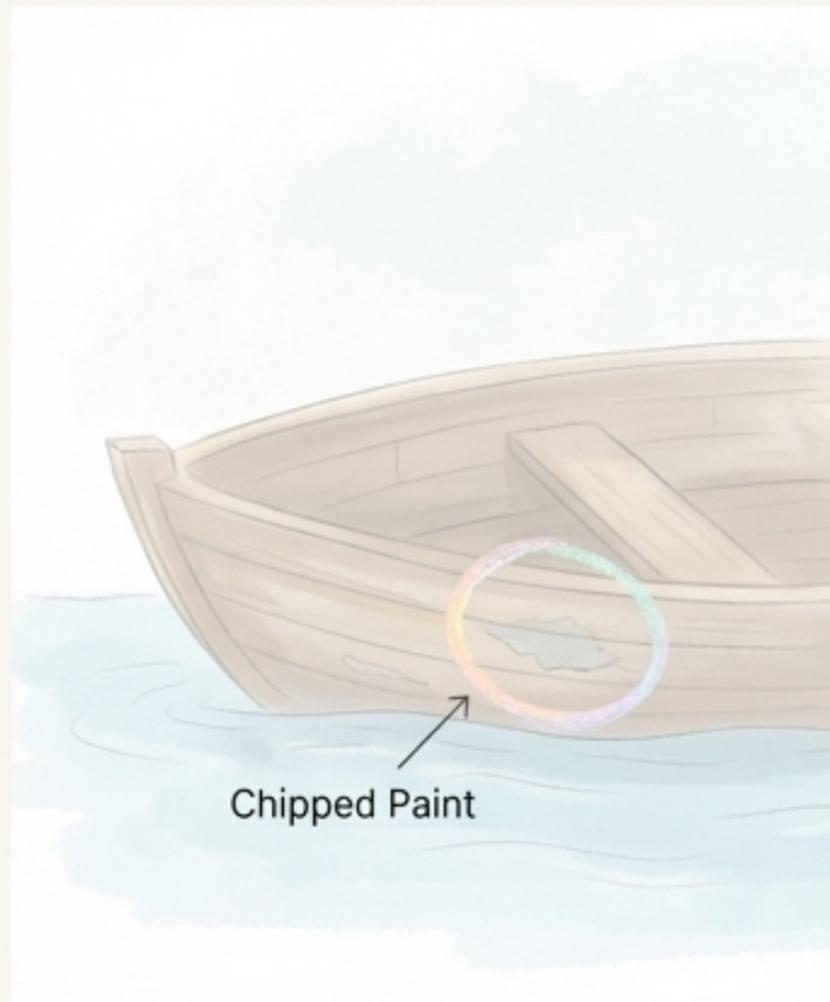
The internet provides easy access to information with clear sourcing, often from the Church's own records.

The Streisand Effect & The New Thesis

The old methods backfired. Excommunicating figures like Kate Kelly and Sam Young turned disciplinary councils into a 'PR nightmare,' amplifying their message. The Church needed a new, more subtle playbook to manage doubt from within, with a strategic focus on inoculating the youth.

Play #1: Frame Foundational Cracks as “Cosmetic Flaws”

The Renlund Parable (“Stay in the Boat”)

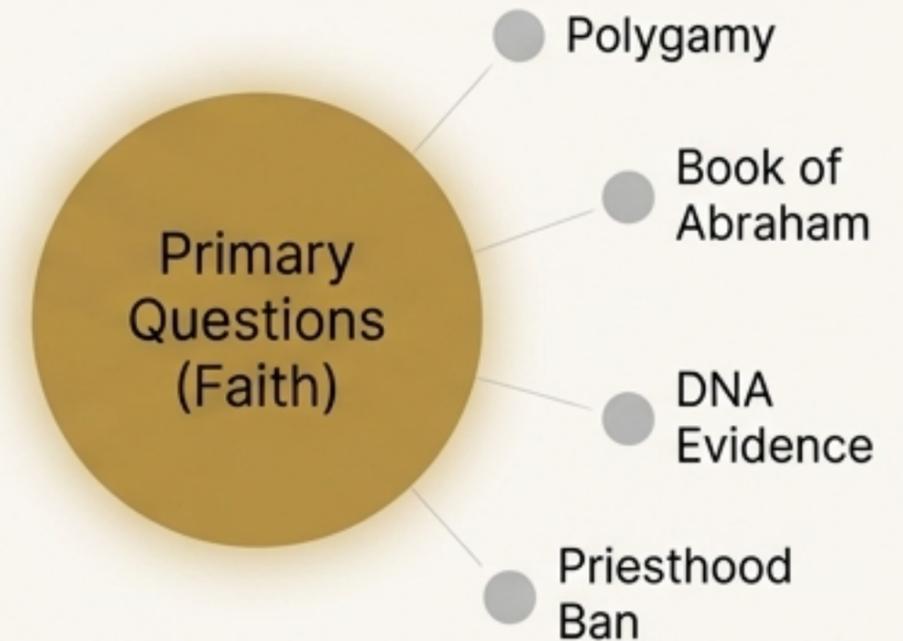


“...dents in the right side of the bow.”

“...some of the paint is chipped and peeling.”

Accuses the doubter of choosing to “focus on the dents in the boat instead of on the capability of the boat.”

The Corbridge Re-categorization

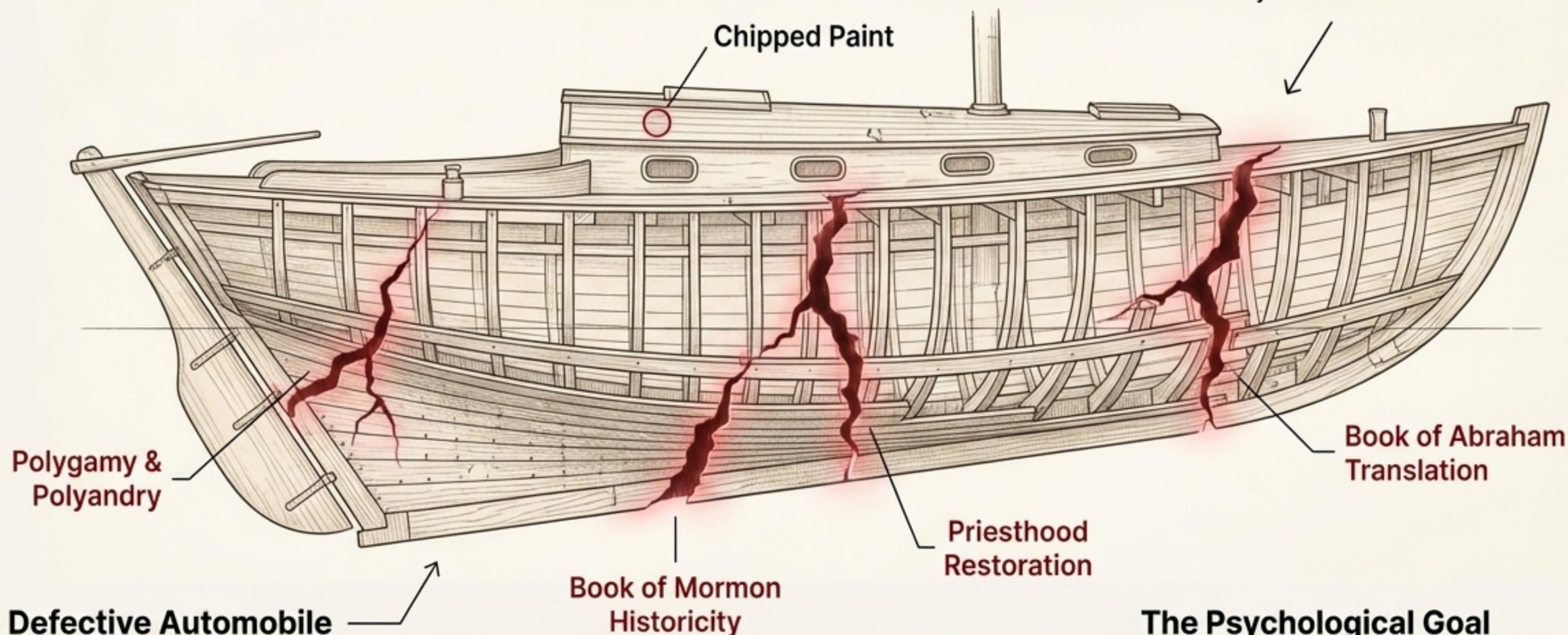


States that these issues “pale into insignificance” when compared to “primary questions.”

Analysis: It's Not Chipped Paint, It's a Cracked Hull

A Strawman Argument

The issues being raised are not minor "dents." They challenge the foundational truth claims of the Church, threatening its very seaworthiness.



The Defective Automobile

Nobody would fault a consumer for raising legitimate issues with a legitimately defective automobile... This is not some mundane detail.

The Psychological Goal

This tactic aims to make the doubter feel irrational, ungrateful, and foolish for worrying about "small things." It shifts the focus away from the validity of the criticism and onto the character of the critic.

Play #2: Characterize Doubt as a Moral and Intellectual Failing

The Ungrateful Child

"The doubter in the boat is portrayed as a **"spoiled little brat"** for noticing flaws."

The Perpetual Troublemaker

The story of "Steven" in the "whack-a-mole" parable, who is labeled a **"Perpetual doubter ... digging up in doubt what he had planted in faith."** It's claimed that **"doubting pleased him more than knowing."**

SPOILED
LITTLE BRAT
UNGRATEFUL
PERPETUAL
DOUBTER
TOXIC
LAZY
SCHOLAR
EVIL
POISONOUS
MUSHROOMS
CONTENTIOUS

The Contaminated Scholar

"Citing Elder Widtsoe, Renlund describes the doubter as a **"lazy scholar"** whose doubts are **"evil"** and **"grow like poisonous mushrooms."**

Analysis: Poisoning the Well to Isolate the Doubter

Ascribes Negative Motive



The tactic asserts the doubter *enjoys* finding problems, rather than being genuinely troubled by them. This dismisses their pain and sincerity.

Creates a False Dichotomy



It presents a binary choice: you are either faithful and good, or you are a doubter who is ungrateful, lazy, toxic, and even evil.

Thought-Stopping Function



This is a powerful technique to prevent empathetic listening. Other members are taught to see the doubter not as a person with legitimate concerns, but as a source of spiritual contagion to be feared and avoided.

Play #3: Forbid Outside Research and Build an Echo Chamber

**“I suggest that
research is not
answer.”**

Redefine Credibility

Instruct members to only “go to reliable trustworthy sources,” implicitly defining “trustworthy” as “Church-approved.”
(Renlund)

– Dallin H. Oaks

First Counselor in the First Presidency

Demonize External Voices

Frame former members and critics as “spiritually bankrupt” charlatans. “Why would you entrust your eternal welfare to those who are spiritually bankrupt?” (Renlund)

Analysis: A Defining Characteristic of High-Demand Groups

The BITE Model Connection



This is a textbook example of Information Control, a key component of Steven Hassan's BITE model for identifying cultic behavior.

The Core Hypocrisy



Joseph Smith's Method



The Modern Mandate

The Church was founded on Joseph Smith's "research" and questioning of all other faiths, teaching members to revere him for being "brave enough to ask." Yet, the organization now forbids its own members from applying the same critical methodology to its own claims.

The Unspoken Admission



An organization confident in its truth claims would encourage scrutiny, not forbid it. This directive is a profound admission of institutional vulnerability.

Play #4: Invalidate New Data by Appealing to Old Feelings



“Doubts about things we already know are very dangerous. Therefore . . .
I tried to take him back to the foundation of his own testimony.”

– Elder Suarez



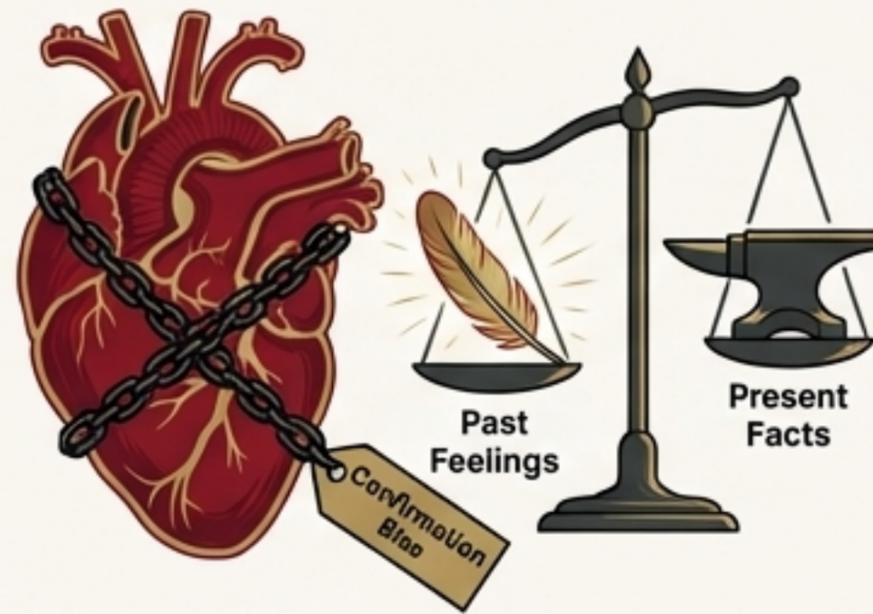
The goal is to revert the member's emotional state to a point *before* the "corrupting" new data was encountered.

Analysis: “Remember How You Felt” Is Not an Answer



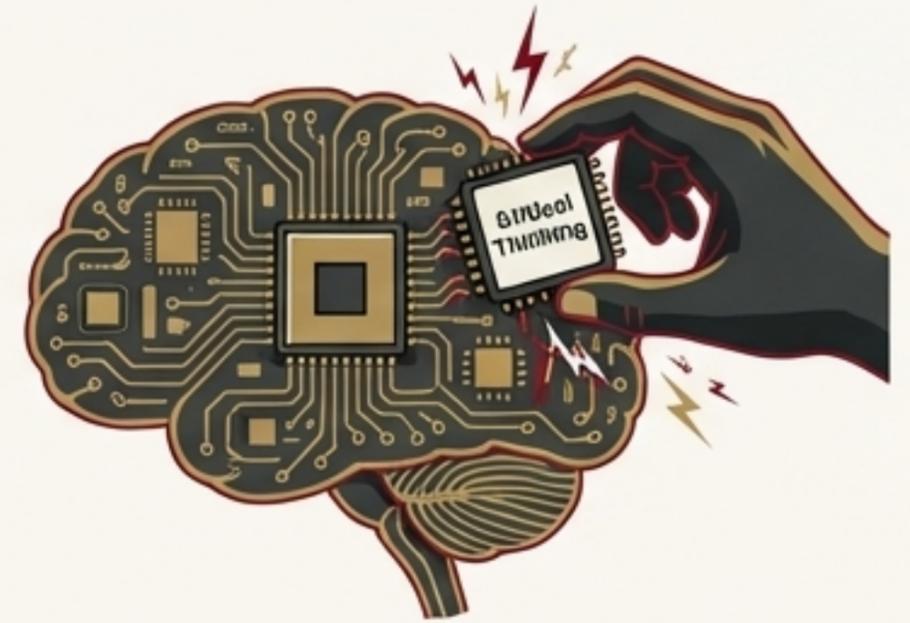
Dismisses Evidence

It deliberately refuses to engage with the new, problematic information. The facts are treated as irrelevant.



Weaponizes Emotion

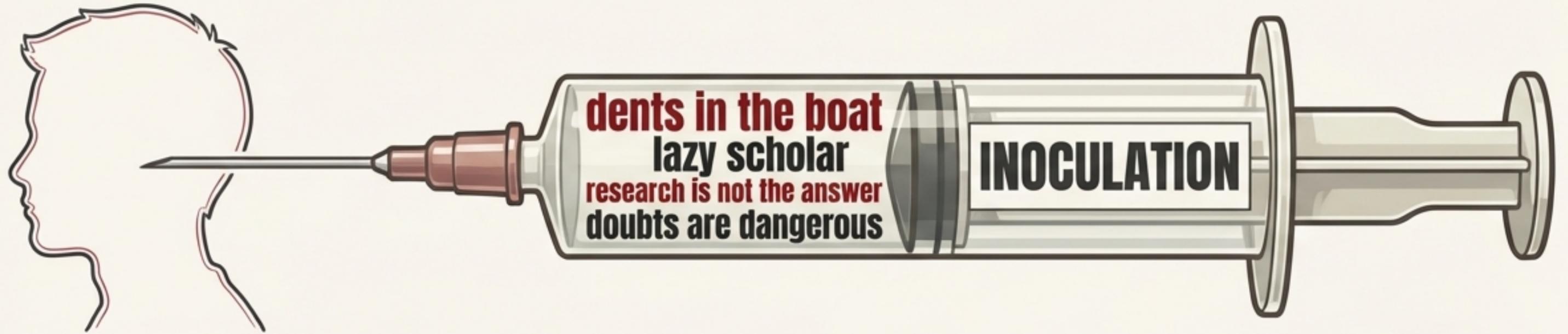
It leverages confirmation bias and emotional reasoning, privileging subjective past feelings over objective present facts.



Short-Circuits Critical Thinking

The goal is to make the member feel that their intellect is the enemy. It treats new knowledge not as something to be integrated, but as a virus to be purged.

The Target Audience: A Strategic Shift to Inoculating Youth



The Venues

The Renlund ("Stay in the Boat") and Suarez/Christensen ("Doubts are dangerous") talks were delivered at "Youth Face-to-Face" devotionals, specifically targeting teenagers.

Elder Corbridge's talk targeted college-age students at BYU.

The New Strategy

After failures like the "Swedish Rescue," Church leadership realized that once an adult member felt deceived, they were almost impossible to bring back.

The new strategy is **inoculation**: pre-emptively arming youth with these tactics so they are conditioned to dismiss challenging information. The Church-published "Saints" history volumes were explicitly described by Church leaders with the word "inoculation."

The Consequences: Damaged Relationships and Stifled Integrity

In Marriages

- Oaks' advice ("research is not the answer") actively drives a wedge in mixed-faith relationships, telling the believing spouse to refuse to engage with their partner's journey. It creates isolation and mistrust.

In Families & Communities

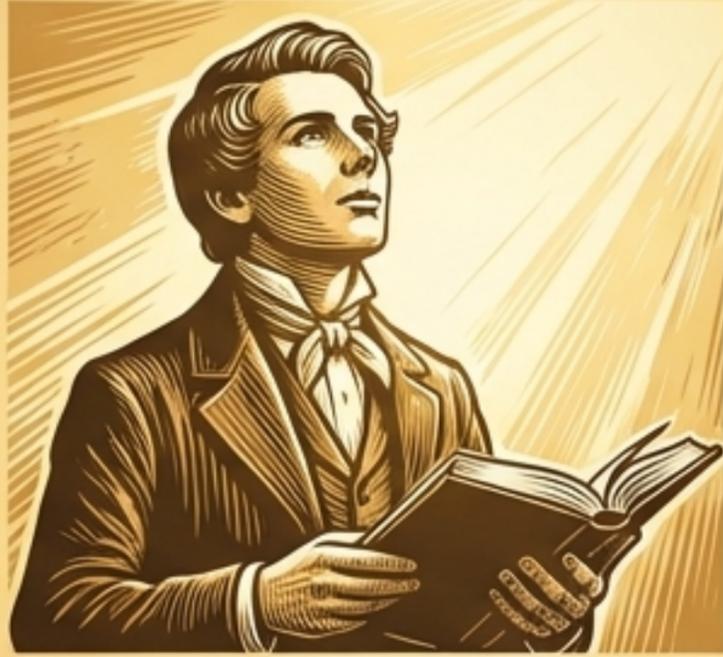
- The "blame the doubter" tactic destroys bonds. It teaches members to see their questioning loved ones as toxic or morally flawed, preventing empathy and understanding.

For the Individual

- It forces an impossible choice between two core human needs: **intellectual honesty** and **social belonging**. To remain in the community, one is often forced to suppress their own conscience and critical faculties.



The Central Contradiction



The Church was founded by a brave boy who dared to question every other church to find the truth.

*Oh say, what is truth?
'Tis the fairest gem...*

**I SUGGEST THAT
RESEARCH IS **NOT**
THE ANSWER.**

**THAT DOUBT WHICH...
BREEDS MORE DOIBT IS EVIL.**

The very quality the Church celebrates in its founder is the quality it now condemns in its members.

Hallmarks of Control, Not Confidence

The strategies employed by the LDS Church to manage doubt are not the actions of an organization confident in its truth.



Information Control
(forbidding research)



Emotional Manipulation
(appealing to past feelings
over present facts)



Blame-Shifting
(characterizing the doubter
as morally flawed)

These tactics are designed to preserve the institution, often at the expense of individual inquiry, integrity, and family harmony.

Sources & Further Exploration

This presentation is an analysis and synthesis of “How the Mormon Church Handles Doubt | Ep. 1800” from the Mormon Stories Podcast.

Featuring Insights From:

Mike (LDSDiscussions.com)

John Dehlin (MormonStories.org)

Nemo the Mormon (YouTube)



Original YouTube Video
mormonstories.org/podcast/handling-doubt



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