

An Incomplete Confession

A Critical Analysis of the LDS Church's New Gospel
Topics Essays on Translation & Polygamy



Based on the analysis from Mormon Stories Podcast: LDS Discussions, Ep. 2063.

The Church Revisits Its Troubled Past

In August 2025, the LDS Church released three new essays addressing foundational and controversial topics:

1.  Book of Mormon Translation
2.  Plural Marriage & The Manifesto
3.  Joseph Smith's Character

Are these essays a genuine effort at transparency, or a more sophisticated form of narrative control?

The essays begin with a 'presumptive language' that assumes the miraculous nature of events without establishing any basis for the claim.

Deconstructing the “Breathtaking Pace”

The Church’s Narrative

“Joseph Smith dictated the book to scribes at a breathtaking pace, completing almost the entire translation between April and June of 1829.”

The Critical Analysis

This ‘65-75 day’ timeline is misleading. Joseph Smith had over seven years (1823-1829) to develop the stories, theological structure, and narrative, incorporating influences from the Bible and local Protestant sermons.

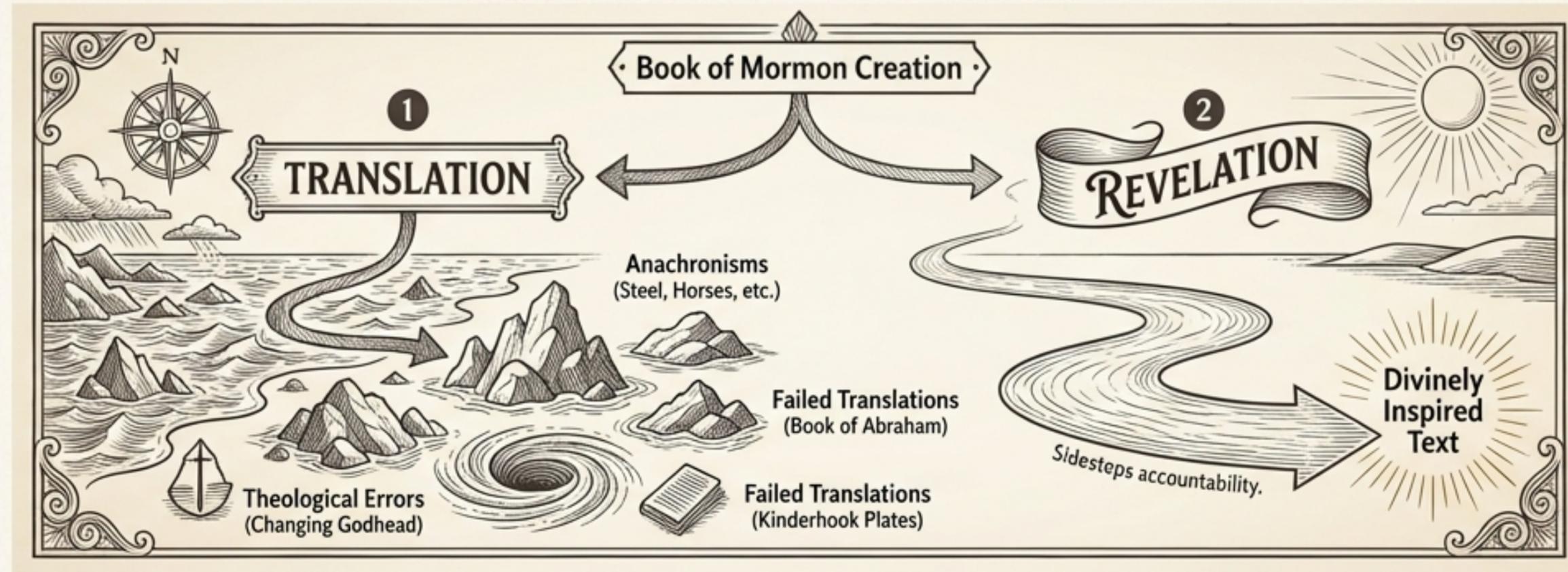
“He’s practicing his story through these years. It’s like practicing a speech to an audience of friends before you give it publicly.” – Sandra Tanner



The Strategic Shift from Translation to Revelation

The Church's Narrative

The essay now frames the process as a divinely inspired act where "the text of the Book of Mormon came by revelation."



The Critical Analysis

1. It inoculates the text against anachronisms and theological errors. The blame for any mistakes shifts from a flawed translation to God's mysterious revelation.
2. It conveniently avoids Joseph Smith's documented inability to translate any other ancient document (e.g., Book of Abraham, Kinderhook Plates).

****Panelist Consensus*** : "They want their cake and eat it too. They want it both ways: translation and inspiration."

A Memory That “Faded” or a History That Was Suppressed?

The Church’s Narrative

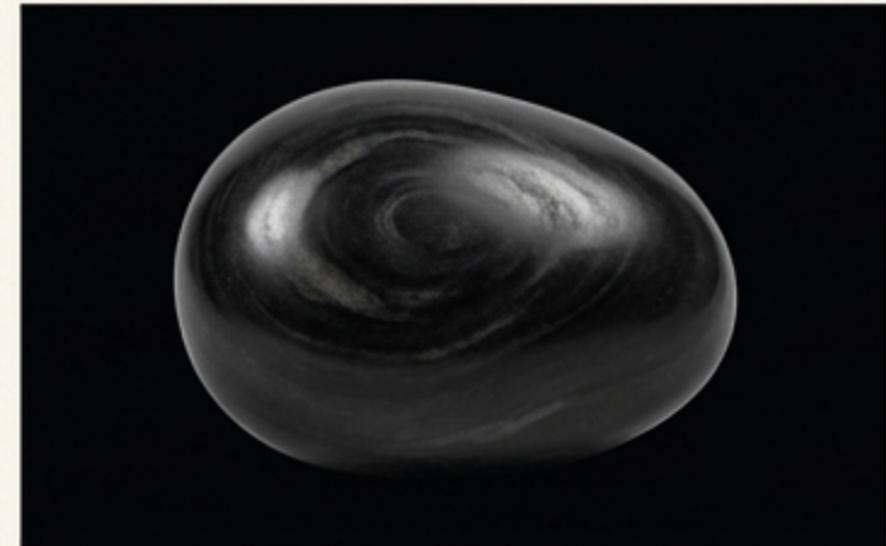
“Memory of the seer stones faded among many Latter-day Saints,” leading artists to depict an inaccurate translation process.



The Critical Analysis

This blames members and artists for a problem created and perpetuated by leadership. The “memory” was actively suppressed:

- Church leaders knew the true method (stone in hat) from witness statements.
- They possessed the actual seer stone in the First Presidency’s vault.
- Prophets like Joseph Fielding Smith publicly and falsely denied the stone was used, calling the accounts “all hearsay.”



If the Tool of Revelation Still Exists, Why Isn't It Used?

The Core Problem: The Church possesses the seer stone, the very instrument it claims was used for divine translation. It is led by 15 men sustained as "Prophets, Seers, and Revelators."



The Unanswered Question: Why rely on academics to translate the Book of Mormon into new languages? Why not use the divinely-provided tool to ensure a perfect, revealed translation for every language on Earth?

Conclusion: The fact that the Church does not use the seer stone implies that it does not work.

The Complicated Faith of the “Reliable” Witnesses

The Church’s Narrative

“The witnesses continue to affirm their testimony throughout their lives.”

The Missing Context

This statement omits critical details about their lives after their alleged experience:

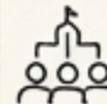


Oliver Cowdery

 Left the church, joined the Methodists (requiring him to recant his testimony), and was excommunicated after calling Joseph Smith an adulterer



Martin Harris

 Joined at least eight other religious movements after leaving Mormonism, including acting as a missionary for the Strangites



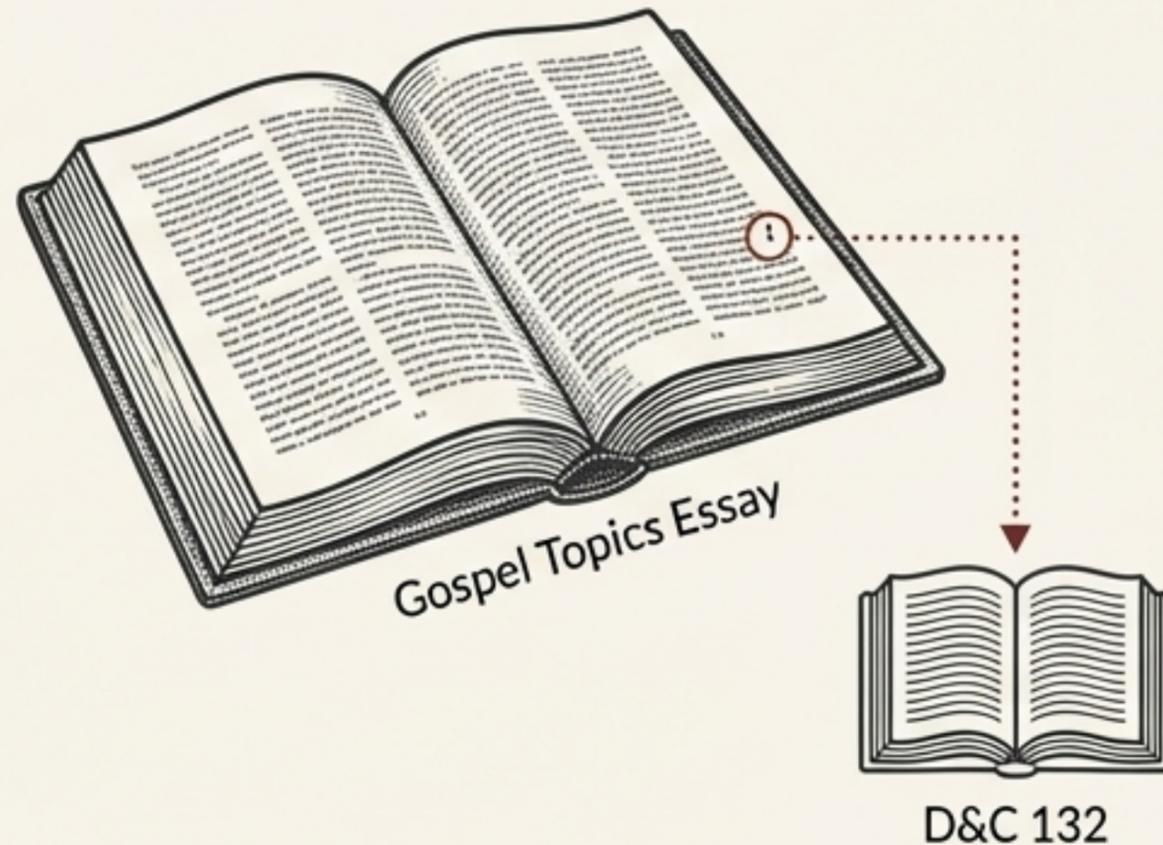
David Whitmer

 Never returned to the church, consistently maintained that Joseph was a “fallen prophet,” and stated that God had personally told him to leave the Church

Was Plural Marriage a Biblical Commandment?

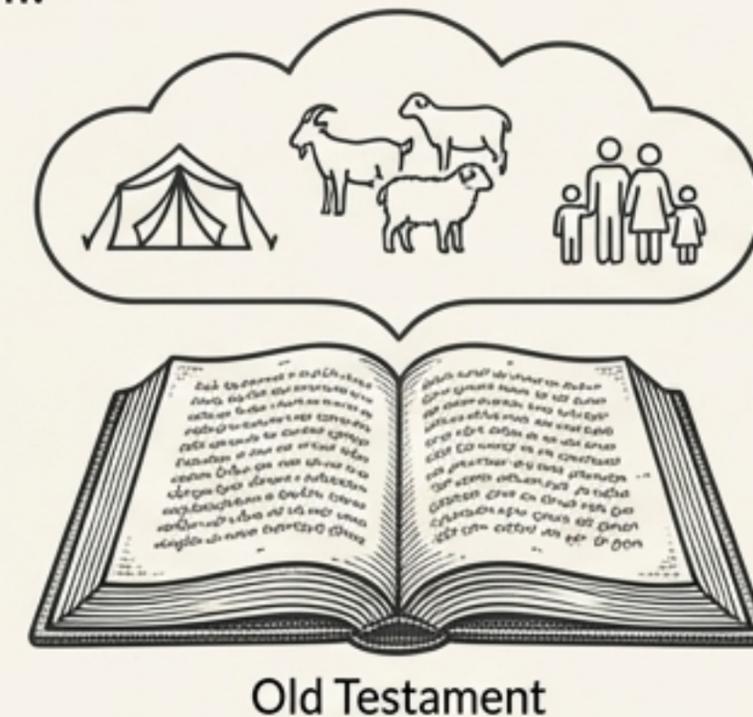
The Church's Narrative

The essay claims plural marriage was a biblically-commanded practice, footnoting Joseph Smith's own revelation, D&C 132.



The Critical Analysis

This is misleading. Plural marriage in the Old Testament was a widespread *cultural practice*, never a direct, universal commandment from God for righteousness. The only "scripture" commanding it for the modern Church is D&C 132—a revelation created by Joseph Smith himself.



The Buried Lede: The Church **Admits** to Post-Manifesto Polygamy

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...The ending of plural marriage took some time.... since the early 1900s...

Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo.

The Critical Analysis

This quiet admission is a bombshell. The essay confirms post-1890 polygamy, the very topic that led to the excommunication of historian D. Michael Quinn.

The Missing Context

This wasn't a few rogue members. It was a systematic, top-down effort by Church leadership, including apostles, to continue the practice in secret in Mexico and Canada, deceiving the U.S. government. A "Second Manifesto" was required in 1904 because the first was not honored by the leadership.



A Requirement for Exaltation? The Essay vs. The Prophets

The Church's Narrative

“No scripture or revelation teaches that plural marriage is a requirement for exaltation.”

A DIRECT FALSEHOOD

The Evidence



Scripture: D&C 132, the foundational revelation on the topic, inextricably links plural marriage (as part of the “new and everlasting covenant”) to the highest degree of exaltation.



Prophets: The “some church leaders” who taught this were multiple successive Prophets of the Church—including Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff—who declared it as essential doctrine from the pulpit.

“[The] only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy.”

—Brigham Young

The Church is Forced to Defend Its Most Controversial Doctrine

The Church's Narrative

The essay states at least 9 times, emphatically, that "Joseph Smith introduced the practice, not Brigham Young."

The Unspoken Battle

This is a direct institutional smackdown of the growing "Joseph Smith didn't practice polygamy" movement. This internal schism threatens the line of authority for every prophet from Brigham Young to the present day.

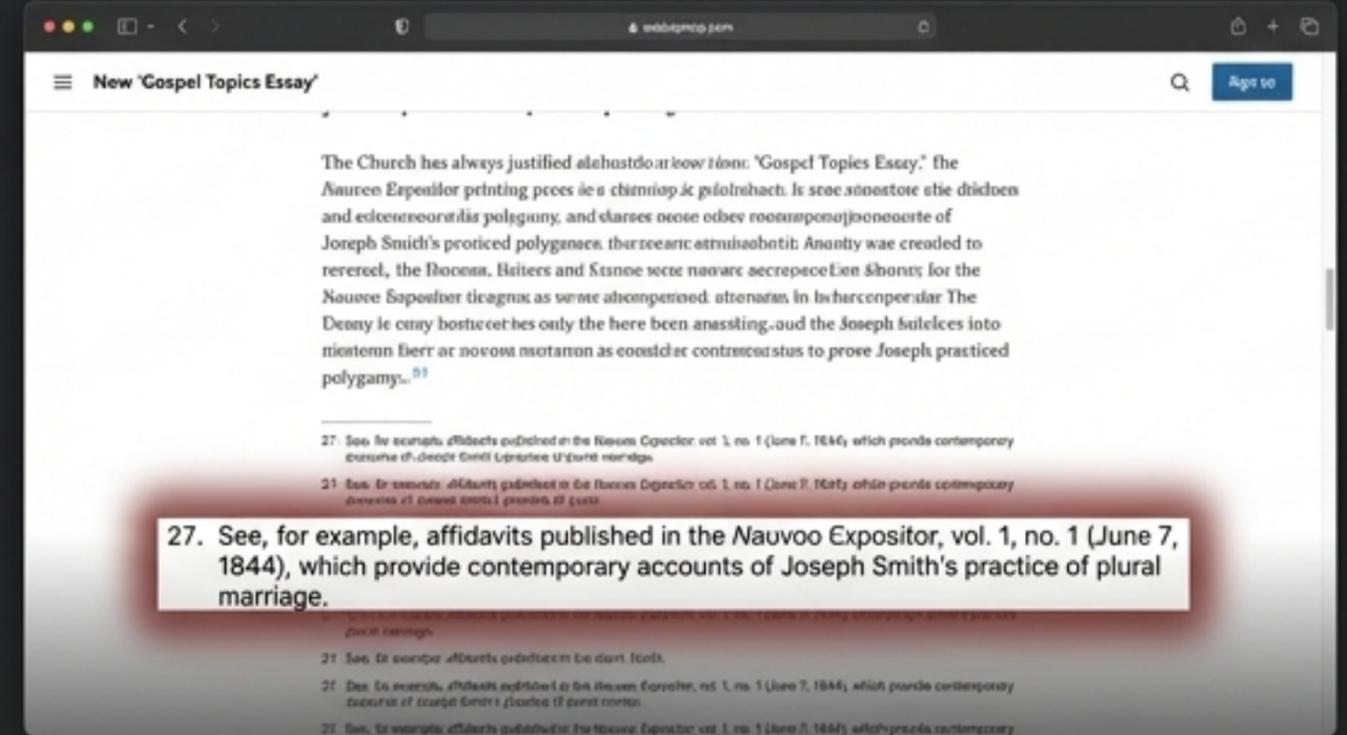
To maintain its authority, the Church must now vigorously defend the very practice it spent a century trying to distance itself from.



Yesterday's "Anti-Mormon Lies," Today's "Credible Source"



The 200-Year Narrative: The Church has always justified destroying the *Nauvoo Expositor* printing press... by claiming it published slanderous lies about his polygamy.



The 2025 Essay's Reversal: The new essay now lists affidavits from the *Nauvoo Expositor* as a "credible contemporary source" to *prove* Joseph practiced polygamy.

The Inescapable Conclusion: The Church tacitly admits the *Expositor* was telling the truth, invalidating its own primary justification for its destruction

Pressure Creates (Partial) Transparency

The timing of these essays is a direct response to significant pressures threatening the institution:



1. Legal Pressure

High-profile tithing fraud lawsuits (e.g., James Huntsman) allege the Church uses a sanitized history to deceive members. These essays provide a form of legal cover (“We disclose this information”).



2. Internal Pressure

The growing “Polygamy Denier” movement directly challenges the prophetic authority of the entire modern Church. The institution must crush this internal schism to survive.

Final Assessment: A Masterclass in Narrative Control



Overall Grade
(from the panel)

What the Essays Do Right

- ✓ They place difficult topics on the table, moving the “informed consent” ball slightly forward.
- ✓ They acknowledge, in a limited way, the seer stone and post-manifesto polygamy.

Where the Essays Fundamentally Fail

- ✗ They consistently use manipulative, presumptive language (“miraculous events”).
- ✗ They fail to take institutional accountability, shifting blame to artists, “faded memories,” or anonymous “some leaders.”
- ✗ They omit the most damning details and historical context.

The Takeaway: These essays are not an honest attempt at historical reconciliation. They are a public relations tool designed to give the appearance of transparency while doubling down on narrative control.

An Unresolved Crisis of Trust

The Core Conflict:

The essays reveal a persistent pattern: Church leaders actively suppressed, denied, and misrepresented foundational aspects of their history for generations.



- Joseph Fielding Smith falsely denied the seer stone's use.
- The First Presidency secretly authorized polygamy after promising to stop.
- The Church punished historians for publishing truths it now quietly admits.

If prophets and apostles have knowingly misrepresented the past, how can their followers trust what they say about the present and the future?