

Dear Brethren,

I write you because I am deeply struggling with the truth claims of the Church along with hundreds of thousands of other saints. As you very well know you have a perfect storm on your hands. I am writing to share perhaps what your missing and offer my honest thoughts as one who sees the problems from a forest perspective rather than from within the trees. I often fear that due to your position you likely hear from a lot of yes men and rarely get someone being blunt. I hope you will permit such an occasion for one saint to be blunt and you take it for what it is worth. I share below a list of the main issues us doubters are losing faith over, why they are deeply problematic, and in the end offer what I feel could be done if you were open to suggestions.

May I start with a little psychology. I am unsure how much any of you know about faith development (not LDS faith but faith generally). When people encounter paradoxes, there is conflict in their mind. If this happens enough times, one will relocate their authority within themselves and trust their truth over what outside authorities say whom one used to trust. The shift of location of authority is actually good and seen as progressive within the fields of cognitive development. These members essentially no longer trust the “self proclaimed experts”... in other words you. What is happening right now in Mormonism is that people are encountering limitless paradoxes and contradictions they never knew existed, and people are losing faith in the authorities and the narrative.

Richard Bushman himself recently stated

“ I think that for the Church to remain strong it has to reconstruct its narrative. The dominant narrative is not true; it can't be sustained. The Church has to absorb all this new information or it will be on very shaky grounds” – Bushman

Please understand I want to trust you, I want to believe my church is good, I want my church to be true..... though I have severe doubts that such is the case, such as when you don't deal with me or other doubters authentically. When you dismiss or dodge our questions, when you say that knowing is more prized than hope, when you offer no apologies for grievous institutional errors, and when you ignore the severe damage your policies are having, you cause us to lose faith in you. Add to that the perception that you do these things to keep the death grip on your authority and to maintain the status-quo culture it multiplies the hurt, pain, and distrust, and betrayal. We lose faith in your goodness and struggle to see how Mormonism is any different than Scientology or a whole host of other unhealthy groups that place control of the masses above real Christlike goodness and healthy vulnerability.

Here is 5 brief issues and the perspective of one doubter. I also know with certainty that my issues are the issues of so many others.

#1 - The LGBT issue.

This is the precipice issue of our day. The world will continue to become more and more accepting as the science becomes more and more certain and the information more and more known that this is a biological issue. This is not about sexual behavior, this is about someone's identity. I sense that you are all aware of the science even if you wish to be seen as naïve to it. To place so much trust in the old Testament as literal stories that clearly define God's standards gets messy and doesn't hold up to scrutiny. Restoration scripture says little to nothing of homosexuality. Who are the celestial people in the lower two glories of the celestial kingdom? Why do we teach that a post mortal man and woman sealed are who god gives creative power when two premortal men (Michael and Jehovah) are our only doctrinal example of who creates?

Play a hypothetical with me. Had the 78' revelation not occurred, who would join a church in 2016 that didn't allow people of color to enjoy full fellowship? The LGBT issue is on the same trajectory. Now ask yourselves, if you make the change 30 years from now, imagine the theological awareness all members will have about just how wrong prophets can be, and so out of touch with Jesus that they entrenched on an issue that caused kids to take their lives. Black folks pre 78' at least had acceptance within the walls of their own homes and their black family. Black folks were not taking their lives over the Priesthood ban. This is exponentially greater in terms of the reconciliation members will have to make. Every member will

have to come face to face with just how fallible church leaders are... just how fallible you are. This shift will be so dramatic that they will either lose faith or have to make overwhelming adjustments to their beliefs, assumptions, and expectations... adjustments that will have them never trusting religious authorities again as their ultimate source of truth. Imagine learning that Jesus either didn't think gay suicide was a big enough deal to talk to you guys about it or that you guys were so set in your ways that you weren't wanting to hear him, that decades went by and you did nothing dramatic to stop it. No one will be joining a homophobic church in 2060 in a developed country. I sense that you sense you are in a conundrum.

Solution

- Can I first suggest you take time to become informed on the science and if you already are, stop pretending you are not. If you are not aware then I suggest you stop dismissing it and take time to truly understand what homosexuality is and isn't. You do people great harm to assume you understand this issue when your predecessors assumed the same and taught egregiously false and harmful things about homosexuality and its causes.

- You have theological room if you are creative, make a clear deliberate shift as soon as possible and label it revelation. Show that Jesus cares about these kids and he has spoken. Yes the older generation will be made extremely uncomfortable. Some will lose faith and leave... but if you do nothing people are already leaving and you are losing the younger generation as their world is too big to maintain exclusive attitudes about people different than us when the science and lived experience don't support you. They simply won't tolerate a homophobic church and homophobic leaders. They have too much access to information to be patient as you turn the ship slowly and they certainly won't tolerate of you not turning the ship at all.

- This issue will not rest and will grow worse until you can find a way to equally include gays in our theology. The longer you wait the more disruptive this will be to your authority and that of those who fill your shoes later. Make the change asap. The sooner you do so the more dramatic and faith promoting it will be seen generally. This abrupt shift will be seen much more as revelation and faith promoting than a long drawn out shift that has the younger generation completely checked out by the time it occurs, dismayed at how many lives you allowed to be sacrificed in the name of your stubbornness and entrenchment.

#2 Women in the Church

Like the first issue, this issue is on a trajectory. This trajectory is softer and hence you can take more time and shift more slowly. That said women are being more highly valued in the world and they are being more and more seen as equals who can contribute to society in the same ways men do. I won't spend much time here as your slight adjustments show that you are aware and are making the shift though too slow for many (and likely too fast for others). This issue will likely only reach a peaceful end if heavenly mother gets 10 fold more visibility and conversation and women share the same priesthood or have something complimentary. They should truly lead over their own organization, along with the ability and encouragement to give blessings as they once did. By the way Heavenly Mother is an incredible doctrine that gives uniqueness and beauty to Mormonism... she could be a real tool to draw the next generation to consider Mormonism and what it brings to the table... again other than protecting your authority, I see little benefit to keeping her hidden.

Solution: Women must be visible in leadership and they must be prized as equals in the home and they must be told a story about their eternal experience that goes beyond being in the background making spirit babies. Again doing so will have the male leadership relinquishing some authority but until you can make space for that you will be giving a message full of doublespeak.

#3 History

The only conclusion to make once one intimately grasps the history and its context is that we have misrepresented our narrative throughout. We have so many problems with our truth claims that it becomes statistically impossible (global

flood, tower of babel, no longer knowing who a Lamanite is, book of Abraham, John Taylor's 1886 revelation, Joseph Smith's deep and problematic treasure digging, polyandry, young brides, the list goes on and on and on) to hold an orthodox view. As Bushman suggests, you are going to have to reconstruct the narrative. People who doubt have good reason. It is more reasonable to doubt once you know the issues in depth than it is to continue orthodox belief. Those who doubt are by far, more informed on average, than those who wholeheartedly believe. You see that right? The more information you learn the less literal this narrative can remain and less "knowing" you can maintain until eventually you realize it is likely not true and you barely hang on with a thread of hope. You either can create safe space for such messiness or you can entrench and hold literal ground but if you do the latter the Church will shrink and become less mainstream and less relevant. When you get to a place where you advocate a mature and nuanced faith, then those who go through this transition will stay in spite of no longer believing literally. I for one no longer need the church to be true..... I simply pray it can someday be good to those on the margins.

Solutions

- If you guys don't literally see Jesus and he doesn't literally speak to you, you have to back off imposing that belief on others (your rhetoric has to change & manuals have to change). If Christ does speak to you literally face to face then you have to offer a reasonable approach to why you guys miss the mark so seriously for so long on really serious issues (your silence to such tough questions is deafening).
- Validate there is reason to doubt and call on people to have faith. When you validate rather than shame you show them you are on the same team and ready to stand with them and that you honor the change in their belief (again this shift whether you like it or not is positive and progressive in terms of development). Acknowledge this is messy and that folks who lose faith have good reason to do so. Honor people who don't buy it. You do acknowledge they have come to such a conclusion honestly, don't you?
- Emphasize the good rather than the true (to do that the Church has to be healthy and positive even for those on the margins. You truly will have to leave the ninety and nine and seek the one) giving it lip service while continuing to marginalize those on the fringes will be seen for what it is... hypocrisy.
- Stop saying you honor questions until you really show a willingness to dive into the tough questions and offer a response that doesn't dismiss them. And once you are ready to stand behind such a statement, then you will have to walk the walk and truly honor and validate the tough questions that call your very authority into question. Truth need not fear. So stop scaring people into unquestioning obedience and silence.
- Start taking an approach that truly values truth seeking and encourages people to think and feel comfortable reevaluating old beliefs and making adjustments. Encourage figurative and allegorical belief where such would be helpful, give people space to discard stuff they can't swallow (section 132 for many for instance)
- Stop scaring people from looking online. If we are all honest, the critic has been tenfold more accurate with the facts than the church has. You come off as severely biased and scared when you show fear for what the critics say. If the Holy Ghost is good at helping us discern truth why are we so afraid of what the critic has to say that we wish our members to simply avoid it? Do you see the how you try to play it both ways? That on one hand you bear witness that the Holy Ghost will help the saints discern truth and on the other hand you fear the saints actually wrestling with information and working to discern truth. Either the Holy Ghost can do his job or Satan is better at deceiving than the Holy Ghost is at discerning. Joseph said "Mormonism is truth". Encourage people to have the wrestle, great faith development comes from such experiences.

#4 prophetic fallibility

You have a serious paradox when you impose that you have authority and speak for God and on the other hand the historical context along with lack of real dynamic revelation, prophesying, and see'ing shows that there is a real disconnect between how we have defined prophet and what is the reality of your role to speak for him. The bar is too high and if permitted to be honest, your not meeting it visually. You either have to have real revelations that draw people to a closer communion with Christ or you have to redefine what it means to be a apostle or prophet in the church publicly so we can all have a "hard reset" on our assumptions and expectations.

Solutions

- Have us sustain the president of the church as just that... President and drop the prophet seer and revelators (unless you can substantiate the revelation, prophesying, and see'ing that is going on. Even Apologists admit there is little of this and argue that such is not your job anymore.). You see, they move the goalpost to defend you rather than have any real evidence to support it. Don't be offended but you guys are no Moses, Noah, or Abraham. Stop telling people you are (rhetoric and manuals). It is a definition you are not visually living up to and unless Jesus literally appears to you and tells you things face to face and he empowers you to do prophetic things which so far seems disconnected from reality. Teach that if God has anything to say to the Church that you are the mediums for that but that generations may go by without any significant theological insight from God.
- Be blunt and admit the race ban was a error that got perpetuated this would be a huge step to help people grow. Help people wrestle with the paradox rather than add to the cognitive dissonance by avoiding a direct discussion of any tough topic.
- Have Sunday school manuals and lessons that encourage critical thinking and discussion of tough questions. (And no the current setup is not it. Yes you have included the essays and "revelations in context", but as intended the lessons really are not designed to have members really dive into the repercussions of such messiness) Give people a safe approved way to transition from outer authority to inner authority so you are seen as part of the solution of encouraging people to grow rather than a barrier that must be discarded in order for them to be true to themselves. When you treat this shift as bad you run counter to truth and this juxtaposition causes cognitive dissonance that in turn becomes a full blown faith crisis and betrayal.
- If maintaining your authority is your top priority (And it appears it is) it will and already is backfiring. You should be symbolically stepping aside and pointing people to Christ. Show members you were never the end, that you are but one tool in their life to help them towards Christ. Have your authority be one tool in their tool bag but that their inner authority (the Holy Ghost within them) as the predominant authority and the main tool at their disposal.
- Give members a real and valid way to dissent and have their concerns voiced, given safe space to be addressed, and encouragement to not have to agree if their conscience says otherwise. Obviously this needs some parameters but currently it is a very unhealthy unquestioning obedience atmosphere that is suffocating those saints who are trying to be authentic and stay. You can't tell people "Gone are the days when a student asked an honest question and a teacher responded, 'Don't worry about it!' Gone are the days when a student raised a sincere concern and a teacher bore his or her testimony as a response intended to avoid the issue." and yet the very leaders at the top refuse to have conversations about tough questions and refuse to answer such and instead do the very things they tell teachers not to in order to avoid the question". Once one's eyes are open to the messiness, one sees through this as a deep fear on your part to be vulnerable and to be forthright. They see through you and see that you are actually aware of the weakness of your own position.

#5 Transparency

Your predecessors did their best to keep the messy reality of Mormonism out of the eyes and ears of the general membership. You claim to desire to correct this and be transparent. The trouble is, it is obvious that your intentions are

still to withhold information and to be selective on just what the majority of saints are aware of. As long as you are seen as not sincere about being transparent, no amount of saying so will rebuild trust. In fact it only makes it worse

- Why are we fearful of the saints learning the deeper history of treasure digging, polygamy, Book of abraham, etc...
- Why do we say we honor questions and gone are the days we bear testimony or say it doesnt matter and yet we dishonor questions by still continually dodging questions and bearing testimony as a way to avoid them?
- Why not be transparent about the financials of the church.
- Why do we obfuscate truth so as to keep the masses comfortable?

Let me state here I am begging and pleading for an LDS leader at the general level to give me 2 hours of their time and answer the questions I have (One I would ask in a face to face or voice to voice conversation). I fear you and I both know the Church can not ever be seen going on record answering the questions I want to ask. I think we both know your position as a whole is so untenable that it can't afford to be on the record answering the tough questions. I would welcome someone to prove me otherwise. I stand ready to have that conversation.

Solution

No matter how painful or embarrassing, open the books and share with your membership where money is spent. Share the realty of the communication God has with you and stop hiding behind it is too sacred. The doubters see this as just more dismissing and dodging. What you seem to be missing is our Church perpetuates a lot of unhealthy behaviors and so little evidence of God's involvement that shaming people for asking such questions is no longer working as a way to deter the questions.

May I conclude simply saying people are experiencing a lot of pain. Many Latter-day Saints who used to be "All-In", thinking the Church was true, are in the here and now barely holding on to the Church being good. This number is growing daily and any effort to dismiss them or ignore them only increases the problem exponentially. I personally have essentially let go of the truth claims, not because the history is messy, but because your hurting those in the margins in the very here and now. In other words I can tolerate a messy history that points to this work not being true, but I can not stand idly by while you hurt others and do nothing , so as to maintain your authority with the uninformed masses who may not be able to handle the realty how how precarious Mormonism's truth claims are. Your predecessors certainly lost my trust and gave me a sense of betrayal. That said I still would have endured and had continued faith. The trouble is now all the information is on the table. The excuses are worn out. Your hurting people in the very here and now and seem unable to sacrifice the power of the authority others have placed in you in favor of doing what is needed to correct the hurt you are doing... I am still here. I still go every week. I simply hang on hoping Mormonism can be good and healthy to its members. We have a long ways to go and it will be hard work. You are going to have to risk some severe discomfort, but I have faith in you. I pray for you. I want nothing more than a Church that can be seen as trying to restore that trust it has trampled on. If you knew my heart you would know that I deeply and sincerely want Mormonism to be something worthy of my continued faith and worthy of people fighting to stay.

May the lord warm your shoulder's

Your friend in Christ

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