**Mormonism**

**Introduction**

In preparing this Podcast, I had to think about how best to use our time. Mormonism – or as it is called today, **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints** – is a vast topic if only because it is so different, in many ways, from any other religion. Most Catholics probably just think of it as a form of Protestantism. But in some respects, it is closer to **Islam** than to **Protestantism**, and in other respects, it is closer to **Catholicism** that to **Protestantism**. While in a few very significant ways, it is closer to **Paganism** than to anything else. It is certainly not a form of Christianity in any meaningful sense of the term although Mormons would be surprised to hear us say that.

But although I think it is good to mention these kinds of “high level” almost philosophical considerations, I don’t know if they add a lot of value from an apologetic point of view so I don’t want to spend a lot of time on them.

At the other end of the extreme from these “high level” considerations, we could get down into an enormous of detail when analyzing Mormonism – historical detail, doctrinal detail, textual detail (in their sacred books) – but there I think we run the risk of missing the forest for the *leaves*. And even if we could discuss all of the details, and even if your audience could remember all of the details, they still might not know where to begin when discussing religion with a Mormon.

So after thinking about all of that, here is how I think we should use our time.

1. We can give a **summary explanation of Mormonism**, and in doing so, I will probably not say much that is different from how the Mormons themselves would explain their religion.
2. I will try to explain as briefly as I can the **major problems with the Mormon religion** as a religious system i.e. why it is not a credible religious system, why it is not worthy of belief. This is the hardest part because we don’t want to get lost in the details.
3. We can try to give some **practical guidance** on how to speak to Mormons about their faith – how to actually have an effective apologetic conversation. And I will try to structure the whole Podcast with this eventual goal in mind.

**Summary Explanation of Mormonism**

Mormonism was founded by Joseph Smith (1805-1844), from upstate New York, in 1831. He claimed that, in 1820, at the age of 14, he had received a vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Joseph said he had been praying for light on which religion he should join. The substance of the message he received was that he should not join any of the current religions because there had been a “Great Apostasy” from the true Christian gospel shortly after apostolic times. It would be Joseph's mission to restore Christianity to its original purity.

According to Joseph Smith, in 1823 an angel named Moroni appeared to him and revealed the location of a set of golden plates inscribed in a language called “Reformed Egyptian”. These golden plates constituted the “Book of Mormon” which was supposedly a compilation, made by a prophet named Mormon, of 15 books written by Jewish prophets who had lived in the New World between 600 B.C. and 400 A.D. Smith met with Moroni over a period of four years to prepare to translate the plates. Smith allegedly did this by peering inside of a hat and using a set of Seeing Stones to illuminate the reformed Egyptian characters on the plates into English text. Smith would then dictate the translation of what he saw to a scribe. Once Smith completed the translation, the angel Moroni took the plates away, and they were never seen again.

This idea that a Jewish civilization existed in Central and North America strikes us as rather odd, but it is a very important point in Mormonism since it is the principal theme of the BOM. Here is the Mormon version of events:

1. At the time of the Tower of Babel, the Jaredites acting under divine inspiration move to the New World where they create a great civilization lasting 2,000 years. Finally, they become extinct due to perpetual wars.
2. Around the time of the Jaredite extinction (600 B.C.), a group of Jewish immigrants known as Nephites left Jerusalem and migrated to Central America. They are a “white and beautiful people” despite being Near Eastern, and they also attain to great heights of civilization.[[1]](#footnote-1)
3. But some fall into wicked ways and are cursed with dark skin. These become the Lamanites.
4. These two groups war constantly, but when Jesus appears in the New World after His resurrection, both nations convert to Christianity and live in peace for 200 years. But after 200 A.D., schisms and heresies arise. The Lamanites finally apostatize as a body and exterminate the Nephites, the final battle taking place in upstate New York to which the Nephites had fled.
5. The Lamanites eventually degenerate into the various Indian nations all of which are descended from these Lamanites.
6. Before the Nephite extinction, the angel Moroni hides their sacred writings which were written on golden plates.

Besides the Bible (King James version) and the BOM, Mormons have two other sacred books – these other two supposedly record the revelations which God gave to Joseph Smith directly:

1. **Doctrine and Covenants (DAC):** published in Kirtland, Ohio in 1835[[2]](#footnote-2).
2. **The Pearl of Great Price (PGP):** First published in England in 1851 as a collection of revelations and other writings. It was revised several times before it was canonized in 1880.

Taken together, these four books of the Mormon Scriptures are known as the “Standard Works”.

*Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price* illustrate a fundamental doctrine of Mormonism which distinguishes it from Catholicism and classic Protestantism – the belief in **continuous revelation**. Christianity holds that public revelation ended with the death of the last apostle, St. John, around 100 AD. But the Mormons believe that prophets continue to exist in the LDS who continue to receive new revelations and communicate new doctrines to the Church[[3]](#footnote-3). The President of the LDS is considered to be a prophet entitled to receive revelation on behalf of the Church and to give God’s word as it is needed in modern times[[4]](#footnote-4).

Mormonism differs from Christianity in even more fundamental respects however.

1. Mormons believe that God the Father was originally a mortal man who lived on another planet. He lived a Mormon way of life, repented of his sins, died, and was eventually raised by his God and installed as God of this world. Since he has a body of flesh and bones, he is still in a place. (He is located on a planet near the star Kolob, see Abraham 3:3 in *The Pearl of Great Price.*) So we can see immediately that **the Mormon conception of God is nothing like the Christian conception of Him**. Matter and spirit are not clearly distinguished in Mormon theology.
2. There is no question of God dwelling in our hearts or souls in any sense because God has a body[[5]](#footnote-5). So there is no spiritual union between God and the believer.
3. God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost are three separate gods. That is important to remember because Mormons do not use the word “Trinity” is the same sense as we do. “*We maintain that these three members of the Godhead are three separate and distinct beings and that* ***God the Father is not a spirit but a glorified being with a tangible body****, as is His resurrected Son, Jesus Christ.*[[6]](#footnote-6)”
4. Mormons do not believe in creation of the world – God the Father simply organized pre-existing eternal matter into the shape of our universe[[7]](#footnote-7).
5. Likewise, Mormons do not believe in the creation of human souls which they believe are also eternal. These souls first received a “spirit body” from God the Father and the “Heavenly Mother” and lived a pre-mortal existence which we have all forgotten[[8]](#footnote-8).
6. For Mormons, Jesus Christ was not always divine, and he was not always the Son of God. Instead, God chose him to become “the first born” by giving Him the first spirit-body. He also has the distinction of being the only one “begotten in the flesh” by God the Father although today’s LDS takes no position on how exactly that occurred – although Bringham Young asserted it was by physical relations with Mary[[9]](#footnote-9).
7. Mormons have a doctrine called “eternal progression” by which good Mormons can be elevated to the status of gods just as God the Father was. This makes Mormons technically **polytheists**. This doctrine has another aspect to it – who made God the Father a god? Another god. Who made that god a god – another god and so on. So Mormons see the process of deification stretching out to infinity in both directions.
8. From what has just been said, it is clear that Mormons do not conceive of heaven as we do. Although they reject crude simplifications like “*after death, every Mormon gets his own planet*”, nevertheless their theories of deification and the role of God the Father in our universe do suggest that something like this will be the good Mormon’s destiny.

We will stop here, but what we have said shows that Mormonism is not even a monotheistic system much less a Christian system.

Nevertheless, in certain **superficial ways**, Mormonism is closer to Catholicism than to Protestantism.

1. Mormons believe in a visible Church with a priesthood. They believe that salvation is based on works, especially temple rituals, called “ordinances.” Mormons have a kind of ordination, confirmation, baptism for the dead, etc.
2. Mormons consider their Church to be the re-founded church of Christ after the Great Apostasy. Therefore, if there was no Great Apostacy, it would follow that the Catholic Church is the true Church. They have no great respect for Protestantism. It is clear to them that any religious group founded by men based upon their own opinions just 500 years ago cannot be the true faith.
3. Note that, for purposes of proselytism, Mormons do not depend much on external motives of credibility e.g. they do not claim that Joseph Smith worked miracles. Conversion is achieved by a process of “**Dialogic Revelation**” through the use of the Book of Mormon. By prayerfully reading this book, one becomes internally convinced of that the Book of Mormon is true, then, by consequence, that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, then, by consequence, that the entire Mormon system is true. **Obviously, that is very different from Catholicism**, but, once converted, Mormons believe that personal revelation is circumscribed by the commands and interpretation of **ecclesiastical authority**.

**The Problems with Mormonism**

**Philosophical problems**

These are not the most helpful in convincing a modern-day person – *although that is the fault of modern people not of philosophy* – but I can’t pass them by without mentioning some of them.

**Eternal Progression** does not work in either direction.

Men cannot become gods, not even the kind of demi-gods that Mormonism seems to imagine God to be. Human beings are human beings, and they cannot become something else without losing their existential identity. And God *in the real sense of the term* is not caused by anything or anyone else.

An infinite series of caused things is absurd – like explaining a flowerpot hanging in their air by a chain which really, really long. The Mormon theory actually walks right into the sophism often used by atheists – “Who caused God?”

The whole idea of God, a transcendent being to whom we owe our being and our absolute allegiance, crumbles away if God is just a being like me who has reached a higher stage of development. To put that in laymen’s terms, if my neighbor Larry might be a God someday, then religion has become devalued.

**Historical Problems**

1. **There is no evidence for the existence of the civilizations described in the BOM.**  Mormonism is extremely well-funded and apparently in recent decades has produced first-class archeologists and scholars of ancient languages (Brigham Young University, The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies a.k.a. FARMS, etc.). These scholars have proposed certain explanations for the problematic details (e.g. the use of iron weapons and silks), but **they do admit to failing to discover any positive evidence** that a Near Eastern culture ever existed in Central America. But there are bigger problems than just problematic details.

* The Native American races do not constitute one physical type. Their facial features and complexions vary widely and give the lie to a common (much less a Mediterranean) ancestry.
* A diversity of languages is also a problem... more than 300 languages have been found in Central America alone suggesting that people had been living there far longer than from 600 B.C.
* Although there are some cultural traits common to New World Indian cultures and Old World cultures (circumcision, food taboos, brick-making) such things have arisen in parallel among cultures before. The problem is the number of Old World customs apparently unknown to New World Indians: proverbs, oaths, the potter's wheel, the plow, stock breeding, use of dung as fertilizer, etc. Scholars agree that New World culture developed in isolation from the Old.
* The highway systems described in the Book of Mormon would have been useless since ancient Native Americans lacked wheeled vehicles and the draft animals to pull them.
* The BOM mentions cattle, cows and calves, bulls, asses, horses, oxen, domestic sheep, pigs and, even elephants, when in fact none of these animals existed in America during Book of Mormon times. On the other hand, the only domesticated animals in pre-Columbian America were llamas, alpacas, guinea pigs, and turkeys (none of which are mentioned in the Book of Mormon).
* Archeological evidence shows paganism well-established in Central America during the centuries they were supposed to be Christian.

1. **The BOM contains anachronisms** i.e. an event that appears out of its proper time. Smith claimed that the BOM, published in 1830, had been translated from golden plates that contained the accounts of ancient inhabitants of the American continent. However …
2. **Reference to synagogues.** The word synagogue or some derivative of it appears at least 25 times in the Book of Mormon[[10]](#footnote-10). The problem is that synagogues did not become a part of Jewish life until after 600 B.C. when the Jewish immigrants migrated to the New World.
3. **St. Peter misquoted.** In **Acts 3:22 ff,** St. Peter paraphrases Moses' words from **Deut. 18:15, 18f** . However, the BOM (I Nephi 22:20) mistakenly represents these words as Moses' own words! Therefore Peter is accidentally quoted centuries before Acts was written or Peter had ever uttered his words.
4. **Greek words in the BOM**. The BOM contains Greek names and words such as Jonas, Lachoneus, Timothy, and Alpha & Omega. But Greek culture had no influence on Jewish culture and literature until the conquests of Alexander the Great which took place almost 3 centuries after the Jewish immigrants supposedly left for America.
5. **Confusion** **of the Old Covenant with the New Covenant.** The Book of Mormon confuses the Old and New Covenants. It stresses that before the coming of Christ the faithful kept the Law of Moses (II Nephi 5:10; 25:23-25, 20; Alma 30:3), yet they also established churches, taught and practiced Christian baptism, and were conversant with New Testament doctrines and events (e.g. II Nephi 9:23; Mosiah 18:17).

**Joseph Smith as Translator.** Joseph Smith’s primary prophetical mission was that of translator. Of course, he is meant to have also received certain direct revelations from God, but his mission began as a divinely-appointed translator of the BOM. If there were incidents which showed Joseph Smith to be untrustworthy as a translator, his entire credibility as a prophet would be severely damaged. There are, at least, two such incidents.

**Case 1: The Book of Abraham (PGP)**

* In November, 1967, the Metropolitan Museum of Art donated 11 papyrus manuscripts to the LDS which had belonged to Joseph Smith and from which he had translated the Book of Abraham.
* Smith had seen the manuscripts in a mummy case 1835 and claimed that the manuscripts were the Book of Abraham. The Mormons purchased both manuscripts and mummies (from Michael Chandler). When Smith's mother and widow refused to go west, the church lost control and track of the manuscripts.
* The LDS turned the manuscripts over to **Dr. Hugh Nibley** (foremost Mormon linguist and apologist but shaky on Egyptian languages) for translation.
  + Already odd because the Mormon president is still supposed to possess the seer stone and to have the power of translation.
  + Nibley wrote an 800-page book on the manuscripts but only translated 2 of them which apparently have nothing to do with the Book of Abraham.
* Then, it was determined from which manuscript, Joseph Smith had taken some (and probably all) of the Book of Abraham. This was examined by three experts in ancient Egyptian (Dr. John Wilson, University of Chicago, Klaus Baer, University of Chicago, and Dr. Richard A. Parker, Brown University). The result less than one year after the donation of the manuscripts...

The Book of Abraham is actually a c. 300 B.C. version of “The Book of the Dead” an ancient Egyptian recipe book of spells which would enable a dead person to live happily in the afterlife. Wrong religion and wrong time period. Smith’s identification of figures depicted on the manuscripts have been shown to be all incorrect. In fact, two of the figures he identified as males are females. Even Mormon Egyptologists admit this. Smith’s credibility as a translator is essential to the credibility of the Mormon scriptures, but …

**Case 2: The Lost 116 Pages**

The first 116 pages of English transcript of the BOM, taken down by the scribe Martin Harris at Smith’s dictation, were lost after Harris took them home to show to his skeptical wife. Mrs. Harris apparently lost, destroyed, or concealed the manuscript, **but she refused to disclose what had happened to it**.

If Joseph Smith was who he said he was, there should have been no problem re-translating the lost pages from the golden plates using the seer stones. On the other hand, if Joseph Smith had made the whole thing up, it would have been impossible for him to reproduce the text as he had previously dictated it – and that would be awkward if Mrs. Harris had not destroyed the original manuscript and could produce for comparison. What does he do?

He receives a revelation from God saying not to retranslate that portion of the plates since the devil has inspired thieves to alter the manuscript in an attempt to discredit the message by comparison. Anyway, the first 116 pages are just an abridgement of a fuller account which Joseph has not translated yet.

Convenient! And strange. Had Joseph retranslated the pages in exactly the same way, his enemies would have had to produce the other “altered” pages for public inspection without allowing any sign of their alterations to appear … signs of erasure, thinning of paper, or difference in handwriting.

**Changes in Dogma Problems**

Over the years, the LDS has shown a remarkable ability to adjust its doctrine to the spirit of the times.

Polygamy was not taught until a revelation of July 12, 1843. Even then, it was not printed in any official text until 1852 and was not officially added to DAC until 1876. **In fact, it was specifically condemned in the 1835 edition of DAC**. To this day, the practice is still condemned in the BOM**[[11]](#footnote-11)** and in the earlier revelations to Smith recorded in DAC 42:22 and 49:16. But section 132 of DAC teaches polygamy in accordance with the 1843 revelation, and Mormon leaders fearlessly defended it as essential to their faith until 1890. In 1890, the president of the Church claimed to receive a revelation telling him to stop the practice (although not to forsake the doctrine). He had previously claimed that the Church could never give up the practice and that he had received a revelation warning him not to.

The LDS did not allow black men to be ordained priests. An official LDS statement (August 17, 1949) explains:

“The attitude of the Church with reference to Negroes remains as it has always stood. It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord, on which is founded the doctrine of the Church from the days of its organization, to the effect that Negroes may become members of the Church but that they are not entitled to the priesthood at the present time”**[[12]](#footnote-12)**

In 1978, another revelation was received which stated that God would now allow black men to receive the priesthood.

More importantly, the LDS now claims[[13]](#footnote-13) that there was never any doctrinal basis for this racial discrimination despite repeated past statements to the contrary and also claims that dark skin is not a sign of God’s disfavor – even the BOM clearly says that it is (2 Nephi 5:21).

**What I have mentioned in this problems section is just a sample of what could have been mentioned**.

**Apologetical Approach to Mormons**

I think talking to Mormons places a great test on our purity of intention because it would be very easy to try to “win” an argument or even “crush” a Mormon opponent by bringing up the more glaring difficulties in their system – and especially with their founder. Some of their founder’s faults, I have deliberately omitted mentioning so as not to make that temptation any stronger than it already is.

We have to remember that Mormons are real people – often very sincere and generous people. *They are not their religious system*. They are probably unaware of most of what I have mentioned today, and they have a similar love and psychological attachment to their religion as we have to ours. So there is nothing to be gained in trying to “beat” them. We are trying to get them to think harder about the truth and to shake their certainty so that they will seriously examine whether or not their religion is credible. We will not gain a hearing from them by mocking what they consider sacred – however unworthy of being considered sacred it might actually be.

So the **first** thing I would recommend is that you speak to Mormons in the spirit of having a discussion about religion – rather than as a contest of apologetical skill. You are more likely to say the right kinds of things if you approach it this way.

**Second**, be ready for them to say some strange things and do not show annoyance. Some of the quotes they will take from the Bible to justify their doctrines will seem incredibly naïve to you. For example, they might argue that God the Father has a body because Scripture often speaks of Him as **seeing** and as **having an arm**, etc. They take these kinds of metaphors very seriously. You can then explain to them that Scripture also speaks of God being a “rock” and a “consuming fire” and even as a bird (Psalm 91:4), and so this language is just metaphoric. In other places, Scripture clearly explains that God is a Spirit and is invisible.

Finally, when speaking to Mormons, try to always guide the discussion back to the question of the Great Apostasy.

If they are wrong about this, everything else is irrelevant. They believe in religious authority, the efficacy of liturgical rites, etc. If the Apostasy did not happen, then the Catholic Church must be the true one because Mormons do not have a Protestant worldview.

Some Texts Cited by Mormons to justify the Great Apostasy Theory**[[14]](#footnote-14)**

* **Amos 8:11-12** “*Behold the days come, saith the Lord, and I will send forth a famine into the land: not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord. And they shall move from sea to sea, and from the north to the east: they shall go about seeking the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.[[15]](#footnote-15)”*
* **Matt 24:4-12** “*For many will come in my name saying, I am Christ: and they will seduce many... And then shall many be scandalized: and shall betray one another: and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall seduce many*”
* **Acts 20:29-30** “*I know that, after my departure, ravening wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And of your own selves shall arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*”
* **2 Tim 4:1-4** *“I charge thee, before God and Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead, by his coming, and his kingdom: Preach the word: be instant in season...there shall be a time, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but, according to their own desires, they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: And will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables.*”

The key is to point out that: **no where does Scripture teach a *complete* apostasy** (although it is clear that the good fish/bad fish, wheat/chaff will be found among God's people until the end).

**In the Old Testament**, there are many incidents of religious corruption, prophets having no vision or prophesying falsely,**[[16]](#footnote-16)** but the corruption was never complete i.e. a remnant always survives as did the ecclesiastical structures i.e. the Levitical priesthood[[17]](#footnote-17). **That is an obvious fact**, and it might be sufficient to point this out, but you could also include (if necessary) some quotations in support of the idea that *this is how God always acts* – **He allows evil, but He never allows His work to be destroyed**.

**Ecclus 44:17-18**  “*Noe was found perfect, just, and in the time of wrath he was made a reconciliation. Therefore was there a remnant left to the earth, when the flood came.*”

**Ecclus 47:24-25** “*But God will not leave off his mercy, and he will not destroy, nor abolish his own works, neither will he cut up by the roots the offspring of his elect: and he will not utterly take away the seed of him that loveth the Lord.*”

**Isaias 10:20-22** “*And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and they that shall escape of the house of Jacob … shall lean upon the Lord the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall be converted, the remnant, I say, of Jacob, to the mighty God.*”

**Amos 9:8-10** “*Behold the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth: but yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord.*”

**3 Kings 19:13 ff** “*the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant: they have destroyed thy altars, they have slain thy prophets with the sword, and I alone am left, and they seek my life to take it away. And the Lord said to him … 'I will leave me seven thousand men in Israel, whose knees have not been bowed before Baal.'*”

**Jer 23:3-4** “*And I will gather together the remnant of my flock, out of all the lands into which I have cast them out: and I will make them return to their own fields, and they shall increase and be multiplied. And I will set up pastors over them, and they shall feed them: they shall fear no more, and they shall not be dismayed: and none shall be wanting of their number, saith the Lord.*”

**Sophonias 3:13** “*The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed, and shall lie down, and there shall be none to make them afraid.*”

Scripture, in fact, teaches that a **complete apostasy is impossible**.

Even in the Old Testament, the kingdom of Christ is presented as perpetual and indestructible:

**Daniel 7:13-14**: *“I beheld therefore in the vision of the night, and lo, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and he came even to the Ancient of days: and they presented him before him. And he gave him power, and glory, and a kingdom: and all peoples, tribes and tongues shall serve him: his power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away: and his kingdom that shall not be destroyed.*”

**Isaias 9:6-7**: “*For a CHILD IS BORN to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace. His empire shall be multiplied, and there shall be no end of peace: he shall sit upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom; to establish it and strengthen it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth and for ever:”*

In the New Testament, the indestructibility of Christ's Church could not be more clear.

**Matt 7:24-25** “*Every one therefore that heareth these my words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock.*”

**Matt 16:18** “*That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*.” (Mormons claim that the rock was actually the Father's personal revelation to Peter, but this does not fit the context at all.)

**Matt 28:20** Christ promised to be with us ***all days*** (so at no time could there be an apostasy) until the end of the world.

**John 14:16-18** Christ promised not to leave us orphans but to send the Church the Spirit of truth to protect His Church: “*I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever. The spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him: but you shall know Him; because He shall abide with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you orphans*.”

Not all Christians will be faithful – that is true – but **God will be faithful! That is the point!** He is the One Who governs the world, and He is faithful.

Furthermore, the epistles (particularly Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians) describe the Church as the very Body of Christ. The gospels describe it as the kingdom of God and the household of God. The Apostasy would imply that Satan is stronger than Christ (despite 1 John 4:3-4[[18]](#footnote-18) and the gospels account of Christ's continuous victories over Satan).

Also, in Matthew 18, Jesus says that if you have a disagreement with a brother, the Church is the final court of appeal, but Mormons say that Jesus sat idly by for 1700 years while people tried to obey this command by following an apostate Church. This is all the more strange in light of the Mormon belief in continuing revelation. If there had been prophets more or less uninterruptedly until the coming of Christ – and again ever since Jospeh Smith re-founded Christ’s Church. Why was there a gap of 1700 years with no prophet? Why was revelation broken off?

Furthermore, Jesus failed not only once but twice since the parallel church that he founded in South America after his resurrection also fell into apostasy (3 Nephi, chapters 11-28)

**Just as there exists no scriptural arguments for a complete apostasy, so there exists no historical evidence for it. The Catholic Church enjoys complete historical continuity.** No matter how far back one goes, there is no Church Father or ancient Christian writer who speaks like a Mormon – in fact, without fail, they all speak like Catholics! Of course you will need to have some examples to show them this, but all of the apologetical books used against Protestants can be used here.

For example, there is no early Christian writer who believes:

* The Father, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost are three separate gods.
* That God the Father was once a mere man and that He still has a body[[19]](#footnote-19)
* Polygamy
* Baptism for the dead
* Celestial marriage (marriages which last into eternity)

The best approach is to simply ask the Mormons to provide evidence that early Christians (of whatever exact period they may choose) believed Mormon doctrines. **Again, keep them focused on the Great Apostasy**! The earliest Church Fathers will have more weight with a Mormon mindset so here are a few examples:

**Pope St. Clement c.96**

He writes to the Church at Corinth in order to rebuke them for deposing their lawfully constituted ecclesiastical officials, and it is clear that he expects prompt obedience to his commands. “*But if any will not obey these things which Christ has spoken through us, let them know that they will be implicating themselves in no small danger and offense.”* St. Clement's efforts to heal the schism were successful, and his letter was so highly prized by the Corinthians that it was still read decades later during the liturgy.

In the same letter, St. Clement describes the Mass as a sacrifice[[20]](#footnote-20).

**St. Ignatius c.110**

He wrote 7 letters to various churches on his way to be martyred.

* + In his letter to the Smyrnaeans, he speaks clearly of the Real Presence in the Eucharist.
  + In the same letter, we find his famous statement: “Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the **Catholic** Church.”

**St. Justin Martyr c.160**

He clearly teaches the True Presence. Since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Euchristic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our flesh and blood is nourished, is both the Flesh and the Blood of that incarnated Jesus.[[21]](#footnote-21)”

**St. Irenaeus c.180**

“When, therefore, we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek among others the truth which is easily obtained from the Church. For the Apostles, like a rich man in a bank, deposited in her most copiously, everything that pertains to the truth[[22]](#footnote-22).”

“*In every Church, there is opportunity for all those who wish to see the truth to learn the Apostolic tradition made known throughout the whole world; we can enumerate those who were appointed by the Apostles as bishops as also their successors down to our own times: men who neither knew nor taught anything like these heretics rave about.*”**[[23]](#footnote-23)**

“*With this Church of Rome, on account of her supreme authority, it is necessary that every other church be in communion.”***[[24]](#footnote-24)**

So, if despite all of this, the Mormons insist that there was a Great Apostasy, they need to give serious evidence of it. Ask them for specific facts.

When and where did this apostacy begin?

Who started it?

Who fought against it?

They need to show that there was a Mormon religion which pre-dated the Catholic Church. **They need to show evidence of a drastic break with the previous belief, ecclesiastical organization, and liturgical practice**. Otherwise … they have nothing.

1. Note that Smith is emphatic that these were the only two ancient peoples which inhabited America. See his famous letter to John Wentworth. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is a revision and expansion of the Book of Commandments (BOC), published in 1833 in Jackson County, Missouri. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the 9th article of their faith. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “The keys of the priesthood, held by our beloved prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, and every other prophet and President of the Church, entitle him to revelation in behalf of the entire Church. This Church is “living” because we have prophets who continue to give us the word of the Lord that is needed for our time.”

   **https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/youth/article/only-true-living-church?lang=eng** [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Doctrine and Covenants* 130:3 says, “The idea that the Father and the Son dwell in a man’s heart is an old sectarian notion, and is false.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. **https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/youth/article/only-true-living-church?lang=eng** [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. **Horn, Trent. 20 Answers- Mormonism (20 Answers Series from Catholic Answers Book 9), p.24** [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:29, and **Horn, Trent. 20 Answers- Mormonism (20 Answers Series from Catholic Answers Book 9), p.24** [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. **Horn, Trent. 20 Answers- Mormonism (20 Answers Series from Catholic Answers Book 9), p.26** [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For example: **Alma 16:13.** [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Jacob 2:24, 27 and Ether 10:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. CES, p.113 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Others include Mark 13:31-23, Luke 21:7-8, 2 Tim 3:1-7, 2 Pet 2:1-3, and Jude 17-19 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. In fact, Amos c.780 B.C. was only foretelling the Assyrian conquest of the Kingdom of Samaria c.721. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Lam 2:14 and 4:13, Jer 23:2631, Ezek 22:22-26, Sophonius 1:4, Mich 3:5, and Ps 74:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Besides the quotations given here, see also 4 Kings 13:23, 4 Kings 19:30-31 (Isaias 37:32 ff), Isaias 11:10-12,and Esdras 9:7-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. “*Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God: And every spirit that dissolveth Jesus, is not of God: and this is Antichrist, of whom you have heard that he cometh, and he is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome him. Because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See the famous “King Follet Discourse”, preached by Joseph Smith in 1844 on the occasion of a funeral of a man named King Follet. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Beginning Apologetics 2*, p.28, Fr. Frank Chacon and Jim Burnham [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *First Apology*, 66, 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Against the Heresies*, Bk. III, ch. 4, 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Against the Heresies*, III, 1. See *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol.1, William Jurgens, n.209 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Against the Heresies*, Bk. III, ch. 3, 2-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)