



Hi! I'm Brother Jake.

Truthfully, I don't have a specific origin story for how I came up with the idea to create my (ongoing) YouTube series. But when I think back, it does remind me of an experience I had on my mission in Peru.

In my final exchange, my missionary companion received a package from home that happened to include a favorite food item of mine—root beer—which he offered to share with me. At that point, it had been almost 2 years since I had last tasted of this nectar of the Gods, so needless to say I was pretty excited. I poured it into a glass and stuck my face near the top while the foam settled, letting the carbonated droplets tickle my nose. After what seemed like an hour, I lifted the glass, winked at my companion (no homo) and took a drink.

It tasted like medicine.

Now, there's a very simple explanation for this: root beer actually does taste like medicine. No, really. It does. It's just one of those things—like football, or vegemite—that people love because they grew up with it and fostered an appreciation from an early age. And once you internalize that appreciation, it's very hard to see it from an "outside" perspective. I knew dozens of Latin American missionaries who had tried root beer and found it strange and (most of the time) gross. "That's crazy!" I would think. "It's delicious! Plus you always have it with pizza! And who doesn't like pizza?" But after a 2 year root beer fast, I got a glimpse of root beer from the "outside," and it permanently changed the way I see it. Sure, I still enjoy root beer (there's really *is* nothing like it with pizza), but whenever I do, I can still taste a faint hint of medicine and the shocking sensation of seeing something I thought I'd never second-guess from an "outsider's" perspective.

Such has been my experience with Mormonism. Now, I'm not saying that the Church is secretly a revolting beer byproduct and we just don't see it; but over time, I slowly began to realize that there are certain aspects of Mormonism, such as the verbal heuristics we give each other ("the gospel is simple!"), the ways we approach difficult topics (sexism, racism), or our explanations of Church doctrines (the origins of the Book of Abraham) that, to someone coming from a critical mindset, can seem strange, off-putting, or downright ludicrous. Now, some will likely speculate that my drift toward the "outside" was a result of a personal shortcomings in gospel living, and they may be right. Maybe I didn't pray or fast or study long or well or hard enough. But whatever the reason, the experience of hearing those things through the ears of an "outsider" is what inspired me to make my videos.

I'm often asked what exactly I'm trying to accomplish with this stuff, and I think it's a fair question. There are really two main motivating factors for me: first, I was looking

for an outlet for the frustration I felt when I heard Mormon platitudes that I found harmful or nonsensical. Second, I wanted to create something that might jolt more traditional members into seeing how their language, arguments, and reasoning sounds like to an outsider. Honestly, I'm not sure I've been successful on both fronts; in fact, based on several conversations I've had with more conservative (religiously, not politically) believers, I'm probably prioritizing the first motivation over the second—the levity of my approach is too thick, the satire too biting, for traditional believers to feel anything but defensive, despite the fact that I only use arguments and ideas that originate in mainstream Mormonism.

The responses to my videos vary, largely based on the individual's relationship with the Church. Many of the strongly positive reactions to the videos come from those critical and/or disillusioned by the Church, who see them as a humorous vindication of their own struggles within the belief system, while most of the negative reactions originate from more traditional members, who see them as an attack. The most interesting thing to me, however, has been the aspects of my stuff that each side of the spectrum chooses to focus on. Those who enjoy my videos consistently comment on the content of the videos themselves—how I was able to accurately articulate this or that aspect of an issue. Those who do not, on the other hand, seem to focus almost exclusively on identifying Brother Jake as an “anti,” a wolf in sheep's clothing, and rarely comment on the content of the videos at all. And while I'd be lying if I wasn't a little disappointed that critics overwhelmingly opt for ad-hominem attacks (check out this scorched earth comment thread on Wheat and Tares), it's understandable—after all, my videos *are* satirical, so I can't say their defensiveness is unjustified, and by being intentionally ambiguous, I'm inviting speculation about where exactly I “stand.”

Speaking of which, I imagine that many of you are wondering when I'm going to just man up and tell you what my personal thoughts and beliefs about the Church are. I know I would be. But you know what? I'm not going to, mostly because I feel it would feed into an aspect of Mormon culture that I truly hate: the reliance on external indicators to determine how one should react to something. If you want to know what to think about my videos, watch my videos. If you want to know what my personal thoughts and feelings are, send me an email; I'd be more than happy to have a conversation.

All that aside, here's the bottom line: I'm perfectly happy with what I've made thus far. Brother Jake is exactly what I want him to be, and I plan on keeping him around for the foreseeable future. So, in the words of the Terminator:

“I'll probably be around here again at some point.” Or something like that.