



If deception is an art form, the LDS Church is fast becoming Botticelli.

The people who brought you the Mormons-don't-believe-they-get-their-own-planet canard are at it again. And this time, it's about the temple.

In a recently released video (and accompanying essay) on its official website, the LDS Church discusses both temple robes and the garment of the holy priesthood. The video likens the "garment of the holy priesthood" to "the nun's habit, the priest's

cassock, the Jewish prayer shawl, the Muslim's skullcap, and the saffron robes of the Buddhist monk."

Crossing the Line

While the comparison may be apt in some respects, the video crosses the line into duplicity when it states:

Some people incorrectly refer to temple garments as magical or "magic underwear." These words are not only inaccurate but also offensive to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. **There is nothing magical or mystical about temple garments**, and Church members ask for the same degree of respect and sensitivity that would be afforded to any other faith by people of goodwill.

Now, I get the fact that the main thrust of the paragraph is to try to keep people from calling the garments "magic underwear," an admonition repeated in the closing paragraph. But pretty much every Mormon knows that there is, in fact, something very "magical or mystical about temple garments." And that something is that they are a protection from harm.



In a famous *60-Minutes* interview aired April 7, 1996, Willard Marriott recounted a personal experience in which he was protected from injury by his temple garments.

Mike Wallace: Do you wear the sacred undergarments?

Willard Marriott: Yes, I do. And I can tell you they do protect you from harm.

Mike Wallace: Really?

Willard Marriott: Uh-huh. I was in a very serious boat accident. Fire—boat was on fire, I was on fire. I was burned. My pants were burned right off of me. I was not burned above my knee. Where the garment was, I was not burned.

Mike Wallace: And you believe it was the sacred undergarments?

Willard Marriott: I do. Particularly on my legs, because my pants were gone, but my undergarments were not singed.

Though Mike Wallace may appear to be suppressing a smile at Williard Marriott's account, his story is not remarkable to Mormons, whose culture is full of such folklore. I have heard such stories off-and-on for over thirty years as a Mormon, and I doubt my experience is unique. Within the past year, our high councilman related a story to our ward in sacrament meeting that was strikingly, if not suspiciously, similar to Willard Marriott's. The approving gasps of the faithful in the congregation were audible.

If such stories are not "magical or mystical" to some degree, I don't know what is.

Where Do These Stories Come From?

But these are not stories that have arisen in a vacuum, separate and apart from any doctrinal foundation. It is in the temple itself where initiates are told the garment "will be a shield and a protection to you against the power of the destroyer" so long as the initiate is "true and faithful to your covenants."

Now, those who wrote the script for the garment video are perfectly aware of this information; they know of the "protective powers" of the temple garment. And it is virtually certain that if they were confronted on this, their response would be that the "protective powers" of the temple garment are not "magical or mystical," but some other adjective that would make it so they weren't being deceptive. I am sure they already have their response mapped out, if and when it should need to be put into use.



But isn't that the hallmark of deception? To say something in order to give a certain impression while knowing the truth is something else? And then banking on the other person not having enough specialized knowledge to ask the question that will bring the deception to light? And then having a ready-made response to show that the deception was not really deception at all, but just a disagreement about definitions?

It Depends On What The Definition of "Is" Is

Which reminds me of another famous deception—"I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky."

Well, that turned out to be a blatant lie.

Or was it?

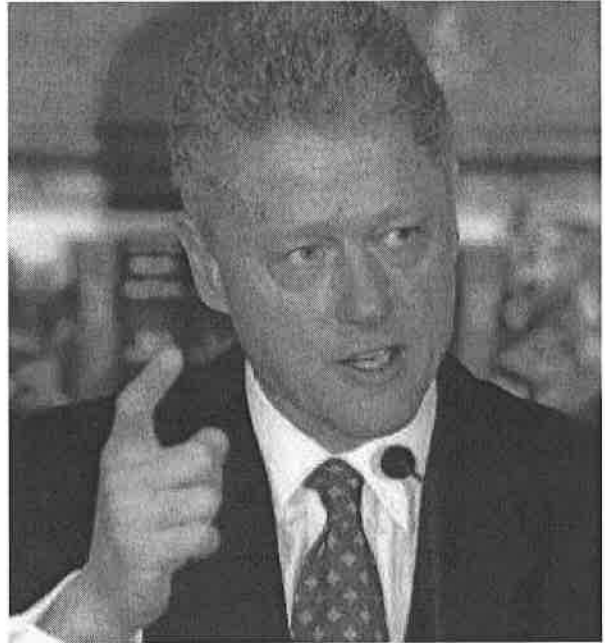
When it came to light that President Clinton really did have “sexual relations” with Monica Lewinsky, his ready-made response was that he did not consider what happened to be “sexual relations.” He likely had his ready-made response in mind when he first made the statement, hoping he would never have to use the response, but having it tucked away in case he should need it.

And he did need it.

And he used it.

And nobody believed him.

The LDS Church should not be going down this same path. Of course, it was easier to confront President Clinton about his denial later when certain evidence came to light. It is not so easy with the LDS garment video.



Why? Because it is anonymous.

As with the recent spate of essays produced by the LDS Church, there are no names attached—no one to take credit; no one to take responsibility for its contents; and most importantly, no one to be held accountable.

The idea promoted by the recent temple clothing video is that the LDS Church has now entered a new age of openness and transparency. And there is some truth in that. But the overriding reality, to my mind, is that the LDS Church is giving the appearance of openness and transparency while simultaneously using deception to hide information it considers sacred.

It is one thing to be opaque, and it is another thing to be transparent. But the worst thing the LDS Church can do is pretend to be transparent while practicing deception.

So how can the LDS Church publicly proclaim there is “nothing magical or mystical about temple garments” when every day and around the world, the same LDS Church is telling its temple patrons the temple garment “will be a shield and a protection to you against the power of the destroyer”?

The answer seems to be in a double-standard that it is acceptable to practice

deception when: (1) It is used on outsiders to protect sacred things; or, (2) When it is used to protect the LDS Church or its leaders.

The New Essays on Plural Marriage

Which brings us to the two new essays on plural marriage recently released by the Church, Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo, and The Manifesto and the End of Plural Marriage. And yes, like the rest, these are also anonymous.

My view is that the new essays are not written as an attempt by the LDS Church to voluntarily enter a new age of transparency. Rather, they are written to counter certain factual information painting the Church and its leaders in a negative light; information that is resulting in the disaffection of many Mormons from the Church;



information that is finding its way into the public discourse in spite of the best efforts of the LDS Church to prevent its members from finding out about it.

While the LDS Church should be congratulated on finally being more open about these aspects of its history, it should not be congratulated on the amount of deception that still manages to be shot through these essays. Some habits are hard to break, it seems.

Due to space limitations, I will focus on only one aspect of one of the essays. The essay is Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo. The aspect is the denials of the same.

Deception Upon Deception

Many scholars believe Joseph Smith practiced deception in denying he was engaging in plural marriage at a time he had many wives in addition to Emma. The Church essay addresses the issue because many Mormons are troubled by this when they find out. But the way the essay deals with the issue is not to simply admit Joseph Smith was being deceptive, but to add a new coat of deception over the old in an attempt to keep the old deception alive and well. Here is the pertinent paragraph from the essay:

The rumors (about plural marriage) prompted members and leaders to issue carefully worded denials that denounced spiritual wifery and polygamy but were silent about what Joseph Smith and others saw as divinely mandated “celestial” plural marriage. The statements emphasized that the Church practiced no marital law other than monogamy while implicitly leaving open the possibility that individuals, under direction of God’s living prophet, might do so.

First, we note that no specific names are mentioned—it is only anonymous “members and leaders” who issued the denials. The fact is we are talking about Joseph Smith.

Second, the essay describes them as “carefully worded denials.” Why does a denial have to be “carefully worded”? Because it is a deception. Because it is a premeditated attempt to get the listener to understand something different than the truth. (See, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman,” another “carefully worded denial.”)

Third, we note the Clintonian shifting of definitions. President Clinton resorted to defending his denial by saying he did not consider what happened with Monica Lewinsky to be “sexual relations.”

Similarly, the essay would have us believe that when “members and leaders” issued their “carefully worded denials” denouncing “polygamy,” that did not mean that “Joseph Smith and others” were not practicing “plural marriage.”



Only people who believed Bill Clinton’s explanation would buy this.

Or, perhaps more realistically, and more unfortunately, many Mormons who did **not** believe Bill Clinton’s explanation **will** buy this. Why will they believe one and not the other when both rationalizations are cut from the same piece of specious cloth? It presumably has less to do with the transparent falsity of the explanation and more to do with who is giving it.

But the deception in this one paragraph continues.

The essay refuses to give us actual examples of these “carefully worded denials.” This refusal is likely because the examples themselves would not jibe with the essay’s explanations. And the authors don’t want to take any chances. They are banking on the fact that the reader is not familiar with the examples and (hopefully) won’t find

them. As bad as the essay's explanations sound, they ring even worse when placed side by side with the denials themselves.

Which I will produce here.

There are two primary denials referenced in the essay. Well, they are not really referenced. In fact, they are not quoted or even cited. But these appear to be the denials for which explanations are given in the essay. The first is from Joseph Smith himself. The second is from the original edition of the Doctrine and Covenants published in 1835.

Joseph Smith's Denials

Joseph Smith denied on several occasions he was practicing plural marriage when he was, in fact, doing so. One of the most famous is this from May 26, 1844, one month before his death: **"What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one."** (History of the Church, Volume 6, p. 411.)

What is the straightforward message of this denial? That Joseph Smith is not practicing plural marriage and has only one wife.

Only by a legalistic parsing of terms could one come up with something different. But



being a lawyer, here goes: (1) Joseph Smith was not practicing adultery because he was actually married to these women; (2) Joseph Smith did not have seven wives; he actually had upwards of thirty wives at this point; and, (3) Joseph Smith could find only one wife, because under the laws of the land, he did have only one wife, all subsequent marriages being illegal.

Now, nobody in their right mind would accept this rationalization as being anything other than deceptive. But it doesn't prevent LDS scholars such as Brian Hales from making such explanations with a straight face.

And the thing that makes this endeavor particularly troublesome is that, while none of these proposed explanations comport with the idea of being honest, the careful reader will note that explanation number 1 actually contradicts explanation number 3.

These are dangerous waters. *Here be dragons.*

Official 1835 Church Denial

The second denial of plural marriage is found in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, which in 101:1 states:

Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.

Now, that seems straightforward enough. The Church in a statement of belief published in an official book of scripture publicly declares in 1835 that “one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband.” No room for equivocation here.

Or is there?

This appears to be the statement the essay seeks to explain away with the justification: **“The statements emphasized that the Church practiced no marital law other than monogamy while implicitly leaving open the possibility that individuals, under direction of God’s living prophet, might do so.”**

So when the Doctrine and Covenants states that “we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband,” it leaves open the “possibility that individuals, under direction of God’s living prophet, might” have more wives than one?

And not only that, such a statement “implicitly” leaves open such a possibility? Orwell, anyone?

Tangled Webs

By publishing this one paragraph in this one essay on its official website, the LDS Church may be revealing more about its current *modus operandi* than about peccadilloes and predilections of prophets past.

Why?

Because it means that the Church can officially publish its belief in one course of conduct while “implicitly” sanctioning the exact opposite.

And not only sanctioning the opposite, but leaving wide the door to actually **do** the opposite.

So if the Church declares its belief that people should not steal, it “implicitly”

sanctions theft?

And if the Church declares its belief that people should not kill, it "implicitly" sanctions murder? (See, *Mountain Meadows*.)

And most significantly in this context, it can only mean that even though the Church declares its belief that people should be honest in all their dealings with their fellow men, it "implicitly" sanctions deception.

So what should we expect when the Church releases unprecedentedly open, honest and transparent essays on troubling aspects of Church history?

The answer, dear reader, is implicit.



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