

Sunstone Symposium Q&A

July 29, 2023

Sandy, Utah

Denver C. Snuffer, Jr.

Steven Pynakker: So, thank you. We'll now open the floor for questions. Please come up to the audience mic to ask your questions...

Denver Snuffer: And I get to decide if I answer.

SP: ...and if we don't have time for your questions, please enter it into the Whova app where your presenter can answer it after the session. Also, it's been requested that the questions remain on topic and that they BE questions.

Question #1: Thank you for your comments. My question comes by way of seeking clarity on a point that I've heard you make a handful of times about hierarchies, and where this talk talks about the hierarchies—the hierarchical institution of the LDS Church—and asserting an idea that there are to be no hierarchies in seeking truth (or something along that line; I'm not trying to put words in your mouth but just trying to make sure I understand what it is that you're trying to say). Because I really appreciated the concepts that Jordan Peterson is... (And I only reference it because, you know, if people aren't familiar with it.) But that hierarchy... Hierarchies are something that are present in everything in nature, in the way that our brains are constructed, in the very way that we look out on the world—that we don't see every detail; we see the hierarchical positions of things that come to us. So is the assertion that you're trying to make that we're trying to eradicate, within practicing Mormonism, complete eradication of hierarchies, or more along the lines of eradicating hierarchies of power, meaning hierarchies of office?

DS: Well, obviously hierarchies of office and power positions are invariably what ambitious people gravitate to. And when they acquire possession of office, then moral authority is no longer what gets respected. It's "office" that gets respected. And therefore, perhaps with good meaning, the lines get a little blurred and they exceed the bounds of propriety. But over time, that becomes a window into abuse.

Are there people who wield more influence within society? As far as I know, Jordan Peterson has not been elected to any office, has not done anything to gain authority or control over anyone, but he wields influence because what he says attracts the notice of and persuades people that he's presenting something that's laudable, persuasive, worthwhile, and ought to be respected. Opinion leaders do not have to have AUTHORITY in order to exert influence. I think if the...

"Office" was fine as long as the person occupying it was a morally straight, trustworthy individual. But as soon as you remove the morally straight, upright individual from the office and you leave the office open for someone else to occupy it, you are now leading yourself into a trajectory that's going to be destructive, as all institutions eventually show us.

We have a great federal government program that anticipated warring factions of ambitious men having divided authority that fight among each other, in the hopes, then, that the public would be left free. And what we see going on in Washington right now is working—kind of—except they didn't anticipate the administrative state, which (at some point) we're gonna have to get rid of.

SP: Okay, here's a question from the Whova app from a member in the audience:

Question #2: You seem to admit that scholars and historians of all stripes disagree with your positions and consider your scholarship to be wishful thinking, illusion, or fiction. Is there any historical evidence or other scholars' works that you would find convincing or that might lead you to reconsider your polygamy-denial position?

DS: Well, yeah; absolutely. If good proof can be generated... I was musing over the LDS Church Historian's volume 15 of *The Joseph Smith [Papers]: Documents*, retelling a transcript of a talk that Joseph Smith had given (in Nauvoo in June of 1844) for which we have three accounts. The documents gave us two of the three accounts, but it excluded—as unreliable—a third account that appears to have been a re-creation by George Smith in 1856, some years after Joseph's martyrdom in 1844. Most of the proof that the LDS historians rely upon in order to create the polygamy narrative are after the death of Joseph Smith and not before.

I respect a lot of the work that LDS historians have done, and I appreciate D. Michael Quinn. He and I disagreed about stuff, and we talked about our disagreements. And the point I made with Michael Quinn was if you take June 27, 1844 (the day that Joseph was killed) and you look at what existed before that date, what evidence do you have to support that Joseph Smith was the originator of polygamy? And what evidence do you have to support the proposition that Joseph Smith opposed polygamy? The record on that date when he died is overwhelmingly—it's not even close—overwhelmingly that Joseph Smith opposed the practice. But you remove him from the place, and you allow people access to the records, and you let them edit the historical journals... (There's more rolling out on that, and I don't want to get high-centered on this one question.) But I'm open to persuasion if you can find me proof. All of the proof that I find is so incredibly suspect that, quite frankly, in a courtroom, an objection could keep it out of evidence!

SP: Okay, another question from the Whova app:

Question #3: Do you agree the church is proud to rebuild the foundation of the Salt Lake Temple yet unwilling to repair cracks in the foundation of their ideology?

DS: Yes. That's well put. Yeah, they're messing with the foundation that... Unfortunately, all of that appears to me to be an ego-driven bunch of rebuilding that doesn't help the original edifice. In fact, they've stripped the interiors. Down in Temple Square, looking at the building under construction a while back and you could see through the windows all the way up to the sky. I mean, they've gutted the original pioneer-era plaster and lath crown moldings and beautiful artisanship; it's gone. It's gonna be replaced by, you know, modern wallboard crown moldings that are manufactured at a plant somewhere, and it's just...it's gone. The artisanship isn't there; they've gutted it. I thought the Lord was going to do

something to destroy the Salt Lake Temple, and in my view, Russell Nelson decided to destroy it on his own. He's succeeded. They're gonna turn it into a movie house.

You're up!

SP: You've got three minutes left. Three minutes left.

Question #4: Okay. You've made the case a number of times that the LDS Church has become this huge corporation, and the segment that is the church itself, the faith portion of it, is relatively...it's just another business. What's their end...? I mean, they've amassed hundreds of billions of dollars at this point. Why do they try to even continue to perpetuate the illusion? What interest do they have in maintaining that little segment when they have this vast wealth from all their commercial businesses?

DS: The religion is the goose that laid the golden egg, and it continues to provide ongoing tax-free-tied revenue that is... It's just an ongoing revenue stream. And you wouldn't kill your revenue stream that is tax-free. It's the goose. And you know, they need it, in part, for some credibility as well. You don't throw away stuff like that if you don't have to.

Yeah?

Question #5: Two questions: One's a really softball question; the other one's a little harder. I was talking to Jeff Foley; he said you had been interested in potentially going to Independence area and doing...

DS: He's ASKED me to do that...

Question #5 (continued): "Potentially." I'm not saying you've committed or anything like that. But in light of this convers[ation]... And that organization's idea was to bring all the cousins of Mormonism together and have a unifying voice. But given your talk today, you wouldn't possibly try and do that talk there to create a unifying voice, I don't think. So, what would you say in that regard? And then my follow-up is the harder question, possibly (maybe not), but do you, then, deny the exaltation of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who also lived plural marriage?

DS: The marriage of Abraham to Hagar was an accommodation Abraham made for his wife; he did not seek that out. And as it turned out, it not only proved to be incapable of being sustained, but it also proved to be a curse that has endured down to today in the ongoing conflict, generation after generation, of the descendants of Ishmael and the descendants of Isaac.

Isaac had one wife! He was not a polygamist.

And Jacob... When I used to teach Gospel Doctrine for all those years and we got to the account of Jacob and his marriage and the father misleading him on his drunken wedding night, I'd mention that it was a scene often repeated in Las Vegas today: *[Behold,] in the morning...it was Leah* (Genesis 9:25 RE)! It's one of the few places where they ought to have thrown in an exclamation point because he was surprised. He was surprised! He didn't... He never gave up on the first wife he wanted, though. And she proved to be barren.

And no...I think there's something in our Scripture—and by “our,” I mean Scripture that has been developed since 2017—that says that each of them, with a singular wife, are exalted. But you'd have to look at the... There's a replacement for D&C section 132 that describes marriage.

And no, I wouldn't come in... I wouldn't go bitch-slap people that are trying to unify. I would remind them of the core, of the most important things—the Christ and Him crucified. That's where we come together. And that matters more than, you know, all of the other financial problems.

SP: Okay, our time is up. Thank you all for attending this session and for supporting Sunstone.