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Doctrine: Models to Evaluate Types and Sources of Latter-day Saint Teachings

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In early 1833, the presiding elder of a small branch in Benson, Vermont, wrote to his brother at Church headquarters in Kirtland, Ohio, hoping to receive guidance from Joseph Smith on a very important question: How do I know what teachings in my branch I should accept as doctrine? He was writing because Jane Sherwood, a woman in his congregation, asserted that she had seen visions of angels and of God that had given her revelation "concerning that which must come hereafter, p[u]rporting indeed that the power of God's Judgment has come & astonishing things soon are to take place."[1]

In response to the inquiry, Joseph Smith wrote back and related an important truth regarding the way true doctrine is disseminated in the Church. Joseph explained, "As it respects the vision you speak of we do not

consider ourselves bound to receive any revelation from any one man or woman without being legally constituted and ordained to that authority and given sufficient proof of it." The Prophet further taught, "I will inform you that it is contrary to the economy of God for any member of the Church or any one to receive instruction for those in authority higher than themselves, therefore you will see the impropriety of giving heed to them." Succinctly, Joseph Smith had laid out essential principles for understanding doctrine in the Lord's restored Church. If a revelation or doctrine was to be given to the Church, it would come from the designated Church authorities, "for the fund[a]mental principals, government and doctrine of the church is invested in the keys of the kingdom."[2]

Questions about Church doctrine did not originate, nor did they cease, in 1833 in Benson, Vermont. Many yet wonder and have pressing questions related to Latter-day Saint "doctrine," such as "If God is unchanging and truth is eternal, then why does Church doctrine sometimes change?" or "Why don't we still teach some of the doctrines that were taught in the early Church? Were they wrong, or are we?" When discussing the Latter-day Saint faith, some imply or assume that everything ever spoken by any Church authority past or present constitutes eternally binding Church doctrine. Additionally, upon hearing an idea brought up in the Church, some want to know, "Is that teaching an *official* doctrine? How can I know?" These questions and many others about Latter-day Saint doctrine have caused difficulty for many, both within and outside the Church.

The purpose of this article is to open a dialogue about the nuances and complexities of Mormon doctrine by proposing two models: the first to evaluate varying *types* of doctrine and the second to evaluate *official sources* of doctrine. We begin by defining and understanding the word *doctrine*. Next we explore various aspects of the word, including concepts such as "eternal doctrine," "supportive doctrine," "policy doctrine," and "esoteric doctrine." We conclude by considering categories that may help us evaluate "official doctrine" and the power in prophetic keys to declare and expand doctrine.

Understanding "Doctrine"

Some of the current confusion surrounding Latter-day Saint doctrine may derive from how it has been variously defined over time, which is primarily a question of semantics. Commonly today, many Latter-day Saints define the word *doctrine* as those things which are eternal or unchanging gospel truths.[3]

However, the term was much more loosely applied by past prophets to also include other types of non-eternal, authoritative teachings.

Dictionaries state that *doctrine*, in its most basic definition, simply means "something that is taught"[4] or "teaching, instruction."[5] This broader understanding of the term is often the way the word is used in scripture. For example, when Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew records that "the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority" (Matthew 7:28–29; see also Matthew 22:33). The word *doctrine* in this verse derives from the Greek *didachē*, meaning "teaching" or "the act of teaching."[6] In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught eternal, timeless truths of the plan of salvation, such as the command to be perfect like God our Father, but he also taught timely cultural applications specific to his hearers, such as the importance of not appearing sad-faced while fasting and responding to lawsuits properly. All of these teachings, whether eternal or dispensation-specific, were part of the Lord's doctrine because they each encompassed part of what he taught (see also Mark 2:27, Mark 11:17–18, Mark 12:38, Luke 4:32).

Historically, Joseph Smith often used the word *doctrine* more in line with this biblical usage of "something that is taught" or "teaching, instruction." The Prophet and his associates, when printing the *Lectures on Faith* from the School of the Prophets, classified them as "Theology," and subtitled them "On the Doctrine of the Church of the Latter Day Saints."[7] In the preface to the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph articulated that the volume "contains in short, the leading items of the religion which we have professed to believe. The first part of the book will be found to contain a series of Lectures as delivered before a Theological class in this place, and in consequence of their embracing the important doctrine of salvation, we have arranged them into the following work."[8] Thus, the *Lectures on Faith* defined Church doctrine to such an extent that Church leaders included these lectures in the 1835 printing of Joseph's canonized revelations as the Doctrine and Covenants, rather than the earlier title, the Book of Commandments. Part 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the lectures, was "The Doctrine," and part 2, Joseph's revelations, was "The Covenants." Because the lectures became part of the canonized scripture, they were taught authoritatively as doctrine. These lectures, however, covered a vast array of topics that included not only eternal, unchanging, simple truths of the gospel but also history, rational theology, elaborative ideas, and pedagogical precepts.[9]

Since Latter-day Saint prophets continually reveal new teachings and interpret doctrines of the past, what is taught in the Church has changed over time. Currently, the Church teaches many things through its official avenues that are different and novel when compared to what was taught when the Church was founded in April of 1830. For example,

1. We emphasize that "exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom can be attained only by those who have faithfully lived the gospel of Jesus Christ and are sealed as eternal companions."[10]
2. Youth are taught not to "disfigure [themselves] with tattoos or body piercings."[11]
3. We declare that God "saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition" into a kingdom of heavenly glory (D&C 76:43).
4. We teach that in the interim between his death and resurrection, Jesus did not go personally to the ungodly and wicked in spirit prison, but that "from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness" (D&C 138:30).
5. Regarding missionary service, "worthy young women who have the desire to serve may be recommended for missionary service beginning at age 19."[12]
6. Faithful members are not to gather to a central location but to "build up Zion wherever we live."[13]

God did not reveal all of his doctrines to Joseph Smith, especially as early as 1830. In fact, many of the doctrines revealed to Joseph, like baptisms for the dead, came to him at the end of his ministry. And unlike many other Christian churches, Latter-day Saints do not believe that all doctrines can be found in scripture. Because we believe in living prophets and continuing revelation, our doctrine is not static, and we will constantly receive new authoritative teachings. The ninth article of faith declares, "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." This does not mean that doctrines cannot be eternal or immovable but that some of them have yet to be revealed and that some of the things from the past will be less authoritative—perhaps even no longer taught. Therefore,

it is deeply important that we understand those core doctrines that are eternal and recognize those that are timely, descriptive, or no longer taught.

Figure 1 provides a model for discussing this broader concept: making core, eternal doctrines the center, yet allowing for us to evaluate additional types of teachings or authoritative statements by General Authorities. This model follows the Church's 2007 statement on doctrine, which explains that "some doctrines are more important than others" and that central among these various doctrines are those that "might be considered core doctrines."[14] To analyze LDS doctrine, we explore each part of this model and discuss potential implications for our understanding and application. The model encourages the evaluation of each doctrine and requires careful historical and theological thought to understand the meaning of doctrines past, present, and future, rather than basic acceptance of all declarative statements being eternally binding.
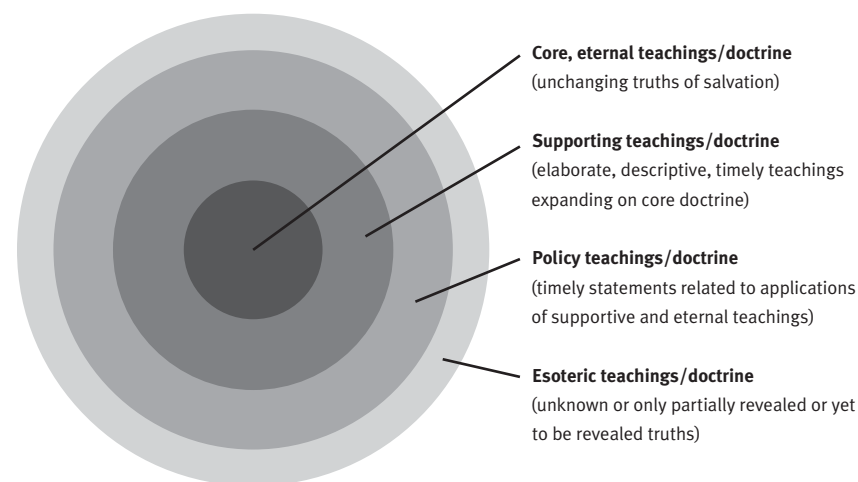

Core, eternal teachings/doctrine
(unchanging truths of salvation)

Supporting teachings/doctrine
(elaborate, descriptive, timely teachings expanding on core doctrine)

Policy teachings/doctrine
(timely statements related to applications of supportive and eternal teachings)

Esoteric teachings/doctrine
(unknown or only partially revealed or yet to be revealed truths)

Figure 1. Types of LDS doctrine.

Core, Eternal Doctrine

There are teachings that could be termed "core doctrines" or "eternal doctrines." In the words of Elder David A. Bednar, these are "gospel doctrines [that] are eternal, do not change, and pertain to the eternal progression and exaltation of Heavenly Father's sons and daughters."[15] Elder B. H. Roberts of the Seventy said that "the great framework of the plan of salvation" has "certain truths

that are not affected by ever-changing circumstances; truths which are always the same, no matter how often they may be revealed; truths which are elementary, permanent, fixed; from which there must not be, and cannot be, any departure without condemnation."[16] Such eternal truths that do not change may include the nature of God, the eternal makeup of the spirit, the universal resurrection, and the work and the glory of God to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of his children (see Moses 1:39). The Church's founding "Articles and Covenants," found in Doctrine and Covenants 20, contain a succinct declaration of core, timeless doctrines, beginning in verse 17 with "there is a God in heaven, who is infinite and eternal," who "created man, male and female, after his own image" (v. 18) and "gave unto them commandments" (v. 19). However, by departing from his ways, humankind "became fallen" (v. 20). "Wherefore, the Almighty God gave his Only Begotten Son" (v. 21) so that through belief in the Savior's divine sacrifice and through the covenant of baptism mankind "should be saved" (v. 25). Those that "worship the Father in his name, and endure in faith on his name to the end" (v. 29) will receive both "justification" (v. 30) and "sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (v. 31). Such truths are at the heart of what has been taught, is taught, and will yet be taught in all dispensations. Such plan-of-salvation truths are what Elder Boyd K. Packer referred to when he said there are "doctrines" which "will remain fixed, eternal."[17]

As emphasized in Doctrine and Covenants 20, the apex of these timeless, eternal, and unchanging doctrines is what is sometimes referred to as *the doctrine of Christ*—that Jesus is the Savior of the world and salvation is found through his name alone (see Mosiah 3:17). The Lord said, "This is my doctrine, . . . that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me. And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God. And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned. Verily, verily, I say unto you, *that this is my doctrine*" (3 Nephi 11:32–35; emphasis added; see also 2 Nephi 31:21, 3 Nephi 27:13–21, D&C 33:11–12). The doctrine of Christ and the centrality of his redeeming Atonement will never change, being a fixed and permanent focal point to the plan of God.

Although eternal truths do not vary, what is understood and officially taught can vary as prophets come to comprehend core doctrines more clearly (2 Nephi 28:30).[18] Many modern Latter-day Saints assume that because the gospel of Christ is eternal, God's prophets have all known the end from the beginning and understand all truths, not only those that have been revealed, but those that will yet be revealed. But Brigham Young taught that Joseph Smith did not know everything about the plan of salvation or his role in the Restoration as he walked out of the Sacred Grove following his experience with God and Jesus. Instead, truths were revealed to him point by point as he learned over many years. Brigham Young explained:

> The Lord can't reveal to you and I that we can't understand; . . . for instance when Joseph first received revelation the Lord could not tell him what he was going to do. He didn't tell him he was going to call him to be a prophet, seer, revelator, high priest, and founder of [the] kingdom of God on earth. Joseph would have said . . . "just what does that mean? You are talking that I can't understand." He could merely reveal to him that the Lord was pleased to bless him and forgive his sins and there was a work for him to perform on the earth and that was about all he could reveal. The first time he sent [an] angel to visit him he could then lead his mind a little further. He could reveal to him there was certain records deposited in the earth to be brought forth for the benefit of [the] inhabitants of the earth. He could reveal after this that Joseph could get them; then he could reveal he should have power to translate the records from the language and characters in which it was written and give it to the people in the English language, but this was not taught him first . . . He could then tell him he was to be called a prophet. He could then reveal to Joseph that he might take Oliver Cowdery into water and baptize him and ordain him to [the] priesthood. After this he could tell him he could receive the high priesthood to organize the church and so on. . . . This is the way the Lord has to instruct all people upon the earth. I make mention of this to show you that . . . the Lord can't teach all things to people at once. He gives a little here [a] little there, revelation upon revelation, on revelation after revelation, a precept today, tomorrow another, next day another. If the people make good use of it and improve upon what the Lord gives them, then he is ready to bestow more.[19]

"New" eternal truths revealed to Joseph Smith, such as the universal resurrection and salvation of the human family in degrees of heavenly glory (D&C 76), have always existed, even prior to the Vision in February of 1832. As scholar Robert J. Matthews pointed out, "Through the experience of translating the Bible, Joseph Smith was to come into possession of knowledge he did not previously have."[20] As the Apostle Paul taught, the Lord's prophets "know in part, and we prophesy in part" because, although they are seers, they do not see all; "for now we see through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12). As seers continue to see, and new eternal truths are revealed more fully, former perceptions distorted by the lenses of mortality will be clarified, expanded, adapted, and changed as they come to learn and teach "that which is perfect" and then "that which is in part shall be done away" (1 Corinthians 13:10).

Supporting Doctrines

Many doctrines strengthen our belief in and elaborate on the core doctrines. Some are timely answers, and others are authoritative interpretations by prophets. For example, if a core doctrine is that God exists, understanding his corporality will help us better comprehend his nature, and in turn, deepen our faith in him. Additionally, since we were created in God's bodily image, knowing how God obtained his form and image can expand our understanding and faith even further. Christ's Atonement is core and essential, but teachings that discuss how he suffered and what he suffered serve to expand upon the core concept of Atonement and redemption. Supporting doctrines can be eternal truths, but knowledge of them, unlike core doctrines, are not necessarily essential for salvation. In other words, supporting doctrines help us understand and elaborate on the eternal doctrines of salvation. They expand upon our understanding of core doctrines, often providing explanation of "how" such teachings function.

An example of a core, eternal doctrine is that Jesus Christ will return to earth and reign as its rightful king and lawgiver. It has been further revealed as a supporting doctrine that a righteous city of New Jerusalem will be built and Christ's people will gather to prepare for his return. Other supporting doctrines related to the Second Coming are that there will be a great gathering in Adam-ondi-Ahman to prepare for Christ's millennial rule, that when Jesus returns to the earth the Mount of Olives will split, that the Jewish people will recognize the Lord as the Messiah (see D&C 45:51–53), that Satan will be bound, and that there will be a thousand-year period of peace. These teachings may not be essential for salvation, but they elaborate upon, expand our understanding about, increase our faith in, and provide potential "hows" to the core doctrine of Christ's return to earth. This supporting ring of doctrine has the potential to include many doctrines of the Church. Although knowledge of supporting doctrines may not be essential for salvation, the truths in them have an eternal element that make them distinct from doctrines that may be termed as policy or procedure.

Policy Doctrine

Church policy is always authoritative, but it inevitably changes as the Church forms new policies that adjust, expand, and react to the situations of the membership. Policy doctrines are formed as the Church addresses issues in each generation to help bring to pass the eternal life of mankind. These are

"the organization, programs, and procedures [that] will be altered as directed by Him whose church this is."[21] Or as President Dieter F. Uchtdorf taught, "Procedures, programs, policies, and patterns of organization are helpful for our spiritual progress here on earth, but let's not forget that they are subject to change. In contrast, the core of the gospel—the doctrine and the principles—will never change."[22]

Policy doctrines are based on eternal, essential truths and supporting doctrines. They can include such teachings as ordaining worthy young men to the priesthood at age twelve, standards for dress and grooming, placing baptismal fonts under the ground, not drinking wine, and changes in Church structure, such as the role of the Seventies or who attends Church council meetings. Surely such teachings as these have not existed in all dispensations and are therefore subject to change based on inspiration and revelation by those who hold the keys to establish laws for the Church. Joseph Smith wrote, "Whatsoever those men [priesthood leaders] did in authority, in the name of the Lord, and did it truly and faithfully, and kept a proper and faithful record of the same, it became a law on earth in heaven" (D&C 128:9).

Policy doctrine exists because God reveals different behavioral applications and policies to his children based on their temporal circumstances. The Word of Wisdom is a modern example of policy doctrine. Restrictions on tea and coffee and wine have not been in effect in all dispensations, yet because the Lord foresaw "evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days" (D&C 89:4), he provided a new doctrine for the "benefit" (D&C 89:1) of the Saints. This doctrine, in particular, has taken many shifts in policy, and eventually by 1933 the Church handbook of instruction required members to strictly follow the Word of Wisdom to be able to enter into the temple. Similarly, the doctrinal teachings restricting multiple earrings were not authoritatively taught prior to President Gordon B. Hinckley's prophetic counsel.

Policy doctrines are likely to change and be given different emphases depending upon the needs and direction of Church leadership during the time—with each era being commanded and inspired in order to guide the Church to accomplish its mission in varied circumstances over time.

Esoteric Doctrine

The word *esoteric* implies teachings that are only understood by a small group of people. Its synonyms are words such as *obscure* and *ambiguous*. Not all

doctrines have been revealed, and there are also doctrines no longer taught that may be true but are not necessary for our understanding now. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that "it is not always wise to relate all the truth. Even Jesus, the Son of God, had to refrain from doing so, and had to restrain His feelings many times for the safety of Himself and His followers, and had to conceal the righteous purposes of His heart in relation to many things pertaining to His Father's kingdom."[23] As M. Gerald Bradford and Larry E. Dahl succinctly stated about "doctrine" in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, "Many individuals write or preach their views. Some, by study and obedience, may learn truths that go beyond the stated position of the Church, but this does not authorize them to speak officially for the Church or to present their views as binding on the Church. There are many subjects about which the scriptures are not clear and about which the Church has made no official pronouncements. In such matters, one can find differences of opinion among Church members and leaders. Until the truth of these matters is made known by revelation, there is room for different levels of understanding and interpretation of unsettled issues."[24] The Prophet Joseph lamented, "I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have, of the glories of the Kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive it."[25]

In April 1829, the Lord revealed through Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery that "other records have I, that I will give unto you power that you may assist to translate" (D&C 9:2). During that same period, Joseph protected the gold plates, which included a large sealed portion translated by Moroni that God would reveal to them later. The book of Ether declared, "Touch them not in order that ye may translate; for that thing is forbidden you, except by and by it shall be wisdom in God" (Ether 5:1). Moroni testified after he had translated the brother of Jared's vision as the sealed portion of the gold plates that "never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest to the brother of Jared" (Ether 4:4). Moroni and the brother of Jared were not the only people who were privileged enough to know the things that were sealed in gold plates. In fact, Moroni explained that "after Christ truly had showed himself unto his people [3 Nephi 11, 24, 26] he commanded that [the things the brother of Jared saw] should be made manifest" to them (Ether 4:2). Therefore, there are greater doctrines that were known to them that are not known to us. These esoteric doctrines are true but are not declared openly. These examples demonstrate that there are

doctrines that are not currently taught but are valid. This opens an avenue for us to evaluate doctrines that are no longer taught but were at some time taught authoritatively. This does not mean that all things taught in the past will eventually be revealed as core, eternal truth, but it does suggest that we should evaluate authoritative statements of the past with vigor and hope for more doctrines in the future.

In some cases, esoteric doctrines are referred to as "deep doctrines" in a somewhat negative tone. Yet, we are told that one day we will read the sealed portion of the gold plates in hopes that it will bring us closer to Christ (see Ether 4; 5). The Lord promises that to the obedient he will "give the mysteries of my kingdom" (D&C 63:23), even to the point of giving "things which have never been revealed" (Alma 26:22). Generally, we discuss and search for esoteric doctrines in private rather than in public. These teachings are esoteric because we do not proclaim them publically or officially, although they may be true and have been taught or will yet be given in the future.

Baptism: An Example of Types of Doctrine

As a potential example of the four types of doctrine in our model, we will analyze the doctrines of baptism. As an example of "core" doctrine, Doctrine and Covenants 20 indicates the essential nature of baptism for the salvation of all humankind. However, how everyone was to have access to the ordinance of baptism was not always understood at the inception of this dispensation. In 1836, Joseph received a vision of the celestial kingdom in the Kirtland temple that showed him his beloved brother Alvin residing there, and Joseph "marveled how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had set his hand to gather Israel the second time, and had not been baptized for the remission of sins" (D&C 137:6). Joseph himself seemed surprised, given the strictness of the teaching that baptism was essential for salvation in the celestial kingdom. The voice of the Lord further instructed him, "All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom" (D&C 137:7–8). Still, the apparent contradiction stood without explanation until Joseph Smith revealed, in the funeral sermon of Seymour Brunson in August 1840, that members could perform proxy baptisms for their deceased relatives, a doctrine on which he

further elaborated over successive years.[26] Initially, baptisms for the dead were performed in rivers without proper record keeping, with very little instruction about proper procedures. Joseph Smith later revealed a policy that there would come a time when baptisms for the dead would have to be performed in sacred temples where witnesses and recorders were present (D&C 124; 127).

- Baptism is a core doctrine of salvation.
- Baptism for the dead is a supportive, essential doctrine revealed to explain the process by which every soul will have the opportunity to be baptized.
- How and where proxy baptisms can legitimately be performed has been established by the policy of the Church.
- Precisely how these proxy baptisms will be accepted by the deceased in the spirit world has not be been fully revealed and may be considered an esoteric doctrine.

Core doctrine
Baptism

Supporting doctrine
Baptisms for the dead

Policy doctrine
Performing proxy baptisms in the temple and keeping a record of them

Esoteric doctrine
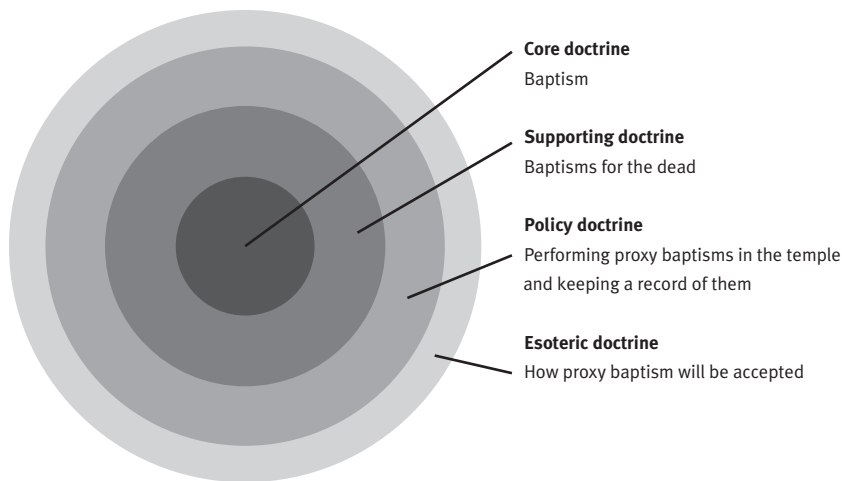How proxy baptism will be accepted

Figure 2. Baptism as an example of types of doctrine.

Helpful Tools to Evaluate Doctrine

Because we have a lay membership that is required to teach each other the doctrines of the kingdom (D&C 88:77), members will, inevitably, need to evaluate the Church's authorized teachings. How can we know if the Church stands behind a particular teaching as one of its authorized doctrines? Although a variety of things are taught in the Church (and thus may be

considered part of Latter-day Saint doctrine), the following four[27] questions are designed to help point us in the right direction when we are looking for official teachings.

1. Is it repeatedly found in the scriptures?
2. Is it proclaimed by the united voice of the current Brethren?
3. Is it consistently taught by current General Authorities and general officers acting in their official capacity?
4. Is it found in recent Church publications or statements?

Let's briefly analyze each of these four potential sources of official Latter-day Saint Church doctrine.

The harmonized scriptures. The officially accepted Latter-day Saint scriptures (the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price) are primary sources that members should address when identifying doctrine. Indeed, these books are often colloquially called the "standard" works, implying "accepted," or a benchmark criterion for doctrine. Elder B. H. Roberts of the Seventy taught, "The Church has confined the sources of doctrine by which it is willing to be bound before the world to the things that God has revealed, and which the Church has officially accepted, and those alone. . . . These have been repeatedly accepted and endorsed by the Church in general conference assembled, and are the only sources of absolute appeal for our doctrine."[28] Professor Robert L. Millet wrote, "In determining whether something is a part of the doctrine of the Church, we might ask, 'Is it found within the four standard works?'"[29] Elder D. Todd Christofferson said, "The scriptures are the touchstone for measuring correctness and truth."[30]

It should be noted, however, that simply because something is found within the pages of canonized scripture does not mean that it represents the Church's official doctrine (see Articles of Faith 1:8). When using scripture to define official doctrines, we are also to seek truths that are often repeated and internally self-consistent. Although it is found in the New Testament, for example, we would not proclaim as our doctrine that "no man hath seen God at any time" (1 John 4:12), because this singular verse sets outside many other harmonized examples of those who have seen God face-to-face (see Exodus 24:9–10, 33:11; Genesis 32:30; Acts 7:55–56, Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17). Elder Russell M. Nelson taught, "In the Bible we read this important declaration: 'In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word

be established' (2 Corinthians 13:1). This assures God's children that divine doctrines are confirmed by more than one scriptural witness. . . . Scriptural witnesses authenticate each other."[31] Similarly, Elder Boyd K. Packer taught that "essential truths are repeated over and over again [in the scriptures]. . . . Every verse, whether oft-quoted or obscure, must be measured against other verses. There are complementary and tempering teachings in the scriptures which bring a balanced knowledge of truth."[32]

Additionally, some doctrines in scripture, like the required ordinance of circumcision for males or the performances of the law of Moses, or policy doctrines such as requiring missionaries to leave without purse (money) or scrip (food) (see Matthew 10:9–10; D&C 24:18), have been superseded by later revelation or prophetic direction (see Galatians 6:15; 3 Nephi 9:17; 3 Nephi 15:8). Thus we should look to see if a scriptural teaching is confirmed by modern revelation or supplanted by it.

The united voice of the current Brethren. Because the words of the Lord never cease, we look to the Brethren to declare his current voice and will to his church and people. We do not believe in *sola scriptura* (by scripture alone), but in *sola prophēta* (by prophet alone).[33] One of the roles of the prophet, as President Gordon B. Hinckley said when he was President of the Church, is to "declare doctrine."[34] Those who also hold all the keys of the kingdom, namely the First Presidency (D&C 81:2), "receive the oracles for the whole church" (D&C 124:126). Sustained by the key-holding Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (D&C 112:30), "with divine inspiration" these two highest governing bodies of the Church "counsel together to establish doctrine."[35]

In a recent *Ensign* article titled "How Is Doctrine Established?," LaRene Porter Gaunt of Church magazines wrote, "When revelation is doctrine for the whole Church, it comes to only the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. . . . The prophet and President of the Church can receive revelation individually that becomes doctrine when it is sustained by the united voice of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles."[36] This is consistent with the scriptural injunction to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Seventy in Doctrine and Covenants 107:27 that "every decision made by either of these quorums must be by the unanimous voice of the same; that is, every member in each quorum must be agreed to its decisions, in order to make their decisions of the same power or validity one with the other" (D&C 107:27).

President Gordon B. Hinckley expounded on the point of prophetic unanimity, relating that "any major questions of policy, procedures, programs, or doctrine are considered deliberately and prayerfully by the First Presidency and the Twelve together. . . . No decision emanates from the deliberations of the First Presidency and the Twelve without total unanimity among all concerned."[37] Recently, Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, "When the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve speak with a united voice, it is the voice of the Lord for that time."[38] Although "the objective is not simply consensus among council members but revelation from God,"[39] as Elder Christofferson reminded, prophetic unanimity cannot be lightly overlooked, as without it there is not the "same power or validity" (D&C 107:27) in united doctrinal pronouncements.

Examples of doctrine proclaimed by the united voice of the current First Presidency and Twelve Apostles can include statements such as letters from the First Presidency, official declarations and proclamations, and official handbooks of instruction. There are other books, manuals, publications, or documents released under the approval or sanction of the united voice of the current prophets, such as *Preach My Gospel.*[40] Additionally, there are official announcements made or released under the united voice of the prophets. For example, in the press conference after announcing the change of the mission ages for males and females in October 2012, Elder Russell M. Nelson said of the age change, "This has been the subject of much study and prayer. We as a First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve are united in our decision to make these important adjustments."[41]

Repeated teachings from the current General Authorities and officers. An additional method to evaluate whether something may be considered part of official Latter-day Saint doctrine is to determine if something is being taught collectively by the current general Church authorities and officers acting in their official capacity. For example, currently many Church leaders are making a pronounced effort to increase devotion to the Sabbath day and meaning to the ordinance of the sacrament, with Church leaders sending training videos and other materials to Church leaders for dissemination in their wards and branches. In another example, a supportive doctrine of Christ's Atonement—his "enabling power" or "strengthening power"—has been oft-repeated in official Church settings by Church officers acting in their capacity.[42] However, the phrase "enabling power" is not found in the standard works, nor is it found in any known official, united statement by the First

Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.[43] Undoubtedly, however, Jesus Christ's enabling power is an official, supportive doctrine of the Church because it is oft-repeated and taught collectively by numerous Church officers acting in their official capacity. Venues of delivering authorized Church doctrine by Church officers include general conference addresses, worldwide leadership trainings and broadcasts, regional conferences, and trainings and seminars for ecclesiastical leaders.

There is safety in the cumulative teachings of general Church officers. Though many doctrines are emphasized, those that have staying power and find their way into the talks and statements delivered to the membership of the Church by numerous authorities can be trusted more than individual statements. As the LDS Newsroom article "Approaching Mormon Doctrine" reminds, "A single statement made by a single leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, but is not meant to be officially binding [doctrine] for the whole Church."[44] As Elder Neil L. Andersen said, "The doctrine of the Church . . . is not hidden in an obscure paragraph of one talk. True principles are taught frequently and by many. Our doctrine is not difficult to find."[45]

Current/recent publications of the Church. While not carrying the weight of harmonized scripture or the united voice of the Brethren, official doctrine for the Church is also taught via the Church's authorized publications. The LDS Newsroom statement reminds us that "[Church doctrine] is consistently proclaimed in official Church publications." While much of the content contained within official church publications is written by curriculum personnel, scholars, and lay members alike, "All of the [Church publications] . . . are reviewed and cleared . . . before they are published and issued to the Church" said Elder Dean L. Larsen of the First Quorum of Seventy while acting as the managing director of Curriculum Resources. He also stated, "Official publications of the Church carry messages that are sound in doctrine and fully in harmony with currently approved policies and procedures."[46]

Examples of official Church publications that publish authorized doctrine include current Church magazines such as the *Ensign* or *New Era*; seminary and institute manuals; priesthood and relief society manuals; items published by © Intellectual Reserve/Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, such as the *Addiction Recovery Program*; scholarly publications such as *The Joseph Smith Papers* from the Church Historian's Press; and web content on official Church spaces such as

mormon.org, lds.org, and LDS Newsroom. While these publications are not the ultimate source for appeal of eternal, supportive, policy, or esoteric doctrine, they can be considered trustworthy sources that represent teachings of authorized Church doctrine.

Evaluating Official LDS Teachings			
These four factors merely serve to assist in evaluating the extent to which an LDS teaching may be considered authoritative or "official." **Is the teaching found in . . .**			
The *Current Publications* of the Church	The *Repeated Teachings* of Current General Authorities/ Officers	The *United Voice* of the First Presidency and Twelve Apostles	The *Harmonized Scriptures*
The books, manuals, magazines published through the Church's official outlets and presses such as · Official websites · Teacher manuals · The Bible Dictionary · Church magazine articles · © Intellectual Reserve · LDS.org topics essays · The Joseph Smith Papers	What is being taught collectively, cohesively, and consistently by general Church leaders acting in official capacities such as · General conference addresses · Worldwide broadcasts/ trainings · Regional conference talks · Seminars and trainings	Official united pronouncements, proclamations, and publications from the current Prophets, Seers, and Revelators such as · Official Declarations and Proclamations · Letters from the First Presidency · Official Handbooks of Instruction · Books, documents, announcements under the official signature of the First Presidency or Twelve Apostles	Teachings that are found repeatedly and consistently in the *canonized revelations and scriptural writings of the prophets in · The Holy Bible · The Book of Mormon · The Doctrine and Covenants · The Pearl of Great Price * *Formally accepted by the Church and its members as standard works*

Figure 3. Official Sources of LDS doctrine.

Applying the Models

It is our hope that understanding *types* and also *official sources* of LDS doctrine in the two models we have proposed can help learners better evaluate and understand various Latter-day Saint teachings. As an example of how

these models may inform various LDS teachings, we will briefly analyze three family-centered doctrinal subjects.

Family Home Evening

As a simple and fairly noncontroversial example, what type of doctrine is family home evening? It doesn't seem that family home evening is a core, eternal truth necessary to know or believe for salvation, nor an elaborative teaching to help us better understand core truths. Family home evening likely fits most as an example of a policy doctrine—a timely teaching for the Latter-day Saints helping us to better apply core, eternal truths related to the family. Using the second of the proposed models herein, if one were to ask "Is family home evening an *official* teaching of the Church today?" the answer would be, "Yes, it is." Although the family home evening program may not be specifically taught in the scriptures, the concept of righteous parents gathering their children to teach gospel truths is found consistently in the standard works (see 1 Nephi 1:1; Enos 1:1; Mosiah 1:2, Mosiah 4:15; D&C 68:25–30; D&C 93:40–48). Specifically, the directive to hold family home evening on Monday is found in the current official *Handbook of Instructions 2* in section 1.4.2.[47] The counsel to hold family home evenings has also been declared repeatedly in recent general conference addresses[48] and is found published in multiple official current Church publications, such as the *Family Home Evening Resource Book,* the *Family Guidebook*, or the family home evening page on lds.org.[49] In summary, family home evening could be categorized as an official policy doctrine of the Church.

Jesus's Marriage Status

How might the two models proposed herein help us understand a more controversial doctrine, such as whether Jesus was married in mortality and to whom? This question arises not only out of curiosity and doctrinal assumption (some deduce that if eternal marriage is required for exaltation, and surely the Lord is exalted, therefore he must be married) but also due to the teachings of some early Latter-day Saint Apostles. Elder Orson Hyde taught in the October 1854 general conference that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and that the wedding at Cana of Galilee was Jesus's own,[50] to which President Brigham Young arose and gave an "amen" to Elder Hyde's comments.[51] Apostle Orson Pratt also wrote in *The Seer* that the Savior was married, suggesting

perhaps that he had more wives than one.[52] There is also evidence in 1883 of Joseph F. Smith teaching that Jesus was married.[53]

Using our proposed models to evaluate doctrine, Jesus being married could be argued as a doctrine of the Church in the mid- to latter-nineteenth century based on the cumulative teachings of Church General Authorities. However, there is no known revelation on the subject, nor united statement from the First Presidency and the Twelve, and the cumulative standard works seem to evade the issue. Like other early doctrines, Jesus's marriage status faded from public teaching over the next decades and moved into the realm of the unknown or undeclared. In 1912 President Charles W. Penrose, as a member of the First Presidency, broached the subject in the *Improvement Era* and said: "We do not know anything about Jesus Christ being married. The Church has no authoritative declaration on the subject."[54] Decades later, a 1997 *Ensign* article suggested that answering the question, "Was Jesus married?" was "inappropriate to discuss in a classroom setting."[55] In 2006, due primarily to the popularity of the novel *The Da Vinci Code*, which posited that Jesus was married and had children, the Church officially released a statement through its spokesperson, saying, "The belief that Christ was married has never been official Church doctrine. It is neither sanctioned nor taught by the church."[56] Thus, while once perhaps being an authoritative teaching, using the model of *official sources* of doctrine, it is no longer an authorized teaching of the Church. It's absent in the Church's current official publications, it is not taught cumulatively by the modern General Authorities, nor is it declared by the united voice of the modern First Presidency and Apostles. Using our model of *types* of doctrine, Jesus's marriage status now rightly belongs to the esoteric ring of doctrine—something once known or taught by others and one day may be taught again, but is not known, taught openly, or declared authoritatively today. It is now a nonauthorized, esoteric teaching.

Heavenly Mother

Many wonder about teachings on our Mother in Heaven. What does the Church teach officially about her? Are teachings about her also esoteric or unauthorized, like Jesus's marriage status? Our models herein would say no. Recently, the Church released an official essay on lds.org addressing the Church's fundamental doctrines related to Heavenly Mother.[57] Teachings confirming her divine existence are found also in our current published hymnal.[58] Many recent Church authorities have also spoke of Heavenly Mother in

official settings such as general conference.[59] Related to sources of official or authorized teachings, the 1995 united statement of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" declares, "Each [person] is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly *parents*, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny."[60] Specifically the First Presidency in 1909 unitedly declared, "all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity."[61] While the harmonized scriptural record does not specifically address Mother in Heaven, teachings about our divine Mother are openly and authoritatively declared by the united voice of the modern prophets, their cumulative teachings, and in official Church publications, thus supporting its status as an official doctrine of the Church.

Applying the first model, what *type* of doctrine may our belief in Heavenly Mother be? The Church's official essay on lds.org says, "The doctrine of a Heavenly Mother is a cherished and distinctive belief among Latter-day Saints."[62] While not using the word "core" or "essential," clearly the doctrine that exaltation is predicated upon the eternal sealing of a man and woman is central to our theology (see D&C 131:1–4; D&C 132:19–22). Teachings about Heavenly Mother may be considered as supportive doctrine to this core teaching related to eternal marriage and godhood. Considering who our deified Mother may be, or how she attained her exalted station, or what her specific influence or mission may be in our quest for salvation seems to fall into the realm of esoteric doctrine. Clearly she loves us,[63] and we await further revealed knowledge on the subject, to be received with gladness. Until then, as the official essay on the subject emphasizes, "our present knowledge about a Mother in Heaven is limited."[64]

These are but a few examples of how the models proposed herein may help to better understand Latter-day saint doctrinal teachings. We make no claim that our conclusions on these previous examples are definitive or even correct. We merely offer them as examples of how our models proposed herein may help facilitate understanding, evaluation, and a starting point for discussion on various doctrinal subjects, whether the subject is fairly benign like Jesus's birth date and whether priesthood holders should wear white shirts when officiating in ordinances, or more sensitive and controversial teachings past and present, such as priesthood restrictions, plural marriage, or same-gender marriage.

Conclusion: Expanding Doctrine

In Mormonism, the current prophets identify the authentic and authoritative doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Though scripture, personal experience, tradition, and our own reason are constantly part of our evaluation of doctrine, prophetic declaration reigns supreme. The concept of continuing revelation, expressed in the ninth article of faith, has allowed for prophets to address each generation and the Church to build "line upon line, precept upon precept" with a certain kind of flexibility that is limited when doctrine can only be found within the pages of the Bible, or to being only that which is eternal and unchanging. All of this implies that new ideas, altered concepts, expanded teachings, and additional knowledge will be given, thus requiring what we teach—our "doctrine"—to also be expandable. The very notions of a living Church and continuing revelation suggest that any statement on doctrine is not a declaration of eternal finality but temporary understanding or expediency.

When doctrine becomes too fixed, it loses its inert potential for revelation. The Prophet Joseph Smith opposed the idea of too strict a definition of the tenants of the Latter-day Saint faith, even after he published his own "Articles of Faith" in a letter to John Wentworth in March of 1842. As Joseph told a Mr. Butterfield who interviewed him in 1843, "The most prominent point of difference in sentiment between the Latter Day Saints [*sic*] and Sectarians was, that the latter were all circumscribed by some peculiar creed, which deprived its members the privilege of believing any thing not contained therein: Whereas the Latter Day Saints [*sic*] have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time."[65]

We are not ignorant to the contradictions of our own positions within this paper—that we are encouraging a more flexible and expansive understanding of Latter-day Saint doctrine, all the while drawing circles and lines to confine it. Defining Church doctrine is much like trying to identify humility: the moment you proclaim it, you have lost its very essence. Thus, although we have proposed delineations of Latter-day Saint doctrine, our models proposed herein—like the nature of doctrine itself—are meant to be flexible and aid in coming to a clearer understanding of truth. To do anything contrary is opposed to the very concept of revelation and living oracles. We anticipate that readers of this article may question whether something is an eternal doctrine or a supportive doctrine, or whether something is considered policy or

esoteric doctrine. We expect that persons will come to differing conclusions not only about which category of doctrine a certain teaching may be placed, but that they may even disagree with the categorical definitions and delineations we have proposed in this paper. We hope this is the case and that these models will act as a springboard for not only helping to answer questions or concerns related to Latter-day Saint doctrine but also further discussion and debate about how doctrine is explained.

Although understanding Latter-day Saint doctrine requires believers to turn to the prophets, it also requires personal evaluation and rigorous study. The declarative nature of doctrine may seem rigid, but its flexibility is also paramount. To be too rigid in defining doctrine goes against the very concept Joseph Smith articulated about creeds: it closes us to new and expansive ways of seeing, understanding, believing, and teaching. Latter-day Saint doctrine is that which we teach—eternal, supportive, policy, esoteric, among others—guided and revealed and officially proclaimed by authorized, key-holding prophets, seers, and revelators. That which tries to confine the Lord and his servants from receiving and teaching anything that is not eternally expansive in nature simply is not Latter-day Saint doctrine. RE

Notes

1. John Sims Carter, journal, 10 March and 5 April 1833, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

2. Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Brent M. Rogers, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds. *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834*, vol. 3 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2014), 59–61.

3. The current Seminaries and Institutes of Religion's *Gospel Teaching and Learning* manual uses the following definition of doctrine: "A doctrine is a fundamental, unchanging truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Church Educational System, *Gospel Teaching and Learning: A Handbook for Teachers and Leaders in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), 26.

4. Dictionary.com, s.v. "doctrine."

5. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. "doctrine."

6. *Strong's Concordance* G1321 rendering "doctrine" as *didachē*, meaning "1. Teaching" and "2. The act of teaching."

7. Doctrine and Covenants, 1835 ed., http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835#!/paperSummary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835&p=13.

8. Preface, Doctrine and Covenants, 1835 ed.

9. The authoritative power of these lectures goes from one prophet simply teaching something to a declaration voted upon by the Church and published as scripture. These profound lectures on "doctrine" cover a vast array of topics, from eternal truths such as the creation of the world and the Fall of man in Lecture First; to historical dates, ages, and lists of righteous men in Lecture Second; to elaborative and supportive theology such as the three

necessary components to have true faith in God in Lecture Third; to esoteric and arcane concepts in Lecture Fifth such as "there are two personages" that make up the Godhead: "The Father being a personage of spirit . . . the Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a personage of tabernacle." *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 5:2. All of these ideas, some of which may not be eternal and unchanging, were part of "something that is taught" or "teaching, instruction" and thus represented part of the doctrine of the Latter-day Saints at that time.

10. *Handbook 2: Administering in the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 3.

11. "Dress and Appearance," in *For the Strength of Youth* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 7.

12. Thomas S. Monson, "Welcome to Conference," *Ensign*, November 2012, 5.

13. "Zion," in *True to the Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 189.

14. LDS Newsroom, "Approaching Mormon Doctrine," May 4, 2007.

15. David A. Bednar, *Increase in Learning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 151. On another occasion, before he was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, then BYU–Idaho President David A. Bednar taught, "Doctrine refers to the eternal, unchanging, and simple truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ." "Teach Them to Understand," Ricks College Campus Education Week devotional, 4 June 1998, 4.

16. *Improvement Era*, May 1900, 576–77.

17. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1989, 18–19.

18. The prophet Mormon provides an interesting example of how new and additional doctrinal understanding comes to the Lord's prophets. As Mormon edited 3 Nephi chapter 28, he discussed the three Nephite disciples who were translated. Mormon mentioned that he did not know if the three Nephites "were mortal or immortal" (3 Nephi 28:17) after they were translated. Later, in the same chapter, Mormon says in verse 37 that after he had recorded his uncertainty of the three Nephites' mortality or immortality, Mormon had asked God about it and the Lord "made it manifest unto me that there must needs be a change wrought upon their bodies" (v. 37) but that the change "was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day" as immortal beings in the resurrection (v. 39). Mormon's knowledge on the doctrinal matter of translated and resurrected beings was expanded and improved upon in front of the reader's very eyes within a single chapter of scripture.

19. Brigham Young, Discourse, 25 March 1855, Papers of George D. Watt, MS 4534, box 3, disk 1, images 142–53, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth, punctuation and capitalization added.

20. Robert J. Matthews, *"A Plainer Translation": Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible—A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 53.

21. Boyd K. Packer, "Revelation in a Changing World," *Ensign*, November 1989.

22. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Christlike Attributes—the Wind beneath Our Wings," *Ensign*, November 2005.

23. As cited in Robert L. Millet, "What Is Our Doctrine?," *Religious Educator* 4, no. 3 (2003): 17.

24. M. Gerald Bradford and Larry E. Dahl, "Doctrine: Meaning, Source, and History of Doctrine," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (Macmillan: New York, 1992), 1:395.

25. History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843], Joseph Smith Papers.

26. Joseph Smith to the Council of the Twelve, 15 December 1840, Letterbook 2, CHL. See Doctrine and Covenants 124, 127, and 128 for further elaborations of this doctrine.

27. These four categories are similar to those that Robert L. Millet identified: "In determining whether something is a part of the doctrine of the Church, we might ask, Is it found within the four standard works? Within official declarations or proclamations? Is it discussed in general conference or other official gatherings by general Church leaders today? Is it found in the general handbooks or approved curriculum of the Church today? If it meets at least one of these criteria, we can feel secure and appropriate about teaching it." Millet, "What Is Our Doctrine?," 19.

28. B. H. Roberts, sermon of 10 July 1921, delivered in Salt Lake Tabernacle, printed in *Deseret News*, 23 July 1921, 7, as cited in Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 15.

29. Millet, "What Is Our Doctrine?," 16, 19.

30. D. Todd Christofferson, "The Blessings of Scripture," *Ensign*, May 2010, 34.

31. Russell M. Nelson, "Scriptural Witnesses," *Ensign*, November 2007.

32. Boyd K. Packer, "The Pattern of Our Parentage," *Ensign*, November 1984, 66.

33. See the forthcoming work of Michael Hubbard MacKay, *Sola Prophēta: The Radical Origins of Mormon Priesthood in the Burned-Over District.*

34. Gordon B. Hinckley, "What Are People Asking about Us?," *Ensign*, November 1998, 70.

35. LDS Newsroom, "Approaching Mormon Doctrine."

36. LaRene Porter Gaunt, "How Is Doctrine Established?," *Ensign*, September 2013, 39.

37. Gordon B. Hinckley, "God Is at the Helm," *Ensign*, May 1994, 53.

38. M. Russell Ballard, "Stay in the Boat and Hold On!," *Ensign*, November 2014, 90.

39. D. Todd Christofferson, "The Doctrine of Christ," *Ensign*, April 2012, 88.

40. Elder M. Russell Ballard said of *Preach My Gospel*, "Under the direction of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, *Preach My Gospel* has been produced. . . . Every word has been studied by the full First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve; this has their complete and total blessing and endorsement." In *Preach My Gospel: Introduction for Leaders*, Missionary Training Satellite Broadcast, 15 October 2004, DVD. See also Benjamin White, "The History of *Preach My Gospel*," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 1 (2013): 129–58.

41. Transcribed from Mormon Newsroom video of press conference for new missionary age service requirements, October 7, 2012. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Uwe9nz2w8k.

42. See examples in recent general conference addresses of the phrase "enabling power" used in Linda K. Burton, "We'll Ascend Together," April 2015; Kevin W. Pearson, "Stay by the Tree," April 2015; Cheryl A. Esplin, "The Sacrament—a Renewal for the Soul," October 2014; David A. Bednar, "Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease," April 2014; Rosemary Wixom, "Keeping Covenants Protects Us, Prepares Us, and Empowers Us," April 2014.

43. Perhaps the nearest approximation to this is in the scriptural study guidebook *True to the Faith*, which has the First Presidency's endorsement (see "Grace").

44. LDS Newsroom, "Approaching Mormon Doctrine"; see this exact statement repeated in Elder D. Todd Christofferson, "The Doctrine of Christ," *Ensign*, April 2012, 88.

45. Neil L. Andersen, "Trial of Your Faith," *Ensign*, November 2012, 41.

46. Dean L. Larsen, "I Have a Question," *Ensign*, August 1977, 38.

47. "Latter-day prophets have counseled parents to hold a weekly family home evening to teach their children the gospel, bear testimony of its truthfulness, and strengthen family unity" (*Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve), 2010, 5.

48. See Elder M. Russell Ballard, "God Is at the Helm," *Ensign*, November 2015; Elder Quentin L. Cook, "The Lord Is My Light," *Ensign*, May 2015; Elder Russell M. Nelson, "The Sabbath Is a Delight," *Ensign*, May 2015—to list just a few.

49. See https://www.lds.org/topics/family-home-evening?lang=eng.

50. See *Journal of Discourses*, 2:81–82.

51. See *Journal of Discourses*, 2:90.

52. "One thing is certain, that there were several holy women that greatly loved Jesus—such as Mary, and Martha her sister, and Mary Magdalene; and Jesus greatly loved them, and associated with them much; and when He arose from the dead, instead of showing Himself to His chosen witnesses, the Apostles, He appeared first to these women, or at least to one of them—namely, Mary Magdalene. Now it would be very natural for a husband in the resurrection to appear first to his own dear-wives, and afterwards show himself to his other friends. If all the acts of Jesus were written, we no doubt should learn that these beloved women were his wives." Orson Pratt, *The Seer*, October 1853 (republished electronically by Seagull Book & Tape, 1993), 105.

53. Elder Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal: "Evening Meeting. Prayer By E Stephenson. Joseph F Smith spoke One hour & 25 M. He spoke upon the Marriage in Cana at Galilee. He thought Jesus was the Bridgegroom and Mary & Martha the brides. He also refered to Luke 10 ch. 38 to 42 verse, Also John 11 ch. 2 & 5 vers John 12 Ch 3d vers, John 20 8 to 18. Joseph Smith spoke upon these passages to show that Mary & Martha manifested much Closer relationship than Merely A Believer which looks Consistet. He did not think that Jesus who decended throug Poligamous families from Abraham down & who fulfilled all the Law even baptism by immersion would have lived and died without being married." Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898 Typescript* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 8:187, July 22, 1883.

54. Charles W. Penrose, "Peculiar Questions Briefly Answered," *Improvement Era*, September 1912.

55. Wayne Lynn, "I Have A Question," *Ensign*, June 1997, retrieved from https://www.lds.org/ensign/1997/06/i-have-a-question?lang=eng.

56. "LDS do not endorse claims in 'Da Vinci,'" *Deseret News*, 17 May 2006; retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/635208214/LDS-do-not-endorse-claims-in-Da-Vinci.html.

57. See Gospel Topics Essays, "Mother in Heaven," https://www.lds.org/topics/mother-in-heaven?lang=eng.

58. See Eliza R. Snow, "O My Father," *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), no. 292.

59. Elder Jeffrey R Holland recently taught, "To Mother Eve, to Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, to Mary of Nazareth, and *to a Mother in Heaven*, I say, 'Thank you for your crucial role in fulfilling the purposes of eternity.'" "Behold Thy Mother," *Ensign*, November 2015, 50; emphasis added.

60. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, November 2010, 129; emphasis added.

61. "The Origin of Man," *Improvement Era*, November 1909, 78.

62. Gospel Topics Essays, "Mother in Heaven."

63. Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, "We are part of a divine plan designed by Heavenly Parents who love us." M. Russell Ballard, *When Thou Art Converted: Continuing Our Search for Happiness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 62.

64. Gospel Topics Essays, "Mother in Heaven."

65. History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843], 1433, Joseph Smith Papers.