

Seven Streams in “The New Mormonism”

by Aaron Shafovaloff · October 28, 2026

Mormonism is not a monolith. It is characterized by radical disunity at a level of belief. Once a member passes the baptismal interview, belief requirements are virtually non-existent as long as they do not publicly agitate against the leadership or violate certain codes of personal conduct.

I outline seven streams of thought within the modern Latter-day Saint movement. These are like ships at sea with the same flag, yet sailing in different directions.

1. PIONEER MORMONISM (MIDDLE MORMONISM)

Focus: Emphasizes the radical distinctives and unique teachings from the era of Brigham Young.

Characteristics: Friendly to frontier ideas like the Adam-God doctrine, blood atonement, and pioneer-era distinctives.

Scope/Demographics: Mostly a minority position in the mainstream church today, though remnants appear in fundamentalist/polygamous groups in Utah (e.g., the Allred or Peterson groups) and among some mainstream members with one foot in and one foot out.

2. CORRELATED MORMONISM

Focus: High regard for institutional direction, church manuals, and General Conference talks as perpetual and reliable.

Characteristics: Heavily influenced by mid-20th-century leaders like Joseph Fielding Smith and Bruce R. McConkie. Strongly affirms traditional doctrines such as the King Follett discourse, the Sermon in the Grove, spirit birth (“literal children of heavenly parents”), and eternal progression (becoming gods).

Scope/Demographics: Represents the plural majority of mainstream Latter-day Saints who care about traditional truth claims.

3. MORMON NEO-ORTHODOXY / ACCOMMODATIONISM

Focus: Spearheaded largely by BYU professors (e.g., Stephen E. Robinson, Brad Wilcox) seeking to minimize LDS doctrine to what early canonical works teach, irrespective of past public teachings by leaders.

Characteristics: Strips away non-canonical traditions and adopts heavy evangelical grace rhetoric (e.g., teaching that salvation is not about strict merit, referencing

concepts like “His grace is sufficient”). Evangelicals have often found this stream evangelical-adjacent, though structurally it remains distinctly Mormon and finally resistant to historic Christianity.

Scope/Demographics: Popular among academic apologists and younger generations seeking a more gracious framing of salvation.

4. REVISIONISM (OSTLERIAN STREAM)

Focus: Heavily driven by higher criticism and intellectual revisionists like philosopher Blake Ostler and Benjamin Spackman.

Characteristics: Features a low view of traditional LDS prophets and views the Standard Works as less binding. Rejects definite divine foreknowledge in favor of open theism and reinterprets foundational doctrines, such as arguing that Heavenly Father was always fully God (prior to kenosis) rather than progressing from a regress of gods.

Scope/Demographics: Disproportionately represents the vocal apologetic minority of young men engaging on social media and the streets.

5. PRIMITIVE MORMONISM

Focus: An eclectic movement centered primarily on the early text of the Book of Mormon while discarding later institutional developments.

Characteristics: Often a polygamy-denier movement adjacent to mainstream Mormonism. Holds a low and sometimes conspiratorial view of Brigham Young, rejects later D&C sections and sometimes the Book of Abraham. It exhibits more than

any other stream a more “Protestant-adjacent” position.

Scope/Demographics: A niche minority view found in Utah, with adherents split between remaining in the mainstream sect or leaving for alternative groups.

6. PROGRESSIVE MORMONISM

Focus: Pushes for the institutional adoption of liberal social values, feminism, and LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Characteristics: Celebrates the inclusion of same-sex marriage (which the LDS Church ceased counting as an act of apostasy for discipline in 2019) and transgender members within church liturgy and life. Represented by progressive voices like Richard and Blaire Osler.

Scope/Demographics: A rapidly growing stream, particularly among millennials (noted by studies like *The Next Mormons*, showing over half of LDS millennials support same-sex marriage).

7. CULTURAL MORMONISM

Focus: Purely focused on moral structure, community, and social benefits rather than theological truth claims.

Characteristics: Adherents are largely unconcerned with whether the historical truth claims are real, choosing instead to stay for the moral framework, family structures, and feeling of well-being.

Scope/Demographics: A massive, highly significant stream in Utah, consisting of members who maintain identity and social ties while being functionally indifferent to strict theology.