

Out of My Faith?
Or Draining Theology's Swamp

May 26, 2003

bob mccue

<http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm>

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As man is
So is his God;
And thus is God,
Oft strangely odd.

Goethe

Abstract

I coach two youth basketball teams this year, one on which my 12-year-old son plays and the other for my 10-year-old daughter and her friends. Both teams practise each week at a catholic elementary school. There is a large, colourful, child-made poster displayed prominently near the front door. It depicts a field covered by oversized flowers, under which is scrawled "Bloom Where You Are Planted".

I walked into that school and saw the above message for the first time last October while I was writing a lengthy letter to my family indicating that I intended to distance myself from the Mormon Church. That caption stopped me cold, and I have thought about it a lot during the last six months. In order to set out those thoughts in a manner that will be helpful, I first need to provide some background and context.

Where do we find wisdom? How do the world's major religious traditions enlighten their followers? Which of their various attributes appeal to me, and why? Why have I interacted throughout my life with the Mormon faith as I have, first blindly believing and then in mid-life knocking over the apple cart? This essay explores these and related questions and tries to determine whether I can grow where I was planted.

I start by drawing a spiritual map that outlines the principal characteristics of the world's major religious traditions. Then, I use it for a number of purposes, which are: to pick the most attractive location for me; to find the spot in which I have lived most of my life up to this point; to determine how I ended up where I have lived and why I stayed so long; to decide where I think I am best off residing in the future; and to figure out how to get from where I am to where I want to be.

So what does the map look like? I note first that there are four original culture and creative centres in world history: China/Japan and Northern India in the East; the Fertile Crescent area in the Near East (referred to as the Levant); and Europe in the West. The two basic types of societies in pre-history were hunter/gatherer and agricultural. The agricultural produced the first complex societies in each of the four original creative zones, developing out of preceding hunter/gatherer societies. In the East, the impersonal, group oriented cultural forces that characterize agricultural society prevailed. In the Levant and Europe the initial complex agricultural societies were conquered by warlike Aryans and Semites, who were individualistic

as a result of the necessities of the hunt, and worshiped warlike, masculine, personal, deities. Their individualistic mythologies were laid over the group oriented, agricultural mythologies of the peoples they conquered.

Far Eastern and Indian (referred to as Eastern) and Western/Levantine (referred to as Western) philosophic/mythologic/religious systems are perhaps best understood by answering the following questions respecting them:

1. What is the relative importance they attach to the group versus the individual? The East is more group oriented; the West more individualistic. Most of the West's dynamism and progress can be traced to this emphasis on individuality. Western culture both encourages conformity and rewards individuality, thus producing the tensions visible in every modern generation between those who uphold society's "traditional values" and those who seek to change them.
2. Do they conceive of deity as a personal or impersonal being? The East is more impersonal, the West more personal.
3. Do they perceive time and history as linear or cyclical? Linear history is a Western idea (probably Semitic or Aryan), which when coupled with individualism is responsible for much of its dynamism during the past several centuries. The East is dominated by a cyclical concept of existence.
4. Do they affirm or deny life? The East tends to life affirming. The West tends to view man and earthly existence as fallen, and hence in need of being subdued, corrected, etc. In this sense, Western culture is life denying in many ways.
5. What is their approach to harmony and conflict? For the reason just indicated, the West tends to be conflict oriented, and the East harmony oriented.
6. Do they deal primarily in metaphor, or dogma and literalism? The West tends to be more dogmatic/literalistic; the East more metaphorical.
7. And finally, how much free will do they allow? The East permits less free will. However, it is more accepting of scientific knowledge since it accepts reality as it manifests itself from time to time. Science is perceived as just another way to explore reality. In the West, however, theology and reality are often at odds with each other. Theology is thought by some to represent a higher reality. When this supposed higher reality, based in dogma, and reality as disclosed by science conflict, a great deal of cognitive dissonance results. Western religious organizations often attempt to restrict free will in order to protect their dogmas. Think of Galileo and his experience before the Inquisition. Dogma, however, gradually gives way to science.

Which attributes attract me? I want to continue to develop my individualistic nature in linear history, but at the same time seek to affirm more of life and find greater harmony with the world around me. The god I wish to worship is the reality that transcends and is immanent in all else. If the devil is in the details, my god is best glimpsed in the macro level patterns that scientists and others use to teach us how the world works. Hence, I conceive of god as the elegant systems of laws that govern our universe and which science is slowly uncovering. The personal god of so many Western religious traditions was, as it were, a metaphor used respecting these

laws as long as man understood so little of them that such a metaphor was necessary. According to Spinoza, Einstein and many since then, we no longer need the metaphor. The mystics, Buddhists and followers of many other Eastern traditions never needed it.

I seek a religious faith and community of fellow travelers that will help me to live as I choose, to progress spiritually as far and as quickly as I am able, and who will not restrain me. I seek the guidance of people whose wisdom is proven by their successful negotiation of life's reefs and shoals as I decide when to accept that the wisdom of science has overcome one of my dogmas.

Why did I stay within Mormonism for so long? Religious impulses are deeply imbedded in us. There are a number of good reasons for which evolution may have selected for humans who favour religious thinking. And most importantly, we have confirmed that the brain works in such a way so as to provide vivid, real experiences with respect to "spiritual" phenomenon, and that the people who have these experiences should be expected to take them seriously, to be convinced of their reality and importance, and hence to be heavily influenced by them.

We are each born into a society of some kind. In my case, that society was Western, democratic, Christian and Mormon. Mormons have a number of powerful socialization mechanisms that are designed to amplify the kind of spiritual experience described above and use that to induce obedience to religious authority figures. Mormons (and members of many other religious groups) generally are kept from evidence that conflicts with the spiritual picture their religion paints for them and so become convinced that their way of doing things is "the" way. Nietzsche notes that that idea that a lie is permitted as a means to pious ends is part of the theory of every priesthood. Hence, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the "Mormon Church" or the "Church") routinely withholds information that might incline us to do things that the Church is sure would not be right for us, thereby manipulating us toward doing the things it thinks are right. At this point, psychological drivers take over. The first is the "confirmation bias". That is, the first idea of a particular type that we become convinced is correct is hard to get rid of. And the smarter and better-educated people are, the stronger their confirmation bias is likely to be. It has also been noted that the more closed minded a person is, the more likely he is to have strong religious beliefs. The confirmation bias is further aided and abetted by our memories. Every time we recall an event, we must reconstruct a memory, and with each recollection the memory may be changed – colored by succeeding events, others people's recollections or suggestions, etc.

So, I conclude that I am lucky to have been able to find a way out of my inherited religious belief system. The odds are stacked heavily against anyone who has been successfully conditioned, as I was, in that regard. Religious organizations sacrifice the interests of individual members by limiting free will, free speech, the distribution of information etc. to the extent necessary to preserve the "system" as a whole. This is done by and large by well meaning people who do not have an understanding of the whole picture, and because of the very factors indicated above, are likely not capable of ever grasping it.

How can I get to where I want to be? Mythology is merely packaging in which we wrap our values. A select few used to do that for the rest of us. As time passes, more of humanity attempts, consciously or not, to do that for itself, as I now do. Mythology's primary historical function has been to answer our existential questions in a way that makes sense in light of our perception of reality. The principal questions I have asked, and answers I have found, as I constructed my personal mythology to this point are as follows:

- (a) What is the purpose of my life? This is drawn largely from Buddhist mythology, and is that I should avoid evil, promote good, purify myself, and be careful not to so focus on the last of these objectives (self purification) that the first and second are forgotten. This amounts to something close to the Golden Rule, as it has been interpreted by many of the major religious traditions and as developed by Immanuel Kant as the so-called "categorical imperative". I note that the ideas of evil, good and purification all depend upon the values I choose.
- (b) My foundational values – or meta-values – are that every human being is of equal worth and has free will, and that we should try to continuously improve ourselves and our surroundings. Trying to bring these overarching values into better focus is my most important task at the moment.
- (c) What is the process that I will use to guide myself as I pursue these objectives? I have adopted the scientific process to the extent possible with respect to the making of my life's decisions. This applies to spiritual matters as well as to all others. This is by far the most important aspect of my personal mythology. It is what will enable my mythology to accommodate change and to improve over time. However, science deals only with the "hows". The great "whys" and the values implicit within them remain in mythology's realm, and are hence of my choosing.
- (d) Do I need any additional beliefs to make my system work? I do not believe that I do. However, many people of whom I have read find that they need to believe in some kind of after life or other principle in order to bring their existential angst down to manageable levels. As far as I am concerned, there is no harm in doing this as long as it does not cause us to believe in a falsehood, or get in the way of accepting the new, useful ideas that science will surely produce. This is the famous "credo consolans" approach to spirituality – "I believe in god (or whatever) because there is no good reason not to believe, and in any event, it comforts me to do so."

So finally I can reconsider the "Bloom Where You Are Planted" poster at the elementary school. While it is hard to see as a result of the sketchy information contained in the above abstract, I am deeply rooted in Mormon soil, and perhaps one might say that an excessive amount of Mormon dung is piled all around me and is so high and deep that it choked off my growth for a period of time. I may have to bring in water and different fertilizer from other places, and then clear a load of that well-intentioned crap away from my roots to let nourishment in. However, this is not likely to change my essence. I bet both my tree's blossoms and its unusual fruit will be recognizably Mormon.

This means I am blooming where I was planted. But perhaps the blossoms have come in multihued instead of monochrome, or are odd sized, or have arrived during a season when most of the trees in the orchard are bare. And the beleaguered farmer in charge of the orchard, having done his best with me and "failed", may yet thank god for those few odd trees who have so frustratingly gotten out of sync with the rest.

But what of my faith? Am I "Out of My Faith?" Have I exhausted it? Did something come out of it? Where is it? From my meanderings below answers can be implied to each of these questions. However, only one answer is worth recording here. I still have my faith. It animates me more than ever. It is so thoroughly engrained in me that I could not get rid of it even if I wished to do so. And in any event, my second birth has caused me to see it in new light, and to wish to develop its role in my life. The less we admit we can know, the more critical to our future progress our faith becomes.

Most importantly, wisdom has grown out of my faith. As a result of the harsh conditioning I underwent as a youth, this took a long time. But eventually the "seed" swelled sufficiently within my breast (see Alma 32:28) that the most important parts of my religious tradition – things like free will, the pursuit of truth, and the importance of honesty – overcame their accumulated, ancient dross. As a result, I feel more alive and joyful than ever.

Now I walk into the unknown with confidence and a smile on my face, guided through fading light by growing faith and my humble admission of ignorance.

Introduction

For the past six months, the most important thing in my life has been putting in place a new spiritual foundation. Part of this exercise has involved dissecting certain aspects of my experience as an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the "Church", the "LDS Church", the "Mormon Church"). I cannot remember ever having so much spontaneous energy for an intellectual task. Joseph Campbell describes this as being "seized by zeal" and as the "second birth" that many cultures have characterized in myth as the virgin birth or resurrection.

The lengthy letter (75 pages more or less) that I sent to members of my family in early November of 2002 summarized why I had decided to distance myself from the LDS church, and scratched the surface on the worldview I was starting to build. Since then I have continued an intense program of reading and study, but instead of focusing on the Church and its problems I have been building a new spiritual paradigm from the ground up. This is the most exciting, wonderful process I have ever encountered, and I now feel that it would be productive to summarize where I am in that regard. There is no doubt that my self-discovery and integration of ideas will continue after this pause to survey the landscape around me.

My profession has taught me the benefits of verbalizing, or even better, writing out my position so that those I trust, and I, can take our best critical shot at it, and then improve it. This essay is written in that spirit.

I write a lot in the course of my profession as a tax attorney. However, until I began to seriously question the LDS Church's role in my life, I did not write recreationally or respecting spiritual matters, except to record notes of talks at Church and that sort of thing. Since beginning to question the assumptions my LDS affiliation had caused me to make, I have not been able to stop writing. It has been a form of therapy in many respects, and has unleashed something that I had felt inside of me but had not been able to give voice to previously.

My purpose in this essay is to record some of the significant things that I have encountered since approximately mid-December, 2002 when I commenced this process in earnest. My primary hope is that this will be of use to my family, others I have come to love, and anyone else who can make use of it. However, I do not wish that anyone accept the ideas I have developed

as "truth". I have recorded the ideas I have been able to find up to this point that make the most sense to me, while acknowledging my limited perspective and error prone nature. What I most hope is that those who read this, and particularly my family, will note the manner in which I am doing my best to carve a personal worldview, philosophy, mythology, religion – call it what you will – that works for me. This is a work in progress. I expect to chip away at it for the rest of my life as I continue to try to understand as much as possible of the ideas produced by science, philosophy, spiritual traditions and all other sources of wisdom that seem credible to me and applicable to how we live. I have stretched my soul as a result of this process, and am committed to continuing to do so. And I am not content to merely think about these things. I am out in the community and with my family doing what seems good to me and finding immense joy and satisfaction as a result. I won't ever find absolute truth, and it makes no sense to me to allow life to pass me by while I continue the search.

Hence, I will be pleased if as you read this you say to yourself something like this:

"It is obvious that bob (or Dad, or Grandpa, or Great-Grandpa) wrestled "mano a mano" with life's great questions. He did not accept what those who say they "know" told him about these things. He questioned, dug, found and eliminated error, and tried to create something that fit him and his honest perception of reality. He used all of the tools he could get his hands on. He looked for tools everywhere instead just where he was told to look. And he gave those tools his best. And when he found what he was as sure as he could reasonable be was right, he sacrificed what he had to in order to use it in his life. In this, he is following the example of his Mormon pioneer ancestors, as well as his parents. Maybe I should do something similar."

Although this essay (or small book – it keeps getting longer) is far from finished, I have decided that it should be published as it at this point. My reasons for doing this are twofold. First, a number of people who are members of the LDS Church have read earlier drafts and tell me that it has helped them expand their view of their religious faith, and to use it in a more healthy fashion in their lives. I note that some of these people have been on their way out of LDS membership or activity, while others have remained active but have not allowed the Church to dominate their lives in the fashion it previously had. Second, one of the things that most interests me at this point is my spiritual journey is the rapidity with which quantum developmental steps can be taken in that regard. A little over a year ago I was a fully active member of the LDS Church, serving as Stake Mission President in the Calgary, Alberta Stake. Now I am something that is more difficult to categorize. Hence, I have decided to publish this essay in its admittedly rough form as part of a series of essays that show my metamorphosis. The other links are first, an essay I wrote while I was Stake Mission President about two years ago to be used as a missionary tool in connection with a dramatic production the Stake was putting on called "Barefoot to Zion". The second is the seventy-five page letter to my family referred to above that outlines some of my concerns respecting the Church's position. And the third is the letter I sent to my Bishop and close friend Bill Tilleman resigning my membership in the Church. This is the last link in that chain, and gives a rough picture of what my worldview looks like a few months after leaving the LDS Church.

From June to September 2002 I went through what you might call the "waking up" phase, during which I gradually reached the point at which I could admit to myself the possibility that the Church might not be "true", whatever that means. Within two or three weeks of consuming reading after asking that question, I reached the conclusion that the Church was not at all what I had believed it to be throughout my adult life. This had occurred by September, 2002. I then began to alternatively read things related to the Church (the "deconstructive" of my journey,

since there were some things I had to get rid of before I could build new ones) and others related to spirituality, mythology, science, philosophy, morality, etc. (the "constructive" phase of the process). I would say that 90% of the ideas in this essay had been formulated by mid-March of 2003, but have taken some time to record.

I have not carefully proof read this document, due mostly to its length, and hence I am confident that it is riddled with typos. Many sections are inelegantly put together, as is the essay as a whole. It is not something I am particularly proud of from a literary point of view. It was written mostly for personal therapy, since I process ideas best if I record my thoughts as they come to me, and it is valuable to me as a spiritual road map. I hope it will be of some benefit to others.

Finally, the word version of this document contains a "point and click" index that will not work in the pdf format that will be used for Internet publishing. Anyone who wishes to have the word copy of the document may email me at robert.mccue@gowlings.com. And those inclined to point out typos or provide me with feedback are invited to do so. I am a student, trying to learn.

General Approach

The Scientific Method and Inductive v. Deductive Approaches to Learning

I should note that I am trying not to make up my mind first and then collect evidence to support my conclusions. That is, in fact, the approach the Church teaches. It tells us what the answers are, and then tries to make sure we don't see any evidence that contradicts those answers. My approach is now the opposite. I am trying to collect and understand as wide a swath of information as possible. Having done that, I look for patterns in that information that make sense in light of all I have seen. This is the inductive, as opposed to the deductive, approach to the study of religion and spiritual life. I develop that idea further below. It is perhaps the most important methodological concept I have grasped.

Implicit in the inductive approach is the basic idea of science – that all theories and knowledge are provisional. I now apply this concept to the spiritual rules that guide much of my life. I search for cause and effect, guide myself by the best information I can find in that regard, and make the leaps of faith required from time to time. Hence, my ideas respecting many important things are changing, and will continue to change. I am more humble than I have ever been respecting my ability to "know" that something is true or right in an absolute sense. However, I have more confidence than ever in my ability to look at the various options presented to me and decide which of those makes the most sense, and are of the most use to me and my loved ones.

I seek ideas and approaches to life that make me more aware of myself and the world around me, and encourage me to question and learn. Conversely, I avoid things that have a numbing effect on my intellect and senses. These things tend to keep information from me and encourage me not to question and learn. Religious dogma, particularly the kind that cannot be questioned, is one of the worst offenders in this regard.

I am dealing in this document with questions of approach and paradigm – things that Campbell calls myth. These things may or may not be "true" in a literal, scientific sense. What is important is whether, and how, they work. The key question then with regard to any myth or paradigm is: Does this work for me, and what kind of a life will I create if I use it? I have come to see my choice of belief largely as a projection of what I want the world to be (or how I want to

interact with it), and of what I want to become. This approach is constrained by reality, as I perceive it.

In summary, I am interested in things that "work"; that will do good things for us. I have always used that paradigm with respect to other matters. The spiritual side of my life is finally being brought into line with the rest of how I live.

I recognize that I am scratching the surface of important and difficult to understand issues in what I have just written. These ideas are developed further at the end of this document. However, an overview at the front end is in my view helpful since an understanding of the general approach will colour everything else that follows.

Personality Profile

I have not done enough research on this topic to have a view I trust, but it is important enough that I feel I should raise it in any event. I will pay more attention and refine my thinking as time passes respecting this aspect of what I have written.

I have become recently more aware of the important role personality traits and basic abilities play in our perception of reality. The upshot of this research is that while there may be one reality, the only way each individual human can access it is through his or her subjective, highly differentiated mental equipment as conditioned by prior experience. This produces dramatic variance in the way any "reality" may be perceived by different people, and has important implications for the manner in which religious belief is developed.

By way of example only, I offer a few of the factors I have encountered in my research that can be counted upon to make quantum differences in how we perceive reality.

1. Mental processing capacity.
 - (a) Uncertainty produces fear. Mental processing capacity allows us to find our feet relatively quickly when bombarded by new and potentially confusing information. Those with less ability to sort through data will remain longer (and perhaps indefinitely) in a state of uncertainty where they are subject to significant fear. Fear causes humans to seek security, often through irrational belief. Adherence to religious ideas that offer security while contradicting abundant objective and subjective data is one manifestation of this phenomenon.
 - (b) As noted in detail below, greater mental processing capacity counter intuitively correlates positively with inability to change opinions once reached.
2. Age. The older we are the more baggage we have to move in order to change our paradigms, and the less mental processing capacity we have.
3. Need for expression. Individuals differ in the way they learn and process information. Some have a high need to express their feelings, while others are more comfortable in silent contemplation. I have a high need to express myself and learn from interacting with others through that expression. This single attribute makes the manner in which I am likely to wish to develop my spirituality

inconsistent with the LDS church, which demands as a requirement of membership that there be no significant public expression of heterodox belief.

4. Need for community. Some of us require more contact with a group of like-minded souls and more support than others do.
5. Follower v. Leader. Some are more comfortable taking orders than giving them.

There is almost no end to the ways in which human personality has been parsed, and the research makes it clear that our personality traits, and history of experience, make a significant difference in how we perceive reality.

Ideally, the topic I am trying to treat would be developed into a matrix that would define various personality types and show the kinds of spirituality likely to be best suited to them, or perhaps even to bring out their strongest qualities. The Enneagram and other approaches to quasi spirituality and personality profiling attempt to do this without the backdrop of world spiritual traditions I have attempted to outline. My approach does not attempt to create such a matrix. Rather, I have tried to explain to myself where I have come from and why I have felt comfortable proceeding as I have.

What follows, hence, is limited by my personality and ability to perceive reality. I do not offer it as an approach that will work for all. However, it works for me and I suspect that it will work for many who are like me. Furthermore, it is my prediction that the more science and less dogma oriented approach to life that I advocate will gradually become the norm in our world. This trend has been visible for centuries, and I see no reason for it to discontinue. As it becomes more mainstream, it will be easier for the followers and the less capable (these are not necessarily the same people) to remain comfortable and still reap the benefits this approach to life has to offer.

I note that the personality tests I have taken indicate the following: I am relatively bright, but far from a genius; I have both strong creative (lateral thinking) and analytical (linear thinking) skills, hence it is not surprising that I found a productive niche as a tax lawyer; I am leadership orientated; I am determined (stubborn?) and goal oriented; I have a high need to express myself; I have a strong affinity to principle – if I think something is "the right thing to do" I am prepared to sacrifice significantly to do it; I enjoy community, but do not have a high need for it; and my most important source of joy and satisfaction is involvement in intense, personal relationships. My intensity/determination/stubbornness are my greatest strength and liability.

My recent departure from the LDS church has had an interesting effect on my personality that I perceive to be good. A description of that, however, goes beyond the bounds of what I am writing here.

Where Will We And Our Families Grow Best?

I coach two youth basketball teams this year, one for my 12-year-old son and the other for my 10-year-old daughter. Both teams practise each week at a catholic elementary school in Strathcona. There is a large, colourful, child-made poster displayed prominently near the front door. It depicts a field covered by oversized flowers, under which is scrawled "Bloom Where You Are Planted".

I walked into that school and saw the above message for the first time last October while I was writing the letter to my family indicating that I intended to distance myself from the Church. That

caption stopped me cold, and I have thought about it a lot during the last six months. In order to set out those thoughts in a manner that will be helpful, I first need to provide some background and context.

The Issue – How Do We Find Wisdom?

I am a pragmatic person, and have noticed in my study of psychology and brain architecture recently how many good ideas start with an observation of what we do and then work backwards to try to explain why. Applying this process to spiritual matters has opened up a new (to me) way of understanding my religious experience that has been helpful. To bring this issue into focus, let's work through a case study.

Assume that one of my late teenage daughters is about to make some important life decisions. She is deciding what kind of education to pursue, and therefore what kind of career to prepare for. She is deciding how to behave sexually and what kind of person she wishes to attract for purposes of dating. She will shortly decide if she wishes to serve a mission for the LDS church. Eventually, she will decide if, who and when to marry, and shortly after that may make decisions with regard to when she should try to start her family.

As she makes these crucial decisions, what kind of information is available to her? And more importantly, how much of that information is she aware of, and which parts of that will likely influence her decisions as a result of her conscious or subconscious choice?

As I answer these questions I am required to address the basic issues of epistemology. How do we learn? Why do we accept some things as "true" or "wise" and reject other competing ways of interpreting the information available to us?

As I have examined my life, read the theory and history of science, religion, philosophy and other human endeavours (I acknowledge that I am just scratching the surface of these topics), some patterns have come into focus for me. They are as follows:

1. The first and most important is that man does not appear to be able to discern absolute truth from scratch, and perhaps never can. We need look no further for evidence of this than the mess of certainly held and conflicting opinion with respect to almost any topic we might choose. However, man is effective (often after many unsuccessful attempts) when asked to choose which of several things before him is the best to achieve a particular objective. This idea is at the root of all science, and is responsible for scientific progress.
2. As long as man believes that he does not have all the truth respecting a matter of significance, he continues to search for information respecting that matter. Brain researchers call this the cognitive imperative. There does not appear to be an end to the information that can be gleaned through this process.
3. However, man fools himself constantly in multiple ways into thinking that he has found absolute truth. Even scientists are guilty of this more often than one might think, and the tendency runs rampant in areas where the falsification process (old theories are proven false, and are replaced by new theories, which are eventually also proven false, and so on) cannot operate. Spirituality is one of these. Beliefs that cannot be falsified are referred to as dogma.

4. As noted, mostly honest, well-intentioned people have from time immemorial been certain that they have had the absolute truth "revealed" to them from an external, divine source. In some cases, these truths are falsifiable and come to form the basis for important scientific theories. Many scientists report the revelatory nature of their most important discoveries. However, most of these truths are related to unfalsifiable spiritual matters, and must be accepted on faith alone. Once such a dogma is accepted, it closes off further investigation by believers with respect to it. As information that contradicts a dogma infiltrates the society in question as the result of the scientific investigations of others, massive cognitive dissonance results and believing members of the society tend to react by affirming the dogma as a badge of religious faith, and so rejecting all conflicting scientific knowledge or reason. So firmly are these dogmas held that often the majority of one or more generations of believers must die with their beliefs to make way for new generations that are not so thoroughly conditioned and therefore are able to accept the knowledge science has produced. Dogma, hence, slowly accommodates science. The most well understood example I can think of in this regard is that of Galileo and the changes to Roman Catholic cosmology that his theories eventually affected.
5. Those who follow dogma and reject science generally speaking are disadvantaged by their beliefs. That is, the positive impact scientific advances could have in their lives is delayed.
6. However, it is the nature of science to disprove its own theories. It is easy to construct a list of scientific theories that were once accepted and on the basis of which many people made important life decisions, and which are now on science's cutting room floor. The social sciences, being much more imprecise than the hard sciences and more relevant to our life decisions, are notorious in this regard. For example, countless persons were harmed by the "remembered abuse" hysteria and the "inner child" movement that went along with it in the 1980s and early 90s. It is likely that there were some abused persons who did remember their repressed memories of abuse, and much more likely that many people were influenced in such a way that they remembered things that did not happen and tore apart many lives as a result. Likewise, certain theories respecting child rearing, self-actualization and many other things have been tested and appear to have been ill founded. These likely caused significant human suffering while in use.

The question I am left with after this review is: Where I should look for wisdom?

And the following questions are related to it. In light of what I have seen in my review of history as indicated above, to what extent should I believe those who claim revelation from an external source and make decisions based upon what they tell me to do? How much should I trust the sometimes powerful feelings I get with respect those things? To what extent should I trust the scientists and their explanations of cause and effect and make decisions based upon the information they produce? And particularly, in the case of conflict between the two, which should take precedence and how much scientific evidence will I require before allowing one of my precious dogmas (and try as I might I will still have many) to give way?

To put a final and not too subtle point on this, I ask to what extent should I rely upon the arm of flesh instead of god?

What follows is an attempt to place these questions in a broad context, and then to answer them. I will do this by sketching the spiritual map that has been forming in my mind as I have read, thought, meditated etc. during the past year. This requires that I review the origins of myth and religion, sketch the various types and approaches I have discovered, and consider the strengths and weaknesses of each as they appear to me.

Having developed the map, I then want to use it for a number of purposes, which are:

1. I want to pick the most attractive location - the location that most appeals to me and appears to me to be the most useful, joyful, etc. which not coincidentally is where I will be able to best answer the above questions.
2. Then, I want to find the spot in which I have lived most of my life up to this point.
3. After that, I want to determine how I ended up where I have lived, and why I stayed so long.
4. Next, I want to use my knowledge of the map to decide where I think I am best off residing in the future. That is, where are my family and I likely to have access to the best wisdom as we make our way through life? That may or may not be the spot that seemed initially most attractive. We have to be realistic about these things. Where we are to some extent determines where we can go. I will encourage my children to take the same approach as I have taken. That is, having reached the best place I think I can, they may start from there and have quite a different idea as to where they should end up. I hope they will not accept what I have done as necessarily being right for them.
5. And finally, I want to figure out how to get from where I am to where I want to be, and how that process of change can be managed so as to produce as much good and as little bad as possible for me, my immediate family, those within my circle of influence, and finally society at large.

My Spiritual Map

Spiritual Cartography and Comparative Mythology

Campbell says that there is nothing better than the study of comparative mythology to help us see the potential of the myths and symbols of our inherited tradition. I would say that in addition to seeing the potential of our own set of symbols, this type of study performs several other critical functions.

1. It allows us to find complementary symbols.
2. It may persuade us that some of the symbols we were handed by our own tradition are dysfunctional for us, and should either be abandoned or completely reinterpreted, which amount to the much the same thing in effect.
3. The study of comparative mythology (particularly the mystical variety) shows how in many societies the "cognoscenti" existed in a sea of folk who not only did not know, but opposed (often violently) those who did. This last point has been particularly comforting to me. It is not just my tradition and I engaged in a

bizarre, unique struggle. This is as time honoured as ying and yang. It may even be a necessary part of life, although I like to think that it is a vestige of ignorance and superstition that will eventually die out. In any event, some cultures manage this process much better than others. As I will show below, the LDS culture is at the dysfunctional end of the spectrum within modern Western society in this regard.

As Campbell would have predicted, it has been most helpful for me to become familiar with Eastern mythology and thought and see my own religious tradition in a broad context. Ironically, my undergrad major was religious studies at the U of Alberta, but my mind was so closed to these ideas at that point that they had little impact on me. I have gone back to the same intellectual field during the past four months and reaped a wonderful harvest. I am overwhelmed at how quickly this process has occurred. It is a "birth" process, and does not have to take a long time.

Generalization and hence error in many particulars will be rampant in what I am about to write because of the degree of abstraction at which I am working. However, by the end of the document I hope to return to earth for a specific analysis of the LDS position, and how we can best proceed from where we find ourselves to where we want to be.

The World's Four Major Creative Centres

To frame this discussion I note that Campbell and others divide the world into four areas for purposes of discerning the source of long-term religious and cultural trends. These were the world's four original culture and creative centres - China/Japan and Northern India in the East, the Fertile Crescent area in the Near East (referred to as the Levant), and Europe in the West. The two Eastern areas were isolated from each other and the rest, and hence were not much influenced in their development by other strains of thought. Hence, they have been relatively static societies. The Levant and Europe, however, were in regular contact with each other and with warlike tribes that pushed in on both of them from the north (the Aryans) and the south (the Semites), producing eclectic, dynamic societies.

The World's Two Source Societal Types

The two basic types of societies were hunter/gatherer and agricultural. The agricultural produced the first complex societies in each of the four zones, developing out of preceding hunter/gatherer societies. In the East, the cultural forces that characterize agricultural society (collectivist, worshipping the earth itself as a metaphor of female based reproduction, sensitive to the seasons, oriented toward harmony, etc.) prevailed. In the Levant and Europe the initial agricultural societies were conquered by warlike Aryans and Semites who were individualistic as a result of the necessities of the hunt, and worshiped warlike, masculine deities. This ideology was superimposed upon the pre-existing collectivist, earth and female worshipping agricultural societies in the Levant and Europe.

Religious/Mythological Taxonomies

There are many ways of categorizing religious and mythological practises. Engaging in this exercise is part of the comparative mythology approach that Campbell advocates. I have found it most useful to analyze religion and myth through different lenses, or methods of categorization, as I draw my spiritual map, locate myself on it, and finally to chart a course from where I am (or was) to where I want to be.

Far Eastern and Indian (referred to as Eastern) and Western/Levantine (referred to as Western) philosophic/mythologic/religious systems are perhaps best understood by answering the following questions respecting them:

1. What is the relative importance they attach to the group versus the individual?
2. Do they conceive of deity as a personal or impersonal being?
3. Do they perceive time and history as linear or cyclical?
4. Do they affirm or deny life?
5. What is their approach to harmony and conflict?
6. How do they deal with mythology itself? Do they deal primarily in metaphor, or dogma and literalism?
7. And finally, how authoritarian and legalistic are they? How much free will do they allow? How flexible are they in terms of the range of belief they can accommodate? This is in some ways a subset of the mythology v. dogma dichotomy, but in my view should be given separate treatment. All religions have dogmatic and mythic components, and one or the other is dominant. The question for consideration here is how a religion deals with the case of a person who wishes to move from the dogmatic to the mythic. Does the religion discourage this, allow it, facilitate it, or encourage it?

Individual v. Society

The East

In the East, the group is of primary importance and the individual is secondary whereas in the West the opposite holds true. Campbell and others trace this back to the dominance in the West of a hunter/gatherer mentality arising in Europe (the home of the Palaeolithic hunt and the Aryans), and the Arabian peninsula (home of the Semites). In hunting cultures, individual and masculine skills were critical. In agriculturally based societies such individual skills were not critical, resulting in a completely different mythological and societal structures.

In the East, for example, there is no idea of an after life that includes the continuance of an individual spirit. That is, individual identity is transient in this life, and therefore relatively unimportant. Many basic Eastern cultural traits are explainable on this basis. That is why Eastern societal roles are so rigid. As a Hindu, your cast defines your life. You are not an individual; you are a part of society - a "dividual". You are not whole in and of yourself, you are a part of a greater whole. As a Buddhist, you seek Nirvana, the extinguishment of self. The Hindu's have a similar idea. In many primitive agricultural societies, the idea that death comes from life (plants rot and out of rot new life is produced) gave rise to blood sacrifice. The blood of death animals (including humans) is poured on the ground to bring forth more life. The more death, the more life. But it is not the individual who dies and returns to life; it is more life of all kinds. Hence, to sacrifice an individual human is not a bad thing. That sacrifice will bring forth life of all kinds. It is life itself that is important, not THE life of any particular being.

The relative unimportance of the individual is reflected in the nature of the divine in Eastern societies - the ultimate power source is an impersonal, transcendent reality. The gods (such as they are in these belief systems – some of the systems do not have gods as we understand that term) are emissaries of that reality. They are vehicles that deliver power from that source, but they are not the source. They are sometimes shown to be fickle beings, much like us, but who have great powers of different types.

The West

In the West the orientation toward the individual produced quite different ideas. After death the individual's identity is retained. When we think of heaven, it includes Mom and Dad along with us, each retaining our individual identity. We are all continuations of the selves that existed in this life. No so for those of the East. On death, they become one with all existence – the transcendent or immanent reality (depending on the mythology in question) – once again.

The idea that death is followed by individual resurrection, both of animals and humans, is an ancient hunting myth that has its roots in the need to protect the psyche from the reality that in hunting societies we kill other animals (beings much like us) to eat. If we perform the right ritual, the animals that we kill come back to life, and so do we when we die. Since individual humans are important, it is a big deal to kill one. Once again, the basic value of society (that of the individual) is reflected in the nature of god himself – he is both masculine and personal (an individual). And since individuals are important, the idea eventually was accepted that they must be self-determining and therefore be permitted to break free (to a greater or lesser extent) from the roles society requires that they assume. We can thank the Greeks for developing the roots of this idea, the Enlightenment in Europe for allowing it to grow, and the Americans for giving it full voice. Some might argue that the Americans have gone too far in that regard, and that this trait will be their downfall if it is not curbed.

The Mask Metaphor

Campbell outlined another useful way to understand the individual v. society dichotomy, which he borrowed from Yeats. Yeats married late in life to a young woman. She shortly thereafter commenced a process of automatic writing that produced Yates own philosophy. He had never articulated, or even understood this philosophy himself up to that point, but immediately recognized it as a synthesis of his work that was waiting within him to come forth.

Automatic writing is a phenomenon studied by psychologists that involves the receipt of bursts of information that seemed to come as an already created whole and are then recorded by the recipient. The result is generally material that seems well beyond what the recipient is capable of writing under her own power. This well documented psychological phenomenon cannot help but remind us of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon as well as Mohamed and the Koran. I have accepted automatic writing as a plausible explanation for Smith's production of the BofM. There is a good chapter in *American Apocrypha* on that topic. It is possible, in my view, for something produced in this way to be "inspired" in the scriptural sense. Anything that produces metaphor or myth of lasting value is inspired from my point of view. We can't identify these things by some stamp of authenticity at the time of production. They are identified by standing the test to time – by continuing over a long period of time to be meaningful. The proof is in the pudding. By this test, some of what Gordon Hinckley has produced is certainly inspired, and Smith left us reams of inspired material both within and outside of the LDS scriptural cannon.

Back to Yeats. Part of the philosophy Yeats' wife produced dealt with the idea of societal masks. As we grow in a society it puts a mask on us that Yeats called the "primary mask". Other people have called the same thing the elementary mask. In some cases we are allowed to choose (to an extent at least) our mask. In other cases, such as within the Hindu caste system for example, there is little choice. The primary mask is designed to teach us our role, draw us into our society and teach us how to fit in and be productive. This mostly good for society, but has some benefits for the individual as well. We all have to start somewhere.

As we mature, there comes a time when it is healthy for us to reshape our mask, and in some cases to cast it aside entirely. Yeats calls this the creation of the antithetical mask. That mask represents the real us. This is the best we can be. It may have nothing to do with our society. We may identify wholly with the antithetical mask, or we may continue to wear the primary mask to an extent, recognizing it as such, and revert to the antithetical mask as often as we can. How we do this, the extent to which we do it, etc. is determined by our individual characteristics and the nature of our society.

The creation with the antithetical mask involves tension with our society. Campbell talks about "fighting through" this process, "for good or ill". I have certainly perceived the process to be a fight. However, I now understand that this is not as it must be. Once we place this process in context, we can understand it as a necessary, healthy part of our development. The tension with our society, family etc. itself is a healthy part of the process if it is used properly. I explore this idea further in the section titled "The Revolution v. Evolution Metaphor" below.

Youth is the time during which the primary mask is fashioned and placed on us. As we reach adulthood and become independent beings, we have the chance to create our own antithetical mask. The use of this mask – playing the role this mask casts for us - is what should power the most creative, wonderful and useful part of our lives: that of middle age. Eventually, our creative powers and other energies decline and the antithetical mask becomes less important. The antithetical mask is what drives change and allows all of our self and creativity to engage with the world around us. When this is no longer possible, the primary mask begins to reassert itself in the sense that progress stops. That is the primary mask – any state of stasis (I am now interpreting Yeats and Campbell). Our passions do not burn as brightly. We prepare to fade into the night. If we have experienced the second birth (leapt from the moon to the sun – see below) this physical decline will be experienced with a healthy, bemused detachment, and the fruits of wearing the antithetical mask can continue to be enjoyed, although perhaps not much new fruit will be created.

Modern Western society encourages the antithetical mask. This is how progress is made so quickly within our society. People reach beyond themselves and what their primary mask has taught them. As they venture into the dark forest to make their antithetical mask (this is the primary motif of the Arthurian legends), they find all kinds of things they would not have otherwise encountered. From the primordial brew into which one generation of Western man after another is thrown to make his antithetical mask, have come the ideas that now power our world. Such creativity is not possible in a static society where we are told what we are, and are required never to step outside of that prescribed state. Hence, we explain much of the difference between the degree of creative power found in the modern East and West.

The East is the world of the primary mask. The West, in varying degrees, is the world of the antithetical mask. The antithetical mask is a metaphor for the use of the scientific method paradigm in material and spiritual life. It requires that we remain open to change and improvement for as long as possible in our lives. Change requires energy. Once energy has

declined to the point where change is no longer feasible, the process stops. In that sense, the primary mask returns.

The Moon to the Sun Metaphor

Yeats had another neat idea (or rather, this idea came to us by way of the automatic writing of Yeats' young wife) that is related to the masks. Yeats relates the primary and antithetical masks to the phases of the moon. The ascending and descending phases correlate to the primary mask, and the mid-phase of high energy to the antithetical. These phases are used in many cultures to explain different aspects of life.

The lunar cycle is 28 days. From days one through 15, the moon increases. At the 15th day, it reaches its full reflective power. From there on, it declines.

The 15th year was, in primitive cultures, the time for a young woman to marry. Dante set the mid-point in life at 35. This was in the 1300s. Today it might be later, but lets not quibble. This is mythology. I personally set the mid-point at 45 (coincidentally, my own age). From there on, life is all downhill in terms of physical and mental prowess in many senses.

On the 15th day of the lunar cycle there is a moment at which the sun sets and moon simultaneously rises, and while both are visible on the horizon they are exactly the same size and color, the moon reflecting the sun. At the equivalent moment in our lives, we can jump from the moon to the sun – take off the primary mask and replace it with the antithetical. We are invited to leave our lunar, reflective, cyclical selves and become part of the eternal energy source. We are invited to leave the provincial for the general and transcendent. We are invited to move from the vehicle to the power source; from the body to the consciousness or spirit. Having done our work – having produced the best that is within us – we can then watch with contentment as the "vehicle" declines in power and finally falls apart. As Campbell puts it, when a light bulb burns out, we are not concerned – we are interested in light, not bulbs. Our light does not go out when our bulb is finished. We can feel the light continuing, or even increasing in strength, as the bulb declines in various ways.

The Revolution v. Evolution Metaphor

As noted above, in the West the idea of the antithetical mask is encouraged. This means that it is expected that people are going to fight institutional control. While elements in society try to quell dissent, it is clear that our society sees value in this kind of diversity and encourages it. Campbell points out, however, that this is a process of evolution, of becoming, not of smashing things up. He points out that some people get stuck in what they perceive to be a fight with forces that are trying to hold them back and that as long as we fight with something, we focus on it and hence are bound to it by a negative force.

The discussion below of Fowler's stage four spirituality identifies this issue as well. We need to stop fighting and simply move on in our evolutionary process. We need to seek harmony within change. This is particularly the case when the force we perceive ourselves in opposition to is a large institution. We have no realistic chance to change such a thing. We are far better off creating whatever space or distance we require to feed ourselves and continue to develop, have the courage to recognize that we do not need the institution to do that, and move along in our evolutionary process. We will find joy and wonder along the way, and if it later becomes possible for the institution to fit comfortably back into our lives, so be it.

My thinking with respect to the Church was characterized last year largely by revolutionary tendencies.

Metaphoric Themes

The above metaphors have some things in common. The first is the recognition that the creation of the antithetical mask creates friction and conflict. As we jump from the moon to the sun, we have to break gravity. And, we can do these things by revolution, or evolution. By using a harmonic paradigm, this process is made much more satisfying.

It is my experience that an understanding of how endemic this process is takes a lot of emotion and turmoil out of it. The Church is playing the role of countless societal institutions throughout the ages as they resist change because that is the nature of societal institutions, and I am breaking free because it is my nature to do so. I should not expect to change the institution, I should just go and live my life as I wish to live it, and create as many good things as I can while creating and wearing my antithetical mask. The writing of this document is a significant step in that creative process. To the extent I can interact with the institution while fashioning and then wearing my antithetic mask and becoming what I am capable of becoming, I should do so. To the extent I cannot, that is just the way it is and nothing to get too upset about. None of this is surprising once we understand the history of this aspect of human life.

Matt Berry dealt with the fight against the repressive institution as follows:

But our sympathies ... our sympathies!? We want to help the lowly and the unfortunate? ... the victims who remain ignorant of an outrageous but successful villain? Test first, and then hold to the maxim: he who helps the intellectually incapable becomes their bully. Our “victims” will be the first to point this out to us. Our choice before the incapable is one of compassion or cruelty – keeping their mask in place by keeping ours in place or ripping off theirs by ripping off ours. The latter honesty at first appears virtuous. Ironically, it is touted as such by the popular religions themselves, but honesty’s actual effect is not our intended effect.

To believe that our message and motive will be understood is a quixotic as to believe that the other is capable of feeling rescued by excruciating truths ... as naïve as to believe that in removing his anaesthetizing self-deception, he will not hate us and entrench himself further into self-deception due to the subsequent pain for which we are to blame. Let us not forget the cornerstone of popular faith: “Truth is the comfortable persistence of my inherited presumptions. Discomfort is a refutation in and of itself.” Oedipus for them is about pity and Freud-sex but nothing more. Suffering through the discipline of recognizing self-deception is incomprehensible as an objective. What we are willing to sacrifice for authenticity seems masochistic to them. And should we preach, we are sadists. (Post-Atheism, p. 40)

The mask and moon/sun metaphors also share something of importance. The primary mask is reflective, whereas the antithetical mask is original and creative. While we wear the primary mask we represent society and reflect societal values. As we put on the antithetical mask, we attempt to create something unique – we become an energy source. In similar fashion, the moon reflects the sun and as we jump from one to the other, we leave a reflective state to become one with the power source.

The antithetical mask, the sun and the self are all independent power sources. When we jump from the moon to the sun, we leave reflective, dependant life and become part of the power source. When we take off the primary mask and create our own mask, we become our own power source. We no longer depend upon the structures that have raised us. We leave the marsupial pouch, the second womb, and chart our own course. It is a wonderful, liberating moment in life.

Group Decision Making Behaviour

Different groups, influenced by their societies and mythologies, use different decision making paradigms. Some are more controlled by a hierarchical power, while others are more free forming.

It could be argued that the creative process that maximizes progress requires the wasting of resources. For example:

1. Within the capitalist system waste surrounds us as people make poor production and consumption decisions. They spend the time, energy and material in seemingly sub-optimal ways, and somehow from the chaos of capitalism comes the most amazing economic progress that man has ever seen.
2. The democratic process is also apparently inefficient. Huge amounts of resources seem to be wasted in protracted, expensive rituals that appear no more useful than the strutting of male peacocks before their potential mates. We question (with good reason) the ethics and morality of many political leaders. And yet, out of democracy's political chaos we somehow grope toward better decisions, on average, than the rest of the world makes.
3. In the world of science, vast sums of money are spent by scientists who research things that are ridiculed by the man in the street whenever they come to his attention. The mating habits of birds? The dead and almost dead languages of obscure tribes in the African jungle? What happened in the theoretical fraction of a millisecond before the theoretical "big bang"? More chaos. More energy expended by people following their hearts. And regularly someone comes along and ties together things that to most of us seem unrelated, and so creates something of profound importance. My most recent experience with research of this sort came when I read Jared Diamond's 1997 Pulitzer Prize winning book "Guns, Germs and Steel", and was provided with the best explanation I have ever seen of the order in which different parts of the earth were populated (largely on the basis of the study of dead and nearly dead languages), how prosperity was created (largely on the basis of an understanding of which plants and animals can be domesticated, and where those were), why one people overran others (largely on the basis of how germs develop), and a variety of other matters of fundamental importance to an understanding of the cause and effect mechanisms that tie this world together.

Other examples could be provided.

And then we turn to the systems within which man or groups of men have decided that a few at the top should make most of the decisions for the rest. We could consider communism and dictatorships in the political and economic worlds, for example. These may have sounded good

in theory - a few smart people should be able to make better decisions about how to do things than us schmucks. But in practise these systems have been a miserable failure. The fact of the matter is that the best and smartest small part of a group cannot, generally speaking, produce ideas that are even close to as good as those that the entire group can produce. History has shown that once the creativity of the masses has been turned off, the ship soon loses momentum and/or drifts off course.

In the more mundane world of business, we could consider organizations that are networked at the grassroots level to encourage the development and dissemination of ideas and compare them to more traditional, pyramid style organizations. Networked organizations of many types are proving far more powerful than the traditional "top down" organizational structures that used to dominate the market by having each cog in the machine simply do its part. An environment in which it was difficult to collect and disseminate information mandated the pyramid organizational structure. This made it difficult to engage the creativity of the grassroots in the way they can be now with networked computers and access to seemingly endless amounts of information.

I think that it is fair to say that in human organizations of most types decision making behaviour improves as the following things occur:

1. More information is put in the hands of the people;
2. More people have access to that information;
3. The people are better trained to use that information; and
4. The people are given more freedom to make decisions based on the information they have and then are required to live with the consequences of those decisions.

As the quality of individual decisions improves, "group wisdom" or the culture of the society in question also improves.

I heard recently on a CBC Ideas program a fascinating example of how this idea works. One of India's largest indigenous computer companies was trying to find a way to "give back" to its community. India faces a tremendous educational challenge. In short, it has too many children for whom to build schools and provide teachers. At the moment it is practically speaking impossible to educate more than a modest percentage of its children.

The company in question decided to experiment with a new way of educating children. First, they began to install Internet computers in villages with little or not access to childhood educational facilities. They did this by finding a thick wall (or building one if they could not find one) and building the computer into the wall so that it would be difficult for thieves to extract or vandals to damage. The computer itself was not exposed, but a touch screen mechanism was by which the Internet could be accessed. Having installed a computer and turned it on, they simply stood back to see what would happen. They gave no classes on how computers operate. Most of the people in the areas where the computers were installed were illiterate in any event, and most of the Internet operates in English.

Most of those interested in the computers were children. Within a short time, by simple trial and error, a community based on a hierarchy of expertise developed around these computers. The

computers were in use constantly during the day and for most of each night. Children developed novel ways of playing games, finding music, drawing pictures, etc. The organized access to the computer with certain times set aside for groups interested in different types of computer use, and for specialized groups like small children who needed help to do things. “Gurus” quickly emerged who could figure things out more quickly than the rest of the group, and a hierarchy of users developed on that basis. One of the most talented in one village was a child so small that he could not reach the touch screen, and had to sit on the ground at a distance and tell older children what to do to get the things they wanted done. The children organized security to make sure that no one broke or stole the computer.

And here is the clincher: Some of the simple programming techniques that emerged in this community of illiterate computer users and rapidly spread to become the norm to accomplish certain community objectives were ingenious – better than anyone at the company had seen anywhere else.

The people at the computer company responsible for this wonderful program could not believe the complexity and wisdom of the behaviour displayed by a series of randomly chosen, dirt poor, groups of illiterate children when they were presented with an opportunity to use a resource and do whatever they wished with it. Not only was the decision making behaviour wise beyond belief, this community and the wisdom it produced was created within a fraction of the time during which the company had hoped to achieve much more modest objectives.

What lessons can we take from this summary of group decision-making behaviour as far as religious or mythological systems are concerned?

Religion or mythology is important in many ways. First and foremost, it is supposed to help us live joyful, fulfilling lives. It does this, primarily, by helping us to make good decisions. It does this by preserving and passing on to each new generation the wisdom of the ages, and by helping us to tailor that wisdom to fit the world’s changing circumstances.

As noted above, some religious organizations are more amenable to the antithetical mask, and hence the individual creative process, than others. In general terms, the West is more accepting of this approach than the East. However, within the West there are huge differences between the various religious organizations in their approach to this issue. Some religions operate on a quasi-democratic principle, and others are more dictatorial. Those at the dictatorial end of the spectrum excuse this by saying that they are doing god’s will. But since they also tell us what god’s will is, that is a little tough to swallow. In fact, these organizations are the religious equivalent of communist or dictatorial (perhaps benevolent) states - a small group of people makes decisions that in their view are in the best interest of the masses.

Given the above examples of positive and negative paradigms involving the engagement of the masses in the creative process, why would we think that religious organizations that operate on a dictatorial principle, and hence disengage to one extent or another the creativity of their membership, will produce better decision making behaviour and more wisdom than those that engage their members as fully as possible in that process?

I note that the recently elected prophet of the Community of Christ organization, formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, does not like being referred to as “the prophet”. He says that he is not a prophet for the people, but rather “the leader of a prophetic people”. That statement seems consistent to me with the best approach in this regard.

The LDS Approach to The Individual v. The Group

Joseph Smith developed the idea of individualism well beyond its Christian moorings. From Smith we get the idea of a pre-existent, co-eternal with god, individualized life force that comes to this earth for specific purposes, and will then progress eternally (perhaps through multiple earthly incarnations and after mortality as well), and can become god-like. In some ways, this is a beautiful synthesis of East and West. The Buddhists and others of the Eastern tradition believe that the ultimate being (god in Western terminology) is a transcendent reality that is beyond our description or understanding. They believe that prior to time we were all part of that, as was the rest of creation, and that upon our death we will become one with it again. When Joseph Smith's teachings are read with mystic eyes, they say much the same thing.

Joseph Smith taught that god requires little in the way of fixed doctrine and was critical of the churches of his day and their dogma. Early Mormonism was, hence, freewheeling from a theological point of view, and much more oriented toward charismatic, individualistic experience with the spirit than it was dogmatic. This is an individualistic approach that is orientated toward engaging the entire group in the creative process. Smith was ahead of his time in this regard. As indicated below in the section entitled "How Did We Get Here, and Why Did We Stay So Long?" things have changed a lot since then. Today, the LDS church is near the negative end of the spectrum in terms of suppression of information, free speech and thought. It should hence be expected not to produce the wisdom, good decision-making and personal creativity and growth that religions oriented toward something similar to the approach Smith originally instituted will produce.

Personal v. Impersonal Deity

One might be tempted to think that questions about the nature of god are so theoretical that we should not bother with them, and I note that this question was not at the top of my list when I began to question the Church. However, as I drilled deeper into the things that bothered me, I eventually got down to this and a few other issues that are so fundamental that they are usually taken for granted. As it turns out, our decision with respect to what we will believe god's nature to be has a direct effect on where we will look for him, who we will consider to be his emissaries, and how we will try to hear his voice.

Eastern religions, generally speaking, have impersonal deities whereas Western religions have personal deities. As Fowler notes in "Stages of Faith" (see below) and Karen Armstrong notes in "The History of God", the more advanced members of the Western belief systems throughout history have tended toward a transpersonal understanding of deity. That is, the mystics of all these belief systems swim in the same waters and speak the same language when it comes to their understanding of the nature of god. I could even go so far as to say that this phenomenon crosses the east-west boundary. That is, the Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim and Christian "mystics" all seem to experience god in the same way.

In "The History of God" (p. 162) Karen Armstrong notes:

The personal God has helped monotheists to value the sacred and inalienable rights of the individual and to develop an appreciation of human personality. The Judeo-Christian tradition has thus helped the West to acquire the liberal humanism it values so highly."

She then goes on to point out that the same God:

... can be a mere idol carved in our own image, a projection of our limited needs, fears, and desires. We can assume that he loves what we love and hates what we hate, endorsing our prejudices instead of compelling us to transcend them. When he seems to fail to prevent a catastrophe or seems even to desire a tragedy, he can seem callous and cruel. A facile belief that a disaster is the will of God can make us accept things that are fundamentally unacceptable. The very fact that, as a person, God has a gender is also limiting: It means that the sexuality of half the human race is sacralized at the expense of the female and can lead to a neurotic and inadequate imbalance in human sexual mores. A personal God can be dangerous, therefore. Instead of pulling us beyond our limitations, "he" can make us as cruel, callous, self-satisfied and partial as "he" seems to be. Instead of inspiring the compassion that should characterize all advanced religions, "he" can encourage us to judge, condemn, and marginalize.

Hence, the personal god is a mixed blessing. It seems to me that such a god, however, would work well as long as we don't have people around who insist that they can hear his voice so clearly. Perhaps the problem is not so much in the conception of a personal god, as in the nature of the mediators who interpret and state for him his will.

While the personal god has dominated most Western religious traditions, many Christian mystics rejected that notion. Campbell indicates in this regard as follows:

One problem with Yahweh, as they used to say in the old Christian Gnostic texts, is that he forgot he was a metaphor. He thought he was a fact. And when he said, "I am God," a voice was heard to say, "You are mistaken, Samael". "Samael" means "blind god": blind to the infinite Light of which he is a local manifestation. This is known as the blasphemy of Jehovah – that he thought he was God. (Campbell and Moyer, "The Power of Myth", p. 76)

The primary focus of Joseph Smith's theology is generally understood within the LDS church to prove that god was anthropomorphic (See D&C 130: 22-23). It is interesting to note, however, that his earlier writings and speaking including some of those later canonized by the LDS church posit a godhead that is one composite being containing three parts. (See Mosiah 15: 1-5; See also "Exploring and Extending the Millet-Bickmore Interpretive Key", by Robert Beckstead, at http://mormonscience.org/Public/Articles/Godhead/RTB_Bickmore-Millet%20Key.htm)

Whatever he originally intended, Joseph Smith is now generally perceived to have been most critical of the difficult to understand creeds of the various sects respecting the nature of god and the godhead. He is said to have been attempting to provide a clear, strong and simple voice in what he perceived to be a confusingly mess of impenetrable ideas about the nature of god. For Joseph Smith it was apparently simple: We are his children; he is our father; we are hence small versions of him. This conception suffers from the very problem Armstrong points to above. It is too easy to project our prejudices etc. onto god if he is a large version of us.

The Nicene Creed and other similar ideas about god that were prevalent in Joseph Smith's day (and still are today) were difficult to understand. I can now see that their opacity was in fact a blessing for those who believed these things in some ways. In particular, this complicated conception of god pointed to the fact that god's nature is not understandable. Scholars, churchmen and many others who did not get that point spent their lives spilling ink and wasting breath as they tried to understand. And many of the Christian mystics walked through this very door into an understanding that god is a transcendent or immanent reality, agreeing with Buddhist and other Eastern ideas about divinity many of them did not know existed.

However, while a few Christians walked through the door, for the majority god was personal, and all-powerful. He made the rules, broke them at will, and was responsible for everything around us. This conception of god created all of the problems Armstrong points out.

In Joseph Smith's effort (as it is now interpreted by most) to clarify the confusion respecting god's nature, in some ways he made things worse. He made god literal, and easily understandable. Smith's god was the ultimate in personal gods. He had deeply human attributes, such as a propensity to "weep" as Eugene England notes in his fine paper "The Weeping God of Mormonism" (See "element – an e-journal of mormon thought" volume 1 at <http://www.nd.edu/~rpotter/element4.html>). And, while LDS scholars and General Authorities have debated and continue to debate this point, there is a solid argument that in Mormon theology god continues to progress. As England indicates, referencing the well-known speech Joseph Smith gave at the funeral of King Follett:

Joseph Smith nowhere in it states definitely that God is finite or progressing in knowledge and power, but he certainly implies that God is not supreme and does not have all power by stating that there are Gods above him. It seems to me that Joseph Smith there also clearly describes an eternal process of learning and growth by which Godhood is attained, and he at least *implies* that that process *continues* for God himself:

First God Himself who sits enthroned in yonder heavens is a Man like unto one of yourselves--that is the great secret! . . . The first principle of truth and of the Gospel is to know of a certainty the character of God, and that we may converse with Him . . . that He once was a man like one of us. . . . You have got to learn how to make yourselves Gods . . . and be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done by going from a small capacity to a great capacity, from a small degree to another, from grace to grace . . . from exaltation to exaltation. [Jesus said], "I saw the Father work out His kingdom with fear and trembling and I am doing the same, too. When I get my kingdom, I will give it to the Father and it will add to and exalt His glory. He will take a higher exaltation and I will take His place and also be exalted, so that He obtains kingdom rolling upon Kingdom." . . . All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement and improvement. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. God Himself found Himself in the midst of spirits and glory. Because He was greater He saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest, who were less in intelligence, could have a privilege to advance like Himself and be exalted with Him, so that they might have one glory upon another in all that knowledge, power and glory. ("The King Follet Discourse: A New Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies* 18, 2 (Winter 1978): 200, 203, 204.)

There are two important ideas that flow from the King Follet discourse and other teachings of Joseph Smith on the topic of the nature of god. The first is that man is as god once was, and can progress to become just like god. This is similar to the idea of the Eastern religions and Western mystics that man (and the rest of creation) emanated from god, is in that sense part of him, and eventually will be reunified with the transcendent reality that he is once again. The idea that we are to continue progressing until we "become gods and goddesses, ..." points us toward the ultimate harmony with all existence, and god, that is fundamental to those Eastern and mystic points of view. These ideas could help us to transcend the problematic boundaries drawn by nations and religious groups. Unfortunately, they are interpreted in a literalistic

fashion within the LDS community (Become gods? We can't even do a reasonable job of home teaching!), the wonderful metaphorical possibilities are missed, and so Gordon Hinckley and others are now distancing themselves from them. They are likely to pass from Mormon consciousness before the last of our grandchildren has passed from this earth.

The second idea is that god is subject to eternal law, and hence is not all-powerful (History of the Church, 4:46 (Dec. 15, 1842)). This idea is developed further by other early LDS leaders, notably including John Widstoe (Rational Theology, pp. 20-22) and BH Roberts (The Mormon Doctrine of Deity, pp. 95-114)). The D&C makes this clear by teaching that there are laws upon which all the blessings are predicated, and that if we obey those laws god is bound (See D&C 82:10; 130: 20,21). This is almost identical to the Eastern and mystic idea that god is not all-powerful, but rather is a vehicle of an even higher power that transcends all and cannot be comprehended by man. It also evokes the idea first articulated in modern times by Baruch Spinoza, a Jewish philosopher in the 1600s, and later adopted by Albert Einstein and many other scientists. That is, god is the elegant systems of law that govern our existence and which science is slowly uncovering. God, as it were, was a metaphor used respecting these laws as long as man understood so little of them that such a metaphor was necessary. According to Spinoza, Einstein and many since then, we no longer need the metaphor. The mystics, Buddhists and followers of many other Eastern traditions never needed it.

In any event, the ideas that god is finite in the fashion indicated above and that "god is as man once was" are the two concepts that get Mormons into the most trouble with the other Christian churches. The mainstream Christian idea is that god can do anything - the law is because he created it, and he can change it or anything else anytime he wants to. This is at the foundation of the problem of evil with which they struggle. That is, if god is all-powerful, then he must be evil because he permits evil to exist. And if he can't prevent evil, then he must not be all powerful, and hence is not God. Smith deftly dealt with this age-old dilemma by adopting the approach of the Eastern and mystic faiths. God is not all-powerful – he is finite. He is a master scientist, in essence. He knows all of the eternal laws, and can accomplish his purposes by using them. Evil is a function of those laws and our free will (one of those laws), and hence is beyond his control.

The effect of the two ideas just mentioned is to close the gulf between god and man created by traditional Christianity. England in "The Weeping God of Mormonism" points out this very thing. In LDS theology, man is more and god is less than most Christians believe. This creates tension between the LDS and Christian camps. This is why they say that we are not Christians. However, these very ideas could make it much easier for LDS people to adopt the harmonious approach to living advocated by certain Eastern and mystic traditions.

As I noted above, when we boil the difficulties that arise out of the personal god down to basic elements, it seems that the problem is two-fold. First, if god is personal then he can behave, think etc. like us and we can project our values onto him, and have them conveniently echo back at us. Religious leaders who for pure and impure purposes speak on god's behalf exacerbate this problem. The second part of the difficulty lies in god's omnipotence. If he can do whatever he wants, then anything the leaders attribute to him is his will. That includes inquisitions, crusades, slavery and other forms of racial prejudice, etc.

The fact that Smith is interpreted to be at the extreme end of the personal god scale would suggest that Mormonism should be in deep trouble on this point. However, the idea that god is not all-powerful provides a significant antidote to the ills of the personal god. If this idea is taken seriously (which it is not in Mormonism), it opens the door to the transcendent or immanent god

who is part of being, within a system of law, and who therefore does not intervene here and there to support our wishes and values. Our task, then, becomes that of discovering eternal law – the principles on which this earth and all around it function. God, as noted above, in effect if not in fact is to be found in the understanding of those laws. Is he any more than a metaphor for them? My inclination at the moment is that he is just and only such a metaphor.

Here we have the beginnings of a myth that can wed science and religion, and allow them to walk down the road together, "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little ..." (D&C 89:12; 128:21), through a process that requires that we "study it out in our minds" (D&C 9: 8) and then check for the feeling that it is right as described both in D&C section 9 and in the book "Why God Won't Go Away", as quoted below in the section titled, " How Did We Get Here, and Why Did We Stay So Long?"

The Mormon idea that is unique to Christianity (I think), that eternal law overrides god means that there is an impersonal bulwark that stands behind god. The question then becomes what can he do within the bounds of that law, and what must flow from the operation of law? That is the area within which Mormons (both members and leaders) manoeuvre to project their attitudes toward god. However, long before I made my break from the Church I had come to the conclusion that there is much more operation of law and much less divine intervention than most LDS people believe. Otherwise, I reasoned, god was a respecter of persons and the purposes of the Plan of Salvation could not be served. Without knowing what I was doing, I was preparing my mind for the transpersonal, transcendent, immanent ground of being I now conceive god to be. I was approaching Fowler's stage five faith.

I suggest that the current LDS interpretation of Smith's theology on this point, while far from perfect, opens the door and points down the hallway toward real spirituality as well or better as most other Christian traditions do. And it may be that Smith's real theology was even better. I have not read enough about this topic to have an opinion worth listening to yet respecting it. In any event, the key in Mormon theology on the nature of god, as it turns out, is not the personality or impersonality of god. It is his omnipotence or lack thereof. This points us in the right direction, as does the ephemeral nature of the definition of god and the godhead used by many mainstream Christian denominations.

Time and History: Linear v. Cyclical

One of the great innovations of the Hebrew/Semitic tradition that was superimposed on pre-existing Levantine ideology was that history is linear and progressive instead of cyclical. The Eastern religious traditions are clearly cyclical in nature. The importance of the idea of reincarnation is a reflection of the fundamental importance of this idea in their culture. The high point of European culture, and still the source of many important modern Western ideas was Greek philosophy, which was unabashedly cyclical in nature.

Thomas Cahill makes the point as follows:

All evidence points to there having been, in the earliest religious thought, a vision of the cosmos that was profoundly cyclical. The assumptions that early man made about the world were, in all their essentials, little different from the assumptions that later and more sophisticated societies, like Greece and India, would make in a more elaborate manner. As Henri-Charles Puech says of Greek thought in his seminal "Man and Time": "No event is unique, nothing is enacted but once ...; every event has been enacted, is

enacted, and will be enacted perpetually; the same individuals have appeared, appear, and will appear at every turn of the circle.”

The Jews were the first people to break out of this circle, to find a new way of thinking and experiencing, a new way of understanding and feeling the world, so much so that it may be said with some justice that theirs is the only new idea that human beings have ever had. Their worldview has become so much a part of us that at this point it might as well have been written into our cells as a genetic code. (The Gifts of the Jews, p. 5)

We are looking here at one of the great turning points in the history of human sensibility – at an enormous value shift. What was real for the Sumerians (and for all other peoples but the Jews) was the Eternal. What was to become gradually real for the Jews and remains real for us is the here and now and the there and then. The question that springs constantly to our lips – “Did that really happen?” – had little meaning in an ancient civilization. (The Gifts of the Jews, P. 127, 128).

In this idea that our experience is part of a unique process we find the roots of many things. Thomas Cahill indicated:

Capitalism and communism are both bastard children of the Bible, for both are progressive faiths, modeled on biblical faith and demanding of their adherents that they always hold in their hearts a belief in the future and keep before their eyes the vision of a better tomorrow, whether that tomorrow contains a larger gross domestic product or a workers’ paradise. Neither ideology could have risen in the cyclical East, in Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism or Shinto. But because capitalism and communism are processive faiths without God, each is a form of madness – a fantasy without a guarantee. Democracy, in contrast, grows directly out of the Israelite vision of individuals, subjects of value because they are images of God, each with a unique and personal destiny. There is no way that it could ever have been “self evident that all men are created equal” without the intervention of the Jews. (The Gift of the Jews, p. 249)

And I note that the dark side of the life affirming v. life denying, and conflict v. harmony concepts described below can also be traced to this idea. So I don’t go quite as far as Cahill does in crediting the Jews, but I do agree that the link between the individual human and the divine, and the unique, progressive nature of each individual’s life experience and hence the linear progressive of human history as a whole is one of the keys to understanding the differences between Eastern and Western thought and culture.

I also note that the Zoroastrians, from whom the Jews likely inherited many religious concepts during the period of Babylonian captivity (590 to 540 BCE more or less), also conceived of history in linear fashion, and they may have inherited this aspect of their belief systems from their Aryan ancestors from Eastern Europe. (See Palmer et al, Religions of the World, p. 47 et seq.). Zarathustra, the founder of Zoroastrianism, lived somewhere between 1,500 and 600 BCE but as is usually the case, built his religious philosophy out of a pre-existing tradition, in this case Aryan. The best available data places Zarathustra well after Moses’ and Abraham’s presumed dates of existence. However, it is in my view not possible to say who came up with the idea of linear time first. It does make sense to me that linear time and individual accomplishment came together, and that these ideas originated in a hunter/herder society. As Campbell points out, that is where individual acts make a great difference in what happens. Hence, since both the Aryans and the Semites were hunter/herders, I do not find it strange that they are both associated with this idea. Whether one of them came up with it and the other

borrowed or whether they both came up with it independently does not matter in my view. The important thing is that these important ideas ended up playing a pivotal role in the development of Levantine religious belief systems, and from there became part of the foundation of the Western world.

Karen Armstrong's ideas summarized below with regard to the imposition of science and its logos approach to life on ancient mythos makes more sense to me than much of what Cahill has to say as he further develops the ideas mentioned above. In short, I do not credit the Hebrews alone in the way he does. I credit the creative tension between certain aspects of Hebrew ideology and its surrounding cultures, such as the Persians (Zoroastrians) Greeks and Romans, with creating an environment in which human culture and civilization could flourish. This is the approach illustrated beautifully by Jared Diamond in "Guns, Germs and Steel". We can explain most progress, and relative rates of progress, by the degree of interaction between people and available resources. The more resources and interaction, the more quickly progress is made. The confluence first of Mesopotamian and Semitic cultures, and then their continual interaction with Aryan and European cultures in an environment rich in resources produced our Western paradigm with all of its problems and power.

As Armstrong and Diamond when taken together lucidly point out, the "eternal laws" that govern the creation of stronger organisms (societally and otherwise) are disclosed by the combination of scientific investigation and an understanding of broad historic trends. Man has always tended to assume that his god was responsible for any victories he won, and that his disobedience to that god or the presence of a stronger god elsewhere were responsible for his defeats. When he credits the Jewish people, and implicitly their belief system, for the pivotal role the Levant played in world history, Cahill is only one of the latest in a long line of people to think in this parochial way.

Did the Hebrews play an important role in the development of Western culture? Without question, yes they did. Was their god or belief system responsible for that? No more so than my god and belief system are responsible for the fact that I am a tax lawyer living in relative luxury in Canada are for that. How would the same god and belief system have served me had I been born in the Andes Mountains among the illiterate Quechua speaking Indians I worked with on my mission? The available of information and resources and interaction with other people largely determine what we do and become. Our belief system is a product, largely, of that as well, as I hope the development of this spiritual map makes clear.

Armstrong and others have painted a convincing picture of how the idea of the Hebrew god morphed from the tribalistic, capricious, bloodthirsty, vengeful Yahweh into the compassionate god adopted by the early Christians. Evolving societal forces, not a god in need of Prozac who finally found some, seem responsible for this developmental process.

The picture that comes into focus is one of the Hebrews happening to be in the right place and right time in history to play a critical role. Had they not come along when they did, others would have to perform the same or a similar role. However, their pivotal place in history has resulted in many, such as Cahill, who assume that this is evidence that there is something unique and special about their history and resulting theology that should give it special status. Not so in my view. It is a steppingstone in humanity's progress, like all others. We should learn from it, use it, and combine it with the best we can find elsewhere as we continue to follow our minds and intuition in a search for both progress and the continuing benefits it brings, as well as greater harmony with ourselves and society at large.

The LDS Conception of Time and History

As Stirling McMurrin eloquently points out, the Christian tradition inherited and developed the Levantine notion of linear history, and did so in a European environment dominated by Greek thought. Much of early Christian theology was a struggle between those conflicting points of view. McMurrin notes:

It would be a serious error to suppose that the classical Christian doctrine [of time] was a denial of human history. On the contrary, it set the Hebrew time-history consciousness in firm opposition to the Greek and Roman conception of the cyclical nature of time that described history as turning indefinitely upon itself in an endless series of time-cycles, a theory commonly accepted in the Non-Semitic world and found in Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius and the Stoics. This classical denial of history was finally overthrown by St. Augustine's "City of God", which was a declaration of a temporal movement of human history from a beginning to an end, a process never to be repeated. The Hebrew conception of the world's beginning made it possible to conceive of an end, and with a beginning and an end there was a definite direction in the movement of history, a direction determined by the purposes of providence of God. But for Christianity, the historical process was nevertheless contained within a framework of eternity, and the numerous issues relating to the tensions of time and eternity were therefore inevitable. ("The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion", p. 40)

McMurrin goes on to outline the ways in which Mormon theology has further developed in some ways, and muddled in others, these concepts.

Now Mormonism has always assumed the naïve concept of space and time as contexts for whatever is real. Accordingly, it denies eternity in the sense of timelessness, describing God as subject to both time and space. God is both somewhere and sometime, a view that has always widely prevailed in popular religion and that is central to the Mormon conception that God is a material being. The doctrine of God's temporality is the most radical facet of Mormon finitism [respecting God's nature] and certainly the most important, for by its very nature temporality involves process, as the concept of time can have meaning only as a measure or context for events. God is placed therefore not above or without, but within the ongoing processes of the universe. The ultimate immutability of reality is thereby denied, and world history, human history, human effort, human development, and human freedom take on a new meaning, for the future is real and unique, not merely from the perspective of men, but as well from the perspective of God. On such a theory it would be impossible to bring men to subservience by the Spinozistic demand that they deny the verdict of their own experience by viewing themselves, their struggles, and their tragedies under the aspect of eternity, from the standpoint of an eternal God for whom there can be neither struggle nor tragedy. Rather, here God himself has the perspective of time, and whatever is in the world and whatever proceeds in the world is real for him genuinely and in its temporal process. The Mormon theologians seem generally to be unaware of the far-reaching implications of this distinctive facet of their theology, even though the Mormon religion is conducive to a highly sensitised temporal consciousness, as evidenced in the historical awareness that characterizes the Mormon mind and habit. Indeed, at times they even betray the high possibilities of their own theology by describing God as subject to eternal, immutable "principles" that are external to him, even though this relegates the divine personality to something less than the highest order of reality. They should find inspiration in Alfred North Whitehead's prophesy that "that religion will conquer which

can render clear to popular understanding some eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact.” (“The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion”, pp. 39, 40)

The use of the word “betray” above is a little confusing. McMurrin makes it clear elsewhere that in his view the most important aspect of Mormon theology is that god is finite and subject to eternal law. This solves the problem of evil and does all kinds of other important things, from his point of view (and mine).

McMurrin does not mention, however, Joseph Smith’s reputed teaching of the doctrine of reincarnation which he appears to have borrowed from the Kabala branch of Jewish mysticism. The concept is developed further below. Reincarnation imports the great cycle concept into the generally progressive notion of Mormon theology. There are also other aspects of the great round or cycle idea that come into the Mormon belief system from other angles, one of which appears to be the Masonic belief system which heavily influenced the development of LDS temple rites.

The closer I look at Smith’s teachings, the more clear it is to me that they were developed in a hodgepodge fashion, probably to deal with exigencies from moment to moment as he scrambled in showman-like fashion trying to keep his jittery flock together. As a result, he painted himself into many corners. The teaching of a finite god located in linear history, subject to eternal law juxtaposed against cabalistic reincarnation is one example of this. That is not to say Smith’s ideas are without merit. They have great merit. But one must be free to dismiss him when he appears wrong or confused.

It would, in my view, be close to impossible to construct a consistent, rational theology around the teachings of Joseph Smith. It is not surprising that no one has attempted it to date. The LDS approach to religion prides itself on being middle to low brow when it comes to theory. Mormonism is about practical living and how one “feels” about her religious experience.

It is also not surprising that as BYU’s Dr. Stephen Robinson and others finally begin to engage Christian theologians in serious theological debate that they are jettisoning Joseph Smith’s teachings that are inconsistent with the already well-developed theology of mainstream Christianity. It appears that the first things Robinson et al would like to get rid of are the ideas that man can become as god/god was once as man, and god is subject to eternal law and hence is finite. Reincarnation, since it is a lesser-known teaching of Joseph Smith, is simply ignored.

As I have so often noted during my recent studies, when we dig deep into any religious tradition, paradox is abundant and ideological trends are discerned against a cacophony of conflicting particulars.

Life Affirming, Life Denying, or Life Changing

According to Campbell and others I have read, there are three types of religious systems found in the East and West. The first is life affirming. This is a trait of the most primitive of religious systems, and some of the better-developed including most of Buddhism’s modern manifestations. Campbell says that he cannot recall having read a single negative word in all of the primitive mythology he has read, ancient or modern, about life itself. The whining and complaining about the nature of life comes from developed societies, living “fat”, as Campbell

puts it. The life affirming mythologies embrace the whole of life, right down to the horrendous roots of death and suffering.

The second type of religious system is life denying. One of the earliest significant examples of this approach came with the Buddha in the 6th century B.C. That is, in the face of the terrible existential questions, early Buddhism denies the validity of life. Hence, the Buddha overcame desire and fear, and left the world. Campbell also points out that desire (or aspiration) and fear are all that bind society together. Early Buddhist society hence must have been bound together by the aspiration to leave life (desire and fear) behind, which gets one into the vicious circle I have read about. The desire to leave desire is itself desire.

This life denying philosophy says, in essence, "get me out of here! I won't play this game. It is too horrendous." There is a thin line between this and the pursuit of Nirvana in some Buddhist traditions. And the "release" that occurs in the Hindu faith that performs a function similar to Nirvana is life denying at least to an extent. Most aspects of Buddhism, however, have developed past its life denying beginnings to become life affirming. The Buddhists did this by stipulating that once we truly understand life, we see that it is perfect as it is, with all of its horror. It is then up to us to transcend our notions of suffering and find perfection both in ourselves and in life. We must harmonize ourselves with life's imperfection. As we come to understand ourselves at the deepest level, we find harmony with all of life and can accept and embrace it as it is. The Buddhist pantheon even includes gods with names like "The Bliss and Ecstasy of Terror". They find ways to embrace it all.

Conflict v. Harmony

Both the life affirming approach and the life denying approach lead to harmony, in different but related ways.

The last of the three basic types of religion or mythology tries to change life. This idea first appeared in the Aryan influenced mythologies of the Levant. It sounds familiar. The earth and man were created by forces of good, but corrupted by forces of evil. The evil in both man and the world must be rooted out, subdued by way of force, through a battle of sorts. We are to enlist ourselves on either the side of good or evil in the course of this battle. If we have not enlisted on the side of "good" (as defined by different people at different times for their own purposes), we are by definition on the side of evil and are to be eliminated. In civilized societies, this means ostracized and despised/pitied at best. In primitive societies it often means death.

This third way, which Campbell equates to marrying someone for the purpose of changing him or her, is life denying. It does not deny life entirely, but substantially. It does not indicate that we should reject the whole; it indicates that we should reject a substantial and bad part, and must fight through that bad part toward something better.

As Campbell indicated:

I once heard a lecture by the wonderful old Zen philosopher, Dr. D.T. Suzuki. He stood up with his hands slowly rubbing his sides and said, "God against man. Man against God. Man against nature. Nature against man. Nature against God. God against nature – very funny religion!" (Campbell and Moyer, "The Power of Myth", p. 66)

Campbell writes of the ancient idea that before time all matter was one and perfect harmony existed:

This story from the Upanishads that we have just read – “I see that I am this creation,” says the god. When you see that God is the creation, and that you are a creature, you realize the God is within you, and in the man or woman with whom you are talking, as well. So there is the realization of two aspects of the one divinity. There is a basic mythological motif that originally all was one, and then there was separation – heaven and earth, male and female, and so forth. How did we lose touch with the unity? One thing you can say is that the separation was somebody’s fault – they ate the wrong fruit or said the wrong words to God so he got angry and then went away. So now the eternal is somehow away from us, and we have to find some way to get back in touch with it. There is another theme, in which man is thought of as having come not from above but from the womb of Mother Earth. Often, in these stories, there is a great ladder or rope up which people climb. The last people to want to get out are two great big fat heavy people. They grab the rope, and snap! – it breaks. So we are separated from our source. In a sense, because of our minds, we actually are separated, and the problem is to reunite that broke cord.

The Greek legend that Aristophanes tells in Plato’s Symposium is another of this kind [of creation story]. Aristophanes says that in the beginning there were creatures composed of what are now two human beings. And those were of three sorts: male/female, male/male, and female/female. The gods then split them all in two. But after they had been split apart, all they could think of to do was to embrace each other again in order to reconstitute the original units. So we all now spend our lives trying to find and re-embrace our other halves. ...

So the one great story is our search to find our place in the drama. To be in accord with the grand symphony that this world is, to put the harmony of our own body in accord with that harmony. ... (Campbell and Moyer, *The Power of Myth*, p. 62, 64, 65)

That is, the problem is to find harmony once again, not to subdue or change something that is bad. This is a very important conceptual point. It has changed the way I perceive many things around me, and there has changed the way in which I react to the potentially conflict, stress inducing aspects of life.

Consider what this idea does in respect of marriage. Campbell writes:

What is marriage? The myth tells you what it is. It’s the reunion of the separated duad. Originally you were one. You are now two in the world, but the recognition of the spiritual identity is what marriage is. It’s different from a love affair. It has nothing to do with that. It’s another mythological plane of experience. When people get married because they think it’s a long-time love affair, they’ll be divorced very soon, because all love affairs end in disappointment. But marriage is recognition of a spiritual identity. If we live a proper life, if our minds are on the right qualities in regarding the person of the opposite sex, we will find our proper male or female counterpart. But if we are distracted by certain sensuous interests, we’ll marry the wrong person. By marrying the right person, we reconstruct the image of the incarnate God, and that’s what marriage is. ... Marriage is a relationship. When you make the sacrifice in marriage, you’re not sacrificing to each other but to unity in a relationship. Marriage is not a simple love

affair, it's an ordeal, and the ordeal is the sacrifice of ego to a relationship in which two have become one. (Campbell and Moyer, *The Power of Myth*, p. 5, 7)

This is similar to the LDS conception. However, in the LDS paradigm the priesthood gets in the way of the two becoming one. The priesthood gives the male ascendancy and obscures the importance of finding harmony and rejoicing in complementary difference. The best statement of the LDS conception of marriage of which I am aware is found in Eugene England's "On Fidelity, Polygamy and Celestial Marriage" (*Dialogue*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1987; reprinted in *Dialogue* Vol. 35, No. 1, 2002, p. 43). He establishes a convincing scriptural and theological basis for precisely the conception of marriage I have tried to articulate, and at the same time argues that polygamy is not a requirement of celestial life but is rather appropriate in some times and places. I had reached these conclusions before I found his arguments, and do not feel that I need any basis in scripture to maintain them. However, it was interesting nonetheless to see how he worked with the material at hand to reason his way toward the right conclusion.

The conflict-oriented approach has been my way to this point in life. As I let that go and adopt a more harmonious attitude to all around me, wonderful things are happening. In particular, I have found within my marriage and family that applying the paradigm outlined above has had important, positive and far-reaching effects.

I must acknowledge, however, that the "subdue all around us" approach is useful in some ways. The idea that we can and should change things has provided a lot of the energy that has propelled the West forward. Jared Diamond in "Guns, Germs and Steel" indicates that both Europe and Asia have similar advantages in terms of domesticatable plants and animals, which were the key determinants of the development of civilization. He provides reasons as to why the West spread its influence to the parts of the world that did not have similar advantages while the East did not to the same extent, and in my view does not give this basic, philosophical difference enough credit.

Certain other aspects of Diamond's theories are also relevant to this point. He suggests that it was not a coincidence that modern civilization emerged in the Fertile Crescent – that is where the earth hosted the largest number of what turned out to be domesticable plants and animals. That confluence created the best conditions for civilization to form and then evolve. Joseph Campbell indicates the same thing respecting the development of the idea of the individual, democracy and other trademark Western cultural traits. These concepts emerged from the centuries of interaction, much of it characterized by conflict, between the different cultures of Europe and the Near East, whereas the cultures of India and the Far East were isolated enough that they did not experience the same kind of productive interaction.

It is not surprising, hence, that our modern Western culture is so dynamic. This is where, more than at any time in human history, the creation of the antithetical mask is encouraged and hence a constant creative tension is maintained as new ideas clash against those supported by the establishment. In the reformulation of my religious faith and worldview, I am a tiny actor in this endless, productive drama, as are the religious functionaries and their followers who provide the resistance necessary to maintain the creative tension I feel. This tension has propelled me far beyond the boundaries of my former faith, and while in some ways I would not wish it upon myself or others, just as perhaps a mother would not wish the pangs of childbirth on her daughter, I am grateful for what it has caused me to do and expect it to do similar things for others.

My objective now is to continue to harness the sources of creative tension in my life, but to recognize and celebrate them for the important function that they perform. Sure, it does not feel good to have been deceived by my religious tradition and its leaders. But once I recognize that this is the nature of religions, and that they are simply an evolved response to deeply rooted human needs of probable evolutionary origin, just as is my need to push past them, I can recast what seemed to like a fight as something constructive. This is a game, albeit one with deadly serious consequences, that mankind has played largely without knowing it from the dawn of history.

There is no question about Joseph Smith's theology on this point – it is life changing and therefore conflict oriented. Joseph Smith was firmly within the Christian tradition in this regard. However, as is the case with Christianity, harmony oriented teachings – some of them powerful – are part of the Mormon tradition. I refer to some of these in the subsection on "Conflict v. Harmony" below within the "Where Do We Want to Be?" section. Unfortunately, in my experience they are not strongly enough embedded in LDS culture to win out over its primary conflict paradigm.

Conflict and Organizational Theory

Using religion to control the masses is probably the world's second oldest profession, is just as honourable (or dishonourable, depending on your point of view) as the first, and is driven by the same kind of primal forces.

There is school of sociological thought that suggests that we should not analyze modern institutions or other types of organization in terms of their functions, but rather in terms of the conflict they host or attempt to mediate. That is, this theory suggests that the purpose of human organizations is to mediate conflict, and one cannot understand an organization without understanding the conflict that gave rise to it and which gives it its character.

This is a fascinating way of approaching the study of religious institutions. I have not found any literature that does this yet, but have not looked carefully in that regard either. This theory seems to be consistent with one of Joseph Campbell's principal ideas respecting mythology. That is, the primary purpose of mythology is to help us deal with our existential questions in a manner that makes sense in light of our knowledge of the world around us. This, I suggest, is the foundational conflict on which all religious belief is based and hence around which all religions are organized.

Next we have to ask why different religions arise from time to time. Here the story gets complicated. Some religions are imposed as part of military or other conquest as a control tool. This is how Christianity was spread through most parts of the world, how the Inca religion came to dominate the Andean region of South America at one time, etc. Society, in many ways, works more smoothly if the values underlying it are consistent. The acceptance of a value system based on divine decree is one of the simplest ways to achieve this kind of consistency.

Some religions arise spontaneously in response to perceived inadequacies of their predecessor. This is how Christianity, Buddhism and Islam all arose in general terms, but the inadequacies they each addressed were quite different. I suggest that Mormonism has followed a similar path. Hence, I believe that the "conflict" theory supports those who would try to understand Mormonism by looking at the controversies within 19th century American society that could have given rise to it.

Alexander Campbell, one of Joseph Smith's contemporary critics, indicated that:

This prophet Smith, through his stone spectacles, wrote on the plates of Nephi, in his book of Mormon, every error and almost every truth discussed in N. York for the last ten years. He decides all the great controversies - infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of freemasonry, republican government, and the rights of man. All these topics are repeatedly alluded to. (Millennial Harbinger, February 7, 1831, <http://www.lds-mormon.com/campbell.shtml>)

A significant amount of more recent scholarship points in the same direction. However, if certain conflicts in Joseph Smith's day gave rise to Mormonism, we have to also ask what has sustained it for almost two hundred years. Surely the originating conflicts are not still with us.

Mormonism changed dramatically as Brigham Young took it to Utah. The nature of the conflicts it mediated likewise changed as it became a pioneering organization that brought huge numbers of immigrants from Europe and forged a complex society in a part of North America that no one else wanted at the time. When the Church's back was almost broken in the late 1800s and much of its power was stripped from it, once again it went through a metamorphosis as it began to function more like a traditional church and less like a government, and as Utah became increasingly integrated socially and otherwise to the rest of the world. The Church lost many of its control tools during that process, and began to emphasize new ones such as continual temple attendance and the worthiness interviews required in that regard. I also suggest that as we have entered and continue to progress into an age in which unprecedented amounts of information are available to anyone who wants it, that the Church has again lost power on a scale similar to that which occurred in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This loss is a result of the Church no longer being able to control information respecting itself and its origins. It is my view that it will again have to reinvent itself to remain relevant to its members. This is what I see happening as its leadership simultaneously move toward mainstream Christianity in many ways, while insisting on complete obedience to Church authority and not probing historical and theological difficulties.

This is an area that I have identified for future study, and so I will not speculate at this point as to the precise nature of the conflicts that have sustained the Church and how they were and are tied to the more stable, but still evolving, base of Mormon theology. After I have dug further into the sociological literature on this point, I will try to determine how the nature of the conflict the Church mediates has changed over the course of time, and see what kind of explanatory power the resulting model has in terms of predicting and elucidating the Church's institutional behaviour. One of the related theories I will explore in this regard is the idea that once any religion has grown to a certain size, which might be termed critical mass, it becomes an organism that has a dynamic that is to some extent independent from the founding and other controversies it mediates. As it becomes a part of a society's social fabric, it begins to mediate conflict that has little to do with religion. And its size and resources enable it, given the right conditions and leadership, to change radically in order to meet different types of conflict that its members face as the world changes. When I consider what Mormonism was during its early days and what it has become, I see evidence of this principle in operation, but do not know much at the moment about the mechanisms that underlie its operation.

Mysticism/Mythology v. Dogmatism/Literalism

Mythos and Logos

As Karen Armstrong puts it:

We tend to assume that people in the past were (more or less) like us, but in fact their spiritual lives were rather different. In particular, they evolved two ways of thinking, speaking, and acquiring knowledge, which scholars have called mythos and logos. Both were essential; they were regarded as complementary ways of arriving at truth, and each had its special area of competence. Myth was regarded as primary; it was concerned with what was thought to be timeless and constant in our existence. Myth looks back to the origins of life, to the foundations of culture, and to the deepest levels of the human mind. Myth was not concerned with practical matters, but with meaning. Unless we find some significance in our lives, we mortal men and women fall very easily into despair. The mythos of society provided people with a context that made sense of their day-to-day lives; it directed their attention to the eternal and the universal. (Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, p. xv)

She then summarized how myth was tied into the Jungian world of dreams and the unconscious; how it was not rational but rather was intuitive; and how it related to religious ritual, cultic practises and meditative disciplines. She concludes her preliminary definition of myth by bringing out an important point respecting history. In pre-modern society history was not the science of finding the truth about what happened in the past. Rather, it was about meaning; it was mythic.

Historical events were not seen as unique occurrences, set in far-off time, but were thought to be external manifestations of constant, timeless realities. Hence history would tend to repeat itself, because there was nothing new under the sun. Historical narratives tried to bring out this eternal dimension. Thus, we do not know what really occurred when the ancient Israelites escaped from Egypt and passed through the Sea of Reeds. The story has been deliberately written as myth, and linked with other stories about rites of passage, immersion in the deep, and gods spitting a sea in two to create a new reality. ... One could say that unless an historical event is mythologized in this way, and liberated from the past in an inspiring cult, it cannot be religious. To ask whether the Exodus from Egypt took place exactly as recounted in the Bible or to demand historical and scientific evidence to prove that it is factually true is to mistake the nature and purpose of this story. It is to confuse mythos with logos. (Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, p. xvi)

This approach to history makes sense particularly in light of the ideas I have recently picked up from the books, "Why People Believe Weird Things" and "Why God Won't Go Away", summarized under the heading "How Did We Get Here, and Why Did We Stay So Long?" Briefly, the first of these ideas is that a concept we become convinced is true becomes a filter that prevents us from understanding evidence that contradicts it. It thus protects and confirms itself. The second idea is that the smarter we are, the stronger this "confirmation bias" is likely to be. The third idea is that the manner in which memories are recalled by the mind aids and abets this process. Memory is not recalled as videotape is rewound, it is reconstructed each time we recall it. Hence, our biases and information we have obtained since the last time the memory was recalled all have been proven to influence our perception of the past through the memory reconstruction process.

As Armstrong pointed out above, myth and the seemingly unchanging values it supported were in pre-modern times the primary lens through which people saw life. Hence, it is not surprising that history (the collective cultural memory) was reconstructed to accord with myth, and hence to become myth itself.

Armstrong defines logos as follows:

Logos was the rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought that enabled men and women to function well in the world. ... Unlike myth, logos must relate exactly to facts and correspond to external realities if it is to be effective. ... We use this logical, discursive reasoning when we have to make things happen, get something done, or persuade other people to adopt a particular course of action. Logos is practical. Unlike myth, which looks back to the beginnings and to the foundations, logos forges ahead and tries to find something new: to elaborate on old insights, achieve a greater control over our environment, discover something fresh, and invent something novel. (Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, p. xvi, xvii)

She continues to note how in pre-modern society mythos and logos were complementary. Mythos provided the meaning and context within which logos provided the nuts and bolts of daily life. She mentioned the First Crusade as a classic of example of mythos and logos both in operation. This Crusade started out as pure logos. In the twelfth century C.E. Pope Urban II wanted the knights of Europe to stop tearing their society apart by fighting each other, and to instead expend their energies in the Near East to extend the Church and Europe's power. As long as the Crusade proceeded on this basis, it was militarily successful. However, Armstrong notes: "When ... Crusaders started making a mythical or mystical vision the basis of their policies, they were usually defeated and committed terrible atrocities." (Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, p. xvii)

For example, think about the following mythic ideas in the context of that Crusade:

1. The Biblical lands were sanctified by Christ during his time on earth;
2. it was god's will that they be returned to Christian hands;
3. god was all powerful; and
4. therefore, god would deliver the Holy Land from the Infidels into the Crusaders' hands if they had the faith to go take it.

Any battle plan based on this kind of reasoning is not likely to be successful. Armstrong notes this as an illustration of the principle that mythology is a poor guide to many of the practical aspects of life.

But was mythology not about ultimate meaning? What is mythos for if not to provide meaning and context, and hence help us to make better decisions? I have several observations in that regard. First, mythos only works as a practical guide within the context where it was developed. By the time the Crusades came along, the mythos in question was not only out of date, but also long out of its time. Second, mythos is an inexhaustible source of meaning. The meanings that can be drawn from any one myth can range from the sublimely inspired to the ridiculous and evil. And third, sometimes when we go back to the root of the myth we find spurious cause and effect relationships that have been codified as myth, and are in fact poor guides to behaviour in

any context. See the discussion below respecting Type 1 and 2 errors and hits in the book "Why People Believe Weird Things".

Each of the above three concepts have possible application to the disastrous idea of the Crusades. But in particular, I note that we revisit the four points above respecting the Holy Land that motivated at least part of the Crusades, we find that they are extrapolations of the belief that the Holy Land was given by god to the children of Israel. This belief was implied from the fact of their successful conquering of the agriculturally oriented inhabitants of that land. However, the Israelites were later rooted out themselves, and have kept returning in reliance upon god's "promise". The history of that area of the world, right up to today, can be read as evidence that one of the most powerful, erroneous ideas ever is that Palestine was given by god to the children of Israel. It has motivated millennia of counterproductive behaviour.

The Christian Crusaders simply appropriated the Holy Land myth for themselves. It was, and is, bad for the Jews, and it was even less suited to the European Crusaders. Hence, the consequences of their use of this myth were predictably disastrous. The Machiavellian side of me says that Pope Urban could have done much more with his Crusade had he recognized the motivating power of this myth, and then made sure that it did not influence any strategic planning related to what he wanted to achieve, which was the conquest of new territory. This was a military manoeuvre, not a spiritual matter. To confuse the spiritual with the practical is, in my experience, to court disaster.

Armstrong notes that by the eighteenth century logos was causing mankind to make such progress, and the weaknesses of mythology as a practical guide to decision making were becoming so apparent that logos became the primary lens through which many people saw life. In particular, the logos approach to history when applied to mythic history was exposing what appeared to be outright falsehood. The Bible, for example, was not what it had been purported to be. It was not written by whom it was purported to have been written. Many of the stories it contained did not appear to accord with "real" history. The actions on which it was based were inconsistent with the newly discovered laws of nature (The flood and Noah's ark; the creation; the virgin birth; the resurrection; the ascension into heaven; etc.). In short, the myths that had given form and meaning to Christian and other forms of religious life were subjected to the rational tests that are at the core of the scientific method, and were "falsified". Those who understood and agreed with the falsification process accordingly rejected those myths.

But logos did not provide the "whys" mythology had been designed to provide. This left many people struggling with existential despair. Largely as a reaction to the primacy of logos and this lack of meaning in life, some religious bodies adopted a logos orientated interpretation of their mythology in an attempt resuscitate the old meanings. This is the literalism that today characterizes fundamentalists of all religious stripes within Christianity (including the Mormons), Islam, Judaism and elsewhere. That is, the logos paradigm is accepted, as are the old myths. This means that the Bible must be an historically accurate record, that the miraculous things it describes literally happened as they were described, etc. This is a difficult position to hold in light of the evidence. Hence, a great deal of organizational effort is expended to first suppress information that runs counter to this theory, and to find any information that might support it. Hence, we have scientists trying to explain why carbon 14 dating does not work and how the earth is only 6,000 years old, where the dinosaurs fit into that picture, etc. Michael Shermer in "Why People Believe Weird Things" devotes an entire chapter to creationism and its loony arguments, and explains from a psychological point of view why some humans need to, and do, believe such things. Some of his ideas are discussed in detail below. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that mankind needs to find meaning in life, and the ascendancy of logos over

mythos was so threatening to some that fundamentalist religious movements resulted. These movements are based in fear, and in their extreme forms are dangerous, evil things.

Some religions, such as Mormonism, mix mythology with literalism and so seem at least at first blush to be more palatable than the hardest core fundamentalist groups. For example, Joseph Smith's theology accommodated much of the science of his day. Therefore, it made sense to the people of Smith's time and place. It answered important questions many of them had about what happened to children who died innocently, but unbaptized, and how the earth was created over a long period of time and through some kind of process instead of as a miraculous event. It made sense out of seemingly senseless arguments about the nature of god. However, Mormonism remained literalistic at its base. Hence, as logos continued to advance it soon began to falsify certain of Smith's dogmatic claims, and the LDS church went on the defensive and became just another fundamentalist organization dissembling, obfuscating and suppressing testimony threatening logos based theories and evidence, and using psuedoscience (a misguided form of logos) to defend its dogma and other faith based claims.

From the dysfunctional nature of fundamentalist organizations and their adherents, we glean solid evidence that just as mythology applied in the sphere of logos produces disaster as it did in the case of the first Crusade, so does logos when applied to the realm of mythology. This leads, for example, to the "science of creationism", as well as the Mormon (and other conservative Christian) attitudes towards the role of women, race, and sexual orientation. It also causes the Mormon authoritarian induced tendencies toward the suppression of information and poor scholarship in any area that might "threaten testimonies". Much worse, it resurrects "whys" that were created in different times and places, were of questionable value during their own time and are completely out of step with modern life. For example, the idea that god prefers any race or type of people over the others, or has "given" any land to a particular group and justifies the use of force to take it away from others, causes humans to continue to act inhumanely.

Karen Armstrong concluded "The Battle for God" by observing that:

Fundamentalists have turned the mythos of their religion into logos, either by insisting that their dogmas are scientifically true, or by transforming their complex mythology into a streamlined ideology. They have thus conflated two complementary sources and styles of knowledge which the people in the pre-modern world had usually decided it was wise to keep separate. ... By insisting that the truths of Christianity are factual and scientifically demonstrable, American Protestant fundamentalists have created a caricature of both religion and science. (Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, p. 366)

My knee jerk reaction upon becoming familiar with the ideas Karen Armstrong articulates so well was that the atheists had it right – there is no god, religion is a massive fraud perpetuated by those in control to make sure that their power is not diminished, and that I should distance myself from it as quickly as possible. However, as I became familiar with the writings of Campbell, I found other more constructive ways to approach mythology in general, and the mythologies that have framed my life in particular.

I then went back to re-read Armstrong, and found that near the end of "The Battle for God" that she notes that the worst of fundamentalism seems to have been a reaction to a form of logos based secularism that tried to wring spirituality out of life entirely. She wonders whether the leaders of that secular movement, who so decry religious fundamentalism of all types, might not have been wise to use the fundamentalist movement to diagnose a real human problem: many

people need the meaning provided by mythology, and are not being provided with that by secularism and logos on their own.

Mythology in General

Campbell indicates that there is archaeological evidence that human religious ritual and supernatural belief (mythology, that is) goes back at least 200,000 years. He also says that the following are the four primary functions of myth:

1. to help us realise the wonder of the universe and experience awe before that wonder.
2. to show the shape of the cosmos, and allow the wonder of it to still come through.
3. to support and validate a social order.
4. to teach how to make the various passages within society (from dependant child, to adult with society, to creative adult pushing the limits of society, to dependant adult, to death), and how to live a human life with the confines of the cosmos and society. (Campbell and Moyer, *The Power of Myth*, pp. 38 – 39)

Campbell summarizes the above four points by indicating that mythology is the belief system that mediates between our instincts and socially induced feelings related to the great existential questions on the one hand, and our external reality on the other. He says that a mythology is not about finding truth, but rather is functional. To work well, it does not have to be true – it has to be "comfortable", meaning that it must provide plausible answers within its place and time to the concerns of ultimate importance (where do we come from; why do we die; why do we suffer; what happens upon death; etc.). He calls it a second womb or marsupial pouch (a "womb with a view"), where we grow to maturity in a spiritual sense, and then can undergo the second birth into another world where we come to grips with the realities than underlie our myth. This is the world inhabited by the mystics of all ages. Our entry into that world usually coincides with the creation of our antithetical mask.

Myths deal with the existential questions. They put the hard questions on the table, and then provide answers to them that are believable. Consider Jesus. The world is lost in sin and heaven unattainable. God is remote from man. The story of Jesus resolves these conflicts. He is god, and is not remote. He atones for all human sin, and therefore makes it possible for man to approach god. Hence, he redeems a lost world. He is resurrected and hence overcomes death. The story of Buddha performs a similar function in his culture. See also for the same kind of thing the Egyptian Osiris, the Greek Dionysis, the Syrian Adonis and the Mesopotamian Tammuz.

Andrew Newberg notes:

Myths, Campbell tells us, show us how to be human. They show us what is most important, and what, in terms of the inner life, is most deeply and profoundly true. The power of myth lies beneath its literal interpretations, in the ability of its universal symbols and themes to connect us with the most essential parts of ourselves in ways than logic and reason alone cannot. By this definition, religions must be based in myth if they are to have anything meaningful to say to us. In this sense, the story of Jesus is a myth even

if it were literally and historically true. Likewise, even if the extraordinary events that myths chronicle never happened, and the beings they portray never walked the earth, the lasting myths of past cultures all contain psychological and spiritual truths that resonate with the psyches and spirits of readers today. (Why God Won't Go Away, p. 58)

The question is not whether a particular person believes in a mythology, the question is which mythology does he believe. We all use one mythology or another to order and create meaning around our world.

The quickest way to discover a person's mythology is to ask her how she would answer the existential questions. Where did life come from? What happens when we die? Why do humans suffer so? Etc.

Myths Are Functional Within Society

However, as noted above, Campbell also says that myths are functional within society. The functions of the old myths may or may not still be relevant. When a myth no longer makes sense within a particular society, it does not protect us and is not comfortable. Hence, it needs to be changed. In pre-modern society, these changes occurred gradually, as required, over time. In modern society we embrace change caused by advancing secular knowledge but have no way to deal with change in the religious part of our lives since logos has frozen that by subjecting it to critical analysis. It is true or not? If true, it must not change. Hence, we cannot admit that it changes. Religions used to be able to pretend that their beliefs did not change, because they changed so slowly and information distribution was so poor that virtually no one noticed the changes. That no longer works. Things change quickly, and we can all see it. Religions based on the "static belief" paradigm therefore fight change, and are becoming increasingly anti-historical. This creates cognitive dissonance for the most aware and thoughtful members of those groups, many of whom are abandoning or ignoring the faiths of their youth.

Since myths are functional within society, why is it surprising that when we take a myth developed to deal with specific issues in one society and apply it in another that problems often result? This is the equivalent of seeing an ill person cured by some medicine, and so giving it to another sick person. Only luck would result in a cure the second time around, and the second patient may well die as a result of the medicine that helped the first patient.

As a result of the changing nature of life, there are issues in today's society with which the ancients did not have to deal, and so are not dealt with by the old myths. These new issues require new myths. For example, the pace of change is a big issue today that has not been satisfactorily dealt with from a mythological point of view. In my view, the way to deal with this issue is to adopt a myth that involves adhering to a process that will allow us to use and embrace change as part of our basic paradigm, instead of adopting static, dogmatic beliefs.

Another issue with which most of the old myths do not deal is the integrated nature of our world. We can no longer use the myths that were developed to sustain societies based on primitive tribes fighting among themselves. We need myths that will encourage cooperation, understanding and harmony. Not surprisingly, the myths used by the Chinese throughout millennia of relatively peaceful co-existence within a monolithic society are based on harmony, while those of Christianity that were created in an environment of more or less perpetual tribal warfare are based on conflict – the need to overcome and subdue "the other". We are likely better served to adopt a more Buddhist-like than Christian mentality in this regard. Does that mean that we should all become Buddhists? Of course not. But by understanding how the

Buddhist idea of harmony and cooperation worked in that society, we can perhaps find something similar that will work in our own.

Most members of each society have believed its myths. Stories don't perform the function of myth. Stories can educate and help us connect with deep truth, but the stories themselves are not myths. What we perceive to be deep truth is the myth. Hence, the old myths are disqualified. They are no longer perceived as conveying meaningful truth. We need something else.

Mysticism

Through Karen Armstrong and others I have become familiar with the great mystic traditions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. I have noted that those traditions were mostly secretive. This is likely due to the fact that in ancient times ideas that were out of the sync with the mainstream were often dealt with harshly. The expression of heterodox ideas was what got Christ killed, and was responsible for the deaths of many mystics. Hence, discretion became the better part of valor.

As free speech and the right to worship as our consciences dictate became part of modern society, it was no longer necessary for those who believed differently than the masses to stay in the shadows. This eventually led to open atheism on the one hand, and on the other the expression of the wonderful variety of religious belief that is part of our world.

Campbell, Karen Armstrong and others have pointed out that the mystics of all traditions work with the same concepts. They have transcended the specifics of their various religions. For example Campbell noted:

To say, "I and the Father are one," as Jesus did, is blasphemy for us. However, in the Thomas gospel that was dug up in Egypt forty years ago, Jesus says, "He who drinks from my mouth will become as I am, and I shall be he." Now, that is exactly Buddhism. We are all manifestations of Buddha consciousness, or Christ consciousness, only we don't know it. The "Buddha" means "the one who waked up". We are all to do that – to wake up to the Christ or Buddha consciousness within us. This is blasphemy in the normal way of Christian thinking, but it is the essence of Christian Gnosticism and of the Gospel of Thomas. ... Sin is simply a limiting factor that limits your consciousness and fixes it in an inappropriate condition. (Campbell and Moyer, *The Power of Myth*, p. 69)

I cannot help but think of Joseph Smith, as well as Buddha, when I read that. Campbell and Karen Armstrong note elsewhere similarities between primitive, Jewish, Muslim and Christian, as well as Buddhism and other Eastern traditions with respect to these matters.

Two things characterize mysticism: The use of metaphor to interpret life and holy writings, and experiencing "transcendent reality" through mental and spiritual disciplines. It is my view that the error in every religious tradition can be eliminated more quickly through use of the mystic approach than another. That is, this is the approach to break through the narrow provincial interpretation of each religion, and get into its universal aspect. As Campbell put it, quoting Hindu scripture: "Truth is one; the sages call it by many names." (Campbell and Moyer, *The Power of Myth*, p. xix)

The fact that some of the great mystics of all faiths have independently reached similar conclusions respecting most of the existential questions is comforting to me. That does not

mean that they have found ultimate truth, but I find it more helpful to draw upon that broad base of experience than the narrower base of any particular religious tradition. I have noted that the non-mystic (that is, literalistic, dogmatic) part of any religious tradition is a source of conflict rather than enlightenment. These seem to me more concerned with sociological functions (helping people cope with the challenges of daily life within a particular society; controlling people; etc.) than anything else.

Myth, Symbol and Meaning

Campbell notes that mythic symbols just "are". They have no fixed meaning, and hence are inexhaustible sources of meaning. They point toward the ultimate reality. Just as one of the Buddha's great lectures consisted of holding up a lotus blossom and saying nothing (it just "is"), so these symbols just "are". In a sense, we also just "are".

In a more superficial way, each real myth has two fundamentally different levels of meaning. The first connects us to our society – draws us into our society – and teaches us a role to play there. The second points to the great, transcendent reality that unites all societies (including all religions).

The myths that endure the ages do so because they impart meaning in a wide variety of situations. Myth is not static. It evolves. Hence, evolutionary theory might be applied to mythology. Myths are selected on the basis of their ability to perform the function required of them, and evolve over time to continue to do that as conditions change.

Those who insist that the truth is captured in any one mythic meaning miss the point of myth. In fact, their very insistence upon having the discerned mythic truth in some absolute sense can be taken as good evidence that they do not have it. That insistence means they do not understand the nature of truth (we never get there – truth is a journey and process, not a destination), and they are insecure enough with respect to their conclusions that they must bluster on about it.

I was reminded of this very thing as I read a snippet from an early 2003 National Geographic while getting ready to leave for work a while ago. It was an article about the Great Wall of China. The author noted that wall building periods correlated with military weakness, which is not surprising. The primary example he gave was of the Tang dynasty, which had developed workable diplomatic ties with its principal northern enemies, and had a strong army. They did not add to the wall because they felt secure without it, and were not worried about their people feeling insecure and doing the crazy things insecure people sometimes do. The Ming dynasty, on the other hand, had poor diplomatic relations with its enemies and a weak army. They built a lot of wall. The wall is, apparently, not much of a deterrent to invading armies, but it is a significant, positive psychological presence for the Chinese people.

As Campbell and others have noted, the only two things that bind people together or motivate human action are fear and aspiration. Wall building uses both. The fear of outsiders binds the people together in their task of wall building. And, the very fact that an apparently powerful wall is being built creates a sense of aspiration – the aspiration to complete a great task, even if in fact will not do what it is represented to do. The peasants who built the wall were not military strategists, after all.

It does not take a rocket scientist to see the parallels between building the Great Wall and the various walls that have been built between the LDS people and their host societies.

Joseph Smith and Mysticism

Joseph Smith was a complex individual who produced an amazing panoply of ideas, some good and others awful. This can perhaps best be summarized by a quote from his friend, colleague and disciple Brigham Young:

When Brother Pratt went back last fall and published the revelation concerning the plurality of wives; it was thought there was no other cat to let out. But allow me to tell you ... you may expect an eternity of cats that have not yet escaped from the bag ...” (Journal of Discourses, 1:188. 1853)

Among other things, Joseph Smith was an interesting mix of mystic and literalist. The more I study science and the world's various religious and spiritual currents, the greater is my appreciation for what Joseph Smith did with what he had. Here are a few examples:

1. "Line upon line, precept upon precept..." That is, we don't get the truth all at once and we do not have it all yet. This is most clearly stated in the ninth Article of Faith: "We believe in all that God has revealed, all the he does now reveal, and we believe he will yet reveal may great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." As noted by David Bailey: "This language is strikingly similar to the definition of the idea of progress as given by Nisbet: "Mankind has advanced in the past, ... is now advancing, and will continue to advance through the foreseeable future." ("Mormonism and the Idea of Progress", Dialogue Vol. 33, No. 4, Winter 2000 p. 72). The line upon line idea implies that theology will be upgraded (error will be corrected) as time passes, and opens the way for religion and science to walk down the road together. "Line upon line ..." is a reasonable working summary of the scientific method. Unfortunately, the LDS Church does not follow this policy in practise. It hides error, and avoids facing it for as long as possible. The blacks and the priesthood and polygamy questions are fine case studies in what is required to change LDS theology. And if polygamy is an eternal law, why do church members in the many countries where it can be practised right now, including Canada, not practise it? Once again, we see evidence that sociology and authority are the primary LDS organizational drivers, instead of any search for theological or other truth. The Church has evolved into something quite different than it was in Joseph Smith's day, and almost certainly is now quite different from what he envisioned.
2. There are multiple gods and universes, inhabited by people like us. This is a staple mystic and Eastern theme. It makes us humble in the here and now, and shows us our potential in some ways.
3. Man is as God once was, This idea was summarized above.
4. God is subject to eternal law, and hence is not all-powerful. This idea was summarized above.
5. Light, energy and truth are somehow one. This idea has all kinds of wonderful possibilities. (See D&C 88)
6. The past, present and future all before god at all times, and this state will be the eternal state of man after death. (D&C 130:7) That is, time is not a permanent

part of reality. This is consistent both with certain mythic themes, and with modern physical theory. As Sterling McMurrin noted, as summarized above, the relationship between time and eternity is complex and somewhat contradictory both within Christian and Mormon theology. However, at the least it must be admitted that Joseph Smith was swimming in deep water with big fish in this area. The ideas he was working with were far beyond the meanderings of an uneducated bumpkin.

7. Man progresses eternally, and reincarnation is part of the process by which this occurs. This idea is not part of the LDS scriptural cannon, and Joseph Smith seems to have been somewhat cryptic when he taught it, and careful about whom he taught it to. However, there is solid evidence that he did both believe and teach this doctrine. (See http://mormonscience.org/Public/Articles/Reincarnation-Resurrection/RTB_MMP_Quotes_LDS.htm) For example, Eliza R. Snow, one of his wives, stated that he taught her this principle and she published an article respecting it. And Heber C. Kimball, one of his closest associated, and others, taught the doctrine and attributed it to Joseph Smith.
8. This list could go on for some time, but we have enough above to make the point.

I do not accept all of these ideas as “truth”. However, they illustrate the range of Smith’s theology, and using these ideas and the metaphors associated with them could make it much easier for LDS people to adopt the harmonious approach to living advocated by certain Eastern and mystic traditions than is the case for many other Christians whose basic mythology is not so eclectic. However, if the above ideas are accepted as dogma, which is the tendency within the modern LDS church respecting all theological constructs, they are as deadening as any other dogma. These concepts also provide other Christian organizations with legitimate reason to believe that Mormons are not Christian in the same they are, and hence create disharmony between Mormons and other Christians.

While it is clear that Smith had ideas of great mystic or mythological potential, it is equally clear that those ideas did not take root and grow. This is largely Smith’s fault. As I study his teachings, the picture that comes into focus is that of a great mystic who was initially trying to make sense out of his experience, but eventually drifted into the kind of rule making and dogma that he abhorred in other faiths. On the whole, he is more literal and dogmatic than mystic and metaphorical.

For interest sake, lets consider at random the mythic potential of a few passages from the Book of Mormon, starting with 1 Nephi 19:23 which has Nephi say, after reading passages from the writing of the ancient prophets to his brethren, that: “I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.”

I suggest that this is an invitation to interpret scripture in its broadest possible metaphoric terms, in the best tradition of myth as outlined by Karen Armstrong above. And when start to poke around for material to which this invitation to metaphor can be applied, we find all kinds of great stuff. I won't take the time to develop these themes, or even mention all that come to mind with little effort. I will just set out the first few that pop up.

The Liahona and its use is a great metaphor in the tradition of the guiding light, oracle or source of divine knowledge.

The adventure into the unknown motif is wonderfully developed by the journey of Lehi and his family toward the Promised Land. Important themes in this story are: how we address the fear of the unknown; how we obtain guidance (the Liahona is the important symbol here); how the solutions we seek are often not the solutions we find, etc.

My favourite mini story on the last point (finding unexpected solutions) is the one in which Nephi has been tied up by his brothers, who are fed up with him, for good reason I might add, in a culture where the younger brother did not behave as Nephi insisted on behaving. (See 1 Ne. 7:15 - 18). Nephi prays for the strength to burst the bonds by which he is bound, and finds that instead of receiving this strength, the bonds simply fall away. This is a powerful metaphor that can be used to explain how peace and the “right way” is often found not in resistance and force, but in somehow “becoming one” with our environment. This is potentially a harmony theme. Many other great concepts can be drawn from this classic, archetypal image. A related idea is that while journeying through the wilderness, Lehi’s family often prayed that their trials would be reduced. Instead, they were made strong and able to bear their trials (See 1 Ne. 17:2). The BofM specifically mentions that the women were made as strong as the men and that although all they had was raw meat to eat, they had adequate milk for their babies. It could be argued that this foreshadows the pioneer trek to Utah, although I do not think that it does. A respected non-Mormon historian, whose name I can’t recall, said that that trek was the defining event of Western US history, and that during it, the Mormon men were remarkable. However, he said, that the men were overshadowed by the Mormon women, who were incredible.

Another archetype from the BofM uses is that of imprisonment and release and the effect of bad habits, leadership and behaviour on that cycle. Consider the story of King Noah, his son Limhi and his people (Mosiah 11 – 25 more or less) who are weakened by bad leadership and bad habits, warned by Abinidi, eventually imprisoned and enslaved by the Lamanites, and finally after great pain and sorrow, are released from bondage by a good power. This story also contains the subplot of unexpected means of relief, the staple archetypal theme referred to above. In Mosiah 24 we read of how the Lamanites gained power over the people of Limhi and began to persecute them (7 – 9), how Limhi’s people cried to the Lord for help (10 – 12), and how the Lord responded initially with strength to withstand affliction, and a promise of later release (13 – 14). Verse 15 states that: “... the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea the Lord did strengthened them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all of the will of the Lord.”

At this point the critical nature of metaphor versus literal interpretation can be made again. Does this scripture mean that we will always have our burdens lifted from our shoulders in this manner, and that we should patiently and cheerfully submit to abuse heaped upon us by our oppressors? A superficial review of either current events (women in Iraq under the Taliban, etc.) or history (the Jews in Nazi Germany, etc.) will tell us that god does not always intervene and burdens are not always lightened. However, we can do many things we think we cannot, and sometimes it even appears that divine intervention of the type described has occurred. One lesson from this may be: keep at it; do not give up; try to do the impossible if that is what you need to do; and you may be surprised at what happens.

Additionally, when in a situation that is beyond our power to influence, this kind of archetypal symbol or concept can be an important coping tool. Many of those who survived the Nazi death camps coped in such ways. Victor Frankl is one of them. His wonderful book “Man’s Search for Meaning” respecting how he developed these techniques and used them to survive

unimaginable atrocities, including experimental castration, with his mind and dignity intact is one of the great literary works of all time.

One of the most helpful practical applications of the imprisonment and release archetype is to understand the effect of personal habit and addiction on individual human beings. Another would be the tracing of the rise and fall of societies in accordance with their habits and the nature of their leadership. The same might be applied to business organizations, or perhaps religious organizations.

In any event, Mormonism has become an ossified, literalistic religion that attempts to control its members as is the case with most religions. Hence, it does not foster creativity and growth, and does not enhance decision making ability and create wisdom as it might. In my view, it posits a mythology that does not work in modern society and therefore is a source of increasing cognitive dissonance for its thinking members, all the while having under its nose what Sterling McMurrin says is one of the few mythological structures based on traditional theology that has the ability to become a science accommodating mythology that can serve modern man in this rapidly changing world of ours.

Science as Mythology

There is a longstanding tension between science and religion, and for good reason. As the author of "God in the Equation" points out:

In fact, religion has been in retreat for centuries ... Theologians repeatedly set out to define and defend their faith by clarifying the distinction between the earthly and the divine, but in the process they left more and more room for the empirical study of the world. Saint Augustine argued that using the human senses to study nature is a valid way to explore the glory of God. The twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides sought a spiritual system that was compatible with Aristotle's model of the universe, "as a means of removing some of the doubts concerning anything taught in Scripture." In the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas folded Aristotelian physics into Christian belief, showing that the two could peacefully coexist. Baruch Spinoza, the seventeenth-century theologian, introduced the radical concept of a God that does not interfere with the operation of the world but is fully defined by His laws of nature. Powell, *God in the Equation*, p. 11)

Albert Einstein and certain other great scientists have approached the study of physical reality in a fashion that could take us a long way down the road mythology has traditionally trod. Said Einstein:

Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe – a spirit vastly superior to that of man ...I believe in Spinoza's God who reveals himself in the harmony of all that exists, but not in a God who concerns himself with the fate and actions of human beings. (*God in the Equation*, p. 3 and p. 11)

This theme is developed further in the book "Why God Won't Go Away". The authors start by reviewing scientific research concerning what can be verified as objectively real outside of our own perception, and conclude that science cannot do that. We cannot get outside of what our brain perceives, and hence are stuck in a subjective world. They therefore turn to the philosophers for help in deciding what is real. They say that what seems most real is real. That

is, we compare different experiences to our base line understanding of reality – waking consciousness – and on the basis of that comparison decide what is real and what is not. For example, dream consciousness may seem real while it persists, but on awakening it no longer seems real. The same is true of other altered mental states. But the mystics tell us that well after their transcendent state has ended they still feel that they have experienced something more real than waking reality. Some great scientists support this idea. Robert Oppenheimer, Neils Bohr, Carl Jung, John Lilly all say that their research has revealed a unity and purpose in the universe that transcends what most of us would consider “normal” reality. Einstein and Schrodinger (the theorist responsible for much of the development of quantum mechanics), arguably the two greatest minds of their day and certainly among the greatest scientific minds of all time, both made similar claims. Einstein wrote:

It is very difficult to explain this feeling to anyone who is entirely without it, especially as there is no anthropomorphic conception of God corresponding to it. The individual feels the nothingness of human desires and aims and the sublime and marvellous order which reveal themselves both in Nature and in the world of thought. He looks upon the individual existence as a sort of prison and wants to experience the universe as a single significant whole. (p. 153)

Schrodinger indicated:

Inconceivable as it seems to ordinary reason, you – and all other conscious beings as such – are all in all. Hence, this life of yours you are living is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but is in a certain sense the whole ... Thus, you can throw yourself flat on the ground, stretched out upon Mother Earth with a certain conviction you are one with her and she with you. You are as firmly established, as invulnerable as she, indeed a thousand times firmer and more invulnerable. (p. 154)

The authors of “Why God Won’t Go Away” continue:

Logic suggests that what is less real must be contained by what is more real, just as dream is contained within the mind of a dreamer. So, if Absolute Unitary Being [the transcendent state reported by the mystics to be reached in deep meditation or contemplation] truly is more real than subjective or objective reality – more real, that is, than the external working and the subjective awareness of the self – then the self and the world must be contained within, and perhaps created by, the reality of Absolute Unitary Being. ... Mystical reality holds, and the neurology does not contradict it, that beneath the mind’s perceptions of thoughts, memories, emotions, and objects, beneath the subjective awareness we think of as the self, there is a deeper self, a state of pure awareness that sees beyond the limits of subject and object, and rests in a universe where all things are one. (p. 155)

The chapter then concludes with a moving quote from Indian mystic literature:

Siddhartha listened. He was listening intently, complete absorbed, quite empty, taking in everything. He felt that he had now completely learned the art of listening. He had often heard all this before, all these numerous voices in the river, but today they sounded different. He could no longer distinguish the different voices – the merry voice from the weeping voice, the childish voice from the manly voice. They all belonged to each other: the lament of those who yearn, the laughter of the wise, the cry of indignation and the groan of the dying. They were all interwoven and interlocked, entwined in a thousand

ways. And all the voices, all the goals, all the pleasure, all the good and evil, all of them together was the world. All of them together was the stream of events, the music of life. When Siddhartha listened attentively to the river, to the song of a thousand voices, when he did not listen to the sorrow or the laughter, when he did not bind his soul to any one particular voice and absorb it in his Self, but heard them all, the whole, the unity, then the great song of a thousand voices consisted of one word. (p. 155, 156)

The book concludes with the following sequence of quotes and ideas. At page 170 Einstein is quoted as saying:

Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. In our endeavour to understand reality, we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. He sees the face and the moving hands, even hears the ticking, but he has no way of opening the case. If he is ingenious he may form some picture of a mechanism which could be responsible for all the things he observes, but he may never be quite sure his picture is the only one which could explain his observations. He will never be able to compare his picture with the real mechanism and he cannot even imagine the possibility of the meaning of such a comparison.

The authors continue:

The best that science can give us is a metaphorical picture of what's real, and while that picture may make sense, it isn't necessarily true. In this case, science is a type of mythology, a collection of explanatory stories that resolve the mysteries of existence and help us cope with the challenges of life. This would be applicable even if material reality is, in fact, the highest level of reality, because despite science's preoccupation with objectively verified truth, the human mind is incapable of purely objective observations. All our perceptions are subjective by their nature, and just as there's no way to peek inside Einstein's watch, there's no way we can slip free of the brain's subjectivity to see what's really out there. All knowledge, then, is metaphorical; even our most basic sensory perceptions of the world around us can be thought of as an explanatory story created by the brain.

Science, therefore, is mythological, and like all mythological systems of belief, it is based on a foundational assumption: All that is real can be verified by scientific measurement, therefore, what can't be verified by science isn't real.

I note parenthetically that I read that last sentence to mean "can't ever be verified by science." Science continually verifies things that could not be previously verified.

This kind of assumption, that one system is [the] exclusive arbiter of what is true, makes science and religion incompatible. If Absolute Unitary Being does, indeed, exist, then science and religion find themselves in a paradoxical situation: The more literally we take their own foundational assumptions, the deeper they are in conflict with each other, and the further they fall from ultimate reality. But if we understand the metaphorical nature of their insights, then their incompatibilities are reconciled, and each becomes more powerfully and transcendently real. ...

The neurobiological roots of spiritual transcendence show that Absolute Unitary Being is a plausible, even probable possibility. Of all the surprises our theory has to offer – that

myths are driven by biological compulsion, that rituals are intuitively shaped to trigger unitary states, that mystics are, after all, not necessarily crazy, and that all religions are branches of the same spiritual tree – the fact that this ultimate unitary state can be rationally supported intrigues us the most. The realness of Absolute Unitary Being is not conclusive proof that a higher God exists, but it makes a strong case that there is more to human existence than sheer material existences. Our minds are drawn by the intuition of this deeper reality, this utter sense of oneness, where suffering vanishes and all desires are at peace. As long as our brains are arranged the way they are, as long as our minds are capable of sensing this deeper reality, spirituality will continue to shape the human experience, and God, however, we define that majestic, mysterious concept, will not go away.

In my view, that is a brilliant insight to conclude a marvellous book. It takes a significant step toward what I have been groping around for months - science and the scientific process have become a large part of our modern mythology. As noted above, the easiest way to prove this is to ask a random sampling of people the existential questions. You will find that their responses will contain a lot of science, mixed with religious ideas.

As Campbell puts it:

... this is the myth to be. "It's already here: the eye of reason, not of my nationality; the eye of reason, not of my religious community; the eye of reason, not of my linguistic community. Do you see? And this would be the philosophy for the planet, not for this group, that group, or the other group." (Campbell and Moyer, *The Power of Myth*, p. 41)

The Use of Science as Mythology

One of the thoughts I had off and on as I read "Why God Won't Go Away" and other books recently is how useful the idea of "not true" is. I picked this up while reading "The History of God". Many mystics found it so difficult to express themselves respecting God and their mystic experience in the positive that they took to using the negative – when they could not express what a thing was, they would get as close as they could to it by expressing all of the things that it was not. Hence, they groped closer and closer to reality or truth in this fashion, recognizing that they would never get there.

This is precisely what the scientific method does. It falsifies old theories, establishes new theories, and then repeats the process. Hence, as error is peeled away we creep closer to truth while acknowledging that we will never reach that goal. Before I understood the scientific method in those terms, I had come to the conclusion that this was the nature of the process I needed to use to upgrade the religious or spiritual ideas I have in my life.

Science has been picking away at religion for centuries, falsifying one thing after another. Religionists, for the most part being anti-historical, forget about this. They forget what they did to Galileo. They forget how religions have adjusted and continue to adjust to Darwin and the rest of the scientists who have showed us how old the earth is and how it was shaped. They forget how the mythology encapsulated by various religions has changed to incorporate the things of science about which modern man has become quite certain. The more science falsifies, the more religion is forced to adjust.

This is a wonderful, healthy, process. Religion is much improved as a result. We don't burn witches any more. We are not as racist. Illness and death are no longer so much thought of as

the result of sin. In short, science has made it difficult for man to use religious belief to support many of his inbuilt ignorances and prejudices. I expect that process to continue.

As science disposes of one religious article of faith after another, we are driven closer to the source of all legitimate religious experience. Illegitimate spiritual experience is gradually exposed for what it is, more and more energy will be focussed on the legitimate. This will slowly result in a convergence of religions thought and practise within the area of legitimacy.

Humans, being what they are, will continue to create distinctions between religious groups. Leaders, to maintain their fiefdoms and power bases, will use these distinctions. But, over time, the real differences will lessen, more interfaith dialogue will arise, and the religiously inclined among us will come to see the world as a whole instead of an amalgam of petty states occupied by theistic, warring tribes.

We should be realistic about the length of this process. As in science, change may not come incrementally as good ideas are introduced. It is more likely to come in breathtaking, revolutionary waves. The best religious ideas of my generation will probably have effect in the next, or the one after that, as they are encountered and implemented by a rising generation who are not so afflicted by the mind set of their elders as the elders themselves are.

There is no doubt that the proliferation of Christian and other religious schools, LDS seminaries etc. will continue as those who fear change sense that they are losing the battle in the public market of ideas, and try to go underground. The most "successful" at implementing these strategies will increasingly isolate themselves, and hence will become tomorrow's Hutterites. The LDS church is headed in that direction, and already (along with a number of the other fundamental religious groups) appears that way to many objective observers who operate outside the narrow religious point of view.

In general, the process I have just described is good. I feel confident that humanity is headed in the right direction – one that will help the world continue to blossom as a rose while skirmishes continue around its edges. And the more voices can be raised in harmony respecting the things "Why God Won't Go Away" so eloquently and rationally presents, the quicker this process will unfold. I will add my small, weak voice to that heavenly choir.

The Honesty Paradigm

Matt Berry in his book "Post-Atheism" equates honesty with the scientific method, and uses it as the basis for much of what amounts to his personal mythology. He notes:

Few religious attempts would deny that the prerequisite to every high aim must involve this intangible: honesty. Can any definition of the word, "Spirituality", exclude honesty? ... This book hazards a definition [of honesty]: Honesty is our effort to affirm reality. It is science by another name. For example, if I see an orange and affirm that there is indeed an orange, then I am honest. Easy enough. But what if reality were sometimes too dangerous or painful to affirm? If I deny the existence of uncomfortable facts, I am "dishonest" or "in error". More importantly, in not understanding the behavioral mechanics involved - cognitive dissonance, for example, I remain tractable ... and tractable to the precise degree that I assert my "freedom" from behavioral mechanics. (pp. 129, 30)

He goes on to note that peer review and the scientific method itself is as much an acknowledgement of the untrustworthiness of our own observations as anything else, and then states:

When we embrace science, then, we enter into a tacit agreement of subjective responsibility. This follows by logical argument. Consider that if I regard San Francisco as my destination, it follows that I believe that I am not now in San Francisco. Likewise, objectivity is a goal, we say, but its being the goal implies that I am not essentially objective, but subjective ... and am therefore burdened with a heavy, personal responsibility to struggle with my biological and cultural inheritance in order to affirm reality and to discover and clarify the relationships of "things-me" within that reality. (p. 130)

And then, he makes the point that will make many, me included, squirm:

In short, we are essentially spiritual, and that constitutes our problem. The question remains whether or not our spirituality is strong enough to brave rude and painful facts in the effort to affirm reality and never deny it. That is to ask, is our spirituality strong enough for truth? (p. 131)

And finally he concludes:

... perhaps our fearless honesty is nine parts of our spirituality, by which we have a chance ... a slim chance, to crown ourselves with the tenth part: science ... the elucidation of our reality. And have we truly seen our reality? That very reality which dropped the apple before Newton's eyes bore testimony of two laws of gravity: one upon the apple and one upon Newton's person - his responsibility for affirming that reality. That reality which bears testimony of our dependence upon sensory organs is of the very same material out of which Jesus spun the truth: The Kingdom of God is within us. Personal responsibility for objective discovery, authentic identify, fearless honesty, self-behaviorism - perhaps we can bundle these "intangibles" under the term, "spirituality." However, it matters little which category heading we draw our red line under. It matters much that we see our subjective responsibility for our subjective discoveries. It matters much that we turn our scientific machinery back around toward ourselves in an effort to acquire greater and greater self-control, clarity of thought, better operating machinery ... that is to say, greater and greater spirituality ... for if to objective science, the human is a machine, whose inherited gears and levers make consciousness and whose narrow corridors of behavior have been set by eons of evolutionary changes, well then that does not do away with my expedient interest for my personal alignment with that reality ... but underscores its importance. And with this realization, we begin the formulation of our behavioral strategy ... our Modern Asceticism (p. 132)

I agree with the central thrust of his argument. A great deal of strength of character, self-awareness and critical thinking is required to be honest with ourselves. This is something that will require a great deal of work on my part, and will last a lifetime.

Andrew Lough deals with a related point by quoting Hans-Georg Gadamer. Honesty and self-awareness are two sides of the same coin.

Experience in the only way to knowledge. Great plays are known in the performance of them. Great literature is known in the application of the concepts they teach. The same

applies with theology. ". Gadamer develops this notion of application. We see that for him understanding a literary work is not a matter of gaining some conceptual understanding which the work enshrines and which is the same for everyone (something objective), it is a matter of an experience that takes place in one's engagement with the work, an experience that brings understanding and insight into reality. It is, as Gadamer stresses, a process in which we are "undeceived" - for "every experience worthy of the name runs counter to our expectations" - undeceived of those of our prejudices that do not "fit" reality. And we have seen that Gadamer regards this process of undeception, which is the result of experience, as summed up in Aeschylus *pathei mathos*, which, however, goes beyond undeception in any particular, for "what a man has to learn through suffering is not this or that particular thing, but knowledge of the limitations of humanity, of the absoluteness of that barrier that separates him from the divine. It is ultimately a religious insight. Thus experience is experience of human finitude. The truly experienced man is one who is aware of this, who knows that he is master, neither of time nor of the future." (Discerning the Mystery, pp. 136, 7)

That is, the truly experienced man is a humble man. Over and over during the course of the last six months the importance of being more humble has been impressed upon me, and I am gradually so becoming.

Lough continues summarizing Gadamer as follows:

Gadamer puts it this way: "the truth of experience always contains an orientation towards new experiences. The perfection of this experience, the perfect form of what we can "experience", does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows better than anyone else. Rather the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is readily undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them." (See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 319) This growth in experience is not primarily an increase in knowledge of this or that situation, but rather an escape from what has deceived us and held us captive. It is learning by suffering, suffering the process of undeception, which is usually painful. (Discerning the Mystery, p. 37)

This hits the mark. Remember the tiger story Campbell tells. That story, a Hindu legend, goes as follows. A pregnant tiger is hunting goats. As she leaps to the kill, her effort brings on the birthing process prematurely, during which she dies. The goats raise her baby tiger. He eats grass and bleats like a goat. He is not a very good goat. Eventually, a male tiger comes to hunt the goats and finds the little tiger. The big tiger undertakes to convince the little guy that he is a tiger, not a goat. He has some trouble getting the point across. Finally, he takes the little tiger to his den and forces him to eat a hunk of raw meat. The little tiger does not want to, and the big tiger forces the meat down his throat. The text of the legend says that the little tiger choked on the meat as "all gag on true doctrine".

Once the meat was down, the little tiger started to change. He started to walk and stretch like a tiger. He gave his first little tiger roar. Then he went into the forest with his mentor to hunt like a tiger.

One moral of the story is that we are all tigers who live among goats and think of ourselves as such. The painful "undeceiving" process described above is analogous to what happened to the little tiger as he found his true nature. The "choking on true doctrine" point is particularly

relevant. This story also resonates with Jung's and Campbell's quotes respecting how institutionalized religion and its small conceptions of god, man and life are things we are taught to cling to when confronted with the much greater realities of these things. The small teachings are goat teachings. Our real nature is that of tigers. We usually need a mentor of some kind to move from goat food to tiger food that can change our nature, and the process is a painful one. This is wonderful stuff, and true to my experience.

Game Theory and the Golden Rule

If I am going to use the scientific method as my primary paradigm, it is important that I understand its limits and not be confused by theories masquerading as science that practically speaking cannot be falsified. That is, there is a crucial distinction between knowledge that is the result of advancing science, and life paradigms that are based on commitment to dogma and cannot be falsified. Almost all theology is such a life paradigm. The "knowledge" produced by some branches of the social sciences are much more like theology or life paradigms than scientific knowledge.

Lets use John Nash, game theory and the Golden Rule as an example. Game theory, until Nash came along, was based on zero sum games. The math used to model those games was well understood, but the games did not accurately model human behaviour and so the theories derived from them were of limited value. Nash recognized some human behavioral attributes exhibited in game behaviour, was able to model them with mathematics, and dramatically increased the explanatory power of the game theory models, ultimately leading to the use of his theories respecting things as diverse as spousal disputes, car auctions, multilateral trade disputes and strategic planning for war. These are powerful explanatory models. Why? Because Nash captured certain principles of human behaviour, and then was able to model them (describe them as principles with relationships to each other that are predictable) in such a way that they help to predict the behaviour of humans individually and in groups.

Did Nash hit upon absolute truth? I don't think we can tell. Perhaps the reasons for human behaviour are so influenced by culture etc. that 100 years from now his models won't work, or that they don't work right now among certain groups of people. The longer and the more cultures in which they work, the more likely it is that he put his finger on a law of some kind that is not bound by time or culture.

It is consistent with LDS theology that such principles exist. "There is a law upon which every blessing is predicated ...". The studies of Campbell, James, Eliade, Jung and many others suggest that across broad expanses of time and culture, man has certain tendencies to believe in and grope toward more understanding of a god or ultimate force of some kind. This suggests that there is some kind of force at work here, and the more we study human behaviour in different times and places, the closer we are likely to come to an understanding of the principles on which these forces operate. As we learn more about these things, there may come a time when some "life paradigms" can be safely moved over into the "scientific" category. Until then, we would do well to distinguish between belief in a life paradigm that seems from some perspective to work, and other things that can be known with greater certainty. I note, however, that even the so-called scientific knowledge is regularly disposed. We should remember that Karl Popper, one of the greatest scientists of all time, insisted that there are only two kinds of scientific theories - those that have been proven false, and those that have not yet been proven false. A healthy dose of skepticism is useful respecting science, and much more with respect to religious beliefs of all stripes.

Another upshot of what Nash's work in game theory indicates is that it may be legitimate to start with a desired behaviour in mind, and work out the type of game or rules that are required to encourage that behavior and the societal or personal results it is likely to bring. Maybe morality and ethics are no more than that, and have no ultimate "ground" in some kind of absolute truth. However, if we want a particular kind of society and life here and now, there are principles of behaviour that most members of society should follow. For example, one of Nash's key ideas was that if each party behaves in the manner that might seem to be in its best interest, in many cases everyone will lose (including the party who acted selfishly to initiate the process). However, if each party behaves in a manner that takes into account the most probable responses of other affected parties to that initiating behaviour, everyone (including the initiator) will be better off in the end. This is not quite the Golden Rule, but is headed in that direction.

This idea is also consistent with the idea of free will. What kind of a world do we want? By our choices we will construct that world, or some other. Will the rules of behaviour that work in our culture work in every culture? I doubt it. However, all that is important to me is what works in our culture - I have no way to find out or apply what works in places to which I don't have access.

The Current Mormon Approach to Science as Mythology

As noted above, Smith's "line upon line" concept and certain other ideas make Mormonism well suited to walk down the road with science and it does so quite well in any area where its dogma does not conflict with science. However, when we look at how Mormonism deals with issues like the historicity of the Book of Mormon, the treatment of gay people we see that science is constrained by dogma within Mormonism. This has caused a suppression of free speech and created an unhealthy, stifling intellectual worldview.

David Bailey nicely summarizes the current LDS position in this regard, and sets it in historical context, in "Mormonism and the Idea of Progress" (Dialogue Vol. 33, No. 4, Winter 2000 p. 69). He starts with Smith's line upon line idea, moves to the ninth Article of Faith (We believe all things now revealed, yet to be revealed etc.), and then quotes Brigham Young as follows:

Our religion measures, weighs and circumscribes all the wisdom in the world – all that God has ever revealed to man. God has revealed all the truth that is now in the possession of the world, whether it be scientific or religious. (Journal of Discourses, 8:162; 9:168) (p. 72)

He notes that:

In general, nineteenth century LDS discourse tended to minimize, not maximize, the distance between God and mankind and between God's world and this world. ... John A. Widstoe was intrigued by Herbert Spencer's theory of evolutionary progress, which he equated with the doctrine of eternal progression. As Widstoe explained, "Progress ... is a process of adding to that which we now possess, by the elimination of errors, by the actual accretion of new truth, and by the development of greater self-mastery... It is the steady approach to the likeness of God." Widstoe also taught that God was the organiser, not the creator, of the world and that he is bound by laws. (Rational Theology, 20-22) (Dialogue, p. 74)

And that:

Roberts also elaborated on Mormonism's distinctive theology of God, arguing that God exists in time and space and is not absolutely omnipotent and omniscient, but instead is bound by certain fundamental laws, and [that he] increases in knowledge and glory. Roberts pointed out that this progressive concept of God avoids many of the pitfalls of traditional Christian theology. (The Mormon Doctrine of Deity, 95-114) Roberts was also an eloquent advocate for a progressive approach to science and religion in the sense of championing, rather than battling, progress achieved in the scientific world. He wrote, "To pay attention to and give reasonable credence to [scientific] research is to link the church of God with the highest increase of human thought and effort." [The Truth, the Way and the Light, p.364) More recently, Hugh B. Brown wrote, "We should be in the forefront of learning in all fields, for revelation does not come only through the prophet of God nor only directly from heaven in visions or dreams. Revelation may come in the laboratory, out of the test tube, out of the thinking mind and the inquiring soul, out of search and research and prayer and inspiration." (Edward Kimball, "An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown", p. 139, a quote from his "Final Testimony") (Dialogue, p.75)

This is the view to which I have come. The next logical question, then, is who is the arbiter of truth? Must we rely upon religious leaders to let us know when truth has been discovered in the laboratory? Or to tell us when a theory from the lab will be eventually proven wrong? History does not disclose that the world works that way. The ideas articulated by Young, Widstoe, Roberts and Brown are, however, consistent with individuals searching out the best information and theories relevant to them, and religion sticking to the Golden rule and things related closely to it. The problem religions have in this regard is their inherited body of dogma, which they feel obliged to defend, and much of which conflicts with information science is producing. For example, issues related to homosexuality, the role of women in society and family life, racial prejudice, etc. When science threatens dogma, those we have been taught and choose to continue to believe that dogma MUST be true have little choice but to fight back. Hence, we have the fundamentalist branches of all religions.

Bailey then goes on to note that many modern LDS church leaders have also been concerned that the tides of progress bring problems as well as benefits. Their concerns include increasing crime, more liberal sexual attitudes, more selfishness etc. Lately Gordon Hinckley has stated on several occasions that our modern day is the most blessed of all, reversing this trend to an extent. But on the theological level, the trend is against the progressive view. Popular authors and BYU professors Stephen Robinson in "How Wide the Divide" and Joseph Fielding McConkie in "Straightforward Answers to Tough Gospel Questions" both adopt literalistic approaches to the interpretation of scripture, and posit an omnipotent god who is not subject to any law. Some refer to this trend as LDS neo-orthodoxy.

Bailey quotes and summarizes Robinson as follows:

"There is not a word of the Bible that I do not personally accept and believe. ... There is not a single verse of the Bible that Latter-day Saints do not accept ... We take the Scriptures to be literally true, and we hold symbolic, figurative or allegorical interpretation to a minimum, accepting the miraculous events as historical and the moral and ethical teaching as binding and valid." Robinson's book makes virtually no mention of the well-known limitations of biblical scripture, even those well known to Latter-day Saints. His position is clearly in the same spirit as a recent statement by Christian evangelical groups affirming the inerrancy of the Bible.

Equally problematic is Robinson's treatment of the LDS doctrine of God. He affirms without any reservation or qualification that, "God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinite, eternal and unchangeable." He acknowledges some early LDS teachings that man can become as gods and that God was once a man, but he dismisses them as being from "non-canonical" sources. He repeatedly emphasizes that Mormons do not believe in "a limited God, a finite God, a changeable God, a God who is not from everlasting to everlasting, who is not omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. (Dialogue, pp. 77, 78)

McKonkie's ideas include the following: God not subject to law; evolution did not happen - it is inconsistent with the fall of man; "This world will know 7,000 years of temporal history. ... To argue for a longer time is to suggest ages for which God has forgotten to call for accountability"; god is the author of law - he does not obey it; learning things of the spirit supersedes things of the world; many forms of knowledge are not part of the gospel and can be learned by anyone; these things are not gospel truth and will be of no value in the world to come.

Bailey concludes:

Needless to say, these positions are at odds with the progressive doctrines of earlier LDS leaders. Yet given the popularity of these two books, it is clear that many, if not most, modern Latter-day Saints are comfortable with these view. (Dialogue, p. 79)

What a shame this is. The LDS church goes backwards into the future. See my comment below respecting Karen Armstrong and her ideas. Gordon Hinckley is aiding and abetting this trend by things he has said to the media (Time Magazine and Larry King live in particular) about the fact that we don't really understand the "man can become like God" etc. statement, and we don't emphasize that aspect of the early teachings of the church.

Bailey notes that by most objective standards, things are getting better, not worse throughout the world. Crime is declining. Rates of abortion and teen pregnancy are declining. Scientific progress continues to accelerate. Technological progress continues to accelerate. The percentage of number of people who are spiritually inclined is increasing. This is not to say that all is well with our society. But it is surely not the case that we are spiralling down the tube.

He concludes with the following expression of concern, with which I concur:

Secondly, if LDS discourse continues to drift away from its traditional concept of a progressing, co-existent God and emphasizes instead the sectarian notion of an absolute and unchanging being beyond time and space, wholly beyond our comprehension, then LDS theology may lose much of its distinctive appeal. It is also likely to become ensnared in many of the philosophical difficulties that have afflicted traditional Christian theology for centuries.

Along this line, if the Church loses sight of its traditional notion of a God who works within the realm of natural law, it may lose its unique doctrinal foundation for finding harmony between science and religion. Do we believe in a capricious magician who has placed evidence throughout the universe to mislead diligent seekers of truth? Or do we believe in an intelligent, rational God who is pleased when we discover the elegant laws by which the universe is governed? In any event, it is essential that we do not teach doctrinal views that are clearly at odds with well-established principles of modern scientific or secular scholarship. To do so needlessly places many Latter-day Saints,

especially college-age youth, in sever conflict with the intellectual world. (Dialogue, p. 81)

Karen Armstrong explains nicely in "The Battle for God" what is going on in LDS culture. As science makes more inroads against dogma, the choice is to accept that the dogma is wrong (hence prophets were wrong) or to confirm dogma using psuedoscience, suppression of evidence, and blind faith. That is the route Robinson and McKonkie are going. I prefer to accept the modern prophets at their word: They told us to expect them to make mistakes, and they have done this even more often than they themselves expected. Since they were this way and we see lots of evidence of ancient prophets being subject to error (leaving aside issues of scribal mistake, hearsay being accepted as literal truth, etc.), I am content to accept with truckloads of salt the literal accuracy of the "truth" that comes to us from any scriptural sources. Life and religion's role in it makes much more sense to me when viewed this way.

By truckloads of salt, I mean that before accepting faith claims by way of making a "credo consolans" leap, I will spend a lot more time and energy testing their cause and effect linkages, and looking far and wide for theories with greater explanatory power than those that are presented to me.

Authoritarian v. Free Will

Every religion is based in dogma and myth. Dogma correlates with authoritarian attitudes emanating from religious leaders, while myth correlates with free will since myth and metaphor can have as many meanings as there are individuals. In some religions, one dominates and elsewhere the other does. Another question that arises in this regard is how well a religion will accommodate the spiritual needs of people as they mature, change, deal with the contingencies of life etc.

James Fowler provides a useful framework within which to think about this issue in his book "Stages of Faith". The question is, how well do different spiritual systems accommodate a person's need to move from one of these stages to another?

The Six Stages of Faith

Fowler starts with the question of what makes the difference between people who are sincerely and deeply committed to one religious point of view, and those who see strengths and weaknesses in various religious systems. Why do some people seem to wear blinders in considering religious ideas, while others are open to looking at many ideas from many sources? I pulled the following summary off the Internet and spiced it with my own ideas.

Fowler extrapolates from research dealing with the cognitive development of children and moral development in humans generally, and defined six different "stages" that people go through in their quest for spiritual understanding.

Stage One

The first stage Fowler calls Intuitive-Projective faith. It usually occurs between the ages of three and seven, and is characterized by the psyche's unprotected exposure to the unconscious. Imagination runs wild, uninhibited by logic and we absorb cultural taboos. Stage one is also dangerous, though, in that the child's imagination can be "possessed" by unrestrained images of

terror and destruction from the unconscious, and the exploitation of the fertile imagination by enforced taboos and indoctrination.

Stage Two

The second stage is called Mythic-Literal faith, in which symbol and ritual begin to be integrated by the child. These symbols, however, are one-dimensional (literal). The runaway imagination of stage one is harnessed, and linear thinking engrained. The stage usually lasts through the school years, but can be maintained for life. Stage two persons have a strong belief in the justice and reciprocity of the universe. Their gods are almost always anthropomorphic. Critical evaluation of myth and symbol is impossible. Fowler describes a person in this stage as being both carried by and trapped in their own narrative. Stage two can be dangerous because its focus on justice and reciprocity tends toward control and perfectionism. A religious system that appeals to a person in this stage will tend to be legalistic and literalistic.

Stage Three

The third stage is labeled Synthetic-Conventional faith. The majority of the population finds its permanent home in this stage. The third stage is characterized by conformity and strong identification with a group. It can be a social or ideological group, like jocks or preppies or musicians, or it can be a religious group. Many people have more than one group with which they strongly identify. People in stage three tend to be overly concerned about what other members of their group think of them, and try hard to conform to expectations. It is in stage three that people are most likely to feel that their group's ideas and approach to life constitute the "one true way." Fowler says, interestingly, that, "... many ways religious institutions 'work best' if they are peopled with a majority of committed folk best described as Stage 3." We should not therefore be surprised to find that most religious institutions, and the Mormon church in particular, cultivate a stage three spirituality.

Fowler talks about a "locus of authority" – the source that people look to for knowledge about how to behave and what ideas are important. In childhood, the locus of authority is usually primarily parental with people holding positions of authority: presidents, policemen, bishops, etc. In stage three, the "locus of authority" is split between the consensus of the group and the leaders of that group. The important thing to note is that in stages one through three the locus of authority is outside the individual.

As people move toward stage four, they internalize values and become more likely to look to their own ideas and principles for moral guidance. This is when they start to notice conflicts between those principles and the general consensus of group members. For example, the pressure some church members brought to bear on the general authorities respecting the issue of race and priesthood may have arisen from this conflict. Something subtler that has been a topic of discussion around my home for years is the irony that the most committed fathers in a supposedly family oriented church seldom see their families. There is much other organizational hypocrisy that operates in this level to irate people on the edge of, or within, stage four. People in stage four tend to withdraw from the group, and conform their ideals and behaviors to self-determined, internalized principles.

The fact is, many people never make it out of stage three. In the LDS church, there is a lot of pressure to remain in the group, and to conform to the teachings of the leaders. If we find a conflict between personal principles (even the ones the Church teaches) and church policies or doctrines (for example, the requirement for "tithing settlement" against the Church's reluctance

to make public its financial status or honesty against the Church's consistent airbrushing of its own history) we are generally advised to not worry, trust the leadership, and read the Book of Mormon again. Besides, if we're doing all the stuff we're supposed to be doing (FHE, scripture study, callings, prayer, journal-keeping, gardening, family history, home- and visiting-teaching, temple attendance, etc.) there is rarely much time or energy left for thinking outside the box.

Stage three people can live happy, worthwhile, productive lives. They just don't know what they're missing, which includes the ultimate becoming that the antithetical mask and stages four through six can facilitate. In short, the very institution they rely upon for nurture spiritually cripples many of them. This reminds me of the state of affairs with the First Nations people within Canada. They have been controlled and supported by the Federal Government for generations in a misguided attempt to "help" them, and the results have been disastrous. Many of them are hollow shells of human beings, riddled with addictions and various other malaises, mostly caused by being protected and supported, and as a result not being allowed to develop themselves in response to the natural pressure of their environment. It is a classic case of "help the butterfly out of the cocoon and cripple the butterfly".

The dangers of stage three include taking symbolic markers such as power, "goodness", and "badness" so literally and adopting the group's perspective so entirely that the objective evaluation of life's experience is impossible. Furthermore, while it is possible for us at this stage to have an intimate relationship with the divine, the group perspective makes this difficult to achieve. As spiritual maturity increases toward such intimacy, frustration and despair increase as a result of cognitive dissonance caused by the collision between reality and the perspective imposed by group. This is the threshold to stage four.

In Yeats' terms, stages one through three are part of the construction and imposition of the primary mask.

Stage Four

The fourth stage is known as Individuative-Reflective faith. This is primarily a stage of angst and struggle, in which one must face difficult questions regarding identity and belief. It is here that we begin to construct Yeats' antithetical mask. Those that pass into stage four usually do so in their mid-thirties to early forties. At this time, the personality gradually detaches from the defining group from which it formerly drew its identity. The person is aware of him or herself as an individual and must - perhaps for the first time - take personal responsibility for his/her beliefs and feelings. This is a stage of de-mythologizing, where what was once unquestioned is now subjected to critical scrutiny.

Stage four is oriented toward the existential, where nothing is certain but one's own existence. As a result, disillusionment is the norm. This stage is not a comfortable place to be and, although it can last for a long time, those who stay in it do so at risk of becoming bitter, suspicious characters who trust nothing and no one.

Most people, however, after entering this stage sense that not only is the world far more complex than stage three mentality would admit, but that it is still more complex and numinous than the agnostic rationality of stage four can appreciate. This moves us along toward stage five. As can be seen, getting stuck in stage four is not a good thing.

Stage Five

Fowler calls stage five Conjunctive Faith, which fits well with my understanding of what it is like to exist on the fringes of the LDS group. It moves us from stage four's rationalism to the acknowledgement of paradox and transcendence. It is in this stage that, in Washburnian terminology (Michael Washburn – "The Transpersonal Psychology in Psychoanalytic Perspective" and "The Ego and the Dynamic Ground"), one chooses regression in the service of transcendence. That captures my experience almost perfectly. Another way of putting the same thing is "credo consolans" (I believe in the absence of proof, but not against proof, because it consoles me), as expressed by people like Stephan Jay Gould.

In stage five, a person grasps the reality behind the symbols of his or her inherited belief systems, and is also drawn to and acknowledges of the symbols of other systems. This stage makes room for mystery and the unconscious, and is fascinated by it while at the same time apprehensive of the power both of these phenomena. It sees the power behind the metaphors while simultaneously acknowledging their relativity. In stage five, the world, demythologized in stage four, is re-sacrilized, and literally brims with vision. It is also imbued with a new sense of justice that goes beyond justice defined by one's own culture and people. Because one has begun to see "the bigger picture", the walls culture and tradition have built between us and others begin to erode. It is not easy to live on the cusp of paradox, and due to its radical drive towards inclusivity, the mind struggles to assimilate and integrate faster than it can work through its cultural and psychological baggage. It is an overwhelming, ecstatic stage in which one is radically opened to possibility and wonder.

This is the world I have inhabited for the past several months.

Stage Six

Stage six is the final stage, which Fowler calls Universalizing faith. While in stage five we catch glimpses of a transcendent, unitive reality. We feel torn between possibility and loyalty, and may even neglect to act on this new understanding out of a regard for self-preservation. In stage six, any such apprehensions dissolve and one becomes an activist for the unitive vision. Fowler describes it as follows:

Persons described by stage six typically exhibit qualities that shake our usual criteria of normalcy. Their heedlessness to self-preservation and the vividness of their taste and feel for transcendent moral and religious actuality give their actions and words an extraordinary and often unpredictable quality. In their devotion to universalizing compassion they may offend our parochial perceptions of justice. In their penetration through the obsession with survival, security, and significance they threaten our measured standards of righteousness and goodness and prudence. Their enlarged visions of universal community disclose the partialness of our tribes and pseudo-species. And their leadership initiatives, often involving strategies of non-violent suffering and ultimate respect for being, constitute affronts to our usual notions of relevance. (Stages of Faith, p. 200)

This is Buddha, Gandhi etc. It is possible to reach this state both through fully denying and fully affirming life. I am not sure I will reach it, and it is not my goal. I want to continue to move along enjoying life as I am, and to remain open to all possibilities. I don't have much to say about this state because I don't understand it. The others I have lived, and believe that I understand quite

well. Here is a concluding and summarizing quote from a publication on the Internet written by someone who does purport to understand stage six:

Fowler, although not normally thought of as a transpersonal psychologist, has much to offer the field. He approaches the whole question from another side, not theorizing about the internal mechanics as Washburn and Wilber do, but merely observing thoughts and behavior. It is impossible, for me, not to visualize the internal drama in Washburnian terms when reading the progression from stages three to six. In stage three, for instance, the ego is dominant and the Dynamic Ground successfully suppressed. Stage four begins the individual's psychic undoing, as one's cultural/religious paradigm begins to crumble and existential anxiety sets in. Stage five begins the terrifying surrender to the power of the Ground, which transforms the personality and infuses it with the vision and the courage to enter stage six, what some might call, enlightenment. One sees things as they truly are, transcending the limitations and conceptions of one's tradition and culture. Fowler has made an important contribution, by setting the transpersonal drama in a context of religious belief, the battleground for so much of the egoic conflict. He also names my own experiences, and I have felt an incredible sense of comfort and relief in reading him when I was going through my stage four trauma. I was not, as I suspected, going crazy! For everything about which my intellect raged was described and understood through Fowler's analysis.

Fowler's six-stage analysis is, from my point of view, a scientific breakdown of the Yeats' simple mask metaphor. Each of those speaks to a different part of me. I also note that many scholars have developed models that attempt to do the same sort of thing Fowler has done. Scott Peck, for example, in his widely acclaimed book "The Different Drum" sets out a four category breakdown that credits Fowler. Others have come up with taxonomies that use over a dozen categories to describe spiritual development. However, the theme is usually the same. We start out narrow and progress into broader, more tolerant and accepting ways of understanding our religious experience and that of others.

Moral Development

Many scholars have used approaches similar to that described above respecting spirituality to track the development of moral reasoning. While I am sure that some of these reference the spiritual development studies referred to above, I have not read any yet that do. However, the correlation between these two areas of study is hard to miss.

As early as Aristotle the view was expressed that the ability to exercise moral judgement is entirely learned. This is consistent with the "blank slate" side of the nature v. nurture debate. That is, our socialization is much more responsible for making us what we are than our genetic or other inheritance. I doubt this view is correct. The best reading I have found on that subject is contained in Steven Pinker's recent book "The Blank Slate". Using the latest in psychological and other studies, he persuasively makes the case for nature playing a much greater role in things like our moral judgement than has generally been thought to be the case. For example, it would be consistent with evolutionary theory for people to develop an inclination to cooperate with the group of which they are a part, and to act therefore in accordance with some version of the Golden Rule. This would explain why this rule seems to appear in virtually all societies that have been successful in the long term.

It is my view that our inclination toward moral behaviour is innate. However, how we act on that impulse is highly conditioned. Nurture, hence, plays a significant role in how we behave in this

regard. Therefore, the religious or social tradition in which we are raised can have a powerful effect on us in this regard.

Here is one description of the stages of moral development (See Manuel G. Velasquez, *Business Ethics – Concepts and Cases*, 3rd Ed., p. 27). First, as children we are told what is right and wrong and obey to avoid punishment. Next, as adolescents we begin to internalize these moral standards, understand how the work, who they benefit etc., and begin to obey them because we wish to advance the well-being of the people to whom we are directly connected and who would be affected by our actions. Finally, as rational, experienced adults we acquire to a greater or lesser degree the ability to reflect critically upon the moral standards received from our culture, evaluate them against our developing sense of right and wrong (more respecting this below), and revise them to the extent they seem inadequate to us. Our morality at this point extends well beyond the circle of those close to us. It takes into account circumstances around the globe and in parts of our society that would not have been known to us as adolescents.

I postulate a correlation between people who progress from Fowler stage three to stage five spirituality and those who achieve relatively higher levels of moral judgement. Fowler stage three spirituality is likely, in my view, to restrict one's ability to empathize with and understand those of other cultures and religious traditions. This restriction is likely to impair moral judgement. For example, the terrorist acts of September 11 and many others were committed by people acting out of a stage three spirituality. Their way is the only way ordained by god, and those who threaten that way are hence evil and must be eradicated. It is easy to see the moral shortcomings of that approach.

An example closer to home is found in many practises related to LDS missionary work that are also clearly stage three orientated. To a significant extent, North American culture is carried on the back of LDS dogma into the lives of people worldwide, most of whom are poorly educated. The notion that the Utah way of doing things is the best way is, in my experience, impossible to disentangle from the gospel message. Many religious rites and rituals that have great value in foreign cultures but that are quite different from our own are hence thrown out because of their connection to a "false" religious tradition. The rites of Mormonism are substituted, which were developed in a different culture and often do not speak to the reality of the people receiving them, and a great cultural inheritance is lost. This loss is caused by an unjustified feeling of superiority that causes Mormons to require its converts to abandon all culture that is connected to religious belief other than Mormonism. And we note that many important aspects of most cultures are represented by their religious belief systems. All of this is caused, primarily in my view, by Mormon dogma-induced moral myopia.

And what of the manner in which families are routinely broken up because the value of being faithful the Mormon church so as to have "eternal" blessings outweighs the value of maintaining healthy relationships between spouses and children? This, in my view, is immoral. And what of the LDS church's practise of suppressing some information respecting its origins and distorting other? This too, in my view, is immoral. Both of these tendencies are based on the Mormon notion that it is the one true church, clearly a stage three idea.

There are many other examples that could be cited.

Western v. Eastern Approaches to Free Will

The physicist Gary Zukav writes in his book about the implications of quantum physics for spirituality, "The Dancing Wu Li Masters":

Acceptance without proof is the fundamental characteristic of Western religion. Rejection without proof is the fundamental characteristic of Western science” (pp. 110-11).

Christianity, for example, holds that the basis of faith involves believing in Jesus as the son of god, which is not falsifiable and hence not scientific. We find a remarkable difference in religions like Buddhism, where practitioners are invited to test religious teachings. The Buddha told his followers not to rely on hearsay, tradition, respect for some guru, or adherence to some theory, but to experience for themselves the efficacy of his teachings. Gnostic Christians expressed similar teachings. As Elaine Pagels writes in her book "The Gnostic Gospels":

The gnostic understands Christ's message not as offering a set of answers, but as encouragement to engage in a process of searching Those who merely believe the preaching they hear, without asking questions, and who accept the worship set before them, not only remain ignorant of themselves, but “if they find someone else who asks about his salvation,” they act immediately to censor and silence him (112-13).

Gnostics, Buddhists, and a large number of other traditions point to our ignorance, not our lack of blind faith, as the cause of our suffering. I think that it is fair to say that Mormons say both things. They seek learning, but only insofar as it does not contradict their dogma.

Chris Holte notes that at least some parts of Buddhist theology tell us that Buddhism itself should not be taken too seriously:

The Thich Naht Hahn's "The Fourteen Precepts of Engaged Buddhism," states:

Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. Buddhist systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth.

All these teachings are trying to tell people that religious truth and religious thinking are for the purpose of "wisdom" or "upaya" and not things to be taken literally. The problem with religious people in our day and age, is that they hear a story such as the stone-cutter, and start looking for archaeological proof that the stone cutter existed, cut stones, and then start insisting that he [was] literally transformed into the Sun or clouds. Religious stories were never meant to be read in that fashion. (Holte, Literal Proof and Literary Issues, http://www.geocities.com/chris_holte/Buddhism/IssuesInBuddhism/literal.html)

It is interesting that in matters of religious believe the West has adopted a relatively static approach whereas the East is open to change. This reverses the general cultural tendencies in both camps. I am at a loss to explain this at the moment, but have a couple of theories that are worth recording and further investigation.

Perhaps within Eastern society the latitude for questioning is in fact quite narrow due to the overriding need to conform imposed by that society. Joseph Campbell has noted that the Western idea of Zen Buddhism is in some cases quite misleading. In the West Zen is seen as a "let it all hang out" and "drop out" philosophy, whereas in fact Zen is the source of the complex Japanese tea ceremony, and is an extremely disciplined form of meditation that while undertaken voluntarily, involves much more structure than most Westerners could stand.

I will venture another guess. I am just starting to learn about Eastern religions, and hence am doing little more than engaging in speculation with this idea. But in any event, perhaps the existential orientation of Eastern society makes it possible for them to evolve with changing scientific theory etc. better than Western religions can. That is, in the East reality just "is". There is no outside agency similar to the Western conception of god that tells a Buddhist, for example, what reality is. It just "is". Hence, any scientific discovery that provides credible proof of what reality is would be accepted in the East without hesitation, whereas in the West such discoveries that contradict pre-existing dogmas perceived to emanate from the outside arbiter of reality (god) must be resisted.

LDS Approach to Free Will

Few theological ideas get more lip service than free will within Mormonism. Joseph Smith and other LDS leaders have taught that no Mormon should accept what they say without taking it to god and receiving independent confirmation of its truthfulness. Smith also said:

I ask, Did I ever exercise any compulsion over any man? Did I not give him the liberty of disbelieving any doctrine I have preached, if he saw fit? (Documentary History of the Church, vol. VI, 273-274, as quoted in Alma P. Burton, Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 105, 106))

And he said:

I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning, for truth will cut its own way. (History of the Church, vol. V, pp. 498, 499)

And speaking of a member of the LDS church who had been brought before a disciplinary council for preaching false doctrine, he first questioned the council's understanding of the relevant doctrine, and then respecting the basic idea of such councils said:

It looks too much like the Methodists, and not like the Latter-day Saints. Methodists have a creed which a man must believe or be asked out of their church. I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammelled. It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine. The high counsel undertook to censure and correct Elder Brown, because of his teachings ... Whether they actually corrected him or not, I am a little doubtful, but don't care. (Documentary History of the Church, vol. VI, 273-274, as quoted in Alma P. Burton, Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 106, 107)

Here are what a number of other prominent LDS leaders have had to say on the topic over the years:

Rueben Clark: If we have the truth, [it] cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed. (Michael Quinn, J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years, p. 24)

B.H Roberts: To pay attention to and give reasonable credence to [scientific] research is to link the church of God with the highest increase of human thought and effort. (The Truth, the Way and the Light, p.364)

Hugh Brown: We should be in the forefront of learning in all fields, for revelation does not come only through the prophet of God nor only directly from heaven in visions or dreams. Revelation may come in the laboratory, out of the test tube, out of the thinking mind and the inquiring soul, out of search and research and prayer and inspiration. (Edward Kimball, "An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown", p. 139, a quote from his "Final Testimony")

Hugh Brown: I hope that you will develop the questing spirit. Be unafraid of new ideas for they are the stepping stones of progress. You will of course respect the opinions of others but be unafraid to dissent if you are informed. Now I have mentioned freedom to express your thoughts, but I caution you that your thoughts and expressions must meet competition in the marketplace of thought, and in that competition truth will emerge triumphant. Only error needs to fear freedom of expression. Seek the truth in all fields, and in that search you will need at least three virtues: courage, zest and modesty. The ancients put that thought in the form of a prayer. They said, "From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half truth, from the arrogance that thinks it has all truth – O God of truth, deliver us. (BYU Devotional, 1958)

James Talmadge: This book is entitled to the most thorough and impartial examination. Not only does the Book of Mormon merit such consideration, it claims, even demands the same. (The Articles of Faith, p. 273)

John Widstoe: To Latter-day Saints there can be no objection to the careful and critical study of the scriptures, ancient or modern, provided only that it be an honest study – a search for truth. (In Search of Truth: Comments on the Gospel and Modern Thought)

David McKay: Ours is the responsibility ... to proclaim the truth that each individual is a child of God and important in his sight; that he is entitled to freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly; that he has the right to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience. In this positive declaration, we imply that organizations or churches which deprive the individual of these inherent rights are not in harmony with God's will nor with his revealed word. (124th Annual Conference, April 4, 1954, p. 26)

I note that David O. McKay's quote came from a conference address connected to the Sterling McMurrin controversy. Joseph Fielding Smith and others had advocated McMurrin's excommunication. McKay met with McMurrin, quizzed him about various things (evolution, blacks and the priesthood, etc.), listened to McMurrin's views that clearly contradicted the official church position, and then told him: "Don't ever let anybody tell you what to think or what to believe" (Stirling McMurrin Oral History, quoted in Prince, David O. McKay and the "Twin Sisters: Free Agency and Tolerance, Dialogue Vol. 33, No. 4, p. 5), and promised to be a witness in his favour if anyone ever convened a church court against him. This insulated McMurrin from Church discipline for the rest of his life. He died a heterodox member of the Church. Several weeks after McKay's meeting with McMurrin, he spoke at general conference and made the above statement. It was well known that McKay was referring to the McMurrin case, and that the degree of diversity of opinion he advocated included McMurrin's well-known humanist/atheist stance and his very public avocation of it. Four days after general conference, M. Lynn Bennion, Superintendent of Salt Lake City Schools wrote to McKay as follows:

Our recent conference impressed upon me more than ever that Religion is a constant struggle between the formalistic and the traditional on the one hand and the unending stimulation of the spirit. Your conference messages are based on laws and

commandments, but the great stress is upon love, freedom, and compassion. I wish to congratulate you again on your prophetic leadership..."

There is a fundamental issue at stake in the case being formulated against [Sterling McMurrin]. You expressed it directly when you spoke of man's right of freedom to think and to worship within the Church. God bless you for taking this stand. It is our most precious possession and worth every sacrifice to maintain. I noted with joy that a number of the brethren caught your spirit and spoke in the same vein...(Prince, supra, p. 6)

The quote from Lynn Bennion is provided to make it clear that it was well known in Salt Lake what had precipitated President McKay's remarks at conference, and the meaning they were intended to convey.

And finally, what of the so-called great council in Heaven that forms the underpinning of the LDS Plan of Salvation? Smith taught that in this council, two plans for man's development on Earth were presented. The first, presented by Lucifer, was that man would be required to obey the laws required to assure a return to our Heavenly Father. Jesus presented the counter plan with free will at its core. His plan postulated that we must have the freedom to choose in order to develop ourselves in such a fashion as to be able to return to our Heavenly Father. Jesus' plan was adopted, Lucifer and those who followed him were cast out of Heavenly Father's presence, and we all chose to come to earth to live in accordance with Jesus' plan.

This encouraging theological start did not take. The LDS approach to information suppression and control is outlined below in the section entitled "How Did We Get Here, and Why Did We Stay So Long?" It is my view that human foible coupled with the imperatives of controlling a large organization caused Smith himself to surrender the principle of free will during this life, and things only got worse as Brigham Young led an embattled people across the Great Plains to establish a new society in the Utah desert.

So How Do We Use Mythology to Move From Stage Three to Five?

I will conclude respecting mythology with a story about James Joyce that illustrates how we move from stage three to five. This captures it all for me. Metaphor moves me more than science.

Campbell tells the story. He starts by quoting the motto from the cover page of Joyce's "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man", and indicating that it comes from the story of Dedalus. The quote is in Latin. It says something like, "and his mind turned to new forms of art". This, according to Campbell, is an oblique reference to Dedalus, the creator of the Labyrinth on the island of Crete, deciding to fly to the mainland on "wings of art". King Minos would not allow him to leave since he was such a wise and useful man, but he had decided to leave in any event. His "wings of art" were the only thing that could carry him over the nets that Minos had set to prevent his passage.

Campbell said that this was Joyce's personal myth. He "flew" from Ireland to the mainland on his wings of art. He flew from the rich, but limiting, catholic symbolism and its orthodox interpretation in which he was well trained as a youth, to mythology and a broad understanding of humanity. Campbell said that this evolution was visible in Joyce's writings. Campbell has written a lot about the necessity of "flying" from the provincial, where we all start out in one fashion or another, to the transcendent.

So, how do we make our wings?

Who Has Who?

As one writer I recently read put it, the bottom line question respecting the authoritarian nature of religion and free will is whether we have religious faith, or whether religious faith has us. If we are well enough informed about what our faith is and how it works in our lives to use it to help us live a full and joyous life, then we have religious faith. If, on the other hand, our beliefs are used by others to control us, then our faith has us. Those others need not be current religious leaders. It is possible to surrender our free will to people who wrote books thousands of years ago that purport to tell us what we should do, or even to abstractions of our own invention.

I have resolved to do what I can to ensure that from now on I have faith, instead of being had by it.

Where Do We Want To Be?

That completes the sketch of my spiritual map. And so we come to the question of where on that map would we like to be. I think it best to tackle this question before the question of where we are and why we have not left before so that the considerations related to those issues will not interfere with our construction of the ideal world.

As it turns out, our map is more like an overlapping matrix in many dimensions than it is map. The dimensions of the matrix are: Individual v. Society; Personal v. Impersonal Deity; Linear v. Cyclical History; Life Affirming v. Life Denying; Harmony v. Conflict; Mysticism v. Dogmatic Belief; Authoritarian v. Free Will.

What is the ideal religion or mythology? That question has many answers that depend on things like individual nature, cultural etc. For example, the LDS church is not, at this point in time, the right religion for a homosexual. In fact, it is extremely damaging to people who are of that type. As the Dalai Lama put it:

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that we have many different religious traditions with different ways of thinking and behaving. But this variety is a way for everyone to be happy. If we only have bread, people who eat rice are left out. With a great variety of food, we are able to satisfy everyone's different needs and tastes. And people eat rice because it grows best where they live, not because it is either any better or worse than bread. (quoted in *Why God Won't Go Away*, p. 165)

All I can do is identify the kind of mythology or religion that seems to be helpful to me, here and now, and adopt a process that will allow me to change as circumstance requires.

As I noted above, I have adopted the scientific process to the extent possible in my spiritual quest. That is, I keep my mind open and use what I might have before regarded as conclusions as working hypotheses. I test by way of experiment to the extent I can. However, I recognize that much of what I am dealing with cannot be tested. Hence, I am faced with the choice of either not believing, or believing in the face of evidence that is unreliable. I note that most of the decisions we make day to day are made with only such evidence. Hence, I feel my way along life's path with sense of awe at the wonderful things I encounter, and with great humility as a result of my knowledge of how unreliable my knowledge is.

I should note that I am in good company in proceeding in the fashion I have decided feels comfortable to me. Einstein and Schrodinger both had similar positions. And Shermer notes the following:

Seven Allen explained, "My present position as to the existence of God is that though it seems utterly fantastic, I accept it because the alternative seems even more fantastic." Marin Gardener, the sceptic's sceptic, calls himself a fideist, a philosophical theist who says *credo consolans* – I believe because it is consoling. Given a metaphysical problem impossible to resolve through science or reason, (like the existence of God), says Gardner, it is acceptable to make a leap of faith. ("Why People Believe Weird Things, pp. 132 – 133)

Hence, bearing in mind that many of my beliefs cannot be rationally defended in scientific terms, and recognizing that I am certain to change my mind in some respects as I pass through life and become wiser in some ways and less wise in others, here is a summary of what attracts me respecting the various religious ideas I have encountered while doing the reading required to assemble the above matrices.

Individual v. Society

I think it critical that I preserve my individualistic orientation. This is too deeply imbedded in my psyche to abandon, and too useful. It keeps me trying to improve, learn and accomplish. It shapes my behaviour, to an extent, with respect to my family and others. For example, I choose to believe that the relationships I have with my family and our individual characters will persist, after this life ends. However, I also feel more connected than ever before to humanity and existence as a whole. This will be addressed below

Personal v. Impersonal Deity

As noted above, before I left the Church my thinking had evolved a long way toward the impersonal god end of the spectrum. I still reflexively conceive of god in human form when I pray or meditate, but I can feel that fading. I am comfortable with an impersonal deity, and think that focusing on understanding the eternal law and nature of existence that is god is healthier than focusing on an anthropomorphic conception that cannot possibly capture what he/she/it is in any event.

Even C.S. Lewis, a noted religious literalist, seems to have appreciated that in our small conceptions of god we do not do him justice:

The one whom I bow to only knows to whom I bow
When I attempt the ineffable Name, murmuring Thou
And dream of Phaedian fancies and embrace in heart
Symbols (I know) which cannot be the thing thou art.
Thus always, taken at their word, all prayers blaspheme
Worshipping with frail images of folk-lore dream,
And all in their praying, self-deceived, address
The coinage of their own unquiet thoughts, unless
Thou in magnetic mercy to Thyself divert
Our arrows, aimed, unskilfully, beyond desert;
And all are idolators, crying unheard
To a deaf idol, if thou take them at thy word.

Take not, O Lord, our literal sense. Lord, in thy great
Unspoken speech our limping metaphor translate.
("A Footnote to All Prayers", as quoted in "Why God Won't Go Away" at p. 157)

Time and History: Linear or Cyclical

It is my view that the concepts of linear time and individual importance, that arose out of the interaction between European and Levantine cultures, is the mainspring of modern Western progress, and at the same time are its greatest liability. This is not surprising since any source of power can be used to go great good or bad. Hence, within my own life I have come to regard my self-conception as a unique being capable of eternal progression through linear history as my wild bull. If I can tame its tendencies toward life denying conflict and put it in harmony's harness, I can have the best of all worlds. If I continue to allow it to determine my relationship to external reality, I will fight my way through life and miss most of its sweetest moments.

Life Affirming v. Life Denying

I have not yet understood how the denial of life is helpful. I am more attracted to the affirmative approach to life the primitive societies and modern Buddhism have taken. As Campbell puts it, they affirmed life right down to its horrendous root. The third paradigm Campbell points out is the one that insists that life must be changed, or subdued, as per the Christian tradition, for example. I do not think this works either.

It is helpful to focus inward on what is happening in our mind, and to have a great deal of respect for the manner in which our mind tricks us about external reality. The thing of primary importance is the ideas that play themselves out in our heads – lust, anger etc. – rather than the external objects we think are the focus of our attention. This is a little like Carlos Castaneda's idea in "The Teachings of Don Juan" – all path's lead nowhere, so make sure that the nature of the journey is satisfactory. That is, it is not the destination we should focus on, it is the journey. Perhaps this is what denying life means – focussing on the destination to the neglect of the journey.

In any event, I think the most helpful way to frame this question is whether we will try to live so as to deny and extinguish the impulse to life, or will we embrace and enhance it? During the last three months I have felt more alive, more excited about life right down to its awful core, etc. that ever before. It seems to me that I should proceed along this path.

Nirvana, it seems to me, is the extinguishment of the impulse to life. It protects us from pain by killing the nerve. I would rather find a way to embrace life, with its pain caused by fear and desire, and revel in the whole of it. I think that I am well on my way to doing that. I think we can experience what Newberg calls Absolute Unitary Being, which is a state similar to Nirvana, without killing the nerve. In fact, in some ways, that will make the nerve more sensitive and will deepen our life's experience. I think this is what has been happening to me. The joys become deeper and more long lasting, and the pains while hurting in some ways more intensely will be accepted, even embraced, as the flip side of the coin.

I can envision a state in which I learn to live life so much on the side of joy that while fear and its concomitant pain are a part of life, they will become chairs scratching in the aisle during a great Bach concerto (or U2 concert) – at worst a minor distraction. The greater my mental and spiritual powers, developed through disciplines like meditation, the more successful in this endeavour I will be.

In LDS terms, the more capable I am of exercising my free will, the more joy I will experience. Capacity to exercise free will derives from two things. First, having done as few things as possible to limit that exercise (picking up drug dependency; having to work 60 hours a week to keep bread on the table etc.); and second doing as many things as possible to enhance my inherent power to choose (developing various abilities, including mental power through meditation, etc.). I can thus choose to embrace life instead of hiding from it. This is a permanent state, just as is nirvana. And it fits with the Western idea of the importance of the individual. Nirvana is based in the Eastern idea of the extinguishment of the individual.

Conflict v. Harmony

I prefer the harmonic approach. As I have absorbed the idea that I must accept life as it is – affirm life – and that the conceptions of good and bad I previously had were preventing me from making valid objective assessments of good and bad, I have felt a gratifying increase in life's harmony.

Campbell notes, for example, the effect this approach has on our conception of sin and repentance:

Ramakrishna once said that if all you think of are your sins, then you are a sinner. And when I read that, I thought of my boyhood, going to confessions on Saturdays, meditating on all the little sins that I had committed during the week. Now I think one should go and say, "Bless me Father, for I have been great, these are the good things I have done this week". Identify your image of yourself with the positive, rather than with the negative. You see, religion is really a kind of second womb. It's designed to bring this extremely complicated thing, which is a human being, to maturity, which means to be self-motivating, self-acting. But the idea of sin puts you in a servile condition through your life. (Campbell and Moyer, *The Power of Myth*, p. 66)

The main concept I am trying to use to increase the harmony in my life is that my nature, in its highest state, is in harmony with all existence. That is, I can find harmony in every event I confront. I have adopted this approach in lieu of the paradigm I used to have that I was in charge, and must bend what I encountered to my will; that I must subdue the world and myself.

Finding harmony does not mean surrender or acceptance of things I don't want in my life. Take the discipline of Kung Fu as an example. It is the art of using opposing forces against themselves. To do this, one must be in harmony with those forces, and while in harmony to harness them.

I observe that the more I understand of my environment and myself, the better I can harmonize with them. That is, to affirm reality I must understand it. I can only affirm it to the extent that I understand it.

In extreme cases, I can ignore or exclude some things from my life. To the extent I must do this to maintain harmony, I am denying the ignored or excluded aspect of life. Taken to an extreme, life is reduced to nothing by that process. The important thing to do is find ways to harmonize.

To the extent that I do not understand the reality around me, I ignore it and can't affirm it.

An example that comes to mind in this regard is that of my 10-year-old girls basketball team. There is one little girl on that team who refused for most of the season to follow my instructions

during games. I am trying to teach the girls about team work, and how to find the thing that they can contribute that will most help the team and to contribute that while encouraging other girls to do the same. This means that not all of them will have equal chances to dribble the ball and shoot baskets during the game, but they all have important things to do.

A while ago, after this little girl had yet again ignored my instructions, I made her sit out a shift during a game. This upset both her and her parents. My choice was to seek harmony without giving in, or to simply lay down the law and ignore any unpleasantness. I was far better off to seek harmony. I found a way to redirect this child's willfulness in a way that will benefit her and the team. Last game she did what she was told, was proud of that, and her parents and I are very happy with the result.

Where is the best code of conduct of which I am aware that promotes harmonic living? I am just starting to study Buddhism, and expect to find lots of good stuff there. But I doubt that I will find anything better than this:

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy and without guile; reproof betimes with sharpness when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproofed lest he esteem thee to be his enemy; that he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death. (D&C 121: 41 – 44)

I heard Steven Covey speak while I was in the MTC in 1976. He said that his then nascent, but rapidly growing consulting business, was built almost entirely upon the principles in those inspired words.

For years as a young lawyer I repeated those words once each day, and ironically now I find that they are taking root in my soul as never before. In order for that to happen, I had to rid myself of the basic paradigm of conflict on which my worldview was based. I expect that as I learn more about Buddhism and other purveyors of the harmonious approach to life my understanding of these principles will deepen. I am just scratching the surface of Buddhism now.

Authoritarian v. Free Will

Obviously, I vote for free will. A religion should encourage its adherents to find the highest level of spirituality they can. It certainly should not hold them back when they want and need more.

The LDS church fails this test miserably, as noted above.

Conclusions – Where Do We Want to Be?

I want to continue to develop my individualistic nature in linear history, but at the same time seek to affirm more of life and find harmony with the world around me. I do not perceive that I will have to sacrifice individualism for harmony. I will rather develop my individualism toward harmony in a fashion that may be uniquely me. I can become more while finding greater harmony.

The god I wish to worship is that reality that transcends and is immanent in all else. I will seek this transcendence/immanence through seeking to understand myself and all reality around me. As I grasp these things, I come to closer to an understanding of god while recognizing that this is a process that will never be concluded.

I seek a religious faith and community of fellow travelers that will help me to live as I choose, to progress spiritually as far and as quickly as I am able, and will not restrain me. Ideally, I would have the privilege of serving and lifting them as they serve and lift me.

I would like the guidance of people whose wisdom is proven by their successful negotiation of life's reefs and shoals as I decide when to accept that the wisdom of science has overcome one of my dogmas. If such person is inspired by god, so much the better. But I will look for proof of inspiration in her batting average and nothing else, and I will make sure that the pitcher has not been lobbing slow pitches to help the average out.

Where Are We Now?

I observe that the LDS tradition is primarily individualistic, worships a personal god, conceives history as linear and is life-denying, conflict oriented, dogmatic and authoritarian. That is, it scores only twice in seven tries. Some of its problems are rooted in Joseph Smith's teachings. Those problematic teachings are simply wrong and should be rejected. We should take Smith at his word when he told us to expect him to make mistakes. He made many. And as noted above, some of the best parts of the LDS tradition are also rooted in Smith's teachings. I acknowledge him as a man of God, and even a prophet (as I now define that term), as a result. The Church ignores much of the best he offers us largely because it is inconsistent with the prevailing LDS culture, as set out above.

My key observation, made through Fowler stage five eyes, is that the LDS church is just another religion. It has its pearls, and its dross. It provides lots of great tools, and often makes it hard for us to use them. But most importantly, from my point of view, it is where I was planted. I inherit my deepest, most engrained and intuitive symbolism from it.

How Did We Get Here, and Why Did We Stay So Long?

The "how did we get here" part is simple. We were born LDS and socialized, as all humans are, within the belief system in which we grew up.

The "why did we stay so long" is more complicated. I have thought a lot about that one.

I still have some pretty critical things to say about our LDS culture. However, my thinking has moderated considerably in that regard since last fall. I now seek harmony with my tradition, and recognize the solid base it has provided for me, from which I now need to move in order to continue to progress in a healthy fashion. My approach in this regard owes a great deal to Joseph Campbell. He has been criticized by many for espousing an overly simplistic and misleading approach to mythology and religion, and hence for throwing the truth out with the bath water. I don't know enough about anthropology, mythology etc. to have an opinion worth listening to in that regard. However, I can say that the way in which Campbell expresses mythic and other themes has resonated deep within me. They help me to understand feelings and experiences with which I have wrestled for years. In short, they work for me and I will therefore continue to use them as I study and refine my worldview.

I also note that I found Campbell after I had made my break with the Church. He did not cause that, and his ideas are largely responsible for bringing me back to the point where I can appreciate and use the best of what my tradition has to offer. He has done this by pointing me toward the idea of a personal mythology, and the importance of starting with the best of the mythology with which I were raised in that regard. He has also shown me the importance of harmony within the Eastern cultures, and how that can be incorporated into the personal mythology of a Western person.

Here is a summary of one of Campbell's ideas that I have found particularly helpful in the context of how I deal with LDS culture by which I am still surrounded. He borrows this from Thomas Mann, the great early 20th century German writer. Mann was unhappy within the community where he was raised, and left for Bohemia, then one of the places in which artists and other free spirits congregated. But he was not happy there either. The Bohemian folk with whom he associated were very bright, but very critical of everything around them. Campbell indicates that they could have been good newspaper journalists. In any event, Mann eventually concludes that nothing in life is perfect, and in fact it is the imperfection in the things around us that give them character, and often draw us to them. He then notes a crucial distinction between two ways in which people react to imperfection. He says that each time we point out an imperfection, we send an arrow into the heart of whatever we deem imperfect. However, the critic or cynic simply sends the arrow and lets it do whatever damage it does, whereas the poet puts love on the arrow's tip, thereby completely changing its affect.

I have tried to tip the arrows I aim at the LDS church with love and appreciation for the place that nurtured me and gave me my primary mask, even if it did not encourage me to venture forth on my own as soon as it should have.

How Did Religious Thinking Get Started in the First Place?

There are a number of convincing answers to this question. They are all based on evolutionary theory and experience.

Common Source v. Simultaneous Development

There are two primary competing theories that explain the universality of experience with god. The one usually rejected by the Church is advocated best by Eliade, Jung and others. This is the so-called "Archetype theory" which posits that a collective unconscious exists that is populated by archetypal images. These images are part of the unconscious of all men, and hence the appearance of common themes in dream, worship, creation myths etc. across many cultures and throughout the ages can be explained.

The competing theory, usually accepted by the Church and most ably promoted by Hugh Nibley, is the so-called "common source" theory. Nibley posits that many important ideas came to us from Adam by way of the dispersion of the human race across the planet and the occasional restoration of lost knowledge by god to prophets in different locales. Hence, for example, temple rituals in the ancient Near East, Egypt, China etc. have certain themes in common. That these themes often relate to similar creation myths found in many cultures, he points out, is consistent with this theory. The idea of the pre-existence is often included with this theory. That is, we brought certain dim recollections of our prior life and belief system with us, and hence are drawn toward similar religious experience. I note that the pre-existence is actually supportive of both theories.

Until recently, I was more persuaded by Nibley than Eliade and Jung. This is one of the many ideas I have revisited. First, I have read some pretty convincing stuff that indicates that Nibley was stretching his sources. A lot of the parallels he has found are not really parallels when they are put in context. I think his research and writing is still valuable, but not nearly so as I once thought. I continue to think, however, that it is possible that the echoes of an ancient temple ceremony etc. may be found in more than one culture and that Nibley's theory is correct in some limited respects. The real problem with this idea is that it does not explain so many other religious behaviours we see around us and are exhibited by people throughout the ages and across a multitude of cultures, and ultimately I think Nibley's analysis points us in the wrong direction.

Nibley's writing assumes that there is one right way to do things; that God gave his chosen people, for example, a pure and undefiled temple ceremony at some time in the distant past and that various peoples have since that time heard and followed echoes of that ceremony until it was restored in its fullness to Joseph Smith.

Hence, the direction in which Nibley points is the "chosen people" and "one true church" direction. He encourages us to interpret the data available to us with that in mind. There is much data, however, that this theory does not explain. For example, if there is one chosen people, why do so many different peoples, all of whom think that they are chosen, have such similar personal experiences with God? And when we look at creation myths, temple ceremonies, other forms of ritual worship, etc. we find so much diversity that the weak common themes Nibley posits are virtually imperceptible. Some scholars say that once Nibley's "parallels" are put properly in context, they do not disclose a common theme. And why would we think that the same religious ideas would produce the same results in cultures as different as those we find around the world? Assuming a loving god of the Christian variety and knowing something of the complexity of our world, would we not assume that he would create systems of rules that would work for his children in their varied circumstances?

In any event, amid all this diversity of religious form, the personal religious experience is remarkably consistent. I will examine why I think this is the case below. And we note that these very similar experiences become the basis for the various groups of "chosen" people to deem themselves chosen, and to persecute, look down upon, kill etc. any other people who has the audacity to think that they are the chosen ones.

The dreams/archetype analysis of Jung and Eliade satisfactorily explains the common religious experience phenomenon. In my view, the dreams and religious behaviours of a wide range of people as well as our own personal experience now is much more consistent with some kind of collective unconsciousness or instinct that it is with divine knowledge transmitted culturally or prophetically restored from time to time.

I am stepping into water over my head here, but let me in any event suggest an analogy that recently occurred to me. I had trouble with Jung's terms "collective unconscious" and "archetype". It was helpful for me to read as broadly as I have recently with respect to how many people in different cultures have similar religious experiences. However, I did not really grasp this concept until I began to think of it in terms of "instinct".

We are familiar with a broad range of instincts. One dictionary defines the term as follows:

The innate capacity of an animal to respond to a given stimulus in a relatively fixed way;

I could choose lots of behaviours from the animal kingdom, or even some human behaviours to illustrate the point. I have chosen the migration pattern of the salmon, since I learned something about that as a result of growing up on the coast.

Salmon are born, generally speaking, in a shallow inland streams many miles from the ocean. After birth they are carried by the downstream current from their small stream, to larger streams, to small rivers, to larger rivers, and finally out to sea. They then spend a number of years travelling thousands of miles at sea, and if they live long enough, reach sexual maturity. At this point, an instinct kicks in that the scientists are still trying to understand. Of all the thousands of rivers that empty into the sea in the area that this salmon has travelled around, this salmon returns directly to the one that disgorged it. It does not swim around looking, smelling, etc. for the right river. It just swims directly from where it is when the urge strikes to its river. It then swims upriver and takes the correct turn at many corners, eventually ending up very near the place it hatched. It then does its best to reproduce.

Scientists who study this phenomenon have determined that a salmon's acute sense of smell has something to do with the process, but this does not explain many aspects of what salmon do as they migrate. There is also another theory that the earth's gravity and position are somehow imprinted on the salmon at birth and, at the right time of year, can act like an inbuilt GPS to guide it back to its birthplace. There are lots of interesting questions still to be answered on this point.

In any event, when I consider the behaviour of a salmon migrating toward its place of birth upon reaching sexual maturity, impelled by forces well beyond its comprehension, whatever they may be, I am drawn to a set of parallel behaviours we find in mankind respecting religious matters. If salmon can be born with a complex set of instincts that are designed to produce certain critically important behaviours at certain points in their life cycle, why not the same with man? The behavioural patterns are certainly similar, although much less precise in man's case.

Darwin and others of his school would say that salmon evolved their migrational ability in order to deal with some important imperative in their environment. I would not disagree. I have no trouble with the idea that evolution created us and the world around us, and agree with Talmage and Widstoe in this regard while disagreeing with Joseph F. Smith and many of his relatives. If we accept evolutionary theory, and the huge amount of evidence of the religious questing/groping etc. of man, does this not lead to the conclusion that an important part of our nature impels us to search for god and try to involve him in our lives (no matter how awkwardly), and that this aspect of our character was naturally selected by evolutionary forces because it performed an important role? I explore this issue further below.

I also note that both the "common source" theory and the "archetypal or instinct" theory are supported by the idea of a pre-existence. If we assume that each human being existed before coming to this earth, and carries with him or her a dim recollection of that experience, that could supply some of the archetypes, collective unconscious and instinct I have noted above. Also, the LDS and Christian conceptions of the "Light of Christ" or "holy ghost" are consistent with this idea. Perhaps there are all different ways of saying the same thing.

Or perhaps the answer is even simpler than what I have just suggested. It is not hard for me to believe that human beings in different places would come to similar answers respecting our existential questions without contact with each other. There are only so many possibilities. Likewise, it is not surprising that the Golden Rule, through trial and error, would have become

the behaviour norm in the societies that were successful in the long term. That rule happens to create strong societies.

I have had some experience with the creation of ideas that I later found in many other places. This happens regularly in the tax planning community. New legislation is passed which in some ways it like a maze for training rats. There are only so many ways through the maze, and if a whole bunch of bright people study the same maze, they will often find the same solutions, unless the maze is so complex that it has a large enough number of possible solutions that separate ways out can be found by many people. The tax legislation I work with is very complex, but not complex enough to provide enough solutions to come close to eliminating overlap. Hence, we regularly “invent” a tax planning technique, only to find it in use elsewhere as a result of other people have independently reached the same solution.

While I was reasoning my way through another maze – that of Mormonism – one of the ideas I developed was that I was honouring my pioneer ancestors by doing exactly what they had done. They rejected old ways of doing things that did not work for them, and had the courage to do something out of step with their communities and families because they felt it was the right thing to do. When this idea came to me, it was a minor epiphany - it resolved something that had troubled me. Later, I ran across the same idea in at least half a dozen other places. I don't know how many of them came up with it independently, as I did, but I suspect that many of them did. This idea makes sense. It is the natural product of being put into the position I was in (being told I was dishonouring my ancestors), and then thinking logically about parallels between my behaviour and theirs. It was one way out of part of the maze. The ideas of god, life after death, reincarnation, etc. are all similar in that regard. They solve pressing existential problems in a way that makes sense if certain leaps of faith are made, and are one of only a few ways out of the maze of which I can think.

We see a dead friend laying on the ground. We can tell that something important has departed him. Did it pass out of existence, or go somewhere else? Those are the only two options I can think while sitting here. If it ceased to exist, that makes me feel uncomfortable about my own future. Surprise, surprise, almost all cultures have come to the conclusion that it continues to exist. So, where did it go? And if it went somewhere else, where is that and what is it like there? It is not difficult to imagine different people in different places independently reasoning their way through that one and coming up with ideas that are similar to each other.

Religions Perform Important Sociological and Psychological Functions

Religions perform certain important psychological and sociological functions, as outlined in the section on mythology above. This alone is likely enough to cause evolution to select for religiously oriented people.

Health Benefits

The health benefits of religion are so significant that Dr. Harold Koenig of Duke Medical Center said: "Lack of religious involvement has an effect on mortality that is equivalent to forty years of smoking one pack of cigarettes per day." (Why God Won't Go Away, p. 129).

Brain Architecture and Chemistry Produces Psuedo and Real Religious Experience

It has been proven that religious experience is "real" in the sense that the brain does things that indicate it is having the kind of experience that would produce profound perceptions of peace,

joy and other desirable altered states. The authors of "Why God Won't Go Away" provide a detailed, experiment based analysis of how the brain produces these effects. I will summarize their reconstruction of how what they have observed in the laboratory could produce the kind of powerful emotional experience described above in real life.

The authors ask that we think of an ancient hunter. He hears a noise in the bushes. His amygdala (a part of the brain) focuses his mind on this. His autonomic system creates an arousal response. His cognitive imperative drives the brain's causal operator to figure out what is going on. No cause is found, so the hippocampus proposes one. It scans memory banks, picks out the possibility of a leopard in the bushes. The causal operator considers this and finds it has reasonable probability, and the hunter runs. The entire process takes a split second. The causal operator is designed to promote survival and play the odds, not find truth. This could be considered a simple myth – that of the leopard in the bushes. There was a lot at stake in finding the answer to the question of what caused the noise in the bushes, and the mind furnished an answer designed to promote survival.

At p. 70 the authors note:

The process is automatic: uncertainty causes anxiety, and anxiety must be resolved. Sometimes resolutions are obvious and causes are easy to spot. When they are not, the cognitive imperative compels us to find plausible resolutions in the form of a story, like the story of the leopard in the trees.

Next, we are invited to consider an ancient chief whose tribesman has died. Existential questions close in on him. He grieves. This creates the same neurological situation as faced the hunter. The amygdala notices frustration and grief, and triggers a limbic fear response. This activates the arousal system. The more grief, the greater the arousal response. The chief's pulse quickens, etc. The chief then notices smoke rising from dead embers of fire and wonders if the life of his friend has risen to the sky in the same fashion. This is the product of the cognitive imperative and causal operator. The right brain, through holistic operator, considers this and approves it. It makes sense, and answers the question that has been the source of concern. This "match" sends positive neural signals racing through the limbic system to stimulate the pleasure centres in the hypothalamus. Because the hypothalamus regulates the quiescent system, these pleasure impulses trigger a response there that the chief interprets as a powerful surge of calmness and peace. The signals then reinforce each other, flowing back and forth, bathing the chief in wondrous feeling.

The authors note at p. 72:

... all this happens in the wink of an eye, too fast for the arousal response that triggered the chief's anxiety to subside. For a remarkable moment, both the quiescent and arousal systems are simultaneously active, immersing the chief in a blend of fear and rapture, a state of intensely pleasurable agitation that some neurologists call the Eureka Response, which the chief experiences as a rush of ecstasy and awe. In this transforming flash of insight, the chief is suddenly freed from his grief and despair; in a deeper sense, he feels that he has been freed from the bonds of death. The insight strikes him with the force of revelation. The experience feels vividly, palpably real. At that moment, the opposites of life and death are no longer locked in conflict; they have been mythically resolved. Now he sees clearly the absolute truth of things – that the

spirits of the dead live on. He feels that he has discovered a primal truth. It is more than idea, it is a belief that he has experienced in the deepest reaches of his mind.

The above experience involving the chief describes perfectly the manner in which my LDS testimony was created.

I was always suspicious of group induced spiritual feelings and so did not pay much attention to the experiences I had during testimony meets and things of that ilk. They seemed too similar to what happened at good basketball games to be taken as a sign of important spiritual things. However, one day at age 18 I was alone at Grandma McCue's dining room table in Lethbridge, studying the Book of Mormon. I had been working on a first year university English paper, and was frustrated by that - I was face to face for the first time in my life with how difficult it is to write anything. It was not a case of writer's block. I was not a writer, and that was becoming apparent. I struggled to find decent ideas, let alone the words, grammar etc. to express them. So, I abandoned the difficult task before me, picked up the Book of Mormon and started to read.

I had been intensely focussed for a long time already that day and was worried about my flagging studies. I was not doing well at school, and exams were approaching. I had also been concerned for some time about what I should do respecting serving a mission. I was to turn 19 in a couple of months, and the heat was being turned up about when I would "go out". I was afraid that I was not capable of doing what I knew missionaries did. And I did not have a testimony that the Church was "true" or that the Book of Mormon was "true". This disturbed me because people who told me, continually and persistently, that both were "true" surrounded me. Why did I seem to be the only one who did not have the divine experience? This was a great source of worry for me.

I had recently been made aware of the standard LDS story respecting how the BofM had been translated, Joseph Smith's poor educational background, the amount of time the translation process had taken, etc. I learned these things in a class I had been taking at the LDS Institute in Lethbridge and through conversation with my friend Jim Davidson and his family in Lethbridge. Jim was an impressive individual, and seemed to have a rock solid testimony of the LDS faith. I envied the strength and stability his life seemed to evidence.

While I was reading that morning, I came across some particularly impressive Book of Mormon passages. I don't recall which ones, but the BofM has plenty. As I read, I can even now vividly recall the manner in which I was struck by the idea that no one in Smith's circumstances could possibly have written that book, and voila, an experience precisely as described above with regard to the chief came upon me. This hit me, as it says above respecting the chief, "with the force of revelation". There is no doubt that the anxiety about my testimony, mission and school, as well as my frustration as a fledgling writer, combined to produce this effect. I had been told that when I felt precisely the peace etc. that I then felt, I would have received my testimony that I could have confidence that the Book of Mormon, the Church and a thousand other things related to them were all "true". Having done what I was told to do (read the Book of Mormon and pray about it), and having felt what I was told I would feel (wonderful peace, burning in the bosom, etc.), and knowing by experience that what I had felt was out of the ordinary, I believed all that I was told I should believe.

Over the years, I have time and again gone back to that event in memory and by re-experience to refresh my LDS testimony when it flagged. That is, as I re-read the Book of Mormon (I have read it cover to cover more than 20 times and my favourite parts of it many more times than

that) I have been struck from time to time by the very same idea – that it was not the work of any man, let alone that of an uneducated young man. Many times I returned to this well for the invigorating experience described above. The greater the anxiety respecting my testimony I was experiencing at the moment, the greater the relief this process offered.

Now that I understand something about how brain chemistry works, and have experienced the same kind of feelings in many other circumstances from which neurology also predicts such experiences arise, I am confident that there is no cause-effect relationship between the “truthfulness” of the Church (or any other church) and such feelings. Likewise, these feelings have nothing to do with the inerrancy, literal truth etc. of any religious text, including the Book of Mormon.

My next most important testimony building experiences occurred in the mission field. That was an era in my life full of disharmony and difficulty. I am not the type who likes to deal with rejection. Daily life as a missionary in Southern Peru was full of rejection, ridicule, etc. To make matters worse, as missionaries we were faced with tremendous pressure from Gene Cook, our Area Authority, and our mission president to produce baptisms like the missionaries in Northern Peru and Ecuador were producing. I found out later that their success was largely due to cultural differences between the peoples with whom we were dealing, and their use of guerrilla style conversion tactics that have since caused the Church great grief as the inactivity rate approached 100% respecting baptisms in that area. But nonetheless, at the time I felt a great deal of angst respecting my inability to find converts while missionaries almost next door seemed to be having success doing just that. It appeared that the only variable factor in the equation was me, or my performance, and hence I must be defective. This was a big source of stress and cognitive dissonance.

As a side note, I found evidence of the General Authorities' sense of humour in the fact that Gene Cook spent many years in Germany in charge of the most difficult baptismal area in the Church after presiding over the debacle described above, and telling us poor missionaries more times than I can count that all we needed was more faith to bring in the baptisms in Southern Peru. My guess is that he found out about the limits of that kind of "faith" while he was in Europe. I should also note that Gene Cook is a fine man in many respects. His enthusiasm, however, to "get the ball over the goal line" caused him to make some terrible decisions as a relatively young General Authority in South America. He was still in his mid-thirties during the years I was in Peru. He is in many respects a remarkable man and teacher. I have one of his tapes respecting child rearing, and still find it enlightening in some ways.

Back to the point. It is no surprise, based on what I now know about brain architecture and chemistry, that when I found someone who agreed with my assertion that the LDS message was "true", all kinds of neat and memorable things happened in my brain. The feelings I had upon finding the few people who joined the Church as a result of my efforts created peak experiences. They soared above my difficult day-to-day existence. I was so deprived of positive experiences that these happy events exploded in my life like wonderful bombs. I will never forget them. And, I would say, the Church has done at least some good things for those Peruvian families. However, I must now admit that the powerful feelings I had respecting them have nothing to do with the “truth” or otherwise of the LDS worldview, or whether it has helped those folks. It had to do with the normal functioning of the brain in anxiety-ridden situations, when presented with moments of brief and dramatic relief. I have experienced similar things many times, such as, for example, after enduring the tedium and difficulty of exam or trial preparation and then experiencing success.

The experiences on which I based my testimony are in my view entirely explained by what is described above. Based on that experience, I assumed the Church to be "true", whatever that ambiguous word means. That, I now believe, was an erroneous assumption. Those experiences have nothing to do with "truth". This is another example of the deductive reasoning religious people of all stripes are encouraged to follow. We are told that because we do x and feel y, then z must be assumed to be "true". From culture to culture what is done (x) to feel the same thing (y) is similar, but the conclusions (z) that are assumed true on that basis are completely different and in fact contradict each other from culture to culture. That is, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, etc. all have testimonies of conflicting "truths", all purporting to come from the same divine source, and all based on the same kind of spiritual experience. In my view, this model nicely explains all of that.

"Why God Won't Go Away" provides a great explanation of how the feelings that comprise "y" in my example come about from a neurological point of view, and suggest to us both what they mean, and what they do not mean. Generally speaking, all these feelings do is tell us that we have solved a vexing problem as well as we are able in light of the evidence available to us, with a bias toward protecting ourselves physically and mentally, as the leopard example indicates. Change the evidence in front of a person, and the operation of the brain and the feelings it produces will change as well. For example, if just as the hunter was about to run he spotted a pig in the bushes, his fear would have subsided and he would have turned his energy toward attacking the pig. And because of our understanding of the cosmos and scientific point of view, it is unlikely that the idea that came to the chief as he watched smoke rise from dead embers would comfort our grief or produce a minor epiphany for us. That is, the strong emotions most people rely upon for their beliefs in spiritual matters exist as a result of the circumstances in which they find themselves, and the evidence they have had the opportunity to consider. These emotions do not point toward the absolutes most people think they do.

The rest of the "testimony building" experiences most folk rely upon can be readily explained in the fashion described above. In addition, the kind of experience summarized respecting the chief, or my own testimony, will be embellished in the retelling and by memory recall, and can be expected to have a powerful motivating effect on other people. People in a state of anxiety will be particularly susceptible to these feelings of relief. And who are those most likely to accept the LDS gospel? People struggling with the existential questions after birth, death etc. or who are anxious to fit in after moving to anew community with the insecurity such changes naturally produce.

Anxiety can be created in a lot of ways. One is to seem to be the only person in the group who does not "get it". This might be called "Emperor's New Clothes" effect. It is much more powerful and effective than we are sometimes prepared to admit. I have experienced this one myself, and feel that I can speak with at least some authority of it. In groups where it is socially taboo to question authority (which is what openly admitting that a person does not feel the spirit, believe 100% etc. amounts to in the LDS church), this effect is especially strong. Hence, group dynamics themselves can create a self-perpetuating cycle of anxiety and relief upon which religious testimonies can come to be based. This is the religious equivalent of the economist's money machine - something is created out of nothing.

Does this mean that religious experience is a mirage? Far from it. What the authors of "Why God Won't God Away" ably point out is that the brain can and regularly does play tricks on us, and they explain why that is the case. These tricks have a solid basis in evolutionary drive and

the survival instinct. An understanding of these things can become part of our refiner's fire - it will burn away misunderstanding and other forms of dross; it will sanctify us as we confront the inadequacy of spiritual ideas that leave us in unholy conflict with other religious traditions; and we will find a deeper and more satisfying joy than any reflection or counterfeit can provide as we reach into the depths of our souls to find the bedrock of spirituality that underlies all human groping toward a divine transcendence. And, I believe, all of this can be done within any religious tradition that is open enough to permit its members to allow the refiner's fire to burn in their lives. My only real concern with the LDS church is that it does not appear to be open enough to permit this to occur at this point in its history. That is a shame, because the more I study mythology, mysticism, world religion and related topics the more I recognize how far ahead of his time Smith was in some ways. He was a great mystic as well as a stifling literalist and horrible liar. Somehow through all that, he pointed toward many things I still find useful.

I believe that spiritual experience is the bedrock of life, and it is more important to me now than ever. The authors of "Why God Won't Go Away" provide some of the best evidence and reasoning I have found to support this aspect of my life. The example I provided above is one that I thought most religious people could relate to by way of personal experience, and hence I included it in this document. The book is full of similar things.

As noted several times already, my main paradigm in many ways will be scientific. However, science is not enough. It tells us the "hows" but cannot address the "whys". The great "whys" will always be in mythology's realm. We need belief systems whose "whys" accommodate scientific change, and hence the best "hows".

Evolution Does Not Correct All Errors

As noted above, humans are pattern-seeking animals. The co-called cognitive imperative compels us to find answers, as illustrated by the case of the leopard in the trees, and the chief watching smoke rise. This is typical human behavior.

However, not all patterns are meaningful and we consistently find meaning that is not there. Michael Shermer in his book "Why People Believe Weird Things" provides some good analysis in this regard. There are two types of errors in this regard. Type 1 – believing a falsehood and type 2 – rejecting a truth. Some of these errors are much more serious than others. Many errors that won't get us killed, but may slow us down significantly, will persist from an evolutionary point of view. There are also two types of "hits". Type 1 – not believing a falsehood, and type 2 – believing a truth. The hits propel us forward. Some errors are rejected quickly to become hits (it is ok to touch snakes with rattles is an error that did not persist for too long). But other errors are hard to detect and so persist.

Some errors, such as magical thinking or religious thinking, are useful as noted above, even if it is not based on truth or reality. That is, they may be errors as well as inadvertent hits.

As noted above, there is evidence that religious or magical belief reduces anxiety in the face of uncertainty, gives a sense (perhaps false) of purpose and hence increases mental and physical health. This type of belief may therefore perform a useful enough function that evolution selects for it. There is also evidence that shamans, kings, magicians, religious figures etc. use the power of magic and religious faith to gain more sexual opportunity and hence leave more of their genes, and beliefs (memes?) behind than the average guy.

A “spandrel” is a necessary by-product of an evolved mechanism. For example, the ornate space between two arches at right angles in a medieval cathedral is a spandrel. It attracts attention and may cause the analysis of the surrounding architecture to start there. That would be misleading. The use of the arches is the place to start. The resulting space was decorated and becomes an attention attracting spandrel. The same thing could be said of male nipples. The question to ask is not why men have nipples, but why women have them. Since men are built on the same architecture, they end up with nipples - another spandrel.

As Michael Shermer notes at p. xxv:

In this sense the magical thinking component of the [human mind] Belief Engine is a spandrel. We think magically because we have to think causally. We make type 1 and 2 errors because we need to make type 1 and 2 hits. We have magical thinking and superstition because we need critical thinking and pattern finding. The two cannot be separated. ...Believers in UFOs, alien abductions, ESP, and psychic phenomena have committed a type 1 error in thinking: they are believing a falsehood. Creationists and Holocaust deniers have made a type 2 error in thinking: they are rejecting a truth. It is not that these folks are ignorant or uninformed. They are intelligent but misinformed. Their thinking has gone wrong. Type 1 and 2 errors are squelching type 1 and 2 hits.

Sociology

Religions at the functional level are comprised of groups of human beings, and most of the rules of sociology apply to them. One theory of institutional development suggests that institutions are instruments to contain conflict and enable people to live together under a shared set of rules and assumptions in a relatively efficient manner. For an example of thinking and research based on this idea, see Adam Gifford Jr., On the Nature and the Evolution of Institutions, Journal of Bioeconomics, 1:127 – 149, 1999 (<http://buslab5.csun.edu/agifford/Research/B&TBioecon.pdf>)

Gifford's theory is that institutions and culture evolve as human beings evolved the ability to facilitate long-term thinking, large social groups, culture etc. Brains evolved not to cope with environment, but to cope with complex social interactions. Larger groups formed for protective and economic purposes. The purpose of institutions and much of culture is to defuse tensions that exist when bonded pair mating occurs, and to provide stability required to maintain the group. A lot of mental energy and ability is required for this. Culture takes the place of a lot of thinking and decision making, among other things. He notes that:

Institutions are a social construct that depend upon a collective reality or shared social intentionality; in this sense institutions are a form of shared human capital, and the value of the individuals social capital depends upon the actions and social capital of others.

A significant part of our shared social intentionality is in the form of cultural habits. These habits reduce the costs of social interaction, they represent a set of shared mental expectations. Much of this institutional capital is background – we are not aware of it. This capital can dissipate through lack of use or through imposed institutional constraints and once it is gone it is difficult to recover." (p. 141)

He then quotes John Searle as saying:

Human institutions are structures of constitutive rules. People who participate in the institutions are typically not conscious of these rules, often they even have false beliefs respecting the nature of the institution, and even the very people who created the institution may be unaware of its structure. Further, the very people who created or participated in the evolution of the institution may themselves have been totally ignorant of the system of rules.

Hence, institutions (including religious institutions) are useful friction reduction devices, and as such constitute a public good. Those who exploit institutions weaken them, and hence damage a public good. This is morally wrong. For example, a government can get away with inflating the money supply for a time because most people would not understand what is going on, but eventually when they do understand the trust in government will be damaged, which can have far reaching and negative consequences to society.

When institutions are maintained largely by habit or on the basis of fear, they can collapse quite suddenly. In that circumstance if the members begin to examine the rules and come to believe that the rules no longer have legitimacy or cannot be enforced, a quick collapse can occur. Think of the Soviet Union.

The background beliefs that are taken for granted and exercise unconscious control over members of the institution can become fragile and then collapse under the bombardment of new information that discloses these rules for the first time, or makes them seem illegitimate, or makes their enforcement seem remote (in cases of control by fear). Information that supports the legitimacy etc. of the rules, or keeps them hidden in the background, of course, has the opposite effect.

Evolutionary theory is used by some scholars to study the kind of institutional change referred to above. That is, institutions progress on the basis of principles of natural selection that are similar to those governing the creation of life itself in all its forms. Since organizations are comprised of living beings, this idea makes sense, and it seems to have significant explanatory power.

Peter Munz (Our Knowledge of the Growth of Knowledge: Popper or Wittgenstein?) suggests that for most of recorded history the basis of social and cultural bonding has been shared belief systems that are exempt from criticism. He said:

Where knowledge is used a social bond, people cannot afford the luxury of exposing it to criticism, lest their co-operation be endangered or cease.

This would overturn or at least threaten the social benefits the institution created in the first place.

However, Munz and others theorize that some groups have moved beyond this fragile and arguably immature social state, and

...have managed to establish societies which are not dependent on the purity of any given cultural strain and which are bonded by criteria other than the adherence to any particular belief system and its rituals.

The essential feature of such a society is that some aspects of its evolution can be regulated by critical discussion in a way that was previously not possible. Some commentators fear that this trend will aggravate the fragmentation within society that many now decry. However, if this does not happen there may instead be fragmentation of a worse kind, characterized by self-contained, inward looking and dogmatic sub-cultures, some of which are likely to be of the virulently negative type described by Karen Armstrong in "The Battle for God". This is the path down which less reason and comparison and more dogma takes us.

Munz, as well as Armstrong, sees the tendency towards dogmatic, closed systems as a fear based reaction to an evolutionary step toward the systematic critical appraisal of beliefs and taboos. Certain institutional leaders who have the most to lose as a result of the paradigm shift can be counted on to resist it in any way they can.

For an exquisite example of how the LDS church creates culture of the "thought saving" variety, see Boyd Packer's 1996 talk respecting the "unwritten order of things" at <http://www.lds-mormon.com/unwrittn.shtml>.

The LDS Church Uses Powerful Socialization Tools

So, we have determined that there are a number of good reasons for religion to be a part of life, and that evolution likely selected for humans that favoured religious thinking. And most importantly, we have confirmed that the brain works in such a way so as to provide vivid, real experiences with "spiritual" phenomenon, and that the people who have these experiences should be expected to take them seriously; to be convinced of their reality and importance. What else happens to make religious thought and action a part of our lives?

As noted above, we are each born into a society of some kind. In my case, that society was Western, democratic, Christian and Mormon. The Mormons, as it turns out, are at the literal, insular end of Western, democratic society. They have a number of powerful socialization mechanisms that are designed to amplify the kind of spiritual experience described above. I won't run through the whole litany. We know all about Primary, daily prayer multiple times, daily scripture study, Seminary, Mission, Temple ceremonies for the living once and regularly as proxy for the dead thereafter, the constant repetition that "the Church is true", the reaction those who doubt are given, etc. These things have a powerful cumulative effect.

Think, for example, of how the temple ceremony and related processes work in light of concepts related to duress and conditioning:

We talk the temple up to our children from infancy. As Fowler notes, the conditioning that occurs during stage one faith is a powerful, and to some extent, dangerous thing. The first songs they often learn, one of the most powerful forms of conditioning, relate to the temple. They attend for the first time at a relatively young age, and after a flood of information that they cannot possibly be expected to understand, they make sweeping covenants including one that requires that they obey the Church's leaders in all important things, and women are required to agree to obey their husbands. The chain of command is clearly established as god to man to woman. Each temple attendant is asked to make these and many other covenants while surrounded by expectantly watching friends and relatives who are reaffirming the same commitments. They are then encouraged to go back again and again to participate in the same process. In each case, the subtle but powerful influence of groupthink is a big part of what occurs.

The young people who make these covenants are carefully kept by the Church from much information that most objective observers would consider relevant to an understanding of how inspired the leaders who the young people are covenanting to follow are, or how direct their connection to God is.

Arguably, the most objectionable of all LDS temple related practices is that of the separation of families at marriage. That is, one must hold a temple recommend (and therefore by definition be a member of the Church) in order to attend the temple and be present for the marriage of a loved one. It at one time was possible for a couple to be married civilly in a public ceremony and then immediately sealed privately in order to accommodate non-members (or non-temple recommend holding members) within their family. That is no longer permitted, strengthening significantly the effectiveness of this control tool.

In order to obtain a temple recommend, one must submit to Church authority through the recommend interview, and either lie or maintain the minimum standard of behaviour required to attend the temple. The intense pressure to be "worthy" to be in attendance at the wedding of a child or grandchild, keeps many members of the Church compliant throughout their lives. I have been in communication with many who indicate that this for many years was their primary motivator with respect to Church activity. One of them referred to this practise as the "golden screw" that holds the entire LDS conditioning system together. I would not go that far, but I agree that this is an important control tool, and that it is increasingly used by the Church in that regard. This is how I explain the Church's temple building program. The temple recommend interview process is the primary control tool the Church has with respect to adult members. If there is no temple with a reasonable distance of a population of Church members, this control tool does not work.

Many months after writing the paragraphs above I ran into a paper presented at the 2002 Salt Lake City Sunstone Symposium entitled "Shaping Mormonism's Spiritual Kingdom of God" by Dr. Claude J. Burtenshaw, a political science professor from the University of Utah. Dr. Burtenshaw's ideas can be summarized as follows.

1. The D&C clearly disclose that the foundation of the LDS church contemplated a union of spiritual and temporal life. That is, the usual political controls over property and freedoms were part of the early LDS life. However, those controls collided time and again with the U.S. constitution, and in a series of conflicts that were largely responsible for the Mormons being driven from place to place, and finally to Utah, the LDS church's political control over its members was gradually stripped away. This process was completed during the period between 1896 and the final collapse of the institution of polygamous marriage during the following ten to twenty years. It was in 1896 that Utah was finally granted statehood, after a crippling battle with the U.S. federal government, on the basis of a completely secular constitution that specifically denied church influence over state institutions.
2. LDS theology accommodated the removal of the political authority its origins contemplated by focusing on the perfection of the individual wherever located instead of the gathering of Saints and the building of a community with standards different from those of its host society. The shift from community building to an individual focus has been critical to the modern Church in many ways. It has made it possible for Mormons to move toward the mainstream of U.S. society, which they have gradually done since these changes were made. Gordon

Hinkley continues to steer the Church hard in this direction, and has even counselled on several highly public occasions that people forget about our past. We are not what we used to be, he says. Look at us now, and see where we are going. Also, think about the consequences for the Church's worldwide missionary effort if it had continued to practise polygamy, counsel the institution of church originated laws that would override the laws of the host political entity, and that new converts should gather to Zion.

3. As the Church's political and therefore community controls were removed, the emphasis on certain personal controls increased. The primary personal control tool the Church has, as noted above, is right to attend the temple. This is an organizational privilege bestowed by the Church on those of its members it deems worthy. Hence, the more desirable and available that privilege is, the more effective it will be as a control tool. The Church's comparatively recent emphasis on temple building and regular temple attendance is nicely explained by this paradigm.

Based on the foregoing information, it does not require much cynicism to posit that the main purpose for temple work for the dead may be to ingrain conditioning in the living. I have never believed that god really needed us to do anything for the dead, but assumed much more benign purposes in continual temple attendance from the living's point of view. And, while saying all of this, I can also say that I believe that LDS temples are sacred spaces, and have had so many worthwhile spiritual experiences there that I can't count them. Once again, we are back to the amazing complexity of our human experience.

Were we to treat the covenant made in the temple as a legal contract, I have no doubt that it could not be enforced because of our laws related to duress and misrepresentation. Our legal system imposes a lowest common denominator kind of morality on us. Religious values should be far above legal morality. When we can look at the practises of a religious institution and have legitimate concerns about the use of duress recognizable at law, this should cause the alarm bells to start ringing.

If a client came to me to discuss joining a religious organization that uses group pressure in the way the Church does, I would have all sorts of warnings to offer him. But I was blind to those concerns respecting the LDS Church until recently.

Other standard LDS practises can be similarly deconstructed.

Deductive, Inductive and Abductive Reasoning

So, we heard the LDS story a million times while we were growing up, and believed it. Why did we believe it? Because people we trusted and loved were, in good faith and with the best of intentions, were telling it to us. But why did we not move into stage four while in early adult life, as Fowler indicates many people do? We certainly should have had enough information by then to put the pieces of the puzzle together.

The answer to this question is interesting. It is my understanding that deductive reasoning works from the more general to the more specific. That is, this process often works from a general theory, to a testable hypothesis, to observations made during testing that prove or disprove the hypothesis and shed light on the validity of the general theory. Inductive reasoning works the other way around, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and

theories. Inductive reasoning, by its very nature, is more open-ended and exploratory, and therefore more helpful especially at the beginning of any complex research project. Deductive reasoning is narrower in nature and is concerned with testing or confirming hypotheses present a priori, and often in social sciences research follows inductive reasoning, on the basis of which a theory or sub-theory has been developed, and is used to refine the theories so developed. Both approaches are useful in their way, and are part of the scientific method.

The third type of reasoning, abductive, first articulated by Charles Sanders Peirce, is also called the "inference to the best explanation". That is, by the process of induction various theories may be identified, and then through the use logic, comparison and other tools, the theory with the greatest explanatory and predictive power is chosen. This theory, is of course, still open to falsification. Abductive reasoning has the additional advantage being applicable to the development of theories respecting unobserved phenomena (such as atoms, for example), where as inductive reasoning, strictly speaking, does not go that far.

It is my understanding that most research (particularly social research, which is what I am engaged in as I try to better understand my religious experience and beliefs) involves both all three kinds of reasoning processes. Even in the most constrained experiment as part of a deductive process, the researchers may observe patterns in the data that lead them to develop new theories. And that is more or less how I have experienced the Church, as indicated below.

It seems clear that it is best to approach matters of religious belief using abductive reasoning. As noted above, that is the most reliable way to start out as we try to get to know the world. We should try to search for broad patterns in the data, and then develop theories as to why those patterns exist, rather than starting with a theory that may have no connection the patterns discernable in the data, but which nonetheless because of the confirmation bias (see my comments below) may interfere with our ability to perceive the data once we get to that stage of the process. It also seems clear that there is a big role for deductive reasoning to play in this process as well as theories are formed and tested.

Most religious systems (including all of Christianity) are based almost entirely on hearsay and deductive reasoning. How much of what comes to us in the Bible is direct evidence? The New Testament was written many years after Jesus died. Most of it is the worst kind of hearsay. And some of Paul's letters are strongly suspected to have been authored by other people who wanted the authority of Paul's name behind their views. The Old Testament suffers from the same type of problem, or worse. Much of it only makes sense as mythology, and was clearly written as such during a time when that was the main lens through which mankind interpreted the world. In order to be a Christian, let alone a Mormon, a lot of hearsay and deductive reasoning must be accepted. This is pretty thin ice once we start to look at it.

It seems to me that Church is a huge exercise in deductive reasoning. Its theology, policy etc. amounts to a grand theory, and we are instructed as to how those who have come before us interpreted the observations, evidence etc. produced by their life experience in a manner that conforms with and proves the correctness of that theory, and are told that if we don't do the same it is we who are wrong, because the Church must be right. We are also heavily discouraged from seeking any data that might conflict with the grand theory. That is, we are actively discouraged from engaging in inductive reasoning, which, as I pointed out above, is generally recognized within the scientific community as the best way to approach complex problems that could be solved in many ways. The scientific community would say, for obvious reasons, that we should open our minds to as many ways as possible of interpreting the data before us before we begin to form theories and test them. The Church, or course, sees no point

in that as far as religion is concerned because it has the "truth" and therefore there is no need to consider any other points of view. This is an ancient religious tradition, best and most notoriously exemplified by the Roman Catholics of Galileo's time, that is alive and well within the LDS church.

Let us now consider how deductive reasoning works "on the ground" from a religious point of view. It is my position that the common denominator of the world's major religions is a powerful form of emotional experience and the Golden Rule. Examples of the kind of emotional experience I have in mind is what I described above with respect to the chief, his dead friend and rising smoke, for example, as well as my former testimony with respect to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and the LDS church. Every major world religion or moral system includes both the Golden Rule and this type of emotional experience as foundation pieces. All the rest of the rules, beliefs, dogmas etc. are all based on assumptions about doctrine, dogma and practise that differ from one to another and that find their roots in spurious, deductive reasoning.

For example, I have an important emotional experience when I read the BofM and put Moroni's promise to the test. On this basis, the Church tells me to believe that the BofM is literal history, Smith was a prophet of god and that everything he told the people while purporting to act as a prophet is god's word, etc. Then, each time I do something within the Church's system that reproduces my emotional experience, I am told that this confirms all of the same assumptions, thus using deductive reasoning to support the Church's grand theory.

The approach I now take is as follows. I am looking far and wide, trying to see patterns of behaviour in my life and things in the lives of other people that point to cause and effect relationships linked to joy, and I am prepared to accept hearsay as at least a beginning point in some cases and I try to confirm my own experience. As I form theories that seem promising about how I can better live the golden rule and have more joy, I sometimes test them deductively, and there is nothing the matter with that. Emotional experience plays a role in confirming to me that I am on the right track, but I try to remain aware of the way in which I have been fooled before by this experience. The basic approach is inductive - that is, open-minded. I will try hard to never again fall into the trap of assuming that my paradigm is so good that it cannot be changed for the better.

Mircea Eliade has observed that religions tend to spontaneously improve as a result of what he thinks is some kind of an impulse within all mankind to express their religious beliefs as fully as possible. Hence, over time the assumptions, dogmas etc. of a religion tend to improve, or the religions will decline and eventually die out. It is interesting to see how this process has occurred within the LDS church. Many of its beliefs have improved. Others have gone the other way. The improvements are no doubt due to the very sort of thing I am doing, and the cumulative effect of my actions and the actions of millions of other people who vote to an extent with their feet respecting what the Church does.

However, I am a bit more cynical than Eliade. I note that once a dogma is accepted as "truth", any investigation that questions it is worse than pointless. It is evil since it casts doubt on dogma's source – god himself. However, as science advances dogma gradually comes within its reach. Scientific information is produced that conflicts with dogma, cognitive dissonance for dogmatic believers results, and dogma slowly moves aside to accommodate science. Think again of Galileo and how he was pilloried by his society, arraigned before a Catholic Inquisition, and recanted under threat of death his heretical views that the earth was round and revolved around the sun.

I also note that the more authoritarian a religious group, the more resistant are its dogmas to scientific advance, and hence the more slowly science's knowledge blesses its adherents. This explains both Mormonism's relatively late release of its racial prejudices, and Hinduism's continued adherence to a caste system that is based on the same dogmatic notion that some humans have greater inherent value and potential during their lifetimes than others.

So, I think that religions owe their progress to science, and that they can be measured primarily as to how much they slow the spread of the good things science has to offer. That is, a good religion is one that does not get too much in the way, whereas a bad one gets in the way all the time. I am not aware of any religion that foments the scientific process where the information produced will contradict its dogma.

With that background, let's move on to consider the differences and similarities between our experience within the LDS Church as faithful, committed members, and the experience of similarly committed, moral and upright Muslims, Jews or whatever. They are also living within a system that imposes deductive reasoning on its adherents, and that system, like the LDS system, is complex enough and sufficiently oriented toward helping people to live the Golden Rule and have moving emotional experiences, that they will have the same type of experience we have had. That is, they will do what their religion tells them, and they will have powerful emotional experience as a result and will also experience many of the "good" things their religion predicts. Whereupon, the leaders of their religion will say: "Well, there we have it!! More proof that we are right", or God's chosen people, or whatever. The system of deductive reasoning they have created is self-confirming and self-perpetuating, just as the LDS system is, and as long as the Church silences those bothersome people who persist in saying on the basis of inductive reasoning: "How about this evidence that contradicts the grand theory?", all will be well in Zion.

I should make an important parenthetical note respecting the foregoing. The "good" things each system produces as mentioned above as proof of their divine inspiration are not necessarily good in some absolute sense, but are defined as good within the system and are accepted as such by the believers. Hence, when they are produced they become convincing evidence for the believers that they are on the right track. For example, the Taliban believe that it is good that women not be educated, play a subservient role within society etc. If from generation to generation, living as the Taliban directs perpetuates this social outcome while keeping the "evil" influences of the Western world at bay, that would be interpreted as "good" within the Taliban's system, and would be accepted by adherents within that system as evidence that God was supporting and directing the Taliban's efforts. If we are honest with ourselves, we can find lots of analogous issues within the culture sponsored by the LDS church. Things that are accepted as "good", or used to be so accepted, can clearly be seen not to be so by either our current definition or reasonable definitions held by others. Consider polygamy (Mormons now rail all the time at the abusive situations in which LDS fundamentalists keep their multiple wives and children), and both past and present Mormon racial attitudes.

In light of the foregoing, I would say that the ethnocentricity of the LDS worldview, and especially cosmology, is mind boggling to me and to those who see the world as I do. I am reminded of a little Indian fellow I met while on my mission in Peru. He was one of a few people in his village who could read and hence was considered a wise man. We opened that village to missionary work, and were told that if we could persuade him, half the village would join the Church. And so, we gave it our best shot. As far as I could tell this fine, well-intentioned man had read two books - the Bible and an old book on communism. The communist book was more persuasive than the Bible, perhaps because it was easier for him to understand, and he

could see how that system, if it could be made to work, would be very helpful to most of the poor people living in Peru's elitist society. There was no persuading this man that there was any perspective other than the two with which he was already familiar (see the confirmation bias comments below). We struggled with that for weeks, and eventually quit in frustration. I remember how my companion and I laughed about that man and the arrogance he had - he had read all of two books and presumed to reject the wealth of knowledge we were in a position to offer him. The Church encouraged me to be in the same position until recently, and I looked as foolish – comfortable in my tiny, isolated LDS world and reading only what my leaders told me I could safely read and feeling certain that I understood all available religious truth that was relevant to me – to other more broadly educated people as this well intentioned Peruvian man did to me while I served my mission. Any system that encourages this kind of parochial worldview is, in my view, bad. The Church does this, in my opinion, and I say this while remembering the words that I have often heard Church members utter – that the Church is a "thinking man's" religion. In my view that is not true. Maybe it once was, but it is not now.

Imagine - god's only chosen people just happens to be my people. Therefore, my way of seeing the world, among the millions of options available in that regard, just happens to be the only right one. And while I acknowledge that there are planets unnumbered on which life like mine exists, I live on the only one to which the saviour of all mankind came. On each of the rest of those unnumbered planets, the same stories of the saviour are told respecting his visit to my planet, which of all those unnumbered planets was selected as his special place of abode. This form of thinking and seeing the world is as old as man himself, and is in my view rooted in a narrow-minded tribalism that has nothing to do with god. This is something that limits any people who are subject to it. It is therefore a bad thing, and should be left behind as soon as possible.

I have found that I have left this idea behind I have related to those around me in more positive ways. Discarding this idea has made me a better, more open minded and flexible thinking person. This works for me.

Relativism, Dogmatism and Critical Preference

There other types of reasoning can also be usefully considered relative to Mormonism.

In deciding what is good or bad, right or wrong, we first have to decide how much we can feel confident that we can know. Here we sit on the edge of an abyss created by philosophers over the centuries, and have to be careful that we do not fall in and spend the rest of our lives arguing about things that cannot be proven. With that caveat, I venture into this slippery territory.

The nature of reality has occupied philosophers from the dawn of recorded history. For present purposes, I need to sketch only parts of a few chapters.

One of the discouraging aspects of philosophical thought is that it is largely focussed on defining the limits of what we can know, and the conclusion is generally speaking that we cannot know anything with certainty. Unfortunately, many prominent schools of philosophical thought have stopped there. This type of philosophy spawned nihilism, relativism, post-modernism (a type of relativism) and a variety of other largely unhelpful, from my point of view, intellectual traditions. After reading quite a bit of this stuff I am, however, left in a humble state with regard to what I can know, and am less prepared than ever to accept as guides those who come to me offering certain knowledge of The Way.

There have been several fairly recent schools of philosophy that have started with the seemingly sensible proposition that we think we are alive, and think we have to make decisions to make our way through life, and it appears that human beings have been doing something similar to what we think we are doing for a long time. Hence, while admitting that it is impossible to know anything with certainty, we should find ways to make the best decisions we can, and press ahead. The alternative is some form of paralysis for which human beings seem not well suited, or acceptance of the status quo. Philosophers such as William James, Charles Peirce, John Dewey and Karl Popper come from these schools.

I will focus for the moment on the thought of Karl Popper, and some who have come after him and further developed his ideas. I note that no one has a perfect philosophical system. Many insightful critiques have been made of Popper, and there is no doubt that better ways of approaching this delicate subject have been and will be developed. However, for the moment it seems to me that the approach I am about to outline works well enough that I both use and recommend it.

Let me first set out the case that many schools of the more relativistic schools of philosophy seem to posit. The end point of their analysis appears to be that we are in a state in which we can only be sure of our own consciousness, and perhaps not even that. Difficulties in language, perception etc. shield all other reality from our view, and when we think we are describing it, we are really only describing an illusion that presents itself to us. Hence, we have little ability to be critical of anything, except when someone indicates that they understand, with certainty, some aspect of reality – we can safely be critical of them for doing that. In a state of such uncertainty, one point of view is as good as another. And some philosophers (including Wittgenstein and Heidegger – relatively recent and highly influential thinkers) seem at times to shroud their perspective in a kind of impossible to understand mysticism that resonates in quasi-religious terms. I will refer to people who subscribe to ideas of this sort as "relativists".

Relativists are often former dogmatists who realise that proof positive of anything cannot be achieved. From this correct idea the most extreme of this group leap to the unwarranted and highly impractical conclusion that all theories and conceptions of reality are of equal value, and hence that there is no such thing as a rational position. Those who are less extreme still have little to offer in terms of how we are to deal with the uncertainty that they have eloquently pointed out.

On the other hand, Karl Popper and certain of the more scientifically oriented philosophers take quite a different approach, that to my dull mind seems much more appealing. After all, we are alive. We make decisions each day on the basis of our perceptions. We can collect evidence that suggests that many people perceive similar things in similar ways, and that this decision-making follows patterns from which rules can be inferred. Other rules seem evident (but not certain) in the physical world (or its illusion) around us. And science has a long track record of, in our illusory world, predicting with success what will happen, as well as on occasion being spectacularly wrong. Using physical theory, for example, the scientists have shot rockets that appear to have landed on the moon where scientific theory predicted they would land, and we have some things that look like moon rocks that were brought back. Ideas like choosing the theories by which I live on the basis of their predictive and explanatory power make sense to me, and Popper et al. base their philosophy on that, while acknowledging that we can't be 100% sure about anything.

Popper's approach is called by some "critical preference", since it amounts to subjecting all theories to the scientific method and running them through other filters, and choosing those that

seem most reliable, whose explanatory and predictive power is greatest, etc. and repeating the process each time new evidence of a significant sort has come to light or new perceptive capacity has been acquired. This approach uses each of the types of scientific reasoning noted above (deductive, inductive and abductive). All this of course is subject to what can reasonably and practically be done.

Critical preference posits that we can be certain of nothing, and in this it agrees with the relativists. However, having induced a healthy humility, it goes on to provide guidance as to how we should deal with our uncertain world, and so indicates that some theories or positions will likely turn out to be better than others in the light of how well they stand up to certain tests.

The third approach, dogmatism (sometimes called "fideism" in the scholarly literature), is what religions and many other social institutions use. Dogmatists are people who believe that knowledge is based on an act of faith, usually in an authority figure of some sort. This enables them to cut off what philosophers call the "infinite regress". That is, in order for a belief to be certainly correct, each of its premises must also be correct. Using logical analysis, it is always possible to continue to ask for justification of premises until circularity is established. That is, it is logically impossible to prove anything as a certainty. Dogmatists, while they do not recognize that this is why they do what they do, avoid this problem by appealing to authority of some kind. In religion, the ultimate authority is god or those who are believed to have authority to act on his behalf. Once they have spoken, an indisputable premise is created from which all-else flows. Most forms of rationalism up to date have, at rock bottom, shared this attitude with the irrationalists (including religiously oriented people) because they share the same "true belief" structure of thought. That is, rationalists sometimes find what appears to be irrefutable authority in a scientific principle, although those most knowledgeable with respect to science would not do this. Others base their certainty in the statements of the great sages, such as Socrates or Plato. The point of much recent philosophy has been to demonstrate the fallacy of proceeding in this fashion.

So, we have one group that says we can't know anything (the relativists), another group that says they are certain of their knowledge (the dogmatists, both rational and irrational), and a third group that stands in the middle (the critical preferentialists). Mormons are clearly dogmatists.

In my view the critical preference approach works best. But what if the relativists are correct and one view is as good as another, with everything shrouded in mystery? I would then ask why we submit to the authority of any religious leader and why are such leaders justified in using every trick in the book to get us to do that? And we must ask whether Christian and other missionary efforts are justified. If one view is as good as another, on what basis are we out trying to persuade others that our view is not just the best one, but the only correct one?

It seems to me that the relativists have performed a valuable service by pointing out to us the uncertainty with which we must live, and the fact that we must choose our values and walk by faith, and so construct the world in which we wish to live. However, having told us what we can't do, it seems to me that they are woefully short in suggesting how we deal with the uncertainty in which we find ourselves. Popper et al, however, go down that path.

If we adopt Popper's view respecting the degree to which we can know things and how we should conduct ourselves in this regard, we will have a way of getting to know reality (such as we can know it, that is) that allows us to use the scientific method as proposed by Popper and others to our best advantage, as well as using our spiritual and other intuition respecting the vast expanse of life with which science does not deal. After all, all science can tell us is the

"hows" of life. The "whys" are left in the realm of religion, myth, philosophy etc. However, occasionally information respecting a "how" will cause us to re-evaluate some of our "whys".

This is precisely what Joseph Campbell has said we need – a mythology or worldview that makes sense in light of the world as we now know it. If we follow Popper's lead, we will have a worldview that will encourage adjustment of both "hows" and "whys" to fit our changing knowledge base as time passes. The course of history clearly indicates that this is what happens in any event, despite the fact that generation after generation of religious human beings think that their "truth" is immutable and unchanging.

The Confirmation Bias

So, we are at the point of having been conditioned and educated by our religion within a system of circular, self-confirming deductive reasoning. We also have perhaps had our first taste of real spiritual experience of the type that got all religion started in the first place, and have been socialized to perceive that in the LDS way. What else is there to support is in our precarious beliefs?

The psychologists have done a lot of work on the so-called "confirmation bias". That is, the first idea of a particular type that we become convinced is correct is hard to get rid of. This is a big one. Psychologist Raymond Nickerson (1998), in a comprehensive review of the literature on this bias, concluded:

“If one were to attempt to identify a single problematic aspect of human reasoning that deserves attention above all others, the confirmation bias would have to be among the candidates for consideration. It appears to be sufficiently strong and pervasive that one is led to wonder whether the bias, by itself, might account for a significant fraction of the disputes, altercations and misunderstandings that occur among individuals, groups, and nations.” (quoted in "Why People Believe Weird Things", p. 299)

All kinds of tests have been conducted to confirm this bias. The idea first lodged in the head and accepted as right causes terrible distortions in how data is perceived. There can be no arguing with this point. Hence, the information we subject our children to is of critical importance, and more important than that is the paradigm or process we teach them respecting how to deal with that information. They should be taught that all theories respecting truth are provisional, as is the case in science. We must be open to theological insights that overturn prior received "truth". "Line upon line ...". This could be used within the Church to mitigate the effect of the confirmation bias, but since that would dilute the authority of the Church's leaders, this is not done.

The confirmation bias suggests that, as a rule, we should be much more suspicious of the positions we have inherited than those we have reached on our own after a thorough review of available data. And we should leave even those in the provisional realm.

The research respecting the confirmation bias shows that the smarter a person is, the less likely they are to change their mind once it has been made up. That is, the smarter and better-educated people are, the stronger their confirmation bias is likely to be. This is the result of their greater than average ability to find patterns in whatever data they encounter to confirm their conclusions, whether such patterns exist or not, and their ability to sway those around them to their view. This will confirm what my friends and family members have long suspected – the

fact that I have changed my mind about some of my fundamental religious beliefs is proof that I am not among the sharpest knives in the drawer.

It has been noted that the easiest marks for magical tricks are Ph.D. and Mensa types, because they take the analytical process seriously, and therefore are more easily fooled by the magicians' misdirection cues. I can only imagine how easy lawyers must be to fool. Not as smart, and more sure of themselves.

It has also been noted that the more closed minded a person is, the more likely it is that he will have strong religious beliefs. As Michael Shermer has noted:

In the study on religiosity and belief in God that Frank Sulloway and I conducted, we found openness to experience to be the most significant predictor, with higher levels of openness related to lower levels of religiosity and belief in God. In studies of individual scientists' personalities and their receptivity to fringe ideas like the paranormal, I found that a healthy balance between high conscientiousness and high openness to experience led to a moderate amount of scientism. This was most clearly expressed in the careers of palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould and astronomer Carl Sagan. They were nearly off the scale in both conscientiousness and openness to experience, giving them that balance between being open-minded enough to accept the occasional extraordinary claim that turns out to be right, but not so open that one blindly accepts every crazy claim that anyone makes (Why People Believe Weird Things, p. 293).

As noted above, the conditioning process of the LDS faith itself tends to produce closed minds through the operation of the confirmation bias and other conditioning and socialization processes. This would itself increase the probability of continued religious belief.

The Nature of Human Memory

The confirmation bias is aided and abetted by our memories. Elizabeth Loftus, world-renowned memory expert and U. of Washington psychology professor has noted:

Memories don't fade... they ... grow. What fades is the initial perception, the actual experience of the events. But every time we recall an event, we must reconstruct the memory, and with each recollection the memory may be changed – colored by succeeding events, others people's recollections or suggestions ... truth and reality, when seen through the filter of our memories, are not objective factors but subjective, interpretative realities. (Shermer, Why People Believe Weird Things, p. 182)

A stark application of memory reconstruction theory is provided by the phenomena of otherwise sane people who have become sure that they have been abducted by aliens. Shermer describes a number of such people and their memories, and notes:

How was this memory recovered? Under hypnosis. ... Memory is a complex phenomenon involving distortions, deletions, additions, and sometimes-complete fabrication. Psychologists call this confabulation – mixing fantasy with reality to such an extent that it is impossible to sort them out. Psychologist Elizabeth Loftus has shown how easy it is to plant a false memory in a child's mind by merely repeating a suggestion until the child incorporates it as an actual memory. Similarly, Professor Alvin Lason put students at California State University, Long Beach, into a hypnotic state and in their

altered state told them over and over that they had been abducted by aliens. When asked to fill in the details of the abduction, the students elaborated in great detail, making it up as they went along in the story. (Shermer, *Why People Believe Weird Things*, p. 96)

Shermer also explains idea of feedback loops – how phenomena can grow and feed on itself. Witch hunts, recovered memories of abuse of various sorts, and the satanic ritual craze of the 1980s are all examples of this. The combination of the confirmation bias and how memory works are critical components to each of these phenomena. Shermer reviews in particular the manner in which memory reconstruction worked in the contest of women who "recovered" memories of sexual abuse through certain types of group therapy. He explains how the goal of some of these therapy groups was to help women recover memories of abuse they did not know they had suffered. In time-limited therapy, they were encouraged to look deep within selves to find these memories, and an amazing number of them were able, within the time allotted for therapy, to do so. The mind produced that for which it was asked. (Shermer, *Why People Believe Weird Things*, p. 109)

Hence, we should expect the confirmation bias to not only screen new information that comes into us, but to also to reconstruct our memories of prior events to some extent. This is, perhaps, how a good feeling becomes an overwhelming "burning in the bosom" as time passes. We should also expect that the probability of such a memory being constructed would increase as a result of being regularly in the company of people who talked about their "burning in the bosom" experiences.

The LDS Church Restricts Access to Testimony Threatening Material

Faithful History

So, we have discovered that our brains are hardwired by evolutionary forces to react to the very kind of anxiety that the LDS culture produces by causing us to experience something that seems like divine manifestation. These experiences are powerful and of a deeply personal kind, and we have been conditioned by our religion within a system of circular, self-confirming deductive reasoning to interpret these experiences to mean that our religion is god's one true way. We then recognize that we are subject to the confirmation bias and that the smarter we are and the better the conditioning to which we have been subject, the stronger that bias will be. And finally we note that our memories are designed so as to amplify the confirmation bias by reconstructing prior experience to conform to our perception of reality. These factors create a feedback loop of sorts: Our brains produce a powerful "spiritual" experience that gives us good reason to believe something; this provides a great starting point for a conditioning system which strengthens the belief; the conditioning system also encourages our brain's natural tendency to reconstruct memory to bring prior events into line with our confirmation bias; which makes us susceptible to more of the same, real, spiritual experience that got the loop started in the first place; and so the process continues.

Is there anything else that could further stack the deck against our leaving the faith of our youth? You bet, and it is a big one - the so-called "faithful history" program. With the best of intentions, the Church has built walls around us in an attempt to protect us from information that it thinks will be harmful to us, and has heavily promoted obedience to Church leadership on the same basis. For example, at a conference for Church educators in August of 1985 Dallin Oaks was talking about the importance of interpreting Church history in context etc., and that church members should not be fooled by the misleading half truths some historians, journalists etc. put

out respecting the Church. Then, amazingly, he makes the following statement while purporting to lecture professional historians respecting the importance of balance and good scholarship in the writing of church history:

Balance is telling both sides. This is not the mission of the official Church literature or avowedly anti-Mormon literature. Neither has any responsibility to present both sides.

I felt physically ill for weeks after discovering this concept last summer. Why does not the Church occupy the moral high ground of truth? I was taught my entire life that this is what we were all about. I grieved as the reality of my religious tradition, to which I had given over twenty-five years of adult life (including five as a Bishop), sank in. What happened, I wondered, to the moral high ground of truth I had been taught since childhood that Mormonism occupied?

In a talk entitled "The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than The Intellect" given by Boyd Packer at the Fifth Annual Church Educational System Religious Educators' Symposium, 22 August, 1981 at Brigham Young University. (See *Brigham Young University Studies*, Summer 1981), what has come to be known as the Church's "faithful history" policy was articulated. For ease of reference I will refer to this seminal discourse as the "Mantle Talk". The ideas it contains had been presented in various ways at earlier times, but this talk and others that followed it make the policy more explicit and turned back a tide of earlier General Authority statements that had been much more accepting of academic freedom.

One of the dominant ideas of the faithful history policy is that the Church is engaged in an epic struggle on the side of good against evil, and that therefore it must take extraordinary measures, such as not presenting the whole truth, in order to avoid putting "faith threatening material" in the hands of Church members. In the Mantle Talk, Packer stated that:

In the Church we are not neutral. We are one-sided. There is a war going on and we are engaged in it. It is the war between good and evil, and we are belligerents defending the good. We are therefore obliged to give preference to and protect all that is represented in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we have made covenants to do it.

This idea has been echoed many times. One such echo worth repeating came from Dallin Oaks, as noted above.

Dallin Oakes also referred in his address to in the battle in which the Church is engaged with the anti-Mormons who do not tell the whole truth, and hence the Church is obliged to tell its side of the story only and as persuasively as possible. That is, Oaks believes that the Church is in the role of a legal advocate (he was a lawyer after all) who is hired to pitch his client's case to the judge and jury, instead of a protective parent who can be relied upon to act in the best interest of her child. Once again, we find that Oaks is following Packer's lead on this point. In the Mantle Talk he said:

There is much in the scriptures and in our Church literature to convince us that we are at war with the adversary. We are not obliged as a church, nor are we as members obliged, to accommodate the enemy in this battle. ...

Suppose that a well-managed business corporation is threatened by takeover from another corporation. Suppose that the corporation bent on the takeover is determined to drain off all its assets and then dissolve this company. You can rest assured that the threatened company would hire legal counsel to protect itself.

Can you imagine that attorney, under contract to protect the company having fixed in his mind that he must not really take sides, that he must be impartial? Suppose that when the records of the company he has been employed to protect are opened for him to prepare his brief he collects evidence and passes some of it to the attorneys of the enemy company. His own firm may then be in great jeopardy because of his disloyal conduct.

Do you not recognize a breach of ethics, or integrity, or morality?

I think you can see the point I am making. Those of you who are employed by the Church have a special responsibility to build faith not destroy it. If you do not do that, but in fact accommodate the enemy, who is the destroyer of faith you become in that sense a traitor to the cause you have made covenants to protect.

The North American litigation system, following the English model, required advocates from each side of the dispute to prepare one-sided arguments and present them to the judge. The judge, being wise, experienced and unbiased, can then decide which of the competing arguments has the most merit.

It should be obvious that this method will not work in the case of the Church, its adversaries and its members. The members are cast in the role of the judge while the Church and its adversaries are the lawyers. The members are not, however, wise, experienced or unbiased. And furthermore, they have no idea that the Church has cast them in the judge's role and is presenting a one-sided argument to them. They think the Church is the source of all truth, much as a judge would be perceived to be.

And I also note that even in a real adversarial litigation system, there are restraints on what the advocates can present to the court. A lawyer must not, for example, mislead the court by allowing false evidence to be presented, or even evidence that by its incomplete nature is likely to mislead the Court. Hence the Church fails to abide by even the low standards of one sided legal advocacy in the manner in which it present information respecting its origins to its members, potential converts and the public.

Before proceeding further, I should note that what seemed to me at first to be a peculiarly Mormon proclivity for religious deception is in fact a local manifestation of a much broader tendency. As Nietzsche notes:

That the lie is permitted as a means to pious ends is part of the theory of every priesthood – to what extent it is part of their practice is the object of this enquiry. (The Will to Power, p. 89)

Once again, I find the feet of clay in my own religious tradition that I had been taught to see only beneath the vestments worn by other religious leaders.

Is the Faithful History Policy Morally Justified?

As noted below, the Golden Rule (do unto others as you would have others do unto to you) and its Kantian counterpart is near the foundation of Western society's value complex, deriving special force in our society from the "individuals are equal" idea, and the idea that we should not mislead others is a sub-rule of the Golden Rule. Hence, there is no moral basis, generally speaking, that can be used to justify a different morality in terms of telling the truth on the part of

Church leaders as opposed to Church members. In a traditional authoritarian or caste-oriented society, such distinctions can often be made. One might argue, based on utilitarian principles, that leadership misrepresentation can be justified on some cases. I do not have the space or time at this point to lay this argument out in detail. Suffice it to say that I have considered the point, and have concluded that the Church's actions are not justified on this basis.

It is beyond doubt that the Church preaches the Golden Rule and the idea that we should not mislead others as part of its moral system. Hence, the Church should not mislead its members, even by the selective suppression of information. That, in my view, is what it does when it discourages scholars from publishing their honestly held opinions respecting historical, scientific or doctrinal matters that are at odds with Church dogma, when it sponsors histories that are misleading as a result of the information they omit, and when it discourages its members from considering any ideas that contradict Church dogma.

It is curious that anything more should need to be said respecting the above matter. However, more does need to be said because it has been my experience that faithful members of the Church have trouble seeing that there is anything the matter with the Church's conduct respecting the matters here in question. Hence, I will draw analogies to other aspects of life with which we are familiar in an effort to show that the deceptive conduct Church members accept on the part of their religious leaders is not accepted in our society with respect to things much less important than the decision as to where a human being will build the foundations of his or her life.

Morality Case Studies

Reasonable Expectations and the Sale of Goods

One of the few useful things I learned in law school was the idea of "reasonable expectations", and how they can be used to find the threads that unite and give meaning both to life in general and to complex legislation, such as the Blue Sky Laws referred to below. As I wrote this essay, it occurred to me that the concept of reasonable expectations finds its roots in the idea that equal human beings deserve equal treatment and is really nothing more than a subset of the Golden Rule.

The reasonable expectations concept works more or less as follows. If I act so as to create a reasonable expectation in a fellow being that I will do something in the future, then it is morally and sometimes legally wrong for me to frustrate that expectation. It is morally wrong because it offends the Golden Rule, and if there is enough at stake, the law will provide a remedy for that wrong.

For example, if I accept the obligation to act as trustee and accept possession of certain assets on the basis that I will use them for the benefit of beneficiaries and then I later use those assets for my own benefit, I have first created expectations that others relied upon (by giving the assets to me instead of to someone else), and later frustrated those expectations. As unlikely as this now seems, several hundred years ago it required litigation in England over many decades to establish as a legal principle the seemingly straightforward idea that such a trustee would be liable to the beneficiaries if he took the assets entrusted to him and used them for his own purposes instead of for the beneficiaries.

Contract law is replete with the "reasonable expectations" theory. Lets start first with the idea of "caveat emptor" (buyer beware). That is, if I sell you a horse and say nothing about its age or

condition, it is up to you to do your own investigation. If the horse is lame and you did not notice, that is your hard luck. However, if I tell you that the horse I am selling you is young and healthy, and you pay a high price for him on that basis, and it is later established that I knew he was old and sick, you will have a legal claim against me because I knowingly established a false expectation on which you acted.

I conclude as a result of the foregoing that when people buy things from us, that we have both a moral (as a result of the Golden Rule) and legal obligation not to tell them misleading things. Given the difference between the importance of buying a horse or a car and defining our religious faith, it is not odd that the standard of disclosure and behaviour to which we hold those who sell life's trinkets is so much higher than that to which our religious leaders and institutions are held?

It has long been my view that our legal system establishes a "lowest common denominator" kind of morality. That is, the morality I expect of my religious community and myself is far above "legal" morality (some would say that is an oxymoron) in almost every respect. Hence, it is with great discomfort that I have had to confront the reality that if the LDS Church sold cars the way its gains converts, the leaders of the Church and the missionaries and members involved in missionary work (my last calling was that of Stake Mission President – I was released about a year ago) would all be guilty of gross and continual violation of the law related to proper disclosure, and could be sued as a result.

I am left with the troubling idea that leaders of the Mormon Church do not meet the minimum standard of morality required by our society of used car salesmen.

The Blue Sky Laws

In the United States, the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, certain other federal laws and certain state laws (known as the "Blue Sky Laws") were brought into being to combat securities promoters who, as it turned out, were selling little more than "blue sky" to the people who bought shares in their companies. The stock market collapse of the late 1920s exposed significant levels of corporate corruption in this regard, an event similar in nature to what we have seen in corporate circles during the last few years.

The essence of the Blue Sky Laws and other laws related to them (for convenience, I will refer to them all as "Blue Sky Laws") is the rule of "full, plain and true" disclosure. That is, a stock promoter must collect certain types of information and make it available to the public before he can offer his stock for sale. This, essentially, suspended the caveat emptor rule as far as the sale of securities was concerned. Of particular importance for present purposes, the Blue Sky Laws require that the promoter must disclose all information in his possession that could be reasonably expected to be relevant to a potential investor. For example, if my company is a mining company and I have one geologist's report that indicates I probably have a gold deposit on my property, and another report that indicates that I do not have any gold on my property, I cannot withhold the negative report from the public. I must disclose that information, and allow potential investors to judge between the two reports for themselves when they decide whether to invest in my company.

I do not say that it is certain that Joseph Smith did not translate the Book of Mormon, or did not see God and Christ, etc. It is possible that he did, and I acknowledge that many believe he did and feel enriched by that belief. However, there is now a great deal of persuasive evidence that these things did not occur in the fashion that the Church teaches they did, and that information

is deeply relevant to the decision a convert to the Church is asked to make first upon baptism and later when going through the temple. As noted above, Dallin Oakes said that the Church does not have the obligation to tell the whole story because it is in a battle with the anti-Mormons who do not tell the whole truth, and hence the Church is obliged to tell its side of the story only and as persuasively as possible.

This, in my view, is a morally bankrupt position. The Church is a position of trust respecting its members, similar to that of a protective parent. The Church encourages the members to think of it in this way. For most members, there is no case that can be made that will counter the Church's position because of the complete trust the members have been led to have in their religious leaders, and the members certainly would not think to question the Church on their own. In fact, they are conditioned to believe that anyone who questions the Church or its leaders is not to be trusted. Hence, to discharge its moral duty the Church must make the whole story available. How this is done would vary according to age and circumstance of those who need to receive this information. But surely each potential adult convert must be given all of the reasonably plausible evidence before committing, and surely regular adult members of the Church at some point are ready for the "meat" we keep hearing about but never see in Church manuals, talks or lessons.

The analogy to the mining company referred to above is close. In each case we are dealing with uncertainty – probabilities that past and present reality is or is not a certain way and therefore that future events that depend upon that reality may be greater or lesser. There is evidence on both sides of the question, and a case that is persuasive to some and not to others can be made on both sides. This is precisely the kind of matter to which the Blue Sky Laws were intended to apply. The promoters are known to have more information than the investors, are considered to be in a position of trust relative to the investors, and hence are required to give the investors "full, plain and true" disclosure so that the investors can make the most informed decision possible. If we require this as a matter of course with respect to relatively unimportant financial matters, how can we settle for anything less with respect to matters of religious belief that determine where we build our life's foundations?

The relationship between the Blue Sky Laws, the Golden Rule and the idea of reasonable expectations is clear. And again, I am troubled by the realization that the leaders of the LDS Church do not come close to meeting the standard of disclosure required by the Blue Sky Laws. That is, our religious leaders do not meet the minimum morality required by law for stock promoters, who (as is the case with car salesmen) are not generally regarded as the most reliable members of our society.

Fiduciary Duties

As noted above, the Church is in a position of tremendous power respecting its faithful members. The earlier in life one becomes a member, the more powerful the Church's influence will be. Faithful members believe the Prophet is in direct and regular contact with God Himself, and are taught to defer to authority in more ways that I can count.

Our legal system places special obligations on persons who bear "fiduciary" responsibilities, such as parents respecting their children, trustees respecting their beneficiaries, employers respecting their employees, doctors respecting their patients, etc. A fiduciary relationship is characterized by an imbalance of power between the two parties, and is a type of relationship which society has an interest in helping to function in a reasonable fashion. Hence, when a

fiduciary abuses his position of trust, the legal consequences are generally severe in order to make clear the degree of societal disapproval such actions merit.

Fiduciary relationships are identified by examining the nature of the influence or control that one party exercises over the other. For example, if a psychiatrist tells a mentally unstable patient that she needs to have sex with him as part of her therapy, she would be much more likely to accept his proposal than if one of her neighbours suggested the same thing. Since society vests in the doctor his influence (thus granting him certain rights), it also imposes upon him certain obligations.

The fiduciary nature of the relationship of a patient to a doctor is instructive respecting the relationship between the Church and its members. The same kind of almost blind faith with which many believe what their doctors tell them (the doctor knows so much and the patient so little about the matters in issue) also directs the behaviour of faithful Church members vis-à-vis the Church. And in the example I provided above, the doctor used his position of trust to gain something he wanted (sex) at the expense of his trusting patient. This illustrates the idea of a "conflict of interest". The doctor's personal interest was in conflict with what is in the best interest of his patient.

There are many cases in which the Church's interest is in conflict with that of an individual member. This is often the case between a group and individual members of the group. Sociologists have studied this phenomenon for many years. All that is remarkable in this regard is that members of the Mormon Church do not recognize this conflict of interest, and believe that their church will not do anything to harm them.

The imagery of the "mother" church is common in many religions. The Mormon Church's mantra "follow the prophet, don't go astray" is an illustration of this principle. Mormons are taught to trust, and do trust, that their religious leaders act in their best interest and can be followed without question. In fact, as noted above with regard to the difference between Fowler stage three and five spirituality, the Church needs lots of stage three types and stage fivers tend to get in the way. Hence, even if I would be much better off in stage five, the Church is set up to keep me in stage three. This is but one illustration the many conflicts of interest that exist between the Church and its individual members.

In certain circumstances, it is clear that the Church would have legally enforceable fiduciary duties with respect to its members. And since I have not researched the matter at this point, I can only indicate that it may have legally enforceable fiduciary duties to make adequate disclosure, at least with respect to converts who join the Church. Hence, it may be that the Church has fiduciary obligations to its members that would enable them to sue it as a result of the misrepresentation referred to above.

It has been suggested to me that litigation is wasteful, and that a "moral" person could not wish on the Church litigation of the type I suggest may be possible, and even that such litigation would restrain free speech respecting religion.

I first note that I am a lawyer, but not a litigator. It is my view that litigation is often wasteful. However, I can think of lots of examples in which litigation has brought to heel commercial and other large institutional interests for whom money and/or influence had come to outweighed moral considerations.

The Church has become a large commercial organization as well as a church. I see lots of evidence that money and/or influence may how outweigh, within the Church hierarchy, morality. One example of this is the way in which the Church is attempting in many ways to slow the dissemination of the type of information that I argue should be made available to members and potential converts. I am not prepared to assume that the leaders' awareness of the cooling effect this information is likely to have on the members' faith, and hence their willingness to continue to "pay and obey" is not a motivating factor in the Church's decision making behaviour with respect to this issue. If litigation could be used as a brake on this kind of immoral behaviour, I think that would be healthy. And I do not think that such litigation would restrain religious free speech any more than our laws respecting slander or defamation restrain the inappropriate use of language to influence other people in those areas.

I have one final comment make respecting litigation. The Church's legal counsel in Canada is a law firm at which I have several friends who are members of the Church. One is a partner there who has primary charge of the Church's legal concerns within that firm. He is also a Stake President. As a result of my long friendship with him, I have heard bits and pieces over the years of what the Church is concerned about from a litigation point of view. Based on that, what I learned while I served as Bishop and in other positions of responsibility within the Church, and what I read in a variety of places, I am confident that the Church is a sophisticated consumer of legal services, and is savvy to the litigation game.

I thought about this recently as I considered the possibility of the kind of law suit referred to above, and the fact that in the early 1970s the Church effectively shut down its official historian's department (See Arrington, "Adventures of a Church Historian"). The reasons for this closure were many and complex. The ones that are clearest relate to the conflict between the story the historians wanted to tell, and what the Church was prepared to let them tell. This may be only a coincidence, but were I legal counsel to the Church during that period of time and were aware of the conflict between what the historians wanted to say and what the Church would permit to be said, I would have advised the Church that if its "real history" was not going to be told by the Church's official historian, it would be best not to have a Church Historian's department that produced things that might be mistaken for real history. That is, if official historian's department published things that would not meet reasonable academic standards for published history, and hence might be construed to misleading, this would increase the probability of successful lawsuits against the Church. If the misleading history were published by BYU "scholars" or FARMS etc., the Church would be one step removed from the fray. Hence, moving Leonard Arrington's Church history group from the Church itself to BYU was sound litigation strategy from the Church's point of view, and it is the kind of strategy that I would expect a sophisticated consumer of legal services, such as the Church, to have been made aware of.

And looking at the closure of the Church History Department from the point of view of the Church's hierarchy, if real history has to be told, then it is best that it come from the academic community where the "intellectual" label can be put on it if it becomes too troublesome. Once that is done, most of the small percentage of members who care about these things will ignore it.

In any event, whether the Church could be successfully sued or not is not important for my purposes in this essay. My point is that, once again, if we have concern that the Church is doing things that are questionable from legal point of view, we can once again be sure that it is well off base from a moral point of view.

Foreign Royalty

I have found it helpful when analyzing problems that come close to my personal interests to try to create an impersonal case study that raises the same issues as does what concerns me personally. This "depersonalization" seems to help me to be more objective. In addition, the use of analogies of this type help me to focus on the hidden aspects of complex problems. That is how many good lawyers stress test their opinions. Computer programmers and other business people use analogies to do much the same thing with their programs and business cases. With that in mind, I propose the following case for consideration.

Assume the following:

1. An attractive stranger shows up in a small town and announces himself as foreign royalty. He dresses, talks and acts like royalty.
2. He lets it be known that as a result of rights conferred upon him by his king, who has sent him to find new nobility for his kingdom, that he can grant nobility and other rights with respect to the foreign kingdom.
3. He tells wonderful stories about the foreign kingdom, which sounds like an amazing, wonderful place, and to which some of the townsfolk may be able to travel as his guests.
4. He is pleasant, charming, and a wonderful storyteller, particularly when it comes to stories about the foreign kingdom.
5. He indicates that he will especially consider exercising his discretion in favour of those who cultivate his good graces. However, he makes no concrete promises to anyone.
6. He indicates that while the pittance the locals have means nothing to him, that he will be favourably disposed toward those who give him 10% of their income (they can get by on 90%, can't they?) and spend most of their free time working the projects around their town that he feels inclined to support. These funds and donated time are allegedly used to help the townsfolk prepare themselves for "nobility" in a variety of ways. This involves building schools, and other public buildings, and doing many things that are good by most measures, and that the townsfolk would likely not have thought to do on their own.
7. He does not take much (in absolute terms) of this money or labour for himself, but does enjoy the best of what the townsfolk's life has to offer.
8. He dies unexpectedly, and is believed to have appointed in his place some of those who were most faithful to him during his life. Eventually they die, and do the same.
9. As a result of the diligence and ability of his followers coupled with the amazing nature of the stories he told and the unusual circumstances of his death, the organization he founded grows to be quite large. Huge amounts of money and time are contributed to it each year. Its leaders rise to positions of international prominence and influence as a result of their association with the organization.

10. Due to the organization's unique origins and good management, its leaders have come to have the complete trust of most of its members. This trust far exceeds anything the stranger was given during his life. The leaders are, practically speaking, not questioned when they indicate that the members should do something because it will increase their probability of being rewarded by the king of the foreign kingdom, whom the leaders have come to perceive themselves to represent, just as did the stranger.
11. However, the organization's leaders, over the years, have become aware of certain aspects of the stranger's history that suggest a strong probability that he had nothing to do with foreign royalty and that many of his stories were if not completely false, then at least partially so. However, because these things happened so long ago, the questions respecting his legitimacy cannot be definitively settled, even though as the years pass the tide of evidence flows (with a few small exceptions) in one direction – against the legitimacy of the stories the mysterious stranger told to support his claims. Most objective observers long ago concluded that the evidence against the stranger's legitimacy is well past the "balance of probabilities" point, and is either at or past the "beyond a reasonable doubt" point respecting most of the stories he told.
12. After the leaders of the stranger's organization become fixed with the above information respecting the doubtfulness of his story, what are they to do?
 - a. Are they morally justified if they do not tell their followers about the information that has come into their possession and acknowledge its importance and relevance?
 - b. Are they morally justified if they continue to accept and use their followers' contributions of time and money without sharing this information with them?
 - c. Are they morally justified if they take steps to avoid being in a position where they will know beyond a reasonable doubt that the stranger was not who he said he was, and that his stories are false?
 - d. Are they morally justified if they take steps designed to make it as unlikely as possible that their followers will come into contact with information that questions the legitimacy of the stranger's identity and stories?
 - e. Are they morally justified in throwing out of town and cutting off communication with any of the townsfolk who happen upon the evidence they already have, unless those townsfolk agree to not discuss this evidence with other townsfolk?

I do not suggest that each of these questions has a simple answer. There are serious issues to be dealt with in terms of transitioning a large number of people who have built their lives on a false foundation onto something that can be sustained. It perhaps is not morally right to do something that would cause a shock so great that many would collapse under it. The utility created by solving this problem in one way as opposed to another should be considered, as should the rights of the various parties involved and questions of justice and equity. I do not discount the importance of issues such as this and would be supportive of the Church going through a process to determine how this should best be done. It is even possible that such a process is going on at present, but behind closed doors. I doubt this, however, because of what

I see currently in terms of the Church continuing to take steps to bury the evidence and to attempt to discourage its members from considering it when they happen to come across it.

I suggest that the application of the Golden Rule would require that, subject only to the kind of counterbalancing issue referred to above, the leaders of the stranger's organization (and by implication the Church) are required by moral principle to disclose their knowledge respecting the stranger and his claims, and allow his followers to decide how that may affect their willingness to continue to live their lives in large measure on the assumption that his stories about the foreign kingdom were factual.

Suggested Justifications for the Church's Current Policy of Non-Disclosure and Misrepresentation

Milk Before Meat

As is the case with many of the main ideas respecting "faithful history" and non-disclosure, the "milk before meat" idea was given prominence by the Mantle Talk referred to above. Boyd Packer there states, referring to the care with which Church history must be taught:

We are teachers and should know the importance of the principle of prerequisites. It is easily illustrated with the subject of chemistry. No responsible chemist would advise, and no reputable school would permit, a beginning student to register for advanced chemistry without a knowledge of the fundamental principles of chemistry. The advanced course would be a destructive mistake, even for a very brilliant beginning student. Even that brilliant student would need some knowledge of the elements, of atoms and molecules, of electrons, of valence, of compounds and properties. To let a student proceed without the knowledge of fundamentals would surely destroy his interest in, and his future with, the field of chemistry.

The same point may be made with reference to so-called sex education. There are many things that are factual, even elevating, about this subject. There are other aspects of this subject that are so perverted and ugly it does little good to talk of them at all. Some things cannot be safely taught to little children or to those who are not eligible by virtue of age or maturity or authorizing ordinance to understand them.

Teaching some things that are true, prematurely or at the wrong time, can invite sorrow and heartbreak instead of the joy intended to accompany learning.

What is true with these two subjects is, if anything, doubly true in the field of religion. The scriptures teach emphatically that we must give milk before meat. The Lord made it very clear that some things are to be taught selectively and some things are to be given only to those who are worthy.

It matters very much not only *what* we are told but *when* we are told it. Be careful that you build faith rather than destroy it.

Echoing Packer, a number of people have told me that the Church has to proceed carefully with the "truth" about its history because the members' faith is delicate and hence milk must be given before meat. My quick response to that is to ask, "When will a 45-year-old former Bishop who is a practising tax attorney with three university degrees be ready for some meat?" I was never served any at Church, and in fact I obeyed my Church leaders who told me to avoid what I have

come to know are the sources of meat that were all around me. The reality of the situation is that to maintain the kind of faith the Church wants its members to have, certain "truths" about the Church, its history, its leadership etc. cannot be talked about. And so they are not.

There is, however, a more complete response to the "milk before meat" justification. It is my observation that religious organizations can be plotted on a continuum from "open or enabling" to "closed or dogmatic". Those that are open facilitate the spiritual maturation process from Fowler stage three (dogmatic, literal – "we are the one and only true church") to stage five (recognizes metaphor, accepts ideas like god is genderless, is open to science overturning dogma, etc.) (See James Fowler, "The Stages of Faith"). Those that are closed try to hold people in stage three for a variety of conscious and subconscious reasons. The fact of the matter (as Fowler points out) is that stage three church members make good foot soldiers. Hence, the leaders of organizations like them in most ways.

While I do not deny that some people are best suited to living their lives in stage three, is it not odd that any church would assume that all are so suited and then do its best to squeeze everyone into that box? Is the god we worship (personal or impersonal) concerned with the power and efficiency of the group, or the progress and individuation of each person within the group? This is a basic question of values, and modern western society has come down hard on the side of the individual, as does Mormon theology. Other more traditional societies, such as the Hindu or the Taliban, would still resolve that question in favour of the group. However, for us here in North America, it seems clear that "good" organizations will facilitate individual growth and "bad" ones will stifle that growth when it conflicts with the group's objectives, as determined by an elite, undemocratically appointed, leadership.

For example, I doubt many in North America would argue that the Taliban with its extreme dogmatism and closure to any ideas that contradict religious belief is a better social system than, say, Mormonism. That we would agree on this point indicates that we think in terms of the relative merits of different religious systems on the scale established by our values. In my view, this kind of thinking is appropriate. We should try to understand as well as possible the cause and effect implications of exposing ourselves in the long term to any environment, understand our options in that regard, and then choose the environment that appears on the basis of the best evidence we can gather to be most suited to what we wish to achieve.

It seems that the LDS Church takes active steps to prevent its members from making the type of spiritual progress described above, thus causing all kinds of needless emotional damage and missed opportunity for peace and joy not to mention wasted time and money. My most recent evidence of this came no more than 15 minutes ago, when an active member of the Church walked into my office at work and told me that the main message, delivered at the Stake Conference she attended last Sunday by a visiting General Authority, was that faithful members of the Church should take any question they have about Church history, doctrine etc. to their leaders, ask the question, listen to the answer, and then let the question go. That is, the members should suppress their doubts, concerns and questions, and continue to faithfully obey the leaders.

In light of the foregoing, it is my view that the LDS version of "milk before meat" goes far beyond the innocent connotation of those words. When a child comes to you and says, "Mom, I found out where babies REALLY come from!!", you don't say "Oh those scientists!! What kind of lies have you heard now! I don't want you ever to listen to those people again!" And then if the child continues to learn about sex and discuss it with his parents and siblings you don't say something like, "If you insist on repeating those lies, we will have to protect the rest of the family

from you by cutting off our association with you!!". That is, if the issue were really "milk before meat", the Church would deal with us as we deal with our children respecting sex, Santa Claus etc. – once it is clear that they are ready for the "truth", we give it to them in the best way we can. The Church does not do this.

This is the crucial difference between "milk before meat" and the kind of dissembling in which the LDS church engages in order to control its members. The church (and other religions as well) keeps as many as possible in the dark for as long as possible, and produces massive cognitive dissonance for anyone awakening from the dark sleep by insisting that facts that conflict with dogma are not real facts regardless of the evidence.

Since Church members are held in this dark dreamland through the age of marriage (missions plus the idea of no sex until marriage plus the acculturation of both young men and women toward temple marriage do a good job of ensuring that only a small percentage of Church members think of these things before they are married) causes terrible problems when spouses wake up at different rates, or when one cannot wake up at all. Some personalities can only take so much anaesthesia. Many marriages have needlessly ended on these rocks.

I distinguish between the Church actively teaching stage five spirituality, and allowing the members who need it to find it on their own. I will accept for discussion purposes that it may not be wise for the Church to actively encourage its members to seek a stage five kind of faith (although I think it could be done and am aware of many organizations in which it is done well – all one has to do is go first to metaphor instead of literalism). But how can we justify the Church's practice of hiding information, and then much worse, kicking out members who somehow stumble into stage five and wish to create a quiet stage five community within the Church? The only reason for the Church to do this is to prevent the distribution of stage five ideas.

There is no doubt that if much of the communication on your average LDS oriented internet bulletin board (with the exception of Nauvoo.com) were conducted in an LDS chapel foyer, the participants would be given a short time to repent and then be permanently shown the door if they persisted. Given the nature of the things that within democratic society are aired in open debate and how many other churches function (even the Episcopalians for Pete's sake – read some Bishop Spong, they tolerate him), I can think of no plausible, moral defense for the Church's practice in this regard.

The evidence I see on this topic is overwhelming consistent with the idea that the primary paradigm of the LDS church's organization and day-to-day operation is the maintenance of its members in stage three so that they can be better controlled. There are lots of historical reasons for which this might have occurred. Orwellian is not too strong a word to use when describing this aspect of LDS culture. Having said that, I do not regard the LDS church's leadership as evil. I do regard them as dangerous because they have a huge platform, huge influence over Church members and are dominated by their own dogma instead of open to reality. That dogma, not coincidentally, gives them their influence and control. My reading of history indicates that any human put in such a situation cannot be trusted.

The Church Never Hid Anything – It Is Your Fault If You Were Unaware of Church History

This is what I was told during a meeting I had with a General Authority as I was working my way through issues such as those outlined above, and I have to admit that it infuriated me. Once again, if something did not work in my life that related to the Church, then I must be at fault

because it is impossible that Church was. No wonder Utah leads North America in Prozac consumption.

The fact of the matter is that the Church regularly discourages its members from considering faith-threatening materials (see the reference to Jeffrey Holland's recent talk above), and it uses its influence where it can to prevent the publication and distribution of faith threatening material. One of Boyd Packer's statements from the Mantle Talk is illustrative:

Several years ago President Ezra Taft Benson spoke to you and said:

It has come to our attention that some of our teachers particularly our university programs, are purchasing writings from known apostates . . . in an effort to become informed about certain points of view *or* to glean from their research. You must realize that when you purchase their writings or subscribe to their periodicals you help sustain their cause. We would hope that their writings not be on your seminary or institute *or* personal bookshelves. We are entrusting you to represent the Lord and the First Presidency to your students, not to views of the detractors of the Church.

I endorse that sound counsel to you.

Remember: when you see the bitter apostate, you do not see only an absence of light, you see also the presence of darkness.

Do not spread disease germs.

Not surprisingly, this is the advice I received from the Church's Institute of Religion instructors whom I got to know during my university days, and from other knowledgeable members of the Church. I, of course, dispensed the same advice many times during my years of Church activity.

And once again, why would we expect an ordinary Church member to question their religious leaders when they say that the members should avoid faith-threatening materials? The imbalance of power between the religious leader and the faithful member makes questioning this kind of advice extremely improbable.

A friend recently suggested to me that the Church's conditioning works a lot like the "invisible" electric fences used to keep dogs in yards. The fence is more imagined than real, and only works as long as the dog thinks it works. The same is true of physical fences used to contain other livestock. When a dog learns to run through the invisible fence's electrical field, it will pass through it quickly enough that the fence cannot contain the dog. The same is true with "fence jumping" cattle. They can get out, and once they know that there is no keeping them in. However, without this knowledge and the power it brings, the fence contains the livestock.

The invisible fence analogy is a good one respecting the Church. We are conditioned to believe that outside it the world is full of danger, and that we hence must stay within the fence. Our conditioning is so strong that the first few times we inadvertently bump into the fence, most of us receive a hard jolt from our conditioning alone. Eventually, however, some acquire enough knowledge that they ignore the fence and pass through.

Disclosure Would Do More Harm than Good

We can, yet again, trace this idea to the Mantle Talk. Boyd Packer there said, "Some things that are true are not very useful." A typical elaboration of this point comes from a friend who was in an e-mail discussion with his brother, a BYU professor, on this topic. The brother was described to me as a typical, conservative member of the Church who is inclined to defend its claims. He said that the Church is true, so why does the history matter? He then asked how exposing the members of the Church to controversial issues will help anyone achieve a stronger testimony, again assuming that since the Church was true, the only worthwhile pedagogical exercise relative to the Church was strengthening the belief that it is true. And finally he asked: "If you met an ugly person, would you tell him/her he/she was ugly just to maintain your integrity? How would that bit of information help him/her in his/her life? Would your sharing that information with him/her make you a better person? How is it then that you would ask the Church to share irrelevant information that would cause many people to have cognitive dissonance and cause confusion? How will this help people in their lives and to improve their testimonies?"

I again note that this logic assumes that the Church is true. This is at the root of Nietzsche's "pious lie" referred to above. Once the leaders are certain they are right, what harm does a little lying do? The people will end up where they are best off in any event. In fact, the lying will save some of them from themselves, since without the lies they may end up becoming "confused" and leaving the fold.

Once we acknowledge the possibility that the Church may be wrong, this question changes completely. In that case, it may make a tremendous difference to me and members of my family if I determine, for example, that the Church's current stance respecting homosexuality, or the female role, or a variety of other things, is not correct and that I am not bound by it. Hence the answer to my friend's brother is that there is much more at stake than he believes, because there is a real chance (in my view a very high probability, but not a certainty) that the Church is wrong respecting many of the ways in which it would have us lead our lives.

Consider, for example, the case of the black person living in the 1950s or a gay person living now. How healthy would it be for such a person to believe the Church's dogma respecting them? How important is it that such a person be given every chance to test the Church's claims?

The Church Is No Worse Than Other Religions Respecting Misleading Disclosure

I was speechless (a rare event) when I had this one tossed at me. It fails on several fronts.

The Mormon Church, remember is God's own Church, especially His, chosen above all others. However can it be satisfied with the standards of error defined by other human institutions?

And what about the fact that most of those other religions make faith claims that cannot be challenged. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Did a virgin really give birth? Etc. The only faith claims of the Mormon Church that are the subject of this essay are those within the grasp of history and science, and I acknowledge that in many cases that grasp is not firm. Nonetheless, we now have a great deal of data relevant to those claims, and some of them are virtually certain to give way, just as did the Christian belief, held firmly for centuries, that the earth was at the center of the universe.

And then we remember the troubling fact that at least some other denominations whose faith structures were also built on comparatively recent events, such as the 7th Day Adventists, have come at least partially clean respecting the cracks in their foundations, and have transitioned their faith to something more durable. And finally we recall that one of the denominations to have done this the RLDS Church, and that many of the faith claims they have de-emphasized or discarded are the very ones under consideration here.

The Church Is At War With Evil And Must Do What Is Required In Combat

As noted above under the heading "Wall Building and War", the Church has used inflammatory language to create a false crisis designed to galvanize the members to action and excuse immoral leadership behavior. In my view, this does not justify the Church's non-disclosure and dissembling.

Conclusion Respecting Faithful History

In light of the foregoing, it is my view that the "faithful history" policy as articulated by Boyd Packer and others is a clear contravention of morality. And Jeffrey Holland's recent talk at the Church's Spring 2003 General Conference (See Michael White above) is of the same ilk.

At a minimum, the Church, in my view, has a duty not to hide these things and to not continue discouraging its members from gathering evidence that is relevant to their faith, and making the most informed decision they can in that regard. It is also my view that the Church has a positive duty to disclose, and one way in which that can be done has been shown by other religious organizations such as the Adventists and the Community of Christ.

It is my view that the barrier that stands between current Church leadership policy and proper disclosure is the leaders' fear that the members will no longer follow if all of the facts are on the table. Hence, this issue boils down in my view to whether a religious organization has the integrity to do what is right in the face of a potential loss of money and influence. So far, money and influence appear to trump morality as the Church places its own interest ahead of that of its faithful, trusting members.

Authoritarianism and Free Will

I have said in more places than I can count (to my children, to those who I have counselled as a Church leader, in missionary discussions, to non-member friends, from the pulpit etc.) that my understanding of history indicates that the main purpose of religion is usually to control the masses, leading the Marx's famous and generally accurate "religion is the opiate of the masses" statement. I have assured many people that our religion was different - that we embraced all truth - and that our religion was empowering, not controlling or limiting. This is clearly what our ideology teaches. I now feel that I was the subject of an almost unbelievably ironic joke. I was kept ignorant of my own history while being relatively knowledgeable regarding that of others, and was subject to many of the same forces I could see operating in other religions while being certain, and assuring others, that we were not so subject. I am still staggered by that realization. We know that, "He who does not know history is condemned to repeat it". I feel that I was so condemned. And "He who controls the past controls the future". This used to be said of old time kings, who controlled what their people knew about the past in order to retain power over them. For example, the Inca kings made sure their people all believed that the king was a literal descendant of the Sun, and therefore must be obeyed. By inculcating this belief, the king

maintained his power. I feel that others have for some time controlled my perception of part of the past that is deeply relevant to me, and so have controlled me.

As I have thought about the concerns expressed above, it has become clear that they are related to free will. I think it important to the exercise of free will that the Church make all of the information it has available to us that is likely relevant to our understanding of the nature of the Church, the relationship our leaders have to god, and therefore the role that the Church and its leaders should play in our lives. The fact that man is a free agent is, in my view, a fundamental part of our ideology. Anything that tampers with that is therefore to be taken seriously.

The position that the Church has adopted is, essentially, this: The Church routinely withholds information that might incline us to do things that the Church is sure would not be right for us, thereby manipulating us toward doing the things it thinks are right. Whose plan does that sound like? We don't need to discuss the public lying Joseph Smith and other engaged in, since it could be written off as the mistakes of a few people. The "faithful history" concept and general restriction of information is far broader than that. It is an institutional characteristic, and one that Karen Armstrong points out we share with other fundamentalist organizations. Fundamentalist organizations, she says, tend to be anti-historical because they are fighting an information war with the scientific community, and the less they have to explain to their members in that regard, the better that war goes for them.

The LDS church does not differ in kind from other Christian organizations in this regard. However, there are important differences of degree. The LDS church is more dogmatic and authoritarian in some ways, and less in others, than the other mainstream Christian churches. These differences can be explained by examining the important faith claims of each organization. A Christian church for which the literal interpretation of the creation narrative in Genesis is an important faith claim has much more trouble with certain branches of science than the LDS church does. However, the LDS church at this point in its history does not feel it can afford to let anyone question the historicity of the BofM. Hence, any science that does this is treated in the same way the hardcore creationists treat geology and carbon 14 dating. Likewise, the origins of the LDS movement and hence of some of its important faith claims are recent enough that they can be examined by historians with the kind of rigorous methodology that is impossible respecting Christianity in general. Hence, the LDS church has a particular problem with historians who insist on trying to find out what "really happened" with respect to a number of colourful episodes in Church history, and publishing their findings. This Mormon Achilles heel gave rise to the disgraceful faithful history policy, and indirectly to the Church's general tendency to suppress enquiry and free speech.

Some have tried to excuse the behavior of the leaders of the LDS church in this regard on the basis that they are well intentioned and the Church does a great deal of good. While I do not think that they are evil in the sense a mafia don might be, I think that they bear the responsibility for causing massive amounts of unnecessary heartache and pain for many members of the Church. They do not need to mislead as they do in order for the Church to perform its function. They do so, in my view, in order to remain in control of the largest organization possible, and I believe that at least some of them make this decision consciously, and then rationalize it.

The Santa Claus Analogy and the Tacit Lie

Lets expand the Santa Claus analogy referred to above. Think again about the good old Santa Claus analogy again. It suggests that it is OK to tell our kids lies about the Gospel because we

often tell lies like that about Santa Claus. This, in my view, is quite instructive with respect to the Church's current leadership.

We tell kids the Santa story and this performs a useful mythological function in their lives. Santa represents the abstract notions of pure goodness and giving, in tangible form, once a year, and they learn something important in a way they can understand at a tender, impressionable age. However, as the child grows and sees things in the world around him that conflict with the story (Flying sleds and reindeer? Visiting all the kids in the world in one night? Getting down all those chimneys? What about houses without chimneys? I have great fun with my kids as I try to get them to accept all kinds of wild explanations for these things as the lights are coming on), he eventually seriously questions. At that point we confirm that his cause and effect analysis is correct, and even help him fill in the blanks. In short, we admit that the whole thing was just a good story, hopefully reemphasize the important lessons it teaches, the child naturally outgrows it and we then move her along to the next phase of life.

So, what happens at Church? Someone questions the cause and effect notions related to an LDS myth and the faithful close ranks and insist on the myth's literal truth. Many who doubt the myth, or perhaps completely disbelieve it, affirm the group's insistence on literal truth sometimes (rarely I hope) by active participation in this process, but most often by the tacit approval their silence indicates. The disbelievers who want for all kinds of reasons to remain members of the Church are forced to do this by the Church's leaders because vocal dissidents will be thrown them out of the Church. This creates an environment of tacit and overt deception and dishonesty, with a by-product of massive cognitive dissonance for those members who become aware of what is going on.

The disbelieving member's position is as follows: I am not allowed to let others know what I believe, and so am assumed to believe what the Church's leaders say the members believe. The fact that I am well educated, perceived to be successful, a former church leader etc. causes some people to base their belief in part on my assumed belief. And if I make it clear that I do not believe, I will quickly be excised like a cancer from the body of the Church before my views can affect the faithful. Once excised, I am demonized and/or pitied as a deceived sinner of some kind, and hence my views can be safely ignored.

I suggest that the above-described environment causes many good people to be unwitting liars, and in many cases to gradually come to the awful realization of what they are doing and hence to become witting liars. I know some people who are stuck in a place where they feel that the lesser of evils is to continue to pretend to believe, and hence to continue to deceive those around them. Hell could not be worse than that.

It is my view that this is an insidious form of the lying for which the Church's leadership is responsible. It is tough to pin this one on any one person or group of people, however, as a conscious lie. A legal concept is, again, instructive. To deal with that very problem in certain types of criminal behavior the legal system uses various concepts to get at the person ultimately responsible for the criminal acts of others – if my threat of pain causes another to steal, for example, I am jointly responsible for the theft.

The really bad guys in criminal organizations are not the ones out peddling drugs and killing people. They are the ones hidden well behind the scenes who provide the system of incentives that keeps everything rolling. And, from what I can tell from the little glimpses I have had into the world of really bad people that my legal career has offered, it is my observation that many of the worst ogres have rationalized their behaviour completely. They are just doing what they

need to in order to achieve some worthwhile objective, and unfortunately have to do some nasty things along the way that are justifiable in the greater scheme of things, particularly if not thought about too carefully.

Once again, I do not equate the leaders of the LDS church with mafia dons, but I do not excuse them for their leading role in perpetuating the deceptive behaviour described above. I can say with confidence that were they inspired by god they would not so behave. Their behaviour has manmade fingerprints all over it.

The LDS Church, the Stages of Faith and Moral Development

The following are my observations respecting Fowler's six stages of spiritual development, moral development in general, and how the LDS church influences each of those processes.

Fowler's Stages of Faith

Fowler talks about people coming back to the faith of their youth in stage five, but participating in it quite differently than they did as stage three participants. I have not found a way to do that with the LDS faith. We are not talking about a group of Episcopalians, Catholics, Reform Jews, etc. who have been conditioned by a lengthy historical interaction with an increasingly liberal, humanist, secular society to tolerate diversity of opinion. It seems to me that every religion can host (and as is pointed out above, to some extent needs) stage three participants. However, some religions will have much more trouble than others in accommodating stages four through six.

It seems to me that we can put the various religious organizations on a continuum of openness. Those whose doctrine is most flexible will be most conducive in encouraging us to move from stage three to five and six. The most dogmatic will hold people in stage three, and throw out the people who insist on moving to stage four etc. Those in that camp with which I am familiar are the Mormons, JW's and Seventh Day Adventists. Judaism, which has been around for much longer than Christianity, accommodates numerous sub groups. Some are designed to allow the flexibility required by the move from stage three to five, and some are not. Buddhism has the same thing built into its system, with overt encouragement to identify yourself as a certain type and adopt the type of Buddhism that serves us best. And in general, Buddhism promotes questioning. In typical Eastern fashion there is no question of progressing from one stage to another until reincarnation kicks in. We are what we are.

The LDS church is designed to keep people locked in stage three. When we start to experience stage four, we are told to either get back in line or get out. We can wonder all we want in silence, but if we need to express ourselves (a human tendency hardwired into us and described by psychologists as part of the cognitive imperative) and talk things through with the people we have come to rely upon as spiritual sounding boards while we process our concerns, we are shown the door. This is not surprising given the movement's history, and is not necessarily a permanent feature of the system. It was much more open in its beginning (in fact we could argue that it started out as the antithesis of what it become in this regard), and had at least one period of remarkable openness during the presidency of David O. McKay.

Free speech and freedom of expression are of fundamental importance to movement from stage three to five. The LDS church does not permit those freedoms outside of its orthodoxy. It does not permit the discussion of heterodox ideas, and in fact has taken steps during the past several decades to make such discussion more difficult. A number academics and other

"liberal" Mormons have been disciplined as a result of writing or speaking in support of heterodox positions, and private study groups have been banned and replaced by adult "Institute" classes since the latter can be controlled in a way that former could not.

The Internet, however, cannot be stopped. It now hosts many defacto private study groups, and information respecting the taboo topics circulates there freely. This is in part why the Church takes such quick action against anyone who makes public questioning information that may disturb "regular" church members. Those members are taught not to look at testimony threatening material. The leaders will look at that stuff and make sure everything is OK. Anyone seen as encouraging others to take the step of using the Internet to search out such material is a direct threat. One of the conditions I was required to agree to in order to keep my membership was that I would not point any member who can to me with questions toward any source of testimony threatening information on the Internet.

One of the trends within the Church that I expect to see strengthen during the next several years at least is that of linking "faithfulness" to not looking at anything faith threatening. This runs counter to the statements many LDS leaders have made over the years with respect to the Church's need and desire to subject its faith claims to all forms of relevant, responsible scholarship, and their assurance that such tests would be passed. As the leaders become aware that this strategy will force the church to face issues that it cannot answer and maintain its literalistic claims, and as they realize that they will not be able to turn the Internet off, the only strategy that remains is the one I have just outlined. I predict that this struggle will go on for a long time, while simultaneously progress will be made (on the back of the internet, Sunstone, Dialogue etc.) toward the dismantling of the Church's literalist stance in many areas.

Assuming we have a low need to express ourselves, and can therefore manage stage four with talking to anyone about it, what do we do once we get to stage five? How do we feed ourselves? How do we connect with other Mormons who are in stage five? The spiritual food on which we thrive is not served at church on Sunday, so where do we go to get it? And how do we find the time to behave in a healthy stage five fashion while living in a stage three LDS world?

I would be grateful to anyone who can outline for me how a person who is moving from stage three to five, and wants to live in stage five, can do so and remain an active member of the LDS church. I don't plan to go back, but if I can help some of my family members and friends avoid the stresses I have dealt with in the past while, their lives will be easier in some ways. And I am not talking about sacrificing too much of "better" for "easier". That is a Faustian bargain I am not prepared to make or recommend.

Moral Development

Many of my comments above respecting spiritual development apply to moral development as well. Until we gain a perspective that allows us to evaluate different cultures and religious belief systems on their merits, we are unlikely progress to what was described above as the adult level of moral judgement. It seems clear that the stage three spirituality on which Mormonism is based augers against that kind of perspective, and hence against the development of moral judgement.

Authority, Shame and Loss of Agency

The nexus between authoritarianism, shame and mental dysfunction is well documented. (See, for example, Scott Peck, "People of the Lie" and "The Road Less Traveled", John Bradshaw, "The Family") Ed Gardiner in his essay "Shame and the Destruction of Agency" (<http://www.post-mormons.com/shame.htm>) reviews some of this research and applies it in the LDS context. What he said could be equally applied to any authoritarian, dogmatic community.

Gardiner shows how people who are brought up in an environment dominated by dogmatic absolutes tend to be troubled in a variety of ways. Gardiner notes, for example, that:

"Unwholesome teaching," abuse, control and authoritarian domination of the spirit do, in my opinion, destroy agency, or perhaps fail miserably to allow it to develop. It must be nurtured, as so many other facets of humanity must, by loving teaching, en-**courage**-ment, and spiritual rewards. It is important that agency is explained, illustrated and modeled. Where is this being done? To be *free*, agency must imply a free choice; a choice unhindered by threats of destruction, abandonment, annihilation or misery. Such threats, which at an emotional level are felt as shaming, will condition and control responses and behavior in ways that do not bring to mind an image of a loving God. ...

Authoritarian systems, by their very nature, enforce a mistrust of the self. This, in order that they, the authoritarian system, may stay in power. The result of this self-mistrust is a divided psyche with an inner war that is fought with weapons forged by shame and steeped in self-loathing.

He goes on to indicate that people who are dominated by fear of authority, who he refers to as "shame based people", tend to have a powerful desire to live within the rules. This often causes them to split off entire sections of their personalities that may bring them into conflict with the rules, creating caricatures of what they might have been. The splitting of the self in this fashion fosters deep-seated behavioural problems of a variety of sorts, such as addiction, depression and various behaviours related to self-loathing. Gardiner quotes Jung to make the point that authoritarian pressure to live in a portion of ourselves makes it much more difficult for us to become fully human, and ironically does this by taking from us the challenge that is central to our humanness:

The cross, or whatever other heavy burden the hero carries, is *himself*, or rather *the self*, his wholeness, which is both God and animal--not merely the empirical man, but the totality of his being, which is rooted in his animal nature and reaches out beyond the merely human towards the divine. His wholeness implies a tremendous tension of opposites paradoxically at one with themselves, as in the cross, their most perfect symbol. (Carl G. Jung, *Aspects of the Masculine*, p. 23)

One might be tempted to say that following Jung's counsel would involve a "let it all hang out", "if it feels good, do it" kind of ethic. I don't think that it the case. When I hear Jung, I also hear Dr. Martin Seligman (see below) telling me that the "rotten to the core" dogma is one of the worst ideas in all human intellectual history for which there is little if any empirical support. It is this idea that I see Gardiner, with Jung's help, criticizing. We are not rotten. We are good, even when we feel impulses that could, if misused, cause trouble for us or others. And we can find harmony with all around us, even in the trying circumstances in which we often find ourselves.

When a significant portion of our selves is repressed as "bad" in clearly delineated, black and white terms, and shame experienced each time these forces are felt within us, even as thought, we create within our minds a psychic battle field, and it should not surprise us that casualties occur. Gardiner quotes Albert Ellis as follows:

Devout, orthodox, or dogmatic religion (or what might be called religiosity) is significantly correlated with emotional disturbance. People largely disturb themselves by believing strongly in absolutistic shoulds, oughts, and musts, and most people who dogmatically believe in some religion believe in these health-sabotaging absolutes. The emotionally healthy individual is flexible, open, tolerant and changing, and the devoutly religious person tends to be inflexible closed, intolerant and unchanging. Religiosity, therefore, is in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance. ("Psychotherapy and Atheistic Values: A Response to A.E. Bergin's 'Psychotherapy and Religious Values,' Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 48, (November, 1980), 637)

Gardiner concludes this point with the observations that:

When the power of "Godly" authority is behind the **en-force**-ment of these sometimes unrealistic "shoulds, oughts and musts" they are often internalized as absolutes and take up sides in the psychic war..

Gardiner then summarizes the emotional growth of children, who pattern themselves after their parents, into adolescents who seek individuation. The adolescent grapples for the first time with the forces described above. The will to grow – to individuate – impels them to differ from strict religious norms. If the world in which the adolescent lives is painted in black and white, she may needlessly come to believe that since white does not work, black it must be. My daughter Amanda has described to me her experience with substance abuse and other things in precisely this language long before I became acquainted with Gardiner's and other work in this area. And for years I resisted going to counseling with respect to Amanda because, as I had been advised by my LDS peers and leaders, non-LDS counselors were likely to blame the Church (and me, as its main enforcer in Amanda's life) for her problems.

I did not experience the effects of authority in my life in quite as dramatic fashion as Amanda did, but I tasted enough myself and saw enough in her to be able to personally certify that the principles of which Gardiner speaks are closely related to reality as I have experienced it.

From my point of view, the most powerful part of Gardiner's presentation related to the connection between security and freedom. He used Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor" chapter of *The Brother's Karamozov* to illustrate his point.

Dostoevsky refers consistently to agency as "freedom of conscience" and uses the story of the Grand Inquisitor's discussion with the Christ figure to explore the age-old conflict between freedom and security. He has the Grand Inquisitor point out the inherent conflict between security and agency when Christ was tempted to turn stones into bread. He also connects Christ's refusal to continue to give the mob bread, free of charge, as they followed him around the shores of the Sea of Galilee. What results, if we look carefully, is a clear statement of Dostoevsky's belief that to give men bread would rob them of agency. To give them security, even certainty, to take away the opportunity to struggle, to worry, to wonder, to blunder, would rob them of agency and then would rob them of awe--and life.

This is the best statement I have run across of why I felt as I did when I left the Church. The certainty of knowing what I needed to do, and feeling guilty if I did not do it and a kind of thin satisfaction when I did, had numbed me to reality and the joys that are possible in life. This is so because my agency has largely been taken from me, as well as my chance to construct a view of reality. I note that I am not naïve respecting the difficulties in finding "reality". I have read enough philosophy to wrestle with that issue and appreciate its difficulties. However, I must make important decisions as to how to live my life. Hence, I must judge as to what is real or not, recognizing that I will make many mistakes as I do so. It is this recognition of uncertainty and exercise of free will that brings life into being. While my agency was suppressed, I felt increasingly wooden as my life progressed, but could not while in the midst of that process put my finger on what was wrong, or even that anything was wrong. Had I been asked how I felt, I would have said that I was happy. Some things can only be appreciated by way of contrasting experience. I now feel like I have discovered Technicolor.

Gardiner continues:

The Grand Inquisitor speaks of the first temptation in the wilderness, to turn stones to bread, and states that if Christ were to use his power in that way and feed mankind's need for security, all would follow and "mankind will run after you like a flock of sheep, grateful and obedient . . ." Then the Grand Inquisitor states, "But you did not want to deprive man of freedom, and rejected the offer, for, you thought, what sort of freedom is it if obedience is bought with loaves of bread?" Here is the nexus of his discourse to me. To be free, man must be free from not only the control of walls, bars, strong-arms and weapons, but must be free also, from the control that comes from the allure of security. What then of its opposite, the threat of annihilation? Is obedience bought with bread/security any less savory than obedience bought with threats (the total withdrawal of security). If there is no agency in the face of the promise of security, is there any more agency in the face of the threat of eternal pain. Hence, faith. Faith must be the only mover, a faith that is forever tenuous and defies certainty. As soon as certainty enters, security is founded and the need to continue that security can be used to control, coerce and confine. ...

Once again Gardiner has precisely articulated my experience with Mormonism. He continues:

In the face of shame there is no way to believe in a *loving* God. Destruction is imminent, always. Unconditional love does not exist. The pain is intense and escaping/avoiding that pain is the dominant force in life. This is why, with shame-based people, I see the formation of a reactive identity that protects and destroys ability to live and grow in a way that honors choice and freedom. There is only one choice; doing whatever keeps me safe from shame-pain. This may include ceasing to be an autonomous human being or succumbing to the forces aligned to convince one that their very person has been found so wanting that further effort is a waste. ...

As I struggled with my daughter Amanda's teenage difficulties, I was confronted with the painful reality that my love for her was conditional. The cognitive dissonance produced by that realization may be what kicked open the door to my spiritual metamorphosis. I realized that my actions and feelings toward her could not loving as long as she refused to conform. In fact, I felt a deep loathing toward her that I struggled to convert into love. That is not to say that I loathed her, or did not love her. I loved her intensely, and this made the fear that I was going to lose her for eternity too difficult to bare. This is what makes family and love related conflict so intense

and difficult – the combatants are held together by love, and forced to deal with the issues (like the loathing I felt for Amanda's life style decisions) that drive them apart.

I studied the concept of love, and initially concluded that there was no such thing as completely unconditional love. It seemed to me that I could love Amanda in an abstract way, but her behavior (which I abhorred) was driving a wedge between us that would prevent our eternal lives from running together, and this also prevented me from feeling unconditional love for her. I feared this, and that fear drove most of my behaviour respecting her. I felt justified in concluding, based on my understanding of LDS theology, that she was exercising her free will and choosing to leave us, thus *preventing me* from loving her and forcing me to endure the emotional pain that preparing for a permanent separation is well-known to create. I felt that I had to deaden my feelings toward her in order to protect myself from an emotional burden I could not bare – that carried when we love someone from whom we will be irrevocably separated. And it was clear to me that this was Amanda's fault. I went through all sorts of other mental gymnastics of a similar sort, all of which left me feeling exhausted, unhappy and somehow soiled.

Only when I reached the point of being able to confidently reject LDS theology and the system of black and white it espouses did I shed the fear and guilt that Amanda's behaviour caused me to feel, and experience what it is like to unconditionally love her. I did not see this coming. These burdens fell from me as does a snake's old skin. It was one of life's remarkable experiences. And the knowledge I gained from it bails me out regularly. Recently, for example, Amanda did something relative to her 14-month-old son of which I did not approve, and respecting which my feelings are strong. They live with us at the moment. We discussed this briefly, without any emotion, and I let it go. It is her choice. She has both freedom and responsibility in this matter. I love her (and her sweet little boy) unconditionally regardless of how she chooses to proceed. I cannot describe how much better this feels than the telephone booth in which I had unknowingly been confined.

We are back, once again, to basic Buddhism. I did not understand how deeply my feelings and actions were shaped by deep fears and desires. I loved Amanda, but the feelings and actions that love should have motivated were overcome by much stronger feelings related to fear. I loathed her lifestyle because of the fear it created in me that our eternal relationship would be dissolved. This caused me to act improperly in attempting to control her behaviour.

And I have finally understood, while writing this, the reason for the difference between the parenting counsel I was able to dispense while I served as Bishop (I was sought out for my counselling skills and good judgement by Ward members) and my highly dysfunctional behaviour as a parent. As long as my judgement was not clouded by fear, I was capable of understanding the issues and explaining them to others. I did not fear intensely enough what might happen to their kids to have my judgement overcome. However, once one of my kids was in the same position, fear dominated me. Dr. Martin Seligman indicates that the subtle aspects of our personalities that relate to joy are blocked when the more primal, survival related mechanisms related to fear are engaged. The same, of course, would hold true respecting balanced, sound reasoning. Once the adrenalin system is operating at a high level, reasoning skills are impaired, as were mine respecting Amanda. I could not follow the sound advice I had so often shared with others.

Gardiner continues:

As a professional teacher for the LDS Church, I saw for years the parade of those who did good because, faced with the power of shame, there was no other choice. In this I saw no virtue, only self-protection and numbness of mind. ...

As a young man, I marvelled at the stories of Mormon authority Paul H. Dunn. I had a personal interview with him. I wanted to be like him. The only problem was that the image he presented to me, an impressionable youth, was fake. It did not contain the full elements of humanity, only a sanitized, glorified and truly fictitious image of a superman. Living up to that image would require a denial or splitting off of much of our humanity.

I note that B.H. Roberts was critical of the Book of Mormon for precisely this reason: Characters such as Nephi, Moroni and many others were not human or believable. They were supermen of the Paul Dunn type. And the bad guys were equally thin. It was a black and white world. The Bible, he noted, did not suffer from the same problem. I postulate that Dunn's storytelling proclivity may have its origins in this deeply engrain aspect of Mormon culture.

Gardiner continues:

Nowhere in LDS culture are the experiences of being a *growing* human being given a balanced representation. ... I was told, as a Seminary teacher, to never discuss any mistakes that I had made lest the students believe that it would be "okay" to make similar mistakes. This practice, compounded by the numbers who do it and the moral force it is given, portrays a view of humanity that is entirely false and inherently shaming, especially if there is an attempt by a person to actually reach the ideal image presented.

Research on shame has led to several theories of how it begins. One of these is that a child establishes an ideal image of the self that is impossible to reach. The person then attempts to reach it and is inevitably frustrated and shamed. This then leads to the need to split off those parts that do not fit the ideal image. My experience is that human beings are a multiplicity of thoughts and feelings and that much of what I need and value comes from my shadow self. Denial of that part of me is destructive. We must allow our children to sense the fullness of their humanity. We need to teach them that mistakes are inevitable, that they are meaningful and nothing over which shame must be felt.

Again, I am grateful to Gardiner for articulating beautifully what I experienced while "growing up Mormon", and for suggesting the simple antidote: Let us all feel our humanity, embrace it, and find harmony through it with the rest of reality as we understand it. Back to Gardiner:

Finally, there is the simplicity of dealing with others from a position of compassion. When my kindness, my forbearance and my "service" is rendered because I have been made, or made myself, responsible for someone (even my older children) then I have added a vulnerability to my actions. I will not be able to allow them to be them because my "goodness," my "righteousness" has become entangled with their behavior. The next step is often taken, that of beginning to control the other because my being "okay" is now involved with their behavior. I will begin to feel insecure in how I am "doing my duty" and shaming control is an easy and effective way to take control. It would not be so if shame were not so painful.

Again, Gardiner has hit the nail on the head in terms of my primary problem as a parent. Life is so much simpler now, ironically, in the world of gray into which I moved from Mormonism's black

and white. Living in black and white is much harder, as it turns out, than acknowledging life's inherent uncertainties, and allowing them to animate us.

Gardiner continues:

That pain and the threat of it continuing will strip one of agency or not allow it to develop in a healthy way. How often do we accept "callings," duties, responsibilities because we are trying to be "good?" What would happen if we were allowed to accept, deny, delay or otherwise manage our "service" with nothing more in mind than compassion? What is stopping us from doing so? A full look at these questions often reveals, when one is honest with self, how much it does happen that we heap unto ourselves responsibilities because we are still trying to "be worthy," be responsible, and "be good enough." How different the attitude and how much greater the degree of heart-felt compassion if we all acted out of benevolence rather than responsibility.

I would go one step further into the Buddhist space beyond both fear and desire. Perhaps this is what Gardiner is saying in any event. Perhaps this is the "pure love of Christ".

Back to Gardiner for the three paragraphs with which he concludes his essay:

These things, although simple, require a profound shift. Trust in self and the motivations of our individual and collective humanity must be fostered, rather than destroyed in the interest of maintaining control. Aberrations of behavior must be treated in different ways, ways that allow for growth and feeling guilt, not shame. Those in positions of authority must handle their own insecurity, worry and fear in new ways, ways that will allow us all to recognize that certainty can only be bought with control and denial of certain realities. Keen, when discussing the need to develop spiritual wholeness wrote,

Avoid anyone who demands obedience. Obedience is a virtue for children and a civic obligation, but not a good way to spiritual maturity. . . . Observe whether difference of opinion, challenge, criticism, and discussion are encouraged or discouraged. Can those in charge acknowledge that they don't know the answers to important questions: Does the leader ever admit that he (it is almost always a he) can be wrong and his critics right? A spiritual community should be open to whatever truth comes knocking on its door. . . . Reject immediately any leader or religion that identifies the home-land with the holy land, the folk with the people of God, the enemy with the evil empire. . . . Test how much humor and poking of fun about beliefs, slogans, and dogmas is permissible. The absence of humor is an almost certain sign of psychological rigidity, fanaticism, and impending spiritual and political tyranny. The first thing deadly serious leaders and organizations do is forbid satire, repress the clown, silence the jester, and kill levity. . . . Mirth and merriment save us from taking ourselves too seriously and protect us from the idolatry of assuming that our churches, rituals, and formulas are themselves sacred rather than symbols that point beyond themselves to the unknown God.

Setting up this controlling, certain system seems to be more in line with "Satan's plan" rather than God's. If we take this serious and respond by being more aware of what our shaming practices do to the agency of others, we may find ourselves more effectively fostering spiritual growth and thus strengthen church, community and individuals.

To which I say, Amen.

Is This Profound Inflexibility a Mormon Thing or a Human Thing?

I am currently reading a book by John Spong: "A New Christianity for a New World". What I find most fascinating about John Spong and his lengthy and prolific authorial and lecturing career is that an Episcopalian Bishop (he retired at the usual age about two years ago) was permitted by his church take the heretical positions he did throughout his career. He believes, for example, that the virgin birth, resurrection and many of the rest of mainstream Christianity's bedrock of faith are metaphors invented by the growing Christian community of the first couple of centuries of the Common Era. And the Episcopalians, as I recall, were one of the dogmatic sects that inspired Smith's approach which was designed to free the people from the fixed doctrine of the "sectarians" and permit them to worship and believe as their consciences dictated. It seems that perhaps we have become them, and they us.

This is not surprising to people who study human behavior in a group setting. In "Why People Believe Weird Things" Michael Shermer devotes an entire chapter to explaining how Ayn Rand, a leading advocate of objectivism (critical, rational thinking) managed to develop what amounted to a cult around her beliefs. This is in some ways the ultimate irony – one of the world's leading proponents of objective, rational thought inadvertently creates an irrational cult. This shows how strong these irrational drivers are in us and how careful we should be respecting their influences in our lives. Here are a few of things Shermer had to say in that regard

He summarized Rand's philosophy to be that reality exists independent of human thought, and reason is the only way to find it. Every human should seek personal happiness and exist for his own sake, and no one should sacrifice himself for or be sacrificed for others. Laissez-faire capitalism is the best system to promote the first three. He indicated at p. 118 that objectivism's main problem was the belief that once a principle was discovered, it was immutable and binding, and therefore all discussion respecting it was closed. This anti-scientific principle runs in an obviously opposite direction to what I would have thought to be the principles of objectivity, and sowed the seeds of religious, dogmatic belief that eventually choked off the life force of Rand's organization. Shermer noted:

The phenomenon [of Ayn Rand's objectivism movement's descent to cult status] provides a lesson about what happens when the truth becomes more important than the search for truth, when the final results of inquiry become more important than the process of inquiry, when reason leads to so absolute a certainty about one's beliefs that anyone who is not for them is anathematized as against them, and when supposedly intellectual inadequacy becomes the basis of a personality cult. (Shermer, Why People Believe Weird Things, p. 114)

Shermer queried whether Rand's organization qualified as a personality cult based on his understanding of it. Here is how he defined a cult for that purpose:

But when we leave the "religious" component out of the definition of cult, thus broadening the word's usage, it becomes clear that Objectivism was (and is) a type of cult – a cult of personality – as are many other, non-religious groups. A cult is characterized by:

Veneration of the leader: Glorification of the leader to the point of virtual sainthood or divinity.

Inerrancy of the leader: Belief that the leader cannot do wrong.

Omniscience of the leader: Acceptance of the leader's beliefs and pronouncements on all subjects, from the philosophical to the trivial.

Persuasive techniques: Methods, from benign to coercive, used to recruit new followers and reinforce current beliefs.

Hidden agendas: The true nature of the group's beliefs and plans is obscured from or not fully disclosed to potential recruits and the general public.

Deceit: Recruits and followers are not told everything they should know about the leader and the group's inner circle, and particularly disconcerting flaws or potentially embarrassing events or circumstances are covered up.

Financial and/or sexual exploitation: Recruit and followers are persuaded to invest money and other assets in the group, and the leader may develop sexual relations with one or more of the followers.

Absolute truth: Belief that the leader and/or the group have discovered final knowledge on any number of subjects.

Absolute morality: Belief that the leader and/or the group has developed a system of right and wrong thought and action applicable to members and non-members alike. Those who strictly follow the moral code become and remain members; those we do not are dismissed or punished. (Shermer, *Why People Believe Weird Things*, p. 119)

By this definition, there is no question but that the LDS church was a cult during the days of Joseph Smith, and for a long time thereafter. It likely still meets enough aspects of the definition to so qualify.

Shermer concludes his discussion of Rand's Objectivist movement with the following observation:

What separates science from all other human activities (and morality has never been successfully placed on a scientific basis) is its commitment to the tentative nature of all its conclusions. There are no final answers in science, only varying degrees of probability. Science is not the affirmation of a set of beliefs, but a process of inquiry aimed at building testable body knowledge constantly open to rejection or confirmation. In science, knowledge is fluid and certainty fleeting. That is at the heart of its limitation. It is also its greatest strength. (p. 124)

I have adopted this approach, to the extent possible, respecting spiritual matters. It should not surprise us that a religious organization like the LDS church can become as rigid as it has if Rand's organization, with its clearly stated rationalist objectives and underpinning, could go the route it did.

Conclusions - How Did We Get Here, and Why Did We Stay So Long?

Our brains are hardwired to react to the very kind of anxiety that the LDS culture produces by causing powerful, deeply personal, spiritual experiences. We have been conditioned within a

self-confirming deductive reasoning system to interpret these experiences to mean that our LDS religion is God's one true way. We then recognize that we are subject to the confirmation bias and that our memories are designed to amplify that bias. The LDS culture then screens as much as possible of the information from the world around us that might contradict our LDS worldview and creates many positive and negative reinforcements to support this system.

I conclude that I am lucky to have been able to find a way out. The odds are stacked heavily against anyone who has been successfully conditioned in that regard.

It is my belief that Joseph Smith started Mormonism as a result of a series of highly charged spiritual experiences of the type described above. These were real experiences, and he reacted to them by providing many important ideas that were well ahead of his time. As noted above, his theology accommodated much of the science of his day and hence "made sense". However, Mormonism remained dogmatic at its base. Hence, as science began to falsify certain of Smith's dogmatic claims, the LDS church went on the defensive and became just another fundamentalist organization doing whatever it needed to do in order to defend its faith claims. The interests of individual members are sacrificed to the extent necessary to preserve the "system" as a whole. This is done by and large by well meaning people who do not have an understanding of the whole picture, and because of the very factors indicated above, are likely not capable of ever grasping that picture.

How Do We Get From Where We Are To Where We Want To Be?

Overview

As noted above, the LDS tradition is primarily individualistic, worships a personal god, perceives history to be linear and progressive, and is life-denying, conflict oriented, dogmatic and inflexible. I want to have a personal mythology that is individualistic and progress oriented, worships an impersonal god, is life-affirming, harmony oriented, is not dogmatic and is flexible. Hence, it appears that I would like to change most of my religious paradigm. As I dig into this task, however, I believe that I will find much of the material that I need to make that change within my own tradition.

It is important to note that a mythology is merely packaging in which we choose to wrap our values. Whether we address the question of forming those values consciously or not, form them we have and will. Sometimes our subconscious, which understands those values better than we do, will communicate those values to our conscious mind in the form of dreams or symbols. This may particularly be the case if the values by which we really live are inconsistent with the values by which we pretend to live.

To the extent possible, I am trying to consciously choose the values by which I will live. I will leave it to my subconscious to bring my self-deception to the surface.

As noted a number of times already, my primary paradigm is the scientific method. That is, I intend to allow the falsification process of science to improve the spiritual part of my life as well as the other parts. However, dogma of all kinds surrounds us. It is not as easy to avoid as we like to think. My primary defense against dogma is to ask myself whether thinking, doing etc. in any particular manner will make me more or less aware of reality. To put it another way, some ways of thinking encourage us not to think, numb us, hide reality from us, etc., while others open us to new experience, new ways of seeing things, make us more sensitive and aware etc. Dogmas and organizations that operate on dogmatic principles are numbing, reality hiding

organizations. They are often also quite comfortable places to spend one's life. I must admit that it is often not too difficult to persuade me not to think. Thinking is hard work, and it often causes me to face unpleasant realities about myself. It is accordingly not surprising that dogmas and thoughtless following characterize human behaviour.

Only after having exhausted the best research available with respect to cause and effect will I default to speculation and intuition, and then I will be especially careful to keep my eyes and ears open for new "light and knowledge" as it comes into existence.

Having said that, I must admit that much of what follows is still in the realm of speculation and intuition. The social sciences, with some help from those who study brain architecture, are the sources of cause and effect information I need to improve my understanding of how my spiritual life works. The information I have reviewed in this area has convinced me that knowledge is increasing with respect to how and why we do things. However, there is lots of speculation masquerading as science, and my study of this area is in its infancy. However, I feel that I now know much more than I did in this regard six months ago, and know enough that I can tentatively create my decision making framework, with full knowledge that it will be significantly reworked within a short time, and that some re-working can be expected throughout my life.

Personal Mythology

Campbell has a number of interesting things to say respecting this process of changing from where we are religiously to where we want to be. He calls it the development of a personal mythology.

This would perhaps be an appropriate place to remind ourselves what mythology is. Joseph Campbell, the great comparative mythologist, said that mythology is other people's religious beliefs. He defined mythology's primary function to be answering our existential questions in a way that makes sense in light of our perception of reality. The existential questions relate to issues like: where did we come from?, why do we suffer?, and what happens after death? He says that to work well, mythology does not have to be true – it has to be "comfortable", meaning that it must provide plausible answers within its place and time. Mythologies are full of dogmas – ideas that are difficult or impossible to disprove – such as that Christ was born of a virgin. Enlightening metaphoric truth often lies hidden beneath dogmatic literalism.

As I develop my own mythology, Campbell suggests that I start with the symbols that were placed deep inside me during my youth, and deconstruct them. That is, get down far enough into them that I start to find their universal applications. This involves understanding their function and how they have worked in my life both to draw me into society, and to connect me to the mostly dimly perceived transcendent reality.

It makes sense to me to go back to the symbols of our youth and use them as much as possible, given what I know about how we learn at different stages of our lives. In linguistic studies (I was a Russian language major at the U of A and took a little linguistic theory there) we are taught that the extent of language mastery a person can expect is largely determined by when she starts to learn the language. The scholars in this field have shown that certain nuances of both pronunciation and understanding cannot be achieved unless a person starts and makes a certain amount of progress on the language by a certain age. As I recall, there are three big age thresholds in the study I read in this regard. The cement gradually hardens in different language development areas, and once it is hard there is only so much we can do with

it. It seems likely to me that something similar occurs with spiritual matters, and that we can likely do the most with the symbols internalized in our youth.

Campbell also suggests that myth and symbol are designed to engage our imaginations at the conscious and subconscious levels. He tells a story about Carl Jung. Jung discovered mythology at mid-career and found compelling parallels between his work on dreams and what he was learning about mythology. For Jung, there were two types of dreams – the first being the private or "small" dreams in which the psyche wrestles with a personal issue, usually related to the collision between ego and a cultural taboo of some sort, or personal conflict; and the second being universal dreams in which the psyche wrestles with the great existential questions. What Jung found in myth was the same material as he had identified in the universal dream world.

After Jung made this discovery, he posed the question to himself: "Which myth do I live by?" and found that he did not have a personal myth. He had rejected religion as mythologically useful at that point in his life, and had not replaced it with anything. He then went through a fascinating process that involved going back to the things that excited him – those that he most enjoyed doing as a boy – and doing them again. As a boy the thing he most enjoyed was building small castles, walls etc. out of stone. So he bought a plot of land near Zurich and began to make a full sized house out of stone with his own hands. As he did this, he paid close attention to his thoughts, feelings and dreams (both daydreams and sleeping dreams). When a promising idea occurred to him, he would follow it through meditation and contemplation. This led him deeper and deeper into his own psyche, and through this he developed a personal system of symbolism that performed in his life the function of a mythology. He also discovered the important symbolism of mandalas (geometric forms) that has played a role in many ancient societies, and have come to be important in many new age philosophies. Mandalas, of which he knew nothing at the time, began to spontaneously appear in his dreams and meditations while he was building his house. He then went looking for them in myth, and found what for him turned into a treasure trove.

This highlights another point Campbell makes. He says that there is nothing better than the study of comparative mythology to help us see the potential of our own myth and symbols. I would say that in addition to seeing the potential of our own set of symbols, this type of study performs several other critical functions. First, it allows us to find complementary symbols. Second, it may persuade us that some of the myths or symbols we were handed by our tradition are dysfunctional, and should be abandoned. Third, the study of comparative mythology (particularly the mystical variety) shows how in many societies the "cognoscenti" existed in a sea of folk who not only did not know, but opposed (often violently) those who did. That understanding helps me to cope.

The steps I think I should take as I construct my personal mythology are as follows:

1. I must determine the purpose of my life. Is it to become a god? Reproduce as much as possible? Do as much good as possible? Acquire the maximum amount of power or number of possessions? Gain as much recognition as possible?
2. I should determine whether there are any environmental factors that are required in order for me to achieve that objective.
3. I should define the process I will use to guide myself as I pursue that objective.

4. I should try to identify the principles of daily living that the application of that process has indicated to me so far that I should follow.
5. I should determine whether I need any additional beliefs to make my system work. That is, I may find that I need to believe things that go beyond what is required to live each day – things that relate directly to the existential questions. The central issue to be examined in this regard is the role of uncertainty in my personal mythology.

As I go through these questions, I will use as many of the symbols from my tradition as I can, and only when my tradition does not supply an essential ingredient will I go outside of it. However, I will make use of the symbols and myths of other traditions whenever I can to attempt to see as many possibilities in my tradition's symbols as possible.

After I have worked through those issues, I will give my personal mythology a test by examining a number of life decisions I have made and determining whether this new mythology, when applied to them, seems likely to produce satisfactory results. And finally, I will ask myself the great existential questions and see how my mythology handles those.

The Purpose of Life

Joy

In my view, life's purpose is to experience joy. Joseph Smith wrote:

Man is that he might have joy. " (2 Ne. 2:25)

And, it is important to distinguish joy from pleasure. As Neal Maxwell pointed out:

Pleasure usually takes the form of "me" and "now", while joy is "us" and "always."

Joy is long lasting, and often is derived from relationships with family and other community members. Those who seek joy itself seldom find it. Those who give themselves, their time, their energy to other people or good causes usually experience joy as a result. And the continued development of our talents, strengths and virtues put us in a position to experience greater joy.

Pleasure is the spiritual equivalent of cotton candy. It is not bad, but we should not rely upon it for long-term sustenance. Those who do are at best never satisfied, and if they pursue this course for long enough may develop serious spiritual or mental imbalances as a result of a consistent lack of required nutrients.

Joy is derivative, not primary. That is, joy is the by-product of a life well lived. It finds us as we work, develop our talents, help others, set and achieve goals, suffer failure and defeat while doing our best or less than our best, become more aware of ourselves and the world around us, just be, and in myriad other ways.

I wrote the above words years ago, believing them to be true. Unfortunately, as what I have written above indicates, many of my most cherished beliefs have recently turned to ashes in my hands. However, this one has not. I have started to apply the scientific method to it and so far it is holding up well.

Dr. Martin Seligman's insightful book "Authentic Happiness" summarizes the current state of psychological research respecting joy. One of the findings he outlines is that the good feelings that result from doing something fun (like eating something we want, seeing a good movie etc.) fade much more quickly than the good feelings that come from doing something philanthropic, and particularly when our action in that regard causes us to use some of our signature strengths or virtues. His central ideas are that joy comes from developing and using, in ways that seem good to us, our strengths and virtues, that we each have a different range of joy that we are capable of experiencing, and that we each should try to live in the upper end of our range.

Seligman makes several other important observations respecting joy. He distinguishes between pleasure and joy in similar terms to those I use above. However, he points out a number of other interesting features of what I have called joy. One of those relates to what he calls gratification and "flow". He distinguishes gratification from pleasure by showing how differently people react to things that are pleasurable in the immediate cotton candy sense, and those that are absorbing. Examples of pleasure producing activities include eating food we like, watching TV, having a back rub, and sexual stimulation. Examples of gratification producing activities include reading a good book, engaging in a hobby or sport we love, and losing ourselves in a project at school or work. The trait that characterizes gratifying activities is that we lose our sense of time to an extent while engaged in them. While in that timeless state, we are said to be in the "flow".

When people are asked to describe how they feel while engaged in a pleasurable activity, they find the required words easily - it tastes great; it felt wonderful; etc. However, when asked to describe how they felt during a flow state, they struggle. They can't seem to find the words to describe this state, and when they do, the words used are not the same as those apt for a pleasurable state.

It has been established that the sense of well being, happiness or joy that results from having engaged in a pleasurable activity lasts a relatively short period of time, and often leaves a yearning for more of what we just had. This is why scratching an itch causes another itch, and one bite of ice cream demands another. Ironically, at the cellular level we are wired so that we demand more and more of a stimulant to maintain the same sense of pleasure. If we feed that demand, our system quickly maxes out and we find no more pleasure in what initially felt so good. However, if we wait for a few moments until the "need" for that next bit of ice cream has faded away and then indulge, the experience of pleasure returns to something near its peak. This is the physiology of addiction. Addicts can't wait for the urge to depart, and end up feeding it until it controls them.

The sense of well being that comes with gratification producing activities is much longer lasting than that which comes from pleasure, and different in kind as the choice of language used to describe the two states would indicate. The research indicates that people who spend large amounts of time in flow related activities are happier, better adjusted and have more capacity to weather adversity and turn their dreams into reality than other people do. Teenagers who engage in lots of flow activities have less trouble with depression, drug abuse, pregnancy etc. than their peers who do not so engage. Interestingly, most high flow teens are of the view that they are missing the real fun stuff by not being able to hang out at the mall with the "cool" kids, watch TV etc. because their flow producing activities take so much time.

Seligman notes that our modern society is more affluent, has more spare time and is better off in virtually all material ways than our predecessors, and yet we are suffering an epidemic of depression and other mental illnesses. He notes that the Old Order Amish and other similar

societal subgroups do not so suffer, and neither do people in many third world countries. And certain underprivileged groups in North America seem to be less affected. Does wealth cause depression? He thinks not. To set up his description of a theory as to what has caused this negative societal mood swing, he tells a story about a colleague who bought an Amazonian lizard of some kind as a pet. The lizard was large enough that it wandered around this fellow's house. Everything was going fine, except he could not get the lizard to eat. He tried everything without success. Finally, the situation was getting desperate. The lizard was obviously in distress, and would still not eat. One day, Seligman's colleague placed a piece of ham sandwich down in front of the lizard and watched hopefully. Nothing. After a few minutes of watching, he returned to his newspaper. After reading the first section, he absentmindedly dropped it onto the floor, where it landed on the sandwich. The lizard immediately perked up. The colleague watched intently as the lizard got up, and slowly circled the newspaper. Then it paused, crouched and pounced on the paper, preceded to tear it up and ravenously eat the sandwich.

As it turned out, the lizard had evolved to only eat after stalking, pouncing and tearing. His hunger could not motivate him to eat without those preliminary steps. Hence, if his environment provided food without the chance to stalk, pounce and tear before eating, he could not eat.

Seligman indicated that while humans are much more complex than Amazonian lizards, we too have brains that have evolved for hundreds of millions of years. In our case, evolution has prepared us to perform tasks that require high levels of concentration, and hence produce gratification and the flow experience. These are the activities that have traditionally kept man alive and progressing. However, we are now so affluent that such tasks are no longer a requirement, and many people have come to regard them as boring or too difficult. Hence, television watching, hanging out and other pleasurable activities have taken their place. We have become an impatient society. We desire immediate gratification. In Seligman's terms, that is an oxymoron. We can have immediately pleasure and in fact that is offered to us constantly. However, we must earn gratification.

As I intuited and Seligman and others have confirmed, too much pleasure cankers the soul. Pleasure is the desert or spice of life. Flow is what builds ability, power and the base upon which joy is built.

And now we move into mythology. Seligman posits that pleasure-inducing activities satisfy physical needs or wants, while gratification producing activities satisfy deep-seated psychological needs and wants. As we satisfy our psychological needs in this regard, we somehow create a store of energy and strength that can be used for many things. In a sense, then, the more time we spend in flow related activities the greater the reserves we create for ourselves. This would explain the research findings that high flow persons are happier, better able to cope with adversity, and more likely to succeed at what they choose to do.

One might be critical of thinking that the pursuit of joy is the purpose of life. It seems a bit shallow, and it smacks of hedonism. However, it is my view that joy, as I define it, cuts a broad enough swath through life to deflect these criticisms. And more importantly, it is grounded in the internal, subjective reality where we all must live. I am again reminded of the words of the shaman Juan, as quoted by Carlos Castaneda in "The Teachings of Don Juan". "All paths lead nowhere", said Juan. So choose a path that we walk with joy from start to finish.

While I am not prepared to say that life's path leads nowhere, I must confess that I do not know where it leads and I am not prepared to believe anyone who armed with nothing more than

metaphysics and the usual attendant speculation indicates to me that they "know" where the path they have chosen will take them. The ideas from books like "Why God Won't Go Away" and "Why People Believe Weird Things", as summarized above, provide me with an adequate explanation of where certainty of this kind comes from, and I will not be deceived by such certainty again.

In light of my admitted uncertainty with regard to my destination, I find Juan's advice compelling – focus on the nature of the journey. Hence, I am content to find my purpose in the creation of joy for others and myself. The greater my understanding of joy and its sources, the broader my perspective, the more good I will do for myself and others, the more meaning my life will have and the more joy I will experience.

Values

As will become apparent as this discussion progresses, what we value determines our perception of good and bad, and also what brings us joy. I have become much more sensitive to the foundational role that my values play in life. Those values are largely what I have inherited from my Mormon heritage – family and other relationships, intimacy, honesty, self-development, the creation of utility, etc.

I am just starting to drill down into those values to understand what is important about them, and how I can make better choices respecting my values and hence the role they play in my life. One of the important lessons I have learned as a result of my spiritual metamorphosis is that I must choose my values, define priorities among them, allocate resources to them, and on that basis I will construct the world around me. It will be a combination of what I construct and what I have to work. However, my input is much more important to this process than I had previously realized.

For example, my belief in Mormon theology caused me to value following authority across a wide variety of issues, and a great deal of effort was directed toward my own obedience to that authority and causing those within my influence to also obey. I now value learning, measuring utility and choice on that basis much more than I did, and am suspicious of any authority that is not well supported in those terms. This shift in values has caused me to use my time in vastly different ways than I did before.

This example raises an interesting point. My life now feels completely different that it did before, and yet my values have not changed much. What has changed is the relative priority between my values. I again come back to the idea that religious authority played far to great a role in my life. It overrode values related to intimacy, relationships, learning and other things. Now that the authority roadblock has been removed, it will take some thought and work to establish more healthy priorities among my other values, and to consider whether new values should be added to the list.

When I say that my purpose is to experience as much joy as possible, that directs me to the task of choosing the values and doing the things connected to them that will create the joy I wish to experience. This is the ultimate, and most important, exercise of free will.

I will not doubt write more about this aspect of the spiritual development process as time passes. But for the moment, this will have to suffice.

How Do We Experience Joy – A Buddhist Case Study

How do we experience joy? The Buddhists have an interesting perspective respecting this question. And I note that Seligman indicates that many of the theories he and others who study in his field have tested and found worthwhile come from Buddhist theology. That is, in his view science is in the process of confirming that we are likely to be happier if we incorporate much of the Buddha's wisdom into our lives. We juxtapose this against similar tests performed with regard to various aspects of the guilt and conflict oriented Christian culture, which find that living life in that fashion augers against happiness.

In any event, during the Tang dynasty a famous poet who was also an important governor went to visit a Buddhist monk renowned for his wisdom, intending to discuss matters of deep religious import. Upon being ushered into the monk's presence, the governor asked what he thought to be the most important teaching of Buddhism. The monk replied that:

It is the teaching of all enlightened ones to cease doing anything evil, to promote goodness, and to purify one's own heart.

The governor was disappointed to have received such pedestrian advice and complained that, "This is what any child of three summers is familiar with. I desire on the other hand what is most abstruse, most essential, most vital in Buddhism. To this the monk replied:

Every child of three summers may know what I said now, but even a silvery-haired man of eighty winters finds it difficult to put the Buddhist instruction into the practise of everyday life. (Zen for Americans, Soyen Shaku, p. 87, 88)

The governor is said to have bowed reverentially and to have gone home wiser.

Both Buddhists and Mormons pride themselves on the practical nature of their religion. The Zen master Soyen Shaku said that while speculation and endless talking of abstraction has its place in Buddhism and is attractive to some:

We, plain ordinary Buddhists, will keep on removing selfishness, seeking the light that is everywhere, practising loving kindness that does not contradict or discriminate. Says an ancient sage, "The Way is near, and thou seekest it afar." Why, then, shall we ever attempt to walk away from the path which extends right in front of us, so wide and well paved?

I summarize the monk's advice, which is the heart of Buddhism, below. I think it is most instructive as to both what joy is, and how we can find it. I also believe, as noted below, that the poet who received this advice should not have been disappointed by its depth. While a child of three summers might be able to repeat the words, few if any silvery-haired men of eighty winters could explain what those words mean.

1. Avoid evil. I would define evil as that which causes a loss of utility without a more than commensurate utility gain to others or us. I discuss the nature of good and evil below. We are swimming across the surface of deep waters here.
2. Promote good. I would define what is good as that which creates utility. Sometimes this may require that we suffer or endure certain things, remembering that utility and joy are long-term concepts.

3. Purify one's heart. I suggest that this amounts to becoming more aware, more honest, and more able to affirm reality. That is, we should try to better understand joy, good and evil. This increases our capacity for joy. A Christian might call this repentance, which is in my experience a shallower concept than what I now have in mind. The problem with repentance, in particular, is that it is a tool for aligning behaviour with a set of standards that originate in dogma and that hence are not necessarily connected to the best knowledge available to us of cause and effect relationships, and do not take into account the tremendous range of individuality that exists within our society, not to mention other societies.
4. Do not get lost in abstractions and miss the sweetest and most important parts of life. The road is near and easy to see, not far away and hard to find. That is, do not let the task of step three overshadow the goodness in daily living called for steps one and two. This is important advice for me. As Matt Berry puts it in more modern terms:

Thus, as with voodoo, failing to get the point becomes the point. To be realists, so we assert, we must forever deliver point of attention elsewhere. The morning newspaper supersedes all prayer – for the danger has been assigned to the other side of the world. And how rudely a little distraction – pass the butter please – interrupts our devotions, as if the reality had been interrupted and not presented ... for we have more important things to consider than a slab of fat since so-and-so just died of a heart attack, and on page two no less.

The aborigine has a bone in his nose; I believe I am no longer subject to primitive forces. The aborigine practise false mechanics; I am a realist who holds with great confidence that there is no ghost in the machine... and yet will not examine my own thought-mechanics for so little as a minute a day. In fact, the farther away I look the more I believe I know myself. I would sooner study an automobile engine than my own mechanisms. (Post-Atheism, p. 15)

The KISS principle (keep it simple stupid) has served me well. How much more simple can it get than this – seek joy by avoiding evil, doing good and as time passes try to better understand joy, good and evil? This is a streamlined philosophy, suited to the weakest as well as the most capable among us. From my point of view, such simplicity is a necessary attribute of a sound approach to life.

How Do We Know What is Real?: Relativism, Dogmatism and Critical Preference

In deciding what is good or bad, right or wrong, we first have to decide how much we can feel confident that we know. Again, we sit on the edge of an abyss created by philosophers over the centuries, and have to be careful that we do not fall in and spend the rest of our lives arguing about things that cannot be proven. With that caveat, I venture into this slippery territory.

The nature of reality has occupied philosophers from the dawn of recorded history. For present purposes, I need to sketch only the last few chapters. There has been for some time a debate between two schools of philosophical thought with respect to what we can know. The founder of one school is Ludwig Wittgenstein while Karl Popper is the founder of the other.

It seems that Wittgenstein posits a state in which we can only be sure of our own consciousness, and perhaps not even that. His approach is referred to sometimes as "relativism". Difficulties in language, perception etc. shield all other reality from our view, and when we think we are describing it, we are really only describing an illusion that presents itself to us. Hence, we have little ability to be critical of anything, except when someone tries to prove that they have an understanding of reality. One point of view is as good as another. And the whole thing is shrouded in a kind of impossible to understand mysticism that resonates in religious terms. I now understand why I have heard BYU types at Sunstone refer to Wittgenstein as one of their heroes.

Relativists are often former dogmatists who realise that proof positive cannot be achieved. From this correct idea they leap to the unwarranted and highly impractical conclusion that all theories and conceptions of reality are of equal value, and hence that there is no such thing as the truth or a rational position.

I note as an aside that the controversial contemporary philosopher Jacques Derrida agrees with Wittgenstein et al., and for that and other reasons dismisses philosophy as just another literary genre. People have been at this for years, and they have succeeded in showing that it is impossible to be sure about anything. While that is a useful contribution, it has been made and we should stop wasting time on more over-serious debate.

On the other hand, Karl Popper and certain more scientifically oriented philosophers take quite a different approach, that to my dull mind seems much more appealing. After all, we are alive. We make decisions each day on the basis of our perceptions. We can collect evidence that suggests that many people perceive similar things in similar ways, and that this decision making follows patterns, or rules. Other rules seem evident (but not certain) in the physical world (or its illusion) around us. And science has a long track record of, in our illusory world, predicting with success what will happen. Using physical theory, for example, they have shot rockets that appear to have landed on the moon, and we have some things that look like moon rocks that were brought back. Ideas like choosing the theories by which I live on the basis of their predictive and explanatory power makes sense to me, and Popper et al. base their philosophy on that, while acknowledging that we can't be 100% sure about anything. Popper's approach is called by some "critical preference", since it amounts to subjecting all theories to the scientific method and running them through other filters, and choosing those that seem more reliable, whose explanatory and predictive power is greatest, etc.

Critical preference posits that we can be certain of nothing, and in this it agrees with the relativists. However, having induced a healthy humility, it goes on to provide guidance as to how we should deal with our uncertain world, and so posits that some theories or positions will likely turn out to be better than others in the light of how well they stand up to certain critical discussion and tests.

The third approach, dogmatism (called "fideism" in the scholarly literature), is what religions and many other social institutions use. Dogmatists are people who believe that knowledge is based on an act of faith, usually in an authority figure of some sort. This enables them to cut off what philosophers call the "infinite regress". That is, in order for a belief to be certainly correct, each of its premises must also be correct. Using logical analysis, it is always possible to continue to ask for justification of premises until circularity is established. That is, it is logically impossible to prove anything as a certainty, except perhaps that we are conscious, and even that is debated. Dogmatists, while they do not recognize that this is why they do what they do, avoid this problem by appealing to authority of some kind. In religion, the ultimate authority is god or

those who are believed to have authority to act on his behalf. Once they have spoken, an indisputable premise is created from which all else flows. Most forms of rationalism up to date have, at rock bottom, shared this attitude with the irrationalists and other fundamentalists because they share the same 'true belief' structure of thought.

So, we have one group that says we can't know anything (the relativists), another group that says they are certain of their knowledge (the dogmatists), and a third group that stands in the middle (the critical preferentialists).

An internet site summarized this area of thought as follows:

The work of Popper and his followers show how rationalists of the dogmatic variety help to maintain the 'true belief' structure of thought. In this structure our opponents can always win if they force the issue and demand that rationalists produce truly justified beliefs. The dilemma of the infinite regress (as noted above) versus dogmatism will defeat the rationalists every time they take up the challenge. The dogmatic, 'true belief' structure of thought is hence the seedbed for the weeds of irrationalism and many rationalists unwittingly nurture and sustain it.

This explains why it has been so hard for rationalists to usher in a genuine 'age of reason' by persuading people to relinquish supposedly 'irrational' authorities, especially those of religion. As long as the quest for foundations of justified belief persists as the unstated and uncriticised framework of thought, revivals and offshoots of irrationalism in various forms will constantly threaten rationality.

The point is to drain the swamp of unreason and not just dam it up or push the waters back in one place while they spread somewhere else. It may be that the decisive implement for this task of 'drainage' is the 'critical preference' mode of thought, informed by the insights of Popper and Bartley on the authoritarian tradition of Western epistemology and rationality. <http://www.the-rathouse.com/bartdogmatic.html>

I have a clear preference for the critical preference approach with respect to the foregoing. But what if Wittgenstein et al are correct and one view is as good as another, with everything shrouded in mystery? I would then ask why we submit to the authority of any religious leader, why are such leaders justified in using every trick in the book to get us to do that, and are our missionaries justified while out there pushing a particular point of view, based on arguably misleading evidence?

About 10 months ago I reached the stunning (for me) conclusion that the answers my religious leaders had given me, and which I had been certain were correct, were probably false. To use Popper's term, I had falsified them to my satisfaction based on evidence I had collected. And that aside, other theories had much greater explanatory power. When I let go of my former certainty, I experienced a spiritual and intellectual rebirth. It was the most wonderful thing I have ever experienced. It seems to me that Wittgenstein et al. point us to that uncertainty, and the fact that we must choose our values, and walk by faith, and so construct the world in which we wish to live. However, having told us what we can't do, it seems to me that they are woefully short in suggesting how we deal with the uncertainty in which we find ourselves. Popper et al, however, go down that path.

If we adopt Popper's view respecting the degree to which we can know things and how we should conduct ourselves in this regard, we will have is a new epistemology that allows us to

use the scientific method as proposed by Popper and others to best advantage. This is precisely what Campbell said we needed – a mythology or worldview that makes sense in light of the world as we now know it.

Good and Evil

The ideas of good and evil are critical to my definition of joy. Hence, to understand joy and become more adept at finding it, I need to understand them as well as I can. I recognize that exercises of this type can result in spinning out of control in a metaphysical word far away from the realities of daily life, and so I approach this exercise with some caution.

I was referring to the waters in which the ideas of good and evil are located when I indicated that the poet missed a chance to discuss abstraction if that is what he wanted. Few ideas have generated as many printed words as the nature of good and evil. For millennia some of humanity's best minds have discussed these topics without resolution.

As I have picked away at the knotted threads of my belief system while writing this, one of the many things that became more clear to me is this: The idea that I could determine what was good and evil in absolute terms is at the root of many of my problems and those of the LDS tradition. This attitude invites an arrogance and narrow-mindedness that characterize fundamentalist religious belief.

I continue believe, or perhaps "hope" is a better word, that there is absolute good and evil. Another way of putting this is that I believe that some things are better and worse than others in an absolute sense. This includes religious beliefs and practises. However, I also believe that most of what we perceive in terms of good and evil is not absolute and I doubt my ability to identify either absolute good or evil or absolute degrees of goodness and less-goodness. Therefore, as a practical matter I believe that it is more helpful to think in terms of what works and does not work instead of good and evil. Here is how I approach this tricky and important question.

There are three basic ways in which humanity's greatest thinkers have approached the question of how to determine what is good, right, etc. and what is not. They are analyses based on utility, justice and rights. I have concluded that each of these approaches can be used to shed light on questions of relative degrees of goodness and badness, but that each of them suffers from the same problem – these approaches depend on agreement respecting underlying values. I will first sketch how these decision making models work, and then discuss their practical problems from my point of view, and conclude with a few ideas as to how we can proceed from a day to day point of view.

Utility

The utility-based analysis, fathered by Jeremy Bentham, starts by asking how much utility, or good, will one thing do as compared to another. To use a simply example, if I spend the next hour smoking cigarettes and drinking beer with my friends, I may have fun with them but will likely take a step down a path that could have severe, negative health and other consequences for me. If I spend that same hour with the same friends jogging and playing Frisbee in the park, we can still have fun and I will have replaced a health and lifestyle damaging activity with one that is likely to work in the opposite direction. Hence, the hour spend doing health promoting things could be said to have more utility than the hour spent smoking and drinking beer.

Utility theory suggests that when we have a choice to make, we should choose the thing that will create the most utility. Utility is defined using a long-term reference, and with respect to all people affected by the decision in question, not just the person making the decision and those closely connected to her.

Utilitarian theory has been criticized on a number of bases. First, it could be used to justify the commission of horrible acts against one member of society, for example, for the benefit of many. The paradigm example is that of torturing to death one child in order that many lives may be saved. Most moral theorists (as well as most people) believe that this is not justified, and that it highlights a fundamental weakness in the utilitarian approach. But hold on a minute. Isn't that kind of human death at the base of a literal understanding of Christian theology? Hmm. Maybe I had best take that one with a big grain of salt, or metaphorically. Or did god really mean that we should follow this as a moral rule that justifies the extreme fringe of utilitarianism? I hope not. Or is god immoral? Again, I hope not. Or maybe somebody got emotional about how wonderful Christ was (or maybe how wonderful the stories about him were that had grown over the course of 60 to 90 years before they were written down), and then went a little overboard with the archetypes that gave rise to animal sacrifice in the first place. Ahhh. Now I feel better. Back to our regularly programming.

Another criticism mounted against utility theory is that of measurement. That is, how do we know what many of our actions do and what utility they create? Utility, once defined, is often all but impossible to measure. And what is "utility" in any event? Is it not largely in the eye of the beholder? We have to define it before we can try to measure it. As it turns out, utility is defined by what we value, and utility theory is of little use in sorting out disagreements between those who value different things.

Utilitarian theory is also criticized on the basis that it does not deal well with some issues related to justice and rights. That is, most people agree that certain things are simply not fair, or not right regardless of the utility they may create. The death by torture of the child described above falls into this category. Such a death seems unjust, and violates the right to life, which is the most basic of the almost universally accepted human rights.

Rights and Freedoms

A right is an individual's entitlement to something. I may be entitled to act in a certain way (to speak as I wish), or to have others act with respect to me in a certain way (to be treated at my place of employment without regard for age, gender or race).

This approach starts with the idea that we have many rights, such as the right to life and the pursuit of happiness, the right to free speech, to associate freely with others, to worship god as we choose, etc. Rights, however, have limits. For example, I have the right to drive a car, but to ensure that I do not endanger others (that is, infringe upon their rights) I am obligated to obey many rules related to driving. I have the right to free speech, but may not use it to promote hatred of others or to slander another's character since that would infringe upon their rights. I have the right to father children, and certain duties to those children and their mother.

On the other end of most rights we will find a duty. That is, if I have the right not to be discriminated against, others have the duty not to discriminate against me. If I have the right to free speech, others have a duty not to restrain my right.

Rights theory approaches the question of what is good from the point of view of the individual. Hence, frequently the exercise of a right by an individual will be found to reduce the utility of society as a whole. At this point, rights theory collides with utilitarian theory. In Canada this tension is expressly recognized in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which while enshrining many of the rights referred to above, allows for those rights to be infringed upon by laws that are "demonstrably justifiable in a free and democratic society".

Many of the rights referred to above are called "negative rights". That is, my right of privacy is the right not to be interfered with in certain ways. My freedom of speech is the right to not have others interfere with my speech, within certain parameters. As we speak about these negative rights, we usually find ourselves talking about what other people are not allowed to do to us. That is why they are referred to as "negative" rights.

Positive rights are much more difficult for society to deal with. For example, Canada recognizes an entitlement to reasonable health care. The financial burden of providing this right is enormous, and rising. Healthcare costs consume approximately one third of government budgets in Canada. This right does not impose the obligation on others to leave us alone in some way. It imposes an obligation that certain people do certain things for us. A Canadian citizen can go to a hospital in Canada and demand health care without paying for it. The doctors and nurses must provide that care. They must take positive steps. That is why it is called a positive right.

The recognition of positive rights is a relatively recent phenomenon. There is much debate respecting the extent to which it is practical to recognize such rights.

So-called "special" rights (and their correlative duties) come into existence as a result of contracts or government regulation. Married people have certain rights and duties respecting each other. Lawyers are given special rights within society, and certain related duties.

Where do rights come from? Many religious systems purport to answer this question on the basis of god's revealed will. Most of these systems conflict with each other, and hence while it is possible that one of them is right, that is unlikely. And if a "true" religion exists, it is impossible to tell it from the many impostors by which it is surrounded. One prominent media organization that who reviewed Karen Armstrong's book "The History of God" called it the story of the biggest wild goose chase in human history.

Utilitarian theory does not provide a sound basis for the establishment of rights. Just because something may provide the best results for society on the basis of one definition or another does not vest in me an obligation to behave in a certain way.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant provided one of best foundational theories for rights. Kant's theory is based on the so-called "categorical imperative", which states that each person should be treated as a free person who is equal to everyone else. Hence, I should only do those things that I would be prepared to have everyone else do. I note the similarity between this idea and the Golden Rule. Kant postulated that each person has the moral right to be treated in this fashion, and hence a moral obligation to act this way as well. That is, given the relationship outlined above respecting rights and duties, if I claim the right of free speech for myself, on what basis can I deny it to others? Hence, they have that right too. Hence, I have the duties consequent on the existence of their right.

Once again, we find ourselves butting up against the question of values. The idea that human beings are equal is of relatively recent invention and has still not been accepted by many in the world. Once we accept that as a basic value, then what Kant says makes sense. However, it would not make sense to a Hindu, since from their point of view members of different castes are not equal and should not be treated the same. It likewise would not make sense to many others.

Justice and Fairness

Justice is comparative. The question is whether one person is being treated justly relative to another. In some ways the idea of justice is a back door way of talking about rights. Slavery might be completely justifiable on utilitarian grounds. However, we condemn it as unjust. This is so because it violates the basic principle of Kantian equality, or the Golden Rule.

The three types of justice generally discussed are distributive justice (how the benefits and burdens of society are distributed among its members), retributive justice (how penalties are meted out for wrongdoing within society) and compensatory justice (how members of society are compensated after having been wronged). I will focus here on distributive justice only.

The basic idea of distributive justice is that similar individuals should be treated equally, and those who are dissimilar should be treated dissimilarly in a reasonable fashion. This is a basically principled, consistent approach to dealing with the different situations we face and can largely be justified by notions of utility and rights. For example, if a black woman and a white man do the same job, justice demands that they be paid the same. Their difference in race and gender does not matter to this. However, if the woman has more skills, works harder etc., she should be paid more in a way that reasonably recognizes the difference between what she brings to the job and delivers on the job and the comparable attributes of her co-worker.

Some theorists are of the view that very few differences between human beings justify different treatment. Others argue that many differences should be recognized in this way. Some argue that the more one contributes, the more she should receive. Others argue that distribution of benefits should be based primarily on need and that burdens should be borne on the basis of ability. Some would have the market determine all of this. Here again we see how underlying values influence how this type of system works.

Summary

Each of the three approaches (utility, rights and justice) sheds a different kind of light on whether something is good or bad, and how it compares in that regard to other available options. It would seem wise, hence, to use all three approaches. My preference is to start with a utilitarian analysis. Despite its difficulties respecting measurement and certain other things, it is the system that produces the best results in the most cases, and as our ability to measure things increases as a result of advancing science and technology, our ability to use utility theory will improve. Having done what I can with a utilitarian analysis, I then check to see what if any rights the option that produces the most utility may violate and whether those violations are so severe as to require a sub-optimal solution from a utilitarian point of view. Finally, I consider justice related questions that have not already been covered by the rights and utilitarian analysis.

As I go through this process, I am constantly making value judgements, many of them so engrained in my thinking that I do not know I am making them. Someone once said that fish,

paradoxically, do not know much about water until they are taken out of it. We have water of various types that dominate our environment, and are invisible to us.

Two people who agree completely with respect to values could use my suggested model above reasonably well. They may have trouble measuring utility, identifying rights and principles of justice etc., but once they had done so they would probably be able to agree with respect to the morality of the matter in question. However, if they have a difference of view respecting values, once that has been encountered my model is not likely to be of much use to them.

For example, lets assume that I highly value orderliness and safety. This will affect what I perceive to create utility, it will heavily influence my views respecting whether certain rights exist or not, where and how limits should be placed and rights, and which outcomes in society are just and unjust. We have seen a marked shift in the Western world in this direction since September 11, 2001, and predictably some say the pendulum has swung too far in that direction while others think it should swing further. These opinions are driven by what people value.

So, from society to society, and from sub-group within society to sub-group, as we find different values we will find what look like different moral codes. What does not work in my society given its values and realities and is therefore considered to be evil (polygamy, for example) may work well, or even be essential, in another society, and hence in that context would be considered good. I have read, for example, of societies within which resources are scarce and there is lots of war. Not coincidentally, this describes the world from which Abraham and the other Semites come to us. In such societies, many young men are killed while at war and masculine attributes (the ability to protect the family and find scarce resources to support them, for example) are important. Hence, it is easy to see why polygamy or something resembling it would be considered "good" in those circumstances. It serves a useful function – it creates utility.

Perhaps a more extreme example might also help to illustrate this point. In many societies it has been acceptable to put old people out on the ice flows, or the equivalent, to end their lives. This would seem to blatantly violate the right to life. However, when this custom is thought of in terms of Kant's categorical imperative with an understanding of the harsh environment and limited resources the society in question faced, perhaps it is understandable. How would we behave if required to make a decision between allowing young people and old people to starve, having done all within our power to avoid the decision? Would this kind of environment likely have an effect on the morality of abortion and the sexual practises that lead to pregnancy?

Religious belief and human sociology being what they are, it is a short step from making a societal decision of the type described above to sacrilizing it (whether it be polygamy, abortion or some form of genocide) and determining that things must be as they are. It is short hop from there to the determination that all other ways of doing things are evil. Recall that Campbell says that the basic function of mythology is to help us make sense out of our existential questions. There is nothing like the stamp of god himself on something that we find troubling to put our minds at ease.

The Connection Between Morality and Joy

I note that my perception of joy seems to be completely divorced from conceptions of good and evil in the absolute sense. That is, I do not appear to be capable of recognizing things that are evil (or at least not good) in an absolute sense. On the contrary, as long as I act in a fashion that I believe to be good, using and developing my strengths and virtues (more relative, subjectively perceived concepts), a sense of joy will accompany me regardless of what the

absolute merit of my actions may be. I do not see anything in the lives of those around to indicate that my experience is unusual. As a result of my observations in this regard, I have decided that the joy in my life will be determined by my actions relative to my understanding of good and evil, not good or evil in an absolute sense. This idea is consistent with the LDS notion that we will all eventually be judged in accordance with the "light and knowledge" we had in this life. It is also consistent with Popper's critical preference theory as outlined above.

For example, there was a time when I rejoiced upon hearing that someone I knew had joined the LDS church, I encouraged many people to do this and was successful in a fair number of cases. There is no question with respect to the validity of the emotions I felt in this regard. I was doing what I thought was right, and when I saw something I defined as "good" happen as a result, I felt joy. This is consistent with Seligman's theory of joy. I was concentrating, behaving philanthropically, using my signature strengths, and experiencing large amounts of flow as a result of my engagement in LDS missionary service.

Now I perceive the LDS conversion process to be at best in most cases an act of innocent deception, and so generally speaking feel sadness and other similar emotions respecting it. I note that when I tried to convert people to Mormonism, I was following the Golden Rule, and now when I try to discourage belief in what I consider to be falsehood I am doing the same thing.

Another example comes from the world of morality studies. Shermer indicates as follows:

If variation and uniqueness are the norm, then what form of morality can possibly envelope all human actions? For human sexuality alone, Kinsey measured 250 different items for each of over ten thousand people. That is 2.5 million data points. Regarding the variety of human behaviour, Kinsey concluded, "Endless recombinations of these characters in different individuals swell the possibilities to something which is, for all essential purposes, infinity." Since all moral systems are absolute, yet the variation of these systems is staggeringly broad, then all absolute moral systems are actually relative to the group conferring (usually imposing) it upon others. At the end of the volume on males, Kinsey concluded that there is virtually no evidence for "the existence of such a thing as innate perversity, even among those individuals whose sexual activities society has been least inclined to accept." On the contrary, as he demonstrated with his vast statistical tables and in-depth analyses, the evidence leads to the conclusion, "that most human sexual activities would become comprehensible to most individuals, if they could know the background of each other individual's behaviour." (Why People Believe Weird Things, p. 250)

In my view that is not to say that in any particular circumstance all ways of doing or being are neutral in the sense that they produce the same results, the same joy. We need to understand cause and effect in our environment, and choose what we want to have – to construct our own world.

Shermer concludes on this point as follows:

... Kinsey demonstrated that while "social forms, legal restrictions, and moral codes may be, a social scientist would contend, the codification of human experience, "they are like all statistical and population generalizations, "of little significant when applied to particular individuals". These laws tell us more about the lawmakers than they do about the laws of human nature: "Prescriptions are merely public confessions of prescriptionists. What is right for one individual may be wrong for the next; and what is sin and abomination to one

may be a worthwhile part of the next individual's life. The range of individual variation, in any particular case, is usually much greater than is generally understood. Some of the structural characteristics in my insects vary as much as twelve hundred percent. In some of the morphologic and physiologic characteristics that are basic to the human behaviour which I am studying, the variation is a good twelve hundred percent. And yet social forms and moral codes are prescribed as though all individuals were identical; and we pass judgements, make awards, and heap penalties without regard to the diverse difficulties involved when such different people face uniform demands. (All Kinsey quotes from Christiansen, 1971 – the last from p 7).

Does this mean that I accept all behaviour as equally good? No. It means that I recognize that my joy is a function of my understanding of the relative merits of different behaviours on a scale of good and bad, regardless of whether that understanding is accurate. Things I think are good and bring me joy may be evil (or not good) in the absolute sense, and things that I shun as evil may be good in the same way. Now that I recognize this, I am comfortable with the idea that the purpose of my life is not to find out what good and evil is first, and then find joy by doing good, but rather it is to experience joy all along the way by doing the best I can to do good for myself and others as I perceive it. As I am successful in "purifying" myself (to use Buddhist terminology), my perception of good, evil and how to find joy will become more accurate and I will in fact do more good. Part of my personal mythology, which I will test as I go through life, is the belief that as I do this the joy I am capable of experiencing will also graduate to a higher order. Does this mean more of what I now experience, or more intensity in that regard? I doubt it. And I emphasize that we are well into pure mythology once again - I suspect the experience will be different in kind rather than amount or intensity. I am excited to find out what this will be like.

Polygamy - A Moral Case Study

Before leaving this point, lets consider why we think that something "works" or does not.

As noted above, all societies operate on the basis of ideas of utility. Attitudes respecting polygamy provide an interesting example of this concept, and I will continue along that vein as it is close to Mormonism's heart.

It is my view that polygamy is less desirable in some ways than monogamy because I value intimacy, which I believe is causally related to the joy in my life. It seems to me that a man and woman living in polygamous circumstances cannot be expected to experience the same degree of intimacy as a man and woman in monogamous marriage. Eugene England and many others agree with me. (See "On Fidelity, Polygamy and Celestial Marriage", Dialogue, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1987; reprinted in Dialogue Vol. 35, No. 1, 2002, p. 43). Thus, I regard monogamy and the intimacy it produces as a luxury available to men and women who live in societies whose resources are abundant enough to support monogamous family units.

The fact that I value intimacy in marriage and consider this to be a luxury I am fortunate to be able to afford is a result of the societal values of the modern Western world superimposed on my Mormon heritage (which is a mixed bag in this regard) and what I was taught by my parents by word and example. I do not value the quantum of sexual intercourse available to me nearly as much as I value intimacy, although I must admit (as even most repressed Mormon males would in their rare moments of honesty about these things) that quantum is to a degree important. Intimacy and sexual intercourse are for me inextricably linked. That is, I do not wish to have sexual intercourse without intimacy. Hence, I believe that polygamy would be a lesser

state (much lesser) than monogamy for me. I might have unlimited opportunities for sexual intercourse, but the price paid in terms of intimacy would be far too great.

Another man may believe that his purpose in life is to father and influence for good (as he defines it) as many children as possible – to provide the maximum possible number of earthly tabernacles for spirits of god and to teach them god's way so that they can return to him. Such a person may be attracted to polygamy for its obvious reproductive and patriarchal influence opportunities. If one takes LDS theology seriously, it is easy to see how a person could be led down this path. In fact, I recently heard of a family from Cardston who after much prayer, fasting and the receipt of the usual kind of spiritual confirmation moved to Arizona to join a polygamous group. They were certain that they were doing god's will.

This example highlights the point that when I say that something "works", I am making an implicit statement respecting values and hence how I define utility, rights and justice, and indicating that whatever "works" enables me to do something I value. It also highlights the point that joy has nothing to do with conceptions of absolute good and bad. We should not be surprised that many (if not most) Taliban women and Mormon polygamists feel great joy in many aspects of their lives. This joy is derived from their conception of good and bad, just as is ours.

One of my clients is Winston Blackmore, until recently the polygamist patriarch of the fundamentalist Mormon settlement near Creston, British Columbia. He has in excess of 80 children, and I can't remember how many wives. I think somewhere around 30. Winston is not an evil man in the terms most of us would conceive evil. I think I know him well enough to say that he is well intentioned, and believes that he is doing god's will. He feels joy and sorrow much as I do in connection with his ideas of what is good and bad. He loves and is very proud of the members of his family and believes that his relationships with them are his primary source of joy.

Having worked through the above example, having recently read England's paper and having just written these few paragraphs, I have a better understanding of the values that determine my attitude respecting polygamy and what it is about my marriage that is important. If we can trace our actions back through thought and impulse to the values in which they are rooted, and then determine where those values came from and the function they perform within us as individuals and the groups to which we belong, we can dramatically increase our self and other awareness. This is one of the processes that will lead to an improved perception of reality – that is, a better understanding of good, bad and a greater opportunity to create joy in our lives.

As I pay more attention to cause and effect, and try to ask and answer the question, "why am I really doing this?", all kinds of interesting truths are making their presence known to me. Some of them are hard to confront.

As Seligman points out, most of the time we skim along across the surface of consciousness with our mind's primary function being to allay our doubts and keep life as simple as possible. It is only when something goes wrong that our mental machinery attempts to engage reality, and even then it is usually a shallow engagement. It takes more mental discipline than most of us have to look reality in the eye. I believe that I can become better at doing this, and that my skills in that regard will be valuable in many aspects of life as I develop them.

So, I believe that rather than worrying about absolute good and evil or absolute truth that we should recognize that all we can do is make the best decision possible using the information available to us. We can do no more than that. Hence, if we do our best to define good and bad

and leave our minds open in such a way that new information and experience will allow our conceptions in this regard to improve as time passes, we will gradually upgrade the manner in which we live, and hence put ourselves in a position to experience more and more joy.

Necessary Conditions

The only one I can think of is free will. If we are not free to act, we cannot do the things we need to find joy. The greater our freedom to choose how and what we will do, the greater our responsibility, the greater our capacity for joy, and the greater the energy that will well up within us as we face this wonderful challenge. Reduce our freedom, and each of the other factors in the equation must decline as well.

We have observed the operation of this principle all around us. The employee who is given greater autonomy and responsibility, or who becomes an entrepreneur. The oppressed spouse, released by divorce, who suddenly blossoms. The athlete who cannot function within a rigid, structured system but who dominates when allowed to just play.

Freedom creates uncertainty. We are taught to fear this uncertainty and it may legitimately frighten us as does any new source of power when it is first put in our hands. How frightening was it to drive a car for the first time? And what have we read about the behaviour of newly freed slaves, or observed in the behaviour of newly returned missionaries? However, as we embrace freedom, become accustomed to it, and then harness it in our own way, we will feel new energies begin to flow and new joys, and we will never look back.

I have all I need in the LDS tradition in this regard. Joseph Smith taught the importance of free will. It is a basic element of the Plan of Salvation. The only problem is that current LDS practise is inconsistent with LDS doctrine. This is a bit like the Jews having gotten so far track with respect to their observance of god's law that Christ needed to give them a strong message of repentance, for which he was killed.

The Process

As intimated in various ways above, I have adopted the scientific process to the extent possible with respect to the making of my life's decisions. This applies to spiritual matters as well as to all others. This is by far the most important aspect of my personal mythology. It is what will enable my mythology to accommodate change and to improve over time. I rely in this regard primarily on the ideas found at the end of "Why God Won't Go Away", as summarized above, as well as Joseph Smith's "line upon line ..." idea with its related concepts, also as summarized above.

I have also decided that the pursuit of joy, as defined above, is the essential purpose of life, and that joy is best found by avoiding evil, promoting good, purifying myself, and trying to stay focussed most of the time on the first two instead of the endless, complex abstractions of theology, etc. in which I could become lost as I try to find "reality" or "truth" and bring myself into harmony with them.

I break those four rules down into two sets or separate rules. The first set is avoid evil, promote good and stay focussed on these two. I can and will carry these rules with me each day and will react spontaneously to 99.99% of the situations in which I find myself based on my understanding of good and bad. However, underlying this relatively simple rules are a set of more complex mechanics that I will need to access as I try to "purify" my heart. This process

will be engaged particularly whenever it comes time to make a complex or major life decision, and as I engage periodically in structured efforts to build my personal mythology. Most importantly, these principles should become part of my daily routine of meditation. It will take a long time to make these ideas reflexive, and that is what they need to be.

My observations, beliefs and resolutions with respect to this process can be summarized as follows:

1. I have observed that my beliefs change as more information relevant to them becomes available to me, and as I pass through life's various stages.
2. I have observed how this process has applied to people within various cultures and times, and hence believe that my experience is indicative of a generally applicable principle of human behaviour that I should take into account as I plan the rest of my life. The best example I can think of respecting the operation of this principle relates to Galileo and his dealings with the Catholic Church concerning the shape of the earth and its relationship to the sun. Over time, the information he and other scientists provided succeeded in changing religious dogma. Many Mormon attitudes have undergone similar changes, including those related to the timing of Christ's second coming, the nature of the ideal family and marriage, and Caucasian racial superiority.
3. I have observed in my own behaviour and that of others, past and present, how belief in unalterable truth causes minds to close and helpful information to be ignored. Once again, Galileo is probably the best example. Current Mormon examples include attitudes respecting homosexuality, the historicity of the Book of Mormon and whether Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham. Hence, I have resolved that:
 - (a) I will root dogma out of my life wherever I find it;
 - (b) I will not accept any information, scientific or otherwise, as true in an absolute sense;
 - (c) I will regard all of the theories on which I base my decisions as useful, working hypotheses to be accepted until disproven; and
 - (d) I will consider any information of reasonable credibility that threatens to falsify my operating theories, no matter how painful that may be.
4. I have observed that my mind's observations of reality are frequently proven to be inaccurate, and that it is impossible for me to perceive reality through any means other than my imperfect, subjectively operating, mind. Once again, we go back to good old Galileo. When I look out the window, it seems obvious that the sun moves around the earth. My knowledge of what I accept to be reality in that regard does not come from my perception of reality, but rather from abstract ideas that I have been taught, and have accepted on faith.
5. I believe that my mind has been conditioned by social and evolutionary forces to create inaccurate perceptions of reality. Until recently, I believed that my testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon came from a direct

experience with god. Now that I understand more about the brain chemistry and functioning involved in producing identical experiences in many other people who have reached conclusions that conflict with mine, I am confident that my experience had nothing to do with god, and that my former belief was induced by a socialization process. Hence, I have resolved that:

- (a) I will seek objective evidence as and when reasonably possible to confirm the unreliable interpretation of reality (past and present) that my mind provides; and
- (b) I will seek, in particular, to understand the cause and effect relationships that govern the events of my life.

6. I believe that as I assemble better data, develop my critical reasoning skills, self awareness, and the ability to be honest with myself, I will perceive reality more accurately. Galileo again provides a good example to illustrate this point. Over time, most of mankind has come to accept the accuracy of his basic propositions and to reject the dogma that contradicted them. And I feel that in my life I have made some significant steps forward during the past six months in each of these categories, and as a result now have a better appreciation of some aspects of reality than I previously had. I note in this regard that:

- (a) The human body and its concomitant consciousness is a constant throughout all times and cultures relevant to us. Hence the opportunity to journey inward toward greater self-awareness, freedom from the cacophony of desire and fear, and harmony, is available to all and is likely experienced in much the same way by all. The more grounded we are in this peaceful place within, the better we will cope with life's vicissitudes and the more joy we will feel.
- (b) I need to learn to meditate. My LDS tradition did not teach me to find truth within myself because it considers theological truth to be found externally – through revelation from god or as pronounced by his earthly representatives. Hence, prayer in the LDS tradition is at best a pale shadow of meditation, and at its worst is a tool used to confirm external authority. That is, members of the LDS church are taught that they should use prayer and the period of weekly silence during the sacrament service to take an inventory of their shortcomings relative to the "commandments", to ask for forgiveness, and to make plans as to how these deficiencies can be corrected. This reinforces the idea that we must conform to an external authority, and turns the meditative process upside down. Instead of turning inward to find and enhance our wellsprings of creative power, we turn outward to consider our deficiencies as defined by external authority and to resolve to align ourselves with that authority. That takes what should enable us find and become the most we can, and turns into a guilt machine that Dr. Seligman would tell us is guaranteed to make us feel unhappy. I do not advocate ignoring our problems. I do advocate finding and enhancing our creative drive, and through that process addressing the aspects of our nature that we need to correct. The role of external authority is to make

suggestions as to how we proceed that we may either reject or accept. It should not drive, indeed dominate, the process from start to finish.

- (c) The process by which a personal mythology a la Jung or antithetical mask a la Yeats is created is part of this purification process.

7. I believe that the above process can continue indefinitely.

I should make it clear that I do not plan to become an adherent of any other faith in the way I was a Mormon. The Eastern religions, while they have a lot of good things to teach us, are no more suited for wholesale application in our culture than the LDS faith is suited for the peoples of Tibet. I am creating something for my own use that combines what is most helpful to me from my own tradition and other parts of the Christian belief system with the most useful ideas that I have found in several other systems. The most important part of these by far is Joseph Smith's "line upon line" idea, or perhaps better put, the application of the scientific method to spiritual ideas.

As long as we continue to diligently search and learn, taking into account other belief systems we discover and the advances of science, we will discover things in our own belief system that can be improved. This will require us from time to time to have the courage to admit that we were wrong, and to move forward in a new direction. This is what I will encourage my children to do. And I expect that their specific beliefs will differ from mine. I think that is as it should be. Eventually I anticipate that I will no longer have the energy to continue to do what I have just described. At that point, I will acknowledge that I have made all of the progress I can and will be content with what I have been able to create, and encourage those around me who still have energy to continue to develop their beliefs.

First Principles of Behaviour

The next step is to break down "avoid evil" and "promote good" a bit further.

There are many sources of information that could suggest behavioural principles to us, including religion in its endless hues. We have tried that and found it lacking in some respects. And there is the study of philosophy and ethics, which contains a virtually endless array of ideas ranging from the seemingly sensible to the bizarre.

What I will do the extent possible is, as indicated above, use the scientific method to establish which behavioural principles are likely to produce joy. So, I ask myself if there are any principles of human behaviour that has been proven to produce joy, as I have defined it, in many times and cultures?

Honesty

Honesty is a crucial aspect of self-awareness, and hence is important to both avoiding evil and promoting good. As noted above, evolutionary and social forces conspire to cause us to mislead ourselves respecting the reasons for which we do things. The more painful the truth, the less likely we are to be able to affirm it. How strong are we spiritually? That can perhaps best be seen by measuring our ability to confront uncomfortable truths about ourselves.

Avoiding Evil

Conscience

If we had a conscience that works as we are told ours does (it is supposed to tell us when we are about to do wrong), all we would have to do is pay attention to it and follow what it tells us. As I have indicated above, I do not think we can often tell what is absolute good or bad. That is, our conscience does not work as we have been taught that it does. The idea of a conscience is another wonderful control tool. It allows church and society to program us to feel guilty as a result of certain behaviours, and then tell us that god himself is giving us messages as to what we should and should not do when we feel guilty. This is kind of like allowing one of the players in a game to make and change the rules at will, and then act as referee as well.

We can, of course, tell what is good or bad according to the societal norms by which we have been conditioned. How well we live in accordance with those norms will largely determine our perception of joy. Also, the process of purifying our souls will gradually raise our understanding of good, bad and joy to higher levels, and hence will upgrade our joy.

Unfortunately, I do not think that it would be wise to simply trust our instincts or conscience to decide what is right or wrong. We know that our conscience is often a reflection of societal values that have nothing to do with right or wrong. We need to question and probe in the manner indicated above to get to the bottom of what we feel about things. This will accelerate the elevation of our perceptions. As Berry notes:

Nothing in life requires more patience than unravelling this inherited mess we have blithely labelled, "the conscience". The strange but natural ill feeling one has when one breaks with custom is confused with "sin". Any move away from the custom is then checked by one's sensation of guilt. Once fully indoctrinated, the believer can roam "freely" ... and never stray from the prescribed routine. Born Mormons tend to remain Mormons, Buddhists, Buddhists. (Post-Atheism, pp. 46-47)

Nietzsche adds more analytical meat when he says:

[Religious leaders] have to set aside the concept of a natural course of events: but since they are clever and thoughtful people they are able to promise a host of effects, conditioned, of course, by prayers or the strict observance of their laws. ...

The holy lie [lies told by all religious leaders for pious purposes] therefore applies principally: to the purpose of an action (natural purpose, reason are made to vanish: a moral purpose, the fulfillment of a law, a service to God appears as purpose): to the consequence of an action (natural consequence is interpreted as supernatural and, to produce a surer effect, the prospect of other, uncontrollable consequences is held out.)

In this way a concept of good and evil is created that seems to be altogether divorced from the natural concept "useful," "harmful", "life-promoting", "life-retarding" – in so far as another life is imagined, it can even be directly inimical to the natural concept of good and evil.

In this way the famous "conscience" is at last created: an inner voice which does not measure the value of every action with regard to its consequences, but with regard to its

intentions and the degree to which this intention conforms with the "laws". (The Will to Power, pp. 90, 91)

While I agree with Nietzsche's conclusions, I would remove some of their sting by pointing out that the powerful experiences described in "Why God Won't Go Away" provide moral justification for many of the wrongheaded actions religious people take. It is far too simplistic to write off millennia of religious activity to a combination of evil and simplicity on the part of all involved. The alternative explanation of powerful, real experience buttressing behaviours for which evolutionary development would likely select makes much more sense to me.

I would summarize by saying that social custom holds the herd together. An inauthentic stamp of god is often put on these customs, usually by well-intended religious leaders under the direct or indirect influence of real spiritual experience had by many of their followers as well as themselves. Some customs, however, are rooted in behavioural truth discovered and proven through trial and error. The only way to sort out what is what is to focus on cause and effect relationships. Guilt associated with the breach of good customs (such as the Golden Rule) is something for which we should be grateful, as is guilt that arises as a result of our subconscious recognizing that we are not being truthful with ourselves. These twinges of conscience are often the first signs that we are becoming more self aware, and will soon be in a position to change for the better.

After we have lived with a source of guilt for long enough to be sure that it is not linked to either self deception or our breach of a sound behavioural rule, the best thing to do is often to charge right through it. For example, for a long time as I tried to decide how to deal with leaving the Church, I felt guilt each time I considered openly admitting that I did not believe, and terrific guilt the first few times I did so. I even felt terrible guilt just posting on an Internet bulletin board for people who are critical of the Church. I eventually decided that the best thing to do for a number of reasons was to get my disbelief out in the open. While this caused me to take a lot of heat, I think it saved a great deal of time and energy by accustoming me to express my beliefs and feelings openly, and so eliminating a source of cognitive dissonance for me. It is not healthy to feel guilt as a result of saying and doing what we believe is right. I was conditioned to feel that way and had to beat that particular bit of conditioning over the head with a shovel for quite a while before it lost the ability to hurt me. I am glad that I did not drag that process out for years, but instead got it over with in the course of about a month.

Our relationship to guilt, and a prosaic description of a partial resolution, is articulated by a friend in the form of his account of the last evening he spent with his father.

In one of his lucid hours, I could see a great anger come over him. He would not look at me or anyone else in the room, and seemed to wish we would all just go away. I asked him, "Are you angry?"

"Yes."

"Because you're still here?"

"Yes."

"Do you pray?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Don't want to."

It was a surprise to me that my father, who had always seemed very prayerful and spiritually minded, would refuse to pray as Death approached. I wanted him to be faithful; I needed him to be heroic and stare Death down while telling his Heavenly Father that he was coming home. And that was my greatest betrayal; at the moment of his quintessential humanity, I asked him to be more than human.

Nearly ten years later I look back on the final week of his life, seeking to atone for the small injustices I perpetrated at his most vulnerable. He lived and died under the immense weight of a guilt he was never able to set aside. He was a better man than most, and far better than he believed himself to be.

But I stand now by the riverside, Dad, and am here to lay down my heavy load. Let me take yours, too, and lay it in the cool shade of the trees. We carried our loads a long time - picked them up from those who bore us. But we'll lay them down and carry instead my laughing children. We'll study guilt no more; we'll fish in the stream and sail paper boats and watch the grasses wave in the current. This atonement, too, flows both ways. (Joe P. Staples, Personal Correspondence, March 19, 2003)

As we harmonize our lives with reality, counterproductive guilt will bother us less and we will become more attuned to an inner voice that we have trained to warn us of self deception, approaching evil, and the opportunity to do good.

Promoting Good

The Value Pyramid

As noted above, it is my reading of the theory of moral philosophy that it is not possible to establish universal good or bad unless religious or some other authority is accepted as the source principle. I am no longer prepared to accept such authority. Hence, I believe that good and bad only exist within a construct of values or objectives established by a particular society. Since these are all over the map from society to society, so are conceptions of good and bad. We might prefer our conception of good and bad, but as philosophers have wrestled with this question, they have not been able to build a persuasive case for a set of values that can be universalized. Hence in this discussion, I will not attempt to refer to moral absolutes. Rather, I will recognize that when we talk of moral rights or obligations, we are doing so within the framework created by Western democratic, and mostly Christian, society.

Our principal values are that individuals are equal and deserving of equal treatment and that each has certain inalienable rights (such as freedom of expression, conscience, association etc.). In this we differ from most other societies that have existed throughout history, and most that exist today. The strength and amazing "progress" (as we define it) our society has achieved is widely believed to have come from our unusual values.

The LDS Church, as part of Western, democratic society, shares these values.

The Golden Rule

The Golden Rule (do unto others as you would have others do unto to you) and its Kantian correlate is near the foundation of this value complex, deriving special force in our society from the "individuals are equal" idea. It is interesting to note that the Golden Rule, while a part of most societies, will itself reflect deeper societal values. For example, the Golden Rule is an important part of traditional Hindu society ("This is the sum of duty, heed it well: Do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you, and wish for others too what you desire and long for, for yourself." Mahabharata 5:1517). However, within the caste system it would be unthinkable to treat someone in a way other than that required by his caste status. Hence, the rules binding caste behaviour would cause the Golden Rule to be applied quite differently in Hindu society than in our society. In fact, we would feel that much of what they believe to be in keeping with their conception of the Golden Rule would be in breach of our conception of it. In fact, we would say that they do not keep the Golden Rule at all. An understanding of this difference between the Christian and Hindu approaches illustrates nicely the powerful influence a fundamental difference in worldview or perspective exerts on us. A Christian would completely misunderstand what a Hindu means by the passage of scripture referred to above, which seems to say the same thing our Golden Rule says. I see this same powerful perspective effect, by the way, on most occasions when I try to discuss anything with a faithful member of the Mormon Church that threatens his or her view that the Church is "true".

I also note that within a particular society the Golden Rule also reflects other values. If I am a socialist, I might do unto a capitalist things that the capitalist will not want and would violate his conception of the Golden Rule.

Despite its weaknesses, the Golden Rule is powerful force with most societies. The research of Dr. Martin Seligman and others indicate that many behaviours that are consistent with the Golden Rule produce joy. And this principle of human behaviour is arguably the most significant common denominators of the world's great religious traditions, and in fact is found near the core of most of them. For example:

1. Modern Western Civilization – See the references to Kant above.
2. Zoroastrianism – Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself. Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29
3. Jainism – In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self, and should therefore refrain from inflicting upon others such injury as would appear undesirable to us if inflicted upon ourselves. Yogashastra 2.20
4. Hinduism – This is the sum of duty, heed it well: Do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you, and wish for others too what you desire and long for, for yourself. Mahabharata 5:1517
5. Judaism – What is hateful to you do not to your neighbour; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it. Babylonian Talmud, Shabath 31a
6. Taoism – Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss. Lao Tzu, T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien, 213 – 218

7. Confucianism – One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct ... loving kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself. Confucius, Analects 15.23
8. Buddhism – Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. The Buddha, Udana-Varga 5.18
9. Sikhism –As thou deemest thyself so deem others. Then shalt thou become a partner in heaven. Kabir
10. Christianity – In everything, do to other as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. Jesus, Matthew 7:12
11. Islam – Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself. Mohammed, Hadith
12. Baha'i – Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings
13. Unitarianism – We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Unitarian principle
14. Native Spirituality – We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive. Chief Dan George
15. Game Theory – Do not act so as to maximize benefit to you. Rather, act so as to maximize your benefit in light of how others will likely react to what you do. This will maximize the benefits for all. John Nash

(Most quotes from Post-Atheism, p. 7 and Religions of the World – A Latter-day Saint View, Palmer, Choi, Keller, Toronto, p. 245)

Accordingly, I feel comfortable building the foundation of my personal mythology around the Golden Rule, as refined by Kant and others. I recognize that it is an act of faith to choose to do good to others even if they do not return the favour. I do this in the belief that in the long run, on average etc., that this will produce the most joy for me and those who matter most to me. I wish to belong to the kind of society that operates primarily on the basis of this rule, and recognize that I must live by it if I expect others to do the same. Also, as noted above respecting John Nash's work on game theory, I believe that following an enlightened version of the Golden Rule will maximize the benefits enjoyed by not only society, but by each individual who chooses to play the game of life in that way.

Harmony

The Eastern idea of harmony has become important to me. This had an immediate positive effect on my marriage, and done many other good things for me, such as helping me to deal in a better way with recalcitrant little girls on my basketball team, my co-workers and my children. The idea that even opposing forces can be redirected in a harmonious way against an opponent is wonderful. I do not need to fight or subdue people and things around me, I need to understand them and find harmony with them. My main mantra in this regard will still be drawn

from D&C 121, as noted above. However, I have added to it ideas from Buddhism, primarily. D&C 121 counsels mostly gentle subduing, but subduing nonetheless. It does not take much to reorientate the ideas in that section with creating harmony.

I note that Dr. Martin Seligman has indicated that much of the positive psychology research he conducts is based in Buddhist philosophy. He suggests that the Buddhist orientation toward contemplation and harmony are a close to perfect foil for the frenetic western life style and mind. He recommends transcendental meditation as a particularly useful tool in that regard. I have started to practise meditation, but recognize the need to have some hands on instruction in that regard, and have committed to get some before the summer passes.

During the past six months I have written more both analytical and creative pages than in any other period of my life. It seems that once the dogmatic blinders came off, a torrent of ideas was released inside of me that I feel compelled to express. What follows is something I started to write over ten years ago shortly after the trip to the prairie it describes, came back to several times in the interim trying to finish, but could not find the right ideas, words, etc. A few weeks ago I realized that the missing ideas had been supplied by the reading I have recently done respecting the Buddhist approach to harmony and unity. The next day, after not having looked at it for years, I completed it, and with the help of Joe Staples, a friend I met on the New Order Mormon board who is finishing his PhD in literature this Spring at the University of Arizona, I polished it up over the course of the following week. Joe critiqued several drafts and gave me the best writing lesson I have ever had in the course of that process.

Harmony

Earth breathes with pendulum ease
or prizefighter violence.

We feel her pulse, but faintly,
she, our unutterable yearning
as we navigate the blind beach approach
laden with towels, toys,
life's worry.

All dissolves to
earth's caressing cadence.

She carries us
in,
through neglected ways,
until numbing, constant cares
spill into wind and surf,
leaving lingering, exhilarating
peace.

Does the ocean do this for everyone?
I grew up with her.
She calms tumultuous youth.
Near her, little stands between us.

"More sand! Water's almost here!" they yell.
I shovel faster.
Four children, with innocent hope,
mould walls against the advancing tide.

Cool sun
shines through late afternoon breeze.
Multi-tiered kites crackle overhead.

The sandcastle is almost complete.

I recall that we once visited the prairie and my Grandmother, both part of life's foundation. I lived with them as a child. Grandma's phone number was the first I learned. I called her often, as a toddler to complain of parental injustice; later to ask for other help. There was nothing she could not do.

While at Grandma's, my friend Ron took us up to the Ridge with his young son. As a teenager, with Ron as my guide, I shot my only deer there. The memory sickens me. Ron, who was to be a physician, traced the bullet's path through ribs, liver, lungs.

On the Ridge, nine-year-old Brayden wanted to shoot – at cans, bottles, fence posts, signs, and particularly gophers. Their death dance strangely excited and disturbed him. He liked guns. He needed to meet and learn to respect death.

Ron was soon Uncle Ron, a patient teacher who let Brayden use his semi-automatic rifle. My wide-eyed son absorbed everything. We saw antelope. Brayden asked Ron if we could shoot them. He replied that such graceful animals were not like gophers – they harmed nothing, were beautiful and to be enjoyed and protected. We could, however, just for fun see how close we could get to them. Ron's Jeep turned from the road.

We bucked across the prairie. Ron explained that we must approach the antelope by driving into the wind so that it would carry our smell and noise away from them. "We must also stay out of their sight. Antelope have great eyesight, hearing and a finely tuned sense of smell. However", he continued, "we can get close to them by doing what the Indians used to do."

Ron told my believing son that an old Indian friend explained that back when the grass on the Ridge was belly high, hunters would crawl as near to the antelope as they could and then lay on their backs, kicking their feet in the air. The antelope would see only feet moving, not recognize that sight and gingerly approach to investigate. Antelope are overly confident of their ability to play with danger and then run away. After the antelope were as close as they would come, the hunters would jump up and shoot at them with bow and arrow. Often an antelope would go home to the stew pot.

We left the Jeep and commando-crawled up a dusty, prickle-covered rise. Finally, we lay silently near the top moving our legs in the air.

The prairie is never still.
Nothing unstable lasts.
Some say wind brings suicide.
They don't like change.
Its purifying force frightens them.

Prairie breeze blows softly, constantly.
Grass waves roll over us.
Cloud horses become castles,
disappear.

Unnoticed, time departs.
Solitude opens my soul,
spilling
cares to be scattered,
carried away.

I feel for the ocean but find
wind whispering through
sky, grass, cloud.

My reverie was interrupted as, unexpectedly, the antelope saw us and cautiously came. At their closest, a good bow shot would have caught them. Our sons' impatience told them who we were. They ran, even babies flying across broken land. Only then did we notice the ants. Everywhere. On the ground, in our hair, under our clothes.

After ridding ourselves of unwelcome passengers we bounced over the prairie as the antelope flew self-confidently ahead, their seeming invincibility confirmed.

Silence calls me back to the beach.

The children had screamed,
doubling effort
to bolster sagging walls.

At last understanding,
they stop, quietly watching
with me.

Caressing rhythm
cleanses, melts
our walls.

Earth's tempo
surrounds us,
taking our flotsam and scars,
creating the pristine.

We are
earth's breath and pulse when
silence, an open heart, a view of the big canvass
attune,
atone.

And so I see
the Psalmist might have said,

Be Still, and Know God.

I am grateful that I am now in a position to understand at least to some extent, and hence to use, life's calming, rhythmic influences on a regular basis, as I inadvertently did on occasion in the manner expressed above.

Forgiveness and Gratitude

The important principles in this regard are summarized below under the heading "Re-Writing History".

Additional Beliefs, and the Role of Uncertainty

As noted above, freedom creates uncertainty. We are taught to fear this uncertainty as it relates to rejecting church authority. However, as we embrace freedom, become accustomed to it, and then harness it in our own way, we will find new sources of energy. This was a pleasant surprise for me. Life had seemed flat to me for years. I believe that this was because I felt I had all the answers. My life, and afterlife, was planned for me. All I had to do was show up and execute – do what I had been told to do.

When I discovered that the answers I had been given respecting questions important to the direction of my life were inaccurate, and that no one I could trust was going to answer those questions for me, all of a sudden I had huge surge of energy directed toward finding the answers to those questions. In an odd way, uncertainty has enlivened me. Fowler notes that the entry into stage five spirituality is characterized by feelings of this type. Gardiner, referred to above, discusses this phenomenon as well.

I have read what the philosophers have to say about existential despair arising from the realisation that god does not exist, there is no life after death, etc. Perhaps those who so despair believed in a literal god and have not been able to transition their belief to the kind of transcendent, immanent ground of being that is evident in the wonder of the earth and universe itself. If we believe that god is at least the force and order of the universe, and perhaps is something more, we are on solid ground in that regard.

And what of an afterlife? I hope that I will exist as an individual once I die and that LDS theology is correct in that regard. However, I do not know what will happen, and I know that the little tastes I have had of the feeling of non-being, or being one with all creation, are wonderful. I have long said that things like an existence without the limitation of time is beyond my comprehension. LDS theology teaches that to be the nature of eternity. Time and space are dimensions of the same reality. If there is no time, what is space? I am content to believe that after death the energy or stream of cause and effect that has been me will continue to exist in some state, and I recognize that it is asking a bit much for a mortal to understand more than that about an existence that I expect to be unrelated to this life.

As noted above, it is my belief that my purpose is to experience joy here and now. I can speculate as to the cosmic consequences of the things that produce this joy, but cannot know them. My not knowing what lies beyond mortal life animates my will to do, feel, think and dream all I can from day to day. And I suspect in any event that my encounter with the eternity may be a lot like the process I have observed in my sweet wife as she prepares for childbirth. The fear of the valley into which she descends is eventually overcome by the discomfort of her physical

circumstance. Then, and only then, does she welcome delivery's uncomfortable embrace. As I finally transcend my body, I hope follow the example I have seen her set seven times during our life together. This, it seems to me, is a worst-case scenario. I have read of other visions of that ultimate eventuality that are much more pleasant.

What about suffering? My belief in that regard has not changed. Mortal life is governed by eternal law, the law that science is slowly coming to understand. Humans act under their own volition within the confines of that law. God is either the law itself (I incline to this view) or an agent like us acting within its bounds. He cannot change the effects mandated by this law, and hence the forces of that law operating on the earth cause natural disasters from time to time, and man regularly does inhuman things to man. This god cannot stop.

Where did we come from? We are comprised of matter and moved by a life force of some kind. I believe that life force existed before my body did. Whether it was personal or not, I do not know, do not believe anyone or I can know, and am not concerned by this.

Respecting existential despair in general, I observe that more Buddhists than we can count have passed contently through life in a state of religious belief most Christians would characterize as atheistic. It seems likely that their belief in what is practically speaking perpetual reincarnation plays a role in the relative confidence with which they face death. On the other hand, the Westerner faces death without the idea that he will pass through many more lives before he is likely to be perfected enough to have his flame extinguished into Nirvana. It is this looking the question of continued existence in the eye throughout this life that produces the characteristically Western despair of which the philosophers speak.

I have now had the chance to think quite a bit about this question for the past several months. It is still a new and disturbing idea for me. However, on the whole, while I recognize that I am much less certain of many important things than I was before, I can feel myself becoming more and comfortable with that state. And I love the energy with which it infuses me. I might have become a scientist had I found this orientation as a young person. I have always been interested in cause and effect, but now I have a burning desire to know more about why people behave as they do, in particular.

Life Decisions

Lets walk through my life up to this point and look at some of the significant decisions I have made and consider whether the process I used under the influence of the Church might have been improved had I focussed more on issues related to cause and effect instead of relying upon the Church's indication to me of what god's will and therefore what I should do.

I was a relatively rebellious youth and experimented with a number of things that were not good for me. However, this did not go much if at all past harmless, typical teenage behaviour. I suppose I could have benefited from a greater understanding of the health risks I was taking, but the nature of adolescence is such that this might not have been a reasonable possibility. I don't think that I needed any more than a better appreciation of the Golden Rule and the concept of harmony to improve that chapter in my life.

I left home at age 16 and spent the rest of my teenage years in Alberta. If I had a better understanding of the relatively harmless nature of my behaviour, I would have stayed in Victoria. As it was, I experienced such guilt and shame because of my teenage peccadilloes that my family and I took extreme measures to correct a small problem. As a result, I lost the chance to

finish growing up at home and bonding with my parents, brothers and sisters. Had I remained at home and had more intimate contact with my father, I might have come to appreciate at a much earlier age the complexity of LDS history and its theological evolution. Who knows where that would have led, but it would likely have been a good thing in any event. Had I better understood the cause of my guilt (largely arbitrary rules put in place by my religion to create a distinct, identifiable and cohesive religious group), I would likely have ignored many of those rules and remained with my family. This, I hope, would have been better for all of us. Hence, more knowledge of cause and effect would have probably made a significant and positive difference in my life.

I quit a good college basketball team. I did this because I was frustrated by my apparent lack of progress, and because I was burned out. I was working half time, going to school full time, playing for a university volleyball team and working out with the college basketball team, and had a girl friend with whom I liked to spend time at least a couple of times a week. Had I understood the unrealistic pressures I was putting on myself, I would have backed off on a few things and probably continued to play collegiate basketball for a few more years. I could have gone much further than I did in that regard. However, I don't think this is a big deal. I did not miss anything important by quitting when I did.

I went on a mission at age 19. The decision to go was made at the same time as I quit the basketball team in exhaustion and frustration. Had I known more about the costs and benefits of the mission experience there is no question that I would not have gone. I was violently conditioned during my mission. Many of my rigid attitudes were developed there in response to my desire to avoid the guilt-induced pain I felt as a teenager when I did not conform to LDS community standards. However, the experiences I had learning to love people in a foreign culture were valuable. I would like as many of my children as possible to have similar experience. The Peace Corp. and many other charitable organizations offer more than adequate programs in this regard.

I choose to obtain an education. This was a good decision, and was motivated largely by what my family and I were taught by the Church about the importance of education in general.

Juli and I met and quickly married. This decision was made under the influence of the idea that we would be inspired to know who we should marry, and that we did not need to put in the work required to determine if we were well suited for each other. We dated for two weeks before our engagement. We then suffered through a difficult three months before really deciding to marry. We both made this critical decision on a basis that could hardly have been worse. Neither of us wants our children to proceed as we did. Our decision should have been made much more slowly, and with much more attention paid to collecting data about the kind of lives we wanted to live, etc. Juli was too young (barely 19), was not ready to be married and was pressured by her family and me to do something she did not want to do. This was grossly unfair to her. I was only 22, and was also too young as well, although I have to admit that I would have vigorously argued that point had anyone tried to make it to me then. This highlights the real problem: we both acting the part that was scripted for us by the Church, the LDS community and our families. Since our marriage, we have experienced a great deal of joy together, as well as the usual heartache and trial. And we have tried our best to live the Golden Rule respecting each other. However, when I look at the decision making process and think about what I would recommend to my children, it would be something that has little resemblance to what we did. Juli and I could both have benefited from more time, and access to much more cause and effect related information before we married. Having said all of that, Juli and I love each other and are committed to each other. I do not question the result of our marriage. We have made a good

marriage, and are fortunate to have each other. As noted above, I have found Campbell's idea that marriage is the reuniting of the primordial whole to be very helpful as Juli and I try to reconcile our very different ways of experiencing life.

Juli became pregnant with our first child immediately after we married. This is what she wanted to do, and I supported her. She felt she was obeying god's will in this. It was a terrible mistake. We should have taken time to get to know each other before she became pregnant. We could have benefited from more cause and effect knowledge in this regard. Instead, we relied upon religious dogma to make this critical decision.

Juli quit going to school and her job in order to stay at home and raise our children. Again, we chose to do this because we felt that it was what god wanted and we would have benefited from more cause and effect information. Juli could have continued to go to school and work part time. I worked part time in any event throughout my student career. Had we done this, we would have delayed our family, allowed Juli to mature and develop her skills, put her in a position to have an identity outside of her role as a wife and mother, reduced the financial pressure on me, and perhaps reduced the size of our family. I love each of our children and do not suggest that we would be better off without any of them. However, as I counsel those same children as to how they might consider living their lives, I will let them know of the difficulties Juli and I created for ourselves by doing things as we have and let them decide how to govern themselves. As already noted above, I have concluded that the purpose of life is not to maximize the number of offspring we have. Juli and I proceeded too soon to start our family, and had children too steadily throughout the first years of our marriage. This harmed Juli's health (she has been more or less constantly sick or depressed, or both) and our family life in many ways. It is possible of course that we would have ended up with the same children in any event, but arriving at different times. I would hope that were the case if we did things differently.

I had the good fortune to have undergraduate grades and law and graduate school test scores near the top the scale. This coupled with my linguistic and international experience as a missionary put me in a position to go to law or graduate school virtually anywhere I wished. I stayed in Edmonton to go to school because the University of Alberta had a good LDS Institute of Religion program, and I felt that we would "have sufficient for our needs" without my receiving the best education available to me. That has turned out to be correct. Given my paradigm at the time, after praying and studying the matter as carefully as I could, this course of action felt right to me. I now see it as pure foolishness. I was fearful of what might happen to my spirituality if I went to a great educational institution because I had heard about how Jim Matkin and a few other young LDS bright lights had gone down to Harvard and apostatized. I therefore felt that exposing myself to that environment was something god would not want me to do. Church leaders in Edmonton with whom I discussed this agreed with my reasoning.

Once during our first years of marriage while living in Edmonton we were literally penniless students living on student loans. However, Juli had just received an unexpected income tax refund of about \$600 as a result of her employment the prior year before she quit work to have Amanda. We were at church one Sunday shortly after the receipt of this refund and the Bishop made an impassioned plea for building fund contributions. We went home, talked about it, decided the Lord needed the money (otherwise the Bishop would not have asked for donations in such strong terms) and so the next week we handed over \$500 on faith that we would be blessed for our sacrifice. This action was typical of our thinking in those days. We were as obedient as we could be. If we thought god required something, we did not think about it, we just did it. This pattern of behaviour continued until well after we moved to Calgary in 1993.

We chose to move to Vancouver after I graduated from law school primarily on the basis that this was where God had the most work for us to do. That was a foolish basis on which to make such a decision, and we suffered in Vancouver as a result of our folly. The cost of living was much too high, my wages much too low, and we had to live so far from my office that I was seldom home. Our years in Vancouver were dark years for us. We would have benefited greatly from more cause and effect information before making this decision.

I accepted a calling as Bishop of our ward in Vancouver at a time when I was commuting more than an hour each way to work, and working long hours. I turned down a good job in Calgary because this calling was extended to me, after telling the Stake President that I thought my family and I should move to Calgary, but that we would stay if he told me that was what God wanted me to do. To my surprise, he called back the next morning and told me just that. During the next five years, I operated near nervous breakdown territory and neglected my family terribly. We could have benefited by much more cause and effect information before we made this decision. I should also say that I made many precious friendships during my years as bishop, and I have some wonderful memories of those people. However, I neglected my primary responsibility while serving people outside of my family, and I impaired my health through the effort I made to cover all of the bases I was on at that time. I am fortunate that I do not carry greater scars than I do from my service in that regard. The idea promoted by the Church that we will be blessed for the sacrifices of this nature we make is pure fallacy. We are not blessed for violating common sense, and LDS scripture teaches this when it tells us not to try to run faster than we have strength. (Mosiah 4:27; D&C 10:4) This healthy teaching is overridden when an authoritative call to action is issued. We once again see in operation the tension between leadership authority and free will – the difference between a life based on "thou shalt" as opposed to "I wills".

The straw (or log, as it were) that broke dogma's back in my life had to do with our daughter Amanda. At age 20 she became pregnant out of wedlock and was faced with the choice of what she should do. She was not an active member of the Church at the time, and had moved home to have some support as she went through the difficult process of deciding what to do. LDS social services contacted her, and with our encouragement she went through their counselling program, which we supported. The purpose of that program was to persuade her to give the baby up for adoption so that it could be raised by a family who would have it sealed to them. Amanda did not feel comfortable with this, but with our encouragement continued with the process. Things progressed to the point where she had chosen a family to take the baby, and at least two other families had received divine inspiration that she was going to give the baby to them. However, in the end she could not do it. And she struggled immensely to get herself into a position where this felt right. She felt horribly guilty because she was, as the counsellors had so often told her, putting her own selfish interests ahead of those of her baby. The day before the baby was born she finally decided that she would keep him in spite of all the pressure that had been put on her. This greatly disappointed many people, including me. I felt the baby would have been better off with another family.

As I watched what happened to Amanda as she dedicated herself to becoming a mother, I had to face the fact that I had encouraged her to do something profoundly wrong. Other well-intentioned members of the Church did the same thing. Thank goodness for her stiff backbone and the few people who were prepared to support her. Keeping Ayden has changed her life. I have almost no doubt now that he will be better off with her than anywhere else. I have no doubt that she will be better off with him. But I don't want to focus on results. It is the nature of the decision making process that is of interest to me. Amanda was directed to make a decision based on dogma, not sound reasoning and the best medical and psychological information

available to her. And she was subjected to a well coordinated, in a sense ruthless, process that was designed to break down her natural inclination to keep her baby. I do not doubt that in many cases this system serves both mother and baby well. This was not one of them. Amanda was relatively mature, wanted the baby, had an extended family waiting to assist her to raise the baby, etc. These circumstances notwithstanding, LDS social services and the wonderful people (I say this sincerely) from our Ward and Stake who have been co-opted in its efforts, were on the cusp of committing a crime against humanity with respect to Amanda and Ayden. Given what I saw, I would be astonished if a similar crime has not been committed on countless occasions throughout the Church by similarly well-intentioned people.

I again emphasize that this is not an exercise in 20-20 hindsight. I can't tell whether life would have turned out better for us if any above decisions had been made differently. However, I can tell that these decisions were made on a flawed basis. The pattern is clear. Many of my worst decisions were made on the basis of what I understood god wanted me to do and so simply did it. I tended to neglect opportunities to collect cause and effect information that was readily available because the answer already seemed clear. My mind was playing the very kinds of tricks on me that are described above. I thought I knew, and hence did not enquire as I should have.

One might say that the Church teaches us to study things out and make rational decisions. That is true, to an extent. But when reason conflicts with dogma, the dogma wins. And in our lives, as illustrated above, there are lots of examples of our acting in accordance with what we were told or otherwise understood to be god's will instead of doing the work required to understand the decision as well as possible, and then making the best decision we could in light of the information we had collected and our judgement of what that information told us.

As I have noted elsewhere, and as this narrative illustrates, the Church does its worst damage to those who are most obedient and believing. Those who do not take its claims too seriously can benefit from the friendly, comfortable environment the Church creates, while not internalizing or obeying many of the counterproductive rules it asks its members to obey.

I think that I can make out pretty well by focussing on the Golden Rule and joy, while at the same time collecting as much information as possible respecting the cause and effect connections that affect the decisions I am required to make. My emphasis needs to be on being more patient, and learning to both better collect and analyse the cause and effect information that is available to me.

I will conclude on this point by noting that I read somewhere recently in one of the brain architecture books that I have been through that we rarely even attempt to engage reality, and then usually only when something is not working in our lives. Otherwise, we skim blissfully across the surface of both reality and consciousness. I am grateful that the cumulative total of things such as those outlined above eventually got my attention.

Re-Writing History

No, this is not more about the Church's faithful history program, but is directly related to it.

Dr. Martin Seligman in "Authentic Happiness" nicely summarizes the current state of psychological research respecting the connection between negative prior experience and current happiness. He notes that the so-called "inner child" movement of the 1980s and early 90s has been thoroughly discredited. The central idea of that movement was that to free

ourselves from the past we have to relive and disentangle a complex relationship between our current problems and what others (usually our parents) did to us as children. There have been numerous studies which show that the causal relationship alleged between harsh childhood experience and adult problems is weak or non-existent. However, a powerful relationship has been established between adult problems and the way in which we remember and dwell upon negative past experience. In short, many of the theories contained in old wisdom books such as "As A Man Thinketh" are supported by psychological research.

In a nutshell, Seligman tells us that the constant remembering of negative past events (or indeed thinking negative thoughts of any kind) will block joyous experience. This, he and others theorize, can be explained by our evolutionary development. Certain experiences ignite the arousal aspect of our nervous system (the adrenalin response related to fear, anger etc.). Since these are related to survival, they override everything else, thus blocking the subtler nervous system and mental processes related to joy.

Seligman also summarizes the state of research respecting the long debated connection between feeling and thought. Classic, Freudian psychology indicates that emotion or feeling drives thought. That is, we feel sad as a result of the deep psychological currents Freud postulated, and thus think sad thoughts. On the other hand, a school of psychologists has developed that observes that talking about sad memories, for example, seemed to create sad feelings. This school uses talk and cognitive therapy to treat psychological disorders by talking and thinking about happy things, for example, to combat sad feelings. Seligman acknowledges that it is not possible to fully reconcile the two sides of this long-standing debate, and then suggests that perhaps some kinds of immediate experience may produce a causal relationship that flows from feeling to thought. For example, when a friend complements us on something we have done, we react instantaneously by feeling good, and this causes positive thoughts. On the other had, Seligman points out that when we remember things, the thought at least in some cases comes first and depending upon what we remember and how, will produce different emotions. He also notes that it has been shown that mood can be changed by changing the nature of the thoughts that occupy us. The research of Elisabeth Loftus (referred to twice above) with respect to the manner in which the mind reconstructs prior events when they are recalled instead of playing some kind of a tape in our head is consistent with this.

We move, then, from the ideas of Seligman and Loftus respecting how the mind works to the concept of forgiveness. If we dwell on the negative aspects of past experience, our mind will continually reconstruct those experiences, elaborate on their negative aspects, perhaps extrapolate them into possibilities for our future. As a result, the adrenalin responses related to fear and anger that accompany this process will block joy that may be available from many other sources at the same time. Continual existence in this kind of state may produce depression, and can in some cases create a negative spiral from which it is difficult to recover.

On the other hand, those who truly forgive (and Seligman proposes a workable, tested model in that regard that is better than anything I have seen) can "re-write" their history so that its positive aspects are emphasized, the adrenalin response related to it is not activated, and it points toward the best possibilities.

I have much experience with the Mormon church that I need to forgive. Little of this has to do with individuals. Almost all of it has to do with the institution itself and a few people who wittingly or not have caused me and many others to suffer by knowingly representing myth as literal truth, and by suppressing information and free speech so that we have been prevented from bringing our lives into harmony with reality much sooner. This has, in effect, left many in

unnecessary cognitive dissonance, and has encouraged us to make the most important decisions of our lives in ignorance of vital and available information.

It is now clear to me how I must proceed with respect to these, and all other, slights of the past. It is time to take out the trash, while retaining the lessons I have learned from sorting through it. And, as indicated above, I have much to be grateful for with respect to my LDS upbringing.

Seligman also recommends something that I started doing in a twisted way as part of my Stake Mission President calling. It occurred to me that the strongest emotional connections I had ever experienced came as a result of my sharing of sincere feelings of love for the young people whom I served as Bishop in a one on one environment. I learned to apply this technique in my home as a result of applying it as Bishop and it has helped me to better connect with the children in particular. It occurred to me that I had never expressed my feelings for many of my closest non-LDS friends. So, as a missionary exercise, I went out and did that with a number of them, and then tied it to the Church. This is how the process went. I gave them each a letter in which I told them how much I thought of them and introduced the Church and BofM to them, and gave them a copy of the BofM. Then, I verbally summarized for them what was in the letter. This involved going through with them our experiences together, telling them why I admired and liked them so much, and then telling them that because of my feelings for them I wanted to share something precious to me – the Church – with them. I always felt a little dirty at that point – like I had sullied something sacred.

In any event, each of these experiences was powerful. One of my friends cried. Each of them was moved. Each friendship continued. None of them expressed any further interest in the Church, and each of them was gun shy respecting that subject whenever it came up after that. Had I not tied the Church to a legitimate expression of friendship, I would have done precisely what Seligman recommends as a way to create a powerful source of joy both for the expressor and the receiver of the expression of gratitude. What I did was akin to the friendly call we sometimes get from the long lost high school buddy that makes us feel great, until at the end Amway comes up ...

Sincere expressions of gratitude, and thoughts of gratitude, trigger the positive mental chain reaction described by Seligman's summary of the research. It is another way to counteract the negative effects of dwelling on past sadness and hurtful experiences. We each have much in our lives about which we may rightly feel hurt and sad, as well as joyful and grateful. This applies to the LDS church as well as to our families and all other aspects of life. We have both dark and bright colours sitting on the palette before us. Where will we dip the brush before painting the canvass of our lives?

As I forgive and rewrite my recollection of experiences as a Mormon, it is also important that I not forget the lessons that experience has taught me in terms of keeping an open mind, not trusting most authority figures who do not obtain their authority by demonstrated expertise, etc. And as noted below, I think it is "promoting good" and consistent with the Golden Rule that I take reasonable steps to let receptive others know about the aspects of LDS culture that are likely to be harmful for them.

Spirituality in Athletics - A Case Study

Just for fun, let's take a look at how some of the things above apply to something that has been close to my heart since boyhood – sports. The question for consideration is whether that

earthly, primal part of my life could have benefited from an earlier and better understanding of spirituality.

While he was with the Chicago Bulls, Phil Jackson did a lot to popularize the idea that athletic performance can be enhanced through meditation and other spiritual means. His spectacular success in moulding the Bulls, with some odd-fitting parts such as Dennis Rodman, into the steamroller they were gave these ideas credence. Personally, all this seemed pretty airy-fairy to me. I thought that Phil was pretty smart to have found a toy interesting enough to hold the attention of a bunch of flighty, too-much-money-not-enough-brains-or-discipline pro athletes, but doubted that it had any real world relevance.

You see, I confess with pride to being a basic sports guy: I prefer doing over thinking or watching; if I thought or watched it was primarily to learn how to do; I was subject to all kinds of weird superstition and ritual as I played my sports of choice (basketball, baseball, volleyball); and my idea of a good book ranged between Bill Bradley's "A Sense of Where You Are" (read several times just over thirty years ago as a young teenager – I can still summarize many of the book's key points) and any issue of Sports Illustrated.

And I am not much different now, as the curtain comes down on my ability to do athletically the things I have most loved. As my doing gradually declines, I make the painful transition to being primarily a watcher. This redirection of vast amounts of energy has resulted my peeling layer after layer off a lifetime of athletic experience until the behavioural, even spiritual, mechanisms at the core of that experience came into view. As a result, I am now able to revisit the significant moments of my athletic life with greater appreciation for the miracles in which I was privileged to participate, revel with my children as they brush up against the possibility of experiencing similar rites of passage in their lives, and marvel at the presence and talent of the Tigers and Annikas of the world as they dominate as no other ever has (yes, golf has appeared on my middle aged horizon), the grace of a Jordan as his sun sets, and the rising international tide athleticism and teamwork that the market economy in the West has set in motion.

As already noted, I wrote the "Zen in basketball" stuff off as another one of the those flaky trends – kind of like genuflecting before stepping up to the plate or wearing the lucky sweater as long as your college team keeps winning during March Madness. I always recognized those things as forms of primitive silliness, although a hot shooting night for my high school basketball team (or any team now that I think of it) would usually result in my wearing the same combination of socks, shorts etc. the next time out.

Researchers discovered over 50 years ago that superstitions behaviour and the predictability of outcomes go hand in hand. As Michael Shermer notes in his book "Why People Believe Weird Things",

The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1954), for example, discovered that among the Trobriand Islanders (off the coast of New Guinea), the farther out to sea they went to fish the more they developed superstitious rituals. In the calm waters of the inner lagoon, there were very few rituals. By the time they reached the dangerous waters of the deep-sea fishing, the Trobrianders were also deep into magic.

Malinowski concluded that superstitious ritual resulted from the human reaction to chance. The more chance and risk involved in any endeavour, the more likely we are to find superstitious behaviour attached to it.

Shermer then went on to note baseball players' superstitious behaviour. Hitting a baseball is one of sports most difficult achievements. And hitters display all kinds of superstitious rituals and other behaviours relative to hitting. Yet the same players have no similar ritual behaviours with regard their fielding. It is no coincidence that good fielders are successful more than 90 percent of the time while good hitters succeed in barely 30% of their attempts. And how many of us know someone who bought a new putter after dropping a few long ones, or a new driver after five minutes of impressive performance on the driving range, only to have the laws of physics and probability return us to earth before the credit card is cool? Both putting and driving are notoriously difficult, even for the best professionals.

I thought that Zen in sports was in the camp of superstition. "Be the ball". Come on! I'll go buy a new driver or putter instead. At least there is some tiny chance that they will actually help me, and I get the buzz of spending some money and goofing around with and showing off a new club. However, to some extent I accepted the idea that maybe the inscrutable Zen might help with inscrutable golf. Maybe if you understand one you would understand the other. I understood neither. But Zen with basketball? Good luck Phil.

With that background, I find myself coming back to this Zen stuff and thinking that Phil Jackson and his players were much more substantive than I had thought. In humility, I have to acknowledge (it hurts to write this) that perhaps I was more shallow than a bunch of pro athletes. Maybe that is going too far. But for sure I was more shallow than their coach.

Much of the background required to understand the Zen in sports thing is set out above. However, a bit more is necessary, and so I will both summarize and embellish what has gone before.

As noted above, Joseph Campbell had a talent for finding the common, illuminating threads that run through and tie together the world's major religious and spiritual systems. The patterns these threads disclose contain great wisdom. For some reason to the Western eye, these patterns are often most visible in the Eastern religious systems. This may be because we cannot be objective about anything to which we are too close. As Campbell points out, the Western adaptation of Zen Buddhism (a la Phil Jackson's "Sacred Hoops" or "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance", for example) contains none of the rigorous discipline that is at the heart of that Eastern art. Some westerners, however, have seen something important in Zen that our culture communicates poorly or not at all, and so have taken just that part and incorporated it into their way of life.

Bearing, therefore, in mind the idea that we are looking for themes, concepts and patterns, not entire religious systems or ways of life, let us look at a few spiritual ideas and see how they might apply to sporting life.

Buddhism is to Hinduism as Christianity is to Judaism. That is, Buddhism grew out of Hinduism as a reaction to what some perceived as the deficiencies of the older system in the same way as Christianity grew out of Judaism. Buddhism bears the name of its founder, as does Christianity. Both founders exemplified their way to enlightenment in reaction to the restraining forces of their mother cultures. We are talking about more than Bob Cousy with his behind the back dribble or Wilt Chamberlain and the dunk. This is James Naismith starting with soccer and rugby, adding the dribble and peach baskets, and ending up with basketball.

One of the problems with our modern interpretation of Christianity that make us miss much of its wisdom is our tendency to take Christ's teachings literally instead of mining their metaphoric

depths. This Christian neglect of metaphor and reliance by default on literalism is largely responsible for the marginalization of Christianity in the lives of a large segment of the modern Western world and the vitriolic fundamentalism of a small, vocal portion of Western society. The Christian heaven with its peace and bliss is, accordingly, generally perceived as being something that will come after the pain and difficulty of this life. Buddhism, however, at least as practised in North America, has mostly remained both metaphoric and practical. Hence, many Westerners (including the odd jock, and lots of golfers) regularly use ideas the roots of which are found within the Buddhist tradition.

For example, both Christ and Buddha overcame similar certain obstacles in the course of showing the way to enlightenment, which for Buddhists would be Nirvana and for Christians, Heaven. In the Buddha's life we find a particularly clear illustration of this process that they have connected to daily life in a fashion that is relevant to the athlete in each of us.

In order to find the peace and bliss of Nirvana and take his seat under the Bodhi (fig) tree, the Buddha had to overcome two things: fear and desire. Having freed himself from those two forces, he was fully aware, balanced and in harmony with his surroundings. He was centred. In many of the Buddha's depictions, the way to the Bodhi tree under which he sits is guarded by two frightening looking beings. They represent fear and desire. He invites us past them to join him in Nirvanic peace. There is a fascinating parallel between this story and the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden where another tree is guarded by the Seraphim. This parallel, however, is well beyond what I am writing here.

Buddhism, with all its arcane philosophy, beautiful poetry, practical wisdom and extreme mental disciplines can be boiled down to two things: Free yourself from fear and desire, and by doing, better enable yourself to do avoid evil and promote good. Could it be that Buddha was in "the zone" as he sat under the Bodhi tree?

Without relating Buddhist meditation to the zone, Joseph Campbell illustrates the ideal "centred" state posited by Buddhism with two athletic examples. First, he notes that in sumo wrestling (which he calls the "survival of the fattest") the combatants spend all but a few seconds of their time during a match in a squat, looking impassively at each other (this reminds me of golf), while the crowd goes wild (I guess the golf analogy only goes so far). This quiet contemplation is followed by a few seconds of activity during which one wrestler ends up either out of the ring or on his back.

What are the wrestlers doing while squatting and thinking? They are freeing themselves from fear and desire through meditation. They are finding that place of awareness, balance, harmony and centeredness from which their actions flow with maximum spontaneity, and not coincidentally, with maximum force. He who does this first, and best, in most cases does not end up on his back. The process these fighters use to center themselves, find energy etc. is precisely the same as the karate and other martial arts masters use before breaking impressive piles of boards, bricks etc. with any (well, almost any) body appendage.

Campbell's second example comes from the world of Japanese swordplay. A newly enlisted apprentice to a master swordsman is likely to be assigned household tasks for weeks before being allowed to touch a sword. During this time the most important lesson of his apprenticeship will be learned. To teach that lesson, the master occasionally pops out of nowhere and whacks the apprentice on the head while he is washing dishes, sweeping the floor, attending to important duties in the loo, etc. Older folk might recall a similar routine in the

Pink Panther movies featuring Peter Sellers and his oriental houseboy. Maybe I'm more shallow than Sellers too? This is becoming too painful for words.

In any event, at first the apprentice responds by trying to anticipate the attacks. This does not work because whenever the apprentice is ready to be whacked here, he is whacked there. Sellers never made it past this stage. Eventually, a successful apprentice learns to be simply aware – to find that place of awareness, harmony and centeredness, free from fear of being whacked or desire catch, maim etc. the whacker, from which his reaction to attack is spontaneous and timely. Such a response, with the right training, can become powerful, and eventually lethal to the attacker if that is what the apprentice desires.

The process to which the swordsman's apprentice is subjected reminds me of what Luke Skywalker was taught respecting the use of light sabres in the movie "Star Wars". This is not a coincidence. Accordingly to Campbell, George Lucas studied both ancient mythology and Zen carefully while constructing the motifs of his Star Wars series.

So what is the zone? Lets start with a few things that it is not to make sure that they don't confuse us. The zone is not necessarily being so hot that for a while you can't miss, although it might be. It is usually not making that one brilliant save, or that one 300-yard drive. Those things are due to the fact that the laws of probability dictate that if you try anything often enough, it will work really well at least a few times. After all those misses, when you do pull off a difficult trick it feels really good and the mind is more than capable of manufacturing a magical feeling with respect to this kind of event when it is recalled by memory. This feeling is similar to what the zone itself elicits, and so these two states are often confused. However, if you get hot on a regular basis; if you more often than not make those brilliant saves and 300-yard drives, you probably know what the zone is.

While in the zone, the perception of self disappears. We merge with the experience itself. We no longer think in terms of hand, ball and bat (or basket, club, etc.). We do not think. Our actions are driven by instinct because in some cases conscious thought cannot occur quickly enough to meet the demands being made of us, and in others because we so will it in order to remain in the zone.

But what I have so far described fits many routine, athletic and other moments in life. What sets the zone apart is the manner in which time elongates, or seems to disappear altogether, and we are infused with an energy and capacity to process information that enables us to make decisions better and more quickly than normal, and more to the point, better and more quickly than our opponent of the day. Our sense of energy and accurate anticipation perhaps does not make us any stronger, but our blows are struck with such perfect timing and so squarely that we are practically speaking invincible. We move without effort, at least one step ahead of where we would otherwise have been. We harness each source of energy that comes within our reach, including those of our foe. Her blows are effortlessly redirected back at her, or to accomplish our objectives. He melts before us, and if we notice his eyes, they are full of fear. She senses the zone operating against her.

The combination of the wonderful feeling of being guided by instinct through an intricate series of precise, difficult movements while seeming to be able to effortlessly anticipate both our opponent's next move and what our response should be produces the magical, powerful feeling that is characteristic of a zone experience.

As noted above, a lot of brain mapping research has been done during the past several years using various techniques to determine which parts of the brain function during different types of activity. These results describe, among other things, what occurs in the brains of Buddhist monks and Catholic nuns while they meditate. At the deepest point in their meditation cycle, the parts of the nervous system and brain that relate to relaxation as well as those that relate to arousal both operate at close to maximum capacity. This is a highly unusual state, since these two systems usually run at counter cycle to each other. One of the other rare times at which the body is designed to produce this pattern of brain and nervous system activity is at or near sexual climax, which requires the simultaneous stimulation of both the relaxation and arousal aspects of these systems.

One of the consequences of strong, simultaneous arousal and relaxation response within the brain is the partial shut down of the part of the brain that delineates between the self and everything around it, called the orientation association area. Scientists theorize that it is the combination of the high functioning of both the arousal and relaxation systems and this shut down of the orientation association area that produces the feelings of bliss, ecstasy and oneness with the universe that mystics of all spiritual persuasions have reported respecting their experiences ever since man started to write things down. This also accounts for the common use of sexually charged language to describe mystic encounters – the neural experience related to sexual activity is a close cousin to that of the mystic.

The Buddhist monk and Catholic nun research indicated that there are at least two ways in which to simultaneously arouse both the relaxation and arousal systems. One of those is likely at work in the creation of the zone. That is sustained physical activity combined with intense concentration on a thing, or set of things, to the exclusion of all else. This can be counted on to cause an increase in the activity of the arousal system as we steel ourselves to achieve our chosen objective, and as we push our bodies to achieve it. After the arousal system has been operating at high capacity for a period of time, it can spill over into the relaxation system and cause it to run counter to its usual pattern of operation and shift into high gear while the arousal system continues to operate in the same fashion. No one knows what causes this to occur in some cases and not in others. But it is probably connected to our ability to maintain a kind of meditative focus that produces calm at the same time as the adrenalin system is at close to full throttle during competition. As this spill over and kick start of the relaxation systems occurs, additional parts of our mind will open up, some likely only normally accessible during our dream life, and hence additional creative and mental powers will become available to us.

In some cases it has been shown that mental stimulation of this kind appears to “pry open the aperture of time” and to cause glimpses or intuitions of events about to happen to slip through to us. While I am not aware of any research of this type conducted with respect to athletes, I have had the experience many times “knowing” while in the zone where a volleyball spike was going, and instinctively launching myself toward the a spot on the floor before the ball was struck. Perhaps a better way to describe this experience is to say that I would instinctively dive well before the ball was struck with only the angle of the spiker rising through the air to guide me, and was regularly thrilled to find that the ball and I arrived at the same place on the floor at the same time and that I had a chance to play it. Given the amount of time it takes to dive for a volleyball spike and how much less time it takes for a well struck ball to travel from hand to floor, this is a common occurrence in that sport. In fact, it is the only way many spikes can be recovered, and recovered they are on a regular basis. And each time it happens it feels like magic.

So, now that I have succeeded in raising our expectations with respect to what we might experience the next time we venture out on the court or field, how can we realistically hope to dip out little cups into this river of energy that has apparently been flowing by us mostly unnoticed through out lives?

Let me answer that question in the context of a story about my daughter's high school basketball team. A short time ago I watched these girls play in what for them was a big game. This is a young team – most of the key players are juniors. However, they have enough talent that during the pre-season they were picked by the local sports news service to be near or at the top of the heap in our Canadian province. Then the season started and their play was disappointing. They did not live up to their billing; they played tight and found ways to lose games they should have won; their team shooting percentage was (and still is) far worse than it was two years ago when they played good high school teams in exhibition games as a group of freshmen.

As freshmen they just played. They were not intentionally centred in that powerful Buddhist place described above, and certainly did not experience the zone as I have described it. However, in their innocence they might have, at times, been on the edge of that state. Now, however, it seems that the higher expectations by which they are surrounded have caused them to both try too hard (be over-influenced by desire) and to fear defeat (be over-influenced by fear). As the season wore on, all eyes were no longer on them. In fact, the word was, "What was the big deal about Springbank? They were overrated." Hence, the pressure began to subside.

Back to the game. They faced off against a team that beat them badly a month ago. At the time of that first game, our girls thought their opponents were the best team in the province. Both teams played poorly during the first encounter. It was an otherworldly game. We caught a good team on a bad day but because we were afraid of them found a way to play worse than they did, and so lost. By the time of the next game, our girls were aware of other contests their opponents had lost, and hence no longer feared them. From the opening tip we controlled a nicely played game, and eventually won it. The girls can still play much better than they have so far. They have not even started to center themselves in the Buddhist sense, but they took a huge step forward by recognizing the role fear played in their earlier defeat.

Earlier the same day (these games were played at a tournament) the girls led the best team in our Province by over 15 points at the end of the first quarter. Somehow they had stumbled to the edge of the zone, and their opposition was running scared. They were an awesome, wondrous sight for those few minutes. And then it was as if they looked around as a group and said, "Hey, what are we doing? We can't play like this!!", and simply turned off the tap. By half time the game was tied, and we lost it in the second half. Once again, fear tripped them up, and this time it was fear of themselves. They were unprepared for how well they can play, and hence rejected their own best behaviour instead of embracing it as a long lost friend.

I hope soon to invite my daughter and her friends to engage in an experiment. They will learn about fear and desire. They will learn the basic techniques of concentration, visualization and meditation. And they will be encouraged to practice both quietly centring themselves away from the fear and desire of the moment before games and practices, as well as concentrating intently on whatever their role happens to be while they are playing. I am certain this will help them to take their next big step forward, and that they can learn some important things about life as they explore this aspect of their athleticism.

And what of the zone? She remains in the realm of magic, mystery. This is a spiritual matter. We invite her presence with our actions, thoughts and attitudes, by preparing our minds by ridding them of impediments like excess fear and desire, and by cultivating our capacity for awareness. These are muscles that will develop like any others through exercise. There is no question that those who know how to prepare, and who perhaps have a mental aptitude for these things, have a better chance than others. But the fact remains that many try out and few are chosen for the full-blown version of this experience.

If the zone graces our play, we are thankful forever and will remember the day or days so that we can tell of it until our children and grandchildren groan as they hear the first words of its introduction. However, they will seek the same privilege we have had, and if they are as fortunate as we have been, they will likewise treasure and polish this gem of a life experience as often as occasion permits.

Do Vocal Fringe Members (and Non-Members) Harm or Help the Church?

This is a relatively unimportant side issue, but I think that it is still worth addressing.

The LDS church has moved from being a socialist, anti-traditional family, lawbreaking, anti-government, charismatic, separationist people, to being a capitalist, patriotic, traditional family, law abiding, non-charismatic people. This represents 180-degree change on a number of important definitional fronts. The only common denominator respecting these changes is a strong tendency to obey the dictates of authority from time to time. Campbell has noted the correlation between the harshness of the host society and the strictures of its religious mores. That is, the more harsh the society and therefore the more important group cooperation and cohesion, the more authoritarian the society's rules and the less individual freedom is permitted. This may explain the shift from Joseph Smith's laissez faire philosophy in LDS' beginnings, to the hierarchical approach that was in place by the end of his life which Brigham Young and others further developed.

During the Church's early days, the environment in which it operated became much more harsh. Particularly, as the Church moved west, group cohesion became a prerequisite for survival in many cases. Hence, the sociologists would predict a tightening of the rules to permit less individual diversity and optimize group efficiency and hence the probability of survival.

As modern society has developed, the environment has become friendlier to the Church. Hence, obedience is no longer an environmental requirement, and many members sense this and are rebelling against the dictates of authority. They do this in many ways. The most common is to simply not obey, and keep quiet about it. While I was Bishop I was amazed at the number of members who held temple recommends and did not obey Church demands in anything like what my understanding of our temple covenants required. I now understand. Those covenants were developed at a time when the degree of organizational control they posit was important, and were recognized as such by the members. Hence, the covenants meant something. Now, however, for many members those covenants are a confusing source of cognitive dissonance. They have to make those promises (or be reminded of them) each time they go to the temple or pass a temple recommend interview (a bizarre invasion of privacy for anyone not indoctrinated by the LDS faith), and yet do not live their lives in accordance with what they have said. And this within a religious organization that puts a high degree of emphasis on individual honesty. No wonder Utahns lead the nation in the incidence of depression and Prozac use. Their lives are rife with this kind of disharmony. The mind deals with deep, irreconcilable conflicts of this sort by burying them.

The second common response to Church authority is open questioning and disobedience. This is much more difficult for the leaders to deal with. They prefer the quiet disobedience mentioned above, and tried to get me to go that route. I have learned that this is their standard response for people like me. In Utah and certain other places where it is difficult to survive if you are not a member of the Church, the threat of pulling one's church membership is an effective control tool. Up here, it does not work so well.

In any event, the leaders have a vested interest in the Church's authoritarian systems, and are doing what they can to resist the loss of power that would flow from reduced obedience by the members. Nonetheless, the rules are slowly relaxing. The process by which this occurs is interesting. With the exception of things like polygamy and the priesthood question, which were forced on the Church by tremendous amounts of outside pressure applied over decades in each case, change in LDS culture and theology happens slowly at the rearguard of societal change. For example, the ERA movement in the US produced a tremendous hue and cry from the women and others within the Church for a greater say for women, priesthood for the women, etc. Many women either left the church or were excommunicated as a result. And, the church quietly began to change the way women participated in church government. They now have more airtime at general conference, a more prominent role in ward, stake and general counsels, etc. Hence, the voices for change are both stifled, and listened to.

Would it be a good thing if those voices were never raised? I am cynical enough, and have been on the inside of the Church governance structure for long enough, that I seriously doubt that change would occur unless a need for it was perceived. Members leaving the Church and demands made loudly and continuously, indicating the possibility of more defections, create that perceived need. This is the pattern seen throughout the religious world.

Society is continually changing, creating different needs that religions are called upon to meet. If a religion does not meet those needs for long enough, it will die. Hence, most religions change. And they tend to be anti-historical (they suppress memory of the changes) because they don't like people to remember how things were since this usually results in more requests for change. Religions are large institutions, and as such are disinclined to change. This is a matter of organizational dynamics. It has little, if anything, to do with god.

Another major change is on the horizon right now. It has to do with homosexuality. I am not sure how the Church is going to deal with this one. Right now the church is, on the one hand, still preaching that homosexuality is a terrible sin, and so makes anyone who is a believing Mormon and gay feel great guilt. On the other hand, the scientific literature is making it more and more clear than the genetic influences in homosexuality are greater than previously understood. That is, it now appears that many homosexuals do not have much in the way of free will when it comes to that life style question. And the church is quietly experimenting with some interesting things. A friend in San Francisco told me a short time ago that there is an LDS ward in the Bay area most of the members of which are gay. The Church leaders there are apparently counselling them in ways that would curl the hair of your average Wasatch front member. Headquarters would likely disavow having anything to do with the program were it made public. It could be blamed on a rogue Bishop or Stake President.

We can find a number of web sites on the Internet for gay members of the Church. Conferences are held by them each year. Interesting articles calling for more tolerance respecting gays are regularly published in Dialogue and Sunstone. Some of these are written by respected, active Church members who have held responsible Church callings (I read one recently by a Bishop from the Los Angeles area) and have dealt extensively with the gay

community. The pressure for change is rising, and will continue to rise as we understand more about what it means to be gay. Of course, many members have been excommunicated or left the Church as a result of its current and prior stand respecting gays. But it is my guess that within my lifetime the Church will find a way to quietly soften its position in this regard. I will watch this one with interest.

The community of fringe Church members and the scientific community will, as usual, drive this process of changing belief or practise. That is where the inspiration comes from in most cases. The same appears to be true with respect to the blacks and the priesthood question, once we hear the whole story. We do not have a prophet who receives inspiration and communicates that to the people. We have a group of 15 very old people who have to agree, and then that result is communicated to the people.

The LDS fringe community also deals with the needs of the LDS gay population, which are not attended to by the Church itself. They are a de facto church in, of and to themselves. They connect largely over the Internet, and the Church is just sticking its organizational toe into their water now. If the Church cannot meet the needs of the gay community, they should go elsewhere. They should not be made to suffer and feel less than whole as a result of a theology that has been proven wrong in many other respects over the years, and will often be proven wrong again as time passes. As I have come to understand these things, my feelings for my uncle Doug McCue and the few other gay people I have dealt with changed dramatically.

Gay folk are god's children, and he made them as they are as surely as he made me as I am. The pain the Church's position causes them is real, unbearably heavy, and has been so for a long time. If inspired men lead the Church, why has this situation been allowed to persist? Rather than turn handsprings in vain attempts to answer that question, as has been done ever since I can remember respecting the blacks, let's come clean – the Church got that one wrong. That is all there is to it. The Church's leaders are fallible. That is a basic and healthy part of our theology. Believe it. Let's govern our lives by it. This is like a blast of fresh air in a dank place.

So, in the LDS church, change occurs primarily as a result of issues being forced into the spotlight by fringe groups and people like Michael Quinn who insist on publishing things the Brethren would rather everyone forgot, or did not learn in the first place. The only difference between the Church's approach and mine is that I take seriously what Joseph Smith taught about every member receiving his own inspiration. And if my inspiration contradicts that of the Church authorities on some point, I should part company with them there. I must follow the best light available to me, and in most cases it will be what feels right to me after carefully considering everything relevant to the decision at hand that I can find, including what the Church's leaders have to say. If as a result I am in the fringe group that drives change, so be it. That process is important to the LDS church, whether its leaders like it or not. A review of the Church's history admits of no other conclusion from my point of view.

If I am studying, thinking, praying etc. about a wide range of things instead of the narrow range to which the Church attempts in a variety of ways to limit me, I am likely to be out in front of what the leaders of the Church are ready to deal with. That is easily predictable, now that I understand how their processes work. And what were Jesus and most of the OT prophets in any event? They were fringe members of their society who said, "Hold on, that doesn't sound right to us", and had the confidence to do what their consciences dictated. Many of them did not have formal leadership status within their religious community, and most were not welcome by the religious leaders of their day. While I don't put myself on a level anything like theirs, I have enough confidence in my own intuition to follow it. The more people who act and think in this

way within our society, the better the ideas we will choose from, and the better off we will all be.

Lowell Bennion has pointed out this very problem with the Church. The Church is run by the equivalent of the Old Testament priests, on one of whom the title of prophet has been placed. But they are all internal, organizationally controlled people. They make decisions by the consensus of 15 elderly gentlemen, who are human beings, and try as they might will have difficulty staying in touch with the rapidly changing reality of their last days. This is perhaps what the Church's name really means - while the earth is not in its last days, the Church is governed by a group of men most of whom are literally in their theirs. As medical technology continues to progress, this problem will only worsen.

Bennion points out that the title of prophet was traditionally conferred, generally speaking, with the benefit of hindsight. Which of the various wandering preachers who arose outside the formal religious system from time to time, for the very purpose of questioning the validity of that system, would strike a chord with the people and so effect change? When that happened, the presence of a prophet would be acknowledged. Many others who preached in this fashion were not so honoured. Bennion notes that by internalizing the role of prophet, the Church has short-circuited the system of occasional correction sparked by constructive, external forces. The Church was probably organized to resist this change in Old Testament times as well. This is a matter of human and organizational dynamics, not of god. Bennion argued that by resigning as president of the Church shortly before his death, Joseph Smith was trying to separate the Church's governance from the prophetic function to allow the Old Testament model to operate as the Church matured. His death, and Brigham Young's organizational prowess, truncated that process.

It is my view that people like Mike Quinn play the role of latter day prophets to the priests running the Church. This is particularly ironic because I understand that Quinn was given a blessing when he was a spiritually gifted teenager in which he was promised that he would be an Apostle. What irony it is that he has become such in a way neither the giver of the blessing, nor he, could have imagined.

I conclude on this point by noting that I do not plan to make a career of correcting the Church, and I do not think it likely that I will have any material effect in that regard. However, I feel that by choosing not to remain silent I am doing the right thing, and while I won't spend a great deal of energy in this regard, as I go through life I will as occasion permits do what I can to encourage others to understand how their faith works and take into their lives all of the light, knowledge and concomitant joy they are capable of receiving. While doing so I will try to remember Thomas Mann's "arrows tipped with love", and Matt Berry's advice to take care not to introduce "excruciating truths" where they cannot reasonably be expected to do anything but cause confusion and pain.

Conclusion

I do not want to try to encapsulate my ramblings, and so I will conclude with the few thoughts that stand out above the others.

As long as I "knew", my mind and heart were closed. Hence, my experience bears out Thoreau's theory that "Humility, like darkness, reveals heavenly lights". The admission that I do not know paradoxically has opened wisdom's door, provides my principal source of energy and lights my way. One of the most interesting and joy producing aspects of this process is that

my orientation has shifted from "thou shalt" (life dictated by external rules) to "I will" (life spontaneously flowing from within). Instead of knowing that I must do, I now pursue those things that beckon to me.

Study, meditation and increasing self-awareness power the purification of my soul. Karen Armstrong speaks for me when she says:

When I immerse myself in sacred texts, whatever they happen to be, I live moments of awe and wonder and transcendence. This is one of the common experiences of the twentieth century. People don't want to leave their own traditions, but they are reaching out instinctively to other faiths. Our society is becoming more and more global, and religious pluralism is one aspect of it. (Readers Guide to "The Battle for God" – an interview with Jonathon Kirsch).

I would add that I also find spiritually moving things in "sacred" texts that deal with the cause and effect connections that drive the human mind, the cosmos, the subatomic world, etc. As Einstein and Schrodinger put it, there is a wonderful, mysterious unity and order to the universe as it unfolds itself before us that gives us the sense that we are somehow one with it. In that wonder, I have glimpsed god.

There is particular delight in my discovery of any cause and effect relationship, and in the development of my ability to align behaviour with such principles. I have felt this occur with things as unimportant as a golf swing and as fundamental as progress toward an understanding of reality itself. The nature of the joy I feel at each step of this process tells me that these principles are of basic importance. If they are not god, they are deity's shadow or reflection. I seek harmony with them. While perfection in this regard is not possible, movement toward it is. Each step I take in that direction is joyous.

The greater my harmony, the greater my energy, utility and joy. And "men are that they might have joy." (2 Nephi 2:25) My purpose is to experience joy here and now. I can speculate as to the cosmic consequences of the things that produce this joy, but cannot know them. I am content to find my meaning in joy itself, and then hope for the best as I go over the top of the roller coaster through the dark door. That will be more exciting than the first Christmas I can remember.

Without discounting the importance of continuing to become more self aware, I note that this road could be all consuming and little satisfying. It could become the equivalent of studying the theoretical principles that underlie the game of golf one's entire life without ever getting out on the course. Hence, while my studies will likely always excite me add spice to my life, it is primarily in living the Golden Rule (or its Buddhist or Kantian equivalents) that I intend to experience life and to find continuous joy.

When I say that my purpose is to experience as much joy as possible, that directs me to the task of choosing the values and doing the things connected to them that will create the joy I wish to experience. This is the ultimate, and most important, exercise of free will. I am responsible for constructing the world in which I wish to live, and by that construction I affect the lives of those around at distances I cannot comprehend.

And finally I can reconsider the "Bloom Where You Are Planted" poster at the elementary school. I am deeply rooted in Mormon soil, and perhaps one might say that an excessive amount of Mormon dung (were this written for less polite company I might have used a ranching

term) is piled all around me, perhaps so high and deep that it choked off my growth. I may have to bring in water and different fertilizer from other places, and then clear a load of that well-intentioned crap away from my roots to let nourishment in. However, this is not likely to change my essence. I bet both my tree's blossoms and unusual fruit will be recognizably Mormon.

So I am blooming where I was planted. But perhaps the blossoms have come in multihued instead of monochrome, or are odd sized, or have arrived during a season when most of the trees in the orchard are bare. And the beleaguered farmer in charge of the orchard, having done his best with me and "failed", may yet thank god for those few odd trees who have so frustratingly gotten out of sync with the rest.

But what of my faith? Am I "Out of My Faith?" Have I exhausted it? Did something come out of it? Where is it? From my meanderings above answers can be implied to each of these questions. However, only one answer is worth recording here. I still have my faith. It animates me more than ever. It is so thoroughly engrained in me that I could not get rid of it even if I wished to do so. And in any event, my second birth has caused me to see it in new light, and to wish to develop its role in my life. The less we know the more important faith becomes.

Most importantly, wisdom has grown out of my faith. As a result of the harsh conditioning I underwent as a youth, it took a long time, but eventually the seed swelled sufficiently within my breast (Alma 32:28) that the most important parts of my religious tradition – things like free will, the pursuit of truth, the importance of honesty – overcame their accumulated, ancient dross. As a result, I feel more alive and joyful than ever.

Now I walk into the unknown with confidence and a smile on my face, guided through fading light by growing faith and my humble admission of ignorance.