

Spirituality

Things spiritual are at the core of life, in my view. Spirituality, however, does not mean going to church, or engaging in overtly religious activity. It is, rather, the kind of respect, reverence and feeling for our fellow man and life in general that characterizes the best of what humanity has shown throughout its short, recorded history.

My approach to spirituality has evolved radically during the course of my life, due largely to the fact that I was raised a devout Mormon and lived faithful to the Mormon belief system for many years. As an aside and at my father's request, I note that my parents are Bob & Katie McCue of Victoria, British Columbia, both of whom continue to be faithful members of the Mormon Church. Dad wants to make sure that I am not confused with him by the many in the Mormon community who know of the historian Bob McCue (him) and might think I am him.

I served as a missionary for the Mormon Church (in southern Peru in the late 1970s) and then remained a faithful, active member of that religious organization until my mid-forties. My service to the Mormon community included a five-year stint as "Bishop" of the congregation to which my family belonged, and a variety of other leadership and teaching responsibilities. I released myself from my last Mormon responsibility (Stake Mission President) in early 2002. I resigned my membership in December of 2002. The three issues that brought this to a head were as follows: First, I began to break the Mormon rule that everything not supportive of the Mormon faith should be avoided. This led me to Mormon history as the professional historians write it - incredibly, at age 45 with three university degrees, a new genre for me. I quickly realized that I had been misled as to how Mormonism started, and hence what it was. I saw a pattern of Mormon leadership deception going back to Mormonism's beginnings with Joseph Smith, and was physically ill for months as I adjusted to this reality.

The suppressed aspects of Mormon history that most troubled me indicated many instances in which Mormon leaders deceived their followers and the public about important matters. Joseph Smith was the worst in this regard. His tendency to deceive when in a tight spot bears a striking resemblance to the habits of shady stock promoters I have met in my legal practice.

I was particularly distressed by Smith's practice of using his authority as a religious leader to persuade women, including many who were married as well as young teenagers, to have sex with him. Smith denied the rumours that swirled around him in this regard for well over a decade, and indicated that God instructed him to lie because the people were not ready to hear the "truth" – that polygamy was God's eternal law and that all who wished salvation must obey it.

The main features of this sordid chapter in Mormon history are not disputed by knowledgeable Mormon leaders or scholars, when put on the spot. The facts are confirmed by multiple reliable sources, including affidavits given by many of Smith's "spiritual wives" that the Mormon Church itself collected shortly after Smith died. Mormons, at that time, were proud of polygamy. These affidavits settled a dispute with a splinter group as to when, how and by whom, polygamy was initially practiced. Mormon scripture today teaches that polygamy will be required of those who dwell with God in the highest realm of heaven. Ironically, throughout most of Smith's life while he practiced polygamy, Mormon scripture expressly forbade it. This was consistent with the "people are not ready for the truth yet" principle on which Smith ran his public relations program in those days.

Second, I was told by the Mormon leadership that I could believe what I wanted and remain a

member of the Mormon Church. However, I could not speak to anyone outside of my immediate family about what I had discovered, regardless of its historical legitimacy.

And third, I thought that in spite of its untrustworthy beginning Mormonism perhaps had become worthwhile as a social movement. Good things do sometimes come from bad, after all. So, I carefully considered the various significant teachings that distinguish Mormonism from other religions and wisdom traditions. This persuaded me that my family and I would likely be much better off without the advice of Mormon leaders.

After carefully considering the foregoing, I decided that I did not wish to be further associated with the Mormon Church, despite still having great respect and feeling for many individual members of that organization. As one might guess, this decision put significant stress on many of my family and other close relationships within the close-knit Mormon community.

Mormonism has a narrow, literal approach to most religious issues, and is authoritarian in the extreme. For example, Mormon theology holds that:

- Mary was a virgin in the sense that she did not have sexual relations with any mortal, but a physical, anthropomorphic God the Father caused her pregnancy in the usual fashion;
- Christ's resurrection literally occurred and he then literally visited certain people in the Americas who had already established Christian communities here;
- The Garden of Eden was located in Jackson County, Missouri;
- Joseph Smith spoke face to face with a physical God the Father and the resurrected Christ, and was commissioned by them to set up the one "true" church, which is the Mormon church;
- God the Father and Christ told Joseph Smith that all of the other churches were "wrong", that their beliefs were an "abomination", and their pastors were "corrupt";
- God used skin color at least in the ancient Americas and perhaps elsewhere to designate the righteous from the wicked, with the wicked being cursed with a dark skin to make it easier for the righteous light skinned people to avoid interacting with potentially corrupting influences;
- God was once a man as we are, and we can become gods just as He is;
- Only those who accept the Mormon message and obey Mormon authority will be able to live with God in the highest realm of heaven, known as the Celestial Kingdom;
- Marriage and family bonds will exist beyond death, but only for those who obey Mormon authority and so qualify to live with God in Celestial Kingdom; and
- In the Celestial Kingdom, polygamy will be the dominant if not only form of marriage since more women are likely to qualify for that exalted state than men.

Mormonism attempts to demystify spiritual issues by providing unambiguous answers to many of the unanswerable questions that troubled people in the early 1800s when it was founded, and still trouble mankind now. In addition, Mormonism introduced a variety of unusual ideas to Christianity, some of them resembling certain aspects of Eastern belief systems.

After determining that much of the information I was taught as a believing Mormon is suspect at best, and likely false, I developed a more flexible approach to the spiritual aspects of life. I am much less certain of myself, and as a result am more open to the beauty and wonder produced by other cultures, religious traditions, science and the arts. This approach to life in general and spirituality in particular fills me with joy.

Some have queried whether this website and the long essays I write indicate that I am trying to set myself up as some kind of a "guru" – an alterative to Mormonism. The answer is a clear no. I encourage people to think for themselves. I suggest that they should not accept so readily what any authority, and particularly religious authority, has to say. I have no intention of telling people what to do, and so becoming their leader. I point to the example of Robert Ingersoll in that regard. Part of his story can be found in the essay titled "Religious Faith: Enlightening or Blinding?" at page 89.

The essential difference between a Joseph Smith and a Robert Ingersoll is that Smith taught some interesting things, claimed to have special authority from God to do so, claimed that to the extent he spoke for God he was inerrant, and then gained control over people as a result of his teachings. Ingersoll taught what amounts to the scientific method (we are never justified in believing that we are certain to be right), that we should approach life in a broadly humanistic fashion, and did not seek to control anyone. Joseph Smith operated on the basis of principles of learning and governance that characterized the Dark Ages. Ingersoll operated on the basis of Renaissance principles.

Others have questioned my decision to leave Mormonism on the basis that such a dislocation would leave a "hole in my heart" that would be impossible to fill. I could not disagree more. In my view, it is up to me whether to frame the "leaving the fold" experience as one that causes a gapping hole, or one that cleans away dross to admit light. And this is a well-trodden path. The Internet and bookstores are full of accounts written by people who have left fundamentalist leaning traditions of all persuasions. Many of those stories are similar to mine. They contain much more joy than tragedy, and are chock full of irony.

It was hard work (and will continue to be hard work) to grind away the layers of social conditioning that my LDS experience caked on me, but that process itself is joyful. And as more grinding occurs, I can feel more light come through. The world is coming to life for me in what were previously unimaginable, and wonderful ways. At least once each week I find myself pausing as my heart swells over something I have learned or felt, while an almost tear inducing feeling of gratitude sweeps over me.

I know some Mormons who are fully apprised of the difficulties of their belief system, and still manage to believe and live much as I do. The Church does not use them; they use it, as should be the case in a relationship between a religious institution and its followers. They are few, and I do not judge them. I do not feel that I could know enough to do so fairly. But my temperament is such that it is better for me to have considerable distance between my life and the LDS Church. And, I believe that for the vast majority of people, being outside of Mormonism is likely to be far more healthy than being inside of it.

For the sake of contrast, and to illustrate the importance of perspective, I have divided this section of the website into two parts. The first contains things I wrote while I was a faithful, active Mormon. The second contains things I wrote as I tried to work my way through what initially seemed like an impenetrable morass in my soul that had been created by many years of highly effective conditioning at the hands of well-intentioned, good-hearted Mormon leaders and family members. I do not suggest that Mormons are bad. In fact, most are wonderful people. But they are kept purposefully in the dark by a few leaders at the top of the system and hence innocently mislead others (such as me) as a result of being conditioned to believe and repeat things that

are false.

With a tip of my hat to Plato, I refer Mormonism's highest leaders as "philosopher kings". They were the wise few who Plato felt were justified in deceiving the masses when it was necessary to do so, since the masses were incapable of understanding what was in their best interest. This concept is closely related to Nietzsche's notion of the "pious" or "holy" lie, which he said is the foundation of all priesthoods and describes behaviour in the religious sphere that is consistent with the philosopher king concept. Nietzsche condemned the pious lie, as do I, as did Joseph Smith. In the so-called "Plan of Salvation", Satan beautifully articulated the philosopher king and pious lie approach, and was vilified for it. The Plan of Salvation, by the way, is the Mormon belief that we lived prior to this life with God; were sent to Earth to be tested; and if we pass the test, will return to live with God and to become like Him.

It is clear, in my view, that Joseph Smith behaved in classic philosopher king fashion, and that the Mormon "faithful history" policy discloses a group of modern philosopher kings who feel justified in telling pious lies. "Faithful history" is a form of Mormon censorship. It suppresses all information that does not encourage Mormons to be more obedient to current Mormon leaders. Hence, facts that strongly suggest Smith and other Mormon leaders are not trustworthy are airbrushed out of Mormon consciousness.

If you are interested in seeing what I wrote as a faithful Mormon, click on the "Mormon" button below. If you are interested in what the world looks like to someone waking up from a well-conditioned intellectual stupor, click on the "Post-Mormon" button. If you are tired of the usual ex-Mormon rants (I hope that is not what I am doing, but some may perceive it that way), you might find "Out of My Faith" an interesting read. Also, some of the shorter, more creative pieces (found in the "Creative Writing, Short Stories and Poetry" section) and the essays respecting "renaissance", "metaphor games" and "perspective" may be more appealing to those who are still firmly connected to Mormonism.

I am told that, in particular, the "First Letter to Elder Holland" and the essay titled "Religious Belief: Enlightening or Blinding?" have been helpful to many people who have visited here. And, in the various pieces titled "Dialogue with My Daughter" I have attempted to summarize in more accessible form some of the concepts that are developed in greater detail in my longer essays. The long essays were, as noted above, mostly learning or therapeutic exercises for me that I have preserved. A friend who edits a newspaper calls my long essays "scaffolding" – the kind of notes writers make to themselves as they are getting ready to publish something. That, in my view, is a fair description. And perhaps some day I will be prepared to do the extra work required to publish something. For the time being, what you find here is the best I am prepared to do. I have decided to post my essays in five categories:

- Departure: These were written as I left Mormonism, are not as thoughtful as the later essays, and are included for more to help me remember what the road behind me was like than anything else;
- Long Essays: More than 15 pages;
- Medium Length Essays: 6 - 15 pages;
- Short Essays: 5 pages or less;
- Creative Writing: Short Stories, Parables and Poetry; and
- New Content: The newest content on the site in each of the above categories can be

found here.

It seems that the further I move away from my Mormon moorings, the less concerned what I write is with the specifics of Mormon history or theology, and the more interested I become in how Mormonism functions as a matter of sociology and psychology. Hence, as a rule of thumb, the further down the list of essays in each category you go, the more eclectic you will find them. In order to preserve a record of my own development, I have decided not to go back and change the earlier pieces to reflect my evolving point of view.

Most of my writing has been done with a view to therapy as opposed to literary excellence, and hence a lot of editing, proofreading and polishing could be done. Perhaps I will get around to that someday. And in the meantime, I hope what I have assembled here is of assistance to you on an "as is, where is" basis.

I note that my intent is not to disturb those faithful Mormons who wish to remain as they are. As Emerson put it, "God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please; you can never have both." To which Henri Poincaré adds: "We also know how cruel the truth often is, and we wonder whether delusion is not more consoling."

All the best,

bob mccue

Calgary, Alberta

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