

Does the Mormon Church Have a Moral Duty to "Come Clean" Respecting the Uncertain Nature of Its Origins?

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September 3, 2003
Version 2

My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, wash, and be clean?

2 Kings 5:10

Introduction

This essay is written as part of my ongoing attempt to understand my religious experience as a faithful member of the Mormon Church, and in the hope that it will shorten the learning curve of others who will come behind me along the same path.

The leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the "Church", the "Mormon Church" or the "LDS Church") are aware of a great deal of persuasive evidence that is relevant to the evaluation of the Church's foundational claims. The questions to which this evidence relates include things like whether Joseph Smith translated, as that term is ordinarily understood, physical golden plates into the Book of Mormon, or did he have some kind of mystic experience that gave rise to that book, or did he just make it up, plagiarize it, etc.? And what was the nature of the experience Mormons know as the "First Vision"? Did Joseph see God the Father and the Jesus Christ and receive a certain clearly defined mandate from them, as he indicated in an account given near the end of his life, or did any of the other various conflicting things he said about that experience occur instead of, or in addition to, what is now contained in the official account?

And how about the chapters in Mormon history euphemistically labelled "Lying for the Lord"? These chronicle the fact that Joseph Smith lied for over ten years over the pulpit, in private, in the news papers etc. by saying that he did not participate in polygamy, and the fact that for close to 15 years between 1890 and 1905 many other Church leaders did the same thing while pretending to obey U.S. federal authority respecting the requirement that Mormons not practise polygamy. During that time almost all of the Twelve Apostles and First Presidency were authorizing or participating in polygamous marriage sealings.

And how about Smith's spotty record as a translator of ancient records?

Questions of this nature abound with respect to the origins of Mormon faith. Evidence respecting the answers to these questions assists us to assess the character and nature of Mormonism's founder, and to better understand the relationship he likely had with God as well as the alleged divine connection of other past and present Mormon leaders. If, as it seems may well be the case, Joseph Smith was given to dreams and visions of a variety of sorts (including some religious and others oriented toward ill conceived, semi fraudulent and ultimately unsuccessful commercial projects), behaved at times in a bizarre fashion (as religious innovators often do according to the sociologists who study

these things), and who did not mind telling lies for years on end when he felt it was required to suit his purposes, we might not swallow whole all of the stories he told. Rather, we might consider each carefully on its merits, take what seems good to us, and not hesitate to discard what seems bad, like the Book of Mormon idea that sin and skin color are correlated.

Furthermore, if Joseph Smith had the habit of exaggerating, particularly when in a tight spot, we might have some concerns respecting the nature of the authority he passed on to those who now lead the Mormon Church, and enjoy the virtually blind obedience of millions of faithful Mormons world wide, something I note Smith himself seldom if ever enjoyed during his leadership tenure. And we might question the time and other resources that we are prepared to dedicate to the causes toward which these men direct us. Each of these causes, perhaps, should be considered on its merits relative to other aspects of life to which we may feel attracted.

My purpose here is not to explore the merits of the questions referred to above. Many who are better informed and more capable than I have already done and will continue to do that. Rather, I would simply acknowledge the existence of those questions and that for the reasons set out above, they are critically important to anyone who is considering making the LDS Church a significant part of his or her life, or for whom it is so already.

The question, then, is to what extent the leaders of the LDS Church have a moral duty to make members and potential converts aware of these questions and the evidence now available concerning them, or at a minimum to desist from doing things calculated to prevent Church members from becoming familiar with these things.

I will conclude that the Mormon Church does have a moral obligation to both disclose and desist as indicated. I find myself in disagreement on this point with Dallin Oaks, who at a conference for Church educators in August of 1985 talked about the importance of interpreting Church history in context, and indicated that Mormons should not be fooled by the misleading half truths some historians, journalists etc. publish respecting the Church. Then, he made the following statement while purporting to lecture historians and other educators with respect to the importance of their use 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 these quotes and other things related to the so-called "faithful history" policy, by which the Church endeavours to air brush out of existence as many "faith threatening" facts as possible. 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 this essay I will first consider the origins of the LDS Church's seemingly psychotic behaviour with respect to emphasizing honesty (one cannot attend a Mormon temple without certifying personal honesty in an interview with Church leaders) while deceiving its members and others with respect to its history. It is my view that this behaviour's principal causes are the Church's siege mentality (a relatively recent manifestation of

which is referred to as the "faithful history" policy), coupled with the Church's certainty that it is right, and hence that misrepresentation respecting the "details" of history does not matter. I will then consider how much it appears LDS leaders know about the troubling questions to which I have referred, and the nature of the moral obligation I suggest they have. After that, I will review a variety of circumstances in which it seems clear that our society would require disclosure of information that are much less important than those related to religious faith. And finally, I will consider the stock excuses proffered by the Church and its members in support of its current policy of non-disclosure and hence continued deception.

Why Does The Mormon Church Misrepresent Its Origins?

"Faithful History"

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. ("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)

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 Packer 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, requires advocates from each side of a 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. According to Packer and Oaks, 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 presents information respecting its origins to its members, potential converts and the public.

Leadership Infallibility

The Mormon belief that its leaders are infallible, and that the Church is "true" without question, is used to justify selective disclosure and misrepresentation. In fact, to a person who holds these beliefs, selective disclosure and misrepresentation would not be problematic because they would, by definition, relate to inconsequential details in the great scheme of things. Given the importance of this issue, I will give it a brief treatment.

I read somewhere that Catholics and Mormons disbelieve the opposite dogmas respecting their religious leadership's fallibility. Catholic dogma states that the Pope is inerrant, but few Catholics believe it. Mormon dogma states that Mormon prophets are error prone, and few Mormons believe that, at least until the prophet in question has been dead for a long time and his words (like those of Brigham Young) have been discredited by subsequent living prophets. That is, for all practical purposes Mormons believe that the teachings of the current prophet are infallible, and will not mislead them. As the Primary children sing, "Follow the Prophet, don't go astray".

The idea that a question has been definitively answered or that any particular teaching is without question correct is harmful in many ways. Science is based on the premise that no question is ever answered beyond all doubt. Science is nothing more than a system of working hypotheses, each accepted only until proven wrong. This is what gives science its vitality.

We see the opposite of science in religious dogma – answers respecting important questions are received by God's representatives, and hence cannot be questioned. This is what led the Catholics of Galileo's time to reject his message respecting the shape of the earth and its place in the solar system, and force him to recant under threat of death. The same process is still underway throughout Christendom, including within the Mormon Church, respecting the basics of evolutionary theory. That truth will eventually be accepted, as was Galileo's. However, we are not there yet. Until we get there, those who do not accept the insights into human nature and the world around us provided by evolutionary theory are the poorer as a result. This illustrates the evils of the idea that once "the" answer has been received, enquiry is no longer necessary.

In "Why People Believe Weird Things" Michael Shermer deals with this idea in an interesting way. He 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. It 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

Shermer 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)

The same criticism could be made of Mormonism and most other religions. For present purposes, the important point is that the Mormon Church's "faithful history" policy and the defences presented for it only make sense if it is assumed *a priori* that the Church cannot be wrong – that it is inerrant. If we make that assumption, then the details of history do not matter. Could we know them, they would only confirm what we already know about the Church's divinely inspired origin in any event. And it would not matter if the Church does not tell the whole story about itself or even misleads its members and others. The errors would be made respecting mere details, since the main point is whether the Church is God's only true Church and that is beyond doubt. Etc. However, if the Church might be wrong, these details are most important.

A review of Church history provides ample evidence that the Mormon Church is like all others – its leaders make horrendous mistakes and hence the Church is often wrong. They have been chronicled elsewhere and so there is no need to do so here. Since a memory of such errors erodes the members' obedience, the Church tends to relegate these errors to the garbage bin. Most members are hence blissfully unaware of them. And a review of religious history in general, coupled with the sociology and psychology of religion, provide much more cogent explanations for why the Church is what it is, has developed as it has and why its members experience what they do than anything the Church has to say. In short, the Mormon Church offers a religious experience to its members that is indistinguishable in its important characteristics from that offered by countless other religious faiths. All that differs is the nature of the stories on which the faith is based, and even these have many close parallels.

Wall Building and War

Joseph Campbell and others have noted that the only two things that bind people together or motivate human action are fear and aspiration. An interesting example of how this work is presented by the construction of the Great Wall of China. It uses both of these forces to motivate action. First, the fear of outsiders binds the people together in their task of wall building. And, second, the very fact that an apparently powerful wall is being built creates a sense of aspiration – the aspiration to complete a great task as part of the epic struggle against the barbarians who threaten China, even if the Wall will not do what it is represented to do. The peasants who built the Wall were not military strategists, after all, and would not know that the Great Wall was likely an ineffective defence.

It is well known that that Great Wall building periods in Chinese history correlate with military weakness. The Tang Dynasty, which had developed workable diplomatic ties with its principal northern enemies, and had a strong army, 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 and the act of building it, while not much of a deterrent to invading armies, are thought to have been a significant, positive psychological force for the Chinese people. These things made them feel secure, and hence made them easier to govern.

The building of religious walls, the use of fear of outsiders and the desire to participate in a great task is part of many religious faiths. Wall building of this type, the fear of outsiders, and the perception of being part of an epic struggle in which good is pitted against evil and the eternal souls of all participants are at stake, are all helpful in terms of uniting the faithful, drawing energy and other resources from them, and making them willing to follow their religious leaders who are presented as being uniquely capable of leading through the crisis. The perception of crisis also creates a mental state conducive to group unity and obedience to strong leadership authority, as is the case in a real military conflict. Furthermore, as is the case in real armed conflict, "extraordinary" measures are often justified. That is, the usual rules of moral conduct are to an extent suspended during war. Religious leaders, in theological battle, can hence be forgiven for doing things that not otherwise not be acceptable, such as lying, misleading by omission, breaking the law, etc. This should be expected. It is the mentality of war. As is justly said, the first casualty of war is usually truth.

By invoking the image of battle, Packer and other have succeeded in creating a "whatever it takes" mentality, along with which goes the idea that any harm that is done to individual members in the course of the lying and cheating that are engaged in during battle is unfortunate, but justifiable, collateral damage.

In light of the foregoing, it is not surprising that many religions, whether under siege or not, like to create this perception among their members. In the case of the Mormon Church, there is a history of persecution that I need not review here. It has been, however, a long time since persecution of any real sort occurred. Hence, it is my view that the perception of current siege promoted by the Church's leaders and used to justify the kind of dissembling on which this essay focuses, is more ephemeral than real. However, the control that this imagery enables the Church's leadership to exercise over its members is real.

I also note that the Internet has recently delivered some heavy blows to the Church's credibility. Convert baptisms are way down in North America, Europe and the rest of the wired world. The explosion of information availability created by the Internet is fuelling this process. Despite the Church's efforts, converts are now in a position to do real comparison-shopping. I predicted a long time ago that the only way for the Church and other organizations like it to combat the Internet would be to equate faithfulness and virtue with "not looking". Jeffrey Holland's talk "A Prayer for the Children" (see the reference below), at the recent General Conference and one by Gordon Hinckley given at the same time, were clear steps in that direction. They are following the same path as other fundamentalist leaning Christian and other religious organizations.

Heresy's Medicinal Effect

So it is clear that the Church is attempting to build faith-protecting walls around its members, and we acknowledge that religious organizations have long done this. What, we might ask, would be the effect if the Church were as successful as it wishes to be in this regard?

Joseph Campbell observes that any religious organization that is successful in stamping out heresy has signed its own death warrant. Heresy, he says, is the lifeblood of religious institutions. Heresy keeps the institution connected to the changing social

reality with which it must deal in order to remain relevant over the long term to its members. Christ was a Jewish heretic. Most of the Old Testament prophets were the same, in the sense that they cut against the institutional religious current of their time. Therefore, in a real sense folk like me who still care enough about the Church to snipe at it from its fringes by publishing essays like this on the Internet where questioning members may see them are doing the Church a service. The Church cannot, in this age, keep information like this out of the hands of many of its members. Pressure will increase on the Church to do what is right, just as was the case with the priesthood issue, until a "revelation" is received and some of the most egregious of the abuses are corrected. This, at least, is my hope.

Is the Mormon Church's Misrepresentation Unusual In the Religious World?

The pattern that comes into focus for us as we go through this process is that the leaders of virtually all religions mislead their followers, some innocently and others not. So why should we assume that the Mormon Church will be the only one that does not do so? In short, 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)

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 Dr. Andrew Newberg's book "Why God Won't Go Away" provide moral justification for many of the wrongheaded

actions religious people take. Dr. Newberg and his co-authors show how the brain chemistry of spiritual conviction works. Their studies show that spiritual experience is "real" in the sense that while a person perceives herself to be having a spiritual experience the brain does things that are consistent with what neurologists would expect to produce profoundly moving mental states. For example, when we are faced with a situation like the death of a loved one that causes intense, existential anxiety and are provided with relief in the form of a religious insight, the parts of our nervous system that are responsible for arousal and relaxation are sometimes simultaneously activated in a way similar to that associated with sexual climax. As a result, we experience an intense, rare, mental state. Not surprisingly, the ideas that appear to have triggered that wonder are not easily abandoned.

Dr. Newberg's ideas, including the one summarized above, have tremendous explanatory power for me. They have helped me to understand why people in different places and times (including our own) have clung to the contradictory and in some cases from my Western point of view, bizarre beliefs they do. We are all captive to our own experience to some extent, and have a need for certainty that causes us to consistently believe that fiction is fact.

Hence, I disagree with Nietzsche to that extent that I believe it 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.

What does make the Mormon experience respecting inadequate disclosure somewhat unusual in the religious world is first, the nature of the Mormon faith claims (witnesses to physical, golden plates; transaction of actual ancient records; angelic visitations witnessed in some cases by others; etc.), and second, their relative recency (less than 200 years old, and accompanied by many contemporary journals and other relatively reliable sources of historic data). These factors, in my view, heighten the disclosure requirements since there is much more relevant, real data to be disclosed than would be the case with, for example, Christianity in general.

Has the Church's "Non-Disclosure" Problem Become More Acute of Late?

It appears to me that it has. The LDS Church has produced a long line of independent thinkers, the first of which was Joseph Smith himself. Here are a few representative quotes:

Joseph Smith: 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)

Joseph Smith: 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)

Joseph Smith: [N]one are required to tamely and blindly submit to a man because he has a portion of the Priesthood. We have heard men who hold the

priesthood remark that they would do anything they were told to do by those who presided over them, if they knew it was wrong; but such obedience as this is worse than folly to us. (Millennial Star, Vol. 14, no. 38, pp. 593-595).

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)

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")

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.

After this good start, that carried us up to the 1970s, things broke down. The Church History Department was disbanded in the early 1970s. The early 1980s saw the articulation of the "faithful history" policy, and by the 1990s the Church was excommunicating scholars who published part of the increasing tide of evidence that continues to come to light questioning the Church's foundational claims. Other religions have been through this, including most recently the 7th Day Adventists and the church former know as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the "RLDS" Church), now known as the Community of Christ. They reacted by decreasing the emphasis they put on their founders' claims, acknowledging to some extent the problematic nature of those claims in light of what modern scholarship has taught us respecting them, and becoming more like mainstream Christian denominations.

As indicated by the quotes above, in an earlier time the Church's leaders were fully confident that both history and science would prove the Church's faith claims. That confidence has waned, and hence what was once a "Let's find out!" attitude has morphed into a "Don't look!" attitude. The RLDS Church went through a similar process during the century plus long debate respecting whether Joseph Smith was a polygamist, and we know how that one ended. Real evidence respecting polygamy eventually penetrated the faith promoting walls that were built to keep it out. This was one of the primary factors that caused the RLDS Church to be eventually reborn as The Community of Christ.

The Church's Moral Obligation To Accurately Disclose

How Much Do The Church's Leaders Know About The Troubling Questions?

If the Church's leaders do not know its history, their misrepresentation of it might be excusable. I am only prepared to say "might", because I think that they still would have

a duty to inform themselves. In any event, because leadership knowledge connects to the duty to disclose, I will examine leadership knowledge.

The short answer is that I am not sure exactly how much the leadership knows. However, they know enough to have formulated the "faithful history" policy, reflected in large measure in the Mantle Talk that counsels, among other things, that scholars not raise troubling questions respecting Church history or leadership principles, regardless of the requirements of their academic discipline for honesty and objectivity to the extent possible. The message is that they, and the Church's members, must exercise faith and follow the Church's leaders while not publicly question them or the Church's official doctrine or history. Jeffrey Holland's talk at the recent General Conference (See Michael White, "A Critique of Elder Holland's "Prayer for the Children" http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/holland_critique.htm) is no more than the other side of the same coin – LDS scholars are not to publish anything that threatens faith (even if it is in all probability historically accurate) and now the members are vigorously and colourfully reminded of the perils they face if they read or think about such things. Holland's message, however, is not new. I have heard it in many forms during my years of Church participation.

Based on the foregoing, and my understanding of the intelligence and diligence of the Church's leadership, it is my guess that they are well informed respecting the controversies respecting the Church's origins.

I do not have much data as to how long Church leaders have been aware of these problems. However, I did find one account that provides evidence that the awareness goes back quite a ways.

BH Roberts was one of Mormonism's most noted intellectuals. In the 1920s the First Presidency gave him the job of responding to some tough questions about the Book of Mormon that a young returned missionary had written to the First Presidency concerning. The returned missionary had introduced the Book of Mormon to a scientist with whom he worked, and in due course was asked these questions. He needed help to find answers.

Roberts could not answer the questions put to him, and as a result eventually prepared a 150-page study outlining his concerns with the Book of Mormon's historicity. Roberts made a presentation to the First Presidency and the Apostles respecting the questions that had been put to him and his study to that point. They considered these matters, with Roberts, during a meeting that lasted three days. Members of Roberts' family who thought the study should be made public published it a few years ago. This is the type of thing the Church has in its possession, but does not make public.

The meeting with the First Presidency and the Apostles did not provide Roberts with the assistance for which he had hoped. According to Roberts, the best this group could do was to bear testimony to him that they knew the Book of Mormon to be "true" on the basis of spiritual experience, and that even though the questions he raised were deeply troubling to them, they would trust in the Lord to provide the answers on His timetable.

After agonizing over the questions that had been put to him, the information he produced respecting them and related questions for some time, attending the meeting referred to above and finding the result of that meeting "wholly unsatisfactory", Roberts wrote a

letter to the young returned missionary who had raised the questions in which he gave assurance that the young man should not be concerned about the Book of Mormon's literal truth. He gave some of the answers to the questions that had been raised, answers that his own study termed "weak" and "unconvincing", and assured the returned missionary nonetheless that the Book of Mormon's "truthfulness" was on solid ground.

Roberts then completed the rest of his public ministry giving regular testimony to the "truthfulness" of the Book of Mormon, presumably on the same basis as the "unsatisfactory" answers the First Presidency and the Twelve gave him, while privately questioning the Book of Mormon's historicity and hoping for further light and knowledge from the Lord on that subject. As was the case with the First Presidency and the Twelve, Roberts kept his troubling questions from coming to the attention of the public at large. That is, in this case it is fair to say that the faith of the Mormon Church's leaders required the suppression of evidence deemed relevant and troubling to them, precisely because it would be relevant and troubling to others. Given the other evidence I have seen, including the Packer and Holland talks referred to above, I doubt that things are any different today.

Based on the analysis below, it is my view that what Roberts and his colleagues did was immoral. And today, in light of the much greater body of evidence that has accumulated since the 1920s to legitimize Roberts' concerns rather than dissolve them, I would say that similar conduct is even more immoral.

The Nature of Moral Rights and Obligations

Since I wish to talk about a "moral" obligation that I suggest that LDS Church has, I should say a few words about what I mean by the term "moral obligation".

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 in any particular context 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. The similarity between this example and the basis of Christianity, while not mentioned by the author of the book I was reading, was not lost on me. We are faced with the irony that Christianity was founded on an act, mandated by god, that most moral theorists and most people would now characterize as immoral. Is god immoral?

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 to 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 us. The doctors and nurses must provide that care. They might 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 history 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 the 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 that 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.

Values

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, let's 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 floes, 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.

LDS Morality

On the basis of the foregoing, in my view it is fair to say 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 (do unto others as you would have others do unto to you) is near the foundation of this value complex, deriving special force in our society from the "individuals are equal" idea. As is inferred above, 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".

In any event, in our society the idea that we should not mislead others is a sub-rule of the Golden Rule, and it derives its special force in our society from the idea that all individuals are equal. And hence it really does mean that we should each treat each other the way we would wish to be treated. Hence, in accordance with the system of morality espoused by the LDS Church and accepted by its members, there is no moral basis that can be used to justify a different rule 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.

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, it is clear that 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, throughout the balance of this essay 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.

Case Studies Respecting Disclosure

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 Oaks 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 than 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 of 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 outweigh 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 now 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 to 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 be 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. 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 - 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.

The Church's communications with its members respecting the matters outlined above reminds me of the advice Lewis Carroll had Humpty Dumpty give to Alice.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it must mean just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that is all."

While Carroll might have had in mind the question of who is master – man or language, this delightful passage raises another question in the context of Mormon leadership and membership. What does language mean? The Church uses words we think we

understand when it tells us that Joseph Smith "translated" the Book of Mormon; "saw" God the Eternal Father and his Son Jesus Christ; received the priesthoods "under the hands of Peter, James and John and John the Baptist"; etc. When we find out that the historical record does not support our understanding, we are often told that the fault is ours for misunderstanding the message. I reject this. The fault lies with those who, like Humpty Dumpty, think they can twist language for their own purposes.

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.

Has The Moat Been Built Too Far Out?

The Church's leadership, as is the case with many of its members, is driven by fear respecting at least some of its important decisions. In the case dealt with by this essay, it is the fear of what might happen if the reality of its foundations are exposed that drives the Church to take positions that are increasingly indefensible from a moral point of view. This reminds me of an observation recently made by the philosopher Daniel Dennett.

To put Dennett's idea in context, I note that he is arguing for the "compatibilist" position in the age-old free will v. determinism debate. That is, he says that our lives are "determined" in a mechanistic sense by a combination of our genetics and our conditioning, and yet we have something that approximates the traditional notion of free will. Hence, he argues, determinism and free will (or his version of it) are compatible, and he is therefore in the "compatibilist" school of thought.

In the quote below, Dennett is finishing a line of argument in which he suggests that the advocates of traditional or "pure" free will, by exaggerating their case, have played into the hands of the "hard determinists" who suggest that life is deterministic, and free will and determinism are incompatible. Hence, they say that while it appears to us that we make self-determined decisions, this is an illusion caused by the way in which our brains work, and nothing more, and that we therefore do not have free will in any sense. Such a position obviates what most of us regard as the core of life – the values by which we have "chosen" to live – and so points toward nihilism.

Dennett's point in this quote is that when we allow our emotions regarding something as important as the question I have just framed to run away with us, we sometimes overstate our case, and thus unnecessarily expose our position to attack. I would go further and suggest that this exaggeration can be the very reason for the attack.

Here is what Dennett has to say:

When the stakes are high, one should be cautious, but excess caution leads to hardened positions and paranoia about "erosion." If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem, as they say. Beware of the thin edge of the wedge, the slippery slope. If you give them an inch, they'll take a mile. Caution can also lead to a sort of unwitting self-caricature, however. In their zeal to protect something precious, people sometimes decide to dig the moat too far out, thinking that it is safer to defend too much than risk defending too little. The result is that they end up trying to defend the indefensible, clinging to an extreme position that is actually vulnerable only because of its exaggeration. Absolutism is an occupational hazard in philosophy in any case, since radical, hard-edged positions are easier to define clearly, are more memorable, and tend to attract more attention. Nobody ever became a famous philosopher by being a champion of ecumenical hybridism. On the topic of free will this tendency is amplified and sustained by tradition itself: As philosophers for two millennia have said, either we have free will or we don't; it's all, or nothing at all. And so the various compromise proposals, the suggestions that determinism is compatible with at least some kinds of free will, are resisted as bad bargains, dangerous subversions of our moral foundations. (Freedom Evolves, p. 101)

I suggest that this passage could be rewritten in terms of religious leaders (Mormon in particular) and their claims to god's absolute and exclusive authority, the literal reality of certain metaphoric or visionary events (such as face to face meetings with god or angels, the translation of the Book of Mormon, etc.) and it would ring as true if not truer than it does as it now stands. And the longer those in charge refuse to acknowledge the increasingly obvious flaws in their position, the worse it will be for them in the end.

The more widely I read about things that are both important and impossible to prove, the more common ground I find with my religious experience, and the better I understand both the actions religious leaders of various stripes have taken, and why I and so many others have bent to their will.

Conclusion

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 the unsavoury aspects of its history. The Church also should stop 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 those things that are relevant to the credibility of its foundation stories, and to address their

weaknesses, 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. And as Daniel Dennett persuasively notes, by building its protective moat too far out in an attempt to protect what it deems most important, the Church will continue to attract unwanted attention to the very flaws it seeks to hide.