

Religious Faith: Enlightening or Blinding?
**A Look at the Origins of Mormonism's Professed Pursuit of Truth and
Simultaneous Inculcation of Ignorance**

Bob McCue

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The further the spiritual evolution of mankind advances, the more certain it seems to me that the path to genuine religiosity does not lie through the fear of life, and the fear of death, and blind faith, but through striving after rational knowledge. Albert Einstein

Introduction

There are many types of faith, but for purposes of this essay, I will divide them into two categories – those that enlighten us and help us progress and those that blind and hence retard us. The first type of faith is wonderful. It is what gets us up in the morning, keeps us learning about our world and pursuing the things we value. The second type of faith – which I will call blind faith – makes people feel comfortable, but at a high cost. It causes those who possess it to become certain in their beliefs respecting things that are not certain. Thus, it robs them of the chance to understand reality, to learn, and to grow. And so it slows progress and causes bad decision-making.

The objective of this essay is to explore the manner in which Mormonism appeared to start with ideas related to the open approach to faith and continues to perpetuate itself on the basis that it wishes its members to live by that approach, when on closer analysis it seems clear that faithful Mormons are and always have been governed by the kind of blind faith "philosopher kings" use to control their followers, and which is the antithesis of open-minded, healthy faith. "Philosopher kings", by the way, are the wise few who Plato said were justified in deceiving the masses when it was necessary to do so, since the masses were incapable of understanding what was in their best interest. This concept is closely related to Nietzsche's idea of the "pious lie", which he said is the foundation of all priesthoods and describes behaviour in the religious sphere that is consistent with the philosopher king concept. Nietzsche condemned the pious lie, as do I, as did JS himself. In the so-called "Plan of Salvation" (the Mormon idea of how we lived prior to this life with God; were sent to this earth to be tested; and if we pass the test, will return to live with God and will become like Him), JS had Satan beautifully articulate the philosopher king and pious lie approach to human society, and to be vilified for it.

I suggest that the lessons learned from this analysis can be applied to many other religious and non-religious groups of people. That is, the problems with Mormonism are not indicative of the peculiarity of Mormonism, but are rather manifestations of universal human weaknesses that are emphasized by some of Mormonism rare qualities.

Epistemology and Blind v. Open Minded Faith

Epistemology is the study of how we come to know things, how much we can really "know", what it is to "know" something, etc. The common perception is that we can know much more than we in fact can. This is rooted in mankind's aversion to uncertainty, and corresponding need for security and comfort. This topic is treated in some detail below. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that science has established to my satisfaction that nothing can be proven with certainty. That is, you could put any seemingly rock solid proposition to me (or perhaps better, to someone who is a real scientist) as a "truth" (like "the earth is round") and it can be shown that your "truth" cannot be proven to be true. This is done by responding to each assertion of fact (such as "the earth is round") by asking "how do you know that?" or something similar until circularity in reasoning (sometimes called an "infinite regress") is established. An example of circular reasoning is as follows.

Assertion of fact: God exists.

Question: How do you know God exists?

A: It says so in the Bible.

Q: How do you know the Bible is true?

A: Because God said it is.

Q: Where does he say that?

A: In the Bible.

Q: So, the Bible is true because it says it is?

A: Uh, let me think about that. I just know that the Bible is true ...

The amazing thing about the dialogue just described is that I have participated in it on a number of occasions with different faithful Mormons and other religiously inclined friends, and they see nothing wrong with it. In my view, underlying their position is the idea that no proof is required that God exists. He just does. And therefore the fact that this particular argument in His favour is circular does not matter. This exemplifies the "true belief" or "blind faith" paradigm.

As unlikely as it may seem to those of us not trained in science, this very thing can be done respecting propositions like "The earth is round". We can show through repetitive experiments of different kinds that many things are highly probable, but not certain.

To avoid this uncertainty, early scientists and many others (including most of well educated humanity today) grounded their "rational" arguments in authority of one kind or another. "Scientist X said...", "Plato said ...", or "God said ..." and did not look behind

that authority at the uncertainty waiting there. Much of this does not matter in a practical way from our point of view, but some goes to the core of our daily existence. Certainty respecting religious matters raises some of the more important issues in this regard. For a summary of various types of reasoning and how they relate to the formation of certain ideas in the religious and other spheres, see my essay titled "Out of My Faith" from page 87, at <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/postmormon.htm>.

The use of authority to cut off the basic circularity of all attempts to establish certainty is the essence of dogmatism. In religion, the ultimate authority is God or those who are believed to have authority to act on his behalf. Once they have spoken, an indisputable premise is created from which all else flows. Most forms of popular rationalism share this attitude with the irrationalists (including religiously oriented people) because they share the same "true belief" structure of thought. That is, rationalists sometimes find what appears to be irrefutable authority in a scientific principle, although those most knowledgeable with respect to science would not do this. As noted above, others base their certainty in the statements of the great sages, such as Socrates or Plato. The point of much recent philosophy, including much of phenomenology and post modernism, has been to demonstrate the fallacy of proceeding in this fashion.

The true belief structure of thought is found in spades in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. For example, we find in Hebrews 11:1 the following: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." And in the Book of Mormon (Alma 32:21), we have what is the best known Mormon scripture respecting the nature of faith, which says:

And now as I said concerning faith – faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.

The implies states of fact which we do not need to "know" in order to act with the same kind of confidence respecting them that we would have as a result of what we might call "real" knowledge – like that related to the shape of the earth. But the Mormon conception of faith goes far beyond that. In Moroni 7: 15-19 we find the following:

15 For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.

16 For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.

17 But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it

is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.

19 Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ.

That is, the feelings we have about religious matters should be taken to be "perfect knowledge" – a form of knowledge that science tells us does not exist. By implication, this to the believer means that religion is a more sure guide than science. And my experience both as a believer, and now with believers in my family and circle of friends, confirms this to be the case. If they believe that God created man in the Garden of Eden, which was located as Joseph Smith taught, at Independence, Missouri, they will reject out of hand the evidence presented by linguists, geneticists etc. that indicates man to have originated in Africa. Religion provides "perfect knowledge" that cannot be questioned. All science provides is "theories".

Note the subtle difference between the way these two scriptures work. Hebrews implies the existence of a reality that is not seen, and encourages the believer to accept his emotional experience of evidence of it. The Book of Mormon makes this explicit. We can have "perfect knowledge". This illustrates another of JS's tendencies – "Let's make things really clear. All the mystery about the nature of God – we'll deal with that by completely anthropomorphizing him." Etc.

One of the negative consequences of the kind of thinking encouraged by the above scriptures is the acceptance of the kind of emotional experience on which faith is based as evidence of fact. There are even some scientists who try to reconcile their religious beliefs with a scientific view of life who use this argument. The result is fairly described in my view as pseudo science. See <http://www.uscatholic.org/2002/12/featb0212.htm> for an interview with Guy Consolmagno, a physicist, author of several books on astronomy, and practising Jesuit priest, for a textbook example of this kind of specious reasoning.

Consolmagno says that religion is "experiential". That is, he believes in religion for the same reason he does in his parents – he has experienced them. This, in a nutshell, is the basis for the multiplicity of religious belief in the world and the source of violence in the Middle East, 9/11 and a host of other religion related ills. This is the pinnacle of anti-science. This is emotion governing reason. By using this illogic, Consolmagno falls into the same error of which he was critical in the above-noted interview respecting those who accept the anthropic principle. He obliquely noted in that context the circularity problem described above, and used that to show why the anthropic principle is unreliable. That is, you start with an assumption that God either exists or does not, and then use logic to prove your own assumption. Having identified the problem with this kind of woolly thinking respecting the anthropic principle, Consolmagno in the very next paragraph makes the same mistake. He grounds his certainty regarding an entire

range of unknowable things respecting God and religion in subjective personal experience, which becomes his unquestioned source of authority.

Science recognizes that our individual, subjective experience is often misleading because of the way the human mind works when combined with limited individual perspective. Hence, science tries to collect data respecting many individual experiences and look for behavioural patterns that will explain what individuals do better than will their own statements as to what they think they are doing. For example, as noted in "Out of My Faith" (see reference above) starting at page 77, recent neurological research shows why certain religious experiences have such a powerful emotional impact on us. The individual Mormon experiences this wonder, having been told before and after that the Mormon God is responsible for what he has felt. In that context, it makes sense to believe this to be true and so the faithful Mormon will tell you - "God has told me that Joseph Smith was his Prophet, ..." The Amazonian tribesman (or Jew, or Jehovah's Witness, or Muslim, etc.) can be shown to have had the same experience and will attribute it to his God, and use it to "prove" the truth of his mythology.

Having observed the similarity in experience, and difference in conclusions just noted, the scientist would proceed as follows. He would note that he cannot disprove the existence of any of the various gods the believers he has studied posit to exist. However, he can note that the all cannot be correct. At a minimum, if there is a God of the type they allege, most (or all) of them have misunderstood his characteristics. This reminds me of one of the rare pieces of C.S. Lewis' writing that I enjoy, "A Footnote to All Prayers" which can be found at page 69 of the "Out of My Faith" essay above referenced. In it, Lewis acknowledges that the nature of God is such that none of our conceptions of Him are adequate, and asks God to forgive our feeble attempts to imagine Him so that we can address our minds to His role in our existence. Furthermore, once the mechanics of the neurology of the believers' experience is understood, as well as how their experience resembles that related to grief, elation, deep meditation, etc., the scientist will have good reason to conclude that the most likely explanation for what he has observed is that the believers were all mistaken for the same reason – they felt something powerful and each made the different erroneous assumptions their cultures encouraged in that regard. This conclusion is the most consistent with what we know about physical law based on repeatable experiments, and it explains why so many people believe they have received radically different messages from "God" about the same thing. But of course, this theory can't be proven true. And it does not need to be in order for us to accept it. All we have to do is decide which of the various theories available for use is most likely to be true. This appears to be most likely, in my view. It helps in this regard to consider all believers other than ourselves, and then be willing to apply the conclusion we have reached regarding all others to our own situation. I recognize how difficult this in practice is for a believer, and confess that I was only able to do it as my belief crumbled. But the effort to do this, in my view, was part of what helped undo my belief.

For a review of the manner in which probabilities are neglected in reasoning related to religion, see my essay "The Book of Mormon DNA Controversy ..." at the website noted

above. The acceptance of personal, subjective experience and anecdotal evidence instead of the explanations science provides with respect to spiritual matters is a simple example of the behavioural tendency there described. This is part of the defence mechanism used by people who have a psychological need based in cognitive dissonance (described in detail below) to continue to believe when their faith is challenged.

Note that religion purports to prove with certainty very complicated things, while science does not attempt to provide certainty with respect to even seemingly simple things, such as the shape of the earth. Is it not interesting that science has a history of providing useful things at an increasing rate as time passes, and religion has a history of causing war, suffering and misleading people in countless ways. I do not suggest that religion does nothing that is useful. It does many useful things. But these are mostly related to the organization of the goodness that is at the core of most human beings. I do not believe that organized religion is justified in taking the credit it does for that. And in any event, religion on the whole makes huge claims that are consistently disproven while at the same time wreaking havoc all over the globe. In the meantime, science's claims are much more modest, and yet it we owe it so much. In business, those whose claims seem difficult to justify ("Invest \$10,000 now and make \$1,000,000 in two months, with no risk!! You just have to travel to Nigeria to pick up your money.") are often trying to blind people by manipulating their emotions (either desire or fear). I now recognize that religion's incredible claims of being able to prove with certainty what most humans long to have proven ("There is life after death!; Life has meaning as follows ...; etc.") does the same thing – they push our emotional buttons and so shut down our rational faculties. These buttons are mostly created by the forces of cognitive dissonance in the manner described below.

I also note that relative to most of the phenomena with which we deal in life, there is tremendous inherent uncertainty with respect to things religious. Therefore, the psychologists tell us, emotions will tend to reign in any event while we make decisions respecting religious matters. This means that it is more likely that religious decisions will be made on the basis of what the surrounding group does, or what some persuasive authority figure says. It also means that the more certainty members of religious groups feel respecting their faith (that is, the more blind their faith is), the more cognitive dissonance they will experience when their beliefs are challenged and hence the more their subconscious mind will suppress any discomfiting evidence by which they are confronted. And finally, this means that once a religion gains critical mass, it is hard to stop, and it takes a powerful emotional force to get a religion going, such as the creative genius and powerful storytelling and charisma of a JS.

I recently heard yet another example of how religious faith comes to the fore in uncertain, difficult times. I am chagrined to have to admit that Bernard Ebbers, the disgraced former CEO of Worldcom, is an Albertan (born in the Canadian province of Alberta) as am I. He is also a born again Christian of the Baptist persuasion. Among the many loony things he did while the house of cards he had built that was called Worldcom was beginning to collapse was announce to Worldcom's board of directors

that God was the chairman of that board, and that they would henceforth begin each board meeting with prayer. Note that this practise was introduced after trouble began to dog Ebbers and Worldcom. That is, as uncertainty rose, and with it fear, God began to play a greater role in the affairs of Ebbers and those who to their cost relied upon him. God, unfortunately, did not bail Ebbers out. But Ebbers did not hesitate to use God in uncertain times in attempt to support his cause. This is the same mentality that has armies charge toward each other both certain that the same God supports their different causes, and attempts to kill each other. For some background information respecting Ebbers and his troubles, see http://www.cephas-library.com/complaints/complaints_is_baptist_ebbers_a_crook.html

I will conclude this section with a quote from one of my favourite philosophers, Daniel Dennett. One of his gifts is the use of enlightening analogy, as evidenced by what follows:

[I]f you want to "reason" about faith, and offer a reasoned (and reason-responsive) defense of faith as an extra category of belief worthy of special consideration, I'm eager to [participate]. I certainly grant the existence of the phenomenon of faith; what I want to see is a reasoned ground for taking faith as a "way of getting to the truth", and not, say, just as a way people comfort themselves and each other (a worthy function that I do take seriously). But you must not expect me to go along with your defense of faith as a path to truth if at any point you appeal to the very dispensation you are supposedly trying to justify. Before you appeal to faith when reason has you backed into a corner, think about whether you really want to abandon reason when reason is on your side. You are sightseeing with a loved one in a foreign land, and your loved one is brutally murdered in front of your eyes. At the trial it turns out that in this land friends of the accused may be called as witnesses for the defense, testifying about their faith in his innocence. You watch the parade of his moist-eyed friends, obviously sincere, proudly proclaiming their undying faith in the innocence of the man you saw commit the terrible deed. The judge listens intently and respectfully, obviously more moved by this outpouring than by all the evidence presented by the prosecution. Is this not a nightmare? Would you be willing to live in such a land? Or would you be willing to be operated on by a surgeon you tells you that whenever a little voice in him tells him to disregard his medical training, he listens to the little voice? I know it passes in polite company to let people have it both ways, and under most circumstances I wholeheartedly cooperate with this benign agreement. But we're seriously trying to get at the truth here, and if you think that this common but unspoken understanding about faith is anything better than socially useful obfuscation to avoid mutual embarrassment and loss of face, you have either seen much more deeply into the issue that any philosopher ever has (for none has ever come up with a good defense of this) or you are kidding yourself. (Darwin's Dangerous Idea (1995))

So, I suggest that the tendency encouraged by religion to allow emotion to govern things that would be more usefully dealt with by the rational part of our intellect is a pathology, and that blind religious belief is the pathogen.

Mormon Leadership Attitudes Respecting Faith

Mormonism started out clearly and loudly espousing a kind of enlightening faith. Dozens of quotes from leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the "Church" or the "LDS Church") can be marshalled in support of this claim. I will provide only a couple. Joseph Smith (JS) said:

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

Years later Brigham Young agreed with him by saying:

It is our duty and calling, as ministers of the same salvation and Gospel, to gather every item of truth and reject every error. Whether a truth be found with professed infidels, or with the Universalists, or the Church of Rome, or the Methodists, the Church of England, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Quakers, the Shakers, or any other of the various and numerous different sects and parties, all of whom have more or less truth, it is the business of the Elders of this Church (Jesus, their Elder Brother, being at their head) to gather up all the truths in the world pertaining to life and salvation, to the Gospel we preach, to mechanism of every kind, to the sciences, and to philosophy, wherever it may be found in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people and bring it to Zion. (Discourses of Brigham Young, p.248)

The vision and objective of open, searching faith could not be more fully expressed. Regrettably, the reality of Mormonism sharply diverged, and still diverges, from this ideal. JS's propensity to be untruthful when he wanted to cause others to do his will has been well documented. Many books have been written on this topic. See, for example, D. Michael Quinn, "Early Mormonism and the Magic World View", and "The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power" (for ease of reference, I will refer to "The Mormon Hierarchy" as "Quinn"), and online <http://www.lds-mormon.com/>, and <http://www.i4m.com/think/>. I do not know how quickly this kind of behaviour became part of JS's repertoire as a religious leader, but given his history of misrepresentation at least and probable lying with respect to his treasure hunting for hire activities (much like a reckless or fraudulent penny mining stock promoter today), it seems fair to infer that he was likely untrustworthy from the beginning of this prophetic career. But in any event, it is clear that long before the end of his ministry he had stopped abiding by his own counsel in terms of the pursuit of truth. And I doubt Brigham Young lived up to his word in that regard at any time during his career as prophet, seer and revelator of the Mormon Church.

Some other early Mormon leaders were positively frightening in this regard. For example, Sidney Rigdon indicated in 1838 that the Danite (see below) role in removing dissenting members such as Oliver Cowdery from the faithful flock was a result of "the imperative duty of the Church to obey the word of Joseph Smith, or the presidency, without question or inquiry, and that if there were any that would not, they should have their throats cut from ear [to] ear." (Quinn, p. 94) This does not go as far as the Nazi icon Herman Hess, who said:

With pride we see that one man remains beyond all criticism, that is the Führer. This is because everyone feels and knows: he is always right, and he will always be right. The National Socialism of all of us is anchored in uncritical loyalty, in the surrender to the Führer that does not ask for the why in individual cases, in the silent execution of his orders. We believe that the Führer is obeying a higher call to fashion German history. There can be no criticism of this belief.' (Hess Biography, <http://thirdreich.net/Hess-Bio.html>)

But we know enough about the Nazi regime to understand that disobedience to the Führer was indeed cause for death in that culture. Hitler, who having abandoned democratic pretence altogether could be much more straightforward about some things than Mormon leaders (such as Brigham Young – see the quote below) have been, said, "What good fortune for governments that the people do not think." (<http://www.fairfield.k12.ct.us/fairfieldhs/cfairfieldhs33/why.htm>)

What Mormonism has ended up with is a system that uses conservative religious leaders as the final arbiters of truth instead of political or scientific leaders. But as is so often the case, the leaders try to claim that they do not do this. Listen again to Brigham Young:

I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security. ... Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not. (Discourses of Brigham Young, edited by John A. Widtsoe [1941], at p. 135).

The key to understanding this quote is an appreciation of the fact that Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders are certain that anyone who can hear the "Spirit of God" will obey them, and most importantly, will not speak out against them since that might cause others not to obey. Hence, those who are sufficiently disobedient, or who speak out in disagreement even while obeying, must not be hearing God's spirit, and are excommunicated – excised from the Mormon body as a form of cancer. This kind of graphic, emotive terminology has been often used by Mormon leaders. Language and actions of this kind engage the fear mechanism described below whenever a faithful Mormon considers disobedience or even looking at any information that may lead in that direction, and results in a "spirit" that more than whispers to those who remain with the

herd – it bellows. That "spirit", or the "conscience" that produces it, is no more than the herd's echoing thunder. As Matt Berry insightfully notes:

Nothing in life requires more patience than unravelling this inherited mess we have blithely labelled, "the conscience". The strange but natural ill feeling one has when one breaks with custom is confused with "sin". Any move away from the custom is then checked by one's sensation of guilt. Once fully indoctrinated, the believer can roam "freely" ... and never stray from the prescribed routine. (Post-Atheism, pp. 46-47)

That is, what Brigham Young likely meant when he said what I quoted above was that all truth that HE, as God's prophet, accepted would be accepted within the Mormon community. But, any information that was inconsistent with God's prior revealed truth could, by definition within the Mormon context, not possibly be truth, and hence not only need not be considered, but should not be considered. I do not imply that Brigham Young was a liar. He was simply a philosopher king. This fully explains his behaviour from my point of view.

Recently, the philosopher king/blind faith approach to life has been clearly articulated by Mormon leaders in the form of the "faithful history" policy. That is the Mormon policy that the only ideas that should be communicated within Mormon society are those that support the current leadership's idea of orthodoxy within Mormonism. See the essay titled "Should the Mormon Church Come Clean" <http://mccue.cc/bob/postmormon.htm> for more information in this regard.

In a relatively recent talk the Mormon Apostle James Faust (See "The Abundant Life", The Ensign, November, 1985, p. 7), who I met while serving as a Mormon missionary in Peru in the late 1970s and believe to be a sincere and good man, treated us to a juxtaposition of the opposing ideas of blind and open faith within a few words of each other. He said:

President Gordon B. Hinckley reminded us,

As a Church, we encourage gospel scholarship and the search to understand all truth. Fundamental to our theology is belief in individual freedom of inquiry, thought, and expression. Constructive discussion is a privilege of every Latter-day Saint. (Ensign, Sept. 1985, p. 5.)

The Savior said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10.) How is the abundant life to be obtained? The abundant life involves an endless search for knowledge, light, and truth. President Hugh B. Brown said:

God desires that we learn and continue to learn, but this involves some unlearning. As Uncle Zeke said: 'It ain't my ignorance that done me up but what I know'd that wasn't so.' The ultimate evil is the closing of the mind or

steeling it against truth, resulting in the hardening of intellectual arteries. (Baccalaureate address, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, 4 June 1965.)

No stone wall separates the members of the Church from all of the seductions of the world. Members of the Church, like everyone else, are being surfeited with deceptions, challenges, and temptations. However, to those of enduring faith, judgment, and discernment, there is an invisible wall which they choose never to breach. Those on the safe side of this invisible wall are filled with humility, not servitude. They willingly accept the supremacy of God and rely upon the scriptures and counsel of His servants, the leaders of the Church. These leaders of the Church are men with human frailties, and are imperfect in their wisdom and judgment. Perfection in men is not found on the earth. But almost without exception these leaders sincerely, humbly, and prayerfully render great and dedicated Christian service to the best of their ability. More important, they hold a divine warrant and commission through which great and eternal blessings come to those who sustain and follow them. They are God's servants.

I believe that few things in life deserve one's complete confidence. I testify that the Church is worthy of our full trust. There is no inconsistency between truth and faith. I know that everyone who sincerely and righteously seeks to know this can have it spiritually confirmed. May we open up our minds, hearts, and spirits to the divine source of truth. May we reach above ourselves and beyond our mundane concerns and become heirs to the knowledge of all truth and to the abundant life promised by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I pray that this may be so, in His holy name, amen.

That is, seek the truth. But remember that truth is whatever the Church's leaders say it is. Trust them. Obey them. Do not question them. Use blind faith instead of open-minded faith and the best of your rational abilities.

In 2001 Thomas Monson said something similar while speaking on behalf of the First Presidency that was directed specifically toward the Mormon Church's young people:

Let us remember that the wisdom of God may appear as foolishness to men, but the greatest single lesson we can learn in mortality is that when God speaks and we obey, we will always be right. Some foolish persons turn their backs on the wisdom of God and follow the allurements of fickle fashion, the attraction of false popularity, and the thrill of the moment. Their course of conduct so resembles the disastrous experience of Esau, who exchanged his birthright for a mess of pottage.

And what are the results of such action? I testify to you that turning away from God brings broken covenants, shattered dreams, vanished ambitions, evaporated plans, unfulfilled expectations, crushed hopes, misused drives, warped character, and wrecked lives. ...

Remember that faith and doubt cannot exist in the same mind at the same time, for one will dispel the other. Should doubt knock at your doorway, just say to those sceptical, disturbing, rebellious thoughts: "I propose to stay with my faith, with the faith of my people. I know that happiness and contentment are there, and I forbid you, agnostic, doubting thoughts, to destroy the house of my faith. I acknowledge that I do not understand the process of creation, but I accept the fact of it. I grant that I cannot explain the miracles of the Bible, and I do not attempt to do so, but I accept God's word. I wasn't with Joseph, but I believe him. My faith did not come through science, and I will not permit so-called science to destroy it. (First Presidency Message, "The Lighthouse of the Lord: A Message to the Youth of the Church", Ensign Magazine, February 2001)

Remember that this message was delivered by a man who is perceived by most of those listening to him to be a prophet of God, and that the message is directed toward impressionable young people, and will be repeated countless times by faithful teachers during Mormon meetings around the world. It emphasizes blind faith over learning; obedience to religious faith over science; and does so by alleging that disaster will strike those who disobey. This is in my view is emotionally abusive, morally reprehensible behaviour.

More recent statements of LDS leaders in this vein (particularly the ones made by Jeffrey Holland and Gordon Hinckley at General Conference less than a year ago) are summarized in my "First Letter to Jeffrey Holland" found at <http://mccue.cc/bob/postmormon.htm>. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that countless statements of the type just indicated can be found with the teachings that are considered canonical, or near canonical, by faithful Mormons.

The mentality engendered by statements of the type described above is responsible for much irrational behaviour within the Mormon community. For example, I was recently travelling home from a basketball tournament with my 17 year old daughter, which I always enjoy. While we travelled she treated me to the following story.

She seldom attends church anymore, but a couple of weeks ago went to see some friends. She was sitting in the foyer with three older girls who are all in university. They were approached by a young man, also a university student. He was strutting a bit, obviously trying to impress one or perhaps all of them. At one point he said:

"Yeah, I was in my physics class the other day and the prof starts talking about the big bang theory. I listened for a couple of minutes and then just couldn't take it any more. So I put up my hand and said, 'What you are saying offends me, and I don't think I should have to sit here and listen to it.'"

"Pardon me?", said the professor.

"What you said offends me" replied this faithful young paragon of Mormon intellectual virtue. "It is not proven to be true; I don't think it's true; and it offends my religious beliefs."

After some discussion, the professor politely told the young man that if he wished to leave the classroom, he was welcome to do so. So he left. He told this story with his chest puffed out, obviously proud of how he had been valiant in the defence of his faith. Three of the four girls listening to him tried to restrain the horror, mirth and disdain the proud young man standing before them had inspired. The fourth congratulated him for standing up for his beliefs.

I do not suggest that the Mormon Church teaches the particular piece of nonsense this young man was spouting, although lots of Mormons share his belief. The problem is in the paradigm he was using. He had a religious belief, and the simple fact that it was a religious belief instead of one of a different kind, put it beyond challenge. I suspect that only someone in religious authority would be able to straighten him out. What science had to say respecting the matter was not only irrelevant, it should be actively resisted because it questioned something that it is wrong to question. He was doing precisely what he had been taught by Mormon leaders, such as those quoted above, to do. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this story from my point of view is how it illustrates that not only does Mormonism succeed in inculcating ignorance within its membership, that that ignorance is becoming increasingly wilful and militant. Given the fear Mormon leaders use to shape the behaviour of the faithful, as noted below, none of this should surprise us.

The manner in which Mormon leaders project how the Church functions differs so widely from reality as to be unrecognizable. In fact, the theory and the reality are antithetical. The bottom line is this: Mormon leaders from at or near the beginning of the Mormon faith have been philosopher kings.

Again, I do not suggest that Mormon leaders are necessarily liars. They are, however, subject to well understood forces within human groups that cause them to "misrecognize" the reality of their situation and act in a philosopher king fashion. See the essay "Should I Join ..." at <http://mccue.cc/bob/postmormon.htm> starting at page 13 for more information in this regard.

Democracy v. Kingship and Theocracy: A Review of Mormonism's Blind Faith Foundations

Overview

As noted above, the schizophrenic Mormon propensity to promote the pursuit of truth while actively suppressing it has its roots in the prophetic career of JS. I will first provide a big picture historical overview, and then fit one of the many chapters of Mormon history that could be used to illustrate this point into the puzzle.

For eons mankind was largely ruled by kings or their equivalent. This rule was supported in most places by a presumed divine right. As the populace became more aware of its surroundings, thanks largely to Gutenberg, this right's illegitimacy was gradually recognized and mankind took what is arguably its most courageous and important step – the reinstatement of the institution of democracy. This was a reinstatement because it appears that a form of democracy was first used by many primitive hunter-gatherer groups. As society became more complex, authoritarian societal structures were found to be more efficient since knowledge was of necessity in the beginning at least, concentrated in the hands of the few, and so power and wealth became similarly concentrated. The Greeks broke this cycle briefly, and then the world fell back into non-democratic darkness during the Middle Ages. As knowledge became more distributed during the Renaissance, and particularly after Gutenberg's revolutionary printing press came into use, so did power. Modern democracy was the result.

The main lesson of democracy is that the more broadly distributed power is, the less likely it is to be abused, and the smaller the potential effects of its abuse. Democracy makes possible the greatest possible distribution of power, because it operates on the ideal that all human beings are equal, and hence have equal rights. All democracies also fall short of that ideal, and while it is tempting to get into this fascinating and complex topic, we will leave it there.

While democracy is brutally inefficient, all others social systems appear to be far worse. Democracy attempts to minimize the abuse of power through a number of means. It requires with few exceptions that those with power disclose how they exercise it. It encourages a free press and freedom of speech that will subject the government's actions to public scrutiny. And most importantly, it institutionalizes the periodic disempowerment of its leaders through democratic elections, and the devolution of power to new leaders. And no matter how powerful a leader is, in most democracies she can generally only serve for a limited term. The lessons taught by history that corroborate the wisdom of these practices are countless, as noted above. In Canada, the current corruption scandal involving the long-in-office Liberal Party is only the most recent of these of which I have become aware. The US, Italy, France and Germany are all at this time dealing with similar problems. And in the developing world where democratic institutions range from weak to non-existent, corruption of the scale just described is so ordinary as to barely merit mention in the weekly news. I was in Peru a couple of summers ago just after Peru's former President Alberto Fujimori fled in disgrace, having stealing some \$70,000,000 USD. Several people we spoke to there said he was not so bad – he had not stolen nearly as much as the prior few presidents had, and while in office he had built more roads, schools, hospitals etc. than all of them combined.

The parallels between the blind faith model of living and the way in which the ignorant masses were required to submit to the will of kings are extensive. Likewise, the parallels between open minded faith, rational thought etc. and the way in which the masses interact with the democratic system are many.

In the essay titled "Should I Join ...", starting at p. 20, and the essay titled "Personal Renaissance", both located at the web address noted above, I use the example of the Dark Ages and the Renaissance to show the difference between the blind and open-minded faith approaches to life. It seems clear that the Dark Ages were a huge step backwards for mankind, and that this was due to the people's blind faith in religious leaders. This is, in my view, symptomatic of a basic human flaw – the tendency of those who have the opportunity to take power to do so, and to exercise that power so as to cause a shift of the group and its collective mind away from the open expression of faith (seeking knowledge and reality) to blind faith in order to further the group's submission to authority. This tendency is responsible for the difference between the Dark Ages and Renaissance attitudes. And, it is responsible for the difference between kingship (or theocracy, which is the same thing in a different guise) and democracy.

Kingship was rejected when mankind moved into democracy. However, theocracy survives along with other forms of dictatorship in certain backward parts of the world, and functions still today on the same basis as the divine right of kings, except the leader is called a prophet, pope, Mullah etc. and purports to speak for God.

Within democracy, theocracy does not work, as the summary of certain aspects of Mormon history from the Nauvoo period below indicates. Therefore, religion in general and modern Mormonism in particular has developed a variety of tools that permit religious organizations the maximum possible power within the democratic context. The contradictory Mormon leadership statements above are examples of these tools at work. This essay is an attempt to understand a few of the most basic of these implements, and so to shed light on the simultaneous and contradictory approach to blind and open faith that the Mormon Church has adopted since near the beginning of its existence.

Religion is a part of our society that operates largely outside the democratic model, and hence is much more subject to the abuses of power that dominated much of human history than is the rest of modern democratic society. That wonderful font of insightful (if lewd) social commentary South Park probably had it pretty close to right in its recent episode respecting religion. The existing religious regime is found to be corrupt or inadequate (Cartman et al catch the local Priest in an innovative sexual position with one of his female congregants). Charismatic leader types steps into the resulting power void (Cartman creates a new church for kids only since kids can only trust other kids – the adults are all screwed up). Those leaders discover the amazing power that is vested in HE WHO CONTROLS BELIEF (Cartman seems to understand power pretty well already, as do most natural leaders, but is amazed at the power his position as a religious leader confers on him). The new religious leader falls under the spell of the power he has discovered (Cartman becomes even more full of himself, begins to demand ever increasing obedience from his followers in classic cult and fundamentalist religious leader fashion.) The followers are soon in the grip of blind faith (The kids have become cult members who have dropped out of school and engage in all kinds of bizarre behaviour.) Soon power becomes the issue instead of truth (Cartman bilks his congregation for a lot of money, and consciously crosses the line from the pursuit of

truth to lining his own pockets - it works for the adults, why not for him?). And we come arrive back at the beginning of the cycle to await our next reformer.

As just noted, religious leaders are ceded significant power by their followers. In some religions, the leaders are elected by the people. In most, they are not. Rather, they are like the old kings who appoint their own successors. But the strictures of democracy require that they appear to be benevolent kings. That is, the people must be persuaded instead of forced. This is what has focused religion and its leaders on the tools of persuasion and subtle power manipulation. In the evolutionary struggle in which religious organizations are involved (See David Sloan Wilson, "Darwin's Cathedral" and other similar works), religion lost a lot of power to democracy. That is, once democracy was a human group's dominant paradigm, the religious leaders within that group could no longer force adherence to obey their will. Obedience had to be given by the followers. This was an evolutionary bottleneck through which religion had to squeeze.

This idea presents an interesting premise that can be tested. The theories of Vernon Smith (Nobel Prize in economics), Gerd Gigerenzer (theory of mind and decision-making), David Sloan Wilson (biology and anthropology) and others suggest that no one would have needed to tell the religious community that this bottleneck was a problem and suggest that they try to figure it out. Rather, once the conditions I just described existed which imposed a limit on the power and hence opportunities for growth and survival of religious organizations, we should expect to see organizational behaviour designed to take back as much power as possible. That is, the organizations would, to the extent this was within their power, adapt to the new environment by displaying new behaviours or emphasizing old ones in new, adaptive ways to restore lost power, and hence enhance survival prospects. This would not likely occur as a result of conscious decision making at any level within the organization. Rather, it would occur as a result of the operation of the largely unconscious collective organizational mind.

The LDS church can be used as a case study in this regard. As it developed through its early days, it moved from democracy toward and finally into theocracy. In Utah, a *de facto* theocracy existed until near the end of the 1800s. Then, the Church was forced to surrender many of its civil powers, polygamy was dismantled etc. and democratic values were dramatically re-emphasized within the Utah Mormon community. It is interesting to note as an aside that even in petitioning for Utah's statehood, Mormon leaders were acting to enhance their power base. In July 1847, when Brigham Young declared that "this is the place," Utah was part of Mexican territory and hence outside the jurisdiction of U.S. authorities. A year later the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed between Mexico and the U.S, ceding territory that included Utah to the United States. Since Utah was part of U.S. territory but was not a state, it did not have the right to its own government and hence was controlled by the US federal government. Hence, becoming a state was the road to relative independence. (See Frank Cannon, "Under the Prophet in Utah")

In any event, if the evolutionary theory above is correct, we should expect to see from about 1890 forward the development within the Mormon community of new control and

persuasion techniques. This pattern of behaviour is evident, as summarized in the essay titled "Should I Join ..." starting at p. 20 (<http://mccue.cc/bob/postmormon.htm>). However, for purposes of this essay another aspect of the long term Mormon leadership behavioural pattern is of interest – the manner in which JS steered his followers gradually away from their relatively democratic orientation in America of the mid-1800s toward the blind faith that characterized kingdoms, and the parallels between JS's leadership attitude in that regard and the current attitude of Mormon leaders as evidenced by the "faithful history" policy described above. It does not overstate the case to say that JS appeared to be moving toward the kind of control exercised by people like David Koresh over the Branch Dividians and Jim Jones over his followers who with him committed mass suicide at Jonestown, Guyana.

To set up a discussion of how JS manoeuvred himself into a position in which he could reach for theocratic control over his followers, and show how deeply engrained in the Mormon collective psyche certain authoritarian, controlling forces are, I will review several chapters of Mormon history that the Church does its best to suppress, and hence are virtually unknown among even most of its best educated, faithful members. Few (if any) of the significant events to which I refer below are controversial in the sense that there is much room for discussion as to whether or how they happened. Many of these facts, for example, were accepted as historical by a General Authority with whom I visited for a couple of hours shortly before I submitted my resignation as a member of the Church. He accepted all of the facts I proposed as historical. It was only lack of time that prevented us from agreeing as to the entire story. His interpretation of the facts, however, was quite different than mine. He is, for example, prepared to accept JS's word as to the reality of the alleged divine visitations and inspiration JS received in spite of what I am about to summarize and many other similar or even more damning chapters in JS's life. While the General Authority's reasons were many, it seemed that they all came back to the idea that God's ways are hard to understand. I am no longer prepared to surrender any of my decision making autonomy to any human being on such a basis.

Timeline of Key Events in Mormon History

I am not an LDS Church history expert. Recognizing the general ignorance (including my own until recently) of people interested in Mormonism with respect to its history, I will here provide a summary time line of the key events in Mormon history that are relevant to the question of the development of Mormon authority and also some that provide a flavour for the kind of environment in which Mormonism developed. I am indebted in this regard, as I am in so many other ways, to the work of D. Michael Quinn. Not only is his book "The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power" an excellent and reliable narrative history, it has as its 7th Appendix an event by event historical summary that I have found to be invaluable in my attempt to put the Mormon authority power matrix puzzle together. In fact, I would suggest to anyone who is interesting in understanding these things (or anything else Quinn's *magnum opus* duo of books respecting the Mormon power matrix covers) that they start by reading the relevant sections of the time

line contained in the appendices to his books, and then turn to the relevant chapters within the books themselves once a conceptual framework has been established.

In any event, here are the key dates and events from my point of view:

- March 28, 1830: The Book of Mormon is advertised for sale. A few days later JS gives Oliver Cowdery his brown “seer stone” or “peep stone” with which JS discovered the golden plates and which he also used to “translate” the Book of Mormon. JS has previously used this seer stone in his family's treasure hunting activities.
- April 6, 1830: The Mormon Church is officially organized at Manchester, New York, not at Fayette as the Church has traditionally claimed.
- April 11, 1830: Oliver Cowdery gives the Church's first major sermon. JS is an awkward speaker and until 1839 will delegate most speaking engagements to others, primarily Cowdery in the early days, and then to Sidney Rigdon. In 1833 JS would announce a revelation appointing Sidney Rigdon as his “spokesman”.
- June 1, 1830: The Church's first missionary efforts are organized and missionaries sent to the “Nephites” and “Lamanites”, being various native Indian tribes in the region.
- September, 1830: JS receives a revelation that only he can receive revelations and commandments for the Church.
- November 4, 1830: JS uses his white seer stone to dictate a revelation to Orson Pratt. This stone is often referred to as the “Urim and Thummim”.
- December, 1830: JS receives a revelation that instructs all Church members to gather to Ohio. This policy of “gathering” would continue well into the Utah period, and would cause the Church to become an economic and political force wherever its headquarters were located. This would create conflict with the inhabitants of the various locales to which Mormons gathered (Kirtland, Independence, Far West, Nauvoo) and would vest secular power in Mormon leaders.
- June 6, 1830: Jared Carter records, “Brother Joseph notwithstanding he is not naturally talented for a Speaker yet he was filled with the power of the Holy Ghost.”
- October 13, 1831: Apostate Ezra Booth's letters to the Ohio Star are printed from this date through December 8. These are later republished in 1834 in the first anti-Mormon book, Eber D. Howe's “Mormonism Unveiled”. Booth refers to a revelation on polygamy, and to twelve unordained apostles. The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles is not officially formed until 1835.
- November, 1831: JS receives a revelation indicating that he and others who engage in spiritual labour should be financially rewarded for their efforts.
- July 20, 1832: JS writes for the first known time about his “First Vision”, describing it in terms of having seen “the Lord”. He will not until three years later mention that his vision included two personages (Christ and God the Father). Well prior to that date, at least one other young Mormon will report having seen both God the Father and Christ in vision.

- January 24, 1832: Bishop Edward Partridge presents his accounting for church revenues and expenses for the previous year to a general conference of the Church, and the conference votes that a financial statement should be presented to each general conference in Missouri. The practise is suspended when church headquarters is moved to Illinois in 1839.
- March 8, 1832: JS is accused of inappropriate sexual behaviour with Nancy Johnston, and is tarred, feathered and nearly castrated by her brothers and their friends. Rumours of polygamy and/or adulterous behaviour on JS's part have been in circulation for some time at this point.
- Winter 1833: JS's first known polygamous marriage, to the 16 year old Fanny Alger.
- February 27, 1833: The Word of Wisdom is received by revelation.
- August 6, 1833: JS announces a revelation respecting government and war. This establishes Mormonism's theocratic framework.
- December 5, 1833: JS announces that the Church will establish a Democratic newspaper because "the influential men of that party have offered a liberal patronage to us."
- December 18, 1833: JS gives a "blessing-prayer" for Oliver Cowdery respecting the "two evils that he must needs forsake". This refers to Cowdery's then recent transgression of entering into a polygamous or adulterous relationship.
- April 23, 1834: JS announces a revelation that ends the Kirtland United Order (Mormonism's attempt at communism) and distributes the real estate assets contributed by members and otherwise accumulated to JS, Cowdery, Rigdon and a few others.
- June 3, 1834: During the Zion's Camp march the skeletal remains of a man are found at an Indian mound in Missouri. JS indicates that they are of a "white Lamanite" and gives extensive personal data respecting him.
- February 14, 1835: JS tells a meeting of Zion's Camp veterans and others that "The coming of the Lord, which was nigh – even fifty-six years should wind up the scene [in the year 1891]."
- February 14, 1835: The newly formed Quorum of the Twelve Apostles includes an astrologer (John Bynton), a "rodsman" (Heber Kimball) who used a rod for divination, to find lost objects, water witching, etc., an amulet-wearer (Brigham Young) and two treasure seeking enthusiasts (Luke Johnston and Orson Hyde). They are ordained by the Book of Mormon's three witnesses, who are a rodsman (Oliver Cowdery), a seer stone enthusiast (David Whitmer), and treasure seeking participant (Martin Harris).
- February 28, 1835: The Council of Seventy and First Quorum of Seventy are formed.
- March 28, 1835: JS announces a revelation respecting the priesthood that includes statements that the First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve, First Quorum of the Seventy and central high council are all "equal in authority".
- August 17, 1835: Certain revelations are canonized, including one that prohibits polygamy.

- September 14, 1835: A salary is established for the Presiding Patriarch. By 1841 this would include a fee of \$1 per blessing. Five years later it would be increased to \$2 per blessing.
- September 24, 1835: The Kirtland Stake High Council appoints JS by revelation as head of the "war department" of the "Lord's Host". This phraseology is later used to describe JS's role with the Danites.
- October 7, 1835: JS uses his white seer stone to give blessings to Newel and Elizabeth Whitney. The Whitney's acquire a seer stone of their own shortly thereafter.
- November 24, 1835: JS performs the illegal marriage of Newel Whitney and Lydia Goldthwaite who was still legally married to another man. He states, "I have done it by the authority of the holy Priesthood and the Gentile law has no power to call me to an account for it." This is his most clear statement to date of theocratic ethics.
- March 3, 1836: JS ordains African-American Elijah Abel to the office of Elder. He would later be ordained a Seventy, and would receive his temple endowment.
- June 29, 1836: The leading citizens of Clay County, Missouri formally petition the Mormons to move from the county in order to avoid forcing "a people into civil war, who held out to them the friendly hand of assistance in that hour of dark distress [1833]."
- November 2, 1836: The Kirtland Banking Society is organized. Its license is refused. It issues notes in any event under the name "Kirtland Anti-Banking Society". It fails causing all who invested or deposited to lose their money.
- May 29, 1837: Apostles Orson Pratt and Lyman Johnson accuse JS of lying, financial fraud and extortion. The Kirtland High Council receives similar formal accusations against Rigdon, Frederick Williams, Parley Pratt and Lyman Johnston. This is the beginning of the apostasy that will cause JS to abandon Kirtland seven months later.
- June 1837: The Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate comments about the Eleusinian mysteries, which the American edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica and other sources in 1837 describe as being revealed by God from the beginning of the word and passed on to worthy initiates through washings and anointing, a new name and garment, vows of non-disclosure, lesser and greater rituals, presentation through drama, an oath of chastity, designation as prophets, priests, and kinds, emphasis on attaining godhood, and a heavenly ascent past various guards to whom departed spirits must give magical passwords.
- June 5, 1837: At JS's trial for conspiracy to commit the murder of Grandison Newell, Apostles Orson Hyde and Luke Johnson admit under oath that JS "seemed much excited and declared that Newell should be put out of the way, or where the crows could not find him; he said destroying Newell would be justifiable in the sight of God, that it was the will of God, ..."
- October 24, 1837: An appeals court confirms JS and Sidney Rigdon's conviction for operating an illegal bank – the Kirtland Anti-Banking Society.
- December 7, 1837: Bishop Edward Partridge officially defines tithing as 2% of net worth. In 1838 this would be changed by revelation to all surplus property at

conversion, and one tenth of annual income thereafter. By 1843 the donation on conversion would be reduced to one tenth of net worth.

- January 12, 1838: JS and Rigdon flee Kirtland to escape law suits related to the failure of the Kirtland Anti-Banking Society and other matters.
- February 5, 1838: JS's disaffected personal secretary accuses him of trying to create a "system of hereditary tyranny". By his death, JS would have made general authorities of his father, his brothers Hyrum and William, his uncle John and his cousin George. Many of them were paid for the time they spent on Church matters. And he would have anointed his son Joseph Smith III as his theocratic successor (president of both the Mormon Church and the world).
- June, 1838: The Daughters of Zion, or Danites, are organized at Far West, Missouri.
- August 6, 1838: The Danites skirmish with anti-Mormons who try to prevent Mormons from voting in civic elections. Civil war breaks out in four Missouri counties. Anti-Mormon mobs loot and burn Mormon settlements. The Danites respond in kind.
- October 25, 1838: The Danites battle the Missouri militia at the Battle of Crooked River. Many die. The Danites torture and mutilate an injured militiaman, who survives.
- October 27, 1838: Upon learning of the Battle of Crooked River, Lilburn Boggs, Governor of Missouri, gives an order to his militia to either drive the Mormons from his State, or exterminate them.
- October 30, 1838: Haun's Mill Massacre occurs. Many Mormon settlers, including women and children, are slaughtered.
- October 31, 1838: JS and the Danites are surrounded at Far West, Missouri, and barely escape execution.
- November 28, 1838: JS and others are jailed at Liberty, Missouri as a result of their role in the Battle of Crooked River and related events.
- January 26, 1839: The Mormon exodus from Missouri to Illinois begins.
- April 16, 1839: JS escapes Liberty Jail. Enraged Missourians drag the two jail keepers through the streets, almost killing them.
- May 10, 1839: JS settles at Commerce, Illinois and renames it "Nauvoo".
- December 16, 1839: The governor of Illinois signs the Nauvoo charter that JS uses to create an independent theocracy.
- October 5, 1840: On motion of John C. Bennett, the general conference votes that no one be judged guilty of a crime unless proven "by two or three witnesses". This was Bennett's way of shielding his own extra-marital sexual activities with both females and males.
- January 19, 1841: John C. Bennett was commended to JS by revelation.
- January 30, 1841: JS is elected sole Trustee-in-Trust for the Mormon Church.
- February 4, 1841: The Nauvoo Legion is organized.
- February 5, 1841: JS is appointed commander of the Nauvoo Legion. It becomes the largest militia in the US.

- February 6, 1841: JS tells the Nauvoo High Council not to excommunicate Theodore Turley for “sleeping with two females”, requiring him only to confess “that he had acted unwisely, unjustly, imprudently, and unbecoming.”
- March 2, 1841: At JS’s request, Bishop George Miller reported that John Bennett’s wife had “left him under satisfactory evidence of his adulterous connections” and that Bennett was an adulterer and “is an impostor, and unworthy of the confidence of all good men.” Miller was presumably investigating Bennett as a result of the revelation JS received that commended Bennett to him.
- April 5, 1841: JS’s first fully dated plural marriage to Louisa Beaman. Bennett knew the details of this event.
- April 8, 1841: Bennett is sustained as Assistant President of the Church in spite of Bishop Miller’s warning as to his character. Bennett’s knowledge of JS’s polygamous practises were likely a factor in this decision.
- October 27, 1841: JS’s first marriage to a woman concurrently married to another man (polyandry) occurs. The woman is Zina Diantha Huntington. Her legal husband, Henry Jacobs, had been sent on a mission by JS. After JS’s death she would also marry Brigham Young, with her still legal husband standing as witness.
- November 7, 1841: JS preaches: “What many people call sin is not sin. I do many things to break down superstition, and I will break it down.”
- December 27, 1841: JS exhibits to the Quorum of the Twelve what Brigham Young calls the “seer stone” but what Wilford Woodruff refers to as the “Urim and Thummim”. Young says that at Nauvoo JS finds two more seer stones on the banks of the Mississippi River.
- March 15, 1842: JS is initiated into Freemasonry and organizes the Masonic Lodge at Nauvoo.
- March 17, 1842: JS organizes the Relief Society.
- March 30, 1842: JS instructs the Relief Society that “... the Society should move according to the ancient Priesthood” and that he “was going to make of this Society a 'kingdom of priests' as in Enoch’s day, as in Paul’s day.”
- April 7, 1842: JS receives a revelation to establish a theocracy – “The Kingdom of God” – later known as the Council of Fifty. The text to this revelation was not officially published or canonized.
- April 14, 1842: JS unsuccessfully proposes polygamous marriage to Nancy Ridgon, daughter of Sidney Rigdon, and later dictates a letter to her that reads in part, “...That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another ... Whatever God [through his prophet JS or otherwise] requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire.” This is another statement of theocratic ethics, which is nothing more than the ends justifies the means, or radical utilitarian ethics. See the essay titled “Christ’s Moral System ...” at <http://mccue.cc/bob/postmormon.htm> for more information in this regard.
- May 4-5, 1842: JS organizes the Anointed Quorum or Holy Order of the Priesthood and initiates nine men into it by use of what would later be called the temple endowment. Women do not participate until September 28, 1843. Emma Smith administers the “anointing” to women who become part of the quorum.

- May 6, 1842: Orin Porter Rockwell attempts the assassination of Lilburn Boggs, Governor of Missouri.
- May 19, 1842: JS becomes Nauvoo's Mayor.
- May 24-25, 1842: Three women testify that two apostles have taught them that JS approved of "spiritual wifery" wherein several men can have sexual relations with one woman. One of those is John C. Bennett. Bennett is excommunicated, and immediately publishes the first exposé of Mormon polygamy. The other apostle was JS's brother William. JS prevents Brigham Young (the president of the Quorum of the Twelve) from disciplining William for adultery. Apostle George A. Smith records that "Wm. Smith committing iniquity & we have to sustain him against our feelings".
- July 2, 1842: The Church's newspaper The Wasp publishes a phrenology (theory that mental powers are determined the shape of the skull) of JS's head and infers his personality. The most prominent phrenological trait is "Amativeness – 11 L[arge]. Extreme susceptibility; passionately fond of the company of the other sex." The official history of the Church still publishes this chart, along with the caution that such a high score indicates "extreme liability to perversion" in the trait.
- July 15, 1842: Thousands of Nauvoo Mormons search for Orson Pratt after discovering a suicide note. They find him distraught because JS had, according to Pratt's wife Sarah, tried to seduce her. JS said that Bennett, not JS, was the culprit. Orson does not accept this.
- July 22, 1842: Orson Pratt votes against a public resolution in favour of JS's virtuous conduct.
- July 27, 1842: Another revelation is given by JS respecting polygamy. The text is available but is not canonized or officially published.
- August 22, 1842: Three Apostles excommunicate Orson Pratt and ordain his replacement in the Quorum of the Twelve.
- March 20, 1843: James Brewster publishes his claim that as part of an 1836 Ohio treasure seeking expedition, JS's father (the Presiding Patriarch of the Church) "anointed the mineral rods and seeing stones with consecrated oil, and prayed over them in the hours of the Lord in Kirtland."
- April 6, 1842: In a sermon JS affirms regarding the second coming of Christ that, "There are those of the rising generation who shall not taste death till Christ comes ... I prophesy in the name of the Lord God, and let it be written – the Son of Man will not come in the clouds of Heaven till I am eighty-five years old [December 23, 1890]."
- May 1, 1843: The diary of William Clayton, JS secretary, indicates that JS translated a portion of the Kinderhook Plates. These were later proven to be a hoax. The Church has accepted this conclusion. This raises the question as to what JS meant when he use the word "translate" in this context or otherwise.
- May 14, 1843: Hyrum Smith assures a Nauvoo wide audience that only the Devil would give a revelation approving "wives & concubines".
- May 23, 1843: Emma Smith approves for the first time one of JS's polygamous marriages.
- May 26, 1843: Hyrum Smith accepts the doctrine of polygamous marriage.

- May 28, 1843: JS and Emma are first couple "sealed" in marriage for eternity. During the previous month JS had married as polygamous wives 17 year old Lucy Walker, 16 year old Flora Ann Woodworth, and 14 year old Helen Mar Kimball who later testified that he had sexual relations with them.
- August 11, 1843: JS performs marriage for Hyrum Smith and his first plural wife and tells William Clayton, "you have a right to get all you can."
- October 1, 1843: The Anointed Quorum "anoints" and ordains William Law as first counsellor to JS as president of the Mormon Church and Amasa Lyman as second counsellor in anticipation of dropping Sidney Rigdon as counsellor to JS at an upcoming conference.
- October 5, 1843: JS's journal reads "Joseph forbids it and the practise hereof. No man shall have but one wife". The History of the Church, 6:46 makes an addition which reverses this absolute denial.
- October 8, 1843: The general conference of the Church refuses to sustain JS's motion to drop Ridgon as a counsellor.
- December 1, 1843: JS's diary makes the first mention of the Nauvoo Mansion's bar room. JS's son later reminisces that JS set up this bar, fully stocked it and appointed Orin Porter Rockwell as bartender.
- December 16, 1843: JS prophecies before the Nauvoo city council. "I prophecy by virtue of the Holy Priesthood vest in me [and] in the name of Jesus Christ that if Congress will not hear our petition and grant us protection they shall be broken up as a government and God shall damn them. There shall nothing be left of them, not even a grease spot." This related to the petition mentioned immediately below.
- December 21, 1843: Nauvoo's city council petition Congress to give territorial status to Nauvoo and authorize JS to call upon federal troops to defend the city. Congress ignores the petition.
- December 27, 1843: The Church's newspaper the Nauvoo Neighbour advertises beer and ale from the Nauvoo brewery.
- December 29, 1843: JS authorizes the Danites to kill "if need be" and says that his life is endangered by "a little dough head" and "a Brutus".
- January 29, 1844: JS is nominated for the US presidency by the Quorum of Twelve Apostles.
- February 1, 1843: JS and Hyrum Smith announce the excommunication of an Elder for teaching polygamy.
- February 6, 1843: JS prophesied that that within five years the people sitting around the table at which he made this prophesy would be able to live without cooking. The official history of the Church deletes this entry from JS's diary.
- February 6, 1844: JS's only acknowledged polygamous child is born.
- February 25, 1844: The Anointed Quorum approves JS's campaign platform for the US presidency.
- March 3, 1844: The Anointed Quorum approves JS first choice as presidential running mate.
- March 8, 1844: The Anointed Quorum approves JS second choice as running mate.

- March 10, 1844: JS convenes the first meeting of the Council of Fifty.
- March 11, 1844: The Council of Fifty is organized.
- March 13, 1844: The Council of Fifty appoints and sends theocratic ambassadors to various nations.
- March 23, 1844: JS gives a charge of secrecy to the apostles and other members of the Council of Fifty.
- March 26, 1844: JS petitions congress to commission him to raise an army of 100,000 volunteers to move under his direction in the Western US. At the time there are 26,000 men, women and children who are members of the Mormon Church.
- April 6, 1844: Sidney Rigdon tells the Church's general conference, "There are men standing in your midst that you can't do anything with them but cut their throat & bury them."
- April 11, 1844: JS is anointed and ordained by the Council of Fifty as King, Priest and Ruler over Israel on Earth. This is interpreted by some of his most influential followers as JS's presidency of the world government which the Kingdom of God, or Council of Fifty, will become.
- April 18, 1844: The Council of Fifty takes the ecclesiastical step of condemning religious dissenters. Church authorities then act to excommunicate William Law, a member of the First Presidency who had found out about JS's polygamous practises and insisted that he cease them. Law responds by forming the "Reformed Church" in Nauvoo for the purpose of countering JS.
- April-May 1844: JS tells Brigham Young and others that JS's unborn son will be named David and will be both Church president and king of Israel on earth.
- May 6, 1844: The Council of Fifty approves JS's third and final choice as vice-presidential running mate in the US presidential election.
- May 7, 1844: William Law and associates receive the printing press on which they intend to print the Nauvoo Expositor, the purpose of which is to educate the world as to JS's polygamous and deceptive practises.
- May 12, 1844: JS proclaims, "I calculate to be one of the instruments of setting up the kingdom of Daniel by the world of the Lord, and I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world." The same day, 300 people attend a meeting at William Law's Reformed Church to listen to sermons against polygamy and "Smith's plan of uniting Church and State."
- June 1, 1844: Heber Kimball clothes himself in endowment robes, prays in the "true order of prayer while holding a divining rod and asks the kind of "yes-no" questions the rod was thought to be able to answer.
- June 7, 1844: The first and only issue of the Expositor is published, making reference to JS's polygamous practices, the 1843 polygamy revelation and JS's 1844 ordination of King of the Earth.
- June 10, 1844: Hyrum Smith tells Nauvoo city council that the 1843 polygamy revelation pertains to ancient polygamy, not to modern.
- June 10, 1844: By JS's order as Mayor, Nauvoo's city council takes action to destroy the Expositor and scatters its type in the street. Mobs begin to gather elsewhere against JS as soon as word of this action spreads.

- June 11, 1844: JS's son Joseph Smith III is ordained as JS's theocratic successor.
- June 18, 1844: JS declares martial law in Nauvoo.
- June 23, 1844: JS tells William Clayton, the secretary of the Council of Fifty, to bury or burn the Council's minutes, and JS and Hyrum flee Nauvoo. Some of his followers accuse him of cowardice, so he returns but says this is contrary to revelation. JS and Emma burn the original transcript of the 1843 polygamy revelation, but William Clayton preserves a copy.
- June 24, 1844: JS surrenders to civil authorities to stand trial for riot and treason, acknowledging that this likely will lead to his death. He is incarcerated at Carthage, Illinois.
- June 27, 1844: A mob approaches the Carthage Jail. JS assumes it is the Nauvoo Legion since he had ordered it to come to his rescue. Its second in command, Jonathon Durham has however disobeyed this order in light of the bloodshed a rescue attempt would cause both at Carthage and Nauvoo. JS is killed after defending himself with a pistol. He leaps from an upper story window of the jail while shouting the Masonic cry of distress "Oh, Lord, my God, is there no help for the widow's son?" He is shot multiple times as he falls, and again while on the ground.

Narrative Historical Summary

The key power wielding organs within Mormonism during the period just described were the Nauvoo City Council, the Stake Presidents of each Stake (like a Catholic Diocese) and their respective High Councils, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (led by Brigham Young), the Anointed Quorum, and finally the Council of Fifty. The roles of these various groups were not well defined. JS led each of them, and it appears that he shifted important decisions among them on the basis of which he thought he could best control and most trust from time to time. Near the end of his life as rumours swirled about his initially secret but increasingly well-known sexual practises and some formerly loyal followers (most notably William Law, his former counsellor in the Mormon Church's First Presidency) fell out with him because of that issue, he shifted civil as well as ecclesiastical power to the Council of Fifty likely because he had reason to believe that they could be trusted more than the others. And finally in the end, when they too betrayed his trust, he immediately resorted again to the other groups or his own executive fiat to make the decisions that brought about his death at the hands of the mob at Carthage Illinois.

I will briefly outline the development of each of the groups just mentioned and their connection to the theocracy JS established.

The idea of creating a theocracy for the Mormon people had long been a part of Mormon ideology. This was the model, for example, on which the righteous people described in the Book of Mormon operated. And while JS did not initially emphasize the union of church and state (Quinn, p. 111), JS's teachings in that regard from 1842 on were clear in that regard. (Quinn, p. 111-113) He perceived himself to be a law unto

himself as a result of his self proclaimed position as God's spokesman, and taught that both civil and religious authority should be exercised by one man. However, he stopped short of explicitly advocating the overthrow of the US government in favour of Mormon theocracy.

In Nauvoo, JS did not initially have much personal civil power. However, by 1844 he had accumulated the following offices: President of the Mormon Church, trustee of Mormon Church finances, Mayor of Nauvoo, chief justice, commanding officer of the militia (the Nauvoo Legion), and registrar of deeds (a position not recognized by Illinois law). (Quinn, p. 110) It is important to note that he added these positions to his personal portfolio gradually. This is a well known pattern used to obtain power over either individuals or groups. In addition, JS used his religious influence in Nauvoo to staff both the civic and county civil administration with Mormon Apostles and General Authorities whom he wished to reward for their missionary and other ecclesiastical service. This also gave him effective control over Nauvoo's civic government. That is, it was a *de facto* theocracy. But this was not enough for JS. (Quinn, p. 108 – 9) Because of the number of Mormons who joined and quickly ascended to the Master level in Illinois Masonic lodges, it also appears that JS was about to take over control of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Illinois. In an apparent effort to thwart JS, the non-Mormon Masonic lodges in Illinois passed a vote in the Fall of 1843 that decertified the Nauvoo lodge. JS, however, continued to initiate Masons, promote them to the level of Master, and to administer Masonic oaths of secrecy, all in contravention of the Masonic rules he had sworn to obey. He did this in secret, while continuing to cultivate the Masonic friendships he had throughout the state in aid of his presidential bid. In this, as in many other respects, JS acted as a law unto himself. (Quinn, p. 130)

The Anointed Quorum was founded in 1842 by way of administering certain ordinances to a select group using a ceremony striking similar to a Masonic ritual with which JS was familiar (Quinn, p 114, 115) which followed the pattern of the Eleusinian mysteries of which it appears JS was aware, the employed other concepts found in the Bible and other sources with which JS is also known to have been familiar. This was the beginning of the current form of the Mormon temple endowment ceremony. By the summer of 1843, JS had linked this ceremony to theocracy, and noted in his journal in that regard that:

Those holding the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings. A perfect law of Theocracy holding keys of power and blessings stood as God to give laws to the people.

One of the interesting aspects of this quorum is that it included women – the wives of the men who were "anointed" and that Emma Smith administered the anointing ceremony in a fashion similar to a priesthood ordinance to the female initiates. The Anointed Quorum acted as an organ of political strategy, endorsing such things as JS "proclamation to the kings of the earth" (Quinn, p. 116), the first two of JS's three choices of running mate in his bid for the US presidency (the third was approved by the

Council of Fifty) and other matters related to his presidential campaign (Quinn, p. 118). Respecting that campaign, the Mormon Church sent its largest missionary force, by far, in its history into the field to seek votes for JS instead of converts. In fact, this is the largest missionary force the Mormon Church has ever deployed in proportion to its membership. (Quinn, p. 119-120)

The establishment of the secret Council of Fifty was also intimately connected to JS's presidential bid. That council was authorized by a revelation on April 7, 1842. However, the text to this revelation was not officially published or canonized and the Council was not established until March 11, 1844, just two days after the Anointed Quorum nominated JS's vice-presidential running mate. The Mormon Church has described the establishment of this council to be for the purpose of preparing for the "political kingdom of God" that would come into being at the second coming of Christ. (Quinn, p. 120) Its members referred to it as the "Kingdom of God", or "Council of the Kingdom", or "council of fifty princes of the kingdom". Two days after the council was established, the Church's Times and Seasons newspaper published an editorial arguing against the constitutional separation of church and state, and concluding that, "... the church must not triumph over the state, but actually swallow it up." (Quinn, p. 122) Other similar announcements followed, including one by Sidney Rigdon. And shortly thereafter, the Council performed a secret ordinance whereby JS was ordained "king, to rule over the House of Israel forever." (Quinn, p. 124) This was recognized by some of his key followers, including Apostles Lyman Wright and Heber C. Kimball, as JS's anointing as "president of the world". (Quinn, p. 124) The members of the Council were sworn to secrecy respecting this ordination, on pain of death. (Quinn, p. 128)

The Council of Fifty did not have a written constitution. A number of members attempted to write a constitution, and failed. Hence, JS declared by revelation from God that the Council itself was its own "living constitution". (Quinn, p. 131) This is particularly interesting since the Council only met at the instance of its chairman, JS, to consider the business he saw fit. In this, it resembled a classic *Curia Regis* or "king's council" of medieval times. (Quinn, p. 123) However, the minutes of its meetings did seem to follow some rules. A quorum of half of its members was required for it to conduct business; decision required a unanimous vote (foreshadowing the same practice in the Mormon Church's First Presidency and Quorum of Twelve Apostles when they together became the dominant authoritarian organ with Mormonism), provided that dissenting votes were required to change to match any "almost" unanimous sentiment of the group; the Chairman (JS) announced his vote first with each other member in order of seniority subsequently announcing his vote to the group. It is hard to imagine a system of superficial democratic appearance that would more effectively maximize JS's influence over a group's decisions. Not surprising, during the Council's three month existence JS's initiatives appear to have been met with unbridled enthusiasm, and no recorded dissent. (Quinn, pp. 131-132)

There is a noteworthy difference between how this structure worked in JS time and how it now works. Given what I know about JS, I believe it likely that he established this mechanism to allow him to create an apparent consensus in an environment he could

control, and then present the "decision of the group" as God's will. And this appeared to work for him. However, in modern times it does not work that way at all. There is no JS who has the force of personality necessary to make changes and achieve unanimity. As a result, the requirement of unanimity puts the Mormon Church in a time warp. It takes generations before the old people who run the Church see the wisdom in adopting social innovations that have long been common place in the educated segment of society, and to unanimously move in that direction. So, the current structure is in my view not purposeful conservatism as many Mormon leaders and faithful members have indicated to me. It is rather an accident of history. JS had his own reasons for setting things up as he did, and this hardened into custom and was set in stone by the perception that JS must have been inspired. Given the course of conduct summarized above, he was inspired by little more than a desire to maintain control over an increasing large and difficult to control group. It is not surprising to find that what worked for him, for a while at least, in that regard is inappropriate to the task for which it is now used. But I digress.

The Council of Fifty immediately after its formation dispatched ambassadors apparently on behalf of the Mormon Church and presumably at its expense to foreign lands such as England, France, Russia and Texas, and to Washington D.C. The nature of these missions is still cloaked with intrigue. The ambassador to Russia was connected with a certain invention that had the power to destroy "an army or navy" and it involved

... some of the most important things concerning the advancement and building up of the kingdom of God in the last days, which cannot be explained at this time. (Quinn, p. 132)

The Council of Fifty's roots were in the infamous Danite organization, a shadowy group of Mormon enforcers and vigilantes that was disbanded at about the time the main group of Mormons moved from Missouri to Nauvoo. In fact, many of the Council of Fifty were former Danites. While they were formally organized under the name "Daughters of Zion", they became known as "Danites", which was a reference to the prophecy in Daniel (2:44-45) respecting the stone that once cut out of the mountain would fill the entire earth. The Danites appear to have been responsible for many of the most inhuman acts committed in Mormonism's name, including burning public and private buildings, pillaging, the use of deadly force during retaliatory attacks against "gentile" groups, the mutilation or torture of the wounded, threatening murder, and likely acts of murder as well. (Quinn, p. 95 – 99). Some, but by no means all, of these actions may have been justified in the context of the civil war-like conditions under which they were committed. These were created by a pattern of escalating violence caused by the non-Mormon community's concern respecting the manner in which Mormons were congregating so quickly and in such large numbers so as to take over the democratic and other social processes in certain parts of Missouri. This eventually led to armed conflict in which the Danite role was prominent, and as a result of which there was looting, destruction of property and death on both sides. Finally, at the "Battle of Crooked River" the Mormon militia (including the Danites) attacked Missouri State troops. This attack was the proximate cause of Governor Lilburn Bogg's infamous

order to Missouri Militia to either drive the Mormon's from the State, or exterminate them. The well-known in Mormon circles "Haun's Mill Massacre" during which Mormon settlers were slaughtered, occurred shortly thereafter. Many other atrocities were committed by both sides. (Quinn, p. 100)

One of the Danites' distinguishing features was the secret signs by which they identified each other and the oath of secrecy upon pain of death they took upon initiation. This included a "charge", "obligation" of secrecy, and a "password". This pattern was repeated for the Council of Fifty, (Quinn, pp. 128-129) the Anointed Quorum, and shows up still in the LDS temple "endowment" ceremony still used to today. (See the essay titled "The Effect of Mormon Temple Marriage ..." at <http://mccue.cc/bob/postmormon.htm>) Interestingly, the Gadianton Robbers, vilified in the Book of Mormon, used a similar system of signs (See Helaman 2:7 and 6:22, for example). When former Danite leader Sampson Avard turned state's evidence respecting JS's alleged illegal activities he gave the words of the Danite oath as follows:

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, I do solemnly obligate myself ever to conceal, and never to reveal, the secret purposes of this society called the Daughters of Zion. Should I ever do the same, I hold my life as the forfeiture. (Quinn, p. 129)

Anyone who received the Mormon temple endowment before it was changed a number of years ago will recognize this formulation.

The historical record is clear that JS and Sydney Rigdon were at a minimum aware and approving of Danite activities (Quinn, p. 93-99) and perhaps ordered them. As note above for example, Rigdon indicated in 1838 that the Danite role in removing dissenting members such as Oliver Cowdery from the faithful flock was a result of "the imperative duty of the Church to obey the word of Joseph Smith, or the presidency, without question or inquiry, and that if there were any that would not, they should have their throats cut from ear [to] ear." (Quinn, p. 94) Given the Danite mandate as just expressed respecting something as mild as conscientious dissent, their atrocities committed in more stressful circumstances are not surprising. And, several members of the Danite group later testified in legal proceedings that the Danites overriding purpose was to bring to pass the overthrow of the State in favour of Mormonism's (that is, JS's) theocratic government. (Quinn, p. 96)

JS made increasing use of oaths of secrecy as he attempted to consolidate his power toward the end of his career. This use was well developed by the time he began his secret practise of polygamy in 1832. However, it appears to have gained new life as a result of his increasingly close association with Masonism toward the end of his life. The blood oaths given by Masons to keep secrets and to support each other, in fact, appear to have played a critical role in the manner in which he formed the Council of Fifty. It appears that nearly all, and perhaps all, of the members of this group were Masons who had given the blood oaths just noted. Several of them were not Mormons and had questionable pasts involving counterfeiting. (Quinn, p. 127) Their primary

virtue seemed to be a commitment to do JS's bidding. However, despite the Council's non-Mormon and "colourful" membership, it made critical ecclesiastical decisions near the end of JS's life such as an offer of re-admittance to the Mormon Church and its First Presidency made to William Law in exchange for his agreement to stop publishing information respecting JS's sexual practises and lack of integrity. A member of the Council was sent to Law to negotiate what amounted to a truce and reconciliation, which Law refused on the basis that he would not be "bought". They also decided the eternal fate of Law and others whom the Council consigned to damnation, before standing aside to permit a perfunctory excommunication to proceed. (Quinn, p. 125-126) This is a pattern JS seemed to often use. He would cause a decision to be made by a group, members of which were committed to secrecy and were also members of the group that had ostensible authority to make the decision in question. Then, the group with ostensible authority would proceed to act as if it had made the decision, and present such to the persons affected as if it had been properly made.

The intervention of the Council of Fifty in ecclesiastical matters would have a profound influence on the question of Mormon leadership succession once JS was dead, since it eroded the until then dominant power of Nauvoo's Stake President, William Marks, and opened the door for Brigham Young to assert that his authority was not restricted to matters concerning his quorum – that of the Twelve Apostles – as had previously been assumed. The Twelve's role until that time had been that of a travelling "high council" that only had jurisdiction over areas where Stakes had not been formed. That is, the unorthodox excommunication of William Law and others at the hands of the Council of Fifty and Brigham Young acting outside his presumed sphere of authority muddied the waters around the question of Mormon authority at a crucial junction in LDS history. (Quinn, p. 126)

JS's down fall came during his campaign for the US presidency, which while taken seriously within Mormonism was a source of amusement for most non-Mormons. However, there is some evidence that JS's personal presence made a favourable impression on some important people (Quinn, p. 135) and that he hence perhaps had reason to hope that he could play a spoiler role in the election that would give him enough leverage to bargain for things that he felt were essential to protect what he had come to see as the Mormon commonwealth. (Quinn, p. 136-137).

The Council of Fifty appears to have been formed as part of JS's burgeoning political ambition. As already noted, the members of the Council who were former Danites had proven capable of taking care of the dirty work required to accomplish some objectives that JS had deemed critical in Missouri, and had been entrusted with security related matters in Nauvoo. They had also kept the secrets that these dark deeds had imposed upon them. Other former Mormon leaders JS had trusted, such as John Bennett and William Law, had violated that trust by going public with information respecting JS's sexual practises. However, notwithstanding the manner in which JS had "qualified" the members of this Council, some of its members felt that JS's kingly ordination was treasonous, but were not prepared to speak out in that regard until they saw what JS

would do with the rights that he had caused the Council to confer upon him. Then on May 12, 1844, one month after that ordination, JS announced,

I calculate to be one of the instruments of setting up the kingdom of Daniel by the word of the Lord, and I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world.

Although he emphasized that this revolution would not be by the sword, by giving this speech he had stepped over a line that galvanized the silent dissenters on the Council of Fifty to action. Within a few hours of JS's sermon in which the above statement was made, 300 people attended a meeting of William Law's "Reformed Church" which openly rejected a Mormon theocracy. (Quinn, p. 137) Shortly thereafter, Law was informed by certain Council members of JS's secret ordination as "King, Priest and Ruler over Israel on Earth". (Quinn, p. 138) This quickly found its way into the only issue Law's newspaper, the Nauvoo Expositor would publish.

Once JS learned that some members of the Council of Fifty had not kept his secret, he did not convene it again (Quinn, p. 139) although Brigham did once JS was deceased. Young used the Council of Fifty to rule Utah for many years. Rather than convene the Council of Fifty, JS called a meeting of the Anointed Council, members of which dominated Nauvoo's City Council. The next morning, Nauvoo's City Council met and authorized the probably illegal destruction of the Expositor's press, which destruction immediately followed. The "princes" of the kingdom were no longer of use to JS. He told William Clayton, the Council's secretary, that he should either bury or burn the Council's minutes – JS did not care what happened to them as long as they did not fall into the hands of the "Church's enemies". (Quinn, p. 140) As was the case in other instances, Clayton's well engrained record keeping nature seems to have resulted in his opting not to burn the minutes, and as a result evidence was preserved that has been essential to the understanding we have gained of how JS, and early Mormonism, functioned.

From that point on, JS made the decisions that needed to be made respecting the destruction of the Expositor and a variety of other critical matters through order of the Nauvoo City Council, or by himself as Mayor or Commander of the Nauvoo legion.

JS's order as Mayor to destroy the Expositor's printing press, along with the news that had already spread courtesy of that press respecting JS's theocratic designs and polygamous activities, inflamed the already hostile populace and resulted in an order for JS's arrest and incarceration at Carthage, Illinois. While jailed at Carthage, JS sent a command in his own handwriting to his second in command of the Nauvoo Legion ordering an attack on Carthage Jail to free himself and those with him. That order was not executed on the basis that such an attack would cause much bloodshed at Carthage, and then again at Nauvoo where a retaliatory attack would no doubt be made. However, JS apparently thought that his order had been carried out because when one of his guards at the Carthage Jail told him that a mob was approaching, JS indicated that there was nothing to fear since they were coming to free him. Moments

later, the recently anointed King of the Earth was killed as he shouted the secret Masonic distress call while leaping from the jail's upper story window.

Historical Pattern Analysis

A few interesting patterns emerged for me as I put together the just completed historical summary.

The most striking is the divergence between the "faithful" history produced by the Church and its apologists and those who might be called real historians, such as Quinn. I note that Quinn is cited regularly by the Church's apologists, but selectively. They cite the source documents in the same selective and deeply misleading manner. Entire books have been written about the pathetic and misleading nature of the story told by the LDS Church and those its controls about itself, and so all I will do here is offer a couple of comparisons that came to attention courtesy of my wife as I wrote this essay. These are all from the Deseret Book published and widely consulted within faithful Mormon circles "Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History" (2000) by Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon and Richard O. Cowan which for ease of reference I will refer to as "Garr".

- Polygamy: To read Garr, one would think that this was a plan that was smoothly rolled out and understood by Church members. He quotes from JS's revelations to the effect that the purpose of polygamy was to "raise up seed" unto God and that God authorized his faithful disciples to practise it. He notes that the "introduction of polygamy was shrouded in secrecy because of the desire for confidentiality". He indicates that JS taught polygamy to members of the Quorum of the Twelve and other worthy men and women and that a few practised it before leaving Nauvoo. He says that those who practised polygamy believed that it "helped ensure exaltation". None of the confusion, deceit, double standards, etc. evidenced in the time line above is conveyed. And while the time line does not deal with this, it was clear in JS's time and even more clear under Brigham Young that the practise of polygamy was not an option if exaltation was a Mormon's goal. Exaltation was inextricably linked (and still is in Mormon theology) to polygamy. For those who take Mormon theology seriously, this is why polygamy is still attractive and will not go away. I visited with a woman just last week whose parents moved from Canada a few years ago to join a Mormon fundamentalist (that is, polygamous) group in Manti, Utah precisely because they believed in Mormon theology.
- The Council of Fifty: Garr does not mention JS's ordination as King of the Earth; he does not mention the Danite connection; he does not mention that most of the few non-Mormons who were on the Council were criminals and/or counterfeiters; he does not mention the Free Mason connection. In short, the description of the Council of Fifty Garr provides is deeply misleading.
- John Bennett: Garr does not mention JS's revelation favouring Bennett; he does not indicate Bennett's knowledge of JS's still then secret practise of polygamy; he does indicate that Bennett tried to pervert the doctrine of plural marriage but fails

to mention that William Smith did the same thing and was not disciplined, and that the only apparent difference between what JS was doing and what William Smith and Bennett did was that they got caught. They felt inspired to have sex with other women, and told those women that JS was doing the same kind of thing. Many other facts related to Bennett's relationship to JS and polygamy are also omitted.

- The Nauvoo Expositor: Garr does not mention William Law's horror upon finding out about JS's secret sexual activities; he does not mention the months Law spent trying to persuade JS to change his ways; he does not mention that the Expositor was Law's last resort; he does not mention the critical role publication by the Expositor of JS's ordination as King of the Earth played in inciting the violence that caused his death; he makes the destruction of the Expositor sound legal.
- The Danites: Garr says that this was a **defensive** (Garr's emphasis) paramilitary organisation. This is only true in part. It also acted as a local enforcement mechanism, as for example when Danites threatened Oliver Cowdery and others with death if they did not leave the body of the Saints in Ohio. Garr alleges that JS "did not have any or connection with the Danite organization". This appears to be false based on Quinn's research. Many other facts are either distorted or omitted.

As I have already said, books have been written about discrepancies of this sort, and so I will leave this analysis at this point.

Mormonism was more democratic in its origins than I had realized. For example, financial transparency is a hallmark of democratic institutions, and in 1832 the Church's general conference established the precedent of the presentation by the executive to the members of a full financial statement each year. As JS consolidated his power, he did away with this indicator of democracy. But even in Nauvoo what the prophet proposed was not always simply rubber stamped by the membership as indicated by the fact that in 1843 when JS wished to get rid of Sidney Rigdon as his counsellor and had already caused the Anointed Counsel to ordain another in Rigdon's stead, the general conference of the Church refused to adopt JS's proposed motion in that regard. It appears that the Mormon Church's slide from democracy into dictatorship occurred by increments during times of great stress. For example, the disclosure of financial statements was dropped during the chaotic move from Missouri to Illinois. And the exodus to Utah vested in Brigham Young more power than JS ever had. This is the equivalent of a government declaring martial law and then quietly keeping the people's rights that such a state of emergency is supposed to temporarily suspend. And we see this practice regularly used by dictators in the developing world where democracy is still non-existent or nascent. For this reason, in stable democracies the people's rights are clearly defined and the circumstances in which they may be proscribed are carefully defined.

JS's various machinations respecting polygamy show his manipulative tendencies at their worst. The various events respecting John C. Bennett are perhaps the most

illustrative of this. JS felt that Bennett might be a good leader as a result of revelation he received to that effect. So he had Bishop Miller investigate Bennett, and an unfavourable report came back. This should have disqualified Bennett for leadership positions. However, somehow Bennett found out about JS's polygamous practises. It is difficult to resist the inference that this knowledge played a role in his becoming a general authority. It appears that JS needed to co-opt Bennett, and there is no better way to do that than make him a leader in spite of Bennett's known proclivities. This shows JS's priorities. His game was dominated by concerns respecting the accumulation and maintenance of power. It reminds me of US foreign policy. Once a priority has been established (like crushing communism worldwide) you can easily wind up with some pretty unusual bedfellows (like bin Ladin). It appears that the same process was employed to build and maintain JS's power base. If he had not been so oversexed, he would have been able to hold on much longer and built something far larger, IMHO.

Returning to Bennett's story, once he was on the inside, he began to use JS's tricks to persuade women to have sex with him. When this comes to light, JS had to get rid of him because JS did not want to go public with polygamy. So JS used the information he had gathered before making Bennett a leader, as well as other information, to discredit him and cause his excommunication. This reminds me of the part in John Grisham's book "The Firm" in which a young lawyer is set up for and falls into a compromising sexual position. Evidence of that is used to blackmail him from time to time so that he will be more likely to obey when called upon to do so.

In any event, in response to JS's excommunicatory action, Bennett wrote an expose of polygamy and I was always therefore taught that he was among the blackest of apostates. Then, JS tried to seduce Sarah Pratt. This took her husband Orson to the brink of suicide, and JS attempted to blame the incident on the already departed and discredited Bennett. That is, Sarah said JS did it, and JS said "No, it was Bennett and you are his mistress". (Quinn, p. 571) When Orson would not play along, he was removed from the Quorum of the Twelve. All of this shows that JS's tendency to use the ends to justify the means – what Quinn calls “theocratic ethics” – is even more pervasive than I had thought. See the essay titled “Christ’s Moral System ...” at <http://mccue.cc/bob/postmormon.htm> for more on this topic.

I had forgotten how clear the evidence is that JS had himself anointed king of the earth by the Council of Fifty, and the role that secret getting out played in his demise. This supports the initial part of the theory I outlined above. That is, the human transition from kingship to democracy is of critical importance to modern human society, and that religious leaders tend to try to turn the clock back to the good old days when the guy in charge was really in charge instead of having to go through the hassle of getting other people to agree with him before he could act. One of JS's mortal errors seems to have been that he tried to turn the clock back too far.

JS was amazingly adept at shifting power among various decision-making organs he had set up in order to maximize his influence, and used sacred oaths to enhance the

effectiveness of this system. I read recently in the Economist Magazine of political shenanigans currently underway in the Ukraine by which the ruthless dictator who now rules that country attempts to give his regime a patina of democratic respectability. This game is likely nearly as old as man.

JS resembled tin pot dictators in other ways as well. He appointed family members to position of power and respecting which their economic circumstances were likely to improve. And leaders in general were appointed largely on the basis of loyalty instead of merit.

I suggest that it is fair to infer that none of the shuffling JS did from one quorum or council to another had any likelihood of leading to better decisions, helping more people, or had any other legitimate organizational purpose. Rather, all of JS's dancing between groups, his use of one group to decide a matter in secret and then influence the apparently responsible group to decide in the same fashion etc., seems to have been calculated as carefully as possible to maximize his influence over the Mormon and Nauvoo civil decision-making organs, and hence to maximize obedience to his will.

It was to the Council of Fifty, the most ruthless, non-religious and secretive of all of these various groups, to which JS turned for support in his megalomaniacal attempt to scale the highest of pinnacle of power – world government. They anointed him King of the Earth, committed to keep this a secret, and to devote themselves to achieving his goal. In time honoured kingly fashion, they were all given the position of "princes" and promised participation in the exercise of any power he accumulated. And perhaps worst of all, members of the Church were engaged to do a variety of tasks without understanding the objectives their actions were to achieve. This is a story straight out of Medieval Europe. It unfortunately, however, reminds of me of current LDS missionary system. In that context, innocent young missionaries are induced to go out to the public and bear their solemn and often tearful testimony to falsehoods that those who know better have taught them as "truth". They too have been purposefully put in a state of ignorance by a few who understand the whole story, and sent to accomplish a task that their lack of information prevents them from understanding. They think that they are doing one thing, when just as the residents of JS's Nauvoo, they are doing something quite different the nature of which would likely disgust them were they capable of understanding it.

JS's ability to persuade those around him that he received continuing revelation about who should make important decisions, to constitute new groups for that purpose, and to move on when he felt he could no longer control those groups seems to have been critical to his longevity and success. Had he been forced to ride one horse and get off when he could no longer control it (as is required in stable democracies), he would have lost control long before he did.

This casts the "line upon line" principle in new light. JS had to be able to change the rules to keep his followers under this control. That is, by forming new councils and having them ratify his decisions, he used basic psychology (apparent authority ratified

by a credible group) to sway the masses. Once a group could no longer be relied upon to serve this purpose, he received new revelation (often disclosed on a confidential basis to only a few key followers who then committed to help him in exchange for perceived earthly and heavenly power and other blessings) and formed a new group from which he would derive the power he needed to accomplish the task he had in mind.

Note how throughout this process just described JS walked the line between kingship (or theocracy) and democracy. It would likely not have worked for him to simply demand obedience to him and him alone, even in God's name. He used others (these "quorums" just noted) to accumulate power through something that looked like democracy. However, his objective was clear. He wanted and was trying to accumulate as much power as possible. While it is not possible to predict where JS would have ended up had he achieved his objective, others who have gone this route include the likes of Jim Jones and David Koresh. The kind of control these men exercised is not achieved at once. Rather, it is built a step at a time. JS's steps are clearly documented in this regard. But when he got to the point of making explicit his eventual goal to the selected-for-their-proven-ability-to-keep-secrets Council of Fifty, even some of them decided that he had gone too far.

It is also interesting to note that JS's aspirations, even during his dark last days, never took a step backwards. His projects were grandiose and getting bigger. His petition to the US Congress to be commissioned to raise an army of 100,000 men, his bid for the US presidency, and his ordination of King of the Earth, all indicate this trend. And JS offered those who were prepared to support him a liberal share in the fruits he expected his master plan to yield.. This is the preferred *modus operandi* used by some of mankind's most successful fraud artists – talk a big story; act like the biggest shot possible; and then blind the "mark" with offers that engage the greed, fear and power mechanisms of the human emotional architecture. Once that is properly done, the mark will be under the fraud artist's control. I also note that a pattern of behaviour I have seen many times in businesses as they are in the course of failing is a leadership tendency to desperately reach for some big prize. That is, if we can just raise this last piece of money that a bank or investor is being asked for, we will turn things around and make unbelievable amounts of money for everyone. That is, grandiose plans do not always mean confident leadership. They often are a sign of desperation. I believe that this was the case with JS. The rumours of his polygamy were circulating with greater intensity. William Law, John Bennett and others who were within his inner circle had defected and would not go quietly away. I believe that the laughable (with the benefit of hindsight) things he proposed during his last months were largely a function of his increasing need to distract those loyal to him from the very issues that brought him down. And in his desperation to distract, he pushed the "king of the earth" issue past the breaking point of the weakest links in his most loyal group. And it only took one of them to blow the lid off. The chain was too long. The longer the chain, the greater the probability that a weak link will be found.

The manner in which JS gradually accumulated power throughout his life, but particularly near the end at Nauvoo as just described, speaks volumes respecting the nature of the man and the basic characteristics of the religious movement he spawned. He used blind faith to accumulate power, but carefully structured the various organs of civic, ecclesiastical and theocratic government just described to give a superficial appearance of democracy. That is, he did not simply announce that God had anointed him King. Rather, he persuaded a group many of whom had committed to three separate blood oaths (Danite, Masonic, and Council of Fifty) to anoint him as king while at the same time he anointed them as princes in the kingdom in classic medieval fashion. That group then set about working to achieve their objective of installing JS as President of the USA, and to establish diplomatic ties with other countries. All the while he presented himself as a democratically elected civic leader, elected leader of the Nauvoo Masonic lodge, and President of the Mormon Church freely sustained by the membership of that organization.

We see the same pattern in Mormonism today. LDS leaders, as noted above, speak about intellectual freedom but in fact mean freedom that is limited by whatever those leaders say is "truth". That is, blind faith is required. Mormons are constantly told how important honesty is, and yet their religious leaders withhold vitally important information from the membership, in effect preventing them from understanding the nature of their own faith. This is purposefully done to inculcate the members' obedience, and causes them to again blindly believe.

I note that what I have written does not establish that Mormonism has cornered the market of religious duplicity. Rather, it indicates that on the crowded spectrum of contemporary religious organizations, Mormonism is located toward the "authoritarian" and "blind faith" end of the spectrum along with many others. However, the story of how Mormonism arrived at its current state, a small part of which has just been told, is much more colourful than most.

The Authority Paradigm

In my view, the easiest way to make sense of Mormon history is to remember that while JS and other Mormon leaders from time to time have had good ideas, and expressed them, that maintaining control of their followers was their primary objective at the subconscious level for sure, and the conscious perhaps. This simple idea reconciles all of the contradiction above, and many others that dominate the annals of Mormon history. For example, Michael Quinn notes that Nauvoo's guarantee of religious freedom for Muslims was well ahead of its time, and that within weeks of passing this law a former high ranking Danite was appointed as one of the law enforcement officers of Nauvoo. Quinn continues:

As recent interpreters of observed about the Mormons: "Here, then, are two dominant threads in the intellectual garment of the early Saints: a coercive, sometimes even violent anti-pluralism, along-side a ringing affirmation of the right of all people to freedom of conscience in matters of religion". (See "Soaring With The Gods: Early Mormonism and the Eclipse of Religions Pluralism", in Richard

T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630 – 1875* (Chicago U. Press, 1988, p. 150, cited at Quinn, p. 107-108).

Quinn, however, does not mention the interesting parallel between this illustration of apparently conflicting ideology and the habit most generations of Mormon leaders have of saying “white” while acting “black”. There are dozens of examples in this regard. Consider the above noted evidence of the so-called dominant threads of Mormonism’s intellectual garment in light of the authority paradigm. Allowing Muslims religious freedom did not threaten JS’s power. Allowing dissenting Mormons the same freedom did. This fully explains what happened in this regard. Enlightened views of humanity and its rights were hence promoted, so long as JS’s power was not threatened. That is, JS was wise enough to be enlightened, but not moral enough to allow that enlightenment to restrain his craving for power.

Think of the statements of LDS leaders as noted above respecting truth, science etc. in light of the authority paradigm. All truth is a part of Mormonism, unless it questions the authority of current leadership, in which case the faithful history policy requires that it be suppressed.

And what of JS’s deceptive, manipulative leadership practises as noted above, compared to his statements respecting truth? Again, the truth appears to quite clearly be subject to revision to the extent required in order to retain power.

Uncertainty, Security, Fear and Power

The above summary of Mormon history and theory discloses in my view a clear pattern of purposefully inculcated blind faith as a control tool. It was effective in JS’s day, and was what kept me in my obedient place until recently. The manner in which blind faith has engrained through conditioning process of various kinds, and its power once engrained, has become a source of fascination for me. What follows is an outline of the of some of the key concepts that seem to me to explain this phenomenon.

The Power of Emotion; The Primacy of Fear

It is well established that the emotional range of human experience often dominates the rational. This is thought by some scientists to be due to the fact that there are many more neural pathways leading from the brain’s more primitive, emotional equipment (the hippocampus, amygdala, etc.) to its more recently developed, rational equipment (the cerebral cortex, etc.) than the other way around. Hence, when the brain is subjected to stimuli that ignite its emotional structures, reason struggles to be heard. (See “Fear Not” by Rudiger Vaas, in “American Scientific Mind” vol. 14, no. 1, 2004, p. 69). This is particularly the case when dealing with phenomena that are not well understood. The feedback system from the rational to the emotional structures in the brain can calm us if we are confident that we “know” what is going on. Think, for example, of the terror an eclipse of the sun at one time caused. But when our emotions are excited, and we don’t “know” why, we are engineered so that emotion usually trumps reason. When this

happens, we generally resort to what seems most safe. This is part of our preservation instinct. Staying with the group and doing what it does is one of those things that is assumed to be safe.

Joseph Campbell, C.G. Jung and others have emphasized the role that fear, and its close cousin desire, play in all emotional forces. Campbell noted the teaching central to Buddhist theory that fear and desire are the two primary forces in life that cause us trouble. And, desire is really for the most part an aspect of fear since when we want something, what motivates us largely is fear that our desire will not be satisfied.

The idea that we fear some things and want others lies beneath much of what is summarized in this essay. For example, the way in which humans have used the information available to them over time seems to indicate that evolution often trades a certain amount of denial of reality for a reduction in our fear of chaos. That is, there seems to be a strong belief at both the conscious and subconscious levels that too much knowledge is dangerous; that if we know too much and hence have too many choices, society may crumble and as a result we may lose control of our fragile existence. What is "too much" is of course defined as more than mankind has at any given point in time, since this pushes us into the unknown.

Consider what happens when we are thrust unceremoniously into new areas of knowledge, and hence choice, as is happening with respect to many genetics related issues today. Here in particular we encounter issues that cause many people to hide their heads in the sand, and otherwise act as if it is best for many of us to be unaware of how free we really are (See Abraham Heschel, "The Insecurity of Freedom"). If you wish to see how this principle operates, I suggest that you choose at random several religiously conservative people over the age of 50 and try to discuss with them the evidence of a genetic explanation for sexual orientation, and the possibility that this and many other things (like intelligence, good looks, etc.) may shortly be "choosable" by way of genetic splicing or some other form of "gene therapy". When I did this, I saw panic in my conversation partners' eyes until the topic was dropped.

The history of modern man can be understood to some extent as the gradual rolling back of the fear of our own freedom as it has become apparent that that the common rabble (that is, people like me) are capable of dealing with the best available knowledge of their reality without falling into the abyss of chaos and nihilism. There can be no doubt that this process is driven by innovations such as the continuing expansion of scientific and cultural understanding, the printing press, democracy, general access to education, and the Internet that have progressively broadened both man's ability and opportunity to understand the world around him (See Charles Van Doren, "A History of Knowledge"; Thomas Friedman, "The Lexus and the Olive Tree"). Mankind has slowly become accustomed to greater degrees of freedom, and as that happens the very nature of human freedom has changed and will no doubt continue to change (See Daniel Dennett, "Freedom Evolves"). But each time advancing knowledge questions the *status quo* or gives us new power, it causes fear. In time, what we fear becomes commonplace. Then the process repeats itself.

Uncertainty and Security; Fear and Power

One of the most ancient and powerful of all human drives is to seek certainty and hence security. We are all vulnerable to those who offer to sell us this in a plausible manner, and as noted below respecting cognitive dissonance, in many cases we do not have to be sold anything – we in fact actively resist ideas or things that might be of great use to us because they upset the status quo and hence make us feel insecure.

Also, as noted above, knowledge is inherently uncertain. Science has established this to my satisfaction. In light of the foregoing, it is not surprising that dogmatic religious faith makes heavy use of religious authority to create the appearance of certainty and provide security. The mechanisms it uses in this regard are fascinating. A little background is necessary to understand how this process works.

Some religious faith is completely consistent with open-minded, progressive faith. Unfortunately, however, much religious faith is dogmatic and blind. Even dogmatic religious faith includes many aspects of the kind of useful faith I mentioned above. As is so often the case in life, some of the bitterest things comes nicely dressed and surrounded by what we want or need. The metaphor of the baited hook comes to mind. Dogmatic religious faith attempts to persuade its believers that the open-minded faith by which they are surrounded is part of their "religious" faith, and seeks to take credit for the good things healthy faith does. In fact, many of the useful things dogmatic religion also likes to take credit for are human universals. These include basic morality and much of humanity's most precious emotional experience.

Morality is not caused by religion, let alone Christianity. The Golden Rule, for example, is part of the fabric of almost all human societies. See the essay titled "Out of My Faith", p. 149, at <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/postmormon.htm> for a summary of various formulations of the Golden Rule in different cultures. The powerful emotional experiences that are associated with religious activities are also associated with many other human social and individual phenomena. But since most humans have a very narrow perspective, they buy the line that their dogmatic religion is responsible for these wonderful things. And religion often uses this misconception to persuade the believers that their beliefs must be "true" and cannot be questioned. The force of universal human emotion, hence, is a big part of what sustains blind faith.

So, dogmatic religious faith makes heavy use of authority to avoid uncertainty and create security. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the hallmark of all dogmatic religious groups with which I am familiar is that they harness the universal emotional workings of human beings, use what amounts to a magician's "misdirection cue" to take credit for the experience, then use that experience to anchor the group's beliefs (the Celestial Kingdom (CK) exists; the Pope is Christ's representative; hell and heaven are real places etc.); and finally use the fear and desire engendered by those beliefs to extract certain behaviors (obedience to group norms; donations of time and money; etc.) from the believers. They encourage blind faith because critical thought on their

adherents' part would bring the curtain down on this magic act sooner than the religious leaders would like.

I packed a lot of information into that last paragraph. Let me break it down a bit by way of an example. I have powerful feelings of love for my family and generally want to please them. My religion might encourage me to express these feelings in public, along with expressions of allegiance to my religious faith. This would likely cause a strong and positive emotional experience, which my religion would likely tell me is due to the influence of God's spirit, is an indication of how pleased He is with my expression of faith, and is an indication of how important it is that I continue to obey the edicts of my religious leaders. Emotional experiences of this sort are used to create a belief in the truthfulness of abstract beliefs, such as that the CK exists and if I don't obey I will not be able to go there and live eternally with my family. Once that belief has been thoroughly engrained, anything that might cause me to disobey, and hence disqualify myself for the CK, would produce fear. And those who hold the key to controlling my fear – my religious leaders who my belief system says I must obey in order to qualify for the CK – would have a significant measure of power over my behaviour.

The process of creating beliefs, that engender fear, that confer power on religious or other leaders, is as old as mankind. And not surprisingly, the negative effect of fear on our decision-making ability has been noted by the sages of many societies.

Buddha reacted in large measure to the fear based system he saw in his Hindu tradition, and attributed all that troubles man to the fact that his actions are dominated by the twin evils of fear and desire. Since much of desire is due to the fear that we will not obtain the thing desired, it is fair to say that Buddha taught that fear is mankind's worst enemy.

According to Confucius, "If you look into your own heart, and you find nothing wrong there, what is there to worry about? What is there to fear?" Christ taught that we should "fear not, only believe". Marcus Aurelius said, "If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment." Thomas Hobbes noted that, "Fear of things invisible is the natural seed of that which everyone in himself calleth religion." Francis Bacon indicated, "To suffering there is a limit; to fearing, none." Thomas Jefferson told us to "Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blind-folded fear." And finally, in likely the most often repeated quotation respecting fear of all, Franklin D. Roosevelt said in his first inaugural address, "The only thing we have to fear is fear it'self - nameless, unreasoning, unjustified, terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

Cognitive Dissonance and Fear

Fear is at the root of cognitive dissonance. Because of the importance of cognitive dissonance theory to an understanding of how potent a force fear can be in our lives, I will provide a reasonably full summary of how this process works.

Cognitive dissonance theory is concerned with the relationships among cognitions. A cognition is a piece of knowledge about an attitude, an emotion, a behaviour, a value, etc. People hold a multitude of cognitions simultaneously, and these cognitions form irrelevant, consonant or dissonant relationships with one another. (See <http://www.ithaca.edu/faculty/stephens/cdback.html>):

Cognitive irrelevance probably describes the bulk of the relationships among a person's cognitions. Irrelevance means that the two cognitions are not related. Two cognitions are consonant if one cognition follows from, or fits with, the other. People like consonance among their cognitions. We do not know whether this stems from the nature of the human organism or whether it is learned during the process of socialization, but people appear to prefer cognitions that fit together to those that do not.

Two cognitions are said to be dissonant if one cognition conflicts with another. For example, I like my friend, and trust him. Various cognitions relate to this. If I then find out that he has lied to me, other cognitions form that are dissonant with those I already hold. Cognitive dissonance is the term used to describe the resulting mental state.

What happens to people when they discover dissonant cognitions? Cognitive dissonance is experienced as a state of unpleasant psychological tension. This tension state has drive-like properties that are similar to those of hunger and thirst. That is, when a person has been deprived of food for several hours, she experiences unpleasant tension and is driven to reduce it. Cognitive dissonance produces similarly driven behaviour to find consonance. However, finding the means to reduce this dissonance is not as simple as eating or drinking.

How does dissonance work? First, dissonance increases as the degree of discrepancy among cognitions increases. That is, how serious was my friend's lie, and how often has he lied? Second, dissonance increases as the number of discrepant cognitions increases. That is, how strong is the evidence of the lying behaviour? How many different cognitions support the dissonant conclusion that I can no longer trust my friend? Third, dissonance is inversely proportional to the number of consonant cognitions held by an individual. That is, if he only lied once and on a multitude of occasions I could be certain that he has been trustworthy, I would be less concerned. Fourth, dissonance is affected by the relative importance of the various consonant and dissonant cognitions in play. Perhaps in the case of this friend, lying is not that important because I do not depend on him in a significant fashion. In such cases my dissonance would be lower than it would if the friend in question was also the mother of my children or my wife.

How can dissonance be reduced? If two cognitions are dissonant, we can change one to make it consistent with the other, change each cognition in the direction of the other, find more offsetting consonant cognitions, or we can re-evaluate the importance of either the dissonant or consonant cognitions. These strategies often result in what is sometimes called denial – the suppression or unrealistic appraisal of evidence in an

effort to reduce dissonance. As William Safire in a New York Times op-ed piece (December 29, 2003), put it:

To end ... cognitive dissonance ... we [often] change the weak cognition to conform to the stronger one. Take Aesop's fox, who could not reach a lofty bunch of grapes no matter how high he jumped. One foxy cognition was that grapes were delicious; the other was that he couldn't get them. To resolve that cognitive dissonance, the fox persuaded himself that the grapes were sour - and trotted off, his mind at ease.

One of Leon Festinger's seminal cognitive dissonance experiments (Leon Festinger, "Conflict, Decision, and Dissonance, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1964) illustrates nicely the dynamics of cognitive dissonance and at the same time outlines what Festinger terms the principle of "insufficient justification" which has been used to explain a wide variety of odd human behaviours.

Three groups of subjects were asked to perform a tedious task for an hour. The task involved putting knobs on pegs, turning them a quarter turn, and then taking them off again. After this had been completed, subjects in the control group rated how interesting the experiment was. The members of the two comparison groups were treated differently. Each of these were told that the experimenter's assistant had not shown up yet so he needed them to help him by telling the next subject that the experiment was interesting. The subjects in one of these two groups were given \$1 to perform this additional task, while subjects in the other were given \$20. After telling the next subject that the experiment was fun, each of the subjects who had been paid was asked to rate how interesting the experiment was.

Both comparison groups rated the task as being more enjoyable than the control group. However, the group that was paid \$20 rated it only slightly higher than the control group, whereas the group that was paid only \$1 rated it much higher than the control group. This result is explained by cognitive dissonance theory as follows: We assume that the subjects came into the experiment with the belief that they do not lie without a good reason. Then, they are induced to lie. Those who were paid \$20 (remember, we are talking about college students about 40 years ago) felt they had a good reason to lie, so that lie did not influence their perception of the experiment. The subjects who were only paid \$1 did not find in that payment sufficient justification for lying, so the fact that they lied without good reason was inconsistent with the belief that they do not lie unless they are justified in doing so. To reduce the cognitive dissonance created by these inconsistent beliefs, the subjects had to change one of them. The "I do not lie without good reason" belief is important to most people's self-perception, so it would be hard to change that belief. It is easier to change the cognition related to the lie. The subjects could not deny saying that the experiment was fun, so they subconsciously increased their perception of how interesting the experiment was.

So, when Mormons go through odd temple rituals, bear their testimonies in public, spend two years as full time missionaries, hand out Books of Mormons to their friends,

or engage in any of the other many behaviours that either publicly commit them to the Church or cause them to feel stress or anxiety of some kind, the principle of insufficient justification will kick in to make them feel that the Church is more valuable than it otherwise would have seemed in their lives. The more a person has done in this regard, the more difficult it should be expected for her to see anything that would question the legitimacy of the Mormon Church.

Several of the most important cognitive dissonance studies have related to religious or quasi-religious phenomena, since this is a part of our society which is rife with cognitive dissonance.

Festinger's theory arose from his observations of a Wisconsin-based flying saucer cult of the 1950s whose prophecy of universal destruction failed to come true. The cult prophesied a vast flood would kill everyone on Earth except for the members of the cult, who would be carried away by flying saucers. The flood, of course, did not materialize. But the faith of the cult members, while stressed, was not broken.

As Festinger put it:

A man with a conviction is a hard man to change. Tell him you disagree and he turns away. Show him facts or figures and he questions your sources. Appeal to logic and he fails to see your point.

We have all experienced the futility of trying to change a strong conviction, especially if the convinced person has some investment in his belief. We are familiar with the variety of ingenious defences with which people protect their convictions, managing to keep them unscathed through the most devastating attacks.

But man's resourcefulness goes beyond simply protecting a belief. Suppose an individual believes something with his whole heart; suppose further that he has a commitment to this belief, that he has taken irrevocable actions because of it; finally, suppose that he is presented with evidence, unequivocal and undeniable evidence, that his belief is wrong: what will happen? The individual will frequently emerge, not only unshaken, but even more convinced of the truth of his beliefs than ever before. Indeed, he may even show a new fervour about convincing and converting other people to his view. (Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, "When Prophecy Fails", (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 3)

He later continued respecting the reaction of believers to a significant failed prophesy:

... dissonance would be reduced or eliminated if the members of a movement effectively blind themselves to the fact that the prediction has not been fulfilled. But most people, including members of such movements, are in touch with reality and cannot simply blot out of their cognition such an unequivocal and undeniable

fact. They can try to ignore it, however, and they usually do try. They may convince themselves that the date was wrong but that the prediction will, after all, be shortly confirmed; or they may even set another date as the Millerites did.... Rationalization can reduce dissonance somewhat. For rationalization to be fully effective, support from others is needed to make the explanation or the revision seem correct. Fortunately, the disappointed believer can usually turn to the others in the same movement, who have the same dissonance and the same pressures to reduce it. Support for the new explanation is, hence, forthcoming and the members of the movement can recover somewhat from the shock of the disconfirmation. (Festinger et al, p. 28)

The cult in question explained the failed prophesy by the fact that on the critical night their prayers "had spread so much light that God saved the world from destruction". And the cult became fervently evangelistic. Festinger suggests that the only way for them to reverse their humiliation was to convert other people to their beliefs. If everyone believed, no one would laugh. However, this did not work: after such a spectacular failure, the cult predictably failed to convert anyone.

Other researchers have questioned Festinger's emphasis on increased levels of proselytizing as a cognitive dissonance coping mechanism, and have proposed broader behavioural models that are in my view consistent with the basics of cognitive dissonance theory. For example, in the context of a failed Lubavitch Jewish messianic expectation, Simon Dein noted the following:

A popular model for looking at failed prophecy is that of Zygmunt (1972) who suggests three modes of adaptation to prophetic failure: adaptation, reaffirmation and reappraisal. First, believers may acknowledge an error of dating such as occurred among the Millerites. Second, the blame may be shifted to some force inside or outside the group which interferes with the cosmic plan. Lastly, believers may postulate that the event in fact occurred but on the spiritual not on the material plane and was not, therefore, directly observable to believers. Building on Zygmunt's ideas, Melton (1985:21) argues "the denial of failure of prophecy is not just another option, but the common mode of adaptation of millennial groups following a failed prophecy." He suggests two additional modes of adaptation, those being social and cultural. The cultural or spiritualization mode means the groups tend to reinterpret the promise of a visible verifiable event into the acceptance of a nonverifiable, invisible event. The prophecy has come about on a spiritual plane. Members may however still experience dissonance and emotions such as sadness, fear, bewilderment and disappointment and it is for this reason that the prophecy must be reinterpreted. The social mode addresses emotional distress by placing an emphasis on renewing group ties after disconfirmation. (What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails: The Case of Lubavitch, p. 3, http://www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m0SOR/3_62/79353385/p3/article.jhtml?term=)

In the Lubavitch case, the observed behaviour fit nicely the theory of adaptation. It is also interesting to note the Lubavitch is one of the few proselytizing, messianic factions of Judaism, and that its relatively moribund fortunes within the Hasidic branch of Judaism were rescued by several charismatic, missionary oriented leaders, the last of who was presumed until well after his death to be the Messiah. The big stories are the ones that sell.

Other similar failed prophesy scenarios have received a great deal of attention. One, also referred to by Festinger, is referred to as "The Great Disappointment" – an event in the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Between 1831 and 1844, William Miller, a Baptist preacher, launched what he called the "great second advent awakening", also known as the Millerite Movement. Based on his study of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, Miller calculated that Jesus would return to earth sometime between 1843 and 1844. Others within the movement calculated a specific date of October 22, 1844. When Jesus did not appear, Miller's followers experienced what became to be called "the Great Disappointment". Thousands of followers left the movement. A few, however, went back to their Bibles to find why they had been disappointed. They concluded that the prophecy predicted not that Jesus would return to earth in 1844, but that a special ministry in heaven would be formed on that date. From this started the modern-day Adventist Church. (See http://en2.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Disappointment)

Of even more interest are the numerous, and failed, similar predictions made by the Jehovah's Witnesses. As noted by Penton, a Watchtower historian:

No major Christian sectarian movement has been so insistent on prophesying the end of the present world in such definite ways or on such specific dates as have Jehovah's Witnesses, at least since the Millerites and Second Adventists of the nineteenth century who were the Witnesses' direct millenarian forbears. During the early years of their history, they consistently looked to specific dates- 1874, 1878, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1920, 1925, and others - as having definite eschatological significance...When these prophecies failed, they had to be reinterpreted, spiritualized, or, in some cases, ultimately abandoned. This did not deter Russell [the JW leader] or his followers from setting new dates, however, or from simply proclaiming that the end of this world or system of things was no more than a few years or perhaps even months away. (M. James Penton, "Apocalypse Delayed" (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 34)

Later dates of 1944 and 1975 were also prophesied.

The experience of the JW community respecting the 1925 "second coming" was typical. As noted by Randall Watters (See "When Prophecies Fail: A Sociological Perspective on Failed Expectation in the Watchtower Society" <http://www.freeminds.org/psych/propfail.htm>):

At the death of C.T. Russell in 1916, J.F. Rutherford took over the role of the "prophet", proclaiming in 1920 that Millions Now Living Will Never Die in a booklet and lecture by the same name. Rutherford set a new date for the end for 1925, also claiming that it would bring the resurrection of the ancient men of God to the earth, such as Abraham, Isaac, David, etc. So sure was Rutherford of this that he made the following statements:

Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the apostle in Hebrews chapter 11, to the condition of human perfection.

The date 1925 is even more distinctly indicated by the scriptures than 1914.

Our thought is, that 1925 is definitely settled by the scriptures. As to Noah, the Christian now has much more upon which to base his faith than Noah had upon which to base his faith in a coming deluge.

Rutherford even had a house built in San Diego for these ancients, and it was deeded to them when it was built! Bearing witness to the ability of the Witnesses to ride out this period of disconfirmation, the house and the prophecy wasn't abandoned until 1943, when it was promptly sold. The Witnesses were later told that it was "built for brother Rutherford's use.

Tremendous disappointment and disillusionment followed this failure. Watters continues:

The disappointment didn't last long, however. The outbreak of World War II was seen as the beginning of Armageddon. An in-house publication of the Watchtower stated in 1940:

The Kingdom is here, the King is enthroned. Armageddon is just ahead. The glorious reign of Christ that shall bring blessings to the world will immediately follow. Therefore the great climax has been reached. Tribulation has fallen upon those who stand by the Lord.

The Watchtower of September 15, 1941 (p . 288) even stated that we are "in the remaining months before Armageddon." Armageddon fever was at an all-time high. Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, former member of the Watchtower's Bethel family, gives us a glimpse of the air of expectancy:

So firmly did Jehovah's Witnesses believe this to be true that there were those who, in 1944, refused to get their teeth filled, postponing all care of their bodies until God saw to their regeneration in His New World. (One zealous Witness I knew carried a supply of cloves to alleviate the pain of

an aching molar which she did not wish to have treated by her dentist, since the time was so short till Jehovah would provide a new and perfect one. To this day, I associate the fragrance of cloves with the imminence of disaster.)"

Amazingly, new leadership while initially cautious of making further predictions eventually fell prey to their predecessors' habit and set out another date. Watters notes:

... the prediction of 1975 that first appeared in Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God (1966). Exercising caution in stating that this new date would definitely be the end, Franz (through his public lectures and Watchtower articles) made statements such as "according to this trustworthy Bible chronology six thousand years from man's creation will end in 1975, and the seventh period of a thousand years of human history will begin in the fall of 1975 C.E." Any Jehovah's Witnesses knew that the end of 6000 years meant the beginning of the millennium of Christ's reign. The Awake! magazine of October 8, 1968 (p. 14) stated, "How fitting it would be for God, following this pattern, to end man's misery after six thousand years of human rule and follow it with his glorious Kingdom rule for a thousand years!"

In lectures given to the members of the headquarters staff in New York, Franz stated (regarding the end) that "we don't know now if it will be weeks or months," before a crowd of 2000 Witnesses. Many other statements were made in print. One traveling overseer even gave a public talk indicating it would be a total lack of faith to doubt that 1975 would be the end! Franz became the fourth president of the Watchtower a year later.

Unlike the flying saucer cult and the Millerites, the Watchtower was at first unwilling to accept blame for the disconfirmation, shifting it to "over-zealous brothers." Many Witnesses, however, were outraged and the Watchtower finally accepted much of the blame publicly.

Friends of those who were Jehovah's Witnesses often noted the changes in their lives as 1975 approached. Janice Godlove relates this regarding her JW brother and sister-in-law:

As 1975 approached, the signs of tension increased. Strange bits and pieces of the family atmosphere came to our attention. There was an almost morbid fascination with flocks of birds gathering in the fall. We were given all of their canned goods since they wouldn't need them anymore. An access panel had been cut in the wall behind their washing machine and the boys (who were 5 and 3 at the time) were told to run to the kitchen and hide if they heard screams. Bill was so disappointed by the failure of 1975 that he attempted suicide. But the tract we left by his hospital bed went unread and the family remained in the organization.

Today, each of the above failures are played down, and no reason is officially given for them. Many recent JW converts are not even aware of the relevant history. There are close parallels here to the faithful Mormon community's ignorance of many important aspects of Mormon history.

Watters concludes as follows respecting the resilience of the JW organization:

A pattern emerges when we examine the growth figures before and after each disconfirmation [failed prophecy]. Typically, there was a rapid growth in numbers at least two years before the prophetic date, followed by a falling away of some (viewed as a "cleansing" of the organization of the unfaithful), then another growth spurt as a new emphasis on evangelism was put forward.

It may seem incomprehensible how the Witnesses could ignore the implications of each disconfirmation. Outsiders view the Witnesses as lacking common sense for not leaving the organization after numerous failures. They fail to understand the dynamics of mind control as used by cults. Even many ex-JWs fail to understand that the further disconfirmation of the importance of 1914 and "this generation" will not seriously affect the numbers of those swelling the ranks of the Watchtower. The results of mind control and unquestioning obedience will have the same effect today as it did in Russell's day. His view was, "Where else can we go?" Harrison writes regarding this attitude,

That, of course, is one of the keys to survival of the organization Russell founded on soft mysticism, glorious visions and worldly disaffection. The Witnesses had nowhere else to go. Their investment in their religion was total; to leave it would have meant spiritual and emotional bankruptcy. They were not equipped to function in a world without certainty. It was their life. To leave it would be a death.

This same dependency-unto-death phenomena is at work in thousands of cults all over the world. People wondered at Jonestown: "Why didn't they leave when they saw what Jim Jones was becoming?" The people of Jonestown answered by their actions, "Where else would we go?" They had burned their bridges to follow their Messiah unto death.

Over 110 years and several failed prophecies later, the Watchtower movement is testimony enough that failed predictions do not mean the dissolution of a cult following. The failure of 1975 resulted in a decrease of less than 2%. The Watchtower will always be able to develop clever rationalizations regarding their changing dates, as their history documents. Today, the Watchtower grows at a rate of about 5% per year worldwide, with over 3.7 million door knockers and over 9 million sympathizers!

The behaviour of the JW faithful in the face of the kind of incontrovertibly disconfirming evidence just described is hard to understand. The reaction of the Millerites seems

more sensible – most believers deciding that they should not continue to believe. Nonetheless, the evidence from many cases in addition to the few summarized above seems clear to the effect that in certain cases, the ties that bind a group together may become so strong that in the short term at least, there it is virtually impossible to shake their faith. In fact, it is in my view consistent with the evidence to suggest that the more potentially disruptive a piece of information is to one's comfortable existence, the more likely it is to be suppressed or otherwise misrecognized. While evidence of this is everywhere around us, including in the summaries of human reaction to failed prophecy above, none is more disturbing than that found in the holocaust autobiographical classic "Night", by Elie Wiesel. Here we find graphic evidence of misrecognition's power to shape our perception of reality.

Wiesel tells the story of how he lived as a 14-year-old Jewish boy in a small Hungarian town called Sighet during World War II. As the Nazis gradually closed their net around this town, rumours began to circulate. However, the residents found reasons to believe that their comfortable little world would not collapse, and so few if any of them escaped while they had the chance. At some point, all of the foreign Jews in Sighet were expelled. One of them was Wiesel's religious mentor, Moshe Beadle, a joyful, deeply spiritual man. Months passed, and life in Sighet continued mostly at its comfortable pace.

Then Moshe returned. He told a chilling story. The buses in which the deportees left Sighet had crossed the border into Poland and been handed over to the Gestapo. The Jews were forced to get off and dig huge pits. Then they were all – men, women and children - machine gunned and pushed into what became their graves. Some babies were tossed into the air and used as human skeet to entertain the soldiers. Moshe was wounded and left for dead. It had taken him months to make his way back to warn his friends. Wiesel notes:

Through long days and nights, [Moshe] went from one Jewish house to another, telling the story of Malka, the young girl who had taken three days to die, and of Tobias, the tailor, who had begged to be killed before his sons...

Moshe had changed. There was no longer any joy in his eyes. He no longer sang. He no longer talked to me of God or of the cabbala, but only of what he had seen. People refused not only to believe his stories, but even to listen to them.

'He's just trying to make us pity him. What an imagination he has!' they said. Or even, 'Poor fellow. He's gone mad.'

And as for Moshe, he wept.

No one would believe him. Not even his protégé Wiesel. This was toward the end of 1942. There was plenty of time to escape.

Wiesel goes on to tell of how more and more news of the war, Hitler's atrocities in general and his plans for the extermination of all Jews gradually infiltrated his town. They heard of what the Germans were doing to the Jews in other parts of Europe. Still lots of time to escape, but no one put what Moshe had said together with these reports and acted. Finally the Germans arrived. They began to remove Jewish liberties – still time to escape and no one acted. Then they created Jewish ghettos, and finally prepared them for mass deportation. All along the way, it would have been possible for many to escape. But at every juncture along this path, the good Jewish people of Sighet rationalized in different ways that things were not so bad; that their lives were not going to change too much; that their god would watch over them. This rationalization ended only as they watched their family members being led into the gas chambers and furnace of Auschwitz, or entered there themselves.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can say that they should have been able to see the signs all around them as to what was happening. Why could they not see the obvious?

Two things come to mind. First, I have become acutely aware during the past couple of years of how difficult it is to see anything that may shatter one's world. That is why spouses cannot see abusive, unfaithful, or addictive behaviour in each other. That is why Mormons are resistant to any information that suggests their worldview is incorrect. However, as the Jews of Sighet illustrate, this power is far greater than I could have understood until I read of their experience. In short, the emotional aspect of human life regularly overcomes what to an objective observer would likely seem to be an insurmountable rational case.

And second, the Jewish people of Sighet suffered from a kind magical worldview. That is, they believed in miracles; they believed that their God had, could and would override the physical laws of cause and effect for their benefit, provided that they were appropriately obedient and exercised the right kind of faith. They believed that god would protect them. And most of all, they did not believe that the kind of evil Hitler represented could exist bring its weight to bear upon them, even in the face of first hand evidence from Moshe and unlimited amounts of anecdotal evidence from other sources. They were naturally resistant to anything that contradicted their magical worldview. This belief was part of what cost the vast majority of those who held it their lives. Many other Jews – often well educated and less magical thinking people such as Einstein – understood enough to leave while they could. That is, the broader a person's worldview, the better developed her connection to reality and hence the less affected she was by magical thinking, the more likely it was that she would flee. Note that I did not mention intelligence. Many intelligent people died at Auschwitz, due to some extent at least to their poor purchase on reality. The framework within which intelligence is exercised is, at it turns out, much more important in many ways than the degree of intelligence.

Perhaps the message that comes clearly through the above accounts of group denial is that the denial inducing nature of cognitive dissonance makes it difficult to self-diagnose. This highlights the importance of getting outside of one's self perception. By

definition, we cannot see our own blind spots. We must either have others we learn to trust point them out for us, or we may eventually feel them through the cognitive dissonance process, which is usually lengthy and painful. This reminds me of something of which I have heard many of my clients complain – the 360 degree review process that has become fashionable in the business community. That process requires senior executives to authorize an outside consultant, who will protect the confidentiality of the other participants, to collect and summarize their views regarding the executive in question. The participants will be drawn from the environment that surrounds the executive – hence the term "360 degree". Hence, superiors as well as subordinates will be interviewed, as will customers, suppliers and other organizational stake holders to whom the executive is relevant.

For the average self-confident, often egotistical senior executive, this is a bruising process that can provide a wealth of information as to the location and nature of personal blind spots. This will usually dramatically increase cognitive dissonance in the short term (what do you mean they all hate me!? They smile at me and are nice to me every time I see them!) and will cause behavioural modification that will dramatically improve performance and likely reduce long term cognitive dissonance, or dissonance respecting more important issues (What do you mean they have all quit!? They said they liked me every time they saw me!).

As noted above, one of Buddhism's central and enlightening notions is that most of mankind's ills are caused by the manner in which fear or desire cause us to make unwise decisions. As the following summary of recent research will show, this ancient insight is remarkably accurate. Buddha's "middle way" was the path that lay between fear and desire and so was out of both their reaches. And since a good portion of desire is fear that we will not obtain that which we most desire, fear is the most primal and effective of emotions. The well known case of denial in marriages where infidelity is a problem illustrates this. The faithful spouse is usually unable to see the evidence of cheating until well after most others can see it. This denial of reality is a function primarily of the spouse's fear of losing the relationship if the information in question is processed and dealt with. The greater the fear, the greater the cog dis it will produce and the deeper will be the consequent denial and suppression of threatening information.

The psychology related to personality profiles indicates to us that not all people are influenced by fear and desire in the same way. In one study that focussed on the question of why some people are more religiously inclined than others, it was determined that the personality trait called "openness" correlates strongly to religious tendencies. Openness is the inclination toward new experience; the opposite of dogmatism. The more "open" a person is, the less likely she is to be influenced by fear in any particular situation, and the less likely she is to be religious in the traditional sense of that word. That is, the less likely she will be to accept traditional religious authority and the literalistic interpretation of scripture it posits. And of course the opposite is also true.

So, the picture that comes into focus is that in any particular case, the unconscious suppression or reinterpretation of information is a function of two things. First, how open to new experience the individual in question person is, and second, how significant is the fear that the denied information is perceived to create.

A faithful Mormon should be expected to experience massive amounts of fear upon contemplating the possibility that the religious truth-claims on which on which much of his life, family and social relationships are based are false. This fear produces a powerful form of cognitive dissonance, and hence an extensive or suppression of the information. We should expect that the more faithful the Mormon, the less able she will be to see the reality of the institution that sponsors her religious faith and the effect that faith has upon her.

So, what do we learn from these bits of theory and history? Is it as simple as implied by the statement wrongly attributed to P.T. Barnum – That there is another sucker born every minute? (See <http://www.historybuff.com/library/refbarnum.html>). Hardly, although since Barnum was allegedly equating "suckers" with those whose buttons he could push so as to cause them to buy his wares, the statement attributed to him was right. More importantly, the clear message of religious history relative to cognitive dissonance is that the social and psychological forces that are the subject of this essay are formidable enemies and powerful allies, and while the reaction of individuals or groups of humans to information that should cast serious doubt on their religious beliefs cannot be predicted, the clear and universal pattern is one of denial and stubborn resistance to any evidence that may or should disconfirm beliefs on which their worldview as well as social and familial relationships are based. This denial is followed in some cases by painful acceptance and adjustment, usually within "the faith".

Cognitive Dissonance, Fear and the Suppression of Information

As noted above, those who suffer from cognitive dissonance are often the last to be able to see their own "issues", and since we all suffer to one extent or another from problems caused by cognitive dissonance's information distorting tendencies, techniques such as the "360 review process" described above are used to help those on whom others depend in important financial matters to get outside themselves. To illustrate just how powerful cognitive dissonance is in this regard, and the mechanism by which the things we fear most are buried, I will provide one more example from the extensive cognitive dissonance literature. This comes from of one of the leading psychology texts used to teach university courses today, "The Social Animal" (9th Edition, 2004), by Elliott Aronson, at page 162.

Hypothesis: Those males with the most aggressive and vocal anti-homosexual attitudes are motivated in that regard by their own homosexual tendencies and their unconscious fear thereof.

Experiment: Survey a group of males to determine their degree of anti-homosexual attitudes. Wire up those males so that their sexual arousal response can be measured. Cause them to watch a series of sexually explicit videos depicting male homosexual

activity, heterosexual activity, and lesbian activity. Measure the sexual arousal response of each male to each video. Correlate degree of sexual arousal to anti-homosexual attitudes.

Results: The higher the degree of expressed anti-homosexual attitude, the higher the sexual arousal response while watching male homosexual activity. However, there is no correlation between sexual arousal while watching lesbian or heterosexual videos and expressed homophobic attitudes. The result of this experiment have been repeated so often that the causal connection they indicate is not in question.

Cognitive dissonance theory would explain this experimental data as follows: One cognition (homosexual activity is bad, sinful, dirty etc. – this is a learned cognition) is inconsistent with another cognition (I am attracted to homosexual activity – this might be learned by is much more likely to be innate either as a result of early conditioning or more likely genetics). Since the mind abhors inconsistent or dissonant cognitions, it must change one or the other. Some people do this by unlearning the first cognition, and either becoming comfortable with, or actually engaging in, homosexual behaviour. Other people (those in this study) rid themselves of cognitive dissonance by burying the second cognition as deeply as possible. Conscious feelings of hate and disgust are used as part of this suppression process.

This explanation is consistent with what Freud called "reaction-formation". This is the blocking of desire by its opposite. Freud used reaction-formation to describe the mechanism whereby the ego reacts to the impulses of the id by creating an antithetical formation that blocks repressed cathexes (emotional energy). Hence, someone who feels homosexual desire might repress that desire by turning it into hatred for all homosexuals.

Another explanatory theory is that many people in our society are socialized to fear and hate homosexuals, and that what the experiment shows is that this learned response is connected to sexuality in a way that we do not yet understand. That is, for example, it may be that the fear underlying homophobic attitudes is connected to sexual stimulation. Much other research has been done with regard to the connection between sexuality and pain or fear. Hence, perhaps the personality type that is inclined to internalize most thoroughly the fear related to homophobia that it is encouraged by some parts of our culture to learn will manifest the greatest sexual stimulation (repressed of course) when faced with homosexual activity.

So, it is not possible to say that homophobic attitudes are indicative of homosexual tendencies. It is fair to say, however, that the fear that underlies homophobic attitudes is connected to sexual feelings, and I can't see how creating this kind of fear, with its hidden connection to sexuality, would be a good thing for the individuals who experience it or the gays who are the receiving end of the hateful behaviour it causes. So, as usual, Buddha was right. We see here more evidence of the manner in which fear causes problems for mankind.

In any event, I was not looking for information respecting homosexuality when I found the research just summarized. I was looking for ways to explain to Mormons how the cognitive dissonance caused by our deepest fears operates to suppress both that fear and the things we fear. I have found it difficult - nigh unto impossible - to get that point across. I think this research may help.

As noted above, the faithful Mormon fear respecting loss of the right to go to the CK, family and other relationships in this life that are the likely (in her view) to result from disobedience to Mormon authority should be expected to cause massive amounts of cognitive dissonance. This should be expected to cause a repression of both those fears and any information that might re-engage them. Hence, faithful Mormons cannot acknowledge the fact that most of their obedience behaviour is driven by fear. Cognitive dissonance prevents them from being able to see that as follows: Mormons have one set of cognitions (obedience to Mormon authority is essential to making to the CK; I really want to go to the CK; so I must obey even when it is hard to do so; etc.) and another cognition (it is not a good thing to be motivated by fear; I am free to choose; Satan's plan was about being motivated by fear and lack of choice; Christ's plan is about choosing what you really want; so I must be choosing what I really want; etc.). These two cognition sets are dissonant. One must be changed.

For the faithful Mormon, it is not possible to change the cognition that obedience to Mormon authority is essential. So, the other cognition is changed. Rather than seeing their obedience as result from fear, they see it as a product of desire. That is, they are freely doing what they are told because they want the blessings of the CK and continued association with the Church. But as Buddha pointed out, desire is just fear's other face. We fear the loss of what we desire. And what do we see when we look at the prototypical happy Mormon family? Do they appear fearful of what they might lose if they disobey or of anything else? Of course not. They are happy in the mindless manner South Park so nicely caricatured in its recent episode respecting Mormonism. In light of the cognitive dissonance theory just summarized, what might this hyper-happiness be taken to mean? Is it analogous to the hyper anti-gay sentiments noted in the research above? Is it a defence against fear; something to suppress that fear and keep it as far away from the conscious mind as possible? Of the several most overtly happy Mormon people I know well, including members of my family and those who I served as Bishop, a significant percentage of them are either clinically depressed and on medication to help them with that, or likely should be. They are the last ones a casual observer would guess to be in such dire straits.

Let's now change the analogy and reapply it. As posited by this essay, faithful Mormons carry one cognition that says that the truth is important, their religion is all about seeking the truth, their leaders tell them to seek the truth, etc. And, they carry another cognition that says that anyone who questions their leaders is evil, because this questioning might cause the faithful to lose the blessings (like going to the CK) that are premised on obedience to Mormon authority. These two cognitions are consonant most of the time. But what happens when a credible source of authority like a formerly trusted member of the Church (like me) or a respected scientist, produces information that questions

something basic about the Mormon Church or its leaders? This causes serious cognitive dissonance. As a result, "apostates" are feared, pitied, hated, etc. Rumours are spread about them. They are dehumanized in various ways. Their credibility is shredded. There are many parallels between how homophobes treat homosexuals and how Mormons treat apostates.

And what of scientists who are teach things that question the Church's foundations? Look no further than the current debate respecting DNA and its application to the Book of Mormon. The first of the Mormon faithful is to vilify the scientists on an ad hominem (personal insult instead of substantive argument) basis, then disparage them as not being "real" scientists etc., and when those two are not enough (as they clearly are not in the case of DNA v. the Book of Mormon) to redefine the question so that it is put out of science's reach. And few faithful Mormons make it that far. Most quite simply and completely suppress all information related to anything that troubles their faith, experience great fear whenever they are challenged respecting matters concerning their faith, and react emotionally to sources of information (including people) who will not go away in much the same way a homophobe would respecting the kind of homosexual behaviour that might be displayed in a public place (hand holding, etc.). This behaviour comes from the same psychological font, in my view.

Hence, it is fair to say on the basis of the research just summarized that just as many homophobes cannot bear to recognize their degree of homosexual attraction or the fear it causes, many Mormons cannot recognize the manner in which they are attracted to ideas of real free thought, freedom from the authoritarian strictures of the Mormon church, other nutty inconsistencies in Mormon life and culture, etc. People grappling with fear at this level cannot be expected to self diagnose.

So how can they be diagnosed? Would we assume that your average red neck gay basher harbours warm feelings for his fellow red necks? Of course not. In fact, the most helpful and insightful point of this research is that we should be looking for fearful, emotional behaviour and taking that as an indication that a psychological soft spot is being touched. That is, in this case and many others a strong emotional "no" does mean "yes" to an extent. And I hasten to add that I exclude from this the most common alleged "no means yes" circumstance.

Here is another example to illustrate this point. Assume that Mr. A is a history professor who is a member of the 7th Day Adventist or Jehovah's Witness faith, and that he finds himself in either of the following situations:

1. He finds out that his children are being taught at school that the holocaust did not happen; that the story of the holocaust is a lie perpetuated by an international conspiracy of Jews that secretly controls most of the world; and that Hitler was a misunderstood historical figure whose teachings are worthy of reconsideration and whose example should be emulated.

2. He finds out that his children are being taught at school that the United States government many years ago discovered extra-terrestrial life; that the US president has since then been in touch with such extraterrestrials and is their puppet; and that all of the stuff we see on the news etc. regarding man walking on the moon, space probes on Mars etc. are just propaganda designed to mislead us as to the real state of the Universe.

Each of the two theories just summarized as having from time to time been taught by what would be regarded by most people as the lunatic fringe of our society. At least one school teacher in Alberta (Jim Keegstra) lost his job for bringing theory No. 1 into the curriculum he taught as a public school teacher.

My question is, how would Mr. A, being a history professor, likely respond in the cases just noted? My guess is that were he not well informed, he would make himself well informed, and he would then use his skills as a historian to educate his children as to the probabilities that one set of data as opposed to another should be believed respecting each of these situations. And, if he found that those who were teaching his children had acted irresponsibly in the manner in which they presented the data, he would attempt to have them change their ways, and if they would not do so, he would seek to have them removed from their posts. Failing that, he might remove his children from their charge.

Let's then put up another couple of examples. Assume that this same Mr. A finds himself in either of the following situations:

A. Evidence is presented to him that strongly suggests that his religious leaders have misrepresented to him and his children the history of the religious movement of which they are a part, and that these alleged misrepresentations are of fundamental importance in that they impugn the credibility of the person on whose testimony the validity of the entire movement rests.

B. Mr. A comes to the conclusion that his religious leaders have misrepresented to him and his children the history of the religious movement of which they are a part, and that these alleged misrepresentations are of fundamental importance in that they impugn the credibility of the person on whose testimony the validity of the entire movement rests.

Now assume that Mr. A does not react in either of cases A or B in the rational fashion he did in cases 1 and 2. Assume that in case A he decides that no investigation is necessary, and that in case B that he does not need to share his conclusions with anyone, but rather that he should keep them to himself.

I suggest that it is fair to call Mr. A's behavior in cases A and B pathological when compared to his behavior in cases 1 and 2. When pathological behavior is observed, it makes sense to look for the pathogen. I suggest that given the connection between Mr. A religious belief and the difference between his behavior in cases 1 and 2 as compared

to cases A and B, that this religious belief should be accepted as the pathogen until compelling evidence to the contrary is produced. Hence, it would be fair to conclude on the basis of the evidence before us that Mr. A's religious belief has impaired his normally acute reasoning abilities respecting historical matters.

I have respectfully suggested to my historian father that his Mormon belief is responsible for the manner in which he failed to teach his children Mormon history in the manner he would have taught them any other kind of history, and has been prepared to stand silently by while others filled his children's heads with things he later acknowledged to he knew to be inaccurate, and I suspect understood in many cases to be gross misrepresentations.

Much of the reading I have done during the past year and a half has been an attempt to understand how people like my father, my wife, and me, who I know to be relatively bright, educated people who are committed to finding the truth in all other areas of life, could have ended up behaving as rationally as we have respecting most things, and in such a different manner respecting Mormonism. I hope that framing the examples I did above respecting other religious belief systems will help others who are faithful to the Mormon belief system to understand that. I have no doubt that if most well educated Mormons observed the behaviour I noted in a JW history professor, they would chuckle about how that guy is in deep denial, and how sad that is. And those belief systems have a problem very similar to that of Mormonism respecting the credibility of their early leaders and the manner in which information respecting that was whitewashed by modern leaders. The Adventists, for example, have been for some time de-emphasizing the teachings of their founder because of the manner in which it has been shown that many of the "revelations" she allegedly received from God were plagiarized from 19th century sources. So, the Adventists have for some time been headed toward a more mainstream posture within Christianity. Again, the parallels to Mormonism are extensive. In addition to whitewashing Mormon history, Gordon Hinckley and others have been moving Mormonism toward the mainstream for some time by attempting to shed things like "man can become God", and emphasizing Christ's role within the Mormon faith while de-emphasizing other things. Once enough perspective is gained, this stuff starts to make sense.

As painful as it initially will be to do so, educated Mormons need to bring their professional training to bear on their religious beliefs; to join the two solitudes that religious belief has caused to exist in their mind; to require that professional standards of honesty to govern their spiritual behavior. Matt Berry, a writer I find insightful, said something with which I am suspect most thoughtful Mormons will agree - that one of the most important measures of spirituality is honesty. One of the things this implies is that the more spiritual we are, the more able we will be to bear the seemingly hard truths of reality as opposed to the comforting myths with which we were raised. And on the basis of personal experience, I have no hesitation saying that once we become accustomed to what might initially seem like "hard truths", they reveal an existence sweeter than anything I could have previously imagined.

Dogmatic Religion Magnifies Fear to Enhance its Own Power

As noted above, many religions (including the Christian and Mormon) create significant amounts of uncertainty that would not have existed without their intervention. This uncertainty has the effect of creating fear, and so inflates the perceived value of the certainty and security the very religions that created the fear have to offer. The Mormon use of the CK exemplifies this practise. It is no different, however, than the use by the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths of the concepts of heaven, hell, purgatory and other after life states that depend upon obedience to religious authority during this life, or the Hindu concept of reincarnation that rewards or punishes one in the next life for his adherence to certain prescribed standards in this one, or innumerable other religious systems that are set up in this fashion.

The historians and anthropologists I have read on this topic suggest that religion has since time immemorial been used as an important part of the glue that binds groups together and that fear is a significant part of the glue. However, many of the particularly inward looking aspects of religion are likely the result of a process that started when religious leaders first had to compete against each other for a limited pool of followers. This competition required that those leaders distinguish their religions from the competition. One effective way to do this is to posit that their particular brand of religion had a monopoly respecting certain concepts (such as the CK) and on God's approval, and that anyone who rejected this belief would be punished by God. This likely raised the "fear" stakes significantly in the religious marketplace. Anthropologists who study isolated groups often find that religion in that context does not deal with the concept of one religion being "true" and others being "false". This is a foreign notion to people who do not have a history of having to choose between religious traditions.

If you think of what likely happened as small, isolated groups of humans merged into more cosmopolitan societies, the above theory makes sense. Each group would have brought its own religion. As the boundaries between the groups broke down, people would have had to choose between religions. Religious belief systems are not static, and so beliefs would have come into play that could then be used to help one religious leader persuade his flock not to leave, and others to join. And religion was of course used as a political tool. These concepts are relevant to that process as well. The Old Testament is an account of mankind during the period while this process was underway.

As noted above, the perception that we have power to overcome what frightens us makes us feel secure. So, we sometimes cling in an unhealthy fashion to the things that help us to overcome our fears. All a religion has to do is create beliefs (the CK exists and only obedient Mormons can go there to live eternally with their families) that create desire/fear (I want to be with my family and hence fear not being with them after death) and offer the "power" to obtain what is wanted and so to avoid the fear. The more deeply we fear, the more prepared we will be to bargain away much of what we have in terms of time, money, talents etc. to avoid that fear. So, the Mormon belief is that obedience to Mormon authority in myriad ways is required in order to have the power to be with our families after death. And the Mormon Church is not bashful – it requires that we promise all that we have before it will release us from our fear, and then makes us

feel lucky that it does not require that we give all we have promised to give. This is a stock psychological persuasion or sales trick. First ask for the moon, and then when something more reasonable is requested in lieu, it is far more likely to be given than if the smaller request were made up front. "All you want is 10% of my income and most of my free time!?! Sure! That is so much better than what I thought you were going to ask for." After all, the covenant each faithful Mormon makes in a Mormon temple is, "you do consecrate yourselves, your time, talents, and everything with which the Lord has blessed you, or with which he may bless you, to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, for the building up of the Kingdom of God ..."

The reason the system that links belief, fear and power works so well for religious leaders is that the thing desired/feared is based on a belief, the creation of which is under the religious leader's control. The thing believed is not real, and hence the power it creates lasts only as long as the belief does. That is, this power is not like that which comes from holding a loaded gun that would do something if the trigger were pulled. All a believer has to do is find out that the gun is not loaded, refuse to obey, and the power evaporates; the bully runs away. Regrettably, that is easier said than done.

Dogmatic Religion Changes the Rules to Keep Uncertainty at Maximum Levels

As noted above, authority is most persuasive in an environment of maximum uncertainty. Hence, religious claims while spectacular are usually not testable. Did the virgin birth occur? It is impossible to test this. How about the resurrection? The miracles Christ is said to have performed? Did Christ himself exist? Did JS see God? None of this can be proven or disproven. And the stakes are set as high as possible. If you are wrong, you will burn in hell; be without your family; suffer some other horrible thing; and so be miserable forever. So why not just obey, since what you are being asked to do is not so bad anyway? When the issues are framed in this fashion, and uncertainty is maximized, the proposition is hard for most believers to resist. This decision making framework puts the maximum weight on apparent authority and what the majority of the group by which the individual is surrounded does. This plays into the hands of the dominant religious force in the group, and since that would be the religious group that is trying to prevent its members from joining other groups, it makes sense that this is how things would have developed.

When a proposition that supports dogmatic religious authority becomes testable, this reduces the tendency of the believers to rely upon groupthink and apparent authority. Hence, religious leaders in such cases are often quick to redefine the issues to the extent possible so that they remain uncertain. A recent example in this regard can be drawn from the Mormon context.

Since the days of JS Mormons have believed that the Book of Mormon told the story of the Native Americans' ancestors, and that the saga described in the book was played out between Chile (where JS said that Lehi and his family landed after sailing from the Near East) and New York State (where JS says he found the golden plates from which he "translated" the Book of Mormon). The Book of Mormon has long been said by

Mormon leaders, including JS, to be the "keystone" of Mormonism. Hence, anything that questioned it, or what JS said about it (since he was God's prophet) struck at Mormonism' foundations.

Recently, great doubt has been cast on this so-called "hemispheric" theory of Book of Mormon geography. Non-Mormons who read this will chuckle at the thought of people been paid salaries and earning PhDs as a result of research done respecting this kind thing. But indeed there is lots of that within Mormondom and at BYU in particular.

In any event, as a result of the masses of evidence that contradict the hemispheric theory, most of which is still unknown to the average faithful Mormon, the academics who are in charge of apologizing for the Church on this point (led by John Sorenson at BYU) have developed what they call the "limited geography" (LG) theory of the Book of Mormon. This theory posits that the entire Book of Mormon story was played out in an area of no more than several hundred square miles, probably in Central America just north of the Isthmus of Panama, and that this explains why no evidence of the genetics, archaeology etc. that the Book of Mormon suggests should exist has been found elsewhere on either continent. The posited area is small enough that it is possible that it has not yet been found, and that it never will be found.

Leaving aside the many problems of the LG theory – such as that the golden plates were alleged to be found in New York; LG contradicts many things JS said, some of which are in the Church's canonical Doctrine and Covenants and a few of which are noted in the historical summary above; and the text of the Book of Mormon itself has to be twisted in all kinds of way to fit the LG theory – we see in the LG theory an attempt by LDS leaders to avoid critical, rational analysis and the faith that goes with it, and to get back onto the uncertain ground where blind faith works best. Enlightened reason and the open minded faith that goes with it can't be controlled. And as noted above, control of belief, and hence fear, and hence power, is what blind religious faith is all about. So, when something foundational to a religion's authority (and hence the belief creation and maintenance mechanism) that did not used to be within the reach of rational processes comes within their reach, the rules of the game must be changed.

One of my friends provided a few examples of how this works. He noted that Karl Popper, the philosopher who formulated the roots of the hypothetical-deductive model used by most working scientists today and that has been used to cast doubt on the Book of Mormon in many ways, worked to draw the line between what should be considered science and what should not. For instance, there may be an invisible unicorn behind the moon, but because there is no way to test this proposition it is not scientific in nature. Popper also claimed that Marxism was at one time based on a scientific model of society that could be tested. Later, it was tested and was shown not to work as it had predicted it would. But in the wake of its refutation, Marxists often attempted to redefine Marxism so that it could not be tested, and so that the tests to which history had already subjected it could be deemed invalid. Hence, Popper claims that Marxism as now often defined is not scientific.

In a fashion similar to Marxism, the Book of Mormon was set up by JS and confirmed by many of his successors (including most notably and recently Spencer Kimball) on the so-called hemispheric theory. This theory came within the grasp of science, was tested, and the evidence now shows a high probability of its refutation or falsification, to use Popper's term. So, the Church and its apologists now seek to redefine the theories on which the Book of Mormon is based. This requires that what JS and other "prophets" said about the book that was consistent with the hemispheric theory be dismissed as "non-prophetic error" and will henceforth be ignored. The LG theory, which is the result of this redefinition process, has been made as difficult to test as possible – so difficult that it is likely a non-scientific theory.

I would suggest that the whole point of those who defend the Church's position is to make their positions as difficult to test as possible, and that this is done for the reasons noted above – to maximize uncertainty, which maximizes the influence of religious authority and groupthink over individual decision-making, which maximizes the power of religious leaders. However, the efforts of Church leaders do not put their revised theories beyond the ken of probabilities. How probable is it that there is unicorn behind the moon? It would be nice to test this theory, but we don't need to given what we know about the world in which we live. This experience gives us enough evidence to form an opinion on which we are prepared to act.

Given the experience we have seen others have with communism, do we much care how those who wish to still use it choose to define it? Given the mass of evidence contra the Book of Mormon being real history, do we care whether a small part of the theory believed by those who want to protect their beliefs respecting that book is not scientifically testable? And finally, respecting the Book of Mormon in general and the LG theory in particular, consider the following. We are dealing with scientists and historians whose stated objective is to support their belief in the Book of Mormon. Their conclusions disagree with those of every non-believing expert to have ever carefully considered the matter. And, the effect (if not purpose) of these faithful Mormon scientists' and historians' research program is to take something that was testable and failed its test, and make it untestable just as have the Marxists with their failed project. Why should we take people such seriously? They have just slightly more credibility than those who still argue that the earth is flat. See <http://www.flat-earth.org/> and <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/flaearth.html> for their story.

It is worthwhile to recall what Sir Isaac Newton, the father of modern science, had to say about the refutation by hypothesis, which is essentially what the Church's apologists are doing both respecting the DNA and LG issues. Charles Van Doren in "The History of Knowledge" summarizes the manner in which Newton created the scientific method, and indicates that the formulation he laid down still accounts for most of what scientists do. Newton had four rules, which when taken together constitute the scientific method. As Van Doren indicates at p. 210:

The fourth rule of reasoning is, in Newton's view, perhaps the most important of all. The entire rule should be quoted:

In experimental philosophy [that is, science] we are to look upon propositions inferred by general induction from phenomena as ... very nearly true, notwithstanding any contrary hypotheses that may be imagined, till such time as other phenomena occur, by which [the existing propositions] may either be made more accurate, or liable to exceptions. ... [and] the argument of induction [what he just stated] must not be evaded by hypotheses.

Newton loathed hypotheses. He saw in them all of the egregious and harmful errors of the past. By "hypotheses" he meant the kind of explanations that the Scholastics had dreamed up to explain natural phenomena, the theory of the Elements, the assumption of Quintessence, and the tortured explanations of so-called violent motion, which even the Parisian theologians had not been able to accept. And he was more than willing to admit that he did not know.

If the limited geography theory is not the kind of hypotheses Newton loathed, I will eat my baseball cap. Opps! I just pulled an LDS apologist trick. We can't find out whether Newton loathed that particular hypothesis, can we? So I will never have to eat my hat, even if I am wrong. I am learning how to play the apologetics game!

I finally note that all of the same problems that my essay respecting DNA and the Book of Mormon point out with the LDS apologist position in that context (See <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/rs.dna%20controversy1004917.pdf>) can fairly be said to apply to the Church's use of the LG theory.

Regrettably, the kind of reasoning just outlined has little impact on most believers. They want to believe, and the weak arguments put forward by their religious leaders are more than enough to keep them marching in line.

Emotion Fuels Blind Faith, Which Sustains Belief, Which Sustains Religious Power Structures

One of the most interesting modern stories respecting the creation of new religions has to do with the explosive growth of evangelical Christianity in the US during the past 100 years. It has grown from a standing start to over 350 million members. And its brand of religion is powerfully emotive. Lots of music; lots of hugging; lots of shouting and praising. Going to a meeting of that sort touches something primal inside many humans, and they are then told that the universal emotions they feel in that regard are "the spirit", that this means that they should obey a particular set of rules (which vary from group to group even with Evangelical Christianity), and that this is not something that can be questioned using reason, probabilities or anything else. This is religious faith. This is blind faith.

Anyone who has the power to control belief in the manner described above can create power out of thin air. The beliefs created by a religion confer power on that religion because it defines itself as the party who holds the key to controlling the fear it has

created. The religion then appears to grant power over fear in exchange for the time, talent etc. noted above. This is the best, and oldest, scam of all time.

Once we are able to "see", we realize that certain of our religious beliefs are false, hence there is nothing to be feared, and hence we are free. We have no need to continue to pay what amounts to a tax in terms of time, talent etc., and our chains fall off as we walk out of bondage.

But, it is not easy to see in the dark. Our eyes are structured for sight in full light. When in the dark, this structure creates a blind spot in the middle of our field of vision. If we want to see something in a darkened room, for example, we can't look directly at it. Rather, we must look to the side so that it will fall into the periphery of our normal range of vision. So it is with our rational capabilities. They are structured to deal with matters that can be analyzed in a relatively straightforward fashion – in full light, so to speak. Great complexity, limited information or any other source of uncertainty acts like mental darkness and creates a blind spot in the middle of reason that prevents us from perceiving the very information we need to gain perspective – to see.

We overcome our eyes' blind spot by looking at what surrounds it. So it can be with our rational blind spots. To overcome them, we must immerse ourselves in the information that surrounds the issue in which we are interested, but is not at its core. For example, was JS a prophet? The information that the Church provides respecting that question is very narrow, misleading and designed to produce maximum emotional impact. As long as this is the only information on which we are prepared to focus, this issue will remain in our intellectual blind spot. However, if we are prepared to look at the information surrounding the question of whether JS was a prophet, we can quickly gain perspective and being to see. For example, how did JS's behaviour compare to that of other religious leaders who started new religions? We find striking parallels when we consider the easily available information in this regard. What do reputable people who are not Mormon and/or who are real historians have to say about JS, his history, his credibility etc.? The information we find relevant to this point casts him in an entirely new light. See the essay titled "Should I Join ..." at <http://mccue.cc/bob/postmormon.htm> at page 5 for a summary of some of this information. As I went through this process, I quickly gained perspective. My beliefs changed, the uncertainty and fear I felt dissipated, and I experienced a renewal of life that will cause me to marvel until the day I die. When I say it was miraculous I am not using hyperbole.

Uncritical faith (that is, dogmatic religious or blind faith) is required to keep the believe – fear – power system working from the perspective of organized religion, and so to keep us in our mental blind spot. That is, a type of faith is required that does not pay attention to the probabilities that should be inferred by the evidence related to the issues in question. My "Should I Join ..." essay at <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/postmormon.htm> starts with a section on Occam's Razor and probabilities in decision making that is designed to emphasize the importance of this kind of thinking in rational decision making that makes use of healthy,

open-minded faith, and its absence in dogmatic religious decision making. As my essay also points out, this is precisely the kind of blind faith and flawed reason that caused the Dark Ages, whereas the Renaissance was the product of critical, probability oriented thought taking hold of human culture once again.

While religion is one of the largest and best known users of blind faith, it is by no means the only one. Anyone who wants to control others or to find security, tends to resort to absolute authority. Having been burned by poor reasoning and blind faith during an experience with Mormonism, many post-Mormons have been inoculated against the similar silliness that dominates much of politics, psuedo-science, psuedo-medicine, and other parts of human culture.

Blind Faith and Environmentalism

It may help the religious faithful to acknowledge the role blind faith plays in their lives if they consider how it operates in an area that presents itself to us in scientific language, but respecting which blind faith and emotion are significant factors. So, lets turn our attention to environmentalism in general, and the Kyoto Accord in particular. As noted above, in any case where uncertainty is high, emotion and authority will play a key role in decision making. This is as true respecting environmentalism and politics as it is respecting religion.

Since my teenage years in the 1970s I have been acutely aware of the fragile nature of our environment, and that if dramatic changes are not made in how humanity takes care of the earth, we soon may not have much left to take care of. As the noted scientist Edward O. Wilson recently put it,

“The constraints of the biosphere are fixed. ... It should be obvious to anyone not in a euphoric delirium that whatever humanity does or does not do. Earth’s capacity to support our species is approaching the limit.” (See “The Bottleneck”, Scientific American, February 2002, reprinted in “The Best of American Science and Nature Writing (2003 Edition), at p. 297)

I can recall a sense to dread, and denial, related to this issue, living as I was as a religiously conservative Mormon in Canada with its vast expanses of undeveloped land and abundant clean water and air. As I matured, the rhetoric in this regard steadily increased, and as I left Mormonism between a year and two years ago, I began to feel an increasing personal buy-in to environmentalist principles. It was interesting for me to become aware that much of my former disdain for and ignorance of the green movement related to my Mormon belief that the “end game” was in God’s hands anyway, and the evidence I regularly read summarized in newspapers and magazines that pointed toward the earth’s gradual degradation was consistent with Mormonism’s apocalyptic stance – the earth was becoming more evil and eventually would be destroyed. As I shed that worldview, I became more sensitive to the fact that what I and each other human being did mattered in terms of the earth’s fate, and so I gradually became greener. I believe that process will continue.

As my interest in things environmental began to increase, the world was near the peak of the “Kyoto” debate. In Canada and elsewhere around the world, the question was whether the so-called Kyoto Accord respecting climate change – an international treaty – should be ratified. The actions required to comply with this treaty in an attempt to reduce green house gas emissions would impose a cost of billions of dollars per year on Canada. The US had refused to ratify the treaty on grounds that the science justifying it was suspect, and it would be too costly in any event for the US to comply. If Canada refused to implement the accord, it would die as a result of inadequate international support. Canada, eventually, ratified the treaty and began to prepare to implement it. Recently, Russia refused to do the same, and so treaty now appears dead.

I read numerous scientific reviews of Kyoto in my consumption of everyday newspapers and magazines. It was clear that the phenomena under consideration were very complex. Some current theories when applied to the extant data indicated we were in serious trouble. Others did not. It seemed to me that many of the respected scientists on both sides of the debate were as dogmatic as the religious people from whom I was trying to get away. But a substantial number of scientists on both sides acknowledged that they did not really understand the long term cause and effect relationships respecting green house gases and global warming and cooling, and indicated that the relationships are still too numerous, complex and poorly understood for science to accurately model. And many basic questions respecting the evidence before us respecting the past remained unanswered. As Ralph Kline, the waggish political leader (“Premier” – kind of like Governor of a US state) of the Canadian province in which I live and anti-Kyoto campaigner famously put it: “So what caused the end of the last Ice Age? Dinosaur farts?”

In any event, the pro-Kyoto lobby emphasized the importance of erring on the side of caution respecting something as important as the health of our planet, played heavily on the current generation’s responsibility to their children, grandchildren, etc. and shrilly proclaimed the irresponsibility and selfishness of anyone who disagreed with them. And the anti-Kyoto lobby loudly focussed on the folly of putting the current generation out of work in order to pay a price for goods that we do not have reasonable evidence to suggest we need, and questioned the intelligence of anyone who disagreed with them. Both sides regularly pointed out the vested interests of the other. This debate are nicely outlined by Wilson in “The Bottleneck” article noted above.

Into this maelstrom waded the Danish statistician/political scientist, former Greenpeace member and still avowed environmentalist Bjorn Lomborg. He started out as a faithful green using his statistician’s skills to try to disprove the 1997 statement of economist Julian Simon that on the basis of current trends, the balance of evidence indicates that the material conditions of life on earth will continue to get better for the vast majority of people throughout the world. This was, of course, blasphemy from the environmentalist point of view. Lomborg set to work using the most reliable data we have to study the long term trends respecting things like public health, infant and other mortality rates, the destruction of forests, the prospects for the continued disposal of human waste using landfills and other currently available technologies, air and water quality, etc. His 500+

page book "The Skeptical Environmentalist. Measuring the Real State of the World" exploded like a bomb in a world already made hypersensitive to these issues by the Kyoto debate. For what it is worth, while I agree with Lomborg's analysis of the both the recent trend and current state of the planet, I do not believe that the trend he extrapolates is reliable. I side with Wilson and the greens respecting these issues. But that is not germane to what I wish to here consider.

Lomborg is, essentially, an environmentalist apostate. He has all the right credentials for the influential green he was. He is a respected university professor. He is gay, a vegetarian, young, not American, and good looking. And he is now anathema in the environmentalist movement. He was trashed by the Scientific American publication and numerous others. Wilson did not refer to him in the article above, but was clearly speaking to his camp. And even in his own country, the government sponsored "Danish Committee on Scientific Dishonesty" found Lomborg's book to be "objectively dishonest", and clearly contrary to the standards of good scientific practise".

In many other quarters Lomborg has been received as a hero for having the courage to stand up for his convictions and to change his mind when the evidence before him warranted it. And the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, to which the Committee on Scientific Dishonesty reported, recently repudiated the Committee's study that was critical of Lomborg. It found that the Committee's report was not backed up by documentation, was void of rational argument, and in its most cutting comment of all, indicated that the Committee's report attacking Lomborg was "emotional".

The issues related to environmentalism, Kyoto and even Lomborg's small part in that epic drama are far too complex to attempt to summarize here, let alone decide. However, it is interesting to consider how Lomborg and his role in the above story fit into the theoretical framework I am attempting to develop in this essay respecting the interaction of emotion and reason in the human decision making process.

Although the environmental debate is cloaked in the language of science, the degree of uncertainty it involves causes it to proceed in a fashion similar to many religious debates. That is, the importance of the issue in question and its complexity are such that our rational processes cannot be expected to deal with it. Hence, we make our decision based largely on what the dominant forces of the group by which we are surrounded do. If I live in a community that depends for its livelihood on the forestry or industrial production sectors, I will not likely agree with Kyoto or the environmentalists. If, on the other hand, I am well to do and live with many other people like me in a beautiful place the sensitive ecology of which is threatened by polluters who live a long way from me, I will likely support Kyoto and be an environmentalist.

This analysis illustrates the importance of classifying issues by starting with a consideration of how difficult reliable information is to find respecting them, rather than depending upon the characterization the debate participants provide. Debates of issues respecting which reliable information is hard to produce will be based on emotion, regardless of how scientific the participants try to make their positions sound.

In the environmental debate, as in most modern debates (including those related to religion), one of the most effective tools is scientific argument. Hence, both sides try to characterize the question as one of science that can clearly be resolved in their favour and most of the public who struggle to follow the debate, buy into that. However, science cannot answer the central questions of the global warming debate, for example, any better than science or theology can resolve the uncertainty over conflicting visions of what will happen after death. The questions in both instances are so complex, and the time frames are so long that the tiny bits of data we have accumulated are close to meaningless. Hence, the comments above respecting the different types of faith that can be used respecting religious questions are equally applicable to environmentalism.

Blind Faith Uses Flawed Reason

The initial response of some dogmatically religious people to what I have so far written in this essay may well be that they are smart, and know how to reason, so they and people like them can't possibly be subject to the kind of blind faith I have described. I am the first to admit that dogmatically religious people reason, and that many are very good at it. My intelligence quotient did not change during the several months it took me to think my way out of Mormonism once I finally had access to the information required to do so. But, the kind of reasoning I used respecting religious matters changed radically during that short period of time. In this lies one of the keys to understanding the difference between blind and healthy faith.

Some dogmatically religious people are brilliant users of reason. The Jews in particular have evidenced incredible mental dexterity as for close to three millennia they have been able to squeeze the interpretations they needed to make their changing society function out of the religious law and its prior interpretations with which they were saddled. Some of the reasoning employed in that context is the work of genius. But that does not make it relevant to the real world, or even helpful. In fact, it is clear that much of that reasoning helped keep a people subject to a crippling, inward looking social structure. See the above summary of part of the book "Night" for one tragedy that was facilitated by this very kind of reasoning. It fair to suggest, as such, that this sparkling reason was often a bad thing.

Every system creates its own internally coherent reason, based on the limited information to which it has access. For example, Ptolemy, the last of the ancient Greece's great astronomers, developed a system based on the observation of stellar and planetary motion that mapped the universe with the earth at its center. This model held sway for 1400 years despite the fact that it was false. He was a great mathematician. His ability in this regard enabled him to find patterns in the data available to him that supported his model, which incidentally was consistent with the Greek belief in how the Universe functioned. The predictions generated by his model in terms of planetary motion were not perfect, but were close enough to what was observed and more to the point, consistent with the prevailing philosophy of the day, that they were not questioned seriously until Copernicus and Galileo.

Mormon testimonies and other forms of religious faith are often formed and perpetuated much as was Ptolemy's model. We inherit a belief system from our society, family etc. We are taught to believe it, and much of the data to which we have access and what we are taught about cause and effect relationships supports our belief. That is, we are taught by loving, credible people by whom we are surrounded that the powerful emotional experiences we have while in our inherited religious context are caused by God's spirit, and mean that we should obey the rules laid down by our religious leaders. Without a framework of experience, or information respecting the similar experience of others, that would cause us to question these assertions, they should be expected to make sense to us. And so our beliefs are formed. The longer we hold any particular belief, and the brighter we are, the more patterns we are likely to see in the data available to us to support that belief (See Michael Shermer, "Why People Believe Weird Things"). And hence, the more likely we are to blindly rely upon prior authority to avoid the need to question what we have accepted. Ptolemy became such an authority, and it took the intellectual earthquake caused by Copernicus and Galileo to knock him off his pedestal.

So, much of religious faith is based on precisely the type of reason just noted. That is, reason that resorts to unquestionable authority to cut off the circular reasoning which must be faced when trying to understand anything respecting even scientific and seemingly "certain" matters. Authority, hence, is used to avoid the need to use probabilities with regard to life's most important questions, and hence makes believers feel secure. I suggested above that this is a false and harmful security.

Dogmatically religious people use as their circular reasoning termination mechanism the Bible or some other source of religious authority. Mormons rely heavily on the leadership of the Mormon Church from time to time to do this for them. The Jews rely upon tortured, but often as noted above, amazingly nimble interpretations of their religious law. Amazonian Indians rely (in part at least) upon the drug induced "inspiration" of their Shamans and other such things for their guiding authority respecting many important decisions.

For example, as recently as two years ago while I was still a faithful Mormon, when questions concerning evolution came up I did not resort to what science had to say on the subject, but turned to what LDS leaders had written about it. The last question I can recall looking up in that regard had to do with whether there could be evolution between species. Joseph F. Smith, a non-scientist and deceased president of the Mormon Church, said on theological grounds that this was not possible and most Church members believe this to be the correct position. A Sunday School teacher taught this, and when I expressed my doubt on the point I was treated to looks of horror from some of the assembled class members. After polite debate, I dropped the issue, but was troubled enough that when I got home I checked what other Mormon leaders had said, and found some that contradicted Smith (James Talmage and John Widstoe) but did not have his rank as a former president of the Church. And so I was troubled. It did not occur to me to consult a scientist. Had I done so, I would have found that the credible scientific community is unanimous – evolution did cause mutations between species. In

fact, it created all of the species that have ever existed. This is the kind of thing a high school biology student would take for granted.

This anecdote illustrates how the faithful Mormon mind works. Had the Church's leaders been unanimous with respect to their position on evolution, I would likely have swallowed hard and suppressed my doubts. On second thought, that might have speeded my departure from the Church. At that point, I was teetering in terms of my Mormon faith, but did not know it. If I had not been able to find any support for a position I was pretty sure was correct, that might have pushed me over the edge. For the fully faithful Mormon, what science had to say is only relevant as it is interpreted by Mormon leaders, even if they are non-scientists. That is, all questions become theological questions to the extent that Mormon leaders wish to deal with them.

So, I am not saying that dogmatic religious faith does not require reason. I am pointing out the partial and misleading nature of the perspective within which such reasoning is often conducted. The influential 20th century philosopher and mystic Krishnamurti described this process as follows:

What creates faith in man? Fundamentally, fear. You say, "If I get rid of faith, then I shall be left with fear, and so have gained nothing." So you prefer to live in an illusion, clinging to its phantasies in order to escape from fear, you create faith. Now when through deep thinking you dissolve faith, then you are face to face with fear. Then only can you resolve the cause of fear. When all the avenues of escape have been thoroughly understood and destroyed, then you are face to face with the root of fear: only then can the mind liberate itself from the clutch of fear.

When there is fear, then religions and authorities, which you have created in your search for security, offer you the opiate which you call faith, or the love of God. Thus you merely cover up fear, which expresses itself in hidden and subtle ways. So you continue rejecting old faiths and accepting new ones; but the real poison, the root of fear, is never dissolved. As long as there is that limited consciousness, the "I", there must be fear. Until the mind liberates itself from this limited consciousness, fear must remain in one form or another. (See <http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/showcollectedworks.asp?cwid=64>)

This is far from an academic, or purely spiritual, matter. Why did the crops fail? The shaman/priest consults god and advises that He is displeased with the people and a sacrifice is required. The people do this and do not embark on the road to understanding that their soils are depleted and need a kind of readily available fertilizer. Why is that person acting in a strange fashion? The religious leader diagnoses demonic possession, and the attempt to understand neural functioning is delayed.

And to hit closer to home, why is our modern culture awash in a tide of pornography, broken homes, drug abuse and "sin"? The priest or Mormon Prophet consults the scripture of his choice and says that it is because the people are rejecting God's word

and not attending church enough, and so the faithful hunker down in longer church meetings and more scripture reading. I predict that the American, in particular, resort to this answer will be seen in future times as foolishness that delayed the diagnosis of America's social ills as surely as casting out devils stalled the commencement and progress of neural research in earlier times.

This mind closing tendency of blind faith can also be observed in our personal relationships. This has a profoundly negative effect on my life due to the fact that most of my family members and friends are faithful Mormons. Here are a couple of recent experiences to illustrate what I mean.

A couple of weeks ago I was sitting with a couple of friends who I had not seen in years, and having a very enjoyable visit. They are both believing, but most would say, "fringe" Mormons. At one point we started to talk about psychology and I mentioned a book I read some time ago – "Shadow Syndromes" by Dr. John Rately of the Harvard Medical School. Great book. This had come up in the context of a discussion respecting promiscuous political and religious leaders. Rately had described Bill Clinton as a classic mild manic depressive. In his manic phase, he would exude tremendous amounts of human energy – a kind of magnetism that would draw people into his wake. This is often the case with great leaders. But, he was prone to mild depression which in his case was manageable. Rately also said that an occupational hazard people like Bill Clinton face is that their magnetism makes available to them much more sexual opportunity than is the norm, and these folks hence tend to be sexually promiscuous. There were nodding heads and agreement all around as I made this comment. We pursued that topic a bit further, and then I said: "I don't want to offend anyone, so perhaps I should not bring religion into this." Both friends assured me that they were impossible to offend and that they wanted to hear what I had to say. We had earlier discussed briefly my departure from the Church, and neither of them were threatened by it or thought that it should be relevant to our continued friendship. I had thanked them for that.

In any event, I proceeded to say, "Well, think of what we just learned about mild manic depressives, charismatic leaders, and sexual promiscuity. Does that not fit JS? He was very bright, very charismatic, and very promiscuous, but in his case the promiscuity was called polygamy." As I said this, a wall came down behind both my friends eyes. "I don't see it", said one. "Me neither" said the other. And so I suggested we move on to another topic. But one of them did not want to. Said he, "I like the idea of polygamy." Our female friend slugged him and I started to laugh. "Really", he said, jokingly (I think – with him it is hard to tell). "The men never want a night off, but the women do." Our female friend said, "I never want a night off!" We all laughed, and my male friend said, "Wild! We could have threesomes, foursomes, whatever. It would be great!" More slugging and laughing.

My point is that obviously bright, not straight up the middle and in fact downright adventuresome, people like these were prevented from seeing a pretty obvious pattern because of the manner in which blind faith and fear of questioning authority shut down their critical thinking faculties as described above.

I have thought a lot about the "wall coming down" phenomenon I just described, which I have seen happen more times than I can count during the past couple of years. When the wall comes down, the nature of the conversation changes. It shifts from what I would call a "learning" conversation to a "faith" conversation. Learning conversations are characterized by the kind of give and take process that was underway between my friends and I before I mentioned JS. That is, one person will bring forward an idea and some evidence to support it. Others will either agree or disagree respecting the idea, or the evidence, suggest other ways of looking at things, and gradually the nature of the positions expressed usually change. Consensus is seldom reached among bright people (though it is often feigned) but it is usually apparent that learning is occurring during the course of the conversation.

Faith conversations are quite different. Learning is seldom involved. My friends' reaction to the suggested analogy between Bill Clinton and JS is typical in this regard – "impossible" they in effect said. No discussion. No consideration of the evidence. This reaction is not based on the rational application of reason to evidence in search of patterns, which is the basis of most measures of intelligence. Rather, it is an exercise in justifying already held beliefs. It is a matter of the certain overcoming the evidence, whatever it may be. Hence, it is a process characterized by anti-reason, the purpose of which is to justify the status quo that is deemed unquestionable.

Here is another recent example to illustrate the same point. I was speaking with an intelligent, good natured, wonderful friend who is a faithful Mormon about psychology – one of my favourite topics of late. This time the grist for the mill was provided by the recent Scientific American Mind edition. We discussed various aspects of Robert Cialdini's article respecting persuasion, and that of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi respecting the psychology of television watching. Our conversation was clearly of the learning variety. She shared a number of things with me from which I learned, and it seemed that I had done the same with her. Then somehow the topic of the Word of Wisdom came up, and the wall came down. The same kind of analysis and evidence that she had found so interesting respecting how different psychological concepts might be considered useful or not were not persuasive, or even helpful, from her point of view when it came to the Word of Wisdom. For example, she seemed to consider recent dietary trends and medical evidence that show green tea to be on balance good for our health to be unimportant. The same was true respecting scientific evidence that questions the validity of various pieces of advice contained in the Word of Wisdom respecting how different grains and meat should be used. The history the Word of Wisdom was irrelevant to her, despite the fact that it strongly suggested the Word of Wisdom started out as advice consistent with the folk tradition of its day and ended up as a cultural marker (who is "in" and who is "out" of the group) which is a common feature of exclusivist groups who are forced to exist in a cosmopolitan society. And she had little interest in the anthropological and sociological evidence related to how similar rules (like the Jewish food taboo system) have evolved. I emphasize that she was polite (as was I) thought this short tour of threatening ideas, and that she is well read,

and in my experience more curious than the average person. We soon dropped the subject and moved on to other things.

And the "wall coming down" phenomenon is the least of our worries. Women, particularly within Mormonism, are inclined to accept inappropriate male authority on the basis of blind faith. One woman who ran across my website sent me a copy of a lengthy letter she had provided to her former Mormon leaders in connection with her ex-husband's attempt to remarry in the temple. Among the things that thoughtful, well written letter chronicled was an occasion while she was undergoing counselling to try to save her abusive marriage during which her psychologist, who was also her Stake President, persuaded her to disrobe in front of him so that he could assure her that she was a beautiful woman. Although she felt a nagging feeling that this was an inappropriate request, the Dr./Stake President's position of authority over her was such that she went ahead. The point is not that lots of Mormon leaders are bad people – there are good and bad people in every context. The point is that it is harmful to inculcate the kind of blind faith and willingness to obey in people that characterizes the relationship between Mormons and their religious leaders. It is precisely this kind of faith that made the Catholic priest sexual scandals the landslide the have become.

A former bishop who resigned his membership a short time after his honourable release following five years of service recently contacted me. He described how his family reacted to his withdrawal from Mormonism. After trying to dissuade him, their feelings were so strong that they felt that he would be better off dead than a living and harmful influence in the lives of his children, and they prayed for his demise. Since his business was intimately connected with that of his father and brothers, they took steps to destroy it thinking that if he lost his business and wealth that this might humble him to the point that he would either repent, or commit suicide. Blind faith produces bad decision making and mental dysfunction in myriad ways.

While my Mormon and other religiously inclined friends cannot see this, I can't avoid the conclusion that the same kind of dangerous, mind-closing tendencies that are obvious when we look at the behavior of radical cults also operate within Mormonism. A particularly striking example of this phenomenon comes from the annals of the Heaven's Gate cult. Their belief was that a space ship was following in the wake of the Hale-Bopp comet in the late 1990s, and that they were to abandon their bodies (commit suicide) just before the comet passed Earth in order to allow their spirits to be picked up by the spaceship and taken to heaven. A store owner in the area where the members of this cult lived reported that shortly before their suicide he sold a powerful telescope to them. They returned it a couple of days later. When asked why, they told him that the telescope was defective – they had been able to see the Hale-Bopp comet clearly, but could not see the spaceship they knew was trailing it. Hence, the telescope was defective. The possibility that the spaceship did not exist could not be considered.

The inability to process available information in a "normal" fashion characterizes blind faith based processes. There are differences between how Mormons and the members

of Heaven's Gate and other dangerous cults think. But those differences are in mere matters of degree. The nature of the mental processes used are the same.

Another large scale illustration of the dangers of blind faith is provided by the profoundly dysfunctional way in which Mormonism deals with homosexuality. As recently as February 6 of this year Boyd Packer addressed LDS Church Education System educators as follows:

Unspeakable wickedness and perversion were once hid in dark places; now they are in the open, even accorded legal protection. (LDS Church News, February 14, 2003)

This is no doubt a reference to the recent US court rulings that sanction gay marriage. To say that the Church's history respecting homosexuality is troubled and troubling is to dramatically understate the case. Here are just a few of the countless disturbing details that could be recounted in this regard. For a summary of the research in this area, see Terry Hiscox, "In God's Name: The Treatment of Homosexuals by the Christian Church" at http://www.affirmation.org/learning/in_gods_name.asp#_edn55

BYU president Ernest Wilkinson succinctly stated BYU's (and implicitly the Church's attitude) respecting gays in an address to the entire student body as follows:

If any of you have this tendency and have not completely abandoned it, may I suggest that you leave the university immediately after this assembly; and if you will be honest enough to let us know the reason, we will voluntarily refund your tuition. We do not want others on this campus to be contaminated by your presence. (Connell O'Donovan, "Private Pain, Public Purges: A History of Homosexuality at Brigham Young University," (28 April 1997), <http://www.exmormon.org/byuhis.htm> (08 Aug. 1998))

In the 1960s and 70s several homosexual purges were conducted at BYU, which used tactics such as the kind of "entrapment" and interrogation procedures usually reserved for hard core criminals. During one of the 70's purges, five students were forcibly "outed", expelled from BYU and later excommunicated. All five committed suicide, as did one professor who was caught in the same purge.

Some students caught in these purges were admitted to "therapy" to help them overcome their "problem". Therapy lasted an average of three months. Patients were required to sign a waiver absolving BYU of all liability. The release form indicated that "damage to tissues or organs may occur" during treatment. Treatment included both vomit and electroshock therapy, and exposure to pornographic material. Here is Hiscox's summary of the experience of three patients and one program employee:

Rocky, one of the participants, said that he spent ten years negotiating his way "through the Mormon church's torturous program for reorienting or curing homosexuals — trying to turn us into heterosexuals."

His bishop told Rocky, at the age of fifteen, that he needed to take this therapy at BYU, and that it would help him into becoming a heterosexual. This is how Rocky explained the procedure: "They explained to me that they would place a heparin lock in my wrist and hook an I.V. up to that, and I would be put in a room alone with a phletheshmograph on my penis that would measure my physical arousal so that when I got an erection they would know." At this point they would show him gay pornography while they would introduce a drug into the I.V. that produced vomiting. Next, they would show him heterosexual pornography and a euphoric drug was injected. In this manner they hoped to have him prefer women to men. It did not work. In the video the interviewer asked Rocky, since he was only fifteen at the time, if he had ever seen pornography of any kind before his session at BYU — Rocky admitted, "No."

Val's experience was different. He saw a Dr. Card at the university and was subjected to electroshock therapy, however Dr. Card preferred to call it biofeedback therapy. In this therapy the patient got to shock themselves by pressing a button; they also got to set the level of electricity used to shock. When the treatment did not work on Val, Dr Card said, "If you really wanted to change, you'd set the level higher." Val deduced from this experience that the process was analogous to having a cold shower. "It was just a stimulus that made you think about something else for a while until the arousal went away."

With Drew, Dr. Card tried hypnotism. The doctor believed he could find the homosexual part of his psyche and then remove it. At some point in the first hypnotic session Drew became agitated. At this point Dr. Card "raised his hand to the square and commanded the devils to depart my soul. Of course nothing happened so he came over and shook me." Then Dr. Card explained to Drew "that at a younger age when I was nervous about going out and growing up and being timid about life that I had invited Satan into my life, and that is why I am gay and that those spirits are still with me and that is who he had spoken to in this session." ...

Ray was not a patient. He was one of the technicians administering treatment of a different kind. He explained that as BYU security caught people in "compromising positions" they had the choice of being kicked out of school and their parents would be notified why, or they could take therapy. It is amazing the coercive power of this institution. Ray explained that the patient would sit in a chair, 'the electric chair', and he would tape electrodes to their groin, thigh, chest, and armpits. Another machine monitored heart and breathing. If the heart rate increased when looking at homosexual pornography, he would zap the patient. As he said, "From the reaction that I saw there were muscle spasms which looked very painful." In fact, he noted that on some "you could see burn marks on the skin. . . ." Then Ray would show heterosexual pornography showing men and women having sex. For this sequence soothing music was piped into the room so that the patient could relate heterosexuality with pleasant music.

It is no wonder that the suicide rate within the Mormon homosexual population has been sky high. The attitude of the Mormon Church and its allied health professionals is purposefully ignorant of much of the best scientific evidence available respecting the nature of homosexuality, and the circumstances in which it is determined by reversible choice as opposed to genetic or social hardwiring that is not so malleable. This is one of the many, and more obvious, fruits of Mormon blind faith. And it blights, or even ends, the lives of those who through mostly genetic and environmental chance find themselves cross threaded with it.

Bounded Rationality and "Heuristics"

Gerd Gigerenzer's research (See "The Adaptive Toolbox" and other works) indicates that while we like to tell ourselves that we are rational, much of our behaviour is determined by "heuristics" (decision making rules of thumb) that evolution has built into us. These are linked to emotion. Once a heuristic switch is tripped, we act and explain our actions to ourselves on a rational basis after the fact. These heuristics enable us to make pretty good decisions based on amazingly small amounts of relevant information; that is, within "bounded rationality". This is something at which humans (and other animals) are adept.

Fear is our most powerful emotional switch. Once it is triggered by a religious belief (I won't be in the CK with my family if I disobey/disbelieve) we don't count the cost of many actions we feel compelled to engage in until it reaches a painfully high level. This is rational behaviour in the same sense as is sprinting away from a bush in which you heard a "big animal" sound at night if you had learned earlier that a tiger had escaped that day from a nearby zoo. Our emotions are designed first and foremost to preserve our lives, and propagate our genes.

As just noted, our emotional "switches" make the price we are prepared to pay to obtain "goods" like being in the CK very high. By measuring the price people are prepared to pay in terms of time, money, opportunity cost etc. to remain part of a community, we have a way to gauge the strength of particular beliefs and fears in that community relative to others in other communities. On that basis, Taliban beliefs are likely stronger than Mormon beliefs, which are stronger than Evangelical beliefs, which are stronger than Anglican beliefs, etc. (all on average, of course). There is a correlation between the strength of religious beliefs and how blind they are.

The strength of a belief, measured in terms of how much believers will sacrifice for it, does not necessarily say anything about how useful the belief is. It is a good thing to have a strong belief in democracy, for example, because it underpins virtually all else we have and we should be prepared to sacrifice a lot to preserve that system. But, other strong beliefs are clearly toxic, such as the belief that all information that questions Muslim orthodoxy must be suppressed, and that if flying planes into skyscrapers in NYC will help in that regard, it should be done. The Mormon propensity to suppress information is a small version of the Muslim belief – not as toxic but still very unhealthy.

Modern Mormon polygamy is, for example, a direct side effect of Mormonism's information distortion practises in the late 1800s.

Religious beliefs harness heuristics within the boundedly rational, information scarce worlds created by the religions themselves for the very purpose of fostering blind faith in beliefs that confer power on the religious institutions in question. Our heuristics related to fear and designed to deal with uncertainty are largely what comprise blind faith in the religious context, and cause it to be the force it is.

The Collective Mind

As note above, religious leaders seem to intuit the importance of keeping their belief systems well within the kind of uncertain environment in which the heuristics described above are at full strength. The manner in which religious and other societal leaders, in a seeming unconscious fashion, do this kind of thing is relevant to how blind faith functions in the lives of the dogmatically religious faithful, and has long caused wonder in those who have observed it. It is to this that Pierre Bourdieu, the respected French social theorist, is described as referring in the following fashion:

Bourdieu takes his argument to a more general level by arguing that not only is all action interested [as in motivated by concerns related to advancing the personal or group interests of those who engage in the actions] but that much action can be carried out successfully only if its interested character goes "misrecognized". He argues that a great many practices [the behaviours required by social custom] could not be performed if they were recognized as emanating from the pursuit of self-interest. [Bourdieu wrote, for example:] "The operation of the gift exchange [a social custom in a primitive group he studied that involved the regular giving of "gifts" that in the aggregate performed within the society in question the function of the market economy in ours], for example, presupposes individual and collective misrecognition of the ... objective reality of the [gift] exchange. (David Swartz, Culture and Power - The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, p. 91)

To this the philosopher John Searle adds the following:

Human institutions are structures of constitutive rules. People who participate in the institutions are typically not conscious of these rules, often they even have false beliefs respecting the nature of the institution, and even the very people who created the institution may be unaware of its structure. Further, the very people who created or participated in the evolution of the institution may themselves have been totally ignorant of the system of rules. (quoted in Adam Gifford Jr., On the Nature and the Evolution of Institutions, Journal of Bioeconomics, 1:127 – 149, at p. 141, (1999) <http://buslab5.csun.edu/agifford/Research/B&TBioecon.pdf>)

Hence, institutions (including religious institutions) are useful friction reduction devices, and as such constitute a public good. It is crucial to note that they can perform a useful

function while disseminating falsehoods. If everyone believes the same lie, at least chaos does not reign. In this sense, religion can in some cases be considered the lesser of evils. Societal as well as biological evolution deals in relative merit ("comparative advantage") instead of truth. Hence, changing just enough to maintain a lesser of evils status over a long period of time will create huge cultural institutions. The history of many religions, including Mormonism, can be thus instructively read.

Some have characterized the collective, unconscious mechanism that guides the actions of institutions as their "collective mind". The best explanation I have found of it thus far is in David Sloan Wilson's "Darwin's Cathedral". He relies on biological research to form his social theories. I note also that Gigerenzer does the same. These are both examples of the theory of evolution being applied to human decision making and social behaviour. Wilson notes that this is a two way street. Geneticists are now finding that one of the best ways to look for microbiological theories to test that are likely to be proven accurate is to analogize between the components of cells and human social groups. So geneticists are studying sociology and anthropology, and social scientists are studying biological evolution. Fascinating. But I digress.

The collective mind concept is similar to Adam Smith's "invisible hand". The recent Nobel Prize winner in economics Vernon Smith has done some work along these lines, showing how the theory of bounded rationality functions in many different types of markets and game theories. He points out over and over again how in computer simulations and other contexts agents with limited intelligence and information, acting in accordance with a series of simple rules, quickly reach market equilibrium or a clever solution to a problem that highly intelligent agents with access to all kinds of information had not been able to find. While not all of the unintelligent agents are right all of the time, as they take cues from each other and modify their behaviour based on those cues their collective behaviour trends quickly toward a rational equilibrium or efficient solution to the problem they collectively face. As noted, this occurs even when they have access to very limited information. And this occurs without any of them having the information necessary to make a "rational" decision in the conscious sense of that term. They appear to, as a group, be using the kind of limited information heuristics of which Gigerenzer writes. This is the collective mind in operation.

Again, this is just what Adam Smith observed respecting the free market economy overall. There seems to be something overarching and invisible that guides that process. The nature of this invisible hand, or collective mind, is determined by the most basic beliefs or values of the group in question. He who controls those beliefs and values, whether he knows it or not, controls the hand. As those beliefs and values change, so does the collective mind. The group is even more buffered from awareness of the heuristics that drive its behaviour than each individual is of her emotional, heuristic switches.

In many groups, there is no entity to which belief control can be ascribed. In most cases, however, there are entities that have a measure of influence. Religious groups can be placed on a spectrum in this regard. At one end we find those that are more

democratic in nature, in which it might be impossible to find a belief influencing agent other than the voice of the people at it changes from time to time, and the occasional persuasive leader who catches the imagination of many within the group. At the other end of the spectrum you find tight knit, small groups who are under the control of a single charismatic leader who wields a strong influence over the groups beliefs. David Koresh and Jim Jones come to mind in the modern context, as does JS in his day.

The Mormon Church would fall toward the Koresh/Jones end of this spectrum because of the institutions of the Twelve Apostles and First Presidency within Mormonism. This group of twelve men, plus the three members of the First Presidency, are the Church's governing body. The existing group appoints new members to replace those who die. Hence, the composition and attitude of the group changes very slowly. All policy decisions of significance must be made by unanimous decision of this group. This locks in place Mormonism's inherited belief system, and explains why this system tends to change several generations behind the mainstream social curve in the US, which is itself well behind the more secular and many would say progressive parts of Europe. See the World Values Survey, and its "Values Map" for some interesting insights in this regard, at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

The collective mind is the result of all of the decisions individual members of a society make. The quality of the decisions the collective mind will make, and the amount of time it will take to make them (which is often relevant to their quality), is determined by the information to which each individual has access, the quality of each individual's decision making process and most importantly the basic values held by the individuals within that group. Think of a simple auction. The basic value is buying at the lowest possible price. Knowledge of this value will help to predict most of the behaviour of those participating in the auction, and is the guiding force that produces the collective mind that Vernon Smith and others have observed. This is one of the reasons for which North Americans who had the chance to participate in the establishment of capitalist values in the former Soviet Block countries found that to be so interesting. One of my LDS friends who is a professor of entrepreneurship studies spent a year over there on a Fulbright Scholarship. He and others have described to me the difficulty of predicting how their students would react to different issues that arose for discussion because their values were not focused on maximizing profit, but rather concerned things like maximizing production at any cost because that would maximize the number of jobs and resources that remained under their control. Product quality, cost control, marketing and the other basic building blocks in a successful business initially make no sense to these folks. And as long as that is the case, their collective mind will not produce Adam Smith's invisible hand, as the history of the Soviet Union shows.

The basic values underlying democratic society are the pursuit of freedom, truth and justice. These are simple ideas, but are complex to implement within society. The basic value of Mormonism is obedience to divine authority, and the Mormon faith has redefined what this means from time to time so as to not go so far offside the democratic values just noted that Mormonism will be shut down. As noted above, JS went too far in that direction at the end of his life, and that is largely responsible for the

manner and timing of his demise. Brigham Young took the Church to Utah where it could develop and operate a theocracy, but in time enough of the rest of society moved in that direction as well that Mormonism was forced to ameliorate its stance on many issues.

The more oriented toward the authoritarian end of the spectrum a group is, the more inclined its collective mind will be to accept things like faithful history that stymie individual growth, stifle truth etc. This, in my view, works hard against the interest of individual members of the Mormon group and in favour of the Mormon institution and is responsible for much of the wilful blindness in Mormon behaviour that has long baffled me. The collective mind produced by such value systems is, quite simply, retarded. And I regard the presence of that value system in my home much as I would lead paint on the walls and furniture or bad insulation in my attic – as a potentially retarding or even lethal influence to be eliminated as soon as possible.

The reaction of many I love to the toxic, mind-closing influence of Mormonism in our lives is testimony to the power of fear and cognitive dissonance described above. If these people felt that there was even a small chance, for example, that the paint on their walls or insulation in their attic could harm their family's health, that possibility would be seriously investigated. And they would not accept the manufacturer's word that "all is well" and leave it at that. And, if they determined on the basis of the best expert evidence to which they had access that there was a small health risk, the house would be repainted or insulation replaced even if the cost to do so were high. However, the psychology of cognitive dissonance indicates that if Great-grandpa invented the insulation, Grandpa made the batch that was used to insulate the house, and I installed it in my house and the houses of all my friends, I will be resistant to the idea that it is toxic.

However, as the psychological research indicates, in cases where people perceived themselves to be in a situation that can't be changed, they suppress the information related to the risks they face instead of acting to eliminate those risks. This explains the peculiar reaction of those who lived closest to the Three Mile Island nuclear facility when it melted down in 1979. Those who lived closest were least inclined to take steps to protect themselves for the risk to which they had been exposed. Their subconscious perception was that nothing could do after the fact would be of use, and so their perception of the risks they had faced was impaired.

And so it is with many faithful Mormons. The Mormon Church itself has inculcated a belief system that creates profound fear of any information that might cause disobedience to Mormon authority. This, in effect, aligns the interests of faithful Mormons (the house owners) with the Mormon Church itself (the manufacturer of bad insulation). Hence, while not necessarily consciously dishonest, their judgement is badly impaired by what they perceive to be their interest in any matter that questions the Mormon Church.

So, decisions based on blind faith are often poorly made and based on limited information. European society under the influence of blind faith rejected the

enlightenment of the Greeks and Romans and plunged the world into the Dark Ages. The Renaissance re-embraced the ideas that drove Greek society in particular, and the life we enjoy today is the result.

I am quick to admit that the rational or open-minded faith approach to life is far from perfect. It has to take responsibility for the Holocaust and many other atrocities that have occurred on its watch. However, when we compare that to what the Dark Ages served up and what we see in the lives of people who live in parts of the world that are still dominated by a blind faith approach to life (such as many parts of India, Africa and the Middle East), it seems clear which system works best.

To the extent that a social group, such as Mormonism, is dominated by blind faith the decisions that its collective mind will make will often be irrational. This would explain, for example, how the leaders of the Mormon Church could make the decision to consciously withhold important information from its membership, and how many faithful members once aware of this decision could find ways to justify it and then proceed so as to keep the rest of the group in the dark. The individual decision making paradigm of faithful Mormons includes the idea that certain types of knowledge (anything that questions orthodox belief) are dangerous and should be suppressed. This belief is then reflected in group behaviour that hides from, and suppresses, that kind of information. The leadership initiative in this regard would not likely have been as successful as it has been without the framework of supportive individual beliefs on which it was built. This is what led me to be able to receive a sound secular education while being kept completely in the dark as to the reality of my religious faith.

Another textbook example of the collective mind in operation is provided by the response described above of Mormon leaders and apologists to the evidence produced by the academic community respecting the inadequacies of the hemispheric theory of the Book of Mormon, as well as to light recent DNA studies have shed on the probable non-historicity of the Book of Mormon (See the essay titled "The Book of Mormon DNA Controversy ..." at <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/postmormon.htm>). And a further example is how the entire complex of religious institution behaviours related to the connection between belief, fear, and power described in this essay are used.

I doubt that in some strategy room somewhere a group of Mormon leaders sat around to plot the most efficient manner, in light of current psychological theory, to meet the challenges of the academic community respecting LG theory or DNA research respecting the Book of Mormon, or to otherwise maximize uncertainty and fear among the membership, and so create or preserve as much power for themselves as possible. Rather, in the case of the LG theory and DNA research, some of the Church's foundational ideas have been overtaken by science and are no longer surrounded by the uncertainty they once were. Without any plotting required, the Church's collective mind quickly hit upon a near optimal strategy in terms of maximizing its continued influence, and it was implemented by apologists related to the Church almost immediately and I suspect without instruction from LDS leaders. I presume that the same thing has occurred through the history of the Mormon and other churches.

This illustrates the fashion in which the Church's collective mind guides its responses to the evolutionary forces with which it must deal in order to survive. Mormon history is fascinating in this regard. See the essay titled "Should I Join ..."
<http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/postmormon.htm> starting at page 28 for a summary of a few key points.

An understanding of the evolutionary forces that apply to a group, and the responses the group will likely make, can help individuals decide which group to associate themselves with to the extent that this choice can be made. For example, the history of Mormonism very clearly identifies it as a group that will make decisions that put the interest of the group ahead of those of individual members of the group. The more blind the faith of the members, the more easily this can be accomplished while holding the group together. The "faithful history" policy referred to above was a significant part of the mechanism used in recent times by the Mormon Church to inculcate blind faith in an attempt to hold onto its members in an environment of increasingly abundant information, and a strengthening ideology of personal choice. This is a classic example of the behaviour to be expected of groups formed in a harsh environment in which extensive group cooperative behaviour is essential to survival. Mormonism was formed on the model of the Hebrew people, who existed in a harsh environment. And then Mormonism was taken by Brigham Young to Utah where it had to survive in a harsh environment. It is not surprising, hence, that Mormonism still today evidences harsh environment group dynamics and encourages blind faith and obedience to autocratic leadership.

Once faithful Mormons are able to see this behaviour they may well decide that it is not in their interest to follow rules that are not designed with their interest in mind. Many, as I have, may decide to leave Mormonism altogether. This will change the nature of and increase the evolutionary pressure on Mormonism. Only time can tell whether Mormonism's collective mind has sufficient flexibility to respond to the evolutionary challenge that awaits it as a result of the Internet and the flood of information to which it is subjecting the Mormon population, and in particular Mormonism's rising generation.

As Andrew Gifford (see above) notes, background beliefs that are taken for granted and exercise unconscious control over members of institutions can become fragile and then collapse under the bombardment of new information that discloses these rules for the first time, makes them seem illegitimate, or makes their enforcement seem remote. Furthermore, where rules are maintained by fear, such as that used by fundamentalist leaning religions, the risk of sudden collapse increases. Such collapse would be precipitated by the message getting through to an increasing number of members that the institution's fear inducing rules no longer have legitimacy or cannot be enforced. Think of the Soviet Union. Information that supports the legitimacy etc. of the rules, or keeps them hidden in the background, of course, has the opposite effect. Hence, the Church's attempts to persuade its members not to question or even look at information that might encourage them to question LDS orthodoxy.

The next couple of decades will be, I believe, of pivotal importance with respect to the future nature and health of the Mormon Church. I will enjoy watching the fray from a comfortable distance.

The Effect of Moving from Blind to Open-Minded Faith

Still not having fully shaken my Mormon roots, I can't resist the temptation to close with my "testimony" as to what it felt like for me to shed the influence of blind faith. I can do no better in that regard than to quote Robert Ingersoll, a contemporary of JS. His words fully capture my sentiments.

When I became convinced that the universe is natural; that all the ghosts and gods are myths, there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood, the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison crumbled and fell, the dungeon was flooded with light, and all the bolts, and bars, and manacles became dust. I was no longer a servant, a serf, or a slave. There was for me no master in all the wide world; not even in infinite space.

I was free; free to think, to express my thoughts; free to live to my own ideal; free to use all my faculties, all my senses; free to spread imagination's wings; free to investigate, to guess and dream and hope; free to judge and determine for myself; free to reject all ignorant and cruel creeds, all the "inspired" books that savages have produced, and all the barbarous legends of the past; free from popes and priests; free from all the "called" and "set apart"; free from sanctified mistakes and holy lies; free from the fear of eternal pain; free from the winged monsters of the night; free from devils, ghosts, and gods.

For the first time I was free. There were no prohibited places in all the realms of thought; no air, no space, where fancy could not spread her painted wings; no chains for my limbs; no lashes for my back; no fires for my flesh; no master's frown or threat; no following another's steps; no need to bow, or cringe, or crawl, or utter lying words. I was free. I stood erect and fearlessly, joyously, faced all worlds.

And then my heart was filled with gratitude, with thankfulness, and went out in love to all the heroes, the thinkers who gave their lives for the liberty of hand and brain; for the freedom of labor and thought; to those who proudly mounted scaffold's stairs; to those whose flesh was scarred and torn; to those by fire consumed; to all the wise, the good, the brave of every land, whose thoughts and deeds have given freedom to the sons of men. And then I vowed to grasp the torch that they had held, and hold it high, that light might conquer darkness still. (Robert. G. Ingersoll, "Why I Am Agnostic", 1896)

Ingersoll's words precisely trace some of the most powerful emotions I have experienced during the last 18 months while emerging from the rubble of my blind Mormon faith. I find several things fascinating about this man. He was one of the most sought after public speakers in America during a time when oratory was a primary form

of entertainment. He was a lawyer, who was also a devoted family man and above reproach in that regard. His attitudes in JS's relatively benighted day included opposition to the closed mindedness evidenced by the religious right; and strong support for the then still unpopular theories of Charles Darwin and all other forms of science and reason as opposed to the type of blind faith of which I have here written. Finally, he advocated an increase in the rights afforded women and African-Americans. That is, he recognized the essential importance of human equality to society.

Here we have a man who was one of the enlightened folk of his time. And we find in him some similarity to the ideas JS expressed, respecting women and black people at least, although Ingersoll took those far further than JS did. In any event, I am prepared to acknowledge that JS was enlightened in some respects, and became near the end of his life a talented orator. However, Ingersoll did not claim a prophetic (or even political) mantle and the power to control the lives of others it might have conferred. It appears that the popularity he enjoyed would have made that kind of power available to him had he chosen to take it. While it is impossible to say at this distance why he proceeded as he did, I am prepared to speculate that his commitment to the principles of rational thought assisted him in that regard. That is, he was free from the retarding influence of the magical worldview and blind faith that dominated JS's life (See D. Michael Quinn, "Early Mormonism and the Magic World View"; John Brooke, "The Refiner's Fire"; and <http://www.irr.org/mit/masonry.html>), as well as the emotional processes described in this essay. His rationality also led him to be dedicated to the democratic process, which dramatically distinguishes him from JS and his theocratic ambitions. Ingersoll also had an outstanding reputation for honesty and other admirable moral qualities.

I am prepared to assume that at least during the early stages of his prophetic career, JS had some powerful emotional experiences that he interpreted as the manifestation of God 's will to him. However, the evidence is very clear in my view that later on he fell prey to the very corrupting influence that he predicted near the end of D&C 121 would trouble most men. The example set by Ingersoll is far preferable, in my view, to that set by JS, Brigham Young or other early Mormon leaders. Ingersoll merely spoke the truth as he saw it, and invited others to investigate and form their own conclusions. In this he followed the best parts of our scientific and democratic heritage. Again, the comparison of Ingersoll to JS is revealing.

A review of Ingersoll's writing is also interesting in light of the often used LDS apologist excuse respecting the kind of bizarre events summarized in my review of certain aspects of LDS history above. That is, LDS apologists regularly indicate that we should not judge the actions of JS and other early Mormon leaders by our own much more rational standards. These men, they say, are a product of their time and so the use of "peep stones", "treasure seeking", "divining rods" etc. should not be taken to suggest the kind of superstitious craziness they would in our day. That is a fair comment. However, the more I read of how the educated and enlightened parts of American and European society functioned in JS's day, the more clear it is to me that he was at the far end of the superstitious, incredible end of the spectrum during his own time. So I now give the apologist argument just mentioned very little weight.

I also find it fascinating that the faith from which Ingersoll freed himself during JS's day produced in him sentiments so similar to mine. But perhaps that is not a coincidence. The faith JS fashioned, which I inherited as a Mormon, perhaps is an effectively freeze dried version of what Ingersoll shed. As I pointed out above, Mormonism is an arch conservative faith. While many of its beliefs have changed, it remains authoritarian to its core. In this it radically diverges from the mainstream of our society, and likely resembles the faith with which Ingersoll was acquainted. A similar analysis can be done respecting the female culture within Mormonism. Even today it seems to be an amazingly well-preserved version of the so-called "cult of true womanhood" that existed in the America of the early to mid-19th century. See <http://www.pinzler.com/ushistory/cultwo.html> for a summary. Or it may be that there is a certain universality in the emotional reaction, and its related heuristic response, that accompanies a dramatic and sudden perception of increased freedom. That is the essential nature of the experience I share with Ingersoll.

The part of my experience that I find most interesting, and to which Ingersoll alluded, is the zest for life, gratitude and joy that still regularly surprise me. For years prior to my "awakening", I had trouble getting out of bed in the morning and finding things to keep me interested as I passed my days. I seldom have such difficulty now. In fact, the opposite prevails. For weeks at a time I wake up with excitement (as I did this morning) earlier than usual with wonderful ideas spinning through my head, feeling rested and hungry to start my day. And I regularly find myself pausing as my heart swells over something I have learned or felt, while an almost tear inducing feeling of gratitude sweeps over me. I have wondered at times if this is a form of madness, so different it is from what I had previously known. I feel drunk with this freedom Ingersoll so eloquently described. And if such is madness, I wish it had found me long ago. Life must then be madness. I am now more alive than I have ever been.

Freedom is an intoxicating tonic. It intoxicates because of the new choices it provides and instability this creates. It is a tonic because over time it builds new strength and capacity. This is the story of human history – increasing freedom breeding both uncertainty and new strength.

As time passes and I become accustomed to the fresh perspective I am so fortunate to have found (or to have been found by, I am not sure which), it most often feels ordinary and comfortable – like an old friend whose presence is both routine and still deeply satisfying – while still occasionally filling me with fire. I do not regret the fading of the honeymoon feeling I so enjoyed. Thus life prepares us for next steps to be taken. However, I will never forget the thunderous entry freedom made into my life, and hope to share with my children and others the reverence it has inspired in me for the miraculous fact of our existence.

Who Should Guide Us? – Balancing Innovation and Tradition

Much of what I have written about is how we will choose our guides through life, and how much we will depend upon those guides as opposed to our own judgement. The

key point of much of the research and writing respecting mental health is that mental dysfunction is often caused by the tendency of individuals to fall under the undue influence of others, be they domineering parents, spouses, religious institutions etc. This tendency is at its worst, it seems, in the situations in which it is least expected. For example, parents and religious institutions should care for and nurture us. When these relationships are abused by those whose need for power overcomes their fiduciary duty to those entrusted to their care, the human guard is down and great damage can be done. As is clear from my views expressed above, I am strongly of the opinion that each of us will be better off if we choose to take more responsibility for our own actions, and cede less authority to religious and other authority figures.

This reminds me of another aspect of the two hour long interview I had with the General Authority mentioned above just before resigning my LDS Church membership. Toward the end of our time together as this well intentioned man was tiring, he said to me something to the effect that all "intellectuals" like me wanted to become "gurus" who would have their own followings; that "we" wanted to set ourselves up as sources of wisdom and leadership that would compete with the Church. This was a new idea to me at the time, but I have had a chance to think about it since. Here are a few of my thoughts.

First, what is an "intellectual"? There are many definitions. One I like comes from David Swartz's review of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work. Bourdieu is one of the world's most respected social theorists. Among his many contributions to the understanding of human society is the idea that "culture" can be understood as a kind of "capital" that functions in some ways analogous to financial capital, and that the various participants in the creation of cultural capital are largely motivated by their "misrecognized" interests. This points us toward the accumulation and exercise of power of different types which as this essay points out is critical to an understanding of Mormonism and other religious movements. Bourdieu notes that the "struggle for symbolic power" is at that centre of this phenomenon. And that symbolic power "involves the capacity to name and to categorize, indeed the capacity to make social groups." (Swartz, "The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu", p. 219).

Bourdieu continues:

... culture producers hold a specific power, the properly symbolic power of showing things and making people believe in them, of revealing, in an explicit, objectified way the more or less confused, vague, unformulated, even unformulable experience of the natural world and the social world, and of thereby bringing them into existence." (Swartz, p. 220, fn. 3)

According to Swartz, an intellectual is one type of "culture producer". And "intellectuals" are those who have an,

unusual sensitivity to the sacred, an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of the universe and the rules which govern their society. (Swartz, p. 221, quoting Edward Shils, "The intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays", p. 3)

I am pleased to count myself among the intellectual crowd, so defined.

A significant part of Bourdieu's analysis concentrates on the tension between the new and old intellectual orders. In that regard, he draws upon Max Weber's distinction between orthodoxy and heresy; priests and prophets. Priests and prophets struggle for the monopoly of cultural legitimacy and the right to withhold and confer this consecration in the name of fundamentally opposed principles: the personal authority called for by the creator or intellectual and the institutional authority favoured by the teacher or priest. (Swartz, p. 226) Bourdieu elsewhere refers to the difference between "creators of culture" and "curators of culture". The intellectual creators of culture oppose the interests of the curators of culture, such as the General Authority with whom I was visiting. As Bourdieu points out, the tension between these two camps is a simple power struggle. To the extent that the creators of culture are successful, the curators lose power.

A friend recently gave this power struggle a new spin, at least from my point of view. (Eve Ross, private correspondence, March 5, 2004) She noted that when she was at university, she thought it would be fun to read a lot of books on philosophy and cobble together her own "grand unifying theory" to govern her life, which is what she saw many of her non-LDS contemporaries doing. This, incidentally, is precisely what many theorists such as Scott Peck ("The Road Less Travelled" and other works) recommend as a critical aspect of maturation toward healthy adulthood. She did not do this because she felt obligated to accept the Mormon Church's "grand unifying theory" in its entirety and not to look beyond it, and this because she felt that she had received a testimony that "the Church is true". So, she thought, "Why waste time reading stuff I'm not allowed to believe?" She was jealous of her non-LDS peers who were using that time in their lives, away from parents for the first time, to individuate by studying many new things and deciding what they believed and what they didn't. That jealousy, combined with the cognitive dissonance that her belief position relative to what she saw in her friends produced, led her to judge her non-LDS peers: "They are wicked and proud because they think they know more than the holy prophets; they may even think they know more than God, who is omniscient. But I am humbly submitting to the will of God by accepting His Plan for me, rather than striking out on my own."

This friend suggested to me that perhaps the GA with whom I visited (and others like him) had great ideas of his own about religion, or church administration, which do not line up with current LDS doctrine and practice. Because of his curator status he is not able to implement, or even talk about, those ideas. And so he is jealous of "intellectuals" who set themselves free of the boundaries he has accepted. Perhaps he thinks to himself, "Those intellectuals think they can dream up a better plan than God's Plan. They might be smarter than me, but they're not as smart as God. I have to shelve my plans whenever they diverge from God's Plan, so those intellectuals should do the

same!" While I acknowledge that this theory is speculative, the GA's emotional response respecting this issue reminds me of the red-neck homophobes described above who have repressed homosexual tendencies hidden beneath their conscious anti-homosexual bluster.

Einstein said something along similar lines that displays his remarkable economy of words and insight when compared to my verbosity. He said:

Great spirits have always found violent opposition from mediocrities. The latter cannot understand it when a man does not thoughtlessly submit to hereditary prejudices but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence....

I respectfully submit that the information I have assembled above provides an explanation for what Einstein pointed out. And I am careful not to suggest that I should be considered to be anywhere near his class, or even that of the relatively unknown Robert Ingersoll. But, something else Einstein said justifies my puny efforts to state my insignificant opinion:

The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing....

So, I am not content to stand by and do nothing after understanding the nature of the fraud that was perpetrated on me and my loved ones mostly by well-meaning, but deceived, family members and friends who were acting (and continue to act) on the basis of the instructions of Mormonism's philosopher kings. Hence this essay. Hence the website on which I have posted it. This, while not much, is what I can do. And so I do it.

JS was a creator of culture. But as noted above, he was also a blind faith promoting power monger which in my view makes him much more dangerous than helpful and disqualifies him as an intellectual. Consider again the difference between JS and Robert Ingersoll. Ingersoll was a noted thinker, orator and leader. He enlightened many people with his ideas, and had power that he could have exercised to control the lives of others. But he did not do so, as I noted above, because of his commitment to open-minded faith and the democratic process. That is, he did not seek power. That, it seems to me, is the key difference between religious leaders of the Mormon type and intellectuals like Robert Ingersoll or many others of a similar type which I could name today.

Now, consider the difference between Ingersoll and another of his contemporaries, Brigham Young. Young was a curator of culture, and a power monger. He would have resisted Ingersoll primarily because Ingersoll would encourage the people think for themselves and this would dilute their obedience to Young.

While I do not I play in Ingersoll's league, my approach was similar to his long before I heard of him. For example, my little website (address noted under the title of this

essay) has recently undergone a surge of recognition and as a result I receive between five and thirty emails a day from all over the world. Many of those who write express thanks for my having expressed things they have felt but were unable to articulate, and likely for that reason feel that I might have insight into other things they have felt, and ask questions. My advice almost invariably contains a caveat something like this: "Nothing is certain; individuals widely vary in terms of what will be good or work for them as a result of genetic and environmental differences; and so I offer what I have observed as a result my reading and experience as just one person's view and wish you the best as you continue to work these things out for yourself." I tell my children and those closest to me that I do not want them to become like me. I want them to commit themselves to learning about themselves and the world, to decide what they value most and to then make the choices and pay the price to live in a manner consistent with those values. This I believe will enable them to experience the greatest degree of continual joy and satisfaction of which they are capable.

So, those who counsel blind faith and that we must take the path up which they lead are in my view not likely to be good guides. The General Authority I mentioned and those who stand with him are just such persons. Of course he does not like "intellectuals" of my type. While he did not mean that as a compliment, I take it as such. He does not like us because we counsel people to think for themselves instead of following blindly. This dilutes his authority. But most of us do not attempt to gather our own blind followers. That would be to transfer blind faith from one bad leader to another, and anyone who does so, whether they use religious faith or any other authority to close the minds human beings, is of the same ilk as the religious leaders of whom I am critical, and should be subjected to the same disdain. Rather, people like Ingersoll and me in my small way transfer power from institutions to individuals. Ironically, that was the essence of much of Christ's message, as it was Buddha's and that of many of the other sages. Their names and teachings have been often appropriated and harnessed by institutions and individuals for purposes that I am sure would profoundly sadden them.

The Nobel Prize winning physicist Richard Feynman has some of the best advice I have come across as to how we can sift through the wisdom offered by the creators and curators of culture by whom we are surrounded while making use of an opened minded, empowering, encouraging faith. I will let him speak for himself.

This phenomenon of having a memory for the race, or having an accumulated knowledge passable from one generation to another, was new to the world. But it had a disease in it. It was possible to pass on mistaken ideas. It was possible to pass on ideas which were not profitable for the race. ...

So there came a time in which the ideas ... accumulating [were] not only of practical and useful things, but [included] ... all types of prejudices, and strange and odd beliefs.

Then a way of avoiding the disease was discovered. This is to doubt that what is being passed [to us] from the past is in fact true, and to try to find out ... again

from experience, what the situation is And that is what science is: the result of the discovery that it is worthwhile rechecking by new direct experience and not necessarily trusting the race experience from the past. I see it that way. That is my best definition. ...

As a matter of fact, I can also define science another way: Science is the belief in the ignorance of experts. ...

In a field which is so complicated that real science is not yet able to get anywhere, we have to rely on a kind of old-fashioned wisdom ... I am trying to inspire [you] to have some hope, and some self-confidence in common sense, and natural intelligence. The experts who are leading you may be wrong. ...

Finally, a man cannot live beyond the grave. Each generation that discovers something from its experience must pass that on, but it must pass that on with a delicate balance of respect and disrespect, so that the race (now that it is aware of the disease to which it is liable) does not inflict its errors too rigidly on its youth, but it does pass on the accumulated wisdom, plus the wisdom that it may not be wisdom.

It is necessary to teach both to accept and to reject the past with a kind of balance that takes considerable skill. Science alone of all the subjects contains within itself the lesson of the danger of belief in the infallibility of the greatest teachers of the preceding generation. (pp. 185 – 188 in an essay entitled "What is Science?" in "The Pleasure of Finding Things Out – The Best Short Works of Richard Feynman")

What a refreshing approach. Science has its limits. Understand where they are, and acknowledge that you are flying more or less blind from that point on. All of the troubles that our ancestors had, and that are now apparent to us, are also our problems with respect to vast portions of our experience because we are flying blind. But, it would be foolish not to avoid the pot holes that have been identified with a high probability of certainty by prior generations.

In another essay, Feynman indicated something similar. He said:

It is our responsibility to leave the men of the future a free hand. In the impetuous youth of humanity [in which Feynman believes we now live], we can make grave errors that can stunt our growth for a long time. This we will do if we say we have the answers now, so young and ignorant, if we suppress all discussion, all criticism saying, "This is it, boys, man is saved!" and thus doom man for a long time to the chains of authority, confined to the limits of our present imagination. It has been done so many times before.

It is our responsibility as scientists, knowing the great progress and value of a satisfactory philosophy of ignorance, the great progress that is the fruit of

freedom of thought, to proclaim the value of this freedom, to teach how doubt is not to be feared but welcomed and discussed, and to demand this freedom as our duty to all coming generations. (P. 149 in an essay titled "The Value of Science" in "The Pleasure of Finding Things Out – The Best Short Works of Richard Feynman)

The Mormon propagation of the kind of certainty that only blind faith can create is one of the growth stunting influences to which Feynman refers. He continues on this theme as follows:

This modern society seems to be threatened by a number of serious threats, and the one that I would like to concentrate on and which will be in fact the central theme, although there will be a lot of subsidiary little items, the central theme of my discussion is that I believe that one of the greatest dangers to modern society is the possible resurgence and expansion of the ideas of thought control; such ideas as Hitler had, or Stalin in his time, or the Catholic religion in the Middle Ages, or the Chinese today. I think that one of the greatest dangers is that this shall increase until it encompasses all of the world. (p. 98 in an essay titled "The Role of Scientific Culture I Modern Society" in "The Pleasure of Finding Things Out – The Best Short Works of Richard Feynman")

Feynman has put his finger here on the LDS's Church's greatest foible. It is in league with the literal forces of darkness – those that darken minds instead of bringing the "light and knowledge" promised. I find great irony in this. The Church's most attractive claim from my point of view that "The glory of God is intelligence, or in other words, light and truth". That claim is made so consistently and effectively that members are deprived in the manner described by this essay of the perspective required to check it.

Feynman's view of religion in general was close to mine. In that vein, he said:

The remark which I read somewhere, that science is all right so long as it doesn't attack religion, was the clue that I needed to understand the problem. As long as [science] doesn't attack religion it need not be paid attention to and nobody has to learn anything. So [science] can be cut off from modern society except for its applications, and thus can be isolated. And then we have this terrible struggle to try to explain things to people who have no reason to want to know. But if they want to defend their own point of view, they will have to learn what yours is a little bit. So I suggest, maybe incorrectly and perhaps wrongly, that we are too polite. There was in the past an era of conversation on these matters. It was felt by the church that Galileo's views attacked the church. Nobody is worrying about it. Nobody attacks; I mean, nobody writes trying to explain the inconsistencies between the theological views and the scientific views held by different people today – or even the inconsistencies sometimes held by the same scientist between his religious and scientific beliefs. (See my essay titled "The Book of Mormon DNA Controversy ..." at <http://mccue.cc/bob/postmormon.htm> for an illustration of the kind of conflict and muddled thinking to which Feynman refers)

... A scientist is never certain. We all know that. We know that all our statements are approximate statements with different degrees of certainty; that when a statement is made, the question is not whether it is true or false, but rather how likely it is to be true or false. "Does God exist?" When put in the question form, "How likely is it?", it makes such a terrifying transformation of the religious point of view, and that is why the religious point of view is unscientific. We must discuss each question within the uncertainties that are allowed. And as the evidence grows it increases the probability perhaps that some idea is right, or decreases it. But it never makes absolutely certain one way or the other. Now we have found that this is of paramount importance in order to progress. We absolutely must leave room for doubt or there is no progress and there is no learning. There is no learning without having to pose questions. And a question requires doubt. People search for certainty. But there is no certainty. People are terrified – how can you live and not know? It is not odd at all. You only think you know, as a matter of fact. And most of your actions are based on incomplete knowledge and you really don't know what it is all about, or what the purpose of the world is, or know a great deal of other things. It is possible to live and not know.

Now the freedom to doubt, which is absolutely essential for the development of the sciences, was born from a struggle with the constituted authorities of the time who had a solution to every problem, namely, the church. Galileo is a symbol of that struggle – one of the most important strugglers. ... The fact that Galileo was right is not essential to this discussion. The fact that he was trying to be suppressed is, of course. (pp 111 - 113 in an essay titled "The Role of Scientific Culture I Modern Society" in "The Pleasure of Finding Things Out – The Best Short Works of Richard Feynman")

So, we should not simply throw out all of our traditional knowledge because it is traditional. There is, for example, much wisdom within the Mormon tradition that I have chosen to keep. But, it now has to pass certain tests before I will keep it. The fact that a prophet said something is no longer enough to cause me to put reason aside. And it simply does not matter to me how long ago the alleged prophet allegedly spoke (Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, Gordon Hinckley, the Pope, etc.) or how many of my ancestors and other have believed what he said. All potential sources of knowledge must pass the same test now. And I cannot describe the wonderful feeling of peace and security that comes paradoxically from my acceptance that nothing is certain.

Conclusion

Faith is one of the most powerful forces on earth. It fuels the miraculous process of science. It causes mankind to reach out to each other across borders as we attempt to resolve centuries old differences in the Middle East and elsewhere. It has created more unity in Europe than ever, and it is building a world-wide consensus respecting the need to take better care of our planet. On the other hand, blind faith is largely responsible for

many of those centuries old conflicts, innumerable other horrors many of which were expressly committed in the name of one god or another, our dismal environmental record, and the fact that science's progress was delayed for centuries by the Dark Ages.

One of the most amazing thing about blind faith is the manner in which today, in the most enlightened and wealthy places on the globe, it can still function so as to insulate large groups of human beings from the information necessary to grasp their surrounding reality. The font of this harmful behaviour is ignorance, uncertainty, and the fear they cause. In order to maintain control, many religions (including Mormonism) sustain this crippling triumvirate in spite of the negative effect that it has on their individual members. The perspective of people within the grasp of this type of ideology is so limited that they cannot see what is happening to them.

Blind faith builds walls of incredible imperviousness. I am proud to do what I can in my little corner of the world, in my humble way, to chip away at the walls of this type that a short time ago contained me. Such walls will not come tumbling down. But, when I look back a few hundred years, I see walls much higher than those that surrounded me. I have faith that as a result of the little bit I will do, and the little bit that will be done by many others, the world in which my children will live will be more enlightened, and in that sense better, than my world. And that several hundred years from now, perhaps one of my progeny will even read something I wrote, like this, marvel at how far mankind has progressed, feel gratitude for the little bit I did, and commit herself to do much more.

This is my hope. In this I have faith.