

McCue's

October 7, 2003

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
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Dear Elder Holland:

I was surprised to receive your letter. Frankly, I wrote to you more to say what I felt should be said than in anticipation of hearing back. I understand something of the burdens you carry, so let me say how much I appreciate both that you responded, and that you did so with such warmth. And rest assured that I will not show your letter to anyone. However, in some cases I will let people who are interested in such things know that you were courteous enough to respond to my somewhat pointed letter to you, and that your reply was warm and conciliatory in nature. I trust that this will be satisfactory for you.

I appreciate the concerns you expressed for my family, and can assure you that the spiritual environment in my home is better now than it has ever been. Were I to return to the Church, that environment would not likely change for the better. Regrettably, activity in the Church has proven itself to me to be much more about going through certain prescribed motions than it is about real spirituality. Those motions consumed far too much of my time and impeded my spiritual progress and that of others in my home. I now have the time and the intellectual liberty to explore spiritual issues that are so exciting and joyful for me that I am still regularly surprised by how wonderful I feel while engaged in that activity, and I have more time to spend with my children during which I try to share this enlivening experience with them. I am trying to help them each to find a spiritual way that suits them from among the many wonderful options of which I am aware, and I invite them to break new ground for themselves as they mature away from my influence. I don't want them to be just like me. I encourage them to discover themselves. Mormonism's clear indication that there is "one true way" and that it can only be found by following the dictates of Mormon authority figures interferes much more than it helps in this critically important part of the maturation process.

Your expression of love and the kind things you said about my immediate family, ancestors and me personally combined to create good feelings as I read your letter. But with the greatest of respect for you and without diminishing my appreciation of your letter, I must note that the issue with me never has been that of doubting the sincere nature and good intentions of other members of the Church, or its leaders. Most Mormons – as is the case with most Amish, Hutterites, Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, Buddhists, etc. – are wonderful people whose fellowship I enjoy.

My concerns relate to the gap I perceive between what the Church holds itself out to be, and what it is. And in the unlikely event you write back to me, I would be deeply grateful if you would address that issue in a substantive fashion. That is what my first letter to you addressed, and I have decided to further flesh these matters out in this letter. Contrary to the view you expressed, until my concerns in that regard are resolved I will not return to fellowship with the Church. There are only two ways of which I am aware to adequately deal with my concerns. Either I must find additional information to persuade me that I have misdiagnosed the Church's ills, or the Church must change. No expression of warmth or testimony will move me until one of those two things happens. I have been deceived in the past by trusting the feelings that such expressions create, and as a result ignored evidence that I should not have ignored and made a host of bad decisions. I will not be so deceived again. And I am not suggesting that you are attempting to deceive me. As I indicated above, I accept your letter as a sincere expression of your feelings and beliefs; but, sometimes the most-sincere of such expressions have unintended, negative effects.

I feel that I have done all I can to find information both pro and con respecting the Church in my attempt to understand it. For months I struggled to find ways to support the Church as it now stands, since if I could do that I would have avoided a lot of discomfort during the past year. But with an increasingly sick feeling in my stomach I eventually came to the conclusion that I cannot support it. I am still prepared to consider, however, anything you wish to point me toward that you think may help in that regard. And changing the Church is not something I can reasonably expect to do and so I am not going to try. I will leave that task to people like Lavina Fielding Anderson, whose efforts, integrity and stamina I respect. But I am not interested in bashing my head against a wall for the rest of my life. There are too many other more enjoyable and important things to do that have a much greater prospect of success. However, I have found and recorded a great deal of information that was helpful to me as I came to grips with the Church's reality. I plan to make that information available to other people, both members of the Church and others interested in it, who may wish to change the way in which the Church operates in their lives. I do this by participating in various on-line communities, and by making time to speak with people occasionally by phone and respond to emails sent privately to me. The community of people who do this worldwide is growing rapidly. They tend to be talented, well-educated people whose energy, enthusiasm and other resources the Church has used extensively in the past and could certainly use in the future.

As evidence of my good will in response to what you showed by writing to me, I have taken the trouble of spending quite a number of hours while travelling on a business trip for a week to write this letter, and then spent a few more hours editing it on my return. The time to write it came while riding on planes, between meetings and in the early morning and late evening, and has allowed me to detail for you both some of the main conclusions I have reached respecting the Church and the process by which I reached them. I am prepared to make this investment of time because you can change the Church, and there is a tiny chance, in my view, that if you read enough letters like this one you will experience a paradigm shift, and will have the courage to take action.

Given what I have learned through my participation in the on-line communities mentioned above, I believe that I speak for many who are at the moment on the Church's fringes. Some of them still attend Church at least occasionally due to an unwillingness to come "out of the closet" with respect to their religious beliefs, but do not actively participate and will not until progress of the kind I describe below is made. However, most of those people would not be frank respecting their concerns with you or anyone else in a position of authority within the Church, or even with members of their own families, due to the unwanted attention that would attract to

them. In me, at least, you have someone who will communicate honestly with you, and hence allow you to come to grips with issues that affect a significant and growing percentage of the population to whom the Church is relevant.

And I note that if I have learned anything over the course of the last couple of years, it is the wisdom of being prepared to admit I am wrong. And so I am willing to have you or anyone you wish provide me with such information or reasoning you as feel has a reasonable chance to persuade me that I am mistaken in what I am about to say. In the same fashion that I expect, based on what you have shown me thus far, that you will read and carefully consider the contents of this letter, I will read and carefully, prayerfully, consider anything you ask me to of similar, or even substantially greater, length than this letter and its appendix. And I recognize that I am still psychologically vulnerable to an inclination to believe the Church is true. I am under a great deal of unintentional but nonetheless real pressure from family and close friends to come back to the Church, and I have told them (on numerous occasions) what I told you above in that regard. The wisest and most healthy thing for me to do would likely be to shut the Church completely out of my life so that I can continue in relative peace to rebuild myself on a stable foundation without the irritation and distraction that are caused by issues related to the Church and its psuedo-history (i.e. "faithful history") and psuedo-science (i.e. Any science that contradicts Mormon orthodoxy is either not talked about or disputed). But if you will engage in an exchange with me, I will leave the door open a little longer.

In the unlikely event that the Church proceeds to change along the lines I am about to outline, you will find me and many like me to be willing helpers. Many of them are now the "pretend" members of the Church to whom I referred above. Others, like me, have left the fold but would be prepared to come back on certain terms. And I will in any event try to help you understand how one as faithful as I was could so quickly find himself in opposition to the Church without committing any sin or otherwise behaving so as to be "unworthy of the spirit" in the sense that a faithful Mormon would understand that phrase. I predict that you will see an increasing number of people similar to me leave the Church as time passes.

I apologize for this letter's length. I surprised myself with the volume of information that spilled out once I started to write. But I know you are a quick reader, and since I believe the information I have compiled may be useful to you I decided not to cut any of it for brevity's sake. However, I have reorganized it so that the body of the letter contains an overview and my conclusion, while the Appendix contains the detailed analysis which I expect you will reserve for a long airplane flight or some similar.

First, I will outline why I left the Church, then describe the process by which that occurred, and conclude with some thoughts respecting the contribution I think the Church could make to the lives of its members and others that would enliven both them and it. I don't apologize for the "steadying the Ark" nature of my concluding comments. It is healthy for each of us to be exposed to perspectives that come from outside our usual paradigm. I now seek that experience since I have found that I learn more from it than almost anything else. This is what I offer to you in this letter, and particularly in my concluding remarks, without the expectation that you will act on my advice, but in hope that you will understand how many people for whom you express concern see the world and the Church's role in it.

Why I Left the Church

The short answer is that my Stake President, in consultation some General Authorities, told me that I had to choose between either continuing to speak with a small group of my LDS friends about issues that I felt were essential to my continued spiritual growth, or remaining a member of the Church. I choose the former. A longer (much longer) answer is as follows:

I recognize that I need wisdom to guide my life. I was taught from my childhood up to trust the Church's leadership as the best source of wisdom. Your letter to me, while it was warm and welcoming, also held the Church out in this fashion. You suggested the inevitability of my return, and emphasized the wisdom and good intentions of those who lead the Church. Until recently, I would have agreed with you whole-heartedly as far as wisdom was concerned. When questions arose concerning things as disparate as moral reasoning, the theory of evolution, foreign policy and even my personal sexual practises within marriage, I always turned first to what the Church's leaders had to say for guidance. To the extent they had opined on a subject, the debate was usually over as far as I was concerned. Their logic became mine.

And I did not, as I suspect is the case with most members, appreciate the fine distinction between what a prophet says from the pulpit or publishes in a book and an "official" pronouncement of policy or doctrine from the Church. Most Church members would expect what the prophet says or writes in authoritative tones to be authoritative. Especially when Church members are taught to accept General Conference talks and Ensign articles by the First Presidency and the Twelve as modern scripture. The recent tendency to retreat in controversial areas to official Church pronouncements respecting things such as evolution is insulting to those (such as me) who were faithful enough to believe what the prophets said and wrote and to guide their education and other important aspects of their lives on the basis of the prophets' erroneous teachings.

Control Instead of Wisdom

I have come to the conclusion, after the most careful study and prayerful consideration of which I am capable, that the Church's leaders follow principles that are designed first and foremost to maintain or expand the Church's influence. This bias often leads them to miss or even purposefully avoid moving in directions that would benefit many individual members. It seems to me that this is caused by the leaders' perception of threats to Church leadership authority that they would be forced to face if they took certain actions. This institutional trait renders the Church an unreliable source of wisdom.

The explanatory thread running through many things that used to puzzle me about the Church is that anything that restricts the power of religious leaders and hence their ability to control member behaviour, is bad and should be suppressed. The Church can be counted on to fight, and has consistently to date, fought virtually all governmental, social and individual forces that have inclined to reduce its control over its membership. These have included government initiatives such as the US government's stance respecting polygamy; social forces such as feminism, individualism and the anti-establishment movement of the 1960s, 70s and 80s; and the increasing academic scrutiny to which the Church has been subjected.

The single most important issue for me in my decision to leave the Church is the understanding I reached that many if not most Church's prophetic leaders, starting with Joseph Smith and ending with Gordon Hinckley, have misled Church members and others when it was necessary to do so in order to secure the members' obedience. The extent to which Church's other leaders are aware of the extent of this deception is, however, not clear to me.

You mentioned Plato. While it is true that many say philosophy starts and ends with him, he had a few really bad ideas. For example, I am sure you remember his odious "metals" metaphor that is analogous to the ancient idea that underpins the Hindu caste system. And more to the point of this letter, how do you feel about his "philosopher kings" concept? As you will recall, they were the wise few who were justified in Plato's view in deceiving the masses when it was necessary to do so, since the masses were incapable of understanding what was in their best interest.

And what of Nietzsche's idea of the "pious lie", which he said is the foundation of all priesthoods? It describes behaviour in the religious sphere that is consistent with the philosopher king concept. Nietzsche condemned the pious lie, as do I, as did Joseph Smith. In the LDS plan of salvation, Satan beautifully articulated the philosopher king and pious lie approach and was vilified for it.

It is clear, in my view, that Joseph Smith behaved in classic philosopher king fashion, and that the LDS "faithful history" policy discloses a group of modern philosopher kings who feel justified in telling pious lies. I describe the evidence and my interpretation of it respecting both of these issues below to an extent, and in greater detail in the attached appendix. Until Church leaders stop deceiving Church members and others, I will have no truck with the LDS Church. It has deceived and taken advantage of me and others in a thousand ways as a result of the implementation of the faithful history and other authoritarian policies, and I will not give it the chance to do so again.

Your well intentioned talk that in part prompted my first letter, and Pres. Hinckley's accompanying "it is all black or white; truth or fraud" line, touched my philosopher king hot button. Such teachings seem calculated to, and in fact do, cause Church members to become less questioning and hence less apt to learn, and more fearful and hence more passively obedient and accepting of LDS pious lies. This is the worst of Mormon and all other religious cultures. It is stupefying. It justifies Marx's dictum about religion being the opiate of the masses. It is the stuff of philosopher kings. In the unlikely event you were to respond to this letter, I would be interested more than anything else in your response respecting this issue.

I note in particular the nature of Pres. Hinckley's "black and white" argument, which is an oft-repeated Mormon leadership theme. This is nothing more than a false dichotomy that performs the function of a debating trick, except he uses it on people who are willing to accept almost anything he says. How can anyone who has experienced the good side of Mormons conclude that Mormonism is 100% fraud? Therefore, if it is either all truth or all fraud, it must be all truth. This is the conclusion toward which Pres. Hinckley directs as many people as possible. But does this position make any sense in light of my life experience in general or experience with and study of Mormonism in particular? No, it does not. I cannot think of anything in life that is as simple as Pres. Hinckley represents this particularly complex issue to be, and my review of Mormon history and theology has brought me the almost certain conclusion that there are serious inaccuracies in the story the Church tells, and pervasive pockets of error within the LDS tradition that continue to influence it today. In short, Mormonism is a mixture of good and bad, truth and error. It is grey. But nonetheless, Pres. Hinckley attempts to win the debate by the manner in which he frames it, and due to how he is trusted, he will be effective in this regard with respect to many people, and was effective until recently in my case.

I do not accuse Pres. Hinckley of conscious trickery. But I believe that he is so sure that he is right that he is incapable of checking the intellectual linkages that underpin the means he uses

to push those who follow him toward what to him seems to be the only possible conclusion. Joseph Smith suffered from the same debilitating, philosopher king delusion. An interesting illustration of this point, and an explanation of its connection to reliability, comes from Smith's encounter with Henry Caswall, who had in his possession a document he believed to be a Greek Psalter that was later confirmed to be such. He presented it to Joseph, said he thought it was a Greek Psalter, and asked Joseph for his opinion. After consideration, Joseph pronounced it to be, without doubt, a dictionary of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Later after verifying through other means the document to be a Greek Psalter, Caswell said as follows in response to Dr. Willard Richard's assertion that, "Sometime Mr. Smith speaks as a prophet, and sometimes as a mere man":

Whether he spoke as a prophet or as a mere man, he has committed himself, for he has said what is not true. If he spoke as a prophet, therefore, he is a false prophet. If he spoke as a mere man, he cannot be trusted, for he spoke positively and like an oracle respecting that of which he knew nothing. (Grant H. Palmer, "An Insider's View of Mormon Origins", pp. 34 – 36)

And therein lies the problem with Joseph Smith for anyone who continues to accept him as a reliable source of information on the basis of which to make important life decisions. Given his history of either prevarication or innocent (but confident) declaration of inaccuracies, it is not wise to believe what he said on any topic unless it can be independently verified. Gordon Hinckley is in the same boat, in my judgement, as illustrated by his continued support of the faithful history policy, and his use of what is clearly a false dichotomy that in fact misleads his followers whether he intends this to be the case or not.

Joseph Smith's meeting with Henry Caswell in my view speaks volumes about the nature of the man. It is clear that Joseph was aware that many of his contemporaries could read ancient Greek. Hence, the argument applied to his translation of the Book of Abraham, that he thought he was safe in pretending to interpret Egyptian because during his lifetime was still an unknown language, did not apply in this case. Were he the clever, conscious fraudster some people claim him to be, he would surely have been wise enough not to take such a firm position respecting something he knew to be verifiable in his day unless he was confident in his conclusion. The Caswell encounter, however, is consistent with the philosopher king theory. Joseph believed his own press clippings. I think that during at least large stretches of his ministry he believed that god was guiding his actions, and that the Book of Mormon, Book of Abraham and other things he produced by what he thought was inspiration and called "translations" did reflect the contents of ancient records, even if he had only seen those records in vision and could not see them in vision or otherwise while he dictated what he thought to be their contents.

The bottom line is that during most of his ministry, it appears to me that Joseph Smith believed that he knew what was best for the people. And whether this was the result of a powerful vision or on the basis of dimly perceived impressions became less important as time passed and what was at stake with respect to maintaining his position of influence grew. This explains to me how he came to create the at first secret institution of polygamy when his sexual activity ran amok, and I can even understand how he could have come to believe that god inspired him to do what he did. He was a philosopher king after all, and once that attitude is sufficiently engrained it can be used to justify almost anything.

The Formulation of Mormon Wisdom

For most of its history and particularly in its post-polygamy phase, the Church has followed societal developments at the conservative end of the spectrum. All one needs in order to have a high probability of accurately predicting the Church's response to any issue is two things. First, an understanding of the Church's primal need to control its membership to the greatest extent permitted by circumstance from time to time, and second, an understanding of the Church's conservative nature.

The Church's governance structure at the top requires that fifteen aged men agree before anything of significance can be changed. These men are appointed largely on their proven ability over many years to control those who follow them and their willingness to follow the dictates of their own conservative leaders. A decision-making mechanism of this type seems to me to guarantee the Church's continuing conservative, membership control oriented stance for the foreseeable future.

Given the fact that the advice dispensed by Church leaders as to how we should live is strongly influenced by what is most likely to keep the people in line while changing things as little as possible, we should not be surprised to find that much of the best of what science and culture has to offer has been overlooked by the Church.

My review of the history of the development of the Church's doctrines and policies and how they have changed over time, correlated with how scientific and cultural theories have developed and changed during the same period, leads to the conclusion that thoughtful members of the Church would have often been better off making important life decisions on the basis of what scientific and other authorities taught instead of following the counsel of Mormon leaders. The evidence I have reviewed also strongly suggests that this is true in my day. This is because historically, as now, the Church's policies are determined by those twin predictable forces: The need to control the Church's membership; and conservatism. While I could turn this letter into a book with a complete summary of the issues I have come across that in my view illustrate this point, I will limit myself to the first two that come to mind: Skin colour and the "One True Church" idea.

Dark Skin Colour Equals Inferior People

Historically the dominant white races have assumed that they are superior to the darker colored races who they have typically conquered. Joseph Smith canonized this in the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young worsened the situation by allowing that erroneous idea to become part of the Mormon governance system when he excluded blacks from priesthood eligibility, and even now this idea permeates Mormon thought despite significant efforts of the leadership to get rid of it, including quietly amending the most offensive of the Book of Mormon's passages in that regard. The "dark skin = inferior people" idea was shattered outside of Mormonism and a few other purposefully ignorant corners of human society, primarily by genetics research and by the 1960s a healthy social change was underway in this regard. Not surprisingly, given its doctrine and conservative nature, the Church lagged far behind respecting this social trend. This point illustrates an important Mormon tendency. Where Church doctrine happens to be at odds with science or history, Mormon leadership becomes anti-science and anti-history, which goes against the general trend of Mormonism. I believe this is because the Church's leaders have come to value control over everything else, and if they admit past mistakes, then they will have to deal with questions concerning the wisdom of their own decisions. So, it is better to be selectively anti-history and anti-science than to deal with issues that may reduce their control over the membership. In my view, the Church needs to simply admit the mistakes that were made in the past, and take advantage of the wonderfully progressive ideas Joseph Smith left us. He even left us the tools to do this – his acknowledgement of leadership fallibility (including his

own) and "line upon line" are among his most important religious innovations in my view. But I digress.

When one reads books such as Jared Diamond's 1997 Pulitzer Prize winning "Guns, Germs and Steel", one finds a cogent explanation of why the light-colored races ended up in their privileged position. This has everything to do with which peoples happened to be in areas that also housed the largest array of domesticatable plants and animals. Given human nature as disclosed to us by our history (and religious history in particular), it is not surprising that these fortunates attributed what was probably circumstance to god-granted, innate superiority.

As a believing Mormon, I was precluded from taking Diamond's theories seriously because they contradict Mormon theories of the origin of man (Adam and Eve came into being at Independence, Missouri, for example). While Diamond's ideas (and those of the legion like him) are sure not to be undiluted truth, I am as certain as I am that the earth is round that they reflect much more of reality than what the Church has to say relative to the same topics. The core of information in Diamond's book has been extant for many years within the scientific community. Diamond simply wove it into a format that was accessible to laypeople. In this and a host of other areas, Mormon prophets are not only behind the knowledge curve, they often actively fight it. I do not want this influence in my life or my home. And I can find the usual, important bromides related to loving my fellow man, being a good father, and abiding by the golden rule in a thousand other places that do not require what has become plain to me is a spiritually and intellectually stunting silliness in belief and practise that Mormonism requires.

The One True Church

This idea is in my view the worst of all. It appeals to the basest element of humanity – the tendency we all have to accept any theories that suggest we are better than others, and to allow ourselves to be influenced by those who espouse such theories. The religious historian Karen Armstrong and a host of anthropologists and sociologists have demonstrated the ancient, tribal practise, mostly found in harsh environments such as those that gave rise to the Hebrew people, of justifying the killing of rival tribes in the fight for scarce resources on the basis that they are not god's people and hence their extermination is justified. As you know, the Old Testament is a history of this practise, and it is reflected in much of the Book of Mormon narrative, although there it is not as blatant.

It should be obvious that in our modern world of plenty, the "One True Church" idea is not only out of place, it is terrifically counterproductive. It is what caused 9/11. It tears the Middle East apart. And its horrors will continue to approach our homes and families as time passes. The Church should take steps to reduce the effect this idea has throughout the world, and where better to start than within the Church itself?

You might say to me, "Come on Bob, the Church does not teach you that you are better than other people. In fact, I can quote you all kinds of scripture and leadership statements to the contrary." I will agree with you in that regard. However, as is the case with so much of what the Church does, there is a double-mindedness in the Church's teachings that warps minds. The Church teaches that "The Glory of God is Intelligence", and yet consistently disparages and suppresses any branch of knowledge that questions LDS orthodoxy. The Church preaches that truth and honesty are paramount values, and even requires that each member who wishes to attend the temple answers in the affirmative the question, "Are you honest in your dealings with your fellow man?" And at the same time, the Church follows the "faithful history" practise and still uses the "lying for the Lord" policy, as well as defending Joseph Smith's use of it. A more

blatant example of dishonesty and situational ethics cannot be found. Again, the explanatory thread here is that anything that threatens Mormon leadership control will be resisted at almost any cost.

By the same token, the Church says that "God is no respecter of persons", "All are alike unto God", etc. while telling me that through my membership in the Church I am one of god's "elect"; that while others have a measure of truth, I have more than them and critical pieces that they lack, and have a duty to persuade others of that fact and get them to follow the Mormon leaders to whom I look as the final arbiters of truth on this earth, etc. How can the result of this not be that I come to feel that all things Mormon are better than all things not-Mormon? I don't see how it could be any other way.

As I shed the "One True Church" idea, I experienced a miracle. The lives of those by whom I had been surrounded became relevant and instructive to me. No longer did I feel that my way was best and so their way could not have anything of significance to teach me. And as I began to pay real attention to them, a treasure trove of uplifting, delightful human experience came into focus. And why would I pay serious attention to the world's great literature and art if it was all a pale shadow of the divine revelation? And in any event, after attending to my duties to work, family and Church (including reading my scriptures daily; reading my Sunday School and Priesthood lessons weekly; writing in my daily journal in an exercise of continuous self-testimony bearing; taking a between half and full day monthly to attend the temple; and preparing home teaching messages and other presentations for Church meetings just in case I had a few minutes left somewhere in my schedule), when was I going to read anything that was not required reading or contemplate the meaning of a piece of art? I had eyes that did not see; ears that did not hear; and a heart that did not feel.

As a Mormon comic recently put it, "Growing up Mormon was great, as long as you like sensory deprivation tanks." I wouldn't go quite that far, while appreciating the caricature he drew. I would say, however, that a Mormon life is filled to overflowing with monochrome Mormonness. A busy Mormon whose horizon is jammed with Mormon things is not likely to question authority.

You may be tempted to say, as a few of my friends and family have, "Bob, I am sorry that your experience with Mormonism was so negative, but that is not my experience at all, and you know that almost all active members of the Church would not agree with your assessment." I understand and accept that. However, let me point out that I was one of those faithful for many years. I was one of your enforcers and cheerleaders. And had anyone asked me if I was happy as a Mormon, and proud to be a Mormon, I would have answered a resounding yes. My feelings in this regard were based on the information to which I had access. In the same fashion that I perceived Paul Dunn differently after I found out that he made up most of his wonderful, faith inspiring stories, I have perceived the Church and my experience at its hands differently since I became aware of how it misled me. My eyes now see, my ears hear and my heart feels differently than before. This is a rebirth process. I remember how the world looks through the eyes of a faithful Mormon leader, and I know how it looks now. Can you say the same thing? I suggest that until you have climbed this particular mountain, you cannot understand the difference between the view from where I now stand and from where I used to stand. I do not say that you are down in a dark valley. But at a minimum, you stand on a different mountain with a completely different view. And I will not suggest that the ground I formerly occupied was like the place on which you stand; but it is fair to say that it is like that upon which the core of your faithful have built their foundations.

Scientific progress is made incrementally. One person makes a small discovery of which another becomes aware and then uses it to solve a problem respecting her research, which leads to another discovery, etc. Cultural progress is made in the same way, and as our society comes to grips with the moral issues that now must be addressed respecting genetic engineering and a host of related issues, I expect to see this incremental process again in use. There is no one source of truth, but miracles are regularly accomplished and what justly might be called divine revelation is received as a result of the collaboration of groups of people wrestling with related issues across the globe as they share their thoughts, findings and problems with each other. If the voices of Church leaders are worth hearing, this is where they should be heard. My impression is that you remain silent because you cannot speak until you are certain you are right. Since you will never be so certain, we will not hear from you and you will be shut out of the process that matters most – that of the formation of the standards on which our society will operate. It was with regret that I recently learned, courtesy of Dialogue and Duane Jeffrey, that the Church had declined an opportunity to make a submission to the National Bioethics Advisory Committee respecting ethical issues related to cloning. Here is the place for real prophetic insight. Do you have it, or not? It is, unfortunately, my observation that the Church's leaders are so focussed on extracting obedience from its members that they do little else, and the risk of being proven wrong in the future by what they say today forces them to remain silent in order to maximize their influence over the membership. The Church's circle has become smaller during my lifetime, and my recent review of LDS history indicates this to be a long-standing trend that I expect to continue indefinitely unless someone like you takes action.

The Church has largely consigned itself to the role of remonstrating with respect to the continual decline of society's values, while adopting in most cases those very values several decades behind the mainstream. Think of, for example, racial attitudes, dress styles, family size, birth control, mothers working outside the home and a host of other societal trends. Would it not be better for the Church's leaders to acknowledge that things will change, and then do their best to identify the principles on which they argue those changes should occur and fearlessly express their best considered opinions with the caveat that they are just that, and so allow those opinions to participate in the building block process I have just described? At present you are little more than a set of brakes that slow down, but do not prevent, the absorption of social trends within the Church. That does some good on occasion, but in my view it does much more harm. And it causes a great opportunity to be lost, in that you cannot effectively participate in the debate that determines the direction of change within our society. Your current approach concedes the decision as to direction to others, and then you fight a rearguard action that does nothing more than slow down the change within the LDS community. If your constituency really were the whole of humanity, your approach would be different.

I will not give up the wisdom and joy I have found outside the Church, and feel that my faithfulness to the Church kept me from many of these things because of the trench mentality that "faithful history" exemplifies. This mentality, it seems to me, has the effect if not the design of strengthening the Church by promoting virtually blind obedience (while always disavowing it, of course) and so augers against the interest of individual members. And while I would be prepared to bring what I have found back to the Church, I will not do so until the deception caused by "faithful history" and related practises stops.

To make matters worse, the Church throughout most of its history has perceived itself to be involved in an epic battle between good and evil. Some of Boyd Packer's most vivid imagery invoked in favour of the "faithful history" policy use the war metaphor. And as recent Iraqi, US and British actions relative to their interaction in the Near East prove yet again, one of war's first casualties is usually truth.

I should also say a little more about how religious belief influences decision-making throughout life, because this is in the end religion's most important function. As noted above, I need to make decisions now, and feel a moral obligation to use the best information available to me, and my best judgement in that regard. For example, what if one of my children turns out to be homosexual? Should I wait for Mormon leaders to eventually agree with the rising tide of evidence to the effect that genetics are often responsible for tendencies of this type, and until then allow my child to labour under the impression that he is fundamentally defective and must either lose his eternal life and live guilt-ridden by virtue of continual sin, or spend his life in misery while swimming against the current of his nature? Or should I reach my own conclusions on the scientific basis described above and teach my child that she is made in god's image, metaphorically at least, and should walk her path through life proudly and with as much joy as possible? In case you wonder, this is not an issue we have to face in our family, but it provided a useful thought experiment for me to work through.

And what of my great-grandmother who accepted a marriage proposal from a man over twice her age (William Paxman, then the president of the Juab Stake) who had been commanded by the First Presidency to take another wife (his fourth) in order to show the leadership flag for polygamy while the Church was still fighting the US federal government in that regard. Great grandma lived her life in loneliness while married, and when her husband died pre-maturely she was left with her three small children, no share of his considerable estate and came to Canada to homestead in poverty because that was the best opportunity available to her. I wept as I recently came to appreciate the extent to which her life was wasted and made miserable by obedience to a purported religious principle that in my view is probably and simply the result of Joseph's sexual folly.

How Mormonism has Affected Me, and What it Would Take for Me to Come Back

Then we come to me and how Mormon belief has affected my life. On the basis of faithful history's misleading stories, I made a host of important decisions that in hindsight look foolish. The rationale for my membership in the Church, and my willingness to spend so much time furthering its interests, was essentially this: I would trust my religious leaders and so would obey them in this life, and in exchange I would receive two things. First, I would experience a better life in the here and now than would otherwise be possible, and second I would receive the rewards of the Celestial Kingdom in the hereafter. As noted above, I have concluded that Joseph Smith – the man on whom I must rely for the validity of the Celestial Kingdom promises – is unreliable. And in any event, I have concluded that the primary value of all metaphysical claims is in metaphor, and still use some of Joseph's ideas in that regard. He was a great mystic, if nothing else. But I am no longer willing to put any weight on the literal accuracy of his promises.

As far as this life is concerned, it is now clear to me that the Mormon way does not provide more joy or a better life than is otherwise available. Mormons spend most of their discretionary time directly or indirectly selling Joseph Smith's afterlife products to themselves and others. That is a pipe dream. It is classic Madison Avenue. It is irony run wild – a group of men and women who hardly see their families as a result of spending so much time talking to other people about the importance of families being together here and hereafter. The structure of the temple ceremony is not accidental, in my view, in how it separates men and women until the Celestial room. That is the Mormon way. And I have rejected it.

I feel that Mormonism has misled me, robbed me of time and other resources, and encouraged me to live my life in fear of non-existent eternal judgement in such a way that I missed much of the beauty and wonder by which I am now, and have always been, surrounded.

I acknowledge that the kind of life the Mormon Church provides will be to the liking of some people, whether it is good for them or not. I also know a few, but only a few, members who are well informed as to the nature of the Church and its history, what it will demand and what it can reasonably be expected to provide in return, and freely choose to remain associated with it. These members tend not to be at the ultra faithful or leadership end of the spectrum, where I was. I have no criticism for them. They have made an informed choice as to how they wish to live, as is their right. And if my children make the same decision, I will have no criticism for them. But, I will do my best to ensure that they understand the reality of Mormonism and what it can reasonably be expected to deliver in return for what it asks, and encourage them to make their decision on that basis. There are in my view many other spiritually oriented organizations that provide much more, and require much less.

So, if I am again to be associated with the Church, it will have to "come clean" respecting a host of uncertainties respecting its history, authority and theology, give up a large measure of its control over its members, and begin to encourage its members to grow spiritually in the myriad ways possible for human beings instead of simply obeying their religious leaders. I do not expect these things to happen, and so am unlikely to re-associate myself with the Church. But I will note in any event for the record my view that the Church should become a facilitator – an expander of free will – instead of a controller of human beings. Mormonism is rife with irony, and none is more striking than the fact that the best parts of Joseph's theology, as represented by the Plan of Salvation and other things like his "man can become god" concept, point the institutional Church toward the role of expanding free will as opposed to what it currently does.

In my view, the explanation for the difference between the core of what Joseph taught and what the Church has become lies in another of his insightful teachings, to the effect that it is a sad truth of human nature that power corrupts. That idea was not, of course, original to Joseph (few of his ideas were), but he was wise enough to emphasize it as part of his movement's foundation, and I honour him for that. If he had established something like the failsafe measures modern democracies have used to deal with the endemic human problems caused by power's corrupting influence, things might be much different within Mormondom now, and I perhaps would not be writing this letter as a non-member of the Church.

The Process

The process I went through during my enlightenment (in the "French" sense of that word) has three stages.

Passive Acceptance Followed by Eyes Slowly Opening

First, while a fully faithful and believing Mormon I encountered "anti-Mormon" literature off and on over the years, and it never much troubled me. It seemed simplistic and so obviously biased that it was not worth considering. However, as time passed various inconsistencies between what the Church taught and what it did began to bother me. Principal among these were the time I was required to spend away from my family as a result of Church related activities, and the level of obedience required with respect to so many things that seemed to me both unimportant and the cause of the conflict between what I believed and felt the Church had taught me about the important things (like putting my family first, as I tried to do), and what the

Church required of me. But these concerns were not pressing enough to on their own motivate me to reconsider my beliefs. They, rather, bubbled beneath the surface.

Courtesy of the Internet, I ran across some articles critical of the Church about 18 months ago that were well reasoned, and for which I did not have easy answers. I encountered these things while trying to help one of my former young men who had run into them and was troubled enough that he had stopped attending Church. So for the first time in my life, I began to seriously address questions concerning the Church's foundations instead of dismissing them out of hand. And while doing so, I also began to think about the authoritarian related concerns mentioned above. You may find it useful to hear exactly how and why the tide turned in this regard. In a sense, you can thank FARMS for my change of heart respecting the Church. And if not FARMS specifically, then "faithful history" in general. The full account of that experience is in the attached appendix.

Critical Examination

The second phase of my change in view involved a critical examination of all of the things I had assumed true respecting the Church. The things under review included that Joseph Smith spoke to god and received a divine mandate from him; that the Book of Mormon was translated from golden plates Joseph received from an angel and contained a literal history of early inhabitants of the Americas; that while Joseph was human and made mistakes he was trusted by god with divine authority and hence I could trust him and take him at his word as well; and that the modern prophets (including you and your confreres) were likewise trustworthy and could be depended upon never to mislead me in a material way and to look after my interests in much the way my own parents would.

During the course of about a six-month period, I slowly came to the horrifying conclusion that much of what my religious leaders had told me during the course of my life, comprising my entire faith foundation respecting the Church, was probably false, and was certainly misleading.

Let me explain what I mean when I say that I have been misled. We will never know for sure what happened respecting many aspects of Church history and it is of course possible to reasonably differ as to the existence certain facts and their interpretation. But how can the Church justify telling its story with the certainty and conviction it does in light of the extant evidence respecting the relevant facts? History is all about assessing the reliability of evidence and hence the probability that one version of events occurred as opposed to another. It is highly improbable, indeed close to impossible, in my carefully considered opinion as a lawyer who goes to court on a regular basis, for you or anyone else to successfully defend the Church's record in this regard. What is required is an acknowledgement of wrong doing, apology for same, rectification to the extent possible, and most importantly a promise to never go down the same road again accompanied by the establishment of fail safe measures in that regard. It makes me ache to think of my wonderful son innocently telling the misleading stories he is as a missionary. I am embarrassed that I told those stories myself until recently. I feel bad about the people I converted to Mormonism. I misled them. You are no doubt familiar with the issues, and so I won't go down the list.

I am reminded of something the philosopher Daniel Dennett said in his recent book "Freedom Evolves". Speaking of the tendency some of those who work in his field have to go overboard while defending principles important to them, such as free will, he rhetorically asked how many philosophers have become famous as a result of advocating "ecumenical hybridism". The clearly articulated, radical positions, he noted, attract much more attention and are the stuff on

which reputations are built and books are sold. Another celebrated philosopher of a more practical variety, P.T. Barnum, was working on the same concept when he observed that "another one is born every minute", and that if you are going to tell a lie, it is best to tell a big one.

One does not have to be much of a cynic to recognize that if the Church told its story in a more responsible fashion it would lose much of its marketing panache. The idea that Joseph had some compelling dreams or visions (like so many others in his day), the content of which he was not sure (as evidenced by his changing accounts respecting them), and that he felt inspired to write a book after dreaming of golden plates on which an ancient history was recorded, and that he was aided in writing that book by extensive use of the Bible, other books he had in his possession whose themes he clearly borrowed, and certain aspects of his family's tradition. This story is nowhere near as inclined to attract attention and followers as the story the Church uses for marketing purposes.

And we also should not forget Joseph's history as a treasure digger, during which he developed the ability to spin fabulous, visionary tales that attracted patrons who paid him for his services as a seer even though he was never successful in finding treasure. In this regard, his behaviour bore a striking resemblance to modern mining stock promoters who play at the fringes of legality in our modern society. A significant part of what Joseph taught as a Mormon prophet has the distinct markings of the magical or alchemical environment in which he operated in this regard. Michael Quinn's research along this vein, as well as the book "The Refiner's Fire" by the non-Mormon historian John Brooke, provide a fascinating picture of the superstitious world in which Joseph and many of his type lived and why they had credibility in certain parts of their society while being regarded by most as operating illegally and immorally. Joseph was one of the "clever folk" within this tradition, who had a social status in most circles similar to that of the snake oil salesmen of his day, and the borderline fraudulent stock promoters and multi-level marketing executives of our own. I am grateful to an inactive Mormon who is still sympathetic to many aspects of his religious roots and teaches law in Washington, D.C. for patiently helping me through my denial respecting both Quinn and Brooke's work while I was still "faithful" enough that FARMS opinion was enough to shut my mind to the insights they provide. Their reviews of both Quinn and Brooke are examples of biased, unreliable scholarship.

I am prepared to assume that Joseph was not a conscious fraud, although there is evidence to suggest he may have been. But it is clear that at a minimum he tended to adopt interpretations at the spectacular end of possibility respecting his life experiences, that he did not bother to explain the difference between vision and reality or metaphor and literality, and that this tendency was particularly in evidence when it came to what was required to get people to do what he wanted them to do. This was the case whether they were wealthy neighbours who believed in the possibility of Spanish treasure buried in the vicinity, religiously inclined folk who thought god could appear to human beings, Church members who he wanted to invest in something, or women with whom he wanted to have sex. You and I both know many people who tend to see much more of what they want and less of what really is, and I suspect that you do not trust them any more than I do. Joseph Smith appears to have been a far more extreme example of this type of personality than anyone with whom I have personally been acquainted.

Regrettably, I have determined that the evidence strongly supports the conclusion that Joseph did not speak with god, did not translate anything in the ordinary sense of that word and has been proven to have either lied or innocently misrepresented his abilities as a translator on many occasions, and without any question lied uncounted times over a period of many years to the members of the Church and others respecting important matters such as his sexual

activities and business affairs related to the Church. Hence, the evidence strongly supports the fact that Joseph Smith was not trustworthy.

This euphemistically referred to "lying for the lord" issue was the clincher for me. I cannot trust that Joseph will provide me with accurate information whenever what he said related to something that was designed to encourage obedience of the Church's membership to his commands. We are virtually certain that he used the "ends justifies the means" reasoning on many occasions to support dishonest communications, and in other ways seems to have claimed what amounts to divine exemption both from the law of the land, and the basic tenets of moral law. Quinn uses the apt term "theocratic ethics" to refer to this behaviour.

It is highly probable that Joseph Smith thought of himself as a philosopher king without likely ever hearing that term. It is fascinating to me that he could have had such a clear and intuitive grasp of these issues, as evidenced by his articulation of Satan's plan in that wonderful piece of mythology Mormons call the Plan of Salvation, and could have fallen so completely into the very hole he pointed out for all to see. Once the extent of Joseph's duplicity registered with me, I could no longer believe the many things he said about how he received his authority and why the people should follow him. And hence I cannot believe the claim modern Mormon leaders make to special divine authority, since they claim it through Joseph.

And Elder Holland, I must tell you how disgusted I am with Joseph's sexual behaviour. The evidence I have reviewed is very clear to the effect that he used his position of authority to take advantage of many women, some of them married and others very young; all of them innocent believers in his divine mandate. And those who refused him often had their reputations besmirched and suffered in other ways as a result of doing what was right. You can imagine my surprise when I read psychological studies that, without mentioning Joseph Smith, described his profile (charismatic religious or other leader, etc.) and predicted that he would have trouble keeping his trousers up while in willing female company, and that as the alpha male of the group he led that he would not have trouble finding compliant companionship in that regard. One writer called it the "Bill Clinton Syndrome". As was the case with the pious lie, which I have long believed applied to all religions other than mine, I was by these studies treated to more evidence that the Mormon Church and its founder were just like all the rest – no better, and no worse – just another group of people trying to make sense out of their existence, led by a man who had some great ideas, was a charismatic leader, and was subject to all the usual human leadership foibles, including helping himself to the sexual prerogatives that leadership of human groups usually offers. And when those foibles caught him in public, they became the basis for a terrible, at first secret and deceptive, doctrinal diversion and social experiment that eventually was responsible for his death and untold later human suffering. I referred to my great grandmother above. She and her children were among those whose lives were twisted by polygamy. It continues to this day, as you know, to inflict suffering on many people connected to Mormonism.

One of the best things you could do, in my view, is to acknowledge polygamy to be the error and sin it was, and to give clear direction to the effect that it will never again be part of Mormon life, here or hereafter. I know that you can't do that without the agreement of your Brethren, which will not be forthcoming. This is one of the many reasons for which the gulf that now separates me from the Church is too wide for me to expect to ever cross it.

I have thought carefully about this next statement, because it is perhaps the most important thing I have to tell you. I could have remained a member of the Church and continued to support you and it with the knowledge that Joseph Smith was both inspired on many occasions

(I still use "men are that they might have joy", and most of the later part of D&C 121 as my central life tenets) and also deeply in error on others. But I cannot support an institution led by people who perpetuate their power, and even extend it over new converts, by causing innocent young people and uninformed adults to bear solemn testimony to stories that I must assume the leaders understand to be misleading. The only justification I have heard for this course of action is the one that B.H. Roberts met when he presented his finding respecting the Book of Mormon to the Twelve many years ago – that they knew it was somehow "true" and that god in due time would provide answers to the troubling questions B.H. raised. I don't know what the balance of evidence was then, but I understand it now and I cannot strongly enough express my view that the Church is no longer justified in telling its story as it does to people who trust it completely and rely upon it for guidance. And the use of innocent agents to disseminate this misleading and highly influential information is morally repugnant.

Dallin Oaks' indication that the Church does not have a duty to tell both sides of the Church's story is simply wrong. You have led the members to believe that you will look after their interests and so have put yourselves in a position analogous to, if not in fact, that of a trustee. If you have not done so, I advise you to consult your lawyers respecting the Church's potential liability by way of class action lawsuit in this regard. In my view, it is only a question of when, not if, one will be launched against the Church and perhaps its leaders personally in that regard. You may be aware of similar litigation in Canada with respect to a Mormon fundamentalist group led by a man named Winston Blackmore in the Creston, British Columbia area. While I am not inclined to make it, it is my view that a similar claim could be made against the Church. The "faithful history" policy, which is the cause of most of the trouble in this regard and as far as I can tell is still in force, is a blight on the record of the modern Church and may end up engraving its tombstone.

Reconstruction and Surprised by Joy

As a result of my experience in the second phase, the beginning of the third phase was dark. I flirted with nihilism, but eventually backed away from that abyss. However, I was then free to seriously reconsider a kind of literature I had started to read years ago (my undergraduate minor was religious studies at the University of Alberta) but had not previously wished to understand. This led to hundred of hours of study, prayer and writing that has reshaped my spiritual landscape for the better.

As I have considered theories of a more naturalistic variety, I have found explanations for many of the very things that so disturbed me during phase two. Anthropologists and sociologists helped me to see patterns in the way young religious traditions and their rituals start and evolve that fit the Church perfectly. Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Max Weber and others painted the big picture of religion and mythology in glowing colours. Psychologists and neuroscientists helped me to understand why so many people from different religious traditions, and irreligious people in settings that have nothing to do with religion, all have similarly moving experiences, and so I came to understand the neurological and social roots of my Mormon testimony. Biologists, linguists and anthropologists such as Jared Diamond, Steven Pinker and Pascal Boyer helped me to understand the evolution of human kind to its present state, why the races are as they are, why some parts of the world seem to have been perpetually poor and others rich, and both the wonders and terrors that our increasing knowledge respecting genetics is about to release upon us. My training as a Mormon had shut me off from most of these things, because anything that questioned the prophets' teachings was taboo as far as I was concerned. I felt like a clamp had been released from my brain. I now feel more joy more regularly than

ever before in my life. The genie is out of the bottle, and cannot be put back in. I have been reborn.

I hope you will not think me unwise for relying upon the "arm of flesh" as I now do. As I noted above, I only resorted to this after a careful review of the historical record comparing what the Church taught and what the theories of scientists etc. were on particular points at different times throughout history, and which views so far appear to have been most wise. I have come to the discomfiting conclusion that I am my own best guide. No one – regardless of how well-intentioned, self-assured or willing to provide advice they appear – can be relied upon to look after my interests. And so while I acknowledge my many weaknesses, I am the best guide I have.

This reminds me of Abraham Heschel's fine book entitled "The Insecurity of Freedom", which I tried to read as an undergraduate and could not grasp. I thought at that time, "I am both free and perfectly secure. What is Heschel going on about? What a waste of time!" I now understand. I was not free. The freedom I thought I had was illusory, as was Emma's when she received D&C 132 from John Taylor on Joseph's behalf and was told to prayerfully consider it and god would tell her that it was right, and if she did not accept it, she would be destroyed. The information to which I had access was controlled; my time was monopolized; my behaviours were controlled by fear that a huge reward I had been conditioned to believe existed might be lost to me if I made even the slightest misstep and did not continually extend myself to do more of what the Church commanded; etc.

Now that I am free, I feel Heschel's insecurity. It enlivens me, and has lit a fire inside of me that makes me want to search, learn and seek god's voice more fervently and sincerely than at any other time of my life. And as noted above, I also feel more energy and joy than I can ever remember feeling. How can this be a bad thing? And rest assured, I am not making any of this up to justify my position.

What are the Church's options?

Let me first say that I understand that even if you agreed with the concerns I have expressed, you would likely feel unable to let me know that, just as B.H. Roberts could not be frank about his concerns respecting the Book of Mormon when responding to the innocent young member of the Church who wrote to him about questions a scientific colleague had raised in that regard. B.H. told that young man that "all was well" respecting the Book of Mormon, despite as a result of the young man's questions having debated his concerns respecting that book for days with the Twelve and the First Presidency, and having written a detailed report respecting the same thing.

I also recognize other aspects of the difficulty of your position. To admit the Church leadership's past errors and current fallibility and tell the members they have to think more for themselves would cause the Church to lose influence, at least in the short term. Few humans have enough integrity to give up power. And in order for the Church to do as I have suggested, all fifteen of the aged men to whom I earlier referred would have to agree that this was the right thing to do. The probability of this happening, in my view, is close enough to zero to be called zero. These are the kinds of practical problems that often dictate the outcome of important decisions within human organizations. They illustrate why politics is referred to as the "art of the possible" and I am now alive to the political reality of Church leadership. Oh that god spoke clearly, and that there was a single prophet who could hear his voice and act in accordance with it! This is the kind of silver bullet mankind has hoped for, and hence has been the stuff of myth ever since

humans first started to record their histories. So why are we surprised that this precisely what the vast majority of members of the Church believe to now the case with Gordon Hinckley? And you and I both know how far from reality that myth is, and that the Church's leadership allows it to perpetuate itself unchecked in testimony meetings, lessons and firesides around the world each week.

It is my observation that the Church is at a significant crossroads, created by the Internet. The way it chooses is likely to determine its nature, and health, for a long time to come. I would like to suggest the use of an evolutionary paradigm within which to consider how the Internet may affect the Church. A brief overview of how evolution works and how it might be said to apply to some aspects of prior Church history may be helpful to put this issue in context.

I have come to the view that evolutionary theory is one of the most useful tools available to us as we seek to understand the physical and cultural worlds in which we live. The first question we should ask ourselves in trying to predict how any new element in an environment will affect the evolution of what it touches is simply this, "who benefits?" That is, which organisms will grow in strength and which will be weakened by this new element? Some writers characterize the evolutionary process in terms of a series of "collisions" between different organisms which elicit various reactions from each and which will result in one organism being weakened or consumed by the other, while that other is strengthened. Much of what is most interesting, and surprising, in life occurs as a result of these collisions, particularly in terms of revealing abilities an organism has available to it when threatened in some way. Only necessity, it seems, is capable of bringing certain capacities to the fore.

The Church has shown a remarkable ability to respond to threats by adapting to its changing environment, but unfortunately and also in accordance with evolutionary theory, has tended to do so in ways that are primarily designed to enhance its power even when the necessary consequence of those actions is to harm the interests of many individual Church members. The attached appendix contains a number of examples that illustrate this point.

Overview of Historical and Anthropological Trends

In each of the cases referred to in the appendix (Church v. Illinois society in the mid-1800s; Church v. US Feds in the late 1800s; Church v. Civil Rights in mid-1900s; Church v. Feminism and Intellectuals in late 1900s) the Church acted to preserve or extend its power base, and has only given up power when forced to do so. However, in the most important of the conflicts above, that respecting polygamy, once two bad ideas (civil power vested in a religious organization and polygamy) were forced out of the Mormon system, the Church's response was to first develop new and more subtle control tools and then to take advantage of the fact that it had been forced to become more mainstream. This illustrates the Church's adaptive flexibility, but unfortunately also illustrates its interest in maintaining as much control as possible over its membership.

The Church's emphasis on control over its members would have been predicted in the situations described above by the anthropologists who study these things. I think that you would find interesting "Religion Explained" by Pascal Boyer, a book I referred to above. While it falls far short of its title, it does explain a number of phenomena. A couple of those are worth mentioning.

First, complex religions arose shortly after writing was created and specialization of all kinds resulted. Religious specialists – or priests – were one of the new specialist classes and

functioned much like the ancient guilds. As long as there was only one religious game in town, often sanctioned by the ruling authorities, the religion in question flourished. However, as society became more pluralistic religions had to find ways to distinguish themselves from each other. Selecting a religion is not like buying a new car – you can't test drive a few and see which performs the best. Most of the benefits promised by religion are of such an ethereal nature that they cannot be tested until after death. Hence, many religions developed early and have since maintained an extensive list of attributes designed to create a monopoly for their services. These tools are also what religions use to control their membership.

Isolation from all other religions is the best kind of monopoly. Another common example of a monopoly creation tool is the idea that salvation or other afterlife benefits come only through a particular brand of religious belief. The Church's emphasis on the possibility of eternal family life and the making of and obedience to temple covenants in that regard is a particularly potent variation on this ancient theme. The Church's tendency to keep its members so busy that they have time for little else is, in my view, simply another manifestation of this sociological tendency that most religious groups exhibit to one extent or another.

It is perhaps not fair to blame institutional religions for the monopolies they attempt to create. It appears that the masses want certainty respecting the inherent uncertainty of life, and religious leaders simply cannot resist the conscious or unconscious temptation to gain and maintain influence by purporting to provide that certainty. Joseph Smith, for example, started his career as a truth seeker unbound by dogma of any kind, and encouraged that attitude in his followers. He also acknowledged his fallibility while coming up with some innovative ideas that addressed issues of concern to many people in his time and place. But as his influence increased, he became less open to any ideas other than his own and hence more dogmatic and less willing to follow many of the very principles that made his movement attractive in its beginning. As he pointed out in D&C 121, power corrupts, and I believe that it corrupted him. And at each stage of the historical process described above, the Church's primary concern may fairly be described as maintaining the illusion for its members that it was still god's only authorized source of salvation, and hence they would be secure for only so long as they remained obedient to their religious leaders, and hence those leaders maintained as much control over their membership as possible as the environment in which the Church was forced to operate changed over time.

Second, the anthropologists have noted that the more harsh the society in which a religion developed, the more authoritarian it is likely to be. This explains the nature of ancient Judaism and Christianity. And while Joseph Smith was charismatic in his organizational style, Brigham Young laid the foundations of the modern Mormon Church during Utah's pioneering period. That was a harsh environment and the structures it caused to be formed still heavily influence the Church, in my view. As the Church matures, it should become more open and less authoritarian. And as I am about to point out, it may now become critical that the Church changes its nature in that regard.

The Internet v. The Church

The Internet has created an environment in which it is not longer possible to control access to information. Organizations such as communist regimes or dictatorships that depend upon information control to maintain their power base will continue to lose power as the Internet becomes more a part of our everyday lives. On the other hand, organizations such as democracies that derive their power from the collective power of their members, and who facilitate their members' use of the Internet and all other available tools in order to enhance the members' power, will thrive. The same analogy can be drawn between the old top-down,

pyramidal structures that dominated the business world until recently, and the flatter, more network-oriented organizations that dominate the business world today.

In a world where information is hard to find and sort, the people at the top played the role of gathering and analysing information, and then passing the relevant bits on to those below them with instructions as to what they should do. Today, many organizations have found that the grassroots members of the organization have access to much more information relevant to their functions than those at the executive level, and the role of the executive has become that of harvesting information from the members of the organization, organizing and making available to all as many as possible of the ideas that have percolated up to the top, and in other ways encouraging the members to expand their capacity to learn and do. The better the leadership facilitates this kind of membership maturation and improvement, the stronger the organization becomes. Leaders have become facilitators rather than commanders, and the primary organizational paradigm is the network. And it is possible in some cases to belong to, contribute to, and benefit from membership in a variety of networks. Those networks that provide the greatest benefits relative to their costs will dominate.

So my question is, will the Church move toward becoming an open network designed to facilitate individual choice and growth, which is what Joseph Smith said he was trying to create, or will it continue to attempt to seal its members off from all information that casts doubt on the misleading stories the Church tells, and by so doing stupefy and weaken them?

It is my view that an increasing percentage of the population hungers for a mythology that weds a familiar spiritual tradition with science's increasingly useful and undeniable role in our lives. That is what many aspects of the New Age movement attempt to do, and why they are becoming so popular. It is also why many aspects of Buddhism and other eastern belief systems are making inroads into Western culture. Some aspects of the theology the Church inherited from Joseph Smith, including his acknowledgement of fallibility, "line upon line", and his embrace of the scientific approach to life, well suit it among the western religious traditions to meet the spiritual needs of modern man, and I believe that its long term prospects could be dramatically improved if it chooses to go that way.

However, as long as the Church continues along its current path respecting the Internet threat, which was characterized by your and Pres. Hinckley's talks (don't question; stay away from the fringes of the community; it is all black or white; etc.) it will in my view see its potential base of members continually shrink. The better informed they are, the less likely they are to be interested in Mormonism because they will see the huge gap between what the Church says about itself and what can reasonably be inferred from the evidence. The Church will become increasingly seen as a modern version of the Amish or Hutterites – only appealing to the ignorant or those who were born and raised within the tradition. And once it has gone too far down that road, I question whether it will be able to come back. In times past, the Church could reinvent itself and within a relatively short time most people would have forgotten what it once was and there would be nothing to remind them of that. That is likely no longer the case, thanks again to the Internet. The Church's sins will be continually on display for all to see. Therefore, the sooner it acknowledges its errors, repents etc., the sooner that fact will be on the record and the more forgivable the delay will be between when the problems should reasonably have been recognized based on the evidence extant, and when remedial action was taken. The longer evidence is allowed to accumulate against the Church's position without being dealt with, the more its long-term institutional credibility will be damaged.

The Church's Potential Role in Spiritual Life

I note, again, that my most significant complaint relates to the deception on which most of this letter has focussed. That cannot be reasonably defended. Were the Church to rid itself of that, what would be left is a healthy mythology in most respects, and in some respects a mythology that could in my view perform a critical role as humanity attempts to bridge the gap between a pre-scientific, mythological world and our current mostly science based worldview.

Science has proven better than anything else at teaching us the hows, but it cannot address the whys. They will remain within mythology, or religion's, purview. And, in my view Joseph's greatest contribution to mythology bears on this point. He echoed without knowing it some of the best ideas of people like the Jewish philosopher Spinoza and anticipated many concepts that have since been articulated people like Albert Einstein in terms of how religion and science can walk down life's path together. If the Church chooses to honour Joseph's prescience in that regard, while rejecting the mistakes he and other Mormon leaders made, I believe that Mormonism could develop into the platform of choice both for those who simply want a comfortable place to live and do not wish to think for themselves, as well as for those who see (or at least think they see) the big picture and are inclined to help expand it and bring it into clearer focus.

When I explained a little about the control related concerns I have respecting the Church to Bob White, a local General Authority and someone I have known for many years, part of his response to me was that if the Church surrendered its control position, that would leave its members exposed to people like me who would then come along to tell them what to do, and fill the power vacuum the Church would have created. And then the members would likely be confused and would make the wrong choice, such as to believe people like me instead of continuing to obey the Church.

I first note that I will be the last person to try to create a religious followership, but I am sure many others will offer their services in that regard. I also note that Bob White's statement is classic philosopher king talk – we can't trust the people to make their own choices because they will decide wrongly (i.e. They will not obey us any more). And I finally note again that in my view the Church's philosopher kings have caused it to abuse its position of trust. That conduct is inexcusable for a modern religious organization. The Church should hence stop doing that and should set up the kind of failsafe measures democracies use to prevent the inevitable abuses of authority will recur within the Church without those measures. If the combination of these steps causes the Church to lose influence, so be it. The Church should have no influence that the people do not freely grant it on the basis of the most accurate information to which they can reasonably have access from time to time.

After having taken the above steps, the Church would operate from the high ground on which I always assumed it stood. It could define itself as a religious organization that helps its members seek truth of all kinds, and make the spiritual progress that each of them is uniquely suited to make. There is no one size fits all. And the Church could help its members to recognize the charlatans of all types who walk among them. I would be proud to again be a member of the Church were it to operate on such a basis. And after a while (it might be a long while) of the members receiving this kind of education at the Church's hands, Utah may even lose its reputation as the best place in the developed world to perpetrate financial fraud. There is more white-collar fraud per capita in Utah than in any other part of North America. This fact is likely due to the gullible, authority craving nature of the Mormons who comprise the bulk of Utah's population and are the bait that attracts the fraud artists. That Mormon tendency is the

unsurprising result of the conditioning to which the Church's leadership subjects members of the Church.

Conclusion

The story I have told you in my usual long-winded fashion about why and how I left the Church typifies what I expect you to hear more frequently as time passes. And as the third world becomes more connected to the Internet, missionary success will slow down there as it already has in the developed world, and my type will begin to make its appearance among Church members in Latin America, Eastern Europe and other similar places. And this is likely to happen more quickly than either you or I might guess. We are dealing with a phenomenon that has an exponential growth curve.

In the extremely unlikely event that you write to me and say, in essence, "Bob, I acknowledge the legitimacy of the problems you have raised, and as luck would have it this generation is that in which the winds of constructive change will start to blow within the Church. And these will not be breezes, Bob. Prepare for a hurricane, and pay close attention to what I and others of the Twelve and First Presidency will say at the next few General Conferences," I will shed tears of joy and will prepare to re-direct part of my life's energy back toward the Church. But until I hear such a message, and see evidence of real change, I have found too many wonderful things outside the Church's ambit and that are inconsistent with it, for me to go back. And most importantly, I want my family to have the kind of life I now have, and not the kind the Church taught me to have.

In my view, there is no oracle, Mormon or otherwise, who hears god's voice in full sentences. And as you know, it has been a long time since any Mormon prophet has made the claim to be such. I am grateful that Mormon leadership honesty has at least reached that level. However, there are many who as they wander through this beautiful, fascinating garden that frames our lives, hear whispers or catch fleeting impressions here and there that seem to bear god's faint imprimatur. In recent years, the observations of these many people have become increasingly accessible to the duller rest of us. As we understand the phenomena those observations describe, we take steps toward god in the only possible way.

If the devil in the details, we seem to catch our most thrilling glimpses of god in the macro level patterns that disclose the elegant laws that govern our existence. I would suggest that Joseph Smith is only one of many who have evidenced the ability to discern these patterns, and I am confident that despite his many serious flaws and errors, he was among the gifted in that regard.

I intend to spend the rest of my life listening in many places for god's whispers and trying to see his fingerprints and discern his will in the patterns that those more erudite than I spend their lives uncovering. And I will govern myself according to what I find in this regard and seems best to me from time to time as my understanding of life improves.

"Men Are that They Might Have Joy" (2 Nephi 2:25) is one of the ideas contained in the Book of Mormon for which I am grateful, and plan to keep. One of the unexpected miracles I experienced as I let go of the iron rod was that of becoming aware for the first time in my life of the virtually endless joys and ways in which I could experience them by which I am, and always have been, surrounded. I began to revel in the truths that many faith traditions and scientists have discovered and artists have illustrated and articulated, and to experiment with how those concepts and images might enrich my life. I discovered that the worlds of art and science were

not part of the "great and spacious building" or "mists of darkness" whose purpose is to deceive me and lead me away from some supremely important path, and most importantly that my life is not part of the field on which any epic battle between the eternal forces of good and evil is being fought. Rather, my eyes have been opened to see many different paths through a beautiful garden, some of which appeal to and enrich me while others leave me cold. I discovered that almost all human lives have stories woven into them that touch me deep inside, and make me more human and joyful as I understand them. Such understanding was impossible as long as I clung to a rod that required anything contradictory to it be dismissed as either threatening or not worthy of serious consideration. Once I grasp their essence, these stories feel like a hitherto hidden part of me. And while they are often so different from my own narrative that they initially disturb and sometimes even disorient to the point of pain, they are not part of any dark mist whose purpose is to mislead and confuse. Rather, they are an essential aspect of life's tapestry whose effect (if not design) is to awaken me to more beauty and order, much of which cannot be reconciled with the Mormon way and hence I did not previously feel at liberty to consider.

My focus has changed from living a "thou shalt", future oriented life to living in the "I will" present. I now focus on my strengths – on feeding and developing them – and on how I can use them to be most productive for both myself and others. The Church no longer dictates how I use my time, who my friends are, or what my priorities will be on a variety of important scores.

The changes I have made feel both good and right. However, it is taking some time to convert belief into action. That means that even though the "shalts" are largely gone, I have not yet fully come to grips with what I want to do at the mundane, day to day level, and I am sensitive to the risk we all face of spinning off into abstraction and missing real life as it passes us by. As the Zen master Soyen Shaku put it, while speculation and endless talking of abstraction has its place in Buddhism and is attractive to some:

We, plain ordinary Buddhists, will keep on removing selfishness, seeking the light that is everywhere, practising loving kindness that does not contradict or discriminate. Says an ancient sage, "The Way is near, and thou seekest it afar." Why, then, shall we ever attempt to walk away from the path which extends right in front of us, so wide and well paved? (Zen for Americans, Soyen Shaku, p. 87, 88)

I intend to be a plain, ordinary person who does much the same thing. And so I believe that there is no narrow path and no iron rod to which we must cling, but rather those privileged to live in this time and in countless places across the globe are in a beautiful garden through which run many more honourable, wonderful paths than there are people. Our target is not tiny and near impossible to hit. It is huge, and we have more arrows in our quiver than we can hope to fire. We can hardly miss if we but take aim and try. And shooting those arrows is fun! I cannot adequately describe the joy I felt (and still feel as I write this) as these ideas slowly dawned on me and were then confirmed by the best study, analysis and contemplation I can muster.

I am my own guide whether I like it or not. And you and the other leaders of the Mormon Church are only a few among those to whom I will listen. However, if you can prove to me that you will help me discern more and better, put me in touch with others who are trying to do as I am, and help me to network with you and them so that I improve my understanding of life while having the chance to serve others by helping them to do the same, then I will choose to collaborate with you. That – being in association based on free will and mutual respect for what we can do for each other, instead of me obeying Church leaders on the basis of their purported

divine authority – is the only basis on which I would wish to again commune with the institutional Church on a regular basis.

I appreciate now more than ever the nature of the burden a thoughtful, caring person such as yourself carries respecting the above matters. Your decision or indecision will influence many lives, and will lift or increase heavy burdens that your predecessors imposed upon the members of the Church. And while it is faint, my hope is that your generation of Mormon leaders will not be like those from whom the twin evils of polygamy and civil power had to be torn against their will, only to find that this is what the Church needed to grow beyond its parochial roots. Those roots are now once again pot-bound, and this time the pot may be rapidly shrinking as a result of the Internet. In my view the best hope for the LDS tree is transplantation, risky, radical and painful though that may be. If there were a time for prophetic insight, this is it.

I hope you can have a hand in writing the first chapter in the Church's history in which it surrenders a significant measure of power over its members because that is the right thing to do, instead of waiting until a gun is put to the Church's head, by which time it may be too late to resuscitate the Church's fortunes. I hope you have the prescience to help the Church get on the right side of its evolving environment by accepting the Internet and the access to information it brings as a chance to enhance the members' spiritual growth and autonomy instead of continuing to try to build protective walls that are designed to prevent them from understanding the nature of their faith and so to be more readily controlled. How did Joseph put it? Something like "a man may as well extend his puny arm to turn back the waters of the Mississippi River ...". That may not be quite right since I don't have my scriptures with me at the moment, being on a business trip as I am. But in any event, we are dealing here with the same kind of thing.

I would not want to be in your position, and again wish you well as you make the important decisions that are yours to make.

All the best,

Bob McCue

Appendix

Why I Left the Church

The short answer is that my Stake President, in consultation some General Authorities, told me that I had to choose between either being able to continue speaking with a small group of my LDS friends about issues that I felt were essential to my continued spiritual growth, or remaining a member of the Church. I choose the former. A longer (much longer) answer is as follows:

I recognize that I need wisdom to guide my life. I was taught from my childhood up to trust the Church's leadership as the best source of wisdom. Your letter to me, while it was warm and welcoming, also held the Church out in this fashion. You suggested the inevitability of my return, and emphasized the wisdom and good intentions of those who lead the Church. Until recently, I would have agreed with you whole-heartedly as far as wisdom was concerned. When questions arose concerning things as disparate as moral reasoning, the theory of evolution, foreign policy and even my personal sexual practises within marriage, I always turned first to what the Church's leaders had to say for guidance. To the extent they had opined on a subject, the debate was usually over as far as I was concerned. Their logic became mine.

And I did not, as I suspect is the case with most members, appreciate the fine distinction between what a prophet says from the pulpit or publishes in a book and an "official" pronouncement of policy or doctrine from the Church. Most Church members would expect what the prophet says or writes in authoritative tones to be authoritative. Especially when Church members are taught to accept General Conference talks and Ensign articles by the First Presidency and the Twelve as modern scripture. The recent tendency to retreat in controversial areas to official Church pronouncements respecting things such as evolution is insulting to those (such as me) who were faithful enough to believe what the prophets said and wrote and to guide their education and other important aspects of their lives on the basis of the prophets' often erroneous teachings.

I laugh now, in a painful sort of way, when I think of a debate in which I participated during a gospel doctrine class a couple of years ago respecting evolutionary theory. The entire debate was conducted on the basis of the various conflicting things Church leaders had said relevant to that issue. And then I went home, got on the Internet and went through my ample library of Church related books looking for more of the same. It did not cross my mind to seriously consider what any non-LDS scientist, or even LDS non-general authority, had to say. What folly.

Control Instead of Wisdom

I have now come to the conclusion, after the most careful study and prayerful consideration of which I am capable, that the Church's leaders follow principles that are designed first and foremost to maintain or expand the Church's influence. This bias often leads them to miss or even purposefully avoid moving in directions that would benefit many individual members because of perceived or actual threats to Church leadership authority that they would be forced to face if they so moved. This renders the Church an unreliable source of wisdom.

The explanatory thread running through many things that used to puzzle me about the Church is that anything that restricts the power of religious leaders and hence their ability to control member behaviour, is bad and should be suppressed. The Church can be counted on to fight,

and has consistently to date, fought virtually all governmental, social and individual forces that have inclined to reduce its control over its membership. These have included government initiatives such as the US government's stance respecting polygamy; social forces such as feminism, individualism and the anti-establishment movement of the 1960s, 70s and 80s; and the increasing academic scrutiny to which the Church has been subjected.

The single most important issue for me in my decision to leave the Church is the understanding I reached that many if not most of the Church's prophetic leaders, starting with Joseph Smith and ending with Gordon Hinckley, have misled Church members and others when it was necessary to do so in order to secure the members' obedience. The extent to which Church's other leaders are aware of the extent of their deception is, however, not clear to me.

You mentioned Plato. While it is true that many say philosophy starts and ends with him, he had a few awful ideas. For example, I am sure you remember his odious "metals" metaphor that is analogous to the ancient idea that underpins the Hindu caste system. And more to the point of this letter, how do you feel about his "philosopher kings" concept? As you will recall, they were the wise few who were justified in Plato's view in deceiving the masses when it was necessary to do so, since the masses were incapable of understanding what was in their best interest.

And what of Nietzsche's idea of the "pious lie", which he said is the foundation of all priesthoods? It describes behaviour in the religious sphere that is consistent with the philosopher king concept. Nietzsche condemned the pious lie, as do I, as did Joseph Smith. In the LDS plan of salvation, Satan beautifully articulated the philosopher king and pious lie approach and was vilified for it.

And yet, Joseph Smith behaved in classic philosopher king fashion, and the LDS "faithful history" policy discloses a group of modern philosopher kings who feel justified in telling pious lies. I describe the evidence and my interpretation of it respecting both of these issues below. Until Church leaders stop deceiving Church members and others, I will have no truck with the LDS Church. It has deceived and taken advantage of me and many others in a thousand ways as a result of the implementation of its faithful history and other authoritarian policies, and I will not give it the chance to do so again.

I also note what might be called the "boy who cried wolf" problem with which the Church has saddled itself by virtue of having lost credibility in the fashion I have just described. There are no doubt many issues respecting which the Church has taught me the truth. However, there are so many instances of which I am now aware and in which the Church has misled me, that my first instinct is to reject the Church's teachings because they are the Church's teachings and hence are likely to be driven more by control oriented principles than a desire for accurate communication and the furtherance of my best interests. I no more believe the Church when it tells me it has something that is good for me than I would an employer or the government. In fact, I would trust either of those sources more than the Church based upon my experience with them. This is an unfortunate side effect of the faithful history policy.

Your well intentioned talk in last April's General Conference that in part prompted my first letter, and Pres. Hinckley's accompanying "it is all black or white; truth or fraud" line, touched my philosopher king hot button. Such teachings seem calculated to, and in fact do, cause Church members to become less questioning and hence less apt to learn, and more fearful and hence more passively obedient and accepting of LDS pious lies. This is the worst of Mormon and all other religious cultures. It is stupefying. It justifies Marx's dictum about religion being the opiate

of the masses. It is the stuff of philosopher kings. In the unlikely event you were to respond to this letter, I would be interested more than anything else in your response respecting this issue.

I note in particular the nature of Pres. Hinckley's "black and white" argument, which is an oft-repeated Mormon leadership theme. This is nothing more than a false dichotomy that performs the function of a debating trick, except he uses it on people who are willing to accept almost anything he says. How can anyone who has experienced the good side of Mormons conclude that Mormonism is 100% fraud? Therefore, if it is either all truth or all fraud, it must be all truth. This is the conclusion toward which Pres. Hinckley directs as many people as possible. But does this position make any sense in light of my life experience in general or experience with and study of Mormonism in particular? No, it does not. I cannot think of anything in life that is as simple as Pres. Hinckley represents this particularly complex issue to be, and my review of Mormon history and theology has brought me the almost certain conclusion that there are serious inaccuracies in the story the Church tells, and pervasive pockets of error within the LDS tradition that continue to influence it today. In short, Mormonism is a mixture of good and bad, truth and error. It is grey. But nonetheless, Pres. Hinckley attempts to win the debate by the manner in which he frames it, and due to how he is trusted, he will be effective in this regard with respect to many people, and was effective until recently in my case.

I do not accuse Pres. Hinckley of conscious trickery. But I believe that he is so sure that he is right that he is incapable of checking the intellectual linkages that underpin the means he uses to push those who follow him toward what to him seems to be the only possible conclusion. Joseph Smith suffered from the same debilitating, philosopher king delusion. An interesting illustration of this point, and an explanation of its connection to reliability, comes from Smith's encounter with Henry Caswall, who had in his possession a document he believed to be a Greek Psalter and that was later confirmed to be such. He presented it to Joseph, said he thought it was a Greek Psalter, and asked Joseph for his opinion. After consideration, Joseph pronounced it to be, without doubt, a dictionary of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Later after verifying through other means the document to be a Greek Psalter, Caswell said as follows in response to Dr. Willard Richard's assertion that, "Sometime Mr. Smith speaks as a prophet, and sometimes as a mere man":

Whether he spoke as a prophet or as a mere man, he has committed himself, for he has said what is not true. If he spoke as a prophet, therefore, he is a false prophet. If he spoke as a mere man, he cannot be trusted, for he spoke positively and like an oracle respecting that of which he knew nothing. (Grant H. Palmer, "An Insider's View of Mormon Origins", pp. 34 – 36)

And therein lies the problem with Joseph Smith for anyone who continues to accept him as a reliable source of information on the basis of which to make important life decisions. Given his history of either prevarication or innocent (but confident) declaration of inaccuracies, it is not wise to believe what he said on any topic unless it can be independently verified. Gordon Hinckley is in the same boat, in my judgement, as illustrated by his continued support of the faithful history policy, and his use of what is clearly a false dichotomy that in fact misleads his followers whether he intends this to be the case or not.

Joseph Smith's meeting with Henry Caswell in my view speaks volumes about the nature of the man. It is clear that Joseph was aware that many of his contemporaries could read ancient Greek. Hence, the argument applied to his translation of the Book of Abraham – that he thought he was safe in pretending to interpret Egyptian because during his lifetime was still an unknown language – did not apply in this case. Were he the clever, conscious fraudster some people

claim him to be, he would surely have been wise enough not to take such a firm position respecting something he knew to be verifiable in his day unless he was confident in his conclusion. The Caswell encounter, however, is consistent with the philosopher king theory. Joseph believed his own press clippings.

I think that during at least large stretches of his ministry Joseph believed that god was guiding his actions, and that the Book of Mormon, Book of Abraham and other things he produced by what he thought was inspiration and called "translations" did reflect the contents of ancient records, even if he had only seen those records in vision and could not see them in vision or otherwise while he dictated what he thought to be their contents. This is even consistent with the fact that we can be quite confident that no one – not even the so-called "witnesses" – saw real golden plates. All of these sightings appear to have been visionary once we take into account all of the evidence relevant to this issue. And we also have lots of evidence that Joseph had in his possession something that was kept hidden from view that had the approximate shape and weight of the golden plates he often described as being in his possession. A good philosopher king would not hesitate to create such an "aid to testimony" to help his followers believe in the reality of his dreams and visions. Hence, while Joseph likely produced and consciously used fake golden plates to deceive his followers, just as he deceived them respecting his sexual practises and a variety of other things, he may have been sincere in his belief of his prophetic calling and the reality of his visions and revelations (which he called "translations"), and was preceding in classic philosopher king fashion to achieve the ends he was certain were right.

The bottom line is that during most of his ministry, it appears to me that Joseph Smith believed that he knew what was best for the people. And whether this was the result of a powerful vision or on the basis of dimly perceived impressions became less important as time passed and what was at stake with respect to maintaining his position of influence grew. This explains to me how he came to create the at first secret institution of polygamy when his sexual activity ran amok, and I can even understand how he could have come to believe that god inspired him to do what he did. He was a philosopher king after all, and once that attitude is sufficiently engrained it can be used to justify almost anything.

Using an economic analogy, the modern Church is far closer to the ideals of communism and totalitarianism than it is to free markets or even social democracy. Their religious leaders teach Church members that democracy is god's way, except when it comes to religion. In that case, dictatorship rules apply and the word of religious leaders must be accepted without noticeable dissent by anyone who wishes to remain part of the community in this life, and in the life to come. Note that it is not belief that is the key. One can believe almost anything and remain a Mormon, and can believe a wide range of offbeat things and still go to the temple. But as soon as a member says, writes or does anything that may negatively affect the control of Church authorities over other Church members, the important line has been crossed and the rules related to apostasy will be invoked. This vividly displays the organization's true colours.

Despite all the talk about "courts of love" being used as aids to personal repentance, apostasy is not primarily defined as a state that threatens the temporal or eternal well-being of an individual, but rather one that threatens temporal group obedience to religious leadership. And since the community is structured to play a pervasive role in members' earthly lives and in the afterlife will be even more important since family associations will only be enjoyed by those who are obedient to LDS authority, the threat of forced disassociation is not taken lightly by those who have been successfully conditioned to believe.

I have to confess that it was only as I wrote this letter that I noticed this coincidence – that political dictatorships that often restrict the powers of religious leaders are bad, and democracy is good so long as it does not restrict the power of religious leaders, hence making religious democracy bad. In my view, many pieces of what was once an incomprehensible puzzle fall neatly into place with the Church is viewed as primarily an organization designed to allow its leaders to maximize the control they exercise over its members.

Brain Washing v. Education

There is a difficult to discern and controversial distinction between education (sometimes called "value engineering") and brainwashing. Some have rightly pointed out that to some extent, the difference is purely that of perspective. However, I recently found some commentary on this topic that made distinctions between the two that in my view are both supportable and useful, and happen to be relevant to this letter. The basic idea is that education becomes brain washing only when misinformation is used to manipulate the formation of values. An example may help to bring this into focus.

Let's consider the manner in which the Hutterites educate their children. These folks are similar in many ways to the Old Order Amish. They are communally living, biblical literalists who regard most aspects of modernity as corrosive, corrupting influences. And their leadership structure is much more authoritarian and controlling than is the LDS. In recent years many Hutterite colonies have been expanding their farming land bases and becoming more capital intensive from an equipment point of view while their non-Hutterite neighbours are going broke. This is made possible by the manner in which the Hutterites accumulate capital within the community by centralizing their authority and living frugally. They are more "beehive" oriented than the Mormons ever were, except perhaps during the brief Mormon flirtation with the United Order, which was headed toward where the Hutterites are.

There are numerous Hutterite colonies on the Canadian prairies. I have spent over half my life living close enough to these communities to have a reasonable idea as to how they function. However, I do not know to what extent their senior leadership believes the stories they tell the membership. So, to bring the brainwashing issue above into focus, let's run through a thought experiment that has two parts.

First, let's assume that the leaders of a Hutterite colony truly believe that the earth is 6,000 years old, that the second coming is proximate and that the only hope for the survival of the people for whom they are responsible at the colony is for them to continue to face inward and shun all of the world's evil influences. Hence, all that they teach their followers is what they believe. Dennett ("Freedom Evolves" at p. 282 – 284) suggests that while they are likely dead wrong with respect to what they teach, they are not brainwashing their followers but are rather doing their best to educate them. It so happens, however, that the education is not a good one. The conditioning to which young Hutterites are subjected is such that the few of them who have the strength to leave their traditional way of life have a great deal of difficulty functioning in our modern world. Their Hutterite education, or value engineering, stunts them in significant ways. But, says Dennett and others to whom he refers, the pejorative term "brainwashing" should not be used in that case since the process described above involved the transmission of values sincerely held by one group of people to another.

Let's change the facts slightly. Everything at the colony is the same, except that the most senior leader is such an intelligent, flexible minded person that he has broken the community taboos and regularly reads newspapers, keeps up to date over the Internet as to current cultural trends,

etc. and has come to the view that most of his tradition is false. However, he also recognizes the enormity of the gap between where his people are and reality, and does not believe they are capable of dealing with reality as he understands it. He is also aware that if enough of his people became aware of and tried to deal with reality, their commune would probably be broken up, the older members would suffer tremendously, and even some of the younger ones would not be able to cope in the real world. But others among the young set would clearly be better off and would adjust. And finally, he realizes that if the commune broke up he would lose his authority and most of his influence. With all of that in mind, he makes the decision any good philosopher king would – he decides that he must protect his people from the truth, and that while it is unfortunate that this will force some young people who would have thrived in the real world not to have that opportunity, it is in the best interest of the community that they make that sacrifice, and so he will do what he can to push them in that direction. This will require that he deceive the people for their own good.

Dennett would call this brainwashing. He says:

Might it be simply falsehood, then, and concealment that are the defining marks of brainwashing? As long as you tell people the truth (what passes for the truth at the time you tell it) and eschew efforts to mislead them, as long as you leave them in a state from which they can make at least as good an independent assessment of their predicament as before you intervened, you are educating them, not brainwashing them. ("Freedom Evolves", p. 283)

It is clear to me both why brainwashing, as Dennett and others define it, is wrong and why the second Hutterite leader I described above is a brainwasher and the first is not. And while the second leader purports to look at the big picture and make a decision that is in the best interest of his community, I would suggest that his view is in fact too narrow, likely because he is subject to the "power corrupts" rule of human behaviour. Think of the effect his actions have on the unborn members of his community. Taking this aspect of things into account is what I believe the "eternal" perspective requires us to do. It is a useful metaphor in this regard. While he is right that the movement toward reality will crush some members of his community, I suspect that he underestimates the resilience of many and has not taken into account what he has the chance to do for his followers' many progeny who could have the chance to grow up unencumbered by Hutterite education or brainwashing, and still benefit from the traditional values that community espouses. But to give them that chance, he must let go of his personal power and influence. This, in my view, is likely the decisive factor in his case and many analogous cases.

The Hutterite example should be instructive for Mormons, since Hutterites are in many ways a caricature of Mormons – they have both our bad and good qualities in mega-doses. If Mormon leaders are so ignorant of reality that they believe the versions of history they teach to members of the Church and others, they are bad leaders and are passing bad values on to unsuspecting followers. Hence, we should avoid their influence. And if they are aware of the problems and are trying to protect their followers from reality as good philosopher kings usually do, they are brainwashers, and hence we should avoid their influence. And as usual, reality is likely at neither of these poles. But it is clear to me that there is an element of both bad education and brainwashing, in the sense those words are used above, within Mormon culture.

The Importance of Monopoly to Religious Organizations

Mormonism's move to Utah is interesting. Many Mormon historians (including my father who received his Ph.D. in history from BYU and taught history at the University of Victoria until recently) and members believe that the Church would not have survived if this move did not occur. It placed a small, struggling religious organization in an environment where a religious monopoly could be easily formed, and hence also accords with what the anthropologists predict is required in order for a strong institutional religious body to be built.

New religious organizations seldom do well in places where cultural diversity is the norm, as was the case in the Eastern part of the US where Mormonism came into existence. Hence, religions have developed over the millennia many tools designed to enable them to create monopolies that will let them grow to critical mass. Once that mass has been reached, they can form a society within societies, and have enough momentum and substance to create sufficient social insulation to sustain themselves as a separate cultural stream. But in almost all cases they must have some time in a monopoly environment in order to create that critical mass. So the move to Utah was an essential factor in Mormonism's initial success, and created the foundation for its current healthy institutional state.

Many aspects of Mormonism make much more sense to me when I view them through the "monopoly" lens. Consider the secrecy related to Mormon temple ceremonies. This gives initiates an air of superiority over non-initiates. And more importantly, it slows down anyone who would like to criticize the form or substance of the ceremony, thus protecting the initiate from the pressure such criticism might create and allowing the ceremony to continue to perform the functions anthropologists attribute to rituals of its type. In business or marketing terms, the secrecy promise creates a "barrier to entry". Secrecy is used in precisely the same way in business circles.

And what of the way in which the theological idea of Mormon temple ordinances for the deceased has been adapted to provide a reason for the living to dedicate so much time to repeating their ritual experience? And what about the organizational emphasis that is placed on the endowment as opposed to the other ordinances that have been streamlined for use in the proxy context, and the manner in which the endowment has been constructed to engrain obedience to Church authority? When these concepts are combined, they result in a massive amount of membership time and other resources (the members pay for those temples, after all) being dedicated to a task that will convince them that they must obey Church authority, and not listen to anyone who questions Church authority. What a virtuous circle from the Church's point of view. Here we find another powerful barrier to entry that enhances the power of the Mormon Church.

And think about the timing of Mormonism's emphasis on temple work. As long as the Mormon Church had an effective monopoly in Utah and the surrounding area in religious terms, temple attendance was a relatively rare event. However, as the Church has become more a part of pluralistic society both in Utah and elsewhere, temple attendance has taken on a much greater role within Mormon culture. It is my view that this is an important part of the Mormon leadership's effort to create and reinforce a Mormon subculture that will be distinct enough to preserve itself within the various societies in which it operates.

Each of the above elements of Mormon temple worship enhances Mormonism's ability to preserve its position as the exclusive purveyor of religious goods to its members. And overall,

the view I have reached is that the function the endowment performs for the dead is the least important thing temple attendance does within the Mormon system. Much more important than that, or the information imparted – which is almost all either practically unimportant or already taught in lessons each Sunday – is the effect of the ritual itself. Mormon temple rituals are, at bottom, about conditioning the members of the Mormon Church to continue to accept the control their religious leaders wish to exert over them. And I am prepared to assume the bona fides of those leaders. In my view, they likely believe that god has appointed them as modern philosopher kings to take care of his folk, and this requires that the members be trained first and foremost to obey their religious leaders. In this, Mormon leaders follow a well-trodden religious and political path.

I note that the literature I reviewed and from which I extracted all of the above observations had nothing to say about Mormonism. It was, rather, overview material related to the principles anthropologists and others have inferred as the result of studying the development of religious organizations and their rituals in many cultures and times. My primary sources were several now fairly old pieces written by Mircea Eliade, Max Weber and Joseph Campbell, as well as Pascal Boyer's recent book "Religion Explained" and a number of the sources referenced in it.

The Role of Mormon Temple Ordinances

And so we come to the Mormon temple ritual. In my view, its primary purpose is to inculcate an attitude of reverence and obedience in faithful Mormons that is so strong that they will continue to accept the biggest of all its misrepresentations (just obey – and don't worry, we will always take care of you and never mislead you – and don't question us) and so remain uncritical of their religious experience. Mormon temple attendance induced obedience is amazingly effective in rendering faithful Mormons incapable of using, with respect to their religious experience, the critical thinking skills they evidence mastery of in other contexts.

While this phenomenon is well known to anthropologists who study primitive religious ritual, the Mormon experience is distinguished by the way in which many Mormons operate with, in effect, a bifurcated reasoning system. They have one set of primitive reasoning tools that is used to deal with religious phenomena and related issues, and another completely different set to deal with everything else in their modern and complex lives. It is not a stretch to analogize this to having both a modern scientist's and a primitive Australian aborigine's minds operating simultaneously within the same skull. And some faithful Mormon intellectual types are even more interesting, evidencing pre-modern, modern, and post-modern thinking with respect to various aspects of their lives. Several of my most interesting debates since leaving the Mormon Church have been with people of this persuasion who for reasons far more complex than I can understand cling to the virtually blind obedience aspect to their faith at the expense of engaging in some of the most difficult reasoning I have ever encountered. They use primitive, scientific and post-modern reasoning as the occasion requires. The post-modern stream is what they use to neutralize modern or scientific thinking that creates trouble for their primitive, Mormon/religious reasoning. Post-modern reasoning does not overcome anything, but it does present an excuse to ignore what troubles us.

I here use the term "post-modernism" in the sense of an extremely relativistic approach to life, with an emphasis on the idea that it is almost impossible to be certain of anything. Hence, post-modernism suggests that it is difficult for anyone to legitimately criticize anyone else, and one approach is as good as another. While this philosophical stream of thought has been discredited in most quarters during the last decade or two, it is a useful tool for a bright Mormon

who has been backed into a corner by his more rigorous thinking scientific or history oriented peers. The part of post-modernism I find useful is the convincing way in which it shows that we can't know anything for sure. Used properly, this serves to keep us humble and always ready to learn from new experience. It is ironic that some of Mormonism's brightest use this approach to defend their beliefs, which include the need to obey leaders who posit absolutely certain knowledge of a multitude of things that are unknowable in precisely the fashion post-modernism points out. War of any kind, whether religious, intellectual or military, makes for strange bedfellows.

Mircea Eliade was one of the world's leading anthropologists and mythologists. His definition of myth, taken from his classic book "Myth and Reality" (Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper & Row, 1963) should strike a chord respecting the endowment with you if you have not already read it:

In general it can be said that myth, as experienced by archaic societies, (1) constitutes the History of the acts of the Supernaturals; (2) that this History is considered to be absolutely true (because it is concerned with realities) and sacred (because it is the work of the Supernaturals); (3) that myth is always related to a "creation," it tells how something came into existence, or how a pattern of behavior, an institution, a manner of working were established; this is why myths constitute the paradigms for all significant human acts; (4) that by knowing the myth one knows the "origin" of things and hence can control and manipulate them at will; this is not an "external," "abstract" knowledge but a knowledge that one "experiences" ritually, either by ceremonially recounting the myth or by performing the ritual for which it is the justification; (5) that in one way or another one "lives" the myth, in the sense that one is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted.

"Living" a myth, then, implies a genuinely "religious" experience, since it differs from the ordinary experience of everyday life. The "religiousness" of this experience is due to the fact that one re-enacts fabulous, exalting, significant events, one again witnesses the creative deeds of the Supernaturals; one ceases to exist in the everyday world and enters a transfigured, auroral world impregnated with the Supernaturals' presence. What is involved is not a commemoration of mythical events but a reiteration of them. The protagonists of the myth are made present; one becomes their contemporary. This also implies that one is no longer living in chronological time, but in the primordial Time, the Time when the event first took place. This is why we can use the term the "strong time" of myth; it is the prodigious, "sacred" time when something new, strong, and significant was manifested. To re-experience that time, to re-enact it as often as possible, to witness again the spectacle of the divine works, to meet with the Supernaturals and relearn their creative lesson is the desire that runs like a pattern through all the ritual reiterations of myths. In short, myths reveal that the World, man, and life have a supernatural origin and history, and that this history is significant, precious, and exemplary.

I cannot conclude this chapter better than by quoting the classic passages in which Bronislaw Malinowski undertook to show the nature and function of myth in primitive societies.

Studied alive, myth . . . is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep

religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. . . . These stories . . . are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, facts and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as to how to perform them. (B. Malinowski. *Myth in Primitive Psychology*. 1926; reprinted in *Magic, Science and Religion*. New York: 1955: pp. 101, 108.)

Clearly, the myths recounted by the Mormon endowment are part of the genre described so well above, and attributed to primitive peoples. Joseph Smith purported to restore the original ways of doing things. At a minimum, he created a genuine mythic structure that performs the same function within Mormonism as mythology traditionally performed in archaic society. Given Mormonism's success and the prominence of Mormon temple practice, it must meet a primal need many humans feel. It is also important to note in this regard that much of the structure of the Mormon temple ritual was borrowed by Smith from the Masons. The Mormon temple rituals were substantially reworked within weeks of his going through the Masonic rituals for the first time, and it was only then that they took on their present distinctly Masonic flavor.

Anthropologists have described the tendency of religious initiatory rituals, many of which are secret, to promise special knowledge (See Pascal Boyer, "Religion Explained", pp. 243 – 246 for an example). However, this promise is seldom fulfilled. Sometimes there is the promise of a further ritual in which the secret will finally be revealed. When that ritual arrives, another is held out, etc. And the secret is never disclosed.

At the end of the Mormon endowment, once the confusion over the odd clothes, special handclasps, "new names" and passwords has worn off, many are left with a feeling of "Was that it? Where is the special gift of knowledge I was promised?" However, there is no promise of other more special ceremonies currently on offer. Rather, the initiate is told that he must continue to come back to the temple to do work for the dead (see below), and as he spiritually matures god will use the medium of the endowment ceremony to unfold his secrets.

A story is told in this regard of Dr. Hugh Nibley, Mormonism's foremost apologist and an erudite scholar. Well into his 70s, Dr. Nibley is said to have been accosted by a friend while he was leaving the Provo temple, near BYU where Nibley taught. Nibley looked confused. The friend asked why. Nibley, who has published extensively respecting ancient parallels to the LDS temple ceremony and arguably understands it better than anyone else, is reported to have said something like: "I just learned more about the endowment while going through one temple session than the sum total of all else I have ever learned respecting it." Whether this story and others like it are urban myths is almost irrelevant, because this is what most faithful Mormons believe the temple has the power to do. And it amounts to the same thing as promising more rituals during which the secret will finally be revealed.

Interestingly, the anthropologists have also observed that in many initiatory rituals, at the end of the line the secret to be revealed is that there is no secret. That is, once the initiate is fully

committed to the organization sponsoring the ritual, he is let in on the real deal – that the entire ritual structure is an elaborate game that enables the organization to keep the initiate's attention long enough to fully engage or co-opt him. "Thanks for playing along", the initiate is finally told. "Now, go and make sure that the game continues to be played by those who will come behind you. As you know, the organization is of essential importance. Hence what might be called deception in other circumstances is not only permissible, but is de rigueur in the case of these rituals. And in any event, God's ways are mysterious. Somehow through these rituals His marvellous purposes are carried out. After all, our ancestors handed these very rituals down to us. And see how strong we have grown! You are performing God's will; you are a tool in His hands; and you will be eternally blessed as a result." And so the cycle continues.

As is so often the case, there are subtle but important distinctions between things that are useful and insightful and those that are used by some to manipulate others. For example, an idea that comes close to the "there is no secret" concept is the Taoist principle that the "high places are within", and its many analogues in the wisdom traditions of other cultures. One way in which this concept is taught in many cultures is through the story of the hero who, after all his wanderings and adventures through the world in search of life's treasure, finally returns home and finds what he sought at the very point from which his journey began. The crucial distinction between this approach to life and that evidenced by Mormon temple ritual is that Mormons are not directed toward ordinary life experience in the present to find life's treasures. They are, rather, directed toward a literal future existence and are told that important knowledge respecting this existence is to be gleaned from Mormon temple ritual by those who are in tune with the "spirit". "The high places are within", on the other hand, is an injunction to pay more attention to the present and the ordinary experiences that form life's fabric. Mythology and things like Mormon temple ritual, in that context, could become guides to our psychology as we pass moment by moment through life instead of a description of a literal future existence. Most types of religious ritual, including Mormonism's, can be used in this regard. However, Mormon ritual was not designed for this purpose and hence I believe that its usefulness in this regard is limited.

I should also note the distinction between what I have described above and the variety of socially useful, but not necessarily true, myths that hold all societies together. For example, aphorisms such as "cheaters never prosper", "virtue will be rewarded", etc. are all passed on as the wisdom of the ages and perform an important sociological function while being either untrue or subject to many unstated exceptions. In my view, these myths are a reflection of the Golden Rule, and are designed to create the kind of society in which most of us have decided we wish to live. Furthermore, as we mature within that society these maxims become codes for complex concepts regarding human behaviour that do in fact have many exceptions. Finally, each of these rules is oriented toward the present. They focus us on elements of human behavior that surround us, and invite us to test them against our experience. This is how we develop our own conceptions of right and wrong, and decide how we will live our lives.

On the other hand, the kind of deception inherent in the "pious lie" is not oriented toward anything testable against our current experience. Pious lies are designed not to produce the kind of society that by rough consensus western man has decided to build, but rather the kind of particular organization a religious or political elite has determined is best for all, and not coincidentally, for the elite themselves. Hence, I suggest that the pious lie and its cousins have little in common with garden-variety socially useful myths.

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

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

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

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

A long time after the ideas I just summarized occurred to me, I ran into a paper presented at the 2002 Salt Lake City Sunstone Symposium entitled "Shaping Mormonism's Spiritual Kingdom of God" by Dr. Claude J. Burtenshaw, a political science professor from the University of Utah. Dr. Burtenshaw's ideas can be summarized as follows.

1. The D&C clearly disclose that the foundation of the LDS church contemplated a union of spiritual and temporal life. That is, the usual political controls over property and freedoms were part of the early LDS life. However, those controls collided time and again with the U.S. constitution, and in a series of conflicts that were largely responsible for the Mormons being driven from place to place, and finally to Utah, the LDS church's political control over its members was gradually stripped away. This process was completed during the period between

1896 and the final collapse of the institution of polygamous marriage during the following ten to twenty years. It was in 1896 that Utah was finally granted statehood, after a crippling battle with the U.S. federal government, on the basis of a completely secular constitution that specifically denied church influence over state institutions.

2. LDS theology accommodated the removal of the political authority its origins contemplated by focusing on the perfection of the individual wherever located instead of the gathering of Saints and the building of a community with standards different from those of its host society. The shift from community building to an individual focus has been critical to the modern Church in many ways. It has made it possible for Mormons to move toward the mainstream of U.S. society, which they have gradually done since these changes were made. Gordon Hinkley continues to steer the Church hard in this direction, and has even counselled on several highly public occasions that people forget about our past. We are not what we used to be, he says. Look at us now, and see where we are going. Also, think about the consequences for the Church's worldwide missionary effort if it had continued to practise polygamy, counsel the institution of church originated laws that would override the laws of the host political entity, and that new converts should gather to Zion.

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

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

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

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

Excessive Future Orientation - A Side Effect of Mormonism's Controlling Culture

Too much emphasis within Mormonism is placed on the literality and wonder of the Celestial Kingdom, and what we need to do to get there. The first and foremost requirement in this regard is obedience to the changing dictates of Mormon leaders. This results in a mentality that

spends a great deal of effort in the present fearfully focused on the eternal consequences of what goes on around us. This largely prevents us from engaging the reality of our life experience.

For example, while I was an obedient Mormon it was difficult for me to simply appreciate the company of a non-member friend because I was ever conscious of my duty to convert that friend to Mormonism, and many of my actions relative to him would be influenced by that duty. This caused me to often act inauthentically toward people with whom I otherwise could have perhaps become truly friendly. Likewise, I had difficulty communicating in any way to family members without trying to influence their behavior toward more obedience to the Church's requirements. This was a result of my being constantly aware of the fact that if members of my family did not become adequately obedient, we would not be able to enjoy each other's company in the Celestial Kingdom. The first function of my life was to obey the myriad rules required for entrance into the Celestial Kingdom, and the second was to do all that was reasonably possible to cause those within my circle of influence, and particularly my family, to do the same.

And what do Church members do when they get together at Church meetings? While there is often an activity of some kind to act as a framework, the purpose of getting together is to encourage each other to be more obedient to the Church's teachings and attend more meetings that will have the same purpose. Church members also spend significant amounts of effort trying to cause inactive members and non-members to become part of the above-described cycle. Boyd Packer succinctly described this concept in a leadership training meeting I once attended by saying that the purpose of everything we do as Church members is to encourage ourselves and others to make and keep covenants, which is to say, submit obediently to Church authority. Hence, Mormons spend an incredible amount of time and energy reassuring each other that they belong to god's only "true" church, and encouraging each other to come to more meetings the purpose of which is to again repeat that message. Rituals that Mormons are instructed to follow in their homes are designed for the same purpose, including daily scripture reading (personal and in family groups), daily prayers (personal, spousal and family group on a twice daily basis, plus at every meal), family home evening family once a week, parent-child "interviews", etc.

I have reached the conclusion that the Mormon way of life I have just described is inimical to what I have recently discovered to be real spirituality. Spirituality requires much more awareness of the present than an obedient, committed Mormon life style permits. The Mormon way of life, with its obsessive focus on obedience to commandments that are purportedly required to gain admittance after death into the Celestial Kingdom, causes us to largely endure the present as an endless series of temptations that may cause us to lose our hoped for prize if they are not successfully resisted. Hence, much of the opportunity we have to live this life, and enjoy what it has to offer, is squandered.

Much has been written respecting "future orientation" problems in western culture. As the South American writer Octavio Paz has put it:

Whoever builds a house for future happiness builds a prison for the present.

Therein lie many of Mormonism's problems. On the other hand, I am quick to admit that psychologists such as Dr. Martin Seligman, one of North America's leading experts respecting the psychology of happiness, tell us that a degree of future mindedness is essential not only to

happiness, but to mental well being. That is, those who are too oriented toward the past or present sometimes have problems placing their difficulties in context. This exposes them to problems related to depression, and inhibits the making of plans that will motivate constructive action in the present. It seems, therefore, that the trick we need to perform is that of finding an appropriate balance and toning down the fear of the present that Mormonism tends to inculcate. Mormons don't so much make healthy future oriented goals as the numb themselves to the present by analyzing it almost exclusively in terms of how it will affect their Celestial possibilities. For example, despite the joy that the spiritual changes I have recently made have brought into my life, and the fact that my children and wife say that I am a better father and husband now than ever, my parents are heart broken because I have disqualified myself for life with them in the Celestial Kingdom.

The antidote often suggested for those westerners who have an excessive future orientation is a greater focus on the present, as taught by Buddhist and other eastern oriented theorists. Ironically, one of the first places I run into this approach was at a leadership-training program sponsored by BYU that I attended as the president of our local chapter of the Marriott School of Management Society. I don't think the folks who made the presentation understood where the path down which they point leads. They advocated that we no longer permit ourselves to be "human doings", and that we revert to our natural state, that of "human beings" – that we "just be". But once I "just was" for a while, I started to feel things that are decidedly counterproductive if one wishes to remain a faithful member of the Mormon Church because it works hard to make us into human doings who do not think enough to question. My guess is that this program, like many others that are proven to lead sheep out of the fold, will be discontinued by BYU if it has not already been. It is my experience that if the Church finds that a program leads members away, the program will be discouraged despite all of the good things it may do. This was the case with some popular, and in many ways effective, weekend long group therapy programs with which I became familiar in the 1980s. Dr. Scott Peck ("The Road Less Traveled", etc.) was one of the leading proponents of these. While I served as Bishop I received a letter from the First Presidency that counseled me to specifically discourage the members of our Ward from participating in such programs because of the manner in which participation seemed to lead members to question their devotion to the Church. I have learned quite a bit about such programs since then, and believe them to be worthwhile endeavors for many types of people. But they do create enough emotional energy to cause even faithful Mormons to question their Mormon worldview, and hence it is not surprising that the Church would discourage them. This is another example of Church advice formulated based on the preservation of control instead of what is in the best interest of individual members.

I have found the "just be" approach, supplemented with what I have learned about Buddhism and meditation, to be most helpful. The present has opened up to me as I have suppressed my Mormon induced, overly future oriented mindset. I now spend no energy or time worrying whether this or that aspect of my behavior or that of my loved ones might disentitle us to Celestial Kingdom. And I spend much more energy than before on noticing the light glancing off my grandson's hair, the beauty of my daughter as she walks through our yard on her way to do something that I might have been concerned about a while ago because it could threaten her "eternal salvation", and the expression on my wife's face as she listens to something our nine-year-old son thinks is of earth shattering importance.

The "future mindedness" issue is so central to Mormonism that I am going to spend a little more time on it. As noted above, there is a correlation between societies created in harsh environments and what seem to us now like excessive future mindedness. This should not be

surprising. Future mindedness helps us cope with difficult present circumstances, and to set goals that will motivate current activity to improve those circumstances. Both of these are helpful, if not essential, characteristics in a harsh environment. Octavio Paz, who so nicely defined this problem as noted above, is a South American. He hence is familiar with an economic environment much more harsh than ours.

We should not be surprised that early Mormons were future oriented, as were many of their contemporaries. The interesting question is why Mormons have retained their future mindedness to a greater extent than most of the rest of western society. It is my view that this is due to the authoritarian and extremely conservative nature of the Mormon Church and the culture it creates.

As noted above, harsh environments create authoritarian religious and other organizations, as well as future mindedness. And once human authority is well established, it tends to perpetuate itself. Mormon leadership has proven adept at this task. One of their major tools in this regard is a belief system that makes the members feel that the Mormon Church is indispensable to their eternal salvation. This is a classic future-minded ploy. "Don't do what you want to and so 'enjoy' this moment," the Mormon leaders say. "Do what we say you must, or you will lose your chance to live after death with your loved ones in the Celestial Kingdom." And as noted above, what the members must do involves using their time and resources to engrain obedience to the Church in themselves, their family members, the other members of their Ward and Stake, and non-members through the missionary efforts they make. All of this combines to make it difficult for the present to be appreciated because it is filled with concerns about a speculative future.

I can hear some of my Mormon friends saying, "Come on Bob. We grant you that the Church is conservative. That is a problem. No argument there. But when did the Church ever tell you not to enjoy the moment? That is a real stretch." So a concrete example or two are in order to help bring this important point home.

I suggest that if there is any time at which one should be "in the moment" it is while making love. The fact that Mormon leaders have from time to time purported to dictate the minutiae of love making, and that the behavior of members such as me has been significantly affected by their counsel, should provide ample proof of the degree to which they seek to control Mormon lives.

My wife and I married in 1980. One of the things that we were told by Church leaders during the interviews through which we had to pass to receive permission to be married in the temple was that we were to wear our temple garments "night and day" – that is, all of the time. I was told during my mission that the Church leaders taught that wearing garments "night and day" meant that garments were to be worn while making love, which although technically possible would take a lot of the – ahem – romance out of the event. I was also told that some members of the Church of the more rebellious variety refused to wear their garments during their most intimate moments with their spouses, but that many did. Since then, I have met some who do. And only a few days ago I heard a member of my own extended family who is one generation older than me, wonder out loud why a young bride she knew was buying lingerie. "How is that going to look with her garments on?", was the core of her concern. She was baffled by this behavior. This woman is intelligent, well informed respecting most things and capable in the extreme, and has passed a lifetime in Church leadership within the Relief Society and Young Women's organizations including numerous stints as the president of both Stake and Ward auxiliaries. It is a shame that her Mormon experience has left her awkward enough in her own skin to make such a statement. What a tragedy this is. She has been robbed of a significant part of one of

life's most potentially meaningful experiences, and is so insulated from reality that she is completely unaware of what has been taken from her. And I can only speculate as to the psychological baggage she carries as a result of the mindset the above comment indicates, and how that would also likely have impeded her ability to be intimate with her husband.

I enquired respecting the "clothed while having sex" matter of my Church leaders just before our marriage, and was told that while the Church used to teach that garments must be worn while making love, that it was now acknowledged to be OK to take them off as long as they were put back on before going to sleep. Otherwise, the promise made in the temple to wear the garments "night and day" would be broken. I was so relieved that my garments could be removed for lovemaking that I did not question the ludicrous nature of the "put them back on" requirement. And so throughout my married life, one of existences' greatest pleasures – that of laying peacefully in my wife's arms after intimacy – has mostly been interrupted by what is in effect a religious ritual in the form of the requirement that sleep must be resisted until my garments have been put back on. And I can remember awakening on numerous occasions with a jerk and a feeling of guilt after dozing off with my wife in my arms, and then climbing out of bed to put my garments on. I am shaking my head as I type these words. The ability of the Mormon Church to control this kind of intimate behavior between married people is astonishing.

And as you know, the Church's intervention respecting intimate behavior between spouses goes much further than what I have just indicated. A letter dated June 9, 1978 from the First Presidency of the Church to various Church leaders instructs that interviews of married persons for the purposes of temple recommends etc.: "should scrupulously avoid indelicate inquiries," yet also emphasizes:

Married persons should understand that if in their marital relations they are guilty of unnatural, impure or unholy practices, they should not enter the temple unless and until they repent and discontinue any such practices.

This letter put Bishops in a delicate position, and was in force when my wife and I married in 1980. Our Bishop told us that the letter likely meant that certain sexual acts, such as oral sex or "unnatural sexual positions", were not pleasing to God. Hmmm. What does that do for a young, recently virgin couple (as we both were) as they climb into bed together while trying to adjust to the novelty of sexual life? Let me assure you that this did not help us to make that adjustment.

Then on January 5, 1982 the First Presidency repeated its 1978 instructions for "interviewing married persons," but added:

The First Presidency has interpreted oral sex as constituting an unnatural, impure or unholy practice.

We also heard about this from our well-intentioned Bishop. So, what happens when a married Mormon couple feel inclined, while in the heat of passion, to do something that might be "unnatural", whatever that means? Do you stop to debate what "unnatural" means? Try doing something that might be "unnatural" with the specter of not making it into the Celestial Kingdom as a result hanging over your head. Good love making is hard enough to achieve for a couple with the responsibilities most Mormons in terms of kids, work, community service etc. without making it more difficult, and the Church has done that in spades.

Let me suggest that sexual advice emanating from Mormon leaders is not conducive to "staying in the moment" while in the bedroom, and that their advice in other spheres is equally inconsistent with appreciating the wonders the present has to offer. And to ensure that I am not misunderstood on this point, let me make it clear that I do not so much complain specifically about the Church's intervention in its members' sexual lives as I use that to establish that the Church has been effective in interrupting one of the most intense and primal of human activities, as well as a million other aspects of our lives that are nowhere as difficult for the Church to control. This should give pause to those who have not noticed how pervasive the Church's influence is in their lives, and provide a reason to take inventory.

Mormonism's "Iron Rod" Paradigm

I don't need to repeat the iron rod story for you. But before I explain its primary relevance to this letter's main topic, I will note as an aside that this is one of the many aspects of the Book of Mormon whose 19th century roots are probably apparent. Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, relates the following:

In 1811, we moved from Royalton, Vermont, to the town of Lebanon, New Hampshire. Soon after arriving here, my husband received another very singular vision, which I will relate: "I thought," said he, "I was traveling in an open, desolate field, which appeared to be very barren. As I was thus traveling, the thought suddenly came into my mind that I had better stop and reflect upon what I was doing before I went any further. So I asked myself, "What motive can I have in traveling here, and what place can this be?" My guide who was by my side as before, said, "This is the desolate world; but travel on." The road was so broad and barren, that I wondered why I should travel in it. ... Traveling a short distance further, I came to a narrow path. The path I entered, and, when I had traveled a little way in it, I beheld a beautiful stream of water, which ran from the east to the west. Of this stream, I could see neither the source nor yet the mouth; but as far as my eyes could extend I could see a rope, running along the bank of it, about as high as a man could reach, and beyond me, was a low, but very pleasant valley, in which stood a tree, such as I had never seen before. It was exceedingly handsome, insomuch that I looked upon it with wonder and admiration. Its beautiful branches spread themselves somewhat like an umbrella, and it bore a kind of fruit, in shape much like a chestnut bur, and as white as snow, or, if possible, whiter. ... I drew near, and began to eat of it, and I found it delicious beyond description. As I was eating, I said in my heart, "I cannot eat this alone, I must bring my wife and children, that they may partake with me. ... While thus engaged I beheld a spacious building standing opposite the valley that we were in, and it appeared to reach to the very heavens. It was full of doors and windows and they were all filled with people who were very finely dressed. When these people observed us in the low valley, under the tree, they pointed the finger of scorn at us, and treated us with all manner of disrespect and contempt..." (See Lucy Mack Smith, "Joseph Smith The Prophet")

If we are to believe Lucy Smith, the iron rod narrative was told by her husband many years before Joseph started to "translate" the Book of Mormon, and it is not much of a stretch to believe that Joseph heard it in the Smith home. The only alternative theory – that Joseph Smith Senior and Lehi (the alleged Book of Mormon prophet) had virtually the same vision – is much less probable. Occam's Razor, which I have found to be a usually reliable guide, supports this conclusion as it does virtually every point I have attempted to make in this letter.

In any event, the iron rod paradigm is woven into current Mormon culture through regular reminders during lessons and sermons, inclusion in the words of popular hymns, and even reference in Mormon dramatic productions that have increasingly influenced the shape of popular LDS culture.

The central idea of the iron rod paradigm is ancient. It is found in the New Testament's "straight and narrow" way and the "camel can't pass through the eye of the needle" concepts, as well as in mythic sources from many other cultures. It is a classic "harsh environment" metaphor. That is, life is full of danger and you must live within a narrow range of acceptable behaviours, or you will be lost in this life and will miss the wonderful rewards assumed to exist in the next. It is also an important part of the effort religious leaders make to create the monopoly their organizations need to remain strong. That is, if I accept the iron rod idea, I will obey my religious leaders and hence will strengthen both them and the organization they lead, often at my expense.

It is my view that the "iron rod" mentality is at best sub-optimal, and at worst unhealthy in the extreme. And it is out of touch with the reality of the 21st century western world. First, most religious leaders have tried to trick their followers into obedience, as is pointed out above. I do not think I am alone in wanting as little deceit in my life as possible. And second, life is not harsh in our day. Life has never been better. There are innumerable ways in which one can live a wonderful, rich life. And tragically, many of those with the iron rod mentality stumble fearfully through this garden in which we live, oblivious to most of what is available to them. And while so stumbling, they will be the last to realize their predicament. Ironically, many Mormons look at the Amish, Hutterites, Taliban and their ilk and express disbelief at how such people can be so blind to the reality of our modern world. The more the Church uses things like the faithful history policy to "protect" its members, the more the Church's members resemble the Amish et al.

"Men Are that They Might Have Joy" (2 Nephi 2:25) is one of the ideas contained in the Book of Mormon for which I am grateful, and plan to keep. One of the unexpected miracles I experienced as I let go of the iron rod was that of becoming aware for the first time in my life of the virtually endless joys and ways in which I could experience them by which I am, and always have been, surrounded. I began to revel in the truths that many faith traditions and scientists have discovered and artists have illustrated and articulated, and to experiment with how those concepts and images might enrich my life. I discovered that the worlds of art and science were not part of the "great and spacious building" or "mists of darkness" whose purpose is to deceive me and lead me away from some supremely important path, and most importantly that my life is not part of the field on which any epic battle between the eternal forces of good and evil is being fought. Rather, my eyes have been opened to see many different paths through a beautiful garden, some of which appeal to and enrich me while others leave me cold. I discovered that almost all human lives have stories woven into them that touch me deep inside, and make me more human and joyful as I understand them. Such understanding was impossible as long as I clung to a rod that required anything contradictory to it be dismissed as either threatening or not worthy of serious consideration. Once I grasp their essence, these stories feel like a hitherto hidden part of me. And while they are often so different from my own narrative that they initially disturb and sometimes even disorient to the point of pain, they are not part of any dark mist whose purpose is to mislead and confuse. Rather, they are an essential aspect of life's tapestry whose effect (if not design) is to awaken me to more beauty and order, much of which cannot be reconciled with the Mormon way and hence I did not previously feel at liberty to consider.

My focus has changed from living a "thou shalt", future oriented life to living in the "I will" present. I now focus on my strengths – on feeding and developing them – and on how I can use them to be most productive for both myself and others. The Church no longer dictates how I use my time, who my friends are, or what my priorities will be on a variety of important scores.

The changes I have made feel both good and right. However, it is taking some time to convert belief into action. That means that even though the "shalts" are largely gone, I have not yet fully come to grips with what I want to do at the mundane, day to day level, and I am sensitive to the risk we all face of spinning off into abstraction and missing real life as it passes us by. As the Zen master Soyen Shaku put it, while speculation and endless talking of abstraction has its place in Buddhism and is attractive to some:

We, plain ordinary Buddhists, will keep on removing selfishness, seeking the light that is everywhere, practising loving kindness that does not contradict or discriminate. Says an ancient sage, "The Way is near, and thou seekest it afar." Why, then, shall we ever attempt to walk away from the path which extends right in front of us, so wide and well paved? (Zen for Americans, Soyen Shaku, p. 87, 88)

I intend to be a plain, ordinary person who does much the same thing. And so I believe that there is no narrow path and no iron rod to which we must cling, but rather those privileged to live in this time and in countless places across the globe are in a beautiful garden through which run many more honourable, wonderful paths than there are people. Our target is not tiny and near impossible to hit. It is huge, and we have more arrows in our quiver than we can hope to fire. We can hardly miss if we but take aim and try. And shooting those arrows is fun! I cannot adequately describe the joy I felt (and still feel as I write this) as these ideas slowly dawned on me and were then confirmed by the best study, analysis and contemplation I can muster.

James Fowler provides a useful framework within which to consider spiritual development in his book "Stages of Faith". Fowler starts with the question of what makes the difference between people who are sincerely and deeply committed to one religious point of view, and those who see strengths and weaknesses in various religious systems. Why do some people seem to wear blinders in considering religious ideas, while others are open to looking at many ideas from many sources?

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

Stage one usually occurs between the ages of three and seven, and is characterized by the psyche's unprotected exposure to the unconscious. Imagination runs wild, uninhibited by logic and we absorb cultural taboos.

Stage two, which usually lasts through school years but can be maintained for life, involves a literal belief in symbols, such as an anthropomorphic god. Stage two people have a strong belief in the justice and reciprocity of the universe. Critical evaluation of myth and symbol is impossible. Fowler describes a person in this stage as being both carried by and trapped in their own narrative. A religious system that appeals to a person in this stage will tend to be legalistic and literalistic.

Stage three is where most adults spend most of their lives. It is characterized by conformity and strong identification with a group. People in stage three tend to be overly concerned about what other members of their group think of them, and try hard to conform to expectations. It is in stage three that people are most likely to feel that their group's ideas and approach to life constitute the "one true way." Fowler says, interestingly, that:

... in many ways religious institutions "work best" if they are peopled with a majority of committed folk best described as Stage 3.

We should not therefore be surprised to find that most religious institutions, and the Mormon Church in particular, cultivate a stage three spirituality. The dangers of stage three include taking symbolic markers such as power, "goodness", and "badness" so literally and adopting the group's perspective so entirely that the objective evaluation of life's experience is impossible. That is what can lead zealots to fly planes into buildings, or agree to "marry" and have sex with a religious leader while continuing to be married to someone else, or assume that garments are the only lingerie Mormons can wear. The former is a Taliban problem, the second is something that Joseph Smith persuaded a number of his female followers to do, and the third is a tragic glimpse of popular, faithful Mormon culture. Furthermore, while it is possible for stage three people to have an intimate relationship with the divine, the stage three group oriented perspective makes this difficult to achieve. As spiritual maturity and perceptive powers increase, leading toward such intimacy, frustration and despair also increase as a result of cognitive dissonance caused by the conflict between a newly perceived reality and the perspective imposed by group. This is the threshold to stage four.

In stage four a person starts to notice conflicts between the principles for which an organization stands, and what it does. Those that pass into stage four usually do so in their mid-thirties to early forties. At this time, the personality gradually detaches from the defining group from which it formerly drew its identity. The person is aware of herself as an individual and must - perhaps for the first time - take personal responsibility for personal beliefs and feelings. This is a stage of de-mythologizing, where what was once unquestioned is subjected to critical scrutiny. This stage is not a comfortable place to be and, although it can last for a long time, those who stay in it do so at risk of becoming bitter, suspicious characters who trust nothing and no one.

In stage five, a person grasps the reality behind the symbols of her inherited belief systems, and is also drawn to and acknowledges of the symbols of other systems. She sees the power behind the metaphors while simultaneously acknowledging their relativity. In stage five, the world, demythologized in stage four, is re-sacrilized, and brims with vision. It is also imbued with a new sense of justice that goes beyond that defined by one's own culture. Because one has begun to see "the bigger picture", the walls culture and tradition have built between us and others begin to erode. This is an overwhelming, ecstatic stage in which one is radically opened to possibility and wonder. This is what I experienced as I let go of the iron rod.

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

It seems clear that the iron rod paradigm is mired in a stage three, or perhaps even stage two, kind of spirituality, and as Fowler points out, it is in the interest of institutional religions to have as many of their members as possible remain in that state. In my view, however, that is not in

the best interest of the individual members. Stage five is a reasonable and healthy goal for most people. To get there, the iron rod mentality must be shed. Temple attendance and faithfulness to temple covenants are designed to keep the iron rod mentality intact, as are many of the rituals that occupy a significant percentage of Mormons' discretionary time. Hence, it is my view that Mormon temple and other rituals present a serious impediment to spiritual development, as Fowler and many others define it.

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

There is a correlation between people who progress from Fowler stage three to stage five spirituality and those who achieve relatively higher levels of moral judgement. Fowler stage three spirituality (and hence the iron rod paradigm) is likely in my view to restrict one's ability to empathize with and understand those of other cultures and religious traditions. This restriction is likely to impair moral development and judgement. For example, the terrorist acts of September 11 and many others were committed by people acting out of a stage three spirituality. Their way is the only way ordained by god, and those who threaten that way are hence evil and must be eradicated. It is easy to see the moral shortcomings of that approach. The same can be said of the Mormon apostasy rules and how they are applied to anyone who dares express in public reservations respecting Mormon orthodoxy.

Another example relates to LDS missionary work. To a significant extent, North American culture is carried on the back of LDS dogma into the lives of people worldwide, most of whom are poorly educated. The notion that the Utah way of doing things is the best way is, in my experience, impossible to disentangle from the gospel message. Many religious rites and rituals that have great value in foreign cultures but that are quite different from Mormon orthodoxy are thrown out because of their connection to a "false" religious tradition. The rites of Mormonism are substituted, which were developed in a different culture and often do not address the reality of the people receiving them. As a result, Mormonism causes the loss of great cultural inheritances. This loss results from an unjustified feeling of superiority that causes the Mormon Church to require its converts to abandon most aspects of their culture that are connected to any religious belief other than Mormonism in the interest of establishing obedience to Mormon authority as the primary societal value. This has ever been the way of conquering powers as they imposed their religious beliefs on their new subjects. And I note that many important aspects of most cultures are represented by their religious belief systems. All of this is caused, primarily in my view, by Mormon dogma-induced, stage three, moral myopia. The iron rod paradigm is near the foundation of this problem.

On the basis of the foregoing, I conclude that the iron rod mentality impedes moral development. As noted above, temple attendance and faithfulness to temple covenants as well

as much of the rest of Mormon ritual behaviour are designed to keep the iron rod mentality intact. And so I conclude that Mormon temple and other rituals hinder the development of moral reasoning.

The Formulation of Mormon Wisdom

For most of its history and particularly in its post-polygamy phase, the Church has followed societal developments at the conservative end of the spectrum. All one needs in order to have a high probability of accurately predicting the Church's response to any issue is two things. First, an understanding of the Church's seemingly primal need to control its membership to the greatest extent permitted by circumstance from time to time, and second, an understanding of the Church's conservative nature.

The Church's governance structure at the top requires that fifteen aged men agree before anything of significance can be changed. These men are appointed largely on their proven ability over many years to control those who follow them and their willingness to follow the dictates of their own conservative leaders. A decision-making mechanism of this type seems to me to guarantee the Church's continuing conservative, membership control oriented stance for the foreseeable future.

Given the fact that the advice dispensed by Church leaders as to how we should live is strongly influenced by what is most likely to keep the people in line while changing things as little as possible, we should not be surprised to find that much of the best of what science and culture has to offer has been overlooked by the Church.

My review of the history of the development of the Church's doctrines and policies and how they have changed over time, correlated with how scientific and cultural theories have developed and changed during the same period, leads to the conclusion that thoughtful members of the Church would have often been better off making important life decisions on the basis of what scientific and other authorities taught instead of following the counsel of Mormon leaders. The evidence I have reviewed strongly suggests that this is also true in my day. This is because historically, as now, the Church's policies are determined by those twin predictable forces – the need to control the Church's membership and conservatism. While I could turn this letter into a book with a complete summary of the issues I have come across that in my view illustrate this point, I will limit myself to the first few that come to mind.

Dark Skin Colour Equals Inferior People

Historically the dominant white races have assumed that they are superior to the darker colored races that they have typically conquered. Joseph Smith canonized this in the Book of Mormon; Brigham Young worsened the situation by allowing that erroneous idea to become part of the Mormon governance system when he excluded blacks from priesthood eligibility; and even now this idea permeates Mormon thought despite significant efforts of the leadership to get rid of it, including quietly amending the most offensive of the Book of Mormon's passages in that regard. The "dark skin = inferior people" idea was shattered outside of Mormonism and a few other purposefully ignorant corners of human society, primarily by genetics research, and by the 1960s a healthy social change was underway in this regard. Not surprisingly, given its doctrine and conservative nature, the Church lagged far behind respecting this social trend. This point illustrates an important Mormon tendency. Where Church doctrine happens to be at odds with science or history, Mormon leadership becomes anti-science and anti-history, which goes against the general trend of Mormonism. I believe this is because the Church's leaders have

come to value control over everything else, and if they admit past mistakes, then they will have to deal with questions concerning the wisdom of their own decisions. So, it is better to be selectively anti-history and anti-science than to deal with issues that may reduce their control over the membership. In my view, the Church needs to simply admit the mistakes that were made in the past, and take advantage of the wonderfully progressive ideas Joseph Smith left us. He even left us the tools to do this – his acknowledgement of leadership fallibility (including his own) and "line upon line" are among his most important religious innovations in my view. But I digress.

When one reads books such as Jared Diamond's 1997 Pulitzer Prize winning "Guns, Germs and Steel", one finds a cogent explanation of why the light-colored races ended up in their privileged position. This has everything to do with which peoples happened to be in areas that also housed the largest array of domesticatable plants and animals. Given human nature as disclosed to us by our history (and religious history in particular), it is not surprising that these fortunates attributed what was probably circumstance to god-granted, innate superiority.

As a believing Mormon, I was precluded from taking Diamond's theories seriously because they contradict Mormon theories of the origin of man (Adam and Eve came into being at Independence, Missouri, for example). While Diamond's ideas (and those of the legion like him) are sure not to be undiluted truth, I am as certain as I am that the earth is round that they reflect much more of reality than what the Church has to say relative to the same topics. The core of information in Diamond's book has been extant for many years within the scientific community. Diamond simply wove it into a format that was accessible to laypeople. In this and a host of other areas, Mormon prophets are not only behind the knowledge curve, they often actively fight it. I do not want this influence in my life or my home. And I can find the usual, important bromides related to loving my fellow man, being a good father, and abiding by the golden rule in a thousand other places that do not require what has become plain to me is a spiritually and intellectually stunting silliness in belief and practise that Mormonism requires.

The One True Church

This idea is in my view the worst of all. It appeals to the basest element of humanity – the tendency we all have to accept any theories that suggest we are better than others, and to allow ourselves to be influenced by those who espouse such theories. The religious historian Karen Armstrong and a host of anthropologists and sociologists have demonstrated the ancient, tribal practise, mostly found in harsh environments such as those that gave rise to the Hebrew people, of justifying the killing of rival tribes in the fight for scarce resources on the basis that they are not god's people and hence their extermination is justified. As you know, the Old Testament is a history of this practise, and it is reflected in much of the Book of Mormon narrative, although there it is not as blatant.

It should be obvious that in our modern world of plenty, the "One True Church" idea is not only out of place, it is terrifically counterproductive. It is what caused 9/11. It tears the Middle East apart. And its horrors will continue to approach our homes and families as time passes. The Church should take steps to reduce the effect this idea has throughout the world, and where better to start than within the Church itself?

You might say to me, "Come on Bob, the Church does not teach you that you are better than other people. In fact, I can quote you all kinds of scripture and leadership statements to the contrary." I will agree with you in that regard. However, as is the case with so much of what the Church does, there is a double-mindedness in the Church's teachings that warps minds. The

Church teaches that "The Glory of God is Intelligence", and yet consistently disparages and suppresses any branch of knowledge that questions LDS orthodoxy. The Church preaches that truth and honesty are paramount values, and even requires that each member who wishes to attend the temple answers in the affirmative the question, "Are you honest in your dealings with your fellow man?" And at the same time, the Church follows the "faithful history" practise and still uses the "lying for the Lord" policy, as well as defending Joseph Smith's use of it. A more blatant example of dishonesty and situational ethics cannot be found. Again, the explanatory thread here is that anything that threatens Mormon leadership control will be resisted at almost any cost.

By the same token, the Church says that "God is no respecter of persons", "All are alike unto God", etc. while telling me that through my membership in the Church I am one of god's "elect"; that while others have a measure of truth, I have more than them and critical pieces that they lack, and have a duty to persuade them of that fact and get them to follow the Mormon leaders to whom I look as the final arbiters of truth on this earth, etc. How can the result of this not be that I come to feel that all things Mormon are better than all things not-Mormon? I don't see how it could be any other way.

As I shed the "One True Church" idea, I experienced a miracle. The lives of those by whom I had been surrounded became relevant and instructive to me. No longer did I feel that my way was best and so their way could not have anything of significance to teach me. And as I began to pay real attention to them, a treasure trove of uplifting, delightful human experience came into focus. And why would I pay serious attention to the world's great literature and art if it was all a pale shadow of the divine revelation? And in any event, after attending to my duties to work, family and Church (including reading my scriptures daily; reading my Sunday School and Priesthood lessons weekly; writing in my daily journal in an exercise of continuous self-testimony bearing; taking a between half and full day monthly to attend the temple; and preparing home teaching messages and other presentations for Church meetings just in case I had a few minutes left somewhere in my schedule), when was I going to read anything that was not required reading or contemplate the meaning of a piece of art? I had eyes that did not see; ears that did not hear; and a heart that did not feel.

As a Mormon comic recently put it, "Growing up Mormon is great, as long as you like sensory deprivation tanks." I wouldn't go quite that far, while appreciating the caricature he drew. I would say, however, that a Mormon life is filled to overflowing with monochrome Mormonness. A busy Mormon whose horizon is jammed with Mormon things is not likely to question authority.

You may be tempted to say, as a few of my friends and family have, "Bob, I am sorry that your experience with Mormonism was so negative, but that is not my experience at all, and you know that almost all active members of the Church would not agree with your assessment." I understand and accept that. However, let me point out that I was one of those faithful for many years. I was one of your enforcers and cheerleaders. And had anyone asked me if I was happy as a Mormon, and proud to be a Mormon, I would have answered a resounding yes. My feelings in this regard were based on the information to which I had access. In the same fashion that I perceived Paul Dunn differently after I found out that he made up most of his wonderful, faith inspiring stories, I have perceived the Church and my experience at its hands differently since I became aware of how it mislead me. My eyes now see, my ears hear and my heart feels differently than before. This is a rebirth process. I remember how the world looks through the eyes of a faithful Mormon leader, and I know how it looks now. Can you say the same thing? I suggest that until you have climbed this particular mountain, you cannot understand the difference between the view from where I now stand and from where I used to

stand. I do not say that you are down in a dark valley. But at a minimum, you stand on a different mountain with a completely different view. And I will not suggest that the ground I formerly occupied was like the place on which you stand; but it is fair to say that it is like that upon which the core of your faithful have built their foundations.

The Role of Science In General

While you were at BYU I am sure you were intimately familiar with the tension between some scientifically and theologically inclined faculty members respecting evolutionary theory in particular and science in general. The theory of evolution, as it applies to biology, culture and a variety of other things, is probably the single most useful theory I have encountered in my effort to understand the world around me and make decisions concerning my day-to-day activities. Until recently, I paid limited attention to that theory because of my understanding that it was deemed erroneous by the weight of the most recent statements of LDS prophets.

I read an entertaining article in the current Dialogue written by a fellow with whom I have had significant private correspondence, Mike Ash, which detailed the Church's official pronouncements respecting evolution, summarized the debate on this topic that occurred over decades with prominent General Authorities participating on both sides, and concluded that the Church never has officially opined that evolutionary theory is false, although it came perilously close to doing so. Whew!, in effect exclaims Mike (for whom I have a great deal of time and respect, by the way), our prophets are not false. But to reach that conclusion he had to take the position that all of the clear statements many prophets had made respecting the invalidity of evolutionary theory were not spoken under inspiration and hence could be ignored. I have long found entertaining that method of *ex post facto* rationalization. And yet on other occasions I find Mike and people like him quoting from Conference talks and reminding us that anything spoken over the pulpit at Conference or published in the Ensign by a member of the Twelve or First Presidency has scriptural force – these are our modern scriptures.

So which is it? If we should ignore those non-official prophetic pronouncements that are wrong, should we not ignore all of them until they are proven right since they are not really prophetic? And can we honestly say that we only put weight on official Church pronouncements, or do we in fact take seriously and make important life decisions on the basis of whatever the prophets say or write by way of general broadcast to the Church's members? The later is obviously correct, and the former is a thin excuse to ignore the errors made regularly by Mormon prophets, despite the fact that members of the Church make crucial life decisions on a daily basis that are directed by the misinformation they have received in that regard.

And to make matters worse, as it becomes more clear that the leaders have made errors, pressure is created to protect the reputation of former leaders and hence the authority of those currently in power, leading to the suppression of anything that questions them, whether it may bear the truth or not. This is the dynamic that brought about the faithful history policy. Intellectuals were discovering information respecting the Church's foundational stories that threatened current leadership influence, and the desire to fight that threat led to the wholesale disenfranchisement of all intellectual enquiry respecting anything that questioned Church authority. This puts academics and intellectual leaning members in a tight spot. Do we check our brains at the door as far as the Church is concerned? This is certainly not what Joseph Smith or the scriptures he produced taught. Nonetheless, the pressure not to think is tremendous, and many have succumbed, leading to a stunted, dishonest form of academic activity within certain parts of the LDS community that is a parody of the real academy.

Far too often as I read the work of Church affiliated scholars in any area respecting which the Church's claims are threatened by academic progress, I recognize the thin, forced voice of those whose conclusion has been reached before their analysis commenced. This is a voice that as lawyer I have been trained to recognize. When I hear it during my professional activities coming from a lawyer representing the other side in a case, I expect to either win before the judge I will eventually face if the case goes to trial, or alternatively to settle on favourable terms. My client's opponent, when represented by a lawyer who is trapped by his starting position and does not realize it, almost always loses badly. Nowhere in Mormondom is this type of voice more clearly heard of late than respecting the application to the Book of Mormon narrative of the most recent DNA research related to population migrations. I am not a science guy, but am as capable as anyone of reading several accounts of the same thing and determining which deals most comprehensively with the evidence, and is most reasonable in the conclusions it draws. The Church had better learn how to gracefully admit its mistakes, apologize and move on to better things.

The Nature of Mormon Leadership

The Church's leaders have learned not to follow Joseph and Brigham's example of saying a lot about a lot, and as a result the Church's official pronouncements say less about less as time passes. I understand why this is the case, but as a result of it the tenor of Church's conferences and official publications has become so oriented toward platitudes and stories designed to scare the membership into continued obedience that I have little time for them any more. The bit of last weekend's Conference that I caught showed this tendency in spades, with Elder Maxwell's talk perhaps being the high water mark. I did not hear your talk, and it is not yet in print form and so I cannot comment respecting it.

Bright, capable men such as yourself should be able to open our minds to new possibilities, and inspire us to see more of life's wonder as we grapple with its challenges. This does not happen often at Conference any more, largely in my view as a result of the desire Church leaders feel not to say anything that subsequently may be proven erroneous. Would it not be better to openly acknowledge your fallibility, as did Joseph, and then say: "And for what it is worth, here is what I think about ...", and give us a look over your shoulder as you wrestle with life's problems? Church members measure the value of a Conference talk by how well it confirms what they already believe. And most of these are little more than the "its true, its true, its true" theme that they have been conditioned to parrot to each other whenever they meet. New and useful paradigms are often not comfortable. I learn the most when I make the effort to understand points of view with which I do not agree.

It was with regret that I recently learned, courtesy of Dialogue and Duane Jeffrey, that the Church has declined an opportunity to make a submission to the National Bioethics Advisory Committee respecting ethical issues related to cloning. Here is the place for real prophetic insight. Do you have it, or not? It is, unfortunately, my observation that the Church's leaders are so focussed on extracting obedience from its members that they do little else, and the risk of being proven wrong in the future by what they say today forces them to remain silent in order to maximize their influence over the membership. The Church's circle has become smaller during my lifetime, and my recent review of LDS history indicates this to be a long-standing trend that I expect to continue indefinitely unless someone like you takes action.

Scientific progress is made incrementally. One person makes a small discovery of which another becomes aware and then uses it to solve a problem respecting her research, which leads to another discovery, etc. Cultural progress is made in the same way, and as our society

comes to grips with the moral issues that now must be addressed respecting genetic engineering and a host of related issues, I expect to see this incremental process in use. There is no one source of truth, but miracles are regularly accomplished and what amounts in my view to divine revelation is received as a result of the collaboration of groups of people wrestling with related issues across the globe as they share their thoughts, findings and problems with each other. It would be helpful if the voices of Church leaders participated in this process. My impression is that you remain silent because you cannot speak until you are certain you are right. Since you will never be so certain, we will not hear from you and you will be shut out of the process that matters most – that of the formation of the standards on which our society will operate.

To turn around one of Boyd Packer's infamous lines, the "Mantle" of Mormon leadership is nowhere near as great as the collective human intellect. I have found more wisdom, light and joy during the past year as a result of "letting go of the iron rod" than I imagined possible. I have been, to use C.S. Lewis' phrase, "surprised by joy", which reminds me of a point just barely worth mentioning, which is that what was once for me one of Ezra Benson's best and most inspired talks plagiarized Lewis shamelessly.

The Church has largely consigned itself to the role of remonstrating with respect to the continual decline of society's values, while adopting in most cases those very values several decades behind the mainstream. Think of, for example, racial attitudes, dress styles, family size, birth control, mothers working outside the home and a host of other societal trends. Would it not be better for the Church's leaders to acknowledge that things will change, and then do their best to identify the principles on which they want those changes to occur and fearlessly express their best considered opinions with the caveat that they are just that, and so allow those opinions to participate in the building block process I have just described? If your voices are worth hearing, that is where they need most to be heard, and yet you are silent respecting most important issues unless you say that we should not change or better yet, we should wind the clock to the golden days of the LDS leaders' youth. At present you are little more than a set of brakes that slow down, but do not prevent, the absorption of social trends within the Church. That does some good on occasion, but in my view it does more harm. And it causes a great opportunity to be lost, in that you cannot effectively participate in the debate that shapes our society. Your current approach concedes the decision as to direction to others, and then you fight a rearguard action that does nothing more than slow down the rate of change within the LDS community. If you constituency really were the whole of humanity, your approach would be different.

I will not give up the wisdom and joy I have found outside the Church, and feel that my faithfulness to the Church kept me from many of these things because of the trench mentality that "faithful history" exemplifies. This mentality, it seems to me, has the effect if not the design of strengthening the Church by promoting virtually blind obedience (while always disavowing it, of course) and so augers against the interest of individual members. And while I would be prepared to bring what I have found back to the Church, I will not do so until the deception caused by "faithful history" and related practises stops.

To make matters worse, the Church throughout most of its history has perceived itself to be involved in an epic battle between good and evil. Some of Boyd Packer's most vivid imagery invoked in favour of the "faithful history" policy use the war metaphor. And as recent Iraqi, US and British actions relative to their interaction in the Near East prove yet again, one of war's first casualties is usually truth.

I should also say a little more about how religious belief influences decision-making throughout life, because this is in the end religion's most important function. As noted above, I need to make decisions now, and feel a moral obligation to use the best information available to me, and my best judgement in that regard. For example, what if one of my children turns out to be homosexual? Should I wait for Mormon leaders to eventually agree with the rising tide of evidence to the effect that genetics are often responsible for tendencies of this type, and until then allow my child to labour under the impression that he is fundamentally defective and must either lose his eternal life and live guilt-ridden by virtue of continual sin, or spend his life in misery while swimming against the current of his nature? Or should I reach my own conclusions on the basis described above and teach my child that she is made in god's image, metaphorically at least, and should walk her path through life proudly and with as much joy as possible? In case you wonder, this is not an issue we have to face in our family, but it provided a useful thought experiment for me to work through.

And what of my great-grandmother who accepted a marriage proposal from a man over twice her age (William Paxman, then the president of the Juab Stake) who had been commanded by the First Presidency to take another wife (his fourth) in order to show the leadership flag for polygamy while the Church was still fighting the US federal government in that regard. Great grandma lived her life in loneliness while married, and when her husband died pre-maturely she was left with her three small children, no share of his considerable estate and came to Canada to homestead in poverty because that was the best opportunity available to her. I wept as I recently came to appreciate the extent to which her life was wasted and made miserable by obedience to a purported religious principle that in my view is probably and simply the result of Joseph's sexual folly.

Does Organized Religion Answer, or Ask, the Existential Questions?

One of the explanations for religion and religious ritual that is commonly offered is that man needs the comfort these things provide in order to deal with the mental stress caused by our many unanswered existential questions – why do we suffer?; why do we die?; what is life's purpose? While there can be no doubt that these questions and the manner in which man has variously attempted to answer them form part of the human cultural foundation, anthropologists have pointed out that there is a tremendous variety in the ways in which these issues have been dealt with, and in fact it appears that the things that concern man are more a function of the “solutions” posited by religion than anything else. The anthropologist Pascal Boyer, in his recent book “Religion Explained”, puts it as follows:

First, as anthropologists have pointed out for some time, some facts of life are mysterious or awe-inspiring only in places where a local theory provides a solution to the mystery or as cure for the angst. For instance, there are places in Melanesia where people perform an extraordinary number of rituals to protect themselves from witchcraft. Indeed, people think they live under a permanent threat from these invisible enemies. So we might think that in such societies magical rituals, prescriptions and precautions are essentially comforting devices, giving people some imaginary control over these processes. However, in other places people have no such rituals and feel no such threats to their existence. From the anthropologist's viewpoint it seems plausible that the rituals create the need they are supposed to fulfill, and probably that each reinforces the other. (“Religion Explained”, pp. 19-20)

Boyer's comments take on new meaning when considered in light of the “control” or “monopoly” paradigm that I have described above. What better way to control a group of people than to

persuade them that a particularly potent threat exists in their environment and that you hold the keys required to thwart it? And it is not necessary to assume that the community leaders who teach these theories are consciously deceptive. I suggest that many of these people may be at the creative and charismatic end of the spectrum – natural leaders if you will – who are either already in or on their way toward leadership positions within their communities. As they wrestle with the great existential questions, they perceive in some particular way the mythic themes related to the metaphysical forces of good and evil that seem present in life and that C.C. Jung and others tell us form the basis of many of our dreams and are woven into man's collective psyche as a result of the commonality of the existential questions. These leaders then create a ritual system designed to comfort both them and those they lead, and usually report having experienced this process as a divine revelation. Given the description Newberg et al gave of the neural processes related to this kind of phenomena (see below), such a report is not surprising. In fact, what I just described fits Joseph Smith like a glove.

Think of Mormon temple ritual in the above context, and its connection to the Plan of Salvation. Joseph Smith told his followers the Plan of Salvation, while not giving it that name. This posited an afterlife full of things that assuage our most painful existential uncertainties: What happens after we die? Will we continue to live with our families? What is the purpose of life? Etc. Then, he indicates that obedience to the laws God communicated to him was required in order to reach the Celestial Kingdom, and established the temple ceremony (which changed dramatically just after he experienced the Masonic ceremony, but that is another story) that seems to have two primary purposes. First, it reiterates the Plan of Salvation, which the people are taught outside the temple. And second, it requires an increased level of commitment in the form of engaging in a ritual in the company of other members of the “insiders” community that would be bizarre from any “outsider's” point of view, as well as making promises of obedience that go well beyond that required upon baptism.

It is clear to me that just as those Melanesians who believe in the reality of witches will obey the commands of those who they perceive to have the ability to protect them from witches, any Mormon who believes in the reality of the Celestial Kingdom and divine nature of the temple ceremony will be inclined to obey the dictates of the leaders of the Mormon Church. This stuff all comes from the same human source – the need felt by societal leaders to organize their followers and cause them to obey. And these leaders tend, of course, toward the philosopher king model.

I also note the connection between the nature of the religious beliefs and rituals used from society to society and the environment in which the society forms. As noted above, harsh environments create authoritarian religious systems and rituals. And as Boyer notes:

Reassuring religion, insofar as it exists, is not found in places where life is significantly dangerous or unpleasant; quite the opposite. One of the few religious systems obviously designed to provide a comforting worldview is New Age mysticism. It says that people, all people, have enormous “power”, that all sorts of intellectual and physical feats are within their reach. It claims that we are all connected to mysterious but basically benevolent forces in the universe. Good health can be secured by inner spiritual strength. Human nature is fundamentally good. Most of us lived very interesting lives before this one. Note that these reassuring, ego-boosting notions appear and spread in one of the most secure and affluent societies in history. People who hold these beliefs are not faced with war, famine, infant mortality, incurable endemic diseases and arbitrary oppression to the same extent as Middle Age Europeans or present-day Third World peasants. (“Religion Explained”, pp. 20-21)

While Boyer does not mention Mormonism in his book, I suspect that I am not the only who has noticed the connection between many aspects of Joseph Smith's theology and New Age theories. It seems likely to me that Joseph, living in an age which could feel some of the optimism that powers our modern world, was moved by the very powers Boyer describes and articulated them with the help of ideas he borrowed from various sources, and with considerable originality. Hence, Mormon theology is an interesting hybrid. Joseph used many of the dark themes of traditional Christianity, but focussed more on man's glorious roots past and godlike potential future. However, he fully harnessed fear in his use of the traditional power formula – he and only he and those he authorized had the keys to these marvels, and therefore he must be followed and obeyed. Those who did not follow with adequate obedience would lose the opportunity to live with their loved ones in the wonderful world he had persuaded them existed after death. You have to give Joseph full credit for coming up with something that touched so many buttons relevant not only to the people of his day, but of generations to come.

New Age theory is less authoritarian and hence more reflective of the more democratic, network-based world in which we live. I would not, however, suggest it as the "one" religious solution. It is just an interesting reflection of our modern culture.

I note in conclusion on this point the relationship between one of Buddhism's basic ideas and the control-based-on-fear approach outlined above. Buddhism posits that the path to the good life lies between the only two forces in life that cause problems for us – fear and desire. Only to the extent that we can free ourselves from these forces will we be free to experience life as it is, and be free. I note that that most religions include dollops of both fear and desire in their control mechanisms. Some fear witches, others hell, others the devil, etc. Some desire Nirvana, others heaven, others life in the Celestial Kingdom with their families, etc. Whether the emphasis is on fear or desire varies from one tradition to another, and probably has a lot to do with the societal factors Boyer refers to above – the nature of our society puts our control buttons in different places to an extent and societal leaders (including religious leaders) are adept at finding those buttons.

However, when we consider how these fears and desires work, we find that they are no more than two sides of the same coin. Does it matter whether I fear hell, or desire to be in the Celestial Kingdom with my family and so fear losing that opportunity? Indeed, Mormon scripture describes the state of those who fail to reach the Celestial Kingdom as that of intense suffering caused by their knowledge of what they might have had and failed to obtain because they were not obedient.

I conclude that the study of anthropology shows Mormonism and Joseph Smith as functioning in the same fashion religions always have, within the context of a particular society, place and time. And, at the risk of repeating myself too many times, that he was a classic philosopher king.

The Ability to Choose How I Spend My Life's Energy

While I was going through university and preparing for my career, I noticed that the trajectory people I knew choose to take on their educational path seemed to make a huge difference in most cases as to where they ended up from a career point of view. One case that caught my attention in particular was that of two men who joined the police force. I knew them both well, and while they seemed to have similar levels of intelligence and ability, one did a graduate degree before entering the force, while the other joined right after high school in the days when

it was possible to do that. The second spend his career toiling on street beats, while the other went straight into the officer corps, and rose from there. The message I took from this experience was that I should pay particular attention to the educational mountain I chose to climb, because that choice would affect many other things that happened as I moved through life.

Until recently, the “which mountain” question had not occurred to me as being relevant from a religious point of view, and in fact in a sense it is not because our belief systems are usually part of life’s wallpaper – something we inherit rather than choose. But I am now acutely aware of the dramatic effect this aspect of life has on our experience.

From a religious point of view, the answer to the “which mountain” question is largely dictated by the valley in which I awake to find myself. Were I raised a Hutterite or polygamous, fundamentalist Mormon, I would have many issues to deal with that would be far more difficult than those I now have. If I were fortunate enough to have worked my way into the “outside” world, I would be struggling to gain a basic education and simply to cope with the modern world. As a Mormon who has let go of the iron rod, I have some deprogramming to do, and this need manifests itself mostly by my feeling compelled to spend a lot of time and effort understanding the cultural and religious forces that were so potent as to control my life while I appeared to live near modern society’s mainstream. I expect that I will have a life long interest in psychology, anthropology, sociology and related topics as a result of my experience as a fully believing, orthodox Mormon. That interest will no doubt enrich my life in some ways.

The fascinating question, to which there is no answer, is toward which ends would I have directed the tremendous energy I have found to explore spirituality if I did not need to patch the holes left by my Mormon experience? That is, which mountain would I have chosen, and felt a passion for, if I did not need to do what I am doing?

It seems to me that the thinking and writing I will do over the next several decades as I continue to pick apart the knotted ball of thread that I have discovered at the core of my inherited belief system will likely be of use to those who have similar balls of thread with which to deal – Mormons and others like them. But if that ball of thread were not there inside me, what would have attracted my attention? My hypothesis is that in the absence of something very specific, such as my issues with Mormonism, I would have found something of a more general nature to explore with a passion similar to that I feel for issues related to Mormon spirituality as it intersects with a variety of cultural and social science disciplines, and the energy that I would have expended in that field would likely have produced things that would have been useful to a broader swath of humanity than what I will produce.

I am not deeply troubled by what I have just written, and write it more by way more of interesting observation than anything else. However, one of my goals will be to raise my children so that the specific knotted ball that wasted part of my life and will occupy as a matter of fascination much of what remains, is not so much a part of theirs. I hope to leave them more free to choose a mountain, instead of being forced to struggle out of a deep, narrow valley and over several high passes, before they can do anything else. I hope to place them in the middle of a broad plain, in view of a variety of mountains, and to spend the early part of their lives while they remain under my influence helping them to understand as much about the various things they can see before sending them off with my best wishes to find the path that calls their name.

The Mormon Reliance on "Feelings"

Pascal Boyer's book "Religion Explained" offers some interesting insights into where our religious "intuition" or "feelings" come from. He uses evolutionary psychological research to suggest that humans evolved "inference systems" to deal with other aspects of their lives, and these predispose us to accept certain ideas and not others in the religions sphere. Hence, the idea of dead ancestors and other spirits being among us is an idea that makes sense the social inference systems we have developed, and it is a common religious theme. And the idea that that these spirits might disappear each Tuesday between the hours of 8 am and 4 pm (which is as logically possible as the existence of ghosts in the first place) is unknown to religion because it does not fit with other inference systems we have developed. Hence, the idea is that certain "illogical" things in the religions context fit with our inference systems and hence are more likely to be accepted than others. And when we look at the ideas that form religious systems, we find a high incidence of ideas that are compatible with the way in which our inference systems work.

It has been proven that religious experience is "real" in the sense that the brain does things that indicate it is having the kind of experience that would produce profound perceptions of peace, joy and other desirable altered states. Newberg et al, the authors of "Why God Won't Go Away", provide a detailed, experiment based analysis of how the brain produces these effects. I will summarize their reconstruction of how what they have observed in the laboratory could produce what I called above "basic divine experience" in real life.

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

At p. 70 the authors note:

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

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

as a powerful surge of calmness and peace. The signals then reinforce each other, flowing back and forth, bathing the chief in wondrous feeling.

The authors note at p. 72:

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

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

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

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

While I was reading that morning, I came across some particularly impressive Book of Mormon passages. I don't recall which ones, but the Book of Mormon has plenty. As I read, I can even now vividly recall the manner in which I was struck by the idea that no one in Smith's

circumstances could possibly have written that book, and voila, an experience precisely as described above with regard to the chief came upon me. This hit me, as it says above respecting the chief, "with the force of revelation". There is no doubt that the anxiety about my testimony, mission and school, as well as my frustration as a fledgling writer, combined to produce this effect. I had been told that when I felt precisely the peace etc. that I then felt, I would have received my testimony that I could have confidence that the Book of Mormon, the Church and a thousand other things related to them were all "true". Having done what I was told to do (read the Book of Mormon and pray about it), and having felt what I was told I would feel (wonderful peace, burning in the bosom, etc.), and knowing by experience that what I had felt was out of the ordinary, I believed all that I was told I should believe.

Over the years, I have time and again gone back to that event in memory and by re-experience to refresh my LDS testimony when it flagged. That is, as I re-read the Book of Mormon (I have read it cover to cover more than 20 times and my favourite parts of it many more times than that) I have been struck from time to time by the very same idea – that it was not the work of any man, let alone that of an uneducated young man. Many times I returned to this well for the invigorating experience described above. The greater the anxiety respecting my testimony I was experiencing at the moment, the greater the relief this process offered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

who are anxious to fit in after moving to a new community with the insecurity such changes naturally produce.

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

Does this mean that religious experience is a mirage? Far from it. What the authors of "Why God Won't Go Away" ably point out is that the brain can and regularly does play tricks on us, and they explain why that is the case. These tricks have a solid basis in evolutionary drive and the survival instinct. An understanding of these things can become part of our refiner's fire - it will burn away misunderstanding and other forms of dross; it will sanctify us as we confront the inadequacy of spiritual ideas that leave us in unholy conflict with other religious traditions; and we will find a deeper and more satisfying joy than any reflection or counterfeit can provide as we reach into the depths of our souls to find the bedrock of spirituality that underlies all human groping toward a divine transcendence. And, I believe, all of this can be done within any religious tradition that is open enough to permit its members to allow the refiner's fire to burn in their lives. My only real concern with the LDS church is that it does not appear to be open enough to permit this to occur at this point in its history. That is a shame, because the more I study mythology, mysticism, world religion and related topics the more I recognize how far ahead of his time Joseph Smith was in many ways. He was a great mystic as well as a stifling literalist, a liar, and still somehow pointed toward many of the things I now find so satisfying.

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

How Mormonism has Affected Me, and What it Would Take for Me to Come Back

Then we come to me and how Mormon belief has affected my life. On the basis of faithful history's misleading stories, I made a host of important decisions that in hindsight look foolish. The rationale for my membership in the Church, and my willingness to spend so much time furthering its interests, was essentially this: I would trust my religious leaders and so would obey them in this life, and in exchange I would receive two things. First, I would experience a better life in the here and now than would otherwise be possible, and second I would receive the rewards of the Celestial Kingdom in the hereafter. As noted above, I have concluded that Joseph Smith – the man on whom I must rely for the validity of the Celestial Kingdom promises – is unreliable. And in any event, I have concluded that the primary value of all metaphysical claims is in metaphor, and still use some of Joseph's ideas in that regard. He was a great mystic, if nothing else. But I am no longer willing to put any weight on the literal accuracy of his promises.

As far as this life is concerned, it is now clear to me that the Mormon way does not provide more joy or a better life than is otherwise available. Mormons spend most of their discretionary time directly or indirectly selling Joseph Smith's afterlife products to themselves and others. That is a pipe dream. It is classic Madison Avenue. It is irony run wild – a group of men and women who hardly see their families as a result of spending so much time talking to other people about the importance of families being together. The structure of the temple ceremony is not accidental, in my view, in how it separates men and women until the Celestial room. That is the Mormon way. And I have rejected it.

I feel that Mormonism has misled me, robbed me of time and other resources, and encouraged me to live my life in fear of non-existent eternal judgement in such a way that I missed much of the beauty and wonder by which I am now, and have always been, surrounded. I don't expect you to have thus perceived your life's journey, but given the tone of your letter I suspect that you will accept this as a sincere appraisal of my experience. And given the fact that you and other faithful Mormons have not experienced what I have, you are in no better position to judge between your position and mine than a life long Taliban or Hutterite is between his and yours. I am, however, in a position to judge the relative merits of my former Mormon lifestyle and what I now experience. And I am grateful that my eyes were opened, even at this relatively late stage in life, to the point that I have been able to have this experience.

I acknowledge that the kind of life the Mormon Church provides will be to the liking of some people, whether it is good for them or not. I also know a few, but only a few, members who are well informed as to the nature of the Church and its history, what it will demand and what it can reasonably be expected to provide in return, and freely choose to remain associated with it. These members tend not to be at the ultra faithful or leadership end of the spectrum, where I was. I have no criticism for them. They have made an informed choice as to how they wish to live, as is their right. And if my children make the same decision, I will have no criticism for them. But, I will do my best to ensure that they understand the reality of Mormonism and what it can reasonably be expected to deliver in return for what it asks, and encourage them to make their decision on that basis. There are in my view many other spiritually oriented organizations that provide much more, and require much less.

So, if I am again to be associated with the Church, it will have to "come clean" respecting a host of uncertainties respecting its history, authority and theology, give up a large measure of its control over its members, and begin to encourage its members to grow spiritually in the myriad ways possible for human beings instead of simply obeying their religious leaders. I do not expect these things to happen, and so am unlikely to re-associate myself with the Church. But I will note in any event for the record my view that the Church should become a facilitator – an expander of free will – instead of a controller of human beings. Mormonism is rife with irony, and none is more striking than the fact that the best parts of Joseph's theology, as represented by the Plan of Salvation and other things like his "man can become god" concept, point the institutional Church toward the role of expanding free will instead of what it currently does.

In my view, the explanation for the difference between the core of what Joseph taught and what the Church has become lies in another of his insightful teachings, to the effect that it is a sad truth of human nature that power corrupts. That idea was not, of course, original to Joseph (few of his ideas were), but he was wise enough to emphasize it as part of his movement's foundation, and I honour him for that. If he had established something like the failsafe measures modern democracies have used to deal with the endemic human problems caused by power's corrupting influence, things might be much different within Mormondom now, and I perhaps would not be writing this letter as a non-member of the Church.

The Process

The process I went through during my enlightenment (in the "French" sense of that word) has three stages.

Passive Acceptance Followed by Eyes Slowly Opening

First, while a fully faithful and believing Mormon I encountered "anti-Mormon" literature off and on over the years, and it never much troubled me. It seemed simplistic and so obviously biased that it was not worth considering. However, as time passed various inconsistencies between what the Church taught and what it did began to bother me. Principal among these were the time I was required to spend away from my family as a result of Church related activities, and the level of obedience required with respect to so many things that seemed to me both unimportant and the cause of the conflict between what I believed and felt the Church had taught me about the important things (like putting my family first, as I tried to do), and what the Church required of me. But these concerns were not pressing enough to on their own motivate me to reconsider my beliefs. They, rather, bubbled beneath the surface.

For a number of years I have been experimenting with various things of the "just be" variety to which I referred above. These things helped to make me feel more at peace, and I began not avoid the kind of perfectionistic compliance with Church requirements that characterized most of my adult life. I was one of those who tried hard to keep my covenants with "exactness", as the endowment teaches that all members should. I note the irony that the Church seems to harm those who most diligently do that it asks. They are, for example, the ones who see their families the least, and spend the most time convincing others to obey the Church. What kind of an organization hurts its most faithful adherents the most? In any event, I did not perceive this to be related to any fundamental change with respect to my belief system, but was concerned that I no longer found the energy to be the 100% home teacher that I had been for years, and that I allowed excuses related to work and my children's activities to override leadership and other meetings. My priorities were slowly changing, and I felt a significant amount of guilt in that regard. I assumed that I would snap out of whatever was slowing me down, and even went to a doctor a couple of times to see if I was vitamin deficient or had something else wrong with me that could explain the low energy levels I felt.

Courtesy of the Internet, I ran across some articles critical of the Church about 18 months ago that were well reasoned, and for which I did not have easy answers. I encountered these things while trying to help one of my former young men who had run into them and was troubled enough that he had stopped attending Church. So for the first time in my life, I began to seriously address questions concerning the Church's foundations instead of dismissing them out of hand. And while doing so, I also began to think about the authoritarian related concerns mentioned above. You may find it useful to hear exactly how and why the tide turned in this regard. In a sense, you can thank FARMS for my change of heart respecting the Church. And if not FARMS specifically, then "faithful history" in general.

Years ago I read a couple of reviews FARMS put out respecting Todd Compton's book "In Sacred Loneliness". On the basis of those reviews, I heaved a sigh of relief and did not read ISL. While looking up some other things related to the Church on the Internet, I stumbled across Compton's rebuttal to the FARMS reviews, and realized that they had presented a grotesquely unfair caricature of his book, that I had been deceived by them and as a result had not read something I should have read. Compton wrote his rebuttal in the tradition of intellectual

freedom and the pursuit of truth best exemplified within Mormonism by Joseph Smith himself, James Talmage, John Widstoe, Hugh Brown, Rueben Clark, David McKay and others who I continue to respect.

I agreed with Compton's rebuttal, and was gravely disappointed by FARMS obviously biased attempts to discredit him. I would go so far as to say that FARMS, in this case and many others I have since witnessed, was so far off base as to appear dishonest. I think it unlikely that they were purposefully deceptive, but if not their bias was so strong in these cases that it rendered them intellectually incompetent. Those are strong words, and I use them with care. I later understood, after learning about "faithful history", why the FARMS writers proceed as they do. They follow the direction of members of the Twelve, who until I found that out were beyond reproach in my view. I felt physically ill for weeks as I adjusted to the idea that some of the men whom I had spent my adult life supporting, defending, and encouraging others to believe and support, were responsible for perpetrating something that in my view comes close to fraud. I was even more sickened as I realized that the system had been set up to put the Church in a position to wash its hands of FARMS if they went too far, since the Church had long ago shut down the only official historian's department for which it would have to take responsibility. Those who I had assumed to be among the most godly began to appear very human – too human – as my eyes continued to open.

I began to double check FARMS, which along with Hugh Nibley had until that point had been virtually my sole source of information when I needed to answer questions that were critical of the Church. Within a short time, I decided that FARMS was unreliable so often that I could not trust its work, and that those to whom I compared FARMS products (Jann Shipps, Todd Compton, Michael Quinn, to name a few) were far more responsible in the positions they took and the manner in which they presented both the evidence we have to work with, and their views. Since then I have discovered a variety of Mormon and non-Mormon scholars whose work is reliable in the academic sense of that word. I now put FARMS on the same level as Jerold and Sandra Tanner have always been in my books – they provide some useful and accurate information, but can't be trusted to provide all relevant evidence respecting any issue, let alone express a reasonable opinion. Hence, I do not refer to them.

Critical Examination

The second phase of my change in view involved a critical examination of all of the things I had assumed true respecting the Church. This amounted to a brief stint in what Fowler calls stage four spirituality. The things under review included that Joseph Smith spoke to god and received a divine mandate from him; that the Book of Mormon was translated from golden plates Joseph received from an angel and contained a literal history of early inhabitants of the Americas; that while Joseph was human and made mistakes he was trusted by god with divine authority and hence I could trust him and take him at his word as well; and that the modern prophets (including you and your confreres) were likewise trustworthy and could be depended upon never to mislead me in a material way and to look after my interests in much the way my own parents would.

During the course of about a six-month period, I slowly came to the horrifying conclusion that much of what my religious leaders had told me during the course of my life, comprising my entire faith foundation respecting the Church, was probably false, and was certainly misleading.

Let me explain what I mean when I say that I have been misled. We will never know for sure what happened respecting many aspects of Church history and it is of course possible to

reasonably differ as to the existence certain facts and their interpretation. I am well aware of the vagaries of history. The litigation in which I engage is nothing more than an exercise in recent historical research, and I know how hard facts are to pin down. And I also know on what basis and to what extent they can be pinned down, and how to work with the probabilities related to this process. In light of that, I ask how can the Church justify telling its story with the certainty and conviction it does in light of the extant evidence respecting the relevant facts? History is all about assessing the reliability of evidence and hence the probability that one version of events occurred as opposed to another. It is highly improbably, indeed close to impossible in my carefully considered opinion as a lawyer who goes to court on a regular basis, for you or anyone else to successfully defend the Church's record in this regard. What is required is an acknowledgement of wrong doing, apology for same, rectification to the extent possible, and most importantly a promise to never go down the same road again accompanied by the establishment of fail safe measures in that regard. It makes me ache to think of my wonderful son innocently telling the misleading stories he is as a missionary. I am embarrassed that I told those stories myself until recently. I feel bad about the people I converted to Mormonism. I misled them. You are no doubt familiar with the issues, and so I won't go down the whole laundry list. A few examples will suffice.

The First Vision. We both know how Joseph's story changed as time passed. It became less magical, more Christian and more certain as he became aware of the role his religious leadership required. This is understandable, and human. And yet the Church tells its members and potential converts only one story – the one most calculated to perpetuate Joseph's authority and probably embellished by him as a consequence of the pressure his leadership was under when the story was published – and does not admit of any uncertainty as to what happened. This is deceptive. Only a philosopher king would so proceed.

The translation of the Book of Mormon. The very use of the word "translation" in this regard is misleading. By his own admission, Joseph did not translate anything in the ordinary sense of that word. The most charitable interpretation of events I can render is that he had visionary experiences of some kind, usually without the plates being present, and dictated the words that came to him in this regard. The Church's blithe use of the word "translation" in the fashion Joseph used it suggested to me that they both likely graduated from the Humpty Dumpty school of linguistics – a word can mean whatever they want it to mean. This is another philosopher king characteristic.

The "Witnesses" to the Book of Mormon. Once the full range of what these men have to tell us about their experience with the golden plates is considered, a picture quite different from that broadcast by the Church comes into focus. Martin Harris lent his testimony to a variety of bizarre projects which we would disbelieve in spite of his testimony. Hence, what he said about the Book of Mormon does not mean much. Others questioned the accuracy of the statement they had signed, and suggested that they did so under pressure and with great reservations since they did not physically experience anything that the testimony indicated. The experience, rather, was visionary and individual instead of a communal and physical experience. And we also have to remember the nature of the times. Magic and the supernatural played an almost mundane role in many lives. Six of the founding members of another to-become-prominent sect swore an affidavit to the effect that while together in broad daylight, they all saw an angel (either Michael or Gabriel, I can't at the moment recall which) appear atop a church building and that he instructed them as to some of the things they were to do respecting the founding of their religious movement. Are we to believe that? Or will we continue take the difficult position that our rustic, and only ours, was the one to accurately perceive his experiences while everyone else was mistaken respecting theirs?

The nature of the Book of Mormon. The preponderance of evidence has been against the Book of Mormon being what Joseph told the world it was since at least the days of B.H. Roberts. The evidence today overwhelmingly in my view points toward the book being a 19th century production. But it is one thing to differ as to how the evidence is to be interpreted, and entirely another to teach innocent young people who have been kept purposefully uninformed as to many of the relevant facts, to bear testimony that the Book of Mormon is without any question or doubt what Joseph said it was. Their innocent testimonies are misleading. Those who cause them to proceed in this fashion are not innocent. Some of the most successful fraud artists I have encountered during the course of my legal practise use this very technique. They hire innocents to sell fraudulent financial products on the basis that those innocents will be richly rewarded for their efforts. The innocents often sell to their family, friends and trusted business associates. In the end, all are defrauded and the innocent salesmen are those who suffer most as a result.

I have seen successful business people, and even one experienced, capable, LDS lawyer, taken in by fraudulent schemes of the above nature, and have concluded as a result and with the assistance of some psychological research relevant to this point, that when the prize offered for any behaviour is large enough, we are all vulnerable to deception. The analogy between some of the cases of financial fraud I have observed and the Church's missionary program is so painfully close that I doubt you have the spiritual and mental strength to look it in the eye. And I say this not to slight your abilities. I have great respect for you in this regard. Rather, I say it in recognition of the gargantuan difficulty of what I am asking you to consider, given your position. I was completely blind to these issues while serving as an LDS leader. The more I understand about the manner in which the human mind functions, the more it fascinates and frightens me.

Before going on I should note one additional point respecting the above fraud analogy. The same forces that shut down the well developed critical faculties of my LDS lawyer friend who was taken in by a fraud artist are also well known by psychologists to function at the core of religious belief. The prize religion offers is huge – relief from the anguish caused by our greatest existential fears. And the LDS Church ups the stakes significantly in this regard by positing the possibility of eternal family life. In the face of this kind of prize, we should not be surprised that rational people are easily persuaded to believe in irrational, extremely low probability versions of future reality. And when you add to this the psychological pressure that being surrounded by believing Mormons for most of life, and then being placed in a leadership position within the Mormon community, it is not surprising to me that for almost three adult decades I was unable to see what is now so clear to me respecting the Church and the manner in which it treated me and continues to treat others. I wish you luck as you wrestle with these powerful forces.

Joseph's Martyrdom. The Church does not tell its members and potential converts about Joseph's extensive prevarication for years respecting his sexual practises, the tensions that created within the Mormon leadership cadre and the surrounding Mormon and non-Mormon communities, the way in which William Law pled with Joseph for months to abandon polygamy before resorting to the Nauvoo Expositor to get the issue out in the open in hopes that the resulting public outcry would bring Joseph to his senses, and Joseph's probable breach of US law related to property rights and freedom of the press by using what many in the area reasonably perceived to be his private militia to destroy that newspaper. Again, there is lots of room for disagreement as to precisely what happened, but in my view there is no reasonable excuse for telling the story in the profoundly misleading fashion the Church currently does.

I could continue for a long time along this vein, but I am sure that by now you understand my point. By way of summary, I am reminded of something the philosopher Daniel Dennett said in his recent book "Freedom Evolves". Speaking of the tendency some of those who work in his field have to go overboard while defending principles important to them, such as free will, he rhetorically asked how many philosophers have become famous as a result of advocating "ecumenical hybridism". The clearly articulated, radical positions, he noted, attract much more attention and are the stuff on which reputations are built and books are sold. Another celebrated philosopher of the more practical variety, P.T. Barnum, was working on the same concept when he observed that "another one is born every minute", and that if you are going to tell a lie, it is best to tell a big one.

One does not have to be much of a cynic to recognize that if the Church told its story in a more responsible fashion it would lose much of its marketing panache. How does this sound: Joseph had some compelling dreams or visions (like so many others in his day), the content of which he was not sure as evidenced by his changing accounts respecting them, and that he felt inspired to write a book after dreaming of golden plates on which an ancient history was recorded, and that he was aided in writing that book by extensive use of the Bible, other books he had in his possession whose themes he clearly borrowed, and certain aspects of his family's tradition. This story is nowhere near as inclined to attract attention as the story the Church uses for marketing purposes.

And we also should not forget Joseph's history as a treasure digger, during which he developed the ability to spin fabulous, visionary tales that attracted patrons who paid him for his services as a seer even though he was never successful in finding treasure. In this regard his behaviour bore a striking resemblance to modern mining stock promoters who play at the fringes of legality in our modern society. A significant part of what Joseph taught as a Mormon prophet has the distinct markings of the magical or alchemical environment in which he operated in this regard. Michael Quinn's research along this vein, as well as the book "The Refiner's Fire" by the non-Mormon historian John Brooke, provide a fascinating picture of the superstitious world in which Joseph and many of his type operated and why they had credibility in certain parts of their society while being regarded by most as operating at or beyond the fringe of law and morality. Joseph was one of the "clever folk" within this tradition, who had a social status in most circles similar to that of the snake oil salesmen of his day, and the borderline fraudulent stock promoters and multi-level marketing executives of our own. I am grateful to an inactive Mormon who is still sympathetic to many aspects of his religious roots and teaches law in Washington, D.C. for patiently helping me through my denial respecting both Quinn and Brooke's work while I was still "faithful" enough that FARMS' opinion was enough to shut my mind to the insights Quinn and Brooke provide. FARMS' reviews of both Quinn and Brooke are other examples of biased, unreliable scholarship.

As I have indicated in several ways above, I am prepared to assume that Joseph was not a conscious fraud, although there is evidence to suggest he may have been. But it is clear that at a minimum he tended to adopt interpretations at the spectacular end of possibility respecting his life experiences, that he did not bother to explain the difference between vision and reality or metaphor and literality, and that this tendency was particularly in evidence when it came to what was required to get people to do what he wanted them to do. This was the case whether they were wealthy neighbours who believed in the possibility of Spanish treasure buried in the vicinity, religiously inclined folk who thought god could appear to human beings, Church members who he wanted to invest in something, or women with whom he wanted to have sex. You and I both know many people who tend to see much more of what they want and less of what really is, and I suspect that you do not trust them any more than I do. Joseph Smith

appears to have been a far more extreme example of this type of personality than anyone with whom I have personally been acquainted.

Regrettably, I have determined that the evidence strongly supports the conclusion that Joseph did not speak with god, did not translate anything in the ordinary sense of that word and has been proven to have either lied or innocently misrepresented his abilities as a translator on many occasions, and without any question lied uncounted times over a period of many years to the members of the Church and others respecting important matters such as his sexual activities and business affairs related to the Church. Hence, the evidence strongly supports the fact that Joseph Smith was not trustworthy.

The euphemistically referred to "lying for the lord" issue was the clincher for me. I cannot trust that Joseph will provide me with accurate information whenever what he said related to something that was designed to encourage obedience of the Church's membership to his commands. We are virtually certain that he used the "ends justifies the means" reasoning on many occasions to support dishonest communications, and in other ways seems to have claimed what amounts to divine exemption both from the law of the land, and the basic tenets of moral law. Quinn uses the apt term "theocratic ethics" to refer to this behaviour.

It is highly probable that Joseph Smith thought of himself as a philosopher king without likely ever hearing that term. It is fascinating to me that he could have had such a clear and intuitive grasp of these issues, as evidenced by his articulation of Satan's plan in that wonderful piece of mythology Mormons call the Plan of Salvation, and could have fallen so completely into the very hole he pointed out for all to see. Once the extent of Joseph's duplicity registered with me, I could no longer believe the many things he said about how he received his authority and why the people should follow him. And hence I cannot believe the claim modern Mormon leaders make to special divine authority, since they claim it through Joseph.

And Elder Holland, I must tell you how disgusted I am with Joseph's sexual behaviour. The evidence I have reviewed is very clear to the effect that he used his position of authority to take advantage of many women, some of them married and others very young; all of them innocent believers in his divine mandate. And those who refused him often had their reputations besmirched and suffered in other ways as a result of doing what was right. You can imagine my surprise when I read psychological studies that, without mentioning Joseph Smith, described his profile (charismatic religious or other leader, etc.) and predicted that he would have trouble keeping his trousers up while in willing female company, and that as the alpha male of the group he led that he would not have trouble finding compliant companionship in that regard. One writer called it the "Bill Clinton Syndrome". As was the case with the pious lie, which I have long believed applied to all religions other than mine, I was by these studies treated to more evidence that the Mormon Church and its founder were just like all the rest – no better, and no worse – just another group of people trying to make sense out of their existence, led by a man who had some great ideas, was a charismatic leader, and was subject to all the usual human leadership foibles, including helping himself to the sexual prerogatives that leadership of human groups usually offers. And when those foibles caught him in public, they became the basis for a terrible, at first secret and deceptive, doctrinal diversion and social experiment that eventually was responsible for his death and untold later human suffering. I referred to my great grandmother above. She and her children were among those whose lives were twisted by polygamy. It continues to this day, as you know, to inflict suffering on many people connected to Mormonism.

One of the best things you could do, in my view, is to acknowledge polygamy to be the error and sin it was, and to give clear direction to the effect that it will never again be part of Mormon life, here or hereafter. I know that you can't do that without the agreement of your Brethren, which will not be forthcoming. This is one of the many reasons for which the gulf that now separates me from the Church is too wide for me to expect to ever cross it.

I have thought carefully about this next statement, because it is perhaps the most important thing I have to tell you. I could have remained a member of the Church and continued to support you and it with the knowledge that Joseph Smith was both inspired on many occasions (I still use "men are that they might have joy", and most of the later part of D&C 121 as my central life tenets) and also deeply in error on others. But I cannot support an institution led by people who perpetuate their power, and even extend it over new converts, by causing innocent young people and uninformed adults to bear solemn testimony to stories that I must assume the leaders understand to be misleading. The only justification I have heard for this course of action is the one that B.H. Roberts met when he presented his finding respecting the Book of Mormon to the Twelve many years ago – that they knew it was somehow "true" and that god in due time would provide answers to the troubling questions B.H. raised. I don't know what the balance of evidence was then, but I understand it now and I cannot strongly enough express my view that the Church is no longer justified in telling its story as it does to people who trust it completely and rely upon it for guidance. And the use of innocent agents to disseminate this misleading and highly influential information is morally repugnant.

Dallin Oaks' indication that the Church does not have a duty to tell both sides of the Church's story is simply wrong. You have led the members to believe that you will look after their interests and so have put yourselves in a position analogous to, if not in fact, that of a trustee. If you have not done so, I advise you to consult your lawyers respecting the Church's potential liability by way of class action lawsuit in this regard. You may be aware of similar litigation in Canada involving a Mormon fundamentalist group led by a man named Winston Blackmore in the Creston, British Columbia area. While I am not inclined to make it, it is my view that a similar claim could be made against the Church. In my view, it is only a question of when, not if, one will be launched against the Church and perhaps its leaders personally in that regard. And more importantly, the "faithful history" policy, which is the cause of most of this trouble and as far as I can tell is still in force, is a blight on the record of the modern Church and may end up engraving its tombstone.

Reconstruction and Surprised by Joy

As a result of my experience in the second phase, the beginning of the third phase was dark. I flirted with nihilism, but eventually backed away from that abyss. However, I was then free to seriously reconsider a kind of literature I had started to read years ago (my undergraduate minor was religious studies at the University of Alberta) but had not previously wished to understand. This led to hundred of hours of study, prayer and writing that has reshaped my spiritual landscape for the better.

As I have considered theories of a more naturalistic variety, I have found explanations for many of the very things that so disturbed me during phase two. Anthropologists and sociologists helped me to see patterns in the way young religious traditions and their rituals start and evolve that fit the Church perfectly. Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Max Weber and others painted the big picture of religion and mythology in glowing colours. Psychologists and neuroscientists helped me to understand why so many people from different religious traditions, and irreligious people in settings that have nothing to do with religion, all have similarly moving experiences,

and so I came to understand the neurological roots of my Mormon testimony. Biologists, linguists and anthropologists such as Jared Diamond, Steven Pinker and Pascal Boyer helped me to understand the evolution of human kind to its present state, why the races are as they are, why some parts of the world seem to have been perpetually poor and others rich, and both the wonders and terrors that our increasing knowledge respecting genetics is about to release upon us. My training as a Mormon had shut me off from most of these things, because anything that questioned the prophets' teachings was taboo as far as I was concerned. I felt like a clamp had been released from my brain. I now feel more joy more regularly than ever before in my life. The genie is out of the bottle, and cannot be put back in. I have been reborn.

I hope you will not think me unwise for relying upon the "arm of flesh" as I now do. As I noted above, I only resorted to this after a careful review of the historical record comparing what the Church taught and what the theories of scientists etc. were on particular points at different times throughout history, and which views so far appear to have been most wise. I have come to the discomfiting conclusion that I am my own best guide. No one – regardless of how well-intentioned, self-assured or willing to provide advice they appear – can be relied upon to look after my interests. And so while I acknowledge my many weaknesses, I am the best guide I have.

This reminds me of Abraham Heschel's fine book entitled "The Insecurity of Freedom", which I tried to read as an undergraduate and could not grasp. I thought at that time, "I am both free and perfectly secure. What is Heschel going on about? What a waste of time!" I now understand. I was not free. The freedom I thought I had was illusory, as was Emma's when she received D&C 132 from Joseph and was told to prayerfully consider it and god would tell her that it was right, and if she did not feel inclined to accept it, she would be destroyed. The information to which I had access was controlled; my time was monopolized; my behaviours were controlled by fear that a huge reward I had been conditioned to believe existed might be lost to me if I made even the slightest misstep and did not continually extend myself to do more of what the Church commanded; etc.

Now that I am free, I feel Heschel's insecurity. It enlivens me, and has lit a fire inside of me that makes me want to search, learn and seek god's voice more fervently and sincerely than at any other time of my life. And as noted above, I also feel more energy and joy than I can ever remember feeling. How can this be a bad thing? And rest assured, I am not making any of this up to justify my position.

What are the Church's options?

Let me first say that I understand that even if you agreed with the concerns I have expressed, you would likely feel unable to let me know that, just as B.H. Roberts could not be frank about his concerns respecting the Book of Mormon when responding to the innocent young member of the Church who wrote to him about questions a scientific colleague had raised in that regard. B.H. told that young man that "all was well" respecting the Book of Mormon, despite as a result of the young man's questions having debated his concerns respecting that book for days with the Twelve and the First Presidency, and having written a detailed report respecting the same thing.

I also recognize other aspects of the difficulty of your position. To admit the Church leadership's past errors and current fallibility and tell the members they have to think more for themselves would cause the Church to lose influence, at least in the short term. Few humans have enough integrity to give up power. And in order for the Church to do as I have suggested, all fifteen of

the aged men to whom I earlier referred would have to agree that this was the right thing to do. The probability of this happening, in my view, is close enough to zero to be called zero. These are the kinds of practical problems that often dictate the outcome of important decisions within human organizations. They illustrate why politics is referred to as the "art of the possible" and I am now alive to the political reality of Church leadership. Oh that god spoke clearly, and that there was a single prophet who could hear his voice and act in accordance with it! This is the kind of silver bullet mankind has hoped for, and hence has been the stuff of myth ever since humans first started to record their histories. So why are we surprised that this precisely what the vast majority of members of the Church believe to now the case with Gordon Hinckley? And you and I both know how far from reality this myth is, and that the Church's leadership allows it to perpetuate itself unchecked in testimony meetings, lessons and firesides around the world each week.

It is my observation that the Church is at a significant crossroads, created by the Internet. The way it chooses is likely to determine its nature, and health, for a long time to come. I would like to suggest the use of an evolutionary paradigm within which to consider how the Internet may affect the Church. A brief overview of how evolution works and how it might be said to apply to some aspects of prior Church history may be helpful to put this issue in context.

I have come to the view that evolutionary theory is one of the most useful tools available to us as we seek to understand the physical and cultural worlds in which we live. The first question we should ask ourselves in trying to predict how any new element in an environment will affect the evolution of what it touches is simply this, "who benefits?" That is, which organisms will grow in strength and which will be weakened by this new element? Some writers characterize the evolutionary process in terms of a series of "collisions" between different organisms which elicit various reactions from each and which will result in one organism being weakened or consumed by the other, while that other is strengthened. Much of what is most interesting, and surprising, in life occurs as a result of these collisions, particularly in terms of revealing abilities an organism has available to it when threatened in some way. Only necessity, it seems, is capable of bringing certain capacities to the fore.

The Church has shown a remarkable ability to respond to threats by adapting to its changing environment, but unfortunately and also in accordance with evolutionary theory, has tended to do so in ways that are primarily designed to enhance its power even when the necessary consequence of those actions is to harm the interests of many individual Church members. Here are a few examples to illustrate this point.

U.S. Society v. The Church (Mid-1800s)

Persecution respecting Joseph Smith's polygamy as well as other matters threatened the Church's existence, and if Joseph Smith had not been killed, might have ended it. But Joseph was killed. He was out of control by that time, and arguably was a liability to Mormonism.

The Church was clearly weakened by this collision, but in the long term was a beneficiary of it because on Joseph's death Brigham Young, a much more stable person and able administrator, took control. He moved the Church to Utah. Anthropologists and historians have shown that in order for a new religion to become strong enough to survive in a pluralistic society, it usually must have a period of monopoly to build its strength. Utah provided the Church with the monopoly environment it needed. Hence, the Church adapted to a severe threat in Illinois by uprooting itself and moving to a place where it could gain the traction it needed to survive in the long term. Without that threat, it might not have moved. The other branches of Mormonism that

stayed in the pluralistic east did not flourish, and most no longer exist. But the move to the west cost many lives, both during the move and while establishing a civilization in the Great Basin. That move was not made because it was prudent for any of the individuals who went. It was made by individuals on faith in institutional leadership, which was acting to preserve the Church as an institution.

The only basis on which the move to Utah could be said to make sense for each individual who went is if we equate institutional good to individual good, which in my view cannot be reasonably done for the reasons outlined above. The same analysis applies to war. War is not in the individual interest of any soldier who goes. But sometimes there are collective benefits that justify individual sacrifices.

I have come to see a huge difference between defending the principles of freedom, democracy, equality of human beings, etc. that most wars in which my country have been involved are about, and defending a brand of Mormonism that sanctions the deception of its membership and offers a poorer quality of life here and now than many alternative belief systems. The only remaining excuse for the sacrifices individuals have been asked to make by their Mormon leaders are the afterlife rewards discussed above, and as I have already noted, they depend entirely upon Joseph Smith's non-existent credibility. Hence, I have concluded that the huge individual sacrifices that Mormonism has required and continues to require are excessive when considered in this light.

U.S. Government v. The Church (Late 1800s)

Once again, polygamy was the issue. This time, the conflict resulted in the confiscation of Church property, curtailment of many civil powers it once wielded within Utah (no more "Kingdom of God" in the original Mormon sense of that term), and its near bankruptcy. This negatively affected the Church's ability to control its members and those related to it thus weakening the monopoly moving to Utah had established. As a result, the Church declined in strength and other elements within Utah society ascended. In particular, individual Church members gained rights they did not previously have, including universal suffrage, a likely collateral benefit to the female LDS community arising from the fight to save polygamy. However, by this point the Church was well enough established that it could sustain its own culture within a pluralistic society. And again, the Church's response to this loss of power was crucial.

The Church changed its policy respecting polygamy (after a number of years of pretending to do so, and lying about what was in fact going on in that regard) and surrendered many civil powers. This undeniably improved the lot of many individuals who became subject to democratic instead of theocratic control in some ways, and were no longer encouraged to use the dysfunctional institution of polygamous marriage. But the change was not made for this purpose. Church leadership in fact, resisted it as strenuously as possible. In this story, the most important part is in the Church's response to this seemingly dramatic loss of power and influence. It developed new tools to create an "in the world but not of the world" mentality within its membership. Mormonism's busy meeting schedule, enveloping social scene and increasing emphasis on temple attendance that has required building temples within easy reach of members around the world, are all part of what has been used to create this mentality.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that the changes that Mormonism was forced to make in Utah when it lost polygamy and its civil authority put it in a position to become the international and almost mainstream force it has become today. One would think prophetic

leadership might have led in that direction instead of fighting it, breaking promises it made and lying respecting what it would do in that regard. If this is how prophetic inspiration works, we here have more evidence that we should not do what the Mormon prophets recommend. And please resist the temptation to tell me that the "Lord works in mysterious ways", "god's ways are not man's ways", or anything of that ilk. That is what the First Presidency and the Twelve essentially told B.H. Roberts respecting his Book of Mormon related concerns. It did not make sense then and makes less sense now.

Civil Rights v. The Church

The "Negro question" plagued the Church as US society gradually awoke to the injustice of racism and began to move toward more egalitarianism. Mormonism brought up the rear because of Brigham Young's apparently politically motivated reversal of Joseph's grant of the priesthood to black men. Brigham's changed that policy at a time when southerners were joining the Church and wanted to move to Utah and keep their slaves. This caused increasing tension between the Church and the rest of society, including campus riots during the 60s and 70s, and I understand many letters from members to the leadership begging for a change to this embarrassing, unfair, racist rule.

After an attempt in the 1950s spearheaded by David McKay and Hugh Brown failed to achieve the unanimity required to extend priesthood authority to the blacks, the Church for many years avoided the issue as much as possible, and finally in 1978 a revelation was received and unlike the similar revelation that Presidents McKay, Brown and others had apparently received over two decades earlier, was unanimously approved. Is it not odd that President McKay's 1950s revelation is never talked about? Learning about how that went was helpful to me in terms of coming to grips with what the term "prophetic revelation" really means in the Mormon context.

In any event, Pres. Kimball's 1978 revelation brought the Church belatedly into line with the rest of society and so relieved a lot of tension. But this did three much more important things. First, it took a big issue off the table that was hampering missionary work in the burgeoning mixed-race missions of South America where I was serving as a missionary at the time. Second, it opened black Africa and other parts of the world to missionary work at a time when it was well known to Church leaders that demand for what the Church had to offer was high. And third, it moved the Church another step closer to the mainstream, and made it possible for the Church to benefit from the "back to basics" backlash against the excesses of the 1960s that occurred in North America and elsewhere during the 70s through 90s. During that period, society seemed to crave security and many religious groups, including the Church, grew more rapidly than ever as a result of their perceived ability to meet this need.

The evolutionary steps the Church took respecting its priesthood qualification policy benefited individuals, but that was not their purpose. The Church was in an increasingly uncomfortable position respecting its racial policies, and as an organization benefited immensely from this change. And most importantly, this change did not cause the Church or its leaders to lose any power.

Feminists v. The Church

The Equal Rights Amendment became the flash point for this issue, but it had simmered for a close to a hundred years before that as the powers Joseph Smith had vested in the Relief Society were gradually stripped away by the Church's male leadership. Among other things, women lost a great deal of their autonomy in terms of creating their own curriculum and

managing their affairs from a financial and administrative perspective, as well as the right to give blessings by the power of the holy ghost and to perform certain priesthood-like ordinances, such as one in preparation for childbirth.

Many women left the Church or curtailed their activity respecting it over the Church's stance respecting the Equal Rights Amendment, and were highly and publicly critical of the Church's position that women could not hold the priesthood at a time when that right was being extended by other religious groups to their women. The Church's response was to excommunicate the worst dissenters, to indicate that it would brook no more dissent in order to muzzle those inclined to continue to complain, and to then take steps to give the female leadership more prominence, and a greater voice (if not authority) in many matters. I note in passing that if I ever wanted something done particularly well as a Bishop, I gave it to the Relief Society. Their average executive ability and spirituality is far above that of any priesthood quorum. We are the "B" team. But I digress.

The important point here is that unlike the "Negro question", the existing male leadership of the Church would lose significant power if the priesthood were granted to women. The blacks will come into the Church slowly, and mostly from its fringes, whereas if the priesthood were extended to women everything would change at that moment. And, there is a good argument to the effect that black males and white males are a lot more alike than are white males and females of any colour.

Intellectuals v. The Church

As the Church's profile increased and more sophisticated tools respecting textual research, archaeology and other disciplines relevant to Mormonism's foundational stories became available, more Mormons and non-Mormons began to study with academic rigour various aspects of Mormonism. Much of what the academics found threatened the believability of the Church's story. This encouraged challenges to Church leadership authority that seemed likely to reduce its strength. Church leaders perceived this as a threat, and imposed the "faithful history" policy. This shut down dissemination within the Church community of most information that questioned the orthodox line, so reducing in the short term at least questions the Church was required to answer from its members.

I cannot think of any argument based on logic, moral reasoning, theology or anything else that justifies this kind of censorship. However, it is in perfect keeping with the philosopher king argument. This evolutionary step clearly strengthened the Church at the expense of the members.

Overview of Historical, Sociological and Anthropological Trends

In each of the above cases the Church has acted to preserve or extend its power base, and has only given up power when forced to do so. However, in the most important of the conflicts above, that respecting polygamy, once two bad ideas (civil power vested in a religious organization and polygamy) were forced out of the Mormon system, the Church's response was to first develop new and more subtle control tools and then to take advantage of the fact that it had been forced to become more mainstream. This illustrates the Church's adaptive flexibility, but unfortunately also illustrates its interest in maintaining as much control as possible over its membership.

The Church's emphasis on control over its members would have been predicted in the situations described above by the anthropologists who study these things. I think that you would find interesting "Religion Explained" by Pascal Boyer, a book I referred to above. While it falls far short of its title, it does explain a number of phenomena. A couple of those are worth mentioning.

First, complex religions arose shortly after writing was created and specialization of all kinds resulted. Religious specialists – or priests – were one of the new specialist classes and functioned much like the ancient guilds. As long as there was only one religious game in town, often sanctioned by the ruling authorities, the religion in question flourished. However, as society became more pluralistic religions had to find ways to distinguish themselves from each other. Selecting a religion is not like buying a new car – you can't test drive a few and see which performs the best. Most of the benefits promised by religion are of such an ethereal nature that they cannot be tested until after death. Hence, many religions developed early and have since maintained an extensive list of attributes designed to create a monopoly for their services. These tools are also what religions use to control their membership.

Isolation from all other religions is the best kind of monopoly. Another common example of a monopoly creation tool is the idea that salvation or other afterlife benefits come only through a particular brand of religious belief. The Church's emphasis on the possibility of eternal family life and the making of and obedience to temple covenants in that regard is a particularly potent variation on this ancient theme. The Church's tendency to keep its members so busy that they have time for little else is, in my view, simply another manifestation of this sociological tendency that most religious groups exhibit to one extent or another.

It is perhaps not fair to blame institutional religions for the monopolies they attempt to create. It appears that the masses want certainty respecting the inherent uncertainty of life, and religious leaders simply cannot resist the conscious or unconscious temptation to gain and maintain influence by purporting to provide that certainty. Joseph Smith, for example, started his career as a truth seeker unbound by dogma of any kind, and encouraged that attitude in his followers. He also acknowledged his fallibility while coming up with some innovative ideas that addressed issues of concern to many people in his time and place. But as his influence increased, he became less open to any ideas other than his own and hence more dogmatic and less willing to follow many of the very principles that made his movement attractive in its beginning. As he pointed out in D&C 121, power corrupts, and I believe that it corrupted him. And at each stage of the historical process described above, the Church's primary concern may fairly be described as maintaining the illusion for its members that it was still god's only authorized source of salvation, and hence they would be secure for only so long as they remained obedient to their religious leaders, and hence those leaders maintained as much control over their membership as possible as the environment in which the Church was forced to operate changed over time.

Second, the anthropologists have noted that the more harsh the society in which a religion developed, the more authoritarian it is likely to be. This explains the nature of ancient Judaism and Christianity. And while Joseph Smith was charismatic in his organizational style, Brigham Young laid the foundations of the modern Mormon Church during its Utah pioneering period. That was a harsh environment and the structures it caused to be formed still heavily influence the Church, in my view. As the Church matures, it should become more open and less authoritarian. And as I am about to point out, it may now become critical that the Church changes its nature in that regard.

And finally, certain sociologists and organizational theorists have recently provided insights into how religions function that are directly relevant to the Church.

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

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

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

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

He then quotes John Searle as saying:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This would overturn or at least threaten the social benefits the institution created in the first place. However, Munz and others theorize that some groups have moved beyond this fragile and arguably immature social state, and

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

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

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

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

It is my view that if the Church continues down the information and dogma road, it may well soon reach the point where things start to come quickly undone for it.

The Internet v. The Church

The Internet has created an environment in which it is not longer possible to control access to information. Organizations such as communist regimes or dictatorships that depend upon information control to maintain their power base will continue to lose power as the Internet becomes more a part of our everyday lives. On the other hand, organizations such as democracies that derive their power from the collective power of their members, and who facilitate their members' use of the Internet and all other available tools in order to enhance the members' power, will thrive. The same analogy can be drawn between the old top-down, pyramidal structures that dominated the business world until recently, and the flatter, more network-oriented organizations that dominate the business world today.

In a world where information is hard to find and sort, the people at the top played the role of gathering and analysing information, and then passing the relevant bits on to those below them with instructions as to what they should do. Today, many organizations have found that the grassroots members of the organization have access to much more information relevant to their functions than those at the executive level, and the role of the executive has become that of harvesting information from the members of the organization, organizing and making available to all as many as possible of the ideas that have percolated up to the top, and in other ways encouraging the members to expand their capacity to learn and do. The better the leadership facilitates this kind of membership maturation and improvement, the stronger the organization will become. Leaders have become facilitators rather than commanders, and the primary organizational paradigm is the network. And it is possible in some cases to belong to, contribute to, and benefit from membership in a variety of networks. Those networks that provide the greatest benefits relative to their costs will dominate.

So my question is, will the Church move toward becoming an open network designed to facilitate individual choice and growth, which is what Joseph Smith said he was trying to create, or will it continue to attempt to seal its members off from all information that casts doubt on the misleading stories the Church tells, and by so doing stupefy and weaken them?

It is my view that an increasing percentage of the population hungers for a mythology that weds a familiar spiritual tradition with science's increasingly useful and undeniable role in our lives. That is what so many aspects of the New Age movement attempt to do, and why they are becoming so popular. It is also why many aspects of Buddhism and other eastern belief systems are making inroads into Western culture. Some aspects of the theology the Church inherited from Joseph Smith, including his acknowledgement of fallibility, "line upon line", and his embrace of the scientific approach to life, well suit it among the western religious traditions to meet the spiritual needs of modern man, and I believe that its long term prospects could be dramatically improved if it chooses to go that way.

However, as long as the Church continues along its current path respecting the Internet threat, which was characterized by your and Pres. Hinckley's talk (don't question; stay away from the fringes of the community; it is all black or white; etc.) it will in my view see its potential base of members continually shrink. The better informed they are, the less likely they are to be interested in Mormonism because they will see the huge gap between what the Church says about itself and what can reasonably be inferred from the evidence. The Church will become increasingly seen as a modern version of the Amish or Hutterites – only appealing to the ignorant or those who were born and raised within the tradition. And once it has gone too far down that road, I question whether it will be able to come back. In times past, the Church could reinvent itself and within a relatively short time most people would have forgotten what it once was and

there would be nothing to remind them of that. That is likely no longer the case, thanks again to the Internet. The Church's sins will be continually on display for all to see. Therefore, the sooner it acknowledges its errors, repents etc., the sooner that fact will be on the record and the more forgivable the delay will be between when the problems should reasonably have been recognized based on the evidence extant, and when remedial action was taken. The longer evidence is allowed to accumulate against the Church's position without being dealt with, the more its long-term institutional credibility will be damaged.

The Church's Potential Role in Spiritual Life

I note, again, that my most significant complaint relates to the deception on which most of this letter has focussed. That cannot be reasonably defended. Were the Church to rid itself of that, what would be left is a healthy mythology in most respects, and in some respects a mythology that could in my view perform a critical role as humanity attempts to bridge the gap between a pre-scientific, mythological world and our current mostly science based worldview.

Science has proven better than anything else at teaching us the hows, but it cannot address the whys. They will remain within mythology, or religion's, purview. And, in my view Joseph's greatest contribution to mythology bears on this point. He echoed without knowing it some of the best ideas of people like the Jewish philosopher Spinoza and anticipated many concepts that have since been articulated people like Albert Einstein in terms of how religion and science can walk down life's path together. If the Church chooses to honour Joseph's prescience in that regard, while rejecting the mistakes he and other Mormon leaders made, I believe that Mormonism could develop into the platform of choice both for those who simply want a comfortable place to live and do not wish to think for themselves, as well as for those who see (or at least think they see) the big picture and are inclined to help expand it and bring it into clearer focus.

When I explained a little about the control related concerns I have respecting the Church to Bob White, a local General Authority and someone I have known for many years, part of his response to me was that if the Church surrendered its control position, that would leave its members exposed to people like me who would then come along to tell them what to do, and fill the power vacuum the Church would have created. And then the members would likely be confused and would make the wrong choice, such as to believe people like me instead of continuing to obey the Church.

I first note that I will be the last person to try to create a religious followership, but I am sure many others will offer their services in that regard. I also note that Bob White's statement is classic philosopher king talk – we can't trust the people to make their own choices because they will decide wrongly (ie. They will not obey us any more). And I finally note again that in my view the Church's philosopher kings have caused it to abuse its position to trust. That conduct is inexcusable for a religious organization. The Church should hence stop doing that and should set up the kind of failsafe measures democracies use to prevent the inevitable abuses of authority will recur within the Church without those measures. If the combination of these steps causes the Church to lose influence, so be it. The Church should have no influence the people do not freely grant it on the basis of the most accurate information they can reasonably have from time to time.

After having taken the above steps, the Church would operate from the high ground on which I always assumed it stood. It could define itself as a religious organization that helps its members seek truth of all kinds, and make the spiritual progress that each of them is uniquely suited to

make. There is no one size fits all. And the Church could help its members to recognize the charlatans of all types who walk among them. I would be proud to again be a member of the Church were it to operate on such a basis. And after a while (it might be a long while) of the members receiving this kind of education at the Church's hands, Utah may even lose its reputation as the best place in the developed world to perpetrate financial fraud. There is more white-collar fraud per capita in Utah than in any other part of North America. This fact is likely due to the gullible, authority craving nature of the Mormons who comprise the bulk of Utah's population and are the bait that attracts the fraud artists. That Mormon tendency is the unsurprising result of the conditioning to which the Church's leadership subjects members of the Church.