

# **Should I Join (or Leave) the Mormon Church?: A Summary of Considerations**

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The predisposition to religious belief is the most complex and powerful force in the human mind and in all probability an ineradicable part of human nature. Edward O. Wilson

## Introduction

This essay presents in summary form some of the important issues for those who need to decide whether to leave or join the Mormon Church. In so doing, it synthesizes hundreds of pages of information presented in various essays on my website at the address noted above, not to mention the volumes that have been written elsewhere respecting this topic.

When speaking of joining or leaving "the Church", I do not have in mind the question of formal membership. Rather, I refer to the Church as a social institution which we can allow to take up more, or less, of the time and energy which comprise our lives.

The "join" or "don't leave" side of the debate is dominated by the Mormon indication that regardless of whether its history is true or false, Mormonism produces good families and people, provides a great atmosphere in which to raise kids, etc., and therefore is on balance a good thing and we should ignore its problematic past. This is one of Gordon Hinckley's favourite refrains when speaking with the media about the Church – "Let's not talk about the past. Look at us today!"

The "leave" and "don't join" position presented by the post-Mormon community is, essentially, twofold. First, Mormons pay a high price in terms of time and other resources to procure benefits in a life after death in the Celestial Kingdom that Joseph Smith (JS) taught existed based on revelations he said he received from God and other celestial beings. If that life does not pan out as advertised, the believers will have been badly taken advantage of, much as was the hapless archetypal dupe from the mid-West who purchased "waterfront" property in Florida's everglades. The "investor" may feel great after having paid his money, but that feeling only lasts until he sees the swamp. So, JS's credibility is of essential importance to anyone trying to decide whether to join, or leave, Mormonism. Second, assuming that JS did have credibility problems, it is still possible that Mormonism has developed into something worthwhile. This is what Gordon Hinckley and others claim. The "leave" and "don't join" camp suggests that President Hinckley is mistaken in this regard, and that this is not surprising given his position. He should not be expected to be objective in his judgements given that the justification for his entire life's work and current position of respect and adoration depends on the continued perception of faithful Mormons and others that the Mormon Church is a worthwhile social institution.

I will discuss the reasons for which the "leave" question is exponentially more complicated in most cases than the "join". For most people, joining means undertaking a cultural transformation that I will suggest has much more downside than upside. Leaving, however, often involves such a rupture of social and family relationships that the human psyche cannot bear to consider it, and hence all information pointing in that direction is suppressed. This causes the believer who is required to face loved ones who have left the faith to fear them, and

to particularly fear and perhaps loath those who insist upon continually presenting her with troubling information. I will suggest that those who cannot cope with such information deserve to be pitied more than castigated. They are not likely stupid or intent upon self deception. Rather, they are prisoners to the relationships and prior experience on which their lives are based. As long as they are surrounded by the information necessary to connect with reality, they will do so if they are able. It is more likely, in my view, that this connection will occur as a result of likeable, non-believing and non-threatening loved ones who remain in the believers lives, than disbelievers who make for the exits. And if too much cognitive dissonance is inflicted on the believers by insisting that they try to understand what they cannot yet, they are likely to choose to avoid pain by terminating the relationships responsible for it. Having not handled this part of my transition out of Mormonism particularly well, I can speak from experience as to both the folly of pushing too hard and the benefits that can come from keeping relationships alive by allowing those we love to change on their own terms, to the extent that they are able to do so. Balancing the reality that people often do not know what they are capable of changing until they are faced with the painful necessity of doing so against the desire to keep relationships alive is one of the most difficult aspects of this process.

Finally, I will suggest that as the "faith" of those who have left Mormonism matures, they will be less threatened by and will become more compassionate toward those they left behind. This for many, including me, is one of compassion's most difficult steps. I believe that this is due to the love we feel for some of those who cannot see things as we do, and the pain it causes for us as we watch them hand over their lives to those who on the basis of false pretences control their beliefs. It takes a mature and well developed personal faith and worldview to gracefully bear this load.

### **The Principle of Parsimony**

To conduct the analysis outlined above and attempt to gain some objectivity of my own, I will play lawyer (which I am) advising a client as to the wisdom of investing in JS's vision of the Celestial Kingdom, Mormon life in general, etc. This thought experiment is designed to bring home the reality that we have to make a decision respecting the Church's claims on the basis of incomplete information, just as we have to make most of our decisions as we pass through life.

#### ***How Does Parsimony Work?***

Most of the best decisions humans make consciously or unconsciously use the "principle of parsimony" (sometimes called "Occam's Razor" after the Bishop of Occam who in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was one of its early and best know practitioners) as a criterion for deciding among competing theories or explanations. This principle states that we should always choose the simplest explanation of a phenomenon – the one that requires the fewest leaps of logic. This is one of science's basic decision making rules.

Another way to think of parsimony when it comes to decision making is that it makes use of probabilities. That is, it requires us to ask something like, "given all we know about the question "x", what is most likely to be the correct answer?" It recognizes that certainty is not possible in answering most if not all questions. This is how scientists, lawyers, judges and others in the business of decision-making try to think, and I will use that approach in this essay. To contrast this approach with what the Church and its faithful often pass off as reasoning, let's use current example from the Mormon milieu.

### ***The "DNA Controversy" and Probabilities***

There is at the moment within the LDS community a debate respecting how much doubt the current evidence respecting DNA casts on the belief JS and most other Mormons have held that the American Indians descend from the House of Israel. While this story is far too long to tell here, it is fair to say that there is much DNA based evidence to suggest that JS and all those who have followed him were incorrect on this point. The Church's response has been to indicate that "all is well" on its official website, followed by a reference to recent articles from the "Journal of Book of Mormon Studies" respecting DNA and the Book of Mormon. See <http://www.lds.org/newsroom/mistakes/0,15331,3885-1,00.html> But one has to read those articles carefully to understand what they mean with respect to this complex issue. They do not conclude that all is well with the Church's theory. In fact, the most reasonable scientific conclusion that can be drawn from those articles is that while the best evidence today indicates that the Church's theory is not correct, it is still possible that at some future time more evidence will be found to support it. That is, all the Church's scholars assure us of is that we are not certain at this point that the Church is wrong. And in its presentation of the evidence, the Church makes no attempt to estimate how likely it is that science will vindicate its position.

Precisely the same thing can be said about the earth's shape as the Church says about the DNA issue respecting the Book of Mormon. That is, the best evidence indicates today that the earth is round, but it is still possible that more persuasive evidence that it is flat will someday be produced. This is what Harvard scientist Stephen Jay Gould said in his introduction to James Watson's "DNA: The Secret of Life". Such statements are useless from a decision making point of view. To make a decision, I need to know how likely is it that the earth will be proven flat or that Native Americans will be shown to have descended from the Israelites. Gould, with good reason, did not feel he needed to provide probabilities respecting the shape of the earth. It is my experience that because of what the probabilities in this regard indicate, the Church and those who are faithful to it both consciously and unconsciously resist this kind of analysis when it comes to things like the Book of Mormon. The manner in which the Church's apologetic scientists framed their analysis respecting the DNA question is a textbook example of this.

To make a decision that depends upon a state of fact, I need to understand the relevant probabilities. For example, many of my clients are in the oil business. Before they drill a well, they spend a lot of money collecting information that allows them to estimate the probability that oil or gas will be found at a particular location, and at a particular depth underground. They then determine how much it will cost to drill the well, and decide based on their best estimate of the probability that oil or gas will be found whether it makes sense to spend that amount of money to drill that particular well. If they asked their geologist whether to drill a well and he all he was prepared to answer was, "Well, no one can prove that there isn't oil or gas there, so let's drill!", he would lose his job. This is tantamount to what the Church says across a wide range of issues. You can't prove God does not exist, so we will assume He does. You can't prove JS lied about a lot of things, so we will assume he is believable. You can't prove that JS did not speak with angels and translate the Book of Mormon from golden plates, so we will assume that he did. And these positions are taken while there is plenty of evidence from which to make a probability based decision. But I digress.

So, particularly with respect to scientific questions such as what kind of light DNA evidence shed's on the Book of Mormon's authenticity, I think it is fair to expect any scientist addressing the issues to do so in a probabilistic way. I suggest that we should be suspicious of any who do not do so. It is my experience that because of what the probabilities in this regard indicate, the

Church and those who are faithful to it both consciously and unconsciously resist this kind of analysis when it comes to things like the Book of Mormon.

It is important to note that the kind of probabilistic analysis I have described can be applied to most of the issues that underpin the Church's faith claims, including those summarized in this essay. Historical analysis works on the same kind of probabilistic principles as does scientific analysis. And yet we find more or less continual resistance from the Church and those who defend it with respect to this kind of approach.

### ***The Church's Apologetic Response Does Not Use Probabilities***

The manner in which the Church's apologetic scientists analyzed the DNA question and presented their findings provides an interesting insight into how the Church attempts to shape public perceptions respecting issues that threaten its position. So I will look a little more closely at their analysis before leaving this point.

Since the question of the application of DNA theory to the native American population base is scientific in nature, one would expect the principle of parsimony to be on prominent display, and indeed one (but only one) of the articles linked to the Church's announcement that "all is well" refers to it. In that regard, D. Jeffrey Meldrum and Trent D. Stephens ("Who Are the Children of Lehi?") note that there is no scientific evidence to support the traditional LDS theory that the Native Americans descended from the Israelites and there is much evidence that must be counted against it. They then indicate that the principle of parsimony indicates that the simplest theory should be accepted until refuted (see pp. 43 – 44). Any scientist reading this would understand them to say that based on the evidence extant, the Church's theory should be rejected until compelling evidence can be found to support it. This means that if a decision had to be made today that depended on whether the Native Americans descended from the Israelites, science would advise us to assume that they did not.

However, Meldrum and Stephens did not say this in the kind of clear fashion that would be required for a layperson to understand it. And then they go on to set out a number of other theories, none of which are supported by any evidence, which could lead to the conclusion that the Native Americans did descend from the Israelites. So, given how oblique Meldrum and Stephens' statement against the Church's theory was, and how they indicated ways in which that theory still could be true if evidence to support it was found, and how the Church's website referred to them as supporting the Church's position, most members who take the time to read what they have written will not understand it, and will likely conclude that these scientists are saying that science supports the Church's theory.

Each of the other articles referred to on the Church's website as supporting its position respecting the origin of the Native Americans takes a similar approach, but does not refer to the principle of parsimony. All they show is that science has not proven with 100% certainty that JS's theory of American Native origins is incorrect, and hence without any discussion of probabilities they invite Mormons to continue to believe that JS was correct.

The difficulty of proving a negative is well known. In addition, contrary to the belief of most non-scientists, science does not purport to prove anything with 100% certainty. Even the basic principles of mathematics were shown by Kurt Godel to be uncertain. So of course it has not been proven that JS was wrong. Without an assessment of the probability based on the best evidence available to date as to who is right and who is wrong, this type of analysis tells us nothing.

The interplay between the Church and science's position respecting DNA illustrates something that is endlessly displayed as Mormons attempt to understand the "reality" of their faith. For the psychological and other reasons set out below, those who believe tend to regularly accept arguments like those offered by the Church in favour of its DNA theories, despite the fact that the evidence is heavily against them. While discussing religious issues such as the one related to DNA, I often hear the faithful discount the most probable theory by referring to the fact that there are many possible ways of explaining what happened, and so allow their faith to determine what is or is not. We do not ignore probabilities in our scientific work or in any other significant aspect of our lives. We should not do so respecting our religious beliefs either, despite the powerful psychological incentives that been built into us to do that.

Mormons are real people who have to make real decisions. For example, put yourself in the shoes of a 19 year old boy who has to decide whether to go to the Ukraine and drink potentially radioactive water (which my son recently did) while telling probably misleading stories about JS and the Book of Mormon (including that the Native Americans are Israelites) for two years, or to continue his university education while doing a Peace Corp stint or two in the foreign culture of his choice. If that boy is rational, he will want to hear about the probabilities of the Book of Mormon being what the Church says it is based on the best evidence collected to date, as well as a host of other things that are analyzed on the same basis.

While assembling the evidence and analysis set out below, I have tried to proceed with a view to the probabilities. That is what my clients expect me to do. And in this case, my client is being asked to make a huge investment that will occupy much of the rest of his life in terms of free time, and a large percentage of his "discretionary" income. So in summary, whether this investment is likely to work out well depends entirely on two things: First, JS's credibility, and second, whether the social structure of today's LDS Church has somehow overcome its dubious beginnings and become worthwhile.

### **Joseph Smith's Credibility**

If any single idea or mental attitude can fairly be said to characterize Mormonism, it is this: Mormons are persuaded to exchange the many wonderful things they could do with their time, energy and other resources during their earthly lives for what JS promised will happen after death. Hence, JS's trustworthiness should be subjected to the most careful consideration of which we are capable. This is how we proceed respecting all of our important decisions that depend upon the trustworthiness of other people. It should give Mormons great cause for alarm – as it did me – when they realize that preventing this analysis from occurring is arguably the Mormon Church's number one priority.

We have on the record countless things that JS said were true. Many of them can be tested. Of those, a significant percentage were found to be false. Of those, many have to do with JS trying to persuade people to obey him. It seems that this was when he was at his worst in terms of prevarication. These events notoriously include his indication for over a decade that he was not having sex with anyone other than his legal wife Emma, and that he was not engaged in polygamy while he was in fact having sex with many women (including teenage girls as young as 14 years of age, and the wives of men he had sent away on missions) and was gradually opening the institution of polygamy up to his inside circle. Those statements that can't be tested, and particularly events such as his alleged conversations with angels and God, are extraordinary, and hence require extraordinary evidence to be believed. That evidence is not forthcoming. Evidence that once looked solid - like that related to the witnesses of the Book of Mormon - on closer scrutiny has largely come unglued. And a host of other things related to the



so-called miraculous events of JS's ministry don't add up once the various accounts extant related to what happened are considered. Hence, it is in my view clear that JS should not be trusted. The most easily accessible single source of information respecting historical data of this nature is <http://www.lds-mormon.com/> Another useful overview source can be found at <http://trials-of-ascension.net/mormon.html>

I have seen many of JS's type in my law practise trying to entice my clients to invest in things as JS did his followers with respect to the "anti-bank" his established in Kirtland (see below) , and I have seen only a small percentage of such investments work out well. Most fail, causing the investors to lose their money, as did JS's illegal bank. This does not mean that the promoters are dishonest criminals, but rather that for various reasons they should not be trusted. Maybe they are overconfident; maybe they overestimate the reliability of what they think they know; maybe they have subconsciously succumbed to the need to be a big shot and are saying things that can easily be shown to be false, or that they will even admit later were false, because they are certain that if they can just get a bit more money they will be able to save the day for everyone, including themselves. The last one is a particularly common story.

In deciding whether to trust someone, you look at their track record in terms of trustworthiness, judgement, reliability, etc. JS's record has been carefully examined in this regard, and in my view it is close to impossible to make a reasonable case on the evidence to which we have access that he was trustworthy. And, there is almost complete unanimity in this conclusion among non-Mormons who have studied JS carefully. Smart? - yes; creative? - absolutely; charismatic? - no question about it; trustworthy? - no. This is precisely the way in which the analysis goes respecting the creators of some of the largest financial messes I have encountered during the course of my legal career.

The following is a summary of only some of the evidence of which I would advise my client in the course of assisting him to make his important decision respecting Mormonism.

### ***Joseph Smith Was a Philosopher King***

JS, as was the case with many before him, accurately observed mankind's tendency to be corrupted by power (See D&C 121:34 - 46), but he did not establish any safeguards within the organizational structure of the church he founded to protect the members from the leadership abuses that were certain, according to him, to occur. And as it turned out, he appears to be one of the worst abusers. He and those who have followed him into the Mormon Church's leadership ranks seem to subscribe to Plato's discredited "philosopher kings" idea and the abuse power it entails. The philosopher kings 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.

JS's behaviour also brings to mind Nietzsche's idea of the "pious lie". These are lies told for the purpose of encouraging behaviour that religious leaders are certain will be good for their followers, and which the followers might not be wise enough to choose for themselves. Nietzsche said that the pious lie was 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 JS. In the so-called "Plan of Salvation", JS had Satan beautifully articulate the philosopher king and pious lie approach, and be vilified for it.

## ***Sexual Behaviour***

The worst of JS's pious lying occurred as he was trying to hide from members of the Church and others his sexual behaviour, which included regularly having sex with a variety of women, many of them either young teenage girls or already married to other men. Some of those men JS had sent away on missions for the Church before telling their wives that "God had given them" to him as "spiritual wives", which meant that they would get together for secret sex from time to time. For almost ten years JS denied in private, in public, over the pulpit, through published newspaper reports, and a variety of other ways, that he was having sex with anyone other than Emma, and denied specifically the rumours that were swirling around him respecting "spiritual wifery" or "polygamy". He even staged fake marriage ceremonies so that it would be assumed that women to whom was in fact polygamously married were married to others, and offered to stage fake excommunications of other men who were also practising polygamy so throw those not in the know off their trail. See <http://trialssofarcension.net/mormon/lying.html> for a summary respecting this and related matters. Mormonism's official doctrine, for which JS was responsible, even prohibited polygamy while he practised it. The first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (1835) included a section denying any practice of polygamy:

Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication and polygamy, we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife, and one woman but one husband, except in the case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again." (History of the Church, Vol. 2, p. 247)

When the truth finally came out near the end of his life, JS claimed God had ordered him to lie because the people were not ready to hear the truth. Far from being the exception, this kind of conduct was commonplace for JS. As the respected historian Michael Quinn puts it at page 88 of his book "Mormon Hierarchy – The Origins of Power":

Smith remained aloof from civil office, but in November 1835 he announced a doctrine I [Quinn] call "theocratic ethics". He used this theology to justify his violation of Ohio's marriage laws by performing a marriage for Newel Knight and the undivorced Lydia Goldthwaithe without legal authority to do so... In addition to the bigamous character of this marriage, Smith had no license to perform marriages in Ohio. "

Although that was the first statement of this concept, Smith and his associates put that theology into practice long before 1835, and long after. Two months later Smith performed marriage ceremonies for which neither he nor the couples had marriage licenses, and he issued marriage certificates "agreeable to the rules and regulations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." Theocratic ethics justified LDS leaders and (by extension) regular Mormons in actions which were contrary to conventional ethics and sometimes in violation of criminal laws.

This ethical independence is essential for understanding certain seemingly inconsistent manifestations in Mormonism. Some had already occurred - reversals in doctrine and divinely revealed procedures, and the publication of unannounced changes in written revelations and historical texts. The Knight marriage was a public example of JS Smith's violation of laws and cultural norms regarding marriage and sexual behavior - the performance of civil marriages by legally unauthorized officiators, monogamous marriage ceremonies in which one or both partners were undivorced from legal spouses, polygamous marriage of a man with more than one living wife, his marriage proposals to females as young as twelve, his sexual relationships with polygamous wives as young

as fourteen, polyandry of women with more than one husband, marriage and cohabitation with foster daughters, and Mormon marriages of first cousins, brother-sister, and uncle-niece. Other manifestations of Mormonism's theocratic ethics would soon begin in Kirtland and continue intermittently for decades - the official denials of actual events, the alternating condemnation and tolerance for counterfeiting and stealing from non-Mormons, threats and physical attacks against dissenters or other alleged enemies, the killing and castration of sex offenders, the killing of anti-Mormons, the bribery of government officials, and business ethics at odds with church standards.

I cannot overemphasize how disgusted I was when I found out about JS's sexual behaviour and the other practises just mentioned. 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 JS, 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. Dr. John Roney of the Harvard Medical School referred to Bill Clinton as a paradigm example of this syndrome in his widely respected book "Shadow Syndromes".

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 refer to my great grandmother below. She and her children were among those whose lives were twisted by polygamy. And it continues to this day to inflict suffering on many people connected to Mormonism.

### ***The First Vision***

JS's story of his encounter with God, Jesus and various divine messengers 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 JS'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.

### ***The "Translation" of the Book of Mormon***

The very use of the word "translation" in this regard is misleading. By his own admission, JS 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 JS used it suggested to me that they both likely

graduated from the Humpty Dumpty school of linguistics as described by Lewis Carroll – a word can mean whatever they want it to mean.

### ***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 communal and physical. 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 the angel Gabriel 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?

### ***Joseph as a Translator of Other Ancient Records***

Grant Palmer in his book "An Insider's View of Mormon Origins" provides an accessible summary of JS's abysmal record as a translator. In every testable case, the evidence strongly supports the conclusion that he failed to do what he claimed to have done. The Pearl of Great Price is his most spectacular translation failure, but for purposes of the point I would like illustrate a lesser-known example serves better. This is provided by JS'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 JS, said he thought it was a Greek Psalter, and asked JS for his opinion. After consideration, JS 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 JS 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 the false dichotomy described below that in fact misleads his followers whether he intends this to be the case or not.

JS's meeting with Henry Caswell in my view speaks volumes about the nature of the man. It is clear that JS 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 it 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 say something that he knew was easily testable. The Caswell encounter, however, is consistent with the philosopher king theory – that is, JS at least some of the time believed he had divine powers as a translator of ancient records and was not afraid to act on what he perceived to be divine inspiration.

I think it likely that during at least large stretches of his ministry JS 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. 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 JS 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 JS 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 JS 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 or outright fraud 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.

### ***Joseph's Experience as a Treasure Digger and Seer***

And we also should not forget JS'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 society.

A significant part of what JS taught as a Mormon prophet has the distinct markings of the magical or alchemical environment in which he operated as a treasure seeker. 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 JS 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. JS 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.

### ***The Kirtland Banking Crisis***

While in Kirtland, JS made application to the Ohio state legislature to charter a bank. The legislature denied the application and so JS formed an "anti-banking" society which was in effect an illegal bank. JS promised his followers in God's name that they would become prosperous if they put their money in his bank. The bank issued bank notes with little or no assets to back them. There is evidence that some of the notes' security was boxes of sand that JS told his followers contained gold coins. Within months, the notes became worthless and those who trusted JS lost their money. Many members left the Church as a result and accused Smith of either being a fraud or a fallen prophet. Warrants were issued for the arrests of JS and Sidney Rigdon as a result of their roles in this fraud. They both escaped arrest by leaving Kirtland in the middle of the night.

### ***The Paul Dunn Analogy***

Some 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 and have provided below a summary of the psychological research that explains why reasonable people often disagree respecting this kind of thing. However, let me point out that I was one of those faithful for many years. 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. This is a psychological principle. And so our feelings related to belief are largely dependant upon what we know about the person who it is suggested that we believe. That is why information respecting JS's history of deception is so critical to those who need to decide whether to believe him.

In the same fashion that I perceived the former Mormon General Authority Paul Dunn differently after I found out that he made up most of his wonderful, faith inspiring stories, I have perceived JS, the Church and my experience at its hands differently since I became aware of how it mislead me. If I heard Paul Dunn tell of yet another amazing experience he had while at war, I would listen bemusedly but would not believe anything until I had independent, trustworthy, third party corroboration. The Church is now in the same boat. It does not make sense to use other JS experiences to bootstrap over problems with his credibility, precisely because he is not a credible source of information. For the same reason, we should not rely upon the experiences or testimonies of other people who relied upon him for their information about spirituality, because he was unreliable and we know how persuasive he was. And when our minds are finally ready to start looking for other ways to explain our experience, we find that there are lots of theories that make great sense, and that explain not only what we have experienced but help us to understand the other contradictory religious experience we see all around us. How is it that others pray just as we do, and bear us their testimony that God has revealed to them that their religious path is the only true one and that ours is false? And these folks outnumber Mormons many thousands to one. There are cogent answers to these questions that are not

accessible as long as we are stuck within the orthodox Mormon worldview. See <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/out%20of%20my%20faith.pdf> for a summary of some of the information available that addresses these issues.

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. I suggest that anyone who has not climbed this particular mountain cannot understand the difference between the view from where I now stand and from where I formerly stood. The psychological literature summarized below supports this conclusion.

### ***Conclusions Respecting Joseph Smith's Credibility***

I am prepared to assume that JS 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. Most of us know people who tend to see much more of what they want and less of what really is, and few of us trust them without third party confirmation once we understand their nature. JS appears to have been a far more extreme example of this type of personality than anyone with whom I have personally been acquainted.

So why would anyone trust JS? I suggest that many trust him because our social relationships regularly overpower our logical powers. There is no message that history delivers more clearly than this. If we wish to understand ourselves, we must first transcend the power of the social group by which we are enveloped. Only a few of the superhuman among us can do it any other way. This is not an event. Self perception comes by degrees as transcension occurs.

The opinion of faithful Mormons in this matter should be give just as much weight as the opinion of faithful Taliban regarding Osama bin Ladin, faithful Muslims regarding Mohammed, etc. That is, none, because their cultural bias has been shown to be so strong that it overcomes their reason.

Can we prove with 100% certainty that JS lied about his sexual activities or the creation of an illegal bank in Kirtland, etc.? No. But the evidence I have reviewed indicates that it is highly probable that he did, and if I have to make a decision now that depends upon his credibility, I should therefore assume that he choose for whatever reason to mislead many people on those and other occasions.

The unequivocal advice I would convey to my client on this point is that JS should not be trusted. Later I argue that current Mormon leaders are also not trustworthy. Hence, Mormonism must stand or fall on the basis of the social benefits it provides as it is currently organized.

## **Modern Mormon Culture**

The first point to note here is that Mormon culture has changed radically during its history, starting as a free wheeling charismatic group, becoming an extremely authoritarian, anti-social organization that choose to isolate itself from the rest of society, and finally being forced back toward the cultural mainstream when theocracy and polygamy were wrested from it by the US government in the early 1900s. Hence, any conclusions that might be reached respecting whether Mormon culture is more good than bad, or vice versa, is subject to revision.

### ***How Carefully Should We Listen to What Insiders Have to Say About Their Own Culture?***

Carefully, but not exclusively. This point is nicely illustrated by an account an anthropologist gave respecting a visit he made to Artic to study the Inuit. He first met with a Catholic priest who was in their community. The priest told him about the natives belief system, how crude and silly it was, etc. Then the anthropologist went over to see the Inuit. When he asked how they were getting along with the priest, they said he was a nice enough fellow, but had some outlandish beliefs. They then proceeded to laugh so hard they fell over while describing the story of the virgin birth. "That priest", they said, "is hilarious!" Most religious beliefs are usually perceived quite differently by those on the outside than those within.

So, we are not well advised to rely upon insiders to assess the value of their own culture. They are too biased to do more than point out the alleged benefits of their society, which should then be tested through research conducted by people who are as unbiased as possible. This points to the fallacy of the old saw that the best way to understand belief is to speak with a believer. The point of view of the believer is certainly part of the picture, but would we rely exclusively on what a Taliban says to understand his culture, or an Old Order Amish, or someone at Jonestown who sang Jim Jones' praises while drinking cyanide laced Kool-Aid? To understand the behaviour of insiders, it is essential that many outside perspectives be considered, and that behavioural data respecting the insiders (both leaders and followers) be collected and reviewed over a long period of time so that their stated intent can be considered in light of the objective nature of their actions.

For example, Mormon polygamy was suspended on threat of extinction of the LDS Church at the hand of the US federal government. At that time the Mormon leadership indicated that polygamy was the law of heaven and that it was suspended solely in order to allow the Church to survive. This implies that as soon as it became legal, polygamy would be reinstated. It has been legal in Canada and many other places in which the Church has a large membership for many years, and the Church has not encouraged, or even condoned, obedience to one of God's "essential", "immutable" laws. It is likely that US constitutional law will soon allow the practise of polygamy again in that country. Will the Church then return to obedience? That is highly unlikely given the current LDS population demographic.

Only in the light of the kind of big picture analysis I have just crudely attempted can we see the reality of polygamous practise in Mormon culture. It was (and still is) largely perceived within Mormonism as a immutable, divine law, and yet the reality of LDS historical and current behaviour shows it to be a changeable social construct. Because it produces cognitive dissonance for Mormons to talk about this kind of thing, they don't. When put in a position where they must, they retreat to "God will enlighten us in His due time" and leave it at that. This kind of response is the last resort of someone attempting to reduce their cognitive dissonance, and as time passes it will be used with increasing frequency by thoughtful Mormons.



Consider also the Mormon emphasis on "family values", spending time with family etc. Most faithful Mormons will quickly volunteer this aspect of the Mormon lifestyle as one of its selling features, and the Church's highly effective marketing program is based on this idea. In fact, the common perception in the US non-LDS community (where the Church's marketing program has been used the most extensively) is that Mormons are among the most family oriented of all people. But, the reality of life for the most faithful Mormons – the most exemplary models of Mormon culture – is quite different. The demands of seemingly endless meetings and other forms of "service" given to the LDS community make it difficult for many faithful Mormon adults to see anywhere near as much of their families as the average North American adult does.

This leads to the irony of Mormons who perceive themselves, and are perceived by others, as being extremely family oriented in fact not doing nearly as much with their families as most North Americans. And even more ironically, the purpose of this endless round of meetings and activity is at least in part likely to keep faithful Mormons so busy that they won't have time to think about some of the troubling aspects of their history and culture that are summarized in this essay. A busy Mormon will continue to give resources to strengthen the Mormon institution without thinking about whether this makes sense or not. A Mormon who is not busy will have the chance to think about things that might turn off the flow of resources to the Church. So Mormon culture is designed to keep Mormons busy. And I should note that I don't believe that a group of evil men are sitting around somewhere in Salt Lake City plotting the continued deception of Mormons everywhere. The sociological and psychological research I have reviewed makes it clear how community leaders are blinded by the forces outlined in this essay just as surely as are their followers. The leaders are, in fact, subject to the strongest of these forces because they have the most to lose if the house of cards comes tumbling down.

I should also note that I believe most Mormons love their families deeply and are good people. One of the things that woke me up was the realization that I was not spending the time I wanted with my family. So my point is that we are unwise to believe what Mormons say in this regard. It is much more revealing to find out how much time a particular Mormon family spends together each week and what they do with that time than it is to listen to what they say. I would have said that I was very family oriented during my almost thirty years of adult life as an active Mormon. But, I spent little time with my family during most of that period, and much of the time I was with them involved Church activities during which I went one way and they another. As a result of these activities and the belief system it established in my family's life, the Church became a third party to each of my important family relationships. And as I found to my horror when I began to question, the allegiance of many family members to the Church was stronger than their allegiance to me as a result of the time we had spent "together" at Church.

This again shows, in my view, what is really going on behind much of what the LDS Church does and how its culture functions. The real issue for the Church is how can it become, and remain, strong. This requires that it solidify its hold on its members. Unfortunately, that means that when one member decides to leave, those who love her are often put by the Church's belief system, which is designed to protect and strengthen the Church, in the position of choosing between their loved one and the Church. This is the result of the literal Mormon belief in rewards that are available only to faithfully obedient Mormons after death in the Celestial Kingdom. If a loved one has rejected that belief and hence refuses to continue to obey, she becomes a toxin that may influence others to do likewise and hence like the offending eye in the New Testament, should be "plucked out". This at a minimum causes a loss of respect for the unfaithful loved one, and particularly in cases where the she is frank about her disbelief, can cause the effective termination of important relationships. Many marriages have ended on these rocks, for example.

The willingness of faithful Mormons to terminate relationships with less than faithful family members is not universal. However, it is common enough that when a Mormon begins to question this issue weighs heavily, and hence acts as a kind of organizational glue that holds the Church together during times of stress. This allows the Church additional time to adjust to new information that from time to time is produced by science that shows its belief system to be something other than what Mormons think it to be. I do not believe that this feature of Mormonism was designed by evil Mormon leaders to hurt the members, but rather is an unfortunate consequence of an institution struggling for survival as human institutions have done from time immemorial. And Mormon leaders believe that the Church is so important that while the break up of marriages and other family relationships is deeply regrettable and to be avoided if possible, it is sometimes an "unavoidable" consequence when one spouse believes and the other does not. This is why Mormons are counselled not to date, or marry, non-Mormons.

My perspective during my years of Mormon activity was that while I was sacrificing fun times with my kids and wife for the Church, this would buy us more blessings in the Celestial Kingdom. In a significant sense, I believed that what we do in mortal life is just a qualifying heat. The real race started after death. Ironically, as it turned out, by sacrificing the present benefits of time with my family for the eternal rewards JS promised, I was putting down roots and encouraging others to put down roots into the Church's system that bonded each individual to the Church and made our continued loving, trusting relationships with each other conditional on continued obedience to the Church. The slogan should be "Church first" instead of "family first". The final irony in this scenario is that most faithful Mormons would have trouble seeing anything wrong in what I just described. They would equate faithfulness to the Church with "good for the family", and unfaithfulness with "bad for the family". This again illustrates the difference between the insider and outsider points of view.

So, when the data are collected and analysed respecting how family-oriented LDS people are, we find that despite their belief that they are family-oriented, much of this orientation relates to the life after death. On earth, Mormons tend to put Church ahead of family since that is what is required to get to the Celestial Kingdom. But they ironically perceive this sacrifice to be made for their families, and so it is part of their "family first" attitude. Such is the power of belief over behaviour.

### ***Why Can't Insiders Accurately Perceive Their Own Culture?***

The following is a summary of some of the principles of social behaviour that make it difficult for insiders to accurately perceive their own behaviour.

#### Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is at the root of denial. Fear is at the root of cognitive dissonance. The extent of our fear is determined by our general tendencies in that regard, and our beliefs. The nature of our beliefs determine our vulnerability to the issue in question. For example, I used to fear not being with my family in the Celestial Kingdom and wanted to be there with them. Fear and desire walk down this path hand in hand. Hence I obeyed the rules designed to get me what I wanted and avoid what I feared. As soon as I no longer believed that the Celestial Kingdom existed, my motivation to do many things evaporated, including some that I did not even know were related to that belief disappeared. I discovered the link while wondering why my motivation toward certain activities or attitudes had changed.

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

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

A cognition is a bit of knowledge or belief. When it disagrees with another cognition in our head ... a nasty jangling occurs. To end this cognitive dissonance ... we change the weak cognition to conform to the stronger one.

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

Cog dis usually functions in a manner no more complicated than that. But while Aesop neatly illustrated cog dis, he did not adequately reveal the primary force that lies beneath it – fear.

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

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

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

A faithful Mormon should be expected to experience massive amounts of fear upon contemplating the possibility that the religious experience on which much of his life, family and social relationships are based is false. This fear produces a powerful form of cognitive dissonance, and hence an extensive or suppression of the information. We should expect that

the more faithful the Mormon, the less able she will be to see the reality of the institution that sponsors her religious faith and the effect that faith has upon her.

### Rational v. "Automatic" Decision-Making

Humans perceive themselves to be rational decision makers. However, there is a great deal of psychological and other research that indicates that many of our decisions are automatic, likely as a result of decision making routines that evolution programmed into us to help us to survive in a harsh environment where decisions have to be made quickly and on the basis of limited information. However, we have a primal need to justify our actions, and in this modern world dominated as it is by a "rational" paradigm, that means we twist our knee jerk reactions into a rational framework in order to feel comfortable with them. For example, why do Mormons believe that tithing brings forth God's blessings? Because of stories told that illustrate the cause effect relationship between paying tithing and receiving blessings. Why are Mormon Priesthood blessings perceived to "work"? Same kind of reasoning. Michael Shermer wrote a book that persuasively sets out how coincidence, mankind's tendency to look for patterns where they don't exist and a misunderstanding of cause and effect relationships nicely accounts for beliefs of this nature, and that the more intelligent a person is the more likely she is to defend the beliefs that she at some point in her development (usually early) she accepted as "true" (See "Why People Believe Weird Things").

One of the evolutionary rules of thumb (sometimes called "heuristics") noted in the research is that when powerful emotions are encountered, reason shuts down. One of those forces is fear. This is adequately explained by what I indicated above respecting cog dis. Powerful desires for money, prestige, sex etc. can also overcome reason. One of my clients was on the verge of falling for a fraudulent financial scheme that offered him \$20,000,000, and came to me for tax planning advice. He had tickets purchased to fly to Nigeria the following week to sign a few papers and collect his money. After I asked some questions, and then provided him with news service articles that indicated how others had lost their money, been kidnapped for ransom, and in one case killed as a result of participating in similar schemes, he reacted like someone coming out of a trance. This experienced, successful businessman's considerable ability to reason had been overcome by the emotion of greed, which is of course a variant of desire.

Other research indicates that the most powerful of emotional forces are often connected to "value structures" such as religion (my religion is "true" and yours is not, for example), morality (the abortion issue; the homosexuality issue, for example), political issues (democracy v. communism, for example), etc.

Another powerful emotion that affects our beliefs is love. I recently watched in amusement (and with some concern) as one of my young friends who I did not think had a religious bone in his body fell in love with a faithful Mormon girl and began to think seriously about serving a mission after years of resisting the pressure of his parents and others to do so.

Love and fear combine to produce potent emotional distortions of reason. This is responsible for the advice provided to medical doctors and other professionals that they not attempt to diagnose or treat themselves or family members. For example, a doctor's love for her child, and fear of the consequence that a serious illness would bring to that child, for example, has been demonstrated to impair her ability to see symptoms that clearly indicate serious illnesses such as cancer.

Yet another area of study focuses on our inherent risk aversion. We tend to overestimate risk and underestimate potential gain from risk taking, and we tend to overvalue what we already possess when it is compared to what we don't possess. One fascinating study in this regard provided university students with one item each that had the same value (say \$5) in their school book store. They were also given some money with which to bid on the items other students were given, and were required to put their own item up for auction with a minimum sale price. On average, each student was prepared to pay much less (say \$3.50) for items similar to her own than the amount for which she was prepared to sell her own item (say \$7). The tendency to value what we have more than similar items we don't have, and to overestimate risk and underestimate the rewards to be gained by taking risk, would promote societal stability and hence make evolutionary sense. And they make us unlikely to change our minds respecting something like religious beliefs we have already accepted.

Another line of research deals with decision-making under conditions of great uncertainty and indicates that the more uncertainty and perceived risk, the more likely it is that we will go with the crowd and accept what authority figures have to say about what we should do. This is one manifestation of something called the "conformist bias" or "authority bias". The conformist bias explains the stock market buying that leads to "bubbles" in the market, and the panic selling that leads to irrational market collapse. It also applies to things like the global warming issue. There is a strong tendency in this regard to agree with the people who are dominant in our group. And what is more uncertain than religious belief? Even in cases where the phenomena are not terribly complex, the conformist bias exerts a powerful influence.

Some researchers have suggested that the conformist bias is just one of many aspects of the authority bias. A strong, perceived source of authority is often found at the root of group behaviour that sets in motion the conformist bias. It should be clear how this plays into the religious mindset, and particularly with regard to the authoritarian, hierarchical Mormon social structure.

In general, the more uncertain a matter, the more influential the authority and conformist biases will be. And authority, of course, is a subjective matter. My beliefs confer authority on certain people and institutions. Hence, those who want to influence me should be expected to attempt to control what I believe.

These biases are aided and abetted by the nature of human memory. Elizabeth Loftus, world-renowned memory expert and U. of Washington psychology professor has noted:

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

Loftus provides numerous examples of how easy it is to suggest to people that they have had an experience, and cause them to believe that they really had it (See "Memory, Faults and Fixes", *Issues in Science and Technology*, Summer 2002, reprinted in "The Best American Science and Nature Writing (2003 Edition) at p. 127). Of particular note are certain experiments that have been conducted to illustrate the way in which our memories and current perceptions are shaped by how we think others have perceived the same event we did. For example, subjects might be shown a series of slides depicting an event or actually witness a staged

event, such as a theft or a traffic accident. Then, the subjects would be given additional information concerning the event. The post-event information given to one group would contain material that contradicted some details of the actual event, such as a stop sign being described as a yield sign. The post-event information provided to a second group of subjects (the control group) would contain no such conflicting information. After ingesting the supplemental information, all subjects would be given a test concerning what they witnessed. In all of these experiments, the subjects who were given the misleading supplemental information performed more poorly than control subjects respecting the items regarding which they had been given misleading information.

This research sheds light on how Mormon testimonies are created. Once we have heard enough other people say, for example, that they felt something particular when they read the Book of Mormon, we are capable of manufacturing similar memories. And the more authoritative, credible, loving etc. the people who suggest these things to us, the more effective they are likely to be. I believe, in addition, that there are other and much more real influences behind the LDS testimony phenomenon. See <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/out%20of%20my%20faith.pdf> at p. 77 and following for a summary.

It has also been shown that certain experiences that cause of the emotion of "elevation" to occur are highly influential with respect to our behaviour. When people see unexpected acts of goodness, they commonly described themselves as being surprised, stunned, and emotionally moved. When asked "Did the feeling give you any inclination toward doing something?," the most common response is to describe generalized desires to help others and to become a better person, and feelings of joy. These feelings bind human groups together, and so create strong, reliable communities. Members of Mormon communities exhibit this kind of behaviour. However, the behaviours in question often also bind the participants to the Church itself. For example, by leaving on a mission for two years, a young man in the Mormon community inspires precisely the kind of emotion described above. And he is subjecting himself to a powerful conditioning force that will make it much more difficult for him to "question" when he returns, and he is keeping himself very busy during precisely the period of time during which most young men question. Hence, the community is strengthened by an act that inspires the emotion of elevation, and at the same time a number of other things are done that will also strengthen the community. Many Mormon conventions have this kind of effect.

As noted above, 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 and has created a society in which an admission of disbelief often costs dearly in terms of marriage and other family relationships, social status, etc. In the face of this kind of prize/penalty structure, we should not be surprised that apparently rational people are easily persuaded to believe in irrational, extremely low probability versions of future reality such as the Celestial Kingdom. And when you add to this the psychological pressure that being surrounded by believing Mormons for most of life, bearing public testimony on countless occasions as to the certainty of my belief, and then being placed in leadership positions 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.

### Even Scientific Thinking is Influenced by these Principles

As noted above, the principles just described were developed with respect to human mental processes in general. They have not been yet broadly applied to religious phenomena. One of my friends who is an LDS professor of religious psychology who has been helping me with this project indicated recently to me that he thinks this neglect is due to the greater credit given within the academic community for empirically oriented research. Since the application of psychological principles to religious behaviour does not easily fit into the mould, it is not an attractive research subject. He agrees with my assessment that the application of these principles to the formation of religious beliefs and cultural practises is reasonable to assume, and that given the dominant nature of emotional forces relative to religious issues, it is also reasonable to conclude that cognitive dissonance, denial etc. will be powerful forces in the determination of religious beliefs. For an excellent overview respecting the application of cognitive dissonance principles to religious issues in general, see "Speculations on a Privileged State of Cognitive Dissonance, by Conrad Montell at <http://cogprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/archive/00002388/01/temp.pdf>

I note in particular something that Thomas Kuhn pointed out in his landmark book on the philosophy of science, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions". In that book he coined the term "paradigm shift" to describe how science changes. Until his time, it was believed that science progressed in a more or less linear fashion. He pointed out that science seems, rather, to lurch forward. His explanation for this, which has been widely accepted in the scientific community, is that the majority of each generation of scientists becomes captive to the dominant "paradigm" of their day. However, a minority of each generation will see things the majority cannot see, and will pursue those interests, sometimes to the derision of their colleagues. A future generation of scientists, less encumbered by the paradigm of their forbears, will often recognize in the fringe work something of importance that will be adopted, amplified and provide the basis for a new paradigm that will rapidly transform the scientific community's views respecting the issues in question. And then the process will repeat itself. A classic example of this is found in the history of DNA. Gregor Mendel did the ground work for modern DNA theory, published his work, and was ignored by the scientists of his generation. He is now revered as the founder of genetic science.

The scientific community is the pinnacle of rational thought in our society. If scientists are subject to the forces described above in the manner Kuhn indicates, how much more so are the rest of us likely to be? And since the correlation between emotion and irrational belief is so strong, and the connection of religion to emotion so pervasive, should we not expect great difficulty as we attempt to be "rational" about religion? But, given modern man's need to explain everything he does in rational terms, should we not also expect him to do that, and believe with all his heart that he is being rational with respect to his religious beliefs?

When we add all of the above factors us, we should not be surprised that it is excruciatingly difficult for the typical faithful Mormon to look any information in the eye that questions the legitimacy of the beliefs on which his life is based.

### ***The Dominant Influences In Mormon Culture***

Modern religions can be plotted on a spectrum between the mentalities that dominated the Dark Ages and the Renaissance. Charles Van Doren describes these as follows:

Edward Gibbon, in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, identified two reasons for the fall of the ancient civilization that he admired so much. He called them barbarism and religion. By barbarism he meant not only the barbarian invasions, but also the deep changes in Roman life brought on by the presence of barbarians, first outside the state but impinging on it, later within the very citadels of Roman power. By religion he of course meant Christianity. The suggestion shocked Gibbon's 18th century readers, but it was not new. (Charles Van Doren, "A History of Knowledge", p. 92)

For a thousand years since the fall of Rome [during the Dark Ages], men and women had turned over responsibility for their moral lives to surrogates of God on earth: the pope at Rome, his bishops, their parish priests or ministers. They had done this for very good reasons, primarily because they were convinced that if they did they would win salvation and eternal bliss.

Perhaps to their surprise, they discovered that the ancient Greeks and Romans, whom they admired for so many things, had by and large made no such bargain. The Romans especially had believed in God and tried to lead upright, moral lives, but they had accepted responsibility for the choice of how they lived. That responsibility had apparently been, in their estimation, inalienable.

The more the Renaissance pondered this belief, the more striking and courageous it seemed. Classical man had been responsible for himself, and had accepted the consequences of his errors if he made them. The risk he took proved great, as the Renaissance realized. Could the reward be equally great?

Renaissance men, and women, too, decided it was, and this became the most important reason for their collective decision to discard the theocratic state and replace it with a secular state and society for which they would henceforth take complete responsibility. They would depend on religious advisers for counsel, but not for leadership. We moderns inherit their decision and, with a very few exceptions (see Chapter 12), have adhered to this belief ever since. (Charles Van Doren, "A History of Knowledge", pp. 166-167)

To summarize, during the Dark Ages mankind was dominated by two things. First, a worldview in which knowledge was certain and permanent. Second, the authority of God's agents on earth, who were responsible for much of that perception of certainty. That certainty, and their willingness to enunciate it, strengthened their authority.

On the other hand, the Renaissance was dominated by the idea that man was responsible for his own actions, that knowledge was gained in increments through study, and that while we could learn about the cause and effect relationships that govern our world, we could never be certain that we had found the "truth" about these things. The best we could do was to choose the best from among the theories of cause and effect presented to us, largely on the basis of their predictive power, and remain prepared for better theories to dethrone even our most cherished notions of how things work.

So, where on the spectrum between the Dark Ages and Renaissance mentalities does the Mormon Church fall at this point in its evolution? It seems clear to me that it is well toward the Dark Ages end of the spectrum. Let's consider the evidence.



## The Nature of Mormon Leadership

I would start with the idea that to the extent that Mormon leaders simply tell their followers the same thing that most other religious and secular moral leaders do (be a good husband and father; keep the law; be a good citizen and community member; live by the golden rule; etc.), they should not be given any credit for this. That advice is available all around us, and does not in my view support Mormonism's claims to divine wisdom that goes far beyond that to which the rest of society has access. To assess the effect of Mormon leadership advice, we need to focus on those aspects of that advice that has differed significantly from general trend within Western society.

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 JS's polygamy as well as other matters threatened the Church's existence, and if JS had not been killed, might have ended it. But JS 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 JS'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 assumption was that the individual members who went would be better off if not in this life, in the next.

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. The Mormon Church most resembles an employer in our lives. There is a symbiotic relationship to an extent between employer and employee, but the employer will often ask things of its employees that are contrary to the employees' interest but that will strengthen the employer.

However, 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 JS's 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 amazingly adaptive response to a seemingly dramatic loss of power and influence. It reinvented itself almost completely by developing 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 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. The best explanation most Mormons can muster to this is that the "lord works in mysterious ways", "God's ways are not man's ways", or something of that ilk. That is what the First Presidency and the Twelve essentially told B.H. Roberts respecting his Book of Mormon related concerns as noted above. It did not make sense then and makes less sense now.

As noted below respecting my grandmother, the history of polygamy related to Mormonism is strewn with the bodies of those who have been harmed by it. The interest of the institution trumped that of individuals in myriad ways over the years.

### *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 equality respecting civil rights. Mormonism brought up the rear because of Brigham Young's apparently politically motivated reversal of JS's grant of the priesthood to black men. Brigham Young 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 (then the Church's prophet) and Hugh Brown (his first counsellor) 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. Many faithful Mormons would dispute my assertion that Presidents McKay and Brown received a revelation to give the priesthood to the blacks, but I am not sure what else to call the inspiration they felt, as the prophet and his first counsellor, that caused them to lobby as long and hard as they did toward this end. Leonard Arrington, the only real historian to be the Church's official historian (and then only briefly) deals with this interesting chapter of Church history in his book "Adventures of a Church Historian". Various Dialogue articles also discuss it.

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 nations 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 in those regions. 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 on through the 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. In fact, they gained power. The Church became stronger by becoming more mainstream and hence acceptable. This eliminated an irritant that caused some members to question Mormon leadership authority, and so that authority was strengthened. The Church's critics were silenced respecting this point, and were the biggest losers as a result of this doctrinal change.

### *Feminists v. The Church*

The Equal Rights Amendment became the flash point for this issue, but it had simmered for close to a hundred years before that as the powers JS 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 anointing before 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. The priesthood 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, it is clear to me 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 theory of LDS leadership, which posits the acceptability of the "ethical lie". This evolutionary step clearly strengthened the Church at the expense of the members.

### *Overview of Historical Trends Respecting Church Authority*

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 long term tendency to maintain as much control as possible over its membership.

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 tendency to do what it can 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. Hence, it should come as no surprise that 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. That is, the evidence I have reviewed strongly suggests that LDS leaders are not in the business of providing the members with leadership and information that is designed to help the members. Rather, the leadership is in the business of persuading the members to do what is inclined to strengthen the Church as an institution even if that is not in the best interest of the members. See <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/out%20of%20my%20faith.pdf> at p. 55 and following for more information relative to this point.

### Can Modern Mormon Leaders Be Trusted?

#### *Faithful History*

I start with a review of the faithful history policy, which can be found described in detail at <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/come%20clean.pdf> I read a lot, and am up to date respecting many social trends. My profession requires this of me. I received three

university degrees (B.A., LL.B. and M.B.A.), graduating near the top of each of my classes, and was then competent enough as a professional to become a partner in a couple of large, respected Canadian law firms. I was also involved for almost thirty continuous years in LDS leadership positions, including five years as Bishop and many others in Stake leadership callings. And somehow through all of this, I did not become aware of even a small fraction of the information relevant to my religious faith. And I am not unusual in this regard. This, in my view, speaks eloquently to how effective "faithful history" has been, and of the attitude of LDS leaders toward the membership. I have been told that the Church's policy is "milk before meat". If someone like me is not ready for meat, who is?

### *Fear Mongering*

Next, consider Jeffrey Holland's talk at last April's General Conference entitled "A Prayer for the Children" in which he counselled not questioning LDS authority and staying close to the orthodox line, because small deviations in one generation lead to bigger ones in the next, and hence what might be a small diversion – a little unfaithfulness – for a father, could condemn his children. See [http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/holland\\_critique.htm](http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/holland_critique.htm) for a review. This uses fear in classic LDS fashion to manipulate behaviour.

Then we have President Gordon Hinckley's, "the Church is all black or all white; all truth or all fraud" talk given at the same conference. He said:

The book of Revelation declares: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15–16). ....

Each of us has to face the matter—either the Church is true, or it is a fraud. There is no middle ground. It is the Church and kingdom of God, or it is nothing.

This is classic scare/control message, particularly when linked to the rest of LDS dogma in the manner indicated above. It also stands in complete contradiction to other LDS scripture that encourage one to "study things out" and which compare knowledge to a growing plant – the antithesis of "hot or cold". It is my view that Church and how it operates make the most sense when viewed through a control/authority paradigm. As soon as I began to use that paradigm to try to understand how the Church has influenced me, things came into focus and I was able to both find the threads that unite my past experience and predict with a high probability of success where things were headed. The "one true church" idea is near the foundation of the LDS control and authority oriented system of religious belief.

The "all black or all white" argument is an oft-repeated Mormon leadership theme, and is nothing more than a false dichotomy that performs the function of a debating trick, except Gordon Hinckley uses it on people who will believe almost anything he says because of the Mormon belief that the utterances and writings of the prophets (including Pres. Hinckley, the rest of the First Presidency, and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of which Jeffrey Holland is a member) are modern scripture that override the Bible and all other scriptural authorities. How can anyone who has experienced the good side of Mormons conclude that Mormonism is 100% bad and fraudulent? Of course there are good things within the Mormon tradition, as there are within all human traditions. Therefore, if Mormonism can only be 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. This position makes no sense in light of my life experience in general or experience with and study of Mormonism in particular. 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 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 many people, and was effective until recently in my case.

To test the sensibility of the black v. white approach, try to think of any other aspect of life in which it would serve us well as a decision making model. Do we accept all of what any school of political thought tells us? How about parenting or child rearing theory? Relationship theory? Educational theory? Economics? Medicine? I cannot think of any other aspect of life in which I would be comfortable accepting the ideas that come from a single source as being my sole guide. Religious belief, in my life, had been established as a unique phenomenon, respecting which all of the rules that governed the remainder of my life were suspended. My acceptance of the one true church concept is what made this possible.

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. JS suffered from the same debilitating, philosopher king delusion. As the Nobel Prize winning physicist Richard Fynman said, we cannot learn until we question. Certainty kills learning.

Teachings such as those of Jeffrey Holland and Gordon Hinckley 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 authority. 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. It is a Dark Ages idea.

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

#### *The Mormon Leadership Use of Persuasive Technique*

Confucious said that the superior man understands what is right while the inferior man understands what will sell. It is my conclusion that LDS leaders tend toward the "understands what sells" side of the spectrum. This is largely unconscious on their part. And their behaviour in this regard provides further evidence of their untrustworthiness. The fear mongering described above is an example of this broad tendency.

As noted above, we are generally speaking more emotional than rational. And we usually do not recognize the personal interests that motivate both our own actions, and those of others who affect us. Hence, social interaction involves a great deal of unconscious game playing, and in fact the continued existence of society in any particular form depends upon the "real" nature of the game remaining unrecognized. Hence, once the kings' right to rule was no longer accepted

as divine and unquestionable, democracy soon took over. And once the inequality of races was no longer accepted as "fact", slavery began to decline.

A significant part of the unconscious game playing involves how we are persuaded by, and persuade others. There are six primary "buttons" that psychologists have identified that are regularly used by those most adept at persuasion to get that they want. They are: Reciprocation – If I give you something, you are more likely to do what I want you to do; Consistency – If I can be caused to commit to do something, I will likely do it; Social Validation – I am more likely to do what is asked of me if I believe that many others are doing the same thing; Liking – I will be more likely to do what you want if I like you, and if you connect me to things I like; Authority – I am more likely to do what you want me to do if you appear authoritative; Scarcity – I am more likely to do what you want if I think that the opportunity you offer is in short supply.

The Mormon Church, and virtually all other long-lived human organizations, makes extensive use of each of the persuasive techniques noted above. For example:

Reciprocation – We are provided with activities at which emotional experiences and community involvement that we like or need are provided to us. We respond by being more willing to do what the Church asks of us.

Consistency – Once we have borne our testimony in public even once, let alone many times, it is hard to behave in a manner that is inconsistent with the public position we have taken. The same thing is true of public prayer, and hence the missionaries focus on getting an investigator to pray in the presence of the missionaries.

Social Validation – The emphasis is on doing things together since it is easier to extract commitments from people. And it is important to control the validating messages the group sends. Hence, only those who will support the leadership's point of view will be permitted air time. And anyone who goes against that grain must be quickly silenced and then gutted from a credibility point of view.

Liking – The sharing of emotional experience creates strong bonds. These bonds make continued obedience to the norms that dominate the group that has shared this experience more likely. Hence, the trick from the Church's point of view is to control the dominant forces within the group.

Authority – The activities in question are authority oriented. The leaders are prominent participants, they are usually dressed for "power", and the activities are carefully controlled. Ideas do not come up from the bottom, as is the case in organizations that are trying to maximize the creation of knowledge and growth. They come down from the top, as the case in organizations where control and execution are the goal. This is the military paradigm, for example. The content of "testimonies" is highly controlled. Leaders set the tone for each sharing exchange. In relatively small group settings (such as Home and Visiting teaching) great effort is made to control the message content. "Correlation" is used to control lesson content in other meetings. Instructors are strongly encouraged not to deviate from the published lesson materials.

Scarcity – Mormons are taught that the powerful emotional experiences they find so attractive are only available through Mormonism. All other brands of spirituality are at least inferior, and in many cases completely counterfeit.



The Mormon Church's use of persuasive technique does not indicate that it is evil – just human. However, there are more and less ethical uses of persuasive techniques. Ethical persuasion educates and informs. Unethical persuasion is based on information and emotional manipulation. The Mormon Church's use of persuasive technique falls at the unethical end of the spectrum. This is illustrated in particular by my recent correspondence with Jeffrey Holland which can be found at <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/spirituality.htm> While Elder Holland's reply to my letter was warm and sincere, it was non-substantive and is a textbook example of almost all of the emotional button pushing persuasive techniques described above.

For more information respecting the use of persuasive technique in the Mormon context, see <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/rs.mormon%20use%20of%20persuasive%20technique1002365.pdf>

### *Mormon Leaders Put Inaccurate Words in the Mouths of Innocents*

Another modern LDS leadership issue has to do with what young, inexperienced missionaries and ignorant members are taught to teach non-members of the Church about Church doctrine in an attempt to persuade them to devote their lives to Mormonism. This again, is a specific application of the general persuasion principles described above.

For example, the preponderance of evidence has been against the Book of Mormon being what JS told the world it was since at least the days of B.H. Roberts near the turn of this century. The evidence today overwhelmingly, in my view, points toward the book being a 19<sup>th</sup> century production. And respecting JS's martyrdom, the Church does not tell its members and potential converts about JS'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 JS 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 JS to his senses, and JS'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.

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 JS said it was, for example. 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 the psychological research referenced above that when the prize offered for any behaviour is large enough (and it does not matter whether the prize is something we want, or the avoidance of something we fear), 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 only a few faithful Mormons have the spiritual and mental strength to look it in the eye.

I conclude that modern Mormon leaders are not worthy of our trust. Their priority is strengthening the Church, not helping individual members of the Church.

### Too Much Time and Other Resources Required

A key Mormon belief is that we should always be engaged in good works; we should not be idle. And in true philosopher king fashion, Mormonism goes about filling its members days with an endless string of activities, rituals, responsibilities and other things to do. This has the effect of leaving little if any time for contemplation, the enjoyment of the present or even doing important things not related to the Church. This provides a benefit to the Church, since in addition to directing massive amounts of time, energy and other resources in its direction, it also leaves little time for the members to think about historical or other problems, and causes the members to be constantly surrounded by other members in meetings and other settings where they are encouraged to remind each other that "the Church is true". This minimizes the incentive the members will feel to question while maximizing the probability that any questions that are raised will be summarily dismissed. It should be obvious that although this is in the interest of the Church, it will often not work well for individual members who would benefit from using their resources in other ways. Robert Levine in "The Power of Persuasion" points out that most cults use a variant to this kind of behaviour to control their members. His descriptions of the Moonie, Jonestown and other cults differ from Mormonism only as to degree. The techniques used are the same.

Think about the purpose of Mormonism's endless 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. And so we endlessly chase our tails in a cycle of meet, tell each other to obey, most of which involves more meetings, at which we will tell each other to obey, most of which ...

Adam Hansen (private correspondence) describes the same phenomenon as follows:

You see, the church is recursion upon recursion upon recursion. What I didn't understand is that that truly is the meaning of "The Lord's course is one eternal round." The Uroboros is the true sign of the Mormon faith, not a cross or a Christian fish. My lame attempt at capturing this in haiku form is:

Come and listen now!  
Message? Come and listen now!  
Tautology rocks!

The three-fold mission of the church can be boiled down to this: We all need to be here to hear that we all need to be here, and we need to convert the Gentiles and reactivate the inactive so they can be here with us and hear that we all need to be here, and even the dead need to have access to this wonderful message that they too need to be here with us, so we'll all get together, tell each other how wonderful it is that we are all here, and do stuff that convinces us that by helping the dead be with us, we are really, really good and here and man if only those other poor benighted souls who aren't here with us could just humble themselves, then they too could be here and hear how important it is that we're all here.

For those who may not have heard the term, the "Uroboros" or "Ouroboros" refers to the ancient symbol depicting a snake or dragon swallowing its tail and forming a circle. It represents cyclical nature; cycles that begin anew as soon as they end.

As just noted, the focus of Mormon meetings is not on education, the expansion of horizon and perspective, the furthering of the individual goals and progress of members of the Church. It is, rather, the inculcation of obedience. This is a Dark Ages approach to the use of time and education. I note that Mormonism does teach many good things. However, they are inexorably tied to obedience to Mormon authority. For example, we are taught to value and seek education, but only so far as it does not conflict with obedience to Mormon authority. We are taught to love our family members, but if that allegiance conflicts with obedience to Mormon authority the message becomes mixed. Obedience to Mormon authority is, within Mormon culture, a leash that restricts the ambit of all of the good things toward which Mormons are pointed.

#### Authority, Shame and Loss of Agency

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gardiner concludes this point with the observations that:

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

Gardiner then summarizes the emotional growth of children, who pattern themselves after their parents, into adolescents who seek individuation. The adolescent grapples for the first time with the forces described above. The will to grow – to individuate – impels them to differ from strict

religious norms. If the world in which the adolescent lives is painted in black and white, she may needlessly come to believe that since white does not work, black it must be. My daughter Amanda has described to me her experience with substance abuse and other things in precisely this language long before I became acquainted with Gardiner's and other work in this area. And for years I resisted going to counseling with respect to Amanda because, as I had been advised by my LDS peers and leaders, non-LDS counselors were likely to blame the Church (and me, as its main enforcer in Amanda's life) for her problems.

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

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

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

This is the best statement I have run across of why I felt as I did when I left the Church. The certainty of knowing what I needed to do, and feeling guilty if I did not do it and a kind of thin satisfaction when I did, had numbed me to reality and the joys that are possible in life. This is so because my agency had largely been taken from me, as well as my chance to construct my own view of reality. This is the difference between the individual responsibility of a Renaissance sort and the institutional domination of the Dark Ages.

I note that I am not naïve respecting the difficulty of finding "reality". I have read enough philosophy to wrestle with that issue and appreciate it. However, I must make important decisions as to how to live my life. Hence, I must judge as to what is real or not, recognizing that I will make many mistakes as I do so. It is this recognition of uncertainty and exercise of free will that brings life into being. While my agency was suppressed, I felt increasingly wooden as my life progressed, but could not while in the midst of that process put my finger on what was wrong, or even that anything was wrong. Had I been asked how I felt, I would have said that I was happy. Some things can only be appreciated by way of contrasting experience. I now feel like I have discovered Technicolor.

Gardiner continues:

The Grand Inquisitor speaks of the first temptation in the wilderness, to turn stones to bread, and states that if Christ were to use his power in that way and feed mankind's need for security, all would follow and "mankind will run after you like a flock of sheep, grateful and obedient . . ." Then the Grand Inquisitor states, "But you did not want to deprive man of freedom, and rejected the offer, for, you thought, what sort of freedom is

it if obedience is bought with loaves of bread?" Here is the nexus of his discourse to me. To be free, man must be free from not only the control of walls, bars, strong-arms and weapons, but must be free also, from the control that comes from the allure of security. What then of its opposite, the threat of annihilation? Is obedience bought with bread/security any less savoury than obedience bought with threats (the total withdrawal of security)? If there is no agency in the face of the promise of security, is there any more agency in the face of the threat of eternal pain. Hence, faith. Faith must be the only mover, a faith that is forever tenuous and defies certainty. As soon as certainty enters, security is founded and the need to continue that security can be used to control, coerce and confine. ...

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

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

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

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

Only when I reached the point of being able to confidently reject LDS theology and the system of black and white it espouses did I shed the fear and guilt that Amanda's behaviour caused me to feel, and experience what it is like to unconditionally love her. I did not see this coming. These burdens fell from me as does a snake's old skin. It was one of my life's remarkable experiences. And the knowledge I gained from it still regularly bails me out. Recently, for

example, Amanda did something relative to her 14-month-old son of which I did not approve, and respecting which my feelings are strong. They live with us at the moment. We discussed this briefly, without any emotion, and I let it go. It is her choice. She has both freedom and responsibility in this matter. I love her (and her sweet little boy) unconditionally regardless of how she chooses to proceed. I cannot describe how much better this feels than the telephone booth in which I had unknowingly been confined.

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

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

Gardiner continues:

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

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

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

Gardiner continues:

Nowhere in LDS culture are the experiences of being a *growing* human being given a balanced representation. ... I was told, as a Seminary teacher, to never discuss any mistakes that I had made lest the students believe that it would be "okay" to make similar mistakes. This practice, compounded by the numbers who do it and the moral

force it is given, portrays a view of humanity that is entirely false and inherently shaming, especially if there is an attempt by a person to actually reach the ideal image presented.

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

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

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

Again, Gardiner has hit the nail on the head in terms of my primary problem as a parent. Life is so much simpler now, ironically, in the world of gray into which I moved from Mormonism's black and white. Living in black and white is much harder, as it turns out, than acknowledging life's inherent uncertainties, and allowing them to animate us.

Gardiner continues:

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

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

Back to Gardiner for the three paragraphs with which he concludes his essay:

These things, although simple, require a profound shift. Trust in self and the motivations of our individual and collective humanity must be fostered, rather than destroyed in the



interest of maintaining control. Aberrations of behavior must be treated in different ways, ways that allow for growth and feeling guilt, not shame. Those in positions of authority must handle their own insecurity, worry and fear in new ways, ways that will allow us all to recognize that certainty can only be bought with control and denial of certain realities. Keen, when discussing the need to develop spiritual wholeness wrote,

Avoid anyone who demands obedience. Obedience is a virtue for children and a civic obligation, but not a good way to spiritual maturity. . . . Observe whether difference of opinion, challenge, criticism, and discussion are encouraged or discouraged. Can those in charge acknowledge that they don't know the answers to important questions: Does the leader ever admit that he (it is almost always a he) can be wrong and his critics right? A spiritual community should be open to whatever truth comes knocking on its door. . . . Reject immediately any leader or religion that identifies the home-land with the holy land, the folk with the people of God, the enemy with the evil empire. . . . Test how much humor and poking of fun about beliefs, slogans, and dogmas is permissible. The absence of humor is an almost certain sign of psychological rigidity, fanaticism, and impending spiritual and political tyranny. The first thing deadly serious leaders and organizations do is forbid satire, repress the clown, silence the jester, and kill levity. . . . Mirth and merriment save us from taking ourselves too seriously and protect us from the idolatry of assuming that our churches, rituals, and formulas are themselves sacred rather than symbols that point beyond themselves to the unknown God.

Setting up this controlling, certain system seems to be more in line with "Satan's plan" rather than God's. If we take this serious and respond by being more aware of what our shaming practices do to the agency of others, we may find ourselves more effectively fostering spiritual growth and thus strengthen church, community and individuals.

I could not concur more with what he said. And I again note the clear parallel between the problems Gardiner articulated respecting the controlling nature of LDS authority and the Dark Ages mentality referred to above.

#### Science In General

JS's "line upon line" concept and certain other ideas make Mormonism well suited to walk down the road with science and it does so quite well in any area where its dogma does not conflict with science. Early Mormonism's acceptance of science seemed, in fact, complete. As noted above, Brigham Young was not saying anything that would have shocked his followers when he indicated that:

In these respects we differ from the Christian world, for our religion will not clash with or contradict the facts of science in any particular. (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 14, p. 116)

However, when we look at how Mormonism deals with issues like the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the treatment of gay people we see that science is constrained by dogma within Mormonism. This has caused a suppression of free speech and created an unhealthy, stifling intellectual worldview.

David Bailey nicely summarizes the current LDS position in this regard in "Mormonism and the Idea of Progress" (Dialogue Vol. 33, No. 4, Winter 2000 p. 69). He starts with Smith's line upon

line idea, moves to the ninth Article of Faith (We believe all things now revealed, yet to be revealed etc.), and then quotes Brigham Young as follows:

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

He notes that:

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

And that:

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

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

that dogma MUST be true have little choice but to fight back. We see this behaviour most clearly modeled in the fundamentalist branches of all religions.

Bailey then goes on to note that many modern LDS church leaders have also been concerned that the tides of progress bring problems as well as benefits. Their concerns include increasing crime, more liberal sexual attitudes, more selfishness etc. Popular authors and BYU professors Stephen Robinson in "How Wide the Divide" and Joseph Fielding McConkie in "Straightforward Answers to Tough Gospel Questions" both adopt literalistic approaches to the interpretation of scripture, and posit an omnipotent God who is not subject to any law. Some refer to this trend as LDS neo-orthodoxy, and it is reflected in many statements made by leaders of the LDS Church.

Bailey quotes and summarizes Robinson as follows:

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

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

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

Bailey concludes:

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

What a shame this is. The LDS Church goes backwards into the future.

Bailey notes that by most objective standards, things are getting better, not worse throughout the world. Crime is declining. Rates of abortion and teen pregnancy are declining. Scientific progress continues to accelerate. Technological progress continues to accelerate. The percentage of number of people who are spiritually inclined is increasing. This is not to say that

all is well with our society. But it is surely not the case that we are spiralling down the tube. He concludes with the following expression of concern, with which I concur:

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

Along this line, if the Church loses sight of its traditional notion of a God who works within the realm of natural law, it may lose its unique doctrinal foundation for finding harmony between science and religion. Do we believe in a capricious magician who has placed evidence throughout the universe to mislead diligent seekers of truth? Or do we believe in an intelligent, rational God who is pleased when we discover the elegant laws by which the universe is governed? In any event, it is essential that we do not teach doctrinal views that are clearly at odds with well-established principles of modern scientific or secular scholarship. To do so needlessly places many Latter-day Saints, especially college-age youth, in severe conflict with the intellectual world. (Dialogue, p. 81)

Karen Armstrong explains nicely in "The Battle for God" what is going on in LDS culture. As science makes more inroads against dogma, the choice is to accept that the dogma is wrong (hence prophets were wrong) or to confirm dogma using psuedoscience, suppression of evidence, and blind faith. That is the route Robinson, McKonkie and the Mormon leadership are going. I prefer to accept earlier Mormon authority, such as that of JS despite his faults and failings. They told us to expect them to make mistakes, and this they have done far more often than they could have known.

In summary, wherever science conflicts with LDS dogma, members of the LDS Church will be directed by their religious leaders to ignore science. Hence, those leaders are not good guides, and more resemble religious leadership during the Dark Ages than that of the Renaissance.

### Polygamy

While polygamy is not directly relevant within Mormonism today, it is relevant to this discussion because it illustrates what happens to people who place their faith in Mormon leaders and accept their advice over that offered by other sources of wisdom available to them.

Most of the literature paints a grim picture of the lives of polygamous families. There are also theories that point toward the possibility that polygamy produced a disproportionate number of people who have remained faithful to the LDS Church through multiple generations. Maybe there are "faithful" genes that were passed along in this way. In any event, it is my view that the lives of those who ended up within a polygamous environment, both within early Mormonism and now, have been more harmed than helped by it.

All societies operate on the basis of ideas of utility. Attitudes respecting polygamy provide an interesting example of this concept.

It is my view that polygamy is less desirable in some ways than monogamy because I value intimacy, which I believe is causally related to the joy in my life. It seems to me that a man and

woman living in polygamous circumstances cannot be expected to experience the same degree of intimacy as a man and woman in monogamous marriage. Eugene England and many others agree with me. (See "On Fidelity, Polygamy and Celestial Marriage", Dialogue, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1987; reprinted in Dialogue Vol. 35, No. 1, 2002, p. 43). Thus, I regard monogamy and the intimacy it produces as a luxury available to men and women who live in societies whose resources are abundant enough to support monogamous family units.

The fact that I value intimacy in marriage and consider this to be a luxury I am fortunate to be able to afford is a result of the societal values of the modern Western world superimposed on my Mormon heritage (which is a mixed bag in this regard) and what I was taught by my parents by word and example. I do not value the quantum of sexual intercourse available to me nearly as much as I value intimacy. Intimacy and sexual intercourse are for me inextricably linked. That is, I do not wish to have sexual intercourse without intimacy. Hence, I believe that polygamy would be a lesser state (much lesser) than monogamy for me. I might have unlimited opportunities for sexual intercourse, but the price paid in terms of intimacy would be far too great.

Another man may believe that his purpose in life is to father and influence for good (as he defines it) as many children as possible – to provide the maximum possible number of earthly tabernacles for spirits of God and to teach them God's way so that they can return to him. Such a person may be attracted to polygamy for its obvious reproductive and patriarchal influence opportunities, and be prepared to trade the intimacy I just mentioned for those things. If one takes LDS theology seriously, it is easy to see how a person could be led down this path. In fact, I recently heard of a family from Cardston, Alberta near where I live who after much prayer, fasting and the receipt of the usual kind of spiritual confirmation moved to Arizona to join a polygamous group. It would be interesting to learn enough about this family to guess at the emotional forces that overcame their reason respecting this decision.

This polygamy example highlights the point that when we say that something "works", we are making an implicit statement respecting values and hence how we define utility, and indicating that whatever "works" enables us to do something we value. It also highlights the point that joy has nothing to do with conceptions of absolute good and bad. We should not be surprised that many (if not most) Taliban women and Mormon polygamists feel great joy in many aspects of their lives. This joy is derived from their ability to do things they value, just as is ours.

One of my clients is Winston Blackmore, until recently the polygamist patriarch of the fundamentalist Mormon settlement near Creston, British Columbia. He has in excess of eighty children, and I can't remember how many wives. I think somewhere around thirty. Winston is not an evil man in the terms most of us would conceive evil. I think I know him sufficiently to say that he is well intentioned, and believes that he is doing God's will. He feels joy and sorrow much as I do in connection with his ideas of what is good and bad. He loves and is proud of the members of his family and believes that his relationships with them are his primary source of joy.

Having worked through the above example, having recently read England's paper and having just written these few paragraphs, I have a better understanding of the values that determine my attitude respecting polygamy and what it is about my marriage that is important. If we can trace our actions back through thought and impulse to the values in which they are rooted, and then determine where those values came from and the function they perform within us as individuals and the groups to which we belong, we can dramatically increase our self and other awareness. This is one of the processes that will lead to an improved perception of reality – that is, a better

understanding of good, bad and a greater opportunity to create joy in our lives. This is one of the many healthy results of the Renaissance attitude toward taking greater personal responsibility for our actions instead of obeying religious or other leaders.

LDS Church leaders do not encourage this kind of individual, reflective practise. They demand obedience to whatever they pronounce as God's will from time to time. This is a Dark Ages attitude.

It is my view that polygamy was the result of JS being caught with his pants down and justifying his actions as God's will. He then had to encourage this practise by others in order to seem consistent. And this led to it becoming a Mormon cultural trait that has harmed countless people over the years. And the interests of individuals in this process were often steamrolled by other organizational issues, or the predilections of individual leaders.

For example, the Church's leadership was for many years focussed on its fight with the US federal government respecting polygamy, and as it appeared that that fight would not be resolved in favour of the Church, it took a variety of steps to try to strengthen its position. It is fair to say, in my view, that my great-grandmother was hit by "friendly fire" in that regard. She 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 as noted above. 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 made miserable by obedience to a purported religious principle that in my view is probably and simply the result of JS's sexual folly.

At Christmas this year I had an experience that made me think of JS and polygamy. I play a trick or two on my younger children each year that has to do with catching them on video or something like that as they sneak out to the Christmas tree during the middle of the night to check their loot. This year I wrote them letters from Santa which were put into their stockings after all of their stuff was taken out and their presents hidden away from the tree. The letters told them how disappointed Santa was in them for continuing to disobey their father and sneak up to look at their presents in the middle of the night. It chastised them for this sin, and sang my praises. To make things look more realistic, the letters also slung a bit of mud in my direction.

As I wrote these letters I thought to myself what a powerful thing it was to understand and be able to manipulate someone else's belief. I had no fear of Santa's threats that were directed towards me because I wrote them, but I knew that the youngest of our children still sort of believed and would be shaken by what Santa said to him. My knowledge of this child and his life allowed me to have some fun with him. My guess is that many of JS's revelations were nothing more than this kind of thing. The difference in his case may have been that he did believe that what he was doing was right, and hence that his deception was justified in a philosopher king kind of way. This I doubt, but since it is impossible to disprove I am prepared to allow JS the benefit of the doubt in that regard.

Modern LDS leaders certainly do understand many of the problems I have noted above. Their deceptive practises are better explained, in my view, by the philosopher king concept than by the theory that they are evil, designing people who intentionally harm the members of the

Church who have entrusted much of their lives to the Church. Life is seldom that black and white, despite President Hinckley's protestations to the contrary.

As a result of JS's introduction of polygamy into Mormon culture and its continuation by Brigham Young and others, and then the manner in which Church officials lied about their continuing illegal practise of polygamy for 15 years after the Manifesto in 1890, polygamy continues to exercise its unhealthy influence over people within and on the fringes of the Mormon Church today. This is the result of the following series of issues or events: The deceptive behaviour of the Church's leaders in the late 1890s during which they told the US Government and others that polygamy was not being practised while continuing to perform polygamous marriages and in private indicate that it did not matter what was said in public, God's law was God's law; Mormon scripture still says that polygamous marriage is God's law (see D&C 132); and so charismatic authority figures within the polygamous groups use of those scriptures and historical events to recruit new adherents to polygamy. And so it does not surprise me that seemingly archaic and dangerous "Mormon Fundamentalist" groups continue to thrive in many places, including Canada. The Church has sown the wind in that regard, and as a result some unfortunates continue to reap the whirlwind.

#### 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. JS 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. Innumerable quotes from Mormon leaders could be offered to illustrate this point. One will suffice, from Spencer Kimball, as quoted in the December 1960, Improvement ERA from his October 1960 General Conference address:

I saw a striking contrast in the progress of the Indian people today... The day of the Lamanites is nigh. For years they have been growing delightful, and they are now becoming white and delightful, as they were promised. In this picture of twenty Lamanite missionaries, fifteen of the twenty were as light as Anglos, five were darker but equally delightful. The children in the home placement program in Utah are often lighter than their brothers and sisters in the hogans on the reservation.

The "dark skin = inferior people" idea was shattered outside of Mormonism and a few other wilfully ignorant corners of human society, primarily by genetics research. 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 that was noted above – 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. This hurts individual members whose world view is shaped by what their religious leaders say.

In my view, the Church would be well advised to simply admit the mistakes that were made in the past, and take advantage of the wonderfully progressive ideas JS left us. He even left us the tools to do this – his acknowledgement of leadership fallibility (including his own) and "line upon line" concept that he borrowed from the Old Testament and then modified, are among his most important religious innovations in my view. To do this, LDS leaders would have to give up most of their current control. The history of human institutions indicates to us that this will not happen until the Church finds itself in a position where all of its alternative courses of action look worse to it than this one. An example of such a position would be the one in which so many members are leaving in protest against the current leadership's conduct that change is required in order for the Church to survive.

When I read books such as Jared Diamond's 1997 Pulitzer Prize winning "Guns, Germs and Steel", I found 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, and nothing to do with innate racial superiority. Given human nature as disclosed to us by our history (and religious history in particular), it is not surprising that those ignorant but fortunate light skinned people attributed what was probably circumstance to God-granted superiority.

As a believing Mormon, I was precluded from taking Diamond's ideas seriously because they contradict Mormon theories of the origin of man (Adam and Eve came into being at Independence, Missouri, for example). While Diamond (and those legion like him) is sure not to be 100% right, I am as certain as I am that the earth is round that he points toward much more of reality than the Church does 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, but 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.

### Feminism

This issue has a long and interesting history. As usual, the Church is with our society's rearguard. But, Mormon mothers now go out to work more; Mormon family sizes are shrinking; Mormon women are tending to finish the educations more frequently instead of going straight into the mother/wife role.

For a chilling view of what the world looked like through the eyes of a Mormon girl growing up in the 1960s, see Deborah Laake's book "Secret Ceremonies". I think the title was designed to sell books. She deals with the temple, but it is hardly the book's main event. This book is about the worldview created by a patriarchal society, and how it negatively affected the decisions that an already somewhat unstable person made throughout most of her life.

The feminist issue highlights a basic Mormon/Dark Ages problem. As noted above, dogma is supposed to be permanent – God is unchanging, and so is his word, etc. However, life changes. There was a time during which the role of wife and mother was gratifying in many ways. Now it is less so, and there are reasons for that. Not to allow women to adapt to their environment it to imprison them. To properly make this point, I need to provide a little



background, which will also be useful to illustrate how scientific research in certain areas is of critical relevance to real life cultural issues that are of particular relevance to Mormons.

Dr. Martin Seligman in his excellent book "Authentic Happiness" tells us that we need "flow" activities to be happy. Seligman says that our modern society is more affluent, has more spare time and is better off in virtually all material ways than our predecessors, and yet we are suffering an epidemic of depression and other mental illnesses (worse in Utah than almost anywhere else, by the way). He notes that the Old Order Amish and other similar societal subgroups do not so suffer, and neither do people in many Third World countries. And certain underprivileged groups in North America seem to be less affected. Does wealth cause depression? He thinks not. To set up his description of a theory as to what has caused this negative societal mood swing, he tells a story about a colleague who bought an Amazonian lizard of some kind as a pet. The lizard was large enough that it wandered around this fellow's house. Everything was going fine, except he could not get the lizard to eat. He tried everything without success. Finally, the situation was getting desperate. The lizard was obviously in distress, and would still not eat. One day, Seligman's colleague placed a piece of ham sandwich down in front of the lizard and watched hopefully. Nothing. After a few minutes of watching, he returned to his newspaper. After reading the first section, he absentmindedly dropped it onto the floor, where it landed on the sandwich. The lizard immediately perked up. The colleague watched intently as the lizard got up, and slowly circled the newspaper. Then it paused, crouched and pounced on the paper, preceded to tear it up and ravenously eat the sandwich.

As it turned out, the lizard had evolved to only eat after stalking, pouncing and tearing. His hunger could not motivate him to eat without those preliminary steps. Hence, if his environment provided food without the chance to stalk, pounce and tear before eating, he could not eat.

Seligman indicated that while humans are much more complex than Amazonian lizards, we too have brains that have evolved for hundreds of millions of years. In our case, evolution has prepared us to perform tasks that require high levels of concentration, hence we perceive these to produce gratification and the flow experience. These are the activities that have traditionally kept man alive and progressing. However, we are now so affluent that such tasks are no longer a requirement, and many people have come to regard them as boring or too difficult. Hence, television watching, hanging out and other pleasurable activities have taken their place. We have become an impatient society. We desire immediate gratification. In Seligman's terms, that is an oxymoron. We can have immediately pleasure and in fact that is offered to us constantly. However, we must earn gratification.

As I intuited and Seligman and others have confirmed, too much pleasure cankers the soul. Pleasure is the desert or spice of life. Flow activities are what build ability, power and the base upon which joy is found.

Seligman posits that pleasure-inducing activities satisfy physical needs or wants, while gratification producing activities satisfy deep-seated psychological needs and wants. As we satisfy our psychological needs in this regard, we somehow create a store of energy and strength that can be used for many things. In a sense, then, the more time we spend in flow related activities the greater the reserves we create for ourselves. The best flow activities are those that allow us to use our signature strengths. Seligman's advice is that we identify those strengths, and find ways to use them in flow activities. Seligman's ideas explain the research

findings that high flow persons are happier, better able to cope with adversity, and more likely to succeed at what they choose to do.

How does Mormonism relate to flow activities? Well, orthodox Mormons don't have as much chance as most modern folk to choose how to use their free time, and hence (I submit) are not as likely to have identified their strengths or to have the chance to use them in flow activities. Is sitting in endless meetings a flow activity? Not for most people. However, it is a good way to reinforce a control structure and keep people from using their time and brains to question. So the LDS church contributes to mental dysfunction not only by creating all kinds of unnecessary cognitive dissonance, but also by making it more difficult for us to do what people like Seligman tell us is necessary in order to become and remain happy.

And what about Stay-At-Home-Mormon-Moms? Their case is a sad one, in my view. Clearly, individual women have varying needs in this respect. They have been taught that if they dedicate themselves to being Stay-At-Home-Moms (this is part of the primitivist theme within fundamentalist religions - if we do it the way it was done in the good old days, everything will be better) they will be happy. However, we observe that modern life has eliminated most of their "flow" activities. Gone are the days when being a homemaker was a skilled occupation that involved making clothes from scratch etc. Mom today is more a chauffeur, warmer-upper of pre-cooked foods, organizer etc. and has few opportunities for flow activities. This tends to make her sad or depressed, and doubly so because after achieving what most Mormon women think they want (stay at home full time with the kids) she sinks toward depression and goes for the Prozac. The stay-at-home-mom model may work for some but it certainly does not work for all and it is a mistake to advocate this as a one-size fits all approach.

I don't advocate that all Moms should leave their kids at home and go to work full-time. But I note that once again, the almost blind adherence to an external, dogmatic standard and the ignorance of other available sources of relevant information has caused much harm. In this case, I would say that it has caused most of at least one generation of Mormons to neglect the pressing issue of what Mom and the kids need to be fulfilled on the one hand and well cared for on the other, in an environment vastly different from that occupied by our pioneer ancestors. Our inability to understand (or even consider) and then use the tremendous knowledge that science and experience has provided to us respecting this issue has, in my view, enriched the makers of Zoloft and Prozac immensely and produced untold grief within the LDS community. Mormon dogma, and the control it causes Mormons to cede to external authority, should be held wholly responsible for this tragedy.

### Homosexuality

One of the most moving pieces of literature I have ever read is "Solus", published by Dialogue many years ago, and recently republished in Dialogue's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. It was written anonymously, and describes the world of a faithful Mormon who was gay, and could not come out of the closet. It let me feel what it is like to believe in a God who pointedly designates you as broken, and orders you to fix yourself, and the agony experienced during years of attempted fixing while following the advice of sincere church leaders and therapists who are trapped by ignorance by their beliefs. As I read that piece, I wept. I understood for the first time in my life what the emotional landscape around suicide must look like.

The Mormon dogma relevant to homosexuality is based on the idea that sexual preference is just that – a preference – and that to prefer other members of one's own sex is sinful.

While this question is far from settled, it now appears that sexual orientation is genetically influenced to a much greater degree than was previously believed. I regularly come across new studies that indicate this. In fact, as I write this paragraph I have in the last two days seen summaries of two such new studies. The first is found in that bastion of liberal society "The Economist", and summarizes a study that just appeared in a respected scientific journal. This study correlates sexual preference to certain physical traits, such as the length of the ring finger relative to the pointer finger, and the nature of the instinctive blink response in certain circumstances. These traits differ between men and women. Women who show the male tendency instead of the female are more likely than usual to be lesbian. The second article was in a recent local newspaper. It described research conducted at UCLA which has isolated 53 genes that seem to determine transgendered persons (those born with genitalia that is neither clearly male nor female) and are thought to be related to sexual preference as well.

Much biological evidence that points toward sexual "preference" not being a matter of choice has been around for many years, and more is being created each day. Mormon dogma slows down the rate at which this valuable information influences Mormon attitudes, leaving the many members of the Mormon Church who are homosexual in a situation not much better than that described in "Solus".

### The One True Church

This idea in my view 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 described 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. 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. This worse-than-Dark-Ages idea is at the root of the One True Church concept.

It should be obvious that in our modern world of plenty, the "One True Church" idea is not only out of place, but 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?

Some 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 would agree with that. 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 JS'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 Mormon leaders as the final arbiters of truth (religious, scientific and otherwise) 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.

The one true church concept broke down for me as I became aware of numerous other religious belief systems that controlled their followers in precisely the way I was controlled by mine, using the same tools. The theories accepted by these communities were contradictory to those accepted in my community. However, the nature of leadership control was much the same. For many years, I assumed that against all odds my community had the truth and all others were mistaken. As I gradually became aware of the errors that Mormon leadership had made over the years, the lights began to come on. My community was as errant as the others. But, the leaders of my community had much in common with the other religious leaders for whom I had been taught to have disdain. And Mormonism's current leaders were the ones who set up the system designed to keep faithful Mormons, such as me, from understanding their own religious heritage through its history, and hence from understanding the nature of the errors Mormon leaders have made. Guess toward whom the disdain I was taught to have has now largely been turned? And this is not because Mormon leaders are necessarily consciously fraudulent or evil. The most charitable light in which I can view them is that of ignorant but well intended actors in a play they do not understand. In essence, they are deceived. This would be funny but for the tragic consequences of their leadership. Hence, I do disdain them and regret what they do, and make no apology for that.

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. 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. The tendency of orthodox Mormonism to hinder our ability to grow spiritually and otherwise is dealt with in greater detail at p. 58 and following of <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/out%20of%20my%20faith.pdf>

Another virulent manifestation of the "one true church" idea is found in LDS temple practise, which is discussed at <http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/temple%20marriage.pdf> The section on "Future Orientation" is particularly germane to this discussion.

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.

### ***Concluding Thoughts Regarding Mormon Culture***

There are a host of issues respecting which I could make observations similar to those above. There are also many issues respecting which the Mormon authorities have made the right call, in my view, such as calling for caution respecting the changing sexual mores of our times, drug and alcohol abuse, etc. However, respecting the latter issues, Mormon leaders say little if anything more than what other relatively conservative religious or moral secular leaders say. Hence their advice in this regard is not helpful in assessing their unique claims to divine inspiration.

And in any event on balance, it is my conclusion that throughout Mormon history as well as today, most members of the Mormon Church would be better off following the advice of authority figures other than leaders of the Mormon Church. The Mormon leaders are not trustworthy, and when their advice is stacked up against that of competing authority figures from the scientific community in particular, it does not fare well. And it does not matter to me whether they are not trustworthy because they are consciously lying, philosopher kings or just poorly informed. The result is the same in each case – their advice is not worth following

It would not be fair to suggest that Mormonism causes dysfunction in every case. Indeed, as I have pointed out above, those who do not take Mormonism too seriously seem to get by relatively well, although they will never know about many wonderful things that their faith probably keeps from their view. But at least it does not appear that this type of person is caused serious problems by their association with the Mormon Church. The type of person most likely to be damaged by Mormonism is the one who internalizes and really believes what she is taught. I was such a person, as was Deborah Laake (See references to "Secret Ceremonies" above), although in many significant ways she and I could not be more different.

I also note that Mormonism is better than many of its alternatives, particularly in the Third World. But it is clearly worse than many others, and those of us who have the luxury of living in the democratic West and of choosing a belief system and a community of believers with which to associate will have no trouble finding a form of religious or secular belief that will serve us better than Mormonism has in almost all important ways. The decision to join, in each case, should be made in light of the other activities in which the person in question might invest their time and money, and the benefits in terms of education, relationships, etc. that are likely to flow from them. Hence, were my client looking for advice as to whether to join, after helping to evaluate his needs, in light of JS's untrustworthiness and the cultural problems noted above, it would be very unlikely that I would think it wise to suggest that he join. As noted below, the decision with respect to leaving is much more complicated. But having myself paid the price to leave, I expect that absence of institutional Mormonism in my children's lives to be an unalloyed blessing.

#### **Once Inside, Departure is Difficult**

The "leave" question is exponentially more complicated in most cases than the "join". Based on the information above, I believe that there are few people in Western democracies for whom Mormonism will do more good than harm. In Third World societies where a connection to the Mormon Church may produce opportunities to learn English, education and advancement that would not otherwise be available, this may not be the case.

So in summary, I suggest that it will be in the interest of very few who are not already "inside" to adopt the fully obedient Mormon lifestyle, and I do not even recommend that people play on the

Church's fringes. It is an all encompassing social force that can easily dominate the lives of people who are drawn toward for family or social reasons. The spider's web; the mind virus; the opiate of the masses are all accurate metaphors for the encounter of the right (or wrong) kind of personality type with Mormonism.

Leaving Mormonism, however, raises questions that are much more difficult to answer. This often involves such a rupture of social and family relationships that the human psyche cannot bear to consider it, and hence all information pointing in that direction will be suppressed as a result of the forces described above. This causes the believer who encounters "questioning" information to fear, and to usually shut down their critical faculties. That is, there is no choice to make. The decision is dictated by the subconscious drivers described above.

Once the subconscious takes over, all kinds of potentially damaging misunderstandings are likely to arise between the believer and those who would like him to "wake up". The more the well intentioned enlightened ones press their case, the more cog dis the believer experiences. This will cause him to fear, and possibly exit from his relationship with, those who are seeking to help him. On the other hand, those who seek to help may be baffled as to why the believer can't see the "obvious", and this may cause them to feel disgust for the believer and to shut down their relationships with him. Each side becomes a source of cog dis for the other. The less secure a party is in his belief (or non-belief), the more cog dis is caused by the presence of an opposing view.

I will suggest that those who cannot comprehend information that describes their faith in a realistic manner deserve to be pitied more than castigated. They are not likely stupid or intent upon self deception. Rather, they are prisoners to the emotions, relationships and prior experience on which their lives are based. As long as they are surrounded by the information necessary to connect with reality, they will do so if they are able.

The difficulty for the believer becomes more significant if he begins to "get it". Then he does have a choice to make, and it is an excruciatingly difficult one in most cases. If he changes his belief to accord with his new view of reality, he becomes a non-believer who produces cog dis for his loved ones and perhaps loses important relationships. If he does not conform his behaviour to his new beliefs, he will behave in a fashion that is inconsistent with his beliefs. This cuts against the psychological grain and causes cog dis for that reason. So, the course of least resistance is to learn as little as possible that will produce more cog dis, and to try to act in a manner that is as consistent as possible with the new information he has come to understand. Many less than fully faithful, but still active, liberal Mormons fit into this category.

Something that weighed heavily on me as I made my decision to leave was how my actions would affect my children. I wish that my parents had given me the chance to choose Mormonism instead of conditioning me as they did. They did this, of course, because they thought it was the right thing to do. It was what had been done to them. Since this is what I wish had been done to me, I thought it was right that I break the generations long cycle of which I was a part, even if that meant paying a high price in terms of personal relationships etc.

In particular, I thought of how I would answer my kids when some of them came to me at age 35 or 40, having married in the temple and built their lives around the Church, and then found out what I now know. How would I answer their question as to why I did not tell them what I knew? I could not think of any reasonable reply. The truthful answer would have to be that I did not want to face the uncomfortable consequences of acting in a fashion consistent with my beliefs, and so I imposed on them the same burden that had been imposed on me. In effect, I would

have been deceiving them by my actions of continuing to attend Church, sending them on missions, getting a temple recommend when I needed one to attend their weddings, etc. So, I choose to embark upon the most difficult journey of my life.

This brings to mind one of my favourite philosopher's, Hans Georg Gadamer. He talked about how difficult the process of identifying and rooting out error is, particularly when the errors are entwined with cherished, long held beliefs. He called this "undeception". Andrew Lough summarizes Gadamer as follows:

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

That is, humble, undogmatic people are more capable of perceiving reality than those who believe they already have the answers. And even for the relatively humble and undogmatic (in which group I cannot count myself), it is painful to go through the undeception process, for we all are affected by a lack of humility and an abundance of dogma. As noted above, recent research supports the connection between humility and ability to change. The psychological quality called "openness" correlates negatively to religious belief (See Michael Shermer, "Why People Believe Weird Things"). That is, the less open to new experience you are, the more religious you are likely to be. It is likely that religion inculcates this quality, and that those with a propensity for it gravitate toward religious or other belief systems that relieve them from other the need to consider many new, and difficult for them, experiences.

### **How Can Post-Mormons "Help" Their Mormon Loved Ones**

I plan to write a full essay on this topic, and am doing the research for it now. Here are what things look like to me so far in this regard.

It is more likely, in my view, that faithful Mormons will be able to come to grips with the reality of their faith as a result of likeable, non-believing and non-threatening loved ones who remain in their lives than if all those who disbelieve either make for the exits or inflict so much cognitive dissonance on the believer that he retreats from those relationships. Having not handled this part of my transition out of Mormonism particularly well, I can speak from experience as to both the folly of pushing too hard and the benefits that can come from keeping relationships alive by allowing those we love to change on their own terms, to the extent that they are able to do so. On the other hand, people often do not know what they are capable of changing until they are faced with the painful necessity of doing so. Sometimes the reality of a relationship that is under severe stress as a result of dysfunctional beliefs is what is require to help a believer break through reality obscuring cognitive dissonance. Finding the right balance in this regard is one of the most difficult aspects of this process.

Those outside of Mormonism who wish to have the maximum influence on their families would do well to remember Thomas Kuhn's insight respecting the scientific community and its "paradigm shifts". It often, even among the most rational of our society, takes a generation or more for erroneous paradigms to change. And even then, the paradigm can only change if information respecting the new paradigm survives so as to be accessible to the rising generation. The "apostate" but affable and well read uncle, grandpa, family friend etc. may be an important source of information to the rising generation that would not be available in any other way. Just knowing such a contradictory person – one who does not follow the Mormon way and in fact is well known to have carefully studied and rejected it – and yet seems like a moral, worthwhile, fun-to-be-with etc. person, will create cog dis in young members of the Church as they mature, and may hasten the day when they will be capable of looking their faith in the eye and seeing it for what it is. It has been noted that the ability to produce a continuing state of cog dis is perhaps the most powerful tool available to those who wish to persuade others. Most of the advertising we are subjected to uses this principle to shape what we want. The continuing acquaintance with a post-Mormon is a form of cog dis producing advertising.

It will be interesting to watch the evolution of the post-Mormon community, and see how many of the "unfaithful" will be prepared to take the kind of long view of things indicated by Kuhn's paradigm shift theory. I suggest that this is necessary to maximize change within the orthodox LDS community. Note that this is the antithesis of what the LDS system is designed to produce – the silencing and excision of dissenters. I hope that as the post-Mormon community matures the path of out-in-open but conscientious, loving dissenter will become the most respected that can be taken. It is my goal to walk this path.

I still have lots of Mormon friends and I respect what they do within their context. The fact is that once we have been properly conditioned, only a small percentage of us are able to get out. And so I respect those who stay on the basis that they are doing the best they can in their circumstances and, realistically, can not be expected to do more. I ask nothing of them in return except the same respect because I too am doing the best I can.

## **Conclusion**

A short time ago, I was one of the true believers and am now more grateful than I can express for the combination of factors that brought me into a psychological space where I was able to critically re-examine my beliefs. The process of undeception or rebirth has been painful and bruising in many ways, but more than worthwhile. I have no hesitation in encouraging those who have found the trail and feel able to start up it to do so, despite the pain I know awaits them. And I recognize that there are many who will simply never be able to even see the trailhead, no matter how plainly marked it now is to my eyes. I understand this, because a little over a year ago I lived it.

However, I also understand the power of the forces that tie us to our traditions and while I wish I could do something to free those I love from those forces, there is little I can do other than remain close to them and watch what happens. I dreamt once of a huge serpent that emerged from a mountain lake around which I hiked with one of my young sons. I watched in horror as the serpent opened his mouth and my curious, loving son climbed inside. The serpent swallowed, my son disappeared without a sound, and the serpent slid back into the lake. It happened so quickly that I had no time to react. I could perhaps have leapt onto the serpent's back. As I considered doing that, a feeling of hopeless swept over me when I realized how pointless that would be.



Einstein said something similar that provides a nice note on which to leave this. He said:

"A human being is part of the whole, called by us 'Universe'; a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest--a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely but striving for such achievement is, in itself, a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security." (See Nick Herbert, "Quantum Reality: Beyond the New Physics", p. 250)

One of the delusions that afflicts those who stare at each other across the gulf that separates faithful and formerly faithful Mormons is that each side fails to appreciate the non-rational nature of the forces that hold the other. This leads to a belief that the others are subject to a deception that they should be able to overcome if they only wanted to and/or tried to do it. I suggest that as the post-Mormons have climbed (or been pushed) at least a little further up the spectrum toward a Renaissance way of perceiving reality, that they take the lead in attempting to understand, and deal in a realistic manner with, those who do not wish to or have not been able to cross that gulf.

The reason Einstein's statement struck me as it did is that I have felt the circle of my compassion expand continuously since leaving Mormonism. This is largely due to the fact that I no longer see myself as above or better than all non-Mormons. In fact, it has been profoundly humbling for me to realize how ignorant I am and to eagerly begin to learn from a multitude of sources that as a Mormon I perceived to be beneath my notice. This does not mean that I no longer judge. I do, and must continue to do this. Our values cause us to judge, and while we should do this carefully there is no need to apologize for it. However, before I judged on the basis of the Dark Ages principles of my Mormon faith. I now use Renaissance principles. I believe that is a big step up.

I should also note that my "circle of compassion" has expanded beyond humanity as a result of my change in faith. I feel a greater reverence for the earth itself, all living things and a list of abstract concepts that while too long to list includes our democratic institutions, our history, our intellectual tradition, etc. This is due, I believe, to another Renaissance concept – personal responsibility. I no longer perceive myself to be in God's hands in terms of when the world will end, for example. Our end, or continual flourishing, is in our hands. My role in that is tiny, but real. This has heightened my interest in healthy ways respecting a multitude of things, and given me a greater respect and appreciation for the wonders humanity's leaders created that put us in the enviable position in which we are. These things have become miraculous from my point of view, whereas before they were "merely" the unfolding of God's plan in the only way it could unfold. The Mormon conception of God dulled my ability to wonder.

Ironically, however, as the circle of my compassion has expanded in almost all ways, it for a time sharply narrowed respecting many of those whom I love the most – those family members who remain faithful Mormons. I have had trouble abiding their narrow mindedness and inability and seeming unwillingness to see the beauty that now astounds me. They are at complete odds with my new value system, and my proximity to and love for them makes this particularly difficult to bear. And my reaction to this difficulty has been less than honourable at times.

While my loved ones characterize the process through which I have gone as a loss of faith, it is in fact a change. I still have faith, and it is broader and more robust than ever. This kind of faith, while new to me and foreign to most Mormons, has been with our race continuously since the Renaissance. As I mature in it, I feel my circle of compassion continue to expand and begin to reach the point where it can include that which was most difficult for me – the beliefs of those I love the most. This essay is my attempt to aid this process both in my own case and respecting those who may read what I have written.