

The Effects of Mormon Temple Ritual and Temple Marriage

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

The Medicinal Effect of Heresy 3

The Purpose of Mormon Temple Ritual..... 5

Mormon Temple Secrecy 6

Mormon Temple Ordinances..... 9

The "Great Secret" 11

The Mormon Temple Marriage Ceremony..... 13

Comparison of the Mormon and Anglican Marriage Ceremonies 15

Celestial Kingdom Requirements 17

Temple Work for the Dead 19

What Anthropology and Psychology Tell Us About Mormon Temple Rituals 20

Great Expectations and Future Mindedness 24

Mormonism's "Iron Rod" Paradigm..... 28

 The Iron Rod Paradigm's Source – The Book of Mormon..... 28

 The "Iron Rod" Story..... 29

 The Iron Rod Paradigm's Source – Smith Family Traditions? 30

 Joseph Smith's Credibility..... 31

 The "Iron Rod" Paradigm is Out of Touch with 21st Century Western Reality..... 32

 "Men Are that They Might Have Joy" – 2 Nephi 2:25 32

 The Iron Rod Paradigm as a Reflection of Spiritual Development..... 33

 The Iron Rod Paradigm as a Reflection of Moral Development..... 35

The Day-to-Day Nature of Mormon Marriage 36

Tom and Mary: A Case Study 38

Paradox Galore..... 40

The Unfaithful Spouse..... 41

My Experience with a Mormon Temple Marriage42
The Benefits of Uncertainty and Necessity44
An Alternative Approach45
Conclusion47

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As man is
So is his God;
And thus is God
Oft strangely odd.

Goethe

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to explore the nature of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (the "Mormon Church", the "LDS Church", or the "Church") temple ritual and the influence of Mormon theology and culture in this regard on members of the Mormon faith. Overall, my objective is to frame Mormon marital and temple ritual experience in a broad enough context that those who are troubled by certain aspects of it may be helped to put their finger on what is wrong, and hence be in a position to take corrective measures if they so choose. I also hope to provide insight for those interested in the Mormon community for other reasons into certain aspects of Mormon behaviour that may be difficult to understand for those who are unfamiliar with the sociological matrix within which faithful Mormons live.

A lot has been written over the years about the Mormon practice of polygamous marriage, the echoes of which still haunt many in the Mormon community. The most recent book in this regard is Jon Krakauer's "Under the Banner of Heaven", which tells the story of Mormon fundamentalists who practiced polygamy and said they were inspired by god to kill some of those who would not go along with their beliefs. My favorite books respecting the nature of early Mormon polygamy are "In Sacred Loneliness" by Todd Compton, and "Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith" by Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery.

The Church banned polygamy almost one hundred years ago while under extreme pressure from the US government. Hence, whenever issues such as those raised by Krakauer come up, the Church simply says: "Not our issue", and hopes that people will move on. While there is ample reason to suggest, as Krakauer and others have, that things are not that simple, this essay does not address that issue. Rather, I wish to explore the form of marriage the Mormon Church has concentrated on promoting for the last forty years or so – marriage of the monogamous, happy, "family first", variety.

The Mormon Church has been highly successful in its use as a missionary tool of the idea that both marriages and families can be "eternal", and that family life should receive more of our energy and attention than it does. Most who read this essay in the early part of the 21st century will be familiar with the "MormonAds" which regularly appear on radio and television in most large and medium size North American media markets. These invariably depict a busy parent making the wise decision to put "family first" and so spend time with his or her kids instead of doing other less important things, like housework, business tasks, going out with buddies, etc.

In Mormon theology, the idea of the "eternal family" is that the bonds of marriage and family will last beyond death for those who qualify for the highest reaches of heaven, known as the "Celestial Kingdom. Mormons believe that there are three levels or "degrees of glory" in heaven, that differ from each other as do the respective brilliance of the stars, the moon and the sun. The highest of these is the Celestial Kingdom, where god himself dwells. Despite recent Mormon leadership statements that cast doubt in this topic, most current Mormons believe that man can become like god, and that god was once a human being like we are now. God is, in effect, a perfected man. Only those who qualify for the Celestial Kingdom will have the chance to become as god, and hence enjoy all of the blessings he enjoys including those of marriage and family relationships. The god of Mormonism is married, has many wives (polygamy was temporarily suspended within Mormonism, not done away with) and innumerable offspring. That is the life toward which Mormons are told by their theology to aspire, although Mormon missionaries do not paint the picture quite that way, and even many long-term Mormons find the idea more than a little off-putting.

But in any event, the highly attractive idea of "eternal families" of the monogamous variety is the current centerpiece of Mormon missionary work and member activity. This is designed to make us feel better about one of the most troubling of our existential concerns – that of separation from our loved ones at death. A Mormon leader once told me that in today's world, the Mormon Church "owns the family". That is, Mormons are widely perceived to be more family oriented than most people, and the Mormon Church as an institution is perceived to be one of the world's strongest advocates for the traditional family unit.

Because of the emphasis in Mormon theology on marriage and family relationships, one would expect Mormon marriages to be better than the norm. In fact, there is some statistical evidence to the effect that Mormons who marry in an LDS temple in the manner described below are much less likely to divorce than the "average" North American couple. By this measure, Mormon marriages are successful. However, the Amish, Hutterites, Taliban, etc. (choose your favorite extremely conservative, patriarchal religious sect) have very low divorce rates as well, in most cases lower than that of temple married Mormons. Do many of us aspire to Taliban style marriages? This highlights the point that there is much more to marriage than not divorcing. Hence, the purpose of this essay is to explore the nature of Mormon temple ritual, and the influence of Mormon theology and culture in this regard on faithful Mormons. But overall, I wish to frame Mormon marital and ritual experience so that those who are troubled in that regard may be helped to put their finger on what is wrong, and hence be in a position to take corrective measures if they so choose.

The analysis I am about to provide will disturb most faithful Mormons and will make some angry. On the other hand, it may come as a breath of fresh air to those within the Mormon Church who feel trapped by forces they can't quite discern, and it may be helpful to non-Mormons who wish to gain insight into what may often seem to them to be the bizarre behaviour of their Mormon relatives or neighbors.

My question then, is what is a "Celestial marriage"? That is, what kind of marriage is required of those who aspire to live forever in Mormonism's Celestial Kingdom? How desirable is the lifestyle that comes with that type of marriage? And in the end, what price is paid during this life, which we know we have, for the possibility of the Celestial rewards promised by Mormonism's founder Joseph Smith and those who have come after him? And is that price worth paying?

The Medicinal Effect of Heresy

I recently read a disturbing deconstruction of certain aspects of the US university educational system, and particularly its orientation toward athletics (See Murray Sperber, "Beer and Circus: How Big Time College Sports is Crippling Undergraduate Education"). The book's major criticisms focus on the tendency of some large US colleges to gain reputation and funding largely on the basis of their research prowess, and hence to neglect the undergraduate educational function. And secondly, those same schools make up for their provision of poor education by creating a "party" atmosphere, the focal point of which is often athletic programs, provided by highly paid coaches and administrators with the help of "student/athletes" who are more poorly paid professional athletes than anything else. Hence, the reference in the book's title to the Roman "circus" environment, which was designed to keep the masses occupied and entertained, and thus diverted from the important issues of the day and more easily controlled. And one is reminded that the circus was made possible by the use of gladiator slaves who were revered while in the arena, and suffered all kinds of abuse while out of the crowd's sight.

As an avid sports fan and father of a soon to be NCAA Division 1A (or "big-time college" to use the "Beer and Circus" term) basketball player, that book provided bitter medicine for me. This came in the form of a wealth of new information delivered from a point of view with which I was unfamiliar. At times I felt that the author stretched his points, but by the end of the book I had come to grips with a number of concerns that had bubbled inarticulately beneath the surface of my consciousness during the past couple of years as I helped my daughter through the NCAA recruitment process. I now feel that I better understand what drives the huge institution to which she will be attached for the next four or five years, and which I might add, along with many others so carefully and lovingly recruited her this summer. My understanding, which I can now pass on to her, will help her to protect her own interests and to make sense out of some things that without a broad perspective she would not likely have been able to understand with respect to her school, and the NCAA athletic scene in general. While reading "Beer and Circus", I experienced a classic painful but highly useful "undeception", to use the German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer's term (see <http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/undeception.pdf>), and feel much better off for having gone through that somewhat difficult experience.

From the point of view of many college sports fans, "Beer and Circus" would be considered heretical, and hence bad. I note, however, that I read just the other day that Vanderbilt University recently restructured its athletic department in an attempt to deal with many of the very issues "Beer and Circus" raised, and with the benefit of the ideas in the book, I have been able to understand a number of things college coaches told us that puzzled me. They were, it now seems, trying to tell us that they were aware of the "Beer and Circus" issue, and were on the athletes' side against the institutions. So it appears that the "heresy" in Beer and Circus is having a salutary effect on the US college sports system.

This is consistent with what Joseph Campbell, the renowned mythologist and comparative religionist, observed. He said that any institution that is successful in stamping out heresy has signed its own death warrant. Heresy, he says, is the painful lifeblood of institutions. Heresy

keeps the institution connected to the changing social reality with which it must deal in order to remain relevant over the long term to those associated with it. In the religious context, Christ was a Jewish heretic and Buddha defined his faith in contradistinction to his Hindu tradition. Most of the Old Testament prophets and religious reformers of all stripes were the same, in the sense that they swam against the institutional religious current of their time and place. The same can be said from a broader cultural point of view of those who forced the civil rights issue in the 1960s, and those who now advocate increased rights for gays and lesbians. And I hasten to note that only large amounts of time and history's hazy lens can tell us which heretics were useful and important, and which were leading others down dead end roads, or worse.

This essay is heretical from a Mormon point of view, and hence will offend many faithful Mormons and would be stamped out of existence if the leadership of the Mormon Church had it in their power to do so. They, contrary to Campbell's advice, do not acknowledge any value in materials deemed heretical, and encourage faithful Mormons in every way they can to avoid information that questions Mormon history, theology or Mormon leadership in any way (see http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/one_true_church.pdf and http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/uncertain_origins.pdf for a summary).

I suggest that this essay and others like it in the "Beer and Circus" tradition perform a useful function regardless of how history judges the writer's point of view. That is, I have assembled information and presented it from a perspective that many who read this essay will likely not have had the chance to consider. A change in perspective is one of the most powerful things that can occur in human life. It provokes a consideration of whether the status quo is adequate. This sometimes leads to change and in other cases confirms that the current course is best. However, in most cases we proceed better informed and hence more capable of making good decisions after an encounter with a perspective altering experience than we could have without it.

I also note that, as was the case for me when I read "Beer and Circus", reading this essay will likely be difficult for many faithful or even fringe Mormons. As Gadamer points out, "undeception", or real learning, is almost always painful to an extent.

I long ago gave up hope of having a material influence on the Mormon Church as an institution. Hence, this essay is not written to the Church, but to those associated with or interested in it who are opened minded enough to allow the inarticulate concerns they may have felt respecting the Church, and in particular its temple practises, to be critically examined. It is my hope that such people will be assisted by this essay, as I was by "Beer and Circus", to deal with a huge, powerful institution that try as it may is not capable of looking after the interests of the individual human beings who fall within its reach. Just as my daughter will be wise to not be fully taken in by the friendly faces and assurances of good will she encountered at each and every one of the universities that recruited her, some of which were specifically excoriated by the author of "Beer and Circus", Mormons should not accept at face value the Mormon Church's many explicit and implicit representations that it will always act in their individual best interest. Large institutions, despite the best of intentions and regardless of what they may say and how lovingly and sincerely it might be said, are simply not capable of such behaviour. The individual should look out for herself, and to do that, must have an understanding of where danger lurks.

Arguably the biggest misrepresentation that religious institutions of many types, including the Mormon Church, wittingly or unwittingly make is that while bad institutional behaviour is the norm out there "in the world", that in "god's church" that will not be the case because it is "god's church" and as such does not suffer from such imperfections. Centuries of experience to the

contrary have beaten this idea out of most Catholics and certain other faithful churchgoers. But in some relatively new religions, such as the Mormon Church, and other fundamentalist sects that carefully control their members' access to information, this misrepresentation still has great persuasive force.

The Purpose of Mormon Temple Ritual

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

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

Post-modernism, for those unfamiliar with the term, is among other things an extremely relativistic approach to life, with an emphasis on the idea that it is almost impossible to be certain of anything. Hence, post-modernism suggests that it is difficult for anyone to legitimately criticize anyone else, and one approach is as good as another. While this philosophical stream of thought has been discredited in most quarters during the last decade or two, it is a useful tool for a bright Mormon who has been backed into a corner by his more rigorous thinking scientific or history oriented peers. The part of post-modernism I find useful is the convincing way in which it shows that we can't know anything for sure. Used properly, this serves to keep us humble and always ready to learn from new experience. It is ironic that some of Mormonism's brightest use this approach to defend their beliefs, which include the need to obey leaders who posit absolutely certain knowledge of a multitude of things that are unknowable in precisely the fashion post-modernism points out. War of any kind, whether religious, intellectual or military, makes for strange bedfellows.

While it is outside the scope of this essay, a fascinating study could be made of the difficulty Mormons get into when they inadvertently use their "religious" reasoning tools for non-religious purposes, such as financial investment. I suggest, for example, that the problems Mormons have in this regard explain why Utahns are among the easiest marks in the world for scam artists. Mormons are well trained by their temple and other religious experience to trust

authority figures, including well-dressed, well-spoken stock promoters and multi-level marketing executives, and have a great deal of practise in the art of suspension of disbelief when a huge reward is offered.

Mormon Temple Secrecy

Mormon temple rites, including the marriage ceremonies performed there, are shrouded in secrecy. Those who participate are required to promise that the details of the ceremony will not be disclosed to or discussed with anyone, not even another initiate, unless the disclosure or discussion takes place inside a temple.

Because of the secret and alleged sacred nature of Mormon temple worship, there will be some who criticize my decision to discuss it publicly, particularly since I am one of those who took the oath of secrecy in that regard. I take promises seriously, and believe that my reliability and reputation for such are my most important assets. However, when I gave my promise of secrecy, I was a barely nineteen-year-old boy surrounded by dozens of family and friends who all said "yes" at the appropriate moment during an almost two-hour long, dizzyingly novel and complex ceremony. By the time I said, "yes" when asked to make the promise of secrecy, I was on autopilot and simply following the lead of my family and friends who were there. If it was good enough for them, who loved me and would knowingly do me no harm, it was good enough for me. Legally and morally, it is my view that promises made under such circumstances are not binding.

I also note that the Golden Rule (or the "categorical imperative", as articulated by Immanuel Kant and his followers, which is a well thought out version of the Golden Rule) has become my most important ethical principle. Were I to be in the position again of a Mormon who was thinking about going to the temple for the first time, I would want precisely the kind of information that I am about to provide. And were I a non-Mormon dealing with Mormons, watching my child about to become a Mormon etc., and wondering why they behave as they do, I would find this kind of information helpful. Hence, "do to others what you would like them to do to you" suggests to me that I should continue along a tack with this essay that will offend some of my Mormon family and friends. I apologize for this, and suggest that those who are likely to be offended not read further.

Until recently, the promise of secrecy respecting the Mormon temple ceremony was backed up by the initiate's agreement to suffer gruesome penalties if that promise is broken, and to endure anything up to and including death before divulging the nature of the ceremony to others who might presumably try to obtain this information by torture.

For example, at one time initiates used to promise as follows with respect to what would happen if they revealed certain aspects of the ceremony:

... we agree that our throats be cut from ear to ear and our tongues torn out by the roots
...

and

... we agree to have our breasts cut open and our hearts and vitals torn from our bodies and given to the birds of the air and beasts of the field ...

and

... we agree that our bodies be cut asunder in the midst and all our bowels gush out ...

After reciting the text of each promise, the temple officiator would in an authoritative voice tell those participating in the ceremony to "bow your heads and say yes" so as to indicate agreement to the promise, and all would do so. I have participated in the temple ceremony over a hundred times, and have never seen anyone dissent. The pattern of submitting over and over again to an authority figure, even when the matters in question are gruesome and/or bizarre, is hence engrained in the Mormon faithful. This fits well with the anthropological patterns observed in the rituals discussed below. Mormon rituals are simply another form of socialization, and in my experience are amazingly effective.

By the time I attended the temple for the first time in 1977, the words: "I will suffer my life to be taken", had been substituted for the more explicit penalty descriptions noted above. However, I was required to perform hand actions indicating death by slitting the throat, laying open the stomach, etc. and the meaning of those hand actions was explained. Hence, the message was still the same. The ceremony was significantly toned down in this regard in the 1980s. As a result, it no longer refers to any penalties for breach of secrecy, but it does require the promise that certain sacred information imparted by the ceremony will not be disclosed, even "at the peril of your life". The explanation for the penalties removal was that this part of the ceremony was merely designed to impress upon the participants the sacred nature of the ceremony, and less bizarre methods have now been found to do that.

The secrecy associated with Mormon temple worship has nothing to do with its sometimes-rumored lewd or immoral nature. In fact, there is nothing lewd about it. Rather, the emphasis on secrecy is part of the attempt most religions make, as indicated in greater detail below, to create a monopoly for the services they provide. That is, the idea that special, sacred knowledge is only available in one place, if believed, creates a monopoly that enhances the strength of the religious organization that controls the information.

Anyone interested in the minutiae of Mormon temple practice will have no trouble finding online the entire text of the ordinances, with an accompanying description. See <http://www.lds-mormon.com/veilworker/endowment.shtml> for an example. I did not go through what is on that site in detail, but what I did review was accurate. The site includes blacklined versions indicating how the current ceremony has been changed. Most Mormons are aware of the significant changes made during the 1980s, but are not aware of some of the outlandish things that were removed from the ceremony long before that, including those mentioned above respecting the oaths of secrecy. Another of my favorites is the promise to obey the "Law of Vengeance", to the effect that:

... you do solemnly promise and vow that you will pray, and never cease to pray, and never cease to importune high heaven to avenge the blood of the Prophets on this nation, and that you will teach this to your children and you children's children unto the 3rd and 4th generation.

This is a promise to avenge Joseph Smith's death, and to keep the fires of vengeance burning in that regard for as long as possible. While I have not been told this by anyone in authority, I would imagine that this aspect of the ceremony was eventually removed once it became difficult for temple attenders to relate to it because so much time had passed since Joseph's death, and

vengeance at the best of times is untoward and seems at odds with Christ's teachings. However, for a period of time, stirring the coals of this memory would have had a powerfully uniting effect on the Church's membership. This is the specter of the common enemy that has been used so effectively to unify groups of humans throughout history and at one time was a critically important part of Mormon psychology and sociology.

The last old chestnut worth mentioning is the Adam-God doctrine. It was part of the temple ceremony until about 1904. This doctrine states that Adam, as a resurrected being, came to earth and had sexual relations with Mary. Jesus was the result of that union. The above referenced site, as well as many others, provides a significant amount of information respecting this aspect of the endowment ceremony.

I have made an effort to describe some, but by no means all, of the oddities of Mormon temple practice. I do this not to make fun of something many people regard as sacred, as I once did myself, but rather to illustrate an important aspect of why secrecy respecting the temple is important to Mormon leaders. The less is known by the membership generally about the temple ceremony's history, the more easily it can be modified by those in authority as times change and the need to do so becomes evident. This is the reason, in my view, that it is not permissible for initiates to talk among themselves about the temple ceremony unless they are in the temple, and there little opportunity is afforded to do this. Were it possible for initiates to talk to each other about the ceremony, I would likely have heard all the things described above from my parents as a matter of course, or my grandparents during the year I lived with them while I attended university. Instead, I discovered these things at age forty-five by the good graces of the Internet.

Because temple related conversations are taboo within the Mormon community, Mormon authorities control to a significant extent the popular history of the temple ceremony. That is, the membership will only remember those aspects of the temple ceremony's history that the leaders wish them to remember. The Internet has dealt power based on control of this type a heavy blow.

I note in passing that the orientation regarding control over information that I described above characterizes the LDS Church's dealings with all aspects of its history. Mormon leaders are not unique in this regard. The religious historian Karen Armstrong has noted the "anti-historical" nature of most fundamentalist leaning religions. They do not want their story told in clear terms and made well known, because once that happens it is not nearly as easy to control their members perception of what happened in the past when that becomes convenient for the leaders. As the adage goes, "He who controls the past controls the future".

During the time when all histories were oral, the purpose of history was to support the status quo. I am familiar, for example, with the oral development of the Inca mythologies in Peru. When the Incas conquered a new people, they would restructure their mythologies for them. The new mythology, which was the people's most important history, would involve the gods or founding ancestors of the people in question being related in some way to the Incas, and would posit the inevitability that their two peoples would at some point run together. And guess who the new myths indicated would be in charge? That's right, the Incas. And of course, because all these histories were oral, it would not take long before the old histories were forgotten and it was assumed that the new ones had always been. Many religious leaders today, including those who run the Mormon Church, evidence a yearning for that kind of control over history and the current obedience such control has always produced.

Mormon Temple Ordinances

An appreciation of the whole of Mormon temple ritual is essential to understand Mormon temple marriage. Hence, an overview is required.

Mormon temple worship is comprised of several parts. First, the initiate is "washed and anointed". This is the ritual dedications of various parts of the body to god's service, and prepares the initiate for her "endowment". The endowment is generally explained as a "gift of knowledge", and provides some, but not much, information that would not already be familiar to a Mormon who had read the Bible and attended church regularly for a period of time. The new information is of the mystical variety (secret passwords to get into heaven; secret signs and handclasps for the same purpose; etc.) and is not informative of much, if anything, that would be useful in daily life. This orientation toward a future state, and de-emphasis of the present, is a theme to which I will return regularly throughout this essay. It characterizes Mormon mentality.

The endowment concerns two things primarily. First, how the cosmos and earth came to be, and second, what god has commanded man to do, and to an extent, why. As the most important commandments are presented, those in the temple are required to publicly commit to obey. This has an important sociological function within Mormonism that is discussed in some detail below.

The pinnacle of the endowment occurs when the initiate is permitted to give the sacred passwords and signs she has received during the course of the endowment and is ushered through a gauze veil into the "Celestial room" of the temple. This space is by far the most ornate and impressive within the temple. The process of "passing through the veil" is a representation of what Mormons believe will happen on death. It also illustrates the Mormon belief that we are surrounded by a world of unseen spiritual beings.

Many of my well-educated Mormon family and friends believe that, literally, the passwords, signs etc. they learned in the Mormon temples will be required of them as they make their way toward heaven after death, and that without those passwords they will not get in. They, of course, must also have lived worthily (obediently, that is), but even the worthy must remember the passwords and signs required to pass into the Celestial Kingdom. The assumption is that if you are worthy, you will remember. Once in the Celestial room, for first time during the ceremony men and women are permitted to stand or sit near each other for a few minutes of quiet chatting or silent communion before departing. This, in theory, is the primary opportunity to ask questions about the ceremony.

The endowment is presented in the form of a play, the primary actors in which are Elohim (God the Father), Jehovah (Mormons believe that Jehovah and Christ are the same person), Michael the Archangel (who becomes Adam), Eve, Lucifer, Peter, James and John, and others. They interact with each other during that timeless period in which the earth was created and the rules of our existence established, and are presented as those who caused these things to occur.

Mircea Eliade was one of the world's leading anthropologists and mythologists. His definition of myth, taken from his classic book "Myth and Reality" (Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper & Row, 1963) will strike a chord with many who are familiar with the Mormon endowment:

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

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

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

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

Clearly, the myths recounted by the Mormon endowment are part of the genre described so well above, and attributed to primitive peoples. Joseph Smith purported to restore the original ways of doing things. At a minimum, he created a genuine mythic structure that performs the same function within Mormonism as mythology traditionally performed in archaic society. Give Mormonism's success and the prominence of Mormon temple practice, it must meet a primal need many humans feel. It is also important to note in this regard that much of the structure of the Mormon temple ritual was borrowed by Smith from the Masons. The Mormon temple rituals were substantially reworked within weeks of his going through the Masonic rituals for the first time, and it was only then that they took on their present distinctly Masonic flavor. See http://www.mindspring.com/~engineer_my_dna/mormon/priorend.htm for a summary in this regard and "Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry": The Relationship Between Freemasonry and Mormonism", by Michael W. Homer, Dialogue, Vol. 27, No. 3. at <http://www.mormonismi.net/pdf/homer1994.pdf> for a detailed review.

The "Great Secret"

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

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

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

There is also an additional Mormon temple ordinance that used to be much more prominent than it is now that perhaps ties into the "secret will come later" idea. The ordinance is referred to as having one's "calling and election made sure". Those who receive that ordinance are deemed to have passed all of the earthly tests required to gain entrance to the Celestial Kingdom. I have not received that ordinance, and have not heard its details discussed by anyone who is personally acquainted with it, and so cannot comment as to its form or substance. However, it does fit the pattern described by the anthropologists.

Interestingly, the anthropologists have also observed that in many initiatory rituals, at the end of the line the secret to be revealed is that there is no secret. That is, once the initiate is fully committed to the organization sponsoring the ritual, he is let in on the real deal – that the entire ritual structure is an elaborate game that enables the organization to keep the initiate's attention long enough to fully engage or co-opt him. "Thanks for playing along", the initiate is finally told. "Now, go and make sure that the game continues to be played by those who will come behind you. As you know, the organization is of essential importance. Hence what might be called deception in other circumstances is not only permissible, but is de rigueur in the case of these rituals. And in any event, God's ways are mysterious. Somehow through these rituals His marvelous purposes are carried out. After all, our ancestors handed these very rituals down to us. And see how strong we [BM note: the organization] have grown! You are performing God's will; you are a tool in His hands; and you will be eternally blessed as a result." And so the cycle continues.

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

I cannot overemphasize the importance within the study of the dark side of religious ritual in general and Mormonism in particular, of the idea that the religious organization is indispensably important, and therefore that the ordinary rules of morality, honesty etc. are suspended when it comes to communicating the organization's history, function, reality etc. to its members and others interested in it. Nietzsche called this the "pious lie" – the lie told by priests of all ages and religious persuasions to convince their followers to do what the priests are certain should be done. Plato wrote of the "philosopher kings" – those few who are wise enough to lead the masses, and must on occasion say whatever is required to get them to do what is best. Neither Nietzsche's priests nor the philosopher kings believe that the great unwashed can be trusted to make that decision on their own. The leaders, therefore, must guide them by any effective means, including deception. These ideas are as old as mankind, and alive and well within Mormonism. See http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/uncertain_origins.pdf for a summary of the issues in this regard.

I should also note the distinction between what I have described above and the variety of socially useful, but not necessarily true, myths that hold all societies together. For example, aphorisms such as "cheaters never prosper", "virtue will be rewarded", etc. are all passed on as

the wisdom of the ages and perform an important sociological function while being either untrue or subject to many unstated exceptions. In my view, these myths are a reflection of the Golden Rule, and are designed to create the kind of society in which most of us have decided we wish to live. Furthermore, as we mature within that society these maxims become codes for complex concepts regarding human behaviour that do in fact have many exceptions. Finally, each of these rules is oriented toward the present. They focus us on elements of human behavior that surround us, and invite us to test them against our experience. This is how we develop our own conceptions of right and wrong, and decide how we will live our lives.

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

The Mormon Temple Marriage Ceremony

The most important part of the endowment is a series of promises (referred to as "covenants") that the initiate makes to god as represented by the leaders of the Mormon Church. These promises significantly increase the initiate's level of commitment to the Church, and are of great importance to the nature of Mormon marriage. They are accordingly discussed in detail below. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that only those who are "endowed" (that is, have made these covenants) can participate in a temple marriage ceremony.

The Mormon temple marriage ceremony itself is simple. It is performed in a relatively small, beautiful room, large enough for immediate family and a few close friends. The room is dominated by large mirrors that face each other on the two sides of the room that will be viewed by the bride and groom as they face each other, holding hands, over the altar. The mirrors symbolize eternity as the bride and groom look into the endless reflections they create.

After a few brief words of advice respecting married life, the officiator says to the groom:

Brother _____, do you take Sister _____ by the right hand and receive her unto yourself to be your lawful and wedded wife for time and all eternity, with a covenant and promise that you will observe and keep all the laws, rites, and ordinances pertaining to this Holy Order of Matrimony in the New and Everlasting Covenant, and this you do in the presence of God, angels, and these witnesses of your own free will and choice?

The groom then says, "yes".

The officiator then turns to the bride and says:

Sister _____ do you take brother _____ by the right hand and give yourself to him to be his lawful and wedded wife, and for him to be your lawful and wedded husband, for time and all eternity, with a covenant and promise that you will observe and keep all the laws, rites and ordinances pertaining to this Holy Order of Matrimony in the New and Everlasting Covenant, and this you do in the presence of God, angels, and these witnesses of your own free will and choice?

The "Holy Order or Matrimony" and the "New and Everlasting Covenant" are references to the endowment, where the heavy lifting with respect to Mormon marriage is done.

The only substantive difference between the two paragraphs above is that the groom "receives" the bride, and the bride "gives herself" to the groom. The groom does not "give himself" to the bride. This, in my view, reflects the patriarchal orientation of the Church. The man is in charge. The woman has "given" herself to the man. This language also harkens back to the day in our culture when the female of the species was a type of property, to be transferred by her father to her husband, whom she would then serve for the remainder of her life. It is also consistent with the manner in which men and woman promise obedience during the endowment. The men are required to obey god. The women, in the current ceremony, are required to promise to obey god and:

... to hearken to the counsel of her husband, as her husband hearkens unto the counsel of [god] ...

Until the last round of changes to the ceremony were made, this passage used to simply read that the women would

... obey the law of their husbands and abide by his counsel in righteousness ...

Again, the patriarchal orientation of the ceremony is visible, as are the changes that are slowly being made to bring it into line with early 20th century (if not 21st) sensibilities.

Note that during the marriage ceremony itself nothing is said about the love the couple has for each other; nothing about their commitment to each other; and nothing about their hopes, dreams, the challenges they may face, etc. The ceremony's emphasis is twofold: first on the eternal nature of the covenant made, and second, through the reference to the New and Everlasting Covenant, on obedience to the Church.

My wife and I married almost twenty-three years ago. To my recollection, today as I wrote this essay was the first time since my wedding day that I reviewed the words we said to each other as we brought our lives together. The fact that I did not note the sterile nature of those words the only time I spoke them is testimony to the power of young love, and perhaps hormones.

My recollection of the ceremony itself is that it was simple, tasteful and beautiful. I recall that it placed the emphasis of the day where it should be – on the commitment we made to each other. The emphasis on obedience was so much a part of the life's wallpaper at that point that I did not notice it.

I remember our wedding day with joy. The best part was what I just described, coupled with the time my wife and I spent sitting in a park shortly after the ceremony, by ourselves, writing in our journals about what we had experienced, and then talking to each other about our hopes and dreams. The reception and family dinner that came later were anti-climatic. And I had no idea respecting the wall that Juli and I would hit as we tried to follow our dream of walking through life together, and loving each other, within the confines of faithful Mormonism.

Comparison of the Mormon and Anglican Marriage Ceremonies

Having been critical of the Mormon marriage ceremony, I should establish that there are better alternatives. The best I have seen are those made up by the couple themselves to reflect the individualistic nature of the covenant they are prepared to make to each other, and their personalities. However, some staid religious institutions are still well ahead of the Mormons. Since the Anglican Church is one of Canada's dominant religious organizations, let me share with you something concerning the ceremony it uses.

The Anglican ceremony includes an explanation of marriage's origin and meaning, and includes the idea that marriage signifies the spiritual union that is possible between Christ and those who "reach out" to him. As noted above, obedience to religious authority is the main motif of Mormon marriage. The Anglican idea of "reaching" implies stretching and desire, and is controlled by the individual. Obedience implies limitation and submission, and is controlled by the Church.

The LDS ceremony, through its connection to the broader temple ritual, teaches us that we marry in order to multiply and replenish the earth, and to have "joy and rejoicing" in our "posterity". The Anglican ceremony explains that marriage was ordained in imitation of Christ, and that:

It is therefore not to be entered upon unadvisedly, lightly or merely to satisfy physical desires; but prayerfully, with careful thought, and with reverence for God, duly considering the purposes for which it was ordained. It was ordained for the procreation of children and that they might be brought up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord, to the praise of his holy name. It was ordained so that those to whom God has granted the gift of marriage might live a chaste and holy life, as befits members of God's beautiful creation. And it was ordained for the mutual companionship, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

This is a much more full bodied description of what the traditional idea of marriage is about, and importantly emphasizes "mutual companionship, help and comfort" provided by the spouses to each other. To keep this essay manageable, I will not address the current debate respecting whether marriage should be confined to heterosexual coupling.

As noted above, in the LDS ceremony the man "receives" the woman, and the woman "gives herself" to the man. It might be fair to imply that in an LDS marriage, the woman gives and the man takes or receives, thus reinforcing a negative patriarchal stereotype. The Anglican ceremony uses the same words on each side of the equation. Each spouse is asked whether he or she will "have" the other as wife or husband.

The word "love" is never used in the LDS ceremony, and neither are any of its synonyms. As noted above, the LDS marriage covenant is with the Church and to obey the Church. The core of the Anglican covenant is to love your spouse. It includes the following language:

...will you have ___ as your wife/husband, to live together, as God has ordained, in the holy state of matrimony? Will you love her/him, cherish her/him, honour and protect her/him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her/him, as long as you both shall live?

And the Anglican ceremony is crowned with this marvelous phrase:

With this ring I wed you, with my body I worship you; with all that I am and all that I have I honour you: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This, in my view, is uplifting, inspiring, encouraging – all that the guiding principle of marriage should be. Hence, I cannot think of better language to use at the apex of the marriage ceremony.

The LDS ceremony allows limited family and friend observation, but not participation. The Church itself is the third party to the LDS marriage covenant, and all others are excluded. The Anglican ceremony asks:

Who brings this woman to be married to this man?

A family member then steps forward indicating his or her role in this regard. And each of the family members present participate when they are asked:

Members of the families of ___ and ___, do you give your blessing to this marriage?

To which they respond, "We do." Thus, the community of family that surrounds the couple is the third party to their marriage.

In the LDS ceremony the bride and groom face each other during part of the ceremony, but never address each other. Again, the Church, as represented by the temple officiator who conducts the marriage, stands firmly between them and mediates their communication. This could be seen as a metaphor for the separation of spouses that occurs during the temple ceremony itself, and that continues throughout the lives of faithful LDS couples. During the Anglican ceremony, the couple faces each other and each in turn says to the other:

I ___ take you ___ to be my wife/husband, according to God's holy ordinance: to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. And to this I pledge you my word.

Most Anglican ministers will leave out the "parted by death" part if asked. But spouses seldom die at the same time. So a parting at death is inevitable for most, including Mormons, and hence this language is perhaps not out of place even for those who believe in a life together after death, as do many Anglicans and members of other faiths.

Throughout the Mormon ceremony the officiator acts by virtue of his priesthood authority. He, as is the case with all Mormon leadership, has the mantle of authority and wields it with a certainty that comforts the insecure and empowers he who wields it. For example, at the conclusion of the ceremony, the officiator says:

By virtue of the Holy Priesthood and the authority vested in me, I pronounce you _____, and you, ____, legally and lawfully husband and wife for time and all eternity, and I seal upon you the blessings of the holy resurrection... the blessings of kingdoms, thrones, principalities, powers, dominions and exaltations... replenish the earth, that you may have joy and rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ [the second coming]... .

By contrast, the Anglican minister closes his ceremony by acknowledging that he does not claim to speak for god. He says:

Let us pray. Eternal God, preserver of all mankind, giver of all spiritual grace and author of everlasting life: send you blessing upon this man and this woman whom we bless in your name; that as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so [they] may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant made between them, of which this ring given and received is a token and pledge, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to your laws; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Those whom God has joined together let not man put asunder.

The blessings promised respecting an LDS marriage all point toward the life after death. As noted above, an LDS couple is promised the blessing of the holy resurrection; kingdoms, thrones, principalities, powers, dominions and exaltations; and joy and rejoicing at Christ's second coming. The Anglican blessing is that the couple: "may ever remain in perfect love and peace together", and that,

The Lord [may] mercifully with his favour look upon you and fill you with all spiritual blessing and grace, that you may so live together in this life, that in the world to come you may have life everlasting.

Hence, the Anglican emphasis is on this life, but includes the concept of a life to come.

While I do not hold the Anglican Church out as the font of all truth, it seems to me that its marriage ceremony, ironically, articulates much more of what most Mormon couples are likely to feel as they approach their marriage commitment than does the Mormon ceremony.

Celestial Kingdom Requirements

In order to have a Celestial marriage, you must qualify for the Celestial Kingdom. To make it to the Celestial Kingdom, one must be "sealed" (as in being bonded together, not as in being stamped with something) to one's spouse in a Mormon temple in a wedding ceremony as described above. This can be done after a civil marriage, in which case the civil marriage is said to have been "sealed", or as the marriage of first instance, in which case one is referred to have having "married in the temple".

As noted above, the marriage ceremony itself makes reference to promises of obedience made in the New and Everlasting Covenant, which is part of the endowment ceremony. These promises are the guts of the Mormon marriage system.

During the course of the endowment, each participant makes a variety of promises. Many of them are mundane (obey the commandments of god as found in the scriptures used by the Mormon Church, for example), but a few are extraordinary. The one that stands out above all others requires unquestioning obedience, and the dedication of all one's time, talent and other resources to the Church. This promise is generally understood to mean that nothing the Church asks for will be refused, such as the donation of time for "callings" (as described below), and financial donations from time to time. However, faithful members understand that it goes much further than this. It is well understood that at some point the Church may call for all of a member's property to be given over, as was the case during a period of time in the Church's early history when it operated on a communal basis. It is also taught that many families will

eventually be told that the time has come to sell their homes etc. and move to Independence, Missouri, which Mormons believe to be where Christ will come when he returns to rule the earth. That is, we are not taking about a metaphoric "all" with respect to these promises. Mormons are literalists in most respects, including this one.

The promises appear, in the current ceremony, in two places. The words used in each are as follows:

... we should covenant to sacrifice all that we possess, even our own lives if necessary, in sustaining and defending the Kingdom of God [BM note: The Kingdom of God is now understood to refer to the Mormon Church. It used to refer to the political arm of the Church that Joseph Smith believed would literally rule the entire earth when Christ returns. He spent much of the later years of his life preparing for that eventuality. This term has a complex history that is beyond the scope of this essay]. ...

... you do consecrate yourselves, your time, talents, and everything with which the Lord has blessed you, or with which he may bless you, to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, for the building up of the Kingdom of God [BM note: See square brackets above] on the earth and for the establishment of Zion [BM note: A short hand reference to the Mormon Church].

Each of these blocks of language are incorporated into specific "covenants", which are promises that each person going through the temple must make in order to complete the ceremony.

Mormon marriage and many other cultural practices are still strongly influenced by the harsh environment in which Mormonism was born. For much of its early history the Mormon Church was under siege, which it often called down upon its own head. Then members of the Church fled to the Utah desert and created their own society. Utah had a harsh environment that required tremendous group cooperation for survival. It is my view that the current, still very authoritarian structure of Mormonism, can be traced to its difficult beginnings, in the fashion indicated by the anthropological studies summarized below.

In light of the Church's authoritarian nature, harsh environment origins, etc., it should not be surprising that the prize of gaining admittance to the Celestial Kingdom, and hence being able to live eternally with one's spouse and children, is reserved for those who are obedient to Church authority. Mormons use the term "faithful" to describe this behaviour. A great deal of fear motivates Mormons in this regard. They believe that the Celestial Kingdom is a physical place, and that if they live properly (obediently), they will have the privilege of being there with their loved ones in a continuation of their earthly relationships, with all parties in the prime of life and free from any disabilities from which they may have suffered in mortality. That sounds pretty good to most people. However, if Mormons stray too far from the path of obedience to Church authority, they will be shut out of the Celestial Kingdom. That possibility inspires a tremendous amount of fear. The stronger the belief in the Celestial Kingdom, the more fear will result from the possibility that one might not have been obedient enough to god's commandments (as communicated and interpreted by Mormon leaders) to make it there. Hence, a great deal of Mormon effort throughout life is dedicated toward qualifying for the Celestial Kingdom by obeying Church authority.

Temple Work for the Dead

Mormon temple rituals are performed for the dead, based on revelations Joseph Smith said that he received from god to that effect, supported by an oblique reference in the New Testament to baptism for the dead (See I Corinthians 15:29). This is why genealogy is so important to Mormons. They believe that it is not possible to perform temple ordinances for dead ancestors and others until certain basic information has been collected respecting them. And until all temple ordinances have been done for all her deceased ancestors, a Mormon cannot gain entry into the Celestial Kingdom.

While a variety of ordinances are performed for the dead in Mormon temples (baptism, washings and anointing, marriages (referred to as "sealings"), and endowments), the emphasis is on the endowment. This takes by far the most time. The most building space is dedicated to it. Elaborate audio-visual systems have been developed to make the endowment presentation more memorable and effective. And great pressure is brought to bear on the members to attend the temple for the ostensible purpose of performing the endowment for the deceased. The connection between personal salvation and getting this job done is used to motivate the behaviour the Church wishes – temple attendance. But my perception is that this stick is not working lately as well as perhaps it did in the past. Hence, Mormons don't hear as much as they used to about the eternal problems they are creating for themselves by choosing to do things with their kids instead of going to the temple to listen to the endowment presentation for the 1,000th time on behalf of a deceased person.

In any event, there is still a lot of organizational effort used, and pressure applied, to the members to encourage attendance at the temple for purposes of participating in the endowment as proxy for the dead. Nothing like the same pressure is used respecting baptisms for the dead (usually done by young people to give them a taste of the privilege of being in the temple), or the other ordinances. And temple building is one of two initiatives that define Mormonism during the past several decades. The Church has expended huge resources to construct temples at distances proximate enough to even relatively small populations of Church members to enable regular temple attendance. This program is the result of a correlation that has been noted by Church leaders between regular temple attendance and donations, attendance at other meetings and similar things that indicate commitment levels. And, by the way, the other defining feature of Mormonism in recent times is an increased emphasis on every young man serving as a missionary. This has multiplied several times the number of young Mormon men serving missions. Missionary service correlates strongly to temple marriage and other long-term behaviors that the Church wishes to encourage, primarily related to the donation of time and money to the Church. Hence, missions are another powerful conditioning tool. As is the case with temple attendance, they have been proven to strengthen the Church's purchase on those who participate in them.

Most Mormons go through the marriage process in the temple once – for themselves. However, most go through the endowment many times as proxies for deceased persons. The Church recommends that members attend the temple to experience the endowment at least once a month, and while most Mormons do not keep that pace, many do and a large percentage of the rest who hold temple recommends go at least a few times a year. Congregations organize special trips. Goals for temple attendance are set in that regard by local Church leaders, and individual members are encouraged to set goals for themselves. Sometimes temple administrators even resort to things like "lets see if we can keep the temple full and operating for twenty-four consecutive hours". This and other similar oddities allow local leaders to make a

special plea to the members that is intended to pull in some people who do not usually attend, and bring out those who do a few more times. The driver here is novelty, either of participating in a group effort toward an unusual goal, or perhaps just being in the temple in the middle of the night. This is the religious equivalent of "Mid-Night Madness" down at "Lou's Discount Auto Sales". The same psychological tools are used in both cases.

What Anthropology and Psychology Tell Us About Mormon Temple Rituals

Theologically, each step of the temple work for the dead process, as described above, is just as important as the others. Hence, the imbalance in resource dedication toward the endowment leads one to wonder what is so special about it. Ways have been found to streamline the other ordinances for the dead to the point that they are laughably perfunctory in many cases. And yet the whole endowment, in precisely the same form as it is presented to each live initiate, is made to live proxies on behalf of dead initiates.

While I will not say much about the practicality of achieving Mormonism's stated goal respecting temple work for the dead, which is that all Mormon ordinances will be done for all people who have ever lived on earth, I will note a few things. Impressive mental gymnastics and generous reliance on god's mysterious ways are required to identify ways in which this goal may be achieved. Most Mormons are uncomfortable when asked things like why they spend so much time and effort on genealogy and temple work if all they can possibly achieve is the identification and performance of temple work for a tiny percentage of the human race, leaving the rest up to god to perform through his miraculous means. If he is already going to do so much, why not leave the little bit we are doing to him as well?

The only answer to this question that makes any sense within the Mormon system of thought is that there is something about going constantly to the temple that is good for the people who do it. And what about the fact that constant temple attendance was not a feature of Mormon life while Mormon society was controlled completely by the Church during the days before Utah became a state? And what of the fact that as time has passed temple attendance and things relate to it, like worthiness interviews prior to attendance, have come to play an increasingly important role in Mormon society? So what is it that drives the Mormon Church to put such an emphasis on temple attendance, and particularly participation in the endowment?

When confronted with human beings who have chosen to dedicate a large portion their scarce resources toward a particular activity, I have found that it is often much more enlightening to step back and look at the big picture instead of accepting the reasons offered by the participants for their behaviour. This is not because people lie, but rather because we often are driven in our behaviour by powerful subconscious currents, and more to the point, we often have been deceived ourselves (often innocently) as to why we do certain things. So with the help of anthropology and psychology, lets take a step back and see if we can bring the big picture into focus.

The anthropologists tell us that harsh environments, in which group cohesiveness is often a requirement for group survival, spawn authoritarian religious systems, and ritual practices in such religious systems are designed to clearly designate who is in (and hence can be trusted in times of crisis) and who is out. Mormon temple ceremonies, the Word of Wisdom (Mormon abstention from tobacco, alcohol etc.) and many other aspects of Mormon culture bear the markings of such a system.

For example, some rituals require that the initiates endure physical and psychological hardship of a significant sort in order to pass a test of some kind before they will be admitted into society as a fully participating member. University frat houses do a similar kind of thing, with various perverse and comic twists. Those who can't deal with the difficulties of the test are thought unlikely to be up to the responsibilities of full society membership, and hence are not accepted.

Mormon temple rituals do not require physical discomfort, but they do purposely I would suggest, create psychological stress. The clothing worn is otherworldly. The secret hand shakes and signs are bizarre. When I received my endowment, the penalties for breach of the secrecy covenant were described in grotesque and literal terms (the tearing out of innards; the slitting of the throat, etc.). And while this was going on, family and friends who I knew to be intelligent, sensible people surrounded me and were going along with all of this crazy stuff. Continuing through that ceremony was more an act of faith and community solidarity on my part than anything else. Had I not been prepared to go through with it, many friendships and family relationships would have been threatened, and my chances of marrying a daughter of one of the "faithful" families in our community would have been greatly diminished. And marriage was on my mind in a serious way at that time, as I would suggest is typically the case for a faithful Mormon late-teenage boy. That, we were taught, was our purpose in life – to marry and become a faithful father and Church leader. Every person to whom I was encouraged to look up came from that mould.

While I did not see things in these terms at the time, the question before me was clearly, "Are you with us or not, even if the going gets rough or things don't make sense all the time?" And I looked around, with acid in my stomach because things did not make sense at that moment, and subconsciously reasoned, "These people love me. And I trust them. They would not knowingly hurt me. And most of all, I want to continue to associate with them. I had better close my eyes and make this plunge." And so I did.

At that point, I had a kind of epiphany experience similar to that described by Andrew Newberg in "Why God Won't Go Away". He summarizes recent scientific studies to the effect that when we are faced with a situation that causes intense, anxiety (as did my first temple experience) and are provided with relief in the form of a religious insight (which the temple experience provides by an impressive visual and tactile presentation of various concepts that are intellectually present throughout Mormon life), the parts of our nervous system that are responsible for arousal and relaxation are sometimes simultaneously activated in a way similar to that associated with sexual climax. As a result, we experience an intense, rare, mental state that can be fairly described as an epiphany. Not surprisingly, the ideas that appear to have triggered that wonder are not easily abandoned.

Many people are completely put off the temple experience. I was euphoric after my first visit, and went back at least twice a week for about three months until I left as a Mormon missionary to Southern Peru.

Cognitive dissonance research sheds some interesting light on what I just wrote. See "Religious Faith: Enlightening or Blinding?" at <http://mccue.cc/bob/long.htm> for a summary of how cognitive dissonance works.

A series of studies were designed to test the connection between initiation rites and the value members of groups attributed to their group experience. A control group was set up that was invited to participate in some kind of study or group activity that was designed to deliver particular benefits, such as the development of study skills. Either no, or minimal, entrance

requirements were established for group membership. A second group was established for the same purpose and used the same activities, materials, etc., but severe entrance requirements were established. Applicants to the second group were told that they were among many who had applied and had to be screened ("many are called by few are chosen"?), and the screening process was rigorous. Days or weeks of testing, probing, interviewing, etc. at the end of which each and every applicant was accepted.

Those who went through the rigorous screening procedure tended to find much greater value in their group's activities than did those who were admitted to the control group without paying a material price. The members of the second group viewed the group as elite, found value where objectively none have been intended, and were much more committed to the group's continued existence and all aspects of its activities than the members of the control group.

Cog dis theory explains this behaviour on the following basis. Members of the second group tended to think, "I paid a high price to get into this group. And, the fact that I was accepted into this group means that I am special. So, the group's activities must be meaningful. If they are not meaningful, then I am not special and in fact I was foolish to have paid the price I did not get in. And since I know I am special, and I am not stupid, the group's activities must be meaningful."

This illustrates cog dis theory in classic form. There are two competing cognitions – "I am special; the group is meaningful" v. "I am not special; I was foolish to waste my time and effort on this group". Cog dis theory predicts that the disharmony or "dissonance" between these two ideas will be resolved by the more powerful of the two ideas suppressing the weaker. It takes a lot of evidence to convince most of us that we were foolish, and we are not special. No amount of evidence is sufficient to convince some people of this. In fact, we are all foolish from time to time, and each human being is so special that in a sense, none of us are. The sooner we get those two ideas through our thick skulls, the sooner our eyes open and we start to enjoy more of life.

We all tend to underestimate the power that mental processes such as what I just outlined have in our lives. The number of Mormons who feel compelled to attend the temple and feel a special power there is neither testimony to their stupidity nor God's reality – it is testimony to the power of group influences to shape our beliefs and perception of reality. And these influences are as real in the post mormon community as they are anywhere else.

Back to anthropology. Mormonism's move to Utah is interesting. Mormon historians and many members believe that the Church would not have survived if this move did not occur. It took a small, struggling religious organization into an environment where a religious monopoly could be easily formed, and hence also accords with what the anthropologists predict is required in order for a strong institutional religious body to be built.

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

Many aspects of Mormonism make much more sense to me when I view them through the "monopoly" lens. Consider the secrecy related to Mormon temple ceremonies. This gives initiates an air of superiority over non-initiates. And more importantly, it slows down anyone who would like to criticize the form or substance of the ceremony, thus protecting the initiate from the pressure such criticism might create and allowing the ceremony to continue to perform the functions anthropologists attribute to such rituals. How can you effectively critique something you know nothing about? In business or marketing terms, the secrecy promise creates a "barrier to entry". Secrecy is used in precisely the same way in business circles.

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

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

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

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

Great Expectations and Future Mindedness

The picture painted of marriage within Mormon culture is attractive. Young people are taught lesson upon lesson about how wonderful the relationship between husband and wife can be. They are to be "best friends", "soul mates", etc. Love between Mormon couples is greater than that of non-Mormons because it is "sealed" in Mormon temples, and it will last forever, literally. And ironically, the many, wonderful metaphoric uses of the various ideas contained within the Mormon conceptual construct related to marriage are almost completely ignored. Nonetheless, marriage is put up on a pedestal where lots of communal energy is focused on it. This causes it to be a high priority for most young Mormons. High enough that when combined with the Mormon teaching with respect to complete sexual abstinence before marriage, Mormons tend to marry young. Indeed, Brigham Young University is parodied in Mormon and non-Mormon circles alike as "Breed'em Young" University.

Young married and about-to-be married Mormon couples are treated to marriage preparation classes that use some good and other not-so-healthy counseling techniques to help couples get to know each other and create a sound foundation for their marriages. This is arguably the part Mormons do best. They set high goals and expectations in terms of what is possible in terms of marriage, and they make at least some good information available to young couples as they start out together. Here is a sampling of the kind of information I have in mind, pulled a few minutes ago from the Church's website:

Tenderness and respect are key ingredients to strengthening affection between husband and wife. Each spouse must be sensitive to the needs of the other.

How strong is the affection in your marriage?

Here are some symptoms to watch for:

- You give gifts only on special occasions.
- You cannot remember the last time you said "I love you."
- You use few terms of endearment.
- You seldom kiss "hello" or "goodbye."
- You rarely hold hands or show affection in public or private.
- You consider romance unrealistic.

Here are some treatments to try:

- Call your spouse on the phone once a day—just to talk.
- Schedule one date per week.
- Tell your spouse, "I love you."
- Write a note of appreciation.
- Buy a small gift.
- Do something nice for your spouse that he or she does not expect.

This is good advice, and is the kind of thing I am grateful to have been taught.

There are three main problems with this part of the Mormon marriage process. First, the teaching with regard to what marriage can be is always intertwined with deference to Church authority. Women are taught from childhood up the importance of the Priesthood, and the

necessity of deferring to righteous Priesthood leadership in the home and at Church. The temple marriage ceremony no longer contains the requirement that the woman agree to obey her husband. However, the ceremony now uses a passage that indicates that the woman will follow her husband as he obeys the Lord, which is a short hand reference for Church leaders since the Lord is not present, but has left them in charge as his agents.

The second problem relates to the high expectations with respect to marriage with which Mormons are raised. As noted below, the reality usually falls far short of the dream. This is a bitter pill for those raised with high expectations to swallow, and likely contributes to problems with depression that cause Utahns to lead the US in consumption of Prozac and related medications.

The third problem is that too much emphasis within Mormonism is placed on the literality and wonder of the Celestial Kingdom, and what we need to do to get there. This results in a mentality that endures the present on the basis that such endurance will bring blessings in the next life. As a result, the opportunity to live this life, and enjoy what it has to offer, is squandered far too often.

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

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

Therein lie many of Mormonism's problems. On the other hand, psychologists such as Dr. Martin Seligman, one of North America's leading experts respecting the psychology of happiness, tell us that future mindedness is essential not only to happiness, but to mental well being. That is, those who are too oriented toward the past or present sometimes have problems placing their difficulties in context. This exposes them to problems related to depression, and inhibits the making of plans that will motivate constructive action in the present. It seems, therefore, that the difficulty is that of finding an appropriate balance. We need a future orientation, but if we have too much of this it can block our access to present experience.

The antidote often suggested for those westerners who have an excessive future orientation is a greater focus on the present moment, as taught by Buddhist and other eastern oriented theorists. Ironically, one of the first places I run into this approach was at a leadership-training program sponsored by BYU. I don't think the folks who made the presentation understood where they path down which they point leads. They advocated that we no longer permit ourselves to be "human doings", and that we revert to our natural state, that of "human beings" – that we "just be". But once I "just was" for a while, I started to feel things that are decidedly counterproductive if one wishes to remain a faithful member of the Mormon Church. My guess is that this program, like many others that are proven to lead sheep out of the fold, will be discontinued by BYU. If the Church finds that a program leads members away, it will discourage it despite all of the other good things it may do. This was the case with some popular, and in many ways effective, intense, weekend long group therapy programs with which I became familiar in the 1980s. Dr. Scott Peck was one of the leading proponents of these.

I have found the "just be" approach, supplemented with what I have learned about Buddhism and meditation, to be most helpful. The present has opened up to me in myriad ways as I have suppressed my Mormon induced overly future oriented mindset. I spend much less energy and time worrying whether this or that aspect of my behaviour or that of my loved ones might

disentitle us to Celestial Kingdom. And I spend much more energy on noticing the light glancing off my grandson's hair, the beauty of my daughter as she walks through our yard on her way to do something that I might have been concerned about a while ago, and the expression on my wife's face as she listens to something our nine-year-old son thinks is of earth shattering importance.

The "future mindedness" issue is so central to Mormonism that I am going to spend a little more time on it here. There is a correlation between societies created in harsh environments and what seem to us now like excessive future mindedness. This should not be surprising. Future mindedness helps us cope with difficult present circumstances, and to set goals that will motivate current activity to improve those circumstances. Both of these are helpful, if not essential, characteristics in a harsh environment. Octavio Paz, who so nicely defined this problem as noted above, is a South American. He hence is familiar with an economic environment much more harsh than ours.

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

As noted above, harsh environments create authoritarian religious and other organizations, as well future mindedness. And once human authority is well established, it tends to perpetuate itself. Mormon leadership has proven adept at this task. As described in detail below, one of their major tools in this regard is a belief system that makes the members feel that the Mormon Church is indispensable to their eventual salvation. This is a classic future-minded ploy. "Don't do what you want to and so 'enjoy' this moment," the Mormon leaders say. "Do what we say you must, or you will lose your chance to live after death with your loved ones in the Celestial Kingdom. You must use the present to do what we tell you to do, and so earn future blessings." And so the present for many Mormons cannot be enjoyed as it should because it is filled with concerns about a speculative future. Also, the Mormon Church has adopted one of the most conservative organizational structures known to man. That is, in order for a major policy change to be made, fifteen very old men must agree respecting it. This ensures that the Mormon Church will change decades behind the rest of developed world, if at all. The time it took for a Mormon "revelation" to be received respecting extending priesthood privileges to black men is illustrative of this point, as are current Mormon attitudes respecting homosexuality and the role of women outside the home.

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

I suggest that if there is any time at which one should be "in the moment" it is while making love. My guess is that the average readers' ability to focus on this essay just went up a notch or two. The fact that Mormon leaders have from time to time felt inclined to dictate the minutiae of love making should provide ample proof of the degree to which they are prepared to control Mormon lives.

Juli and I married in 1980. One of the things that we were told by Church leaders during the interview through which we had to pass to receive permission to be married in the temple was that we were to wear our temple garments "night and day" – that is, all of the time. In those days, temple garments were one-piece suits of knee length underwear made of nylon or other lightweight materials. They symbolize certain of the covenants made in the temple, and are intended to be a constant reminder of those covenants, and that the Mormon temple initiate is different from all other people who do not wear them.

I was told during my mission that the Church leaders taught that wearing garments "night and day" meant that garments were to be worn while making love, which while technically possible would take a lot of the – ahem – romance out of the event. I was also told that some members of the Church of the more rebellious variety refused to wear their garments while making love, but many did. Since then, I have met some who do. I enquired respecting this matter of my Church leaders just before our marriage, and was told that while the Church used to teach what I had been told, taking one's garments off to make love was OK, but that they must be put back on before going to sleep. Otherwise, the promise made in the temple to wear the garments "night and day" would be broken. I was so relieved that my garments could be removed for lovemaking that I did not question the ludicrous nature of the "put them back on" requirement.

I have a confession to make. Even while serving as Bishop and trying my best to be a faithful Mormon there were times when Juli and I enjoyed laying naked together after making love so much that we fell asleep that way. More amazingly, most of the time we put our garments back on before falling asleep. I can remember awakening on many occasions with a jerk and a feeling of guilt after dozing off in a pleasant, naked state with my wife in my arms, to climb out of bed and put my garments on. I am shaking my head as I type these words. The ability of the Mormon Church to control this kind of intimate behavior between married people is astonishing.

And it gets better. A letter dated June 9, 1978 from the First Presidency of the Church to various Church leaders instructs that interviews of married persons for the purposes of temple recommends etc.: "should scrupulously avoid indelicate inquiries," yet also emphasizes:

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

This meant that in determining whether a couple was worthy to be granted a temple recommend that would permit them entry into the temple either for their own purposes, or to perform ordinances for the dead, or to attend the marriage of a friend or family member, the Bishop or other person granting the recommend should not ask explicit questions about sexual practices, but should give some instruction as to what was OK and not OK in that regard, and let the member in question judge his own worthiness.

This letter was in force when Juli and I married, and we were told that it likely meant that certain sexual acts, such as oral sex or "unnatural sexual positions", were not pleasing to god. Hmmm. What does that do for a young recently virgin couple (as we both were) as they climb into bed together while trying to adjust to the novelty of sexual life? Then on January 5, 1982 the First Presidency repeated its 1978 instructions for "interviewing married persons," but added:

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

This counsel was dispensed in temple recommend interviews, in marriage preparation classes and elsewhere within the LDS community.

So, what happens when a married Mormon couple feel inclined, while in the heat of passion to do something "unnatural", whatever that means? Do you stop to debate what "unnatural" means? Try doing something that might be "unnatural" with the specter of not making it into the Celestial Kingdom hanging over you. Good love making it hard enough to achieve for a couple with the responsibilities most Mormons have chosen to carry in terms of kids, work, community service etc. without making it more difficult, and the Church does that in spades.

Let me suggest that sexual advice emanating from octogenarian Mormon leaders is not conducive to "staying in the moment" while in the bedroom. It is amazing how effective Mormon leaders have been in using concerns respecting the speculative future potential of the Celestial Kingdom to disrupt the present during one of the most intensely occupying activities known to mankind – lovemaking. If you are a Mormon, the rules of the "Kingdom of God" reach into every aspect of your life. Orthodox Jews may have it worse, and there are perhaps a few others like them, but it is hard to beat Mormonism for the many in which it invades and dominates the lives of its "faithful".

None of the other examples I could recount respecting how Mormon culture interferes with the present are as interesting as those above. But I will in any event provide a couple more.

Some time ago Juli and I visited Washington D.C. and New York on separate occasions. The NY trip included Sept. 11, 2001, but that is another story. We both try to pretend to have some culture, and so spent a fair bit of time in museums and art galleries while in both cities. It was not possible for me to view some of humanity's greatest works of art without beginning to sing "I Am a Child of God" (a Mormon children's song) in my head to avert the "impure" thoughts that came as a result of seeing the semi-clad or naked female figures that appear frequently in these works. This puritanical attitude was the direct result of what I was taught throughout my Mormon life, and it without question interfered with what should have been rare and precious moments viewing treasures I am not likely to again see in person. Flanders on the Simpson's Show is not a caricature. During the last year I have shaken this unhealthy tendency.

And for something more mundane, I can't count the number of times I have been put in the situation of having to choose between some boring, virtually useless (even from the Church's point of view) meeting with respect to a Church function such as home teaching, and one of my kids' activities such as a ball game or practice. This is a "can't win" situation. If I attend the Church meeting I am irritated by the knowledge that I am missing something more important, and if I skip the meeting to be with my kids I feel guilty because I am breaking my temple covenant to obey my Church leaders and give all of my time, talents etc. as required by the Church. In neither case does my Church oriented philosophy help me to stay in the moment and enjoy what it has to offer.

Mormonism's "Iron Rod" Paradigm

The Iron Rod Paradigm's Source – The Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon is judged by most non-Mormons (and many Mormons) to be leaden literature. Mark Twain, in "Roughing It", famously indicated that:

The Book of Mormon seems to be merely a prosy detail of imaginary history, with the Old Testament for a model; followed by a tedious plagiarism of the New Testament. The author labored to give his words and phrases to the quaint, old-fashioned sound and structure of our King James's translation of the Scriptures; and the result is a mongrel -- half modern glibness and half ancient simplicity and gravity.

And the man who many regard as Mormonism's finest early mind, B.H. Roberts, said respecting the Book of Mormon that:

In the first place there is a certain lack of perspective in the things the book relates as history that points quite clearly to an undeveloped mind as their origin. The narrative proceeds in characteristic disregard of conditions necessary to its reasonableness, as if it were a tale told by a child, with utter disregard for consistency. ...with the strong implication that they have their origin in one mind. ... [The Book of Mormon shows] evidence that it is the work of a pious youth dealing with very common place stock arguments clumsily put together... (See <http://www.lds-mormon.com/bhrob.shtml>)

While I agree with the above statements, it is my view that the Book of Mormon contains a number of memorable stories, some of which are still useful to me. Others have powerful effects that I believe are toxic and hence have rejected. One of those is foundational to current Mormon culture and is closely related to the "future mindedness" and temple covenant obedience issues discussed above. It is found in 1 Nephi 8, and relates to the book's first prophet, Lehi, presumed to have been living in Jerusalem at about 600 BCE.

The "Iron Rod" Story

Lehi dreamed of tree the fruit of which was "most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted". A "straight and narrow" path, along which ran an "iron rod" that functioned as a handrail, led to the tree and he wished his family would find that path and come to him to share the wonderful fruit he had found. Some of them did find the path and eventually came to him. Other family members, along with multitudes of others, did not wish to come to the tree. Others tried to find the path, but were confused by "mists of darkness" that arose around it. And others still found the path and followed it for a time while holding onto the iron rod, until they were confused by the mist and darkness around the path or were discouraged by the mocking of well-dressed people in a "great and spacious building" who looked down on them as they tried to make their way toward the tree, and so they let go of the iron rod and left the path.

In this story, holding onto the "iron rod" was the key for those who eventually found the sweet fruit. The rod represents obedience to the "word of God", which since god himself is not present really means obedience to the words of those who hold themselves out as his authorized representatives. If one held to that rod and followed it blindly, in spite of the mists, darkness and confusion, the mocking of the socialites in the great and spacious building, etc., she would eventually reach the tree and enjoy the fruit.

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

The central idea of the iron rod paradigm is ancient. It is found in the New Testament's "straight and narrow" way and the "camel can't pass through the eye of the needle" concepts, as well as

in mythic sources from many other cultures. It is a classic "harsh environment" metaphor. That is, life is full of danger and you must live within a narrow range of acceptable behaviors, or you will be lost in this life and will miss the wonderful rewards assumed to exist in the next. It is also an important part of the effort religious leaders make to create the monopoly they need to remain strong. That is, if I accept the iron rod idea, I will obey my religious leaders and hence will strengthen both them and the organization they lead.

The Iron Rod Paradigm's Source – Smith Family Traditions?

While this is a bit off topic, I should note the probable inspiration for the iron rod story as it appears in the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, relates the following:

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

If we are to believe Lucy Smith, the iron rod narrative was told by her husband many years before Joseph started to "translate" the Book of Mormon, and it not much of a stretch to believe that Joseph heard it in the Smith home. The only alternative theory – that Joseph Smith Senior and Lehi (the alleged Book of Mormon prophet) had virtually the same vision – is much less probable.

It is important at this juncture to remember Joseph Smith's admitted method of translation. He would put his face into the opening of an old hat at the bottom of which was the "peep stone" he used to use to hunt for buried treasure as a hired "treasure seeker". This kind of aid to inspiration was not unusual in the much more magic oriented times in which Smith lived. His right hand man for many years, Oliver Cowdery, was said to have the gift of using a "divining

rod" for water witching and other similar tasks, as well as for receiving inspiration from god. In many parts of North America in the 19th century, the line between magic, superstition and religion were not drawn as clearly as they are today.

The "golden plates", on which he claimed the Book of Mormon was written in a language related to Egyptian, were usually not with him when he did this. That is, he did not need to see the document he was translating while performing the translation. Smith would go into a semi-trance as he stared into the darkened interior of the hat at his peep stone, and he would see in the stone the words that were a "translation" of the figures he claims were on the golden plates. He would dictate those words, often with specific spellings that the stone disclosed to him, to his scribe.

Joseph Smith's Credibility

I am prepared to assume that Smith was not a conscious fraud. As evidenced by the above story and many others we have respecting his family, it seems clear that both Smith and other members of his family, and particularly his father, were spiritually oriented people who had experiences that were out of the ordinary. So assuming that Smith thought he was having some kind of extraordinary spiritual experience, it makes sense to me that while in his translation trance he would draw upon stories such as the above, possibly without even realizing that he was doing so and without even a conscious recollection of the story's source.

It accordingly appears likely that the iron rod story was not the product of an ancient prophet, but rather was drawn from Smith's 19th century surroundings and woven into his evolving mythology, of which the Book of Mormon was part. Joseph Smith was creative, charismatic and a great storyteller. It appears that he pulled together and creatively synthesized ideas from the Jewish Cabala mystic tradition, a book called "View of the Hebrews" by Solomon Spaulding that was published well before the Book of Mormon to which Smith is known to have had access, and many other 19th century sources. I found particularly interesting the fact that the notion of "Kolob" (the planet composed of fire and glass on which god dwells), Smith's cosmology and several other key ideas I once assumed to be Joseph Smith originals appear to have been drawn from "The Philosophy of a Future State" by Thomas Dick, a book Smith owned. (See "An Insider's View of Mormon Origins", Grant H. Palmer, pp. 23 – 25) Smith, as was the case with Ellen White, the founder of the Seventh Day Adventists, seems to have borrowed liberally without attributing credit from 19th century sources in order to create his revelations. The Adventists have recognized this, and have reduced their reliance on their founder's revelations as a result and are moving toward the Christian mainstream. (See "An Insider's View", p. 263.) While the leaders of the Mormon Church are also trying to become more mainstream and are de-emphasizing some of Smith's teachings, they are so far unwilling to acknowledge any recognition of the sandy nature of the foundations on which most Mormon faith has been built.

In the case of the question of whether this particular story originated as Smith said it did with a prophet in 600 BCE (more or less) or was the result of Smith's creative ability, the question is simply one of whether we can believe Smith. It has been established beyond a reasonable doubt that Smith lied in a variety of circumstances, many of them relating to his polygamous lifestyle, when he felt it was necessary to accomplish his objectives. But leaving that issue and the murky question of when dishonesty can be justified aside, what is Smith's record as a translator of ancient documents?

Smith asserted with absolute certainty his ability to translate ancient records. It has been shown, as a minimum, that he did not translate in the ordinary sense of that term, any of the records he translated that were subsequently translated by other real translators (Egyptian papyri, Kinderhook Plates, Greek Psalter, Bible – See "An Insider's View" for a summary). An interesting illustration of this point, and an explanation of its connection to reliability, comes from Smith's encounter with Henry Caswall, who had in his possession a document he believed to be a Greek Psalter, and was later confirmed to be such. He presented it to Smith, said he thought it was a Greek Psalter, and asked Smith what he thought it was. After some consideration, Smith pronounced it to be, without doubt, a dictionary of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Later, in discussion with Dr. Willard Richards and in response to Richards' assertion that, "Sometime Mr. Smith speaks as a prophet, and sometimes as a mere man", Caswall said:

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. ("An Insider's View", pp. 34 – 36)

And therein lies the problem with Joseph Smith for anyone who continues to accept him as a prophet of god. Given his history of either prevarication or innocent (but confident) declaration of falsehood, it is not wise to believe what he said on any topic unless it can be independently verified. This, of course, holds for what he said concerning the temple ceremony – that god revealed it to him, and that it was the same ceremony that was used in Solomon's temple and had been used since the beginning of time by Adam and all those who have held god's true priesthood.

The "Iron Rod" Paradigm is Out of Touch with 21st Century Western Reality

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

"Men Are that They Might Have Joy" – 2 Nephi 2:25

This is one of the ideas contained in the Book of Mormon for which I am grateful, and plan to keep. One of the unexpected miracles I experienced as I let go of the iron rod was that of becoming aware for the first time in my life of the virtually endless joys and ways in which I could experience them by which I am surrounded. I began to revel in the truths that many faith traditions and scientists have discovered, and to experiment with how those ideas might enrich my life. I discovered that the worlds of art and science were not part of the "great and spacious building" or "mists of darkness" that try to deceive me and lead me away from some supremely important path, but are rather different paths through the garden, some of which appeal to and enrich me while others leave me cold. I discovered that almost all human lives have stories woven into them that touch me deep inside, and make me more human and joyful as I understand them. Once I grasp them, these stories feel like a hitherto hidden part of me. And

while they are often so different from my own narrative that they initially disturb, they are not part of any dark mist whose purpose is to mislead and confuse. Rather, they are an essential aspect of life's tapestry whose effect (if not design) is to awaken me to more beauty and order.

My focus has changed from living a "thou shalt", future oriented life to living in the "I will" present. I now focus on my strengths – on feeding and developing them – and on how I can use them to be productive for both myself and others. This feels both good and right. However, it is taking some time to convert belief into action. That means that even though the "shalts" are largely gone, I have not yet fully come to grips with what I want to do at the mundane, day to day level, and I am sensitive to the risk we all face of spinning off into abstraction and missing real life as it passes us by. As the Zen master Soyen Shaku put it, while speculation and endless talking of abstraction has its place in Buddhism and is attractive to some:

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

I cannot adequately describe the joy I felt (and still feel as I write this) as it became clear to me that there is no iron rod to which any of us must cling. Rather, those privileged to live in this time and in countless places across the globe are in a beautiful garden through which there are many more honourable, wonderful paths than there are people.

The Iron Rod Paradigm as a Reflection of Spiritual Development

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

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

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

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

Stage three is where most adults spend most of their lives. It is characterized by conformity and strong identification with a group. People in stage three tend to be overly concerned about what other members of their group think of them, and try hard to conform to expectations. It is in

stage three that people are most likely to feel that their group's ideas and approach to life constitute the "one true way." Fowler says, interestingly, that:

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

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

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

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

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

It seems clear that the iron rod paradigm is mired in a stage three, or perhaps even stage two, kind of spirituality, and as Fowler points out, it is in the interest of institutional religions to have as many of their members as possible remain in that state. In my view, however, that is not in the best interest of the individual members. Stage five is a reasonable and healthy goal for most people. To get there, the iron rod mentality must be shed. Temple attendance and faithfulness to temple covenants are designed to keep the iron rod mentality intact. Hence, it is

my view that Mormon temple ritual presents a serious impediment to spiritual development, as Fowler and many others define it.

The Iron Rod Paradigm as a Reflection of Moral Development

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

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

An example closer to home is found in many practises related to LDS missionary work that are also clearly stage three orientated. To a significant extent, North American culture is carried on the back of LDS dogma into the lives of people worldwide, most of whom are poorly educated. The notion that the Utah way of doing things is the best way is, in my experience, impossible to disentangle from the gospel message. Many religious rites and rituals that have great value in foreign cultures but that are quite different from our own are hence thrown out because of their connection to a "false" religious tradition. The rites of Mormonism are substituted, which were developed in a different culture and often do not speak to the reality of the people receiving them. As a result, Mormonism causes the loss of great cultural inheritances. This loss results from an unjustified feeling of superiority that causes Mormons to require its converts to abandon most aspects of their culture that is connected to religious belief other than Mormonism. And we note that many important aspects of most cultures are represented by their religious belief systems. All of this is caused, primarily in my view, by Mormon dogma-induced moral myopia. The iron rod paradigm is near the foundation of this problem.

On the basis of the foregoing, I conclude that the iron rod mentality impedes moral development. As noted above, temple attendance and faithfulness to temple covenants are designed to keep the iron rod mentality intact. And so I conclude that Mormon temple ritual hinders the development of moral reasoning.

The Day-to-Day Nature of Mormon Marriage

I note that the following description is of a "faithful" LDS couple. That is, these folks take their temple covenants seriously. Many Mormons do not do this, and ironically, Mormonism works relatively well for them. Those who are most damaged by the Mormon way of life are those who really try to obey – to do what the Mormon Church tells them to do – to perform their temple covenants "with exactness" as the temple ceremony requires. The fact that these – the truly faithful – are usually those most negatively affected by Mormonism is telling. In most cases we expect that those who follow a recipe with the most care will be rewarded with the best result, or at least the result most resembling what they were trying to achieve. Within Mormonism, there is a strong argument that the opposite is true.

Mormon marriage's greatest strength and weakness are found in the degree of commitment the man and woman make to each other. This is not "til death do us part", or "we'll give it our best shot". The commitment is made "for time and all eternity". Historically, this has often meant that many faithful Mormon men and women would endure almost anything before contemplating divorce, and I have seen some marriages survive amazingly rough patches to become fine relationships. I have seen many more marriages that were extended exercises in endurance, and should probably have been ended. These tend to produce unhappy adults and children who have seen marriage at its numbing worst, and are likely repeat that pattern.

The proper roles of the Mormon man and woman within marriage are well defined. The man is ultimately responsible. As noted above, the woman is required to obey the man, as long as he is obedient to god (as interpreted by Mormon leaders from time to time, which in practice means he must obey the Mormon leaders). There was a time when this required that Mormon women permit their husbands to take second, third, etc. wives. The rules by which both the men and the women are required to live change from time to time. The constant is that the Church's leaders are those who drum the beat to which the members march. This is consistent with a religious philosophy and supporting structure formed in crisis, and then perpetuated by leaders who suffer from the human tendency of resisting any influence that would dilute their power. In one of my favorite Joseph Smith passages, he astutely described this human tendency and the manner in which it should be resisted. See Doctrine & Covenants Section 121: 34 – 46, and particularly verse 39, which says:

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.

Well put, and applicable to most of Mormonism's current leaders, regardless of their good intentions and friendly manner.

Mormon life is busy. Many more Mormon women than the national average are stay-at-home moms. Many of those who work outside the home do so under a burden of guilt, due to a series of high profile public addresses that Mormon leaders have given over the years indicating that the woman's place is in the home, in the absence of a high level of necessity. The language of some of these discourses has been strong enough to cause women to question whether their choice to work outside the home might disqualify them for life in the Celestial Kingdom. The cognitive dissonance this creates is deeply disturbing for those affected by it. Note again the correlation between those who believe and those who are controlled by their belief. A woman whose understanding of the Celestial Kingdom was metaphoric, or otherwise not literal or

strong, would not be affected to anything like the same extent by the kind of this kind of Mormon leadership disapproval as would a fully and literally believing woman.

Many Mormon men, particularly those who are their family's sole breadwinners, work longer hours than the norm. This creates added pressure on the marriage relationship.

Mormon families tend to be larger than the norm. At one time in Mormon culture, children were to an extent a resource used to work the family farm. Now they perform little meaningful work and require a great deal of education and entertainment. This places an additional time requirement on both parents, and hence puts additional strain on the marriage relationship. The programming to which the children's non-Mormon friends are treated in terms of lessons, team sport involvement, etc increases this strain. There is a natural tendency to try to make opportunities available to one's children that are not too far behind those to which their friends have access. Since most North American families have two children, it is difficult for many Mormon families to keep up to the programming pace set by non-Mormon families. Hence, Mormon parents face either the stress of resisting the temptation to keep up with the Jones' effort to educate and entertain (provide cultural opportunities for?) their kids, or that of running faster than is comfortable, and hence not seeing each other as much as they should. As a result of these pressures, Mormon family size is shrinking. But it still remains higher than average, and in Utah and other places with high concentrations of Mormons where these pressures are hence reduced, family sizes continue to be relatively large.

And then there are the Church "callings" that generally speaking both Mormon men and women hold. These are responsibilities that Mormons discharge within their congregations, such as acting as teachers of classes, and in various ecclesiastical and administrative capacities. Mormon congregations do not have paid clergy. While this kind of community service can be healthy and an important part of a balanced life, callings often require excessive amounts of time each week, and in some cases consume enormous amounts of time. As a young husband and father, with five small children and a wife whose health was unstable, I commuted over two hours to work each day, averaged between 50 and 60 hours a week in the office, and put in between 15 and 20 hours as Bishop of our congregation. I look back on that period of time now as sheer, undiluted, madness. In most cases, it is my view that Church callings place further pressure on Mormon spouses ability to find the time they need to nurture their relationship.

My calling as Bishop did one thing, however. When I was called I was just starting to catch the glimmer of questions about the Church's legitimacy. As a result of the pressure I just described, not to mention the fact that I was the leader of the herd, those questions did not surface until several years after my five year term as Bishop ended. I was anesthetized by that calling and the pressure it created in my life.

It is telling, in my view, that during the Mormon temple ceremony the men and women are separated until the conclusion of the ceremony. This is inadvertently symbolic of the life Mormons lead - the men go in one direction and the women another, with the promise that in death they will be united. Many have noted irony in that the Mormon Church makes such a big deal of family life, while requiring that many of the most faithful of its members spend little time together as families due to the combination of the burdens described above.

There is a lot of talk in the lessons taught to both the men and women in Mormon congregations with respect to the importance of treating spouses with respect, working at making a marriage satisfying, etc. A sample of that was provided above. However, this seems to me akin to the

endless discussion in communist controlled command economies about the importance of efficiency and innovation. Talk is cheap, as they say. You can talk all you want about things of this nature and nothing will happen if the real incentives are not properly aligned.

Tom and Mary: A Case Study

So what, within Mormon marriage, are the real incentives? Perhaps the best way to address this question is by way of an example.

Lets assume that Tom and Mary are a couple in their mid-thirties, married for about twelve years. They have four children. Mary is a stay a home mom. Tom is a talented junior executive or professional, who earns a good income but is away from home with his job a lot. Money is tight since they get by on Tom's income, and pay 10% of that to the Church as a tithe, and about another 2 or 3% in other donations. To make ends meet (or keep up with the Jones, depending on your point of view), Tom is more of a do-it-your-selfer than most of his non-Mormon neighbors. So, in his "spare" time, Tom is trying to landscape their home by himself, finish the basement, etc.

Because Tom and Mary are both talented, they are given relatively time consuming callings at Church. Tom has run the gamut of Scout Master, Young Mens' President, Elder's Quorum President, and has just been called into the Bishopric as a counselor. Those "in the know" have already whispered that they can see Tom as the next Bishop of the Ward. On the other hand, Mary is great with kids and the teenage girls love her. So she has spent her time in the Primary Presidency and in a variety of Young Women's callings. They both enjoy the time they spend interacting with other well intentioned, good people in the course of their Church callings, although they chafe at the amount of time this takes and particularly the number of meetings they seem to attend at which little is accomplished, and they are told the same old things over and over again.

Tom regularly brings Mary flowers, and they try to have a "date night" once a week. But Mary was recently thinking about that, and realized that it has been over a year since they went out on a date. Time just passes so quickly. And in fact, when they do get out together – usually while driving to either a Church activity or a business function – she has noted that it is hard to find things to talk about. She is coming to the sickening realization that she and Tom live in different worlds. They have little in common except their children and Church activities, and even those seem to be largely separated.

After mentioning her concerns with respect to their relationship to Tom several times and not drawing much of a response, Mary decides that she needs to do something a bit more drastic because she feels an increasing sense of panic with respect to their relationship. She has recently fully recovered from the birth of their fourth child (and has decided that it will be their last in spite of subtle pressure from family and friends to have more), and realizes that during her "baby mill" years, she was so busy coping with one infant after another, endless nursing, sleep deprivation, child care tasks, Church callings, etc. that she had not noticed that she and Tom were drifting in different directions and had less and less as time passed to do with each other. And their sex life - already difficult as a result of her almost constant pregnancy, nursing at night and exhaustion - was going from bad to worse. She feels that their relationship falls far short of the dreams they both had for their marriage, and she has become increasingly determined to steer them back toward that ideal.

When she addresses these issues with Tom, and tells him tearfully of the depth of her concerns, he is stunned. As far as he is concerned, everything is going great. They have a nice home; he is providing all that their family needs; Mary is lucky to be able to stay at home with the kids as she always wanted; they have great friends at Church; they are both faithful to each other and their "temple covenants", etc. And so he is shocked at how strongly Mary feels about their situation, and quickly agrees to try to remedy things.

Over the course of the next year, Tom and Mary try off and on to regain their sense of intimacy, but if it is not one thing it is another that gets in the way. Tom's work and Church responsibilities consume more time that he has to give, and often when he gets home he is too tired to be emotionally available to Mary, and she is exhausted by her own routine. They both try, but there is only so much energy to go around. And the yard and basement are still not finished after five years of Tom's chipping away at them. Mary, finally, takes up the tools and starts on the job in the basement herself, with some comic and other productive results.

Mary, after giving numerous warning signals, finally provides Tom with an ultimatum - either they get their marriage "back on track" within the next year, or she will look seriously at moving out. She tells him that she is drowning from an emotional point of view. Tom is stunned. How could she!! He loves her. He is faithful to her. He is a good father and faithful priesthood holder. Etc.

The next Sunday, Tom and Mary are seated across from their Bishop in his office. He is a good, honest and sincere man, with no training in counseling or anything else relevant to the task he now faces. But, he is a priesthood leader and hence all parties to the meeting believe that he has the right to the inspiration required to guide Tom and Mary.

After hearing their story, the Bishop gently chides Mary. Tom is a good man, he says. He is a faithful man. Surely Mary does not want to throw away the wonderful life they have together, does she? What of her temple covenants? Is Mary depressed? Perhaps she should see a doctor about that. He knows of a number of other women in the Ward who have started taking Prozac during the past few years, and have seemed to cope with the challenges of "motherhood" much better after that.

This example has gone far enough. Where do your sympathies lie? Was Mary justified in giving Tom her ultimatum? What did you think of the Bishop's advice?

Most faithful Mormons would think that Mary has reacted too hastily, and that the Bishop's advice was bang on. Keeping the family together is more important than "happiness", whatever that means. And a faithful priesthood holder like Tom is a rare commodity - one that should be treasured instead of thrown away.

But the most important question is the one that almost always goes unasked - should Tom and Mary jettison their Church responsibilities, in whole or in part, in order to meet Mary's needs? One Church leader described to me a meeting in which a particular man's name was brought up as a candidate for a Stake President calling. "No", said one of the other leaders present. "He can't do it. His wife is too high maintenance." Those words were spoken both to me and in the meeting in question in a way that conveyed the defective nature of that kind of woman. She lacks strength, faith, vision, etc. This pejorative term - high maintenance wife - was used to refer to a woman who insisted upon having what most people would regard as a normal family life; the kind of life that is advertised with regard to Mormon marriage, where husband and wife

enjoy each other's company across a wide range of activities; are "best friends", "soul mates", etc. The group lamented that this fine Priesthood leader had been saddled with such a burdensome wife. This answers the question above respecting the balance between Mary's desire for a particular kind of family life and the time required by the Church. Church responsibilities will almost always win that tug of war.

This case study describes innumerable Mormon marriages, except for Mary's ultimatum. Most Mormons who observed Tom and Mary from even a relatively close distance, would consider them to be the ideal "Celestial" couple. That is, they are apparently on the road to the Celestial Kingdom. That judgment would have nothing to do with how well Tom and Mary's marriage was working in fact. It would, rather, be based on Tom and Mary's outward observance of the requirements of Mormon life. Stay at home mom. Lots of kids. Responsible callings in the Ward. Etc. The relationship itself can be an empty shell, and as far as everyone is concerned, the marriage is still "Celestial".

In fact, it can be worse than that. Tom could be authoritarian to the point of being emotionally abusive to Mary. He could be destroying her self-esteem, but as long as they can continue to go through the external motions, perhaps with the help of Prozac, their marriage will be considered to be on its way to Celestial status. And despite all of the high sounding talk during lessons at Church about "date night" and the importance of being kind to our spouses, the reality of Mormon marriage is this - as long as you go through the motions described above, you will garner the respect of the community both informally by way of how friends and family treat you, and formally through being given increasing responsibility within the Church hierarchy. And you will both feel and be perceived by others to be "Celestial Kingdom bound". So if you suggest that you will leave the relationship if it cannot be changed to provide what you feel is essential from an emotional point of view, you will be unlikely to receive community support. I can think of a number of men and women who have left Mormon marriages for precisely this reason, and in each case the community excoriated them. They were described as having "gone nuts", or having sinned in some terrible way and so "lost the Spirit" and "went off the deep end", etc.

And worst of all, if you suggest that you need to stop going through some of the motions required for a Celestial marriage, such as giving large amounts of your time to the Church, you will also bear the community's disapproval and be considered to have put your Celestial marriage in jeopardy. This will be the case even if the tenor of your marriage relationship has in fact been dramatically improved by your actions in that regard. This, more than anything else, shows the dysfunctional nature of the Mormon marriage concept.

Paradox Galore

The case study above is full of paradox. Contrast the reality of many Mormon marriages with the ideal young Mormons bring into marriage. That idea never fully dies in most cases. It tortures those who recall it. What happened to that dream? Why can't they achieve it? Are they deficient in some way? It must be their fault, because it can't be god's or the Church's. Depression often follows.

As noted above, it is well known that Utah leads the US in per capita consumption of Prozac. I am confident that things of this sort, and Mary's position in the above case study, are largely responsible for that.

Note that the behaviors required for a Celestial marriage benefit the Church as an organization, and in many cases harm individual members of the Church. That is, the idea of Celestial marriage as a wonderful blessing available to individuals is in fact used by the Church to create fear, and to control its membership so as to make them more obedient to Church dictates, and most of all, to continue to dedicate resources of different kinds to the Church in obedience to the temple covenants referred to above. Were Church leaders to counsel Mary, in private and all men and women in public, to first and foremost make sure that their marriages satisfy the emotional needs of each spouse, this would result in a massive shift of resources away from Church projects toward individual and family interests. Hence, I doubt that this kind of advice will be forthcoming from the Church.

The Unfaithful Spouse

Lets change the above case study in one particular to test my theory that Celestial marriage is about controlling member behaviour instead of making happy marriages.

Let's assume that Tom comes home one day and tells Mary that he has discovered that the Church is not what it says it is, and that he no longer wishes to participate. Assume further that he changes at the same time to correct most of the things that have been troubling Mary. That is, he starts to devote much more time to her and their children. He even stops working so hard. In short, Mary is much happier with her situation at home, but deeply troubled because Tom has rejected the Church and hence Celestial marriage.

Several of Mary's friends counsel her to leave Tom, because he is going to prevent her and worst of all, her children, from making it to the Celestial Kingdom. The Bishop does not go that far in his counsel, but expresses grave concern for her and her children's eternal salvation. And Mary is aware that Joseph Smith polygamously married the wives of men who were less than faithful (while the women in question were still married to their less than fully obedient husbands). She also remembers Church counsel throughout the years, supported by New Testament scripture, that clearly indicates that she should "pluck out the eye" and "cut off the hand" that offend her, etc.

So Mary is faced with a situation that could give her the emotionally available, supportive, loving spouse she wants, but at the cost of her "Celestial" marriage. What should she choose? And what would the Church tell her, formally and informally, to choose?

In my experience, the answer to these questions is clear. Mary has received direct and indirect counsel from the Church community that she leave Tom. My wife received more or less the same message with respect to me, and I have seen the same occur on many other occasions. That is, Celestial marriage is more important than the quality of the spousal relationship. The speculative, metaphysical non-reality of "Celestial marriage" is more important than the only marriage reality of which we can be sure – that existing here and now between the spouses in question. If they are not going to obey together, then the obedient one is justified in leaving leave the disobedient one in order to prevent spread of whatever malady is causing disobedience. While not all (or even a majority of Mormons) would expressly counsel someone in Mary's position to leave her husband, a large majority would be understanding and supportive were Mary to do so.

Again, we see the emphasis of Celestial marriage. It is designed to strengthen the Church as an organization, not to create happy marriage relationships.

My Experience with a Mormon Temple Marriage

If you had asked me whether I was happy with my Mormon lot in life at any time up to a little over a year ago, I would have answered enthusiastically "yes!" with perhaps a few small reservations. No other answer is acceptable if you are a faithful, Celestial Kingdom bound, Mormon. And this would not have been a forced answer. I believed it. But I suspect that most Hutterites, Amish, Taliban etc. would provide a similar answer respecting their degree of life satisfaction. The message here is the more controlled the environment in which a person lives, the less credence we should likely give to what they tell us.

Underneath my mandated happiness I felt a deep sadness, and an increasing feeling that I was somehow trapped. I was so busy that I hardly had time to draw breath, and at times when I had the chance to relax with my family I was not able to do that. I would find myself quickly bored, or irritable, and would make up an excuse to go out to do something. These excuses often had something to do with a Church responsibility. But once I spent an entire Saturday in the rain working on a landscaping project in our backyard because I could not stand to be in the house with my wife and our small children. I told myself that I was "overstimulated" and that I just needed to slow down. But somehow I could not. I was on a treadmill that was moving too fast. And when I tried to rest the thought of the million things that I "needed" to do respecting my Church and other responsibilities would not let me be in peace. While writing this essay, I have finally determined why this was the case.

In its effort to maintain control over its members, the Mormon Church creates the perception that it (and its members on its behalf) is at the forefront of an important and desperate fight for the souls of mankind. Members who buy into this idea are rightly terrified by the powerful forces the "Adversary" has arrayed on his side of the battlefield. There are those who teach evolution and sex education in the schools and are controlling the minds of our children. There are those who peddle drugs and alcohol, the latter through clever media campaigns and the former through peer pressure at school. There is the endless sexual innuendo of our culture, media, daily discourse, etc. And there is much more. Gordon Hinckley, the current president of the Church, has recently referred to the "cascading avalanche of evil" that is all around us. The whole world is out to corrupt us. Satan's influence is everywhere. And the only way to resist is to retreat into the confines of constant Church activity, scripture reading, prayer etc. in order to stay on track toward the Celestial Kingdom. I cannot count the number of times I have heard Church members say something to the effect that, "I don't know what would have happened to me if I was not a member of this Church!", and then proceed to speculate about possible drug abuse, divorce, and other sources of unhappiness from which the Church is perceived to provide protection.

And so the Mormon Church creates lots of problems for its members, and then provides a comprehensive set of solutions. This starts with the definition of the Celestial Kingdom, and the belief engendered in the Mormon faithful that this is a wonderful place – so wonderful that almost any price is worth paying in order to live there after death. The challenge this poses is how one can live so as to get into the Celestial Kingdom. So, a lengthy set of rules is laid out with which one must comply in order to reach the Celestial Kingdom, and these include obeying Church leaders in the fashion described above. This complicates the first problem, and puts the Church in the role of both law-maker and judge. I note as an aside that a keystone of democratic society is the separation of the legislative and judicial branches of government. When these two functions are performed by the same imperfect human beings, bad things almost always happen. And so it is with the Church.

As a result of the foregoing, most members of the Church feel that without the Church's help, they are not likely to navigate life's trials successfully enough to make it to the Celestial Kingdom. This makes them feel deeply grateful for the many protective mechanisms provided by the Mormon Church, despite the fact that these tend to isolate them from their non-Mormon peers (who are viewed to a greater or lesser extent as the dangerous "other"), and many seemingly pleasurable aspects of life that can distract the faithful from their task of getting to the Celestial Kingdom, and hence are also viewed as dangerous or evil.

Much of the happiness I felt as a Mormon was counterfeit. I felt something like happiness far too often as a result of doing things that assuaged the fear I felt about not making it to the Celestial Kingdom. For example, after spending time with one of my children I would feel good about having taught them something designed to make them believe that the Church performed a crucial role in their lives. I felt the same after being with the young people at Church for whom I was responsible for years. Happiness, for me, was defined largely as doing anything that made me or other people more likely to remain faithful to the Church. It was that simple, and shallow. Life, of course, had other pleasures. But what I have just described dominated the agenda. As a result of my focus on that issue, I often missed the many simple beauties and wonders my moments with other human beings and the world around me had to offer.

It is my view that this tendency runs through the Church from top to bottom. One might say that the Church does a great job of keeping people busy and connected to each other. There are endless meetings that give the perceptions that something is being accomplished, even though on even cursory examination shows that is often not the case. There are also many legitimate opportunities to interact with other people and create friendships. That is good. However, when the substance of what Mormons do when they get together is considered, a different picture emerges. Most of the time Mormons spend together is designed to allow them to convince each other that the Mormon Church is indispensable to their happiness. That is, not much real humanitarian service is performed. Mostly, people just get together and tell each other that "The Church is True" in various ways, some explicit and many implicit, over and over again. Sometimes there is a little Scouting or some other youth activity thrown in, or if adults are gathering there might a few things of interest to them, but in the end the purpose of the meeting is to convince or remind those in attendance that "The Church is True". And the success of such activities is measure on the basis of how many people come to subsequent activities, each of which have the same purpose. Again, we come back to the illuminating idea that fundamentalist religious organizations are largely about creating the perception in their membership that they have something so special to offer that the membership cannot safely go elsewhere.

The upshot of this way of looking at life is twofold. First, we end up viewing the present moment as the battlefield within which the forces of god and Satan fight over the souls of man, and in particular, our souls and those of our children and other loved ones. Hence, the present is not to be enjoyed. It is most of all a place of danger, and we need the Church's protection as we cautiously make our way through it. This approach to life is closely connected to the impulse all religions display toward creating a monopoly for the services they offer. If we feel threatened enough, and believe that the community created by the Church has the power to protect us, we will continue to buy what the Church is selling. It is also part of the future mindedness problem described above. Mormons, ironically, spend their present trying to secure a future state – that of the Celestial Kingdom. Octavio Paz hit the nail on the head. The use of the present to obsessively build something for the future creates a life in prison.

Second, we perceive ourselves as being on god's side fighting against Satan's forces. This creates a feeling of great solidarity among those who are on the same side. Fear and desire are the two most powerful forces that can be exploited to create cohesive groups. Mormons fear the Adversary's power, and are taught to see it in all manner of influences in the world around them so as to persuade them to band together. And they desire to be with their families in the Celestial Kingdom, while fearing that they may not be obedient enough to obtain that blessing. This also has the effect of strengthening their desire to remain with the group and continue to do what the group does.

As a result of these two tendencies, it was difficult for me as Mormon to enjoy any moment as it passed unless I was focused intently on something that had meaning for me in the context of making progress toward the Celestial Kingdom. I felt guilty about almost everything else, and in fact for many years stopped playing the sports I loved because I could not justify the use of my time in that way. And then I would be faced with the irony of finally having some time to spend with my family, which is what this was supposed to be all about if you believe Mormon theology, and could not bring myself to be with them in the present. I could not sit still long enough to enjoy the very thing my life was supposedly designed to enable precisely because it was in the present, and I had been long trained to only use the present to prepare for the future. The only way I could enjoy my family in those days was by speculating about how great it would be to enjoy their company in the Celestial Kingdom IF (there comes the fear again) when we could all get there. I was barred from the present.

During the day that I worked furiously and confusedly in the rain while my family sat inside wondering what was the matter with me, the penny started to drop. I knew that something was not right either with me, or with something that was influencing me. But it took years for the concerns that I then felt to work their way close enough to the surface for me to hear what they had to say.

The Benefits of Uncertainty and Necessity

The degree of commitment most Mormons feel toward the marriage covenant is a good thing. But as is the case with most good things, it has some untoward consequences. One of those is the tendency it creates to hang on to something that would be best jettisoned from all parties' point of view.

I mentioned above the way in which command economies work in communist countries. They are monopolies. They are insulated from competitive forces, and for a time many economic theorists believed that they would prove much more efficient than the wasteful methods used by market economies as they seem to stumble and lurch forward.

One of the blind but somehow ingenious forces that drives many things that are fundamental to our lives, from evolution to market economies, is necessity. So not surprisingly, it seems that there is a strong streak in human nature that causes us to do only what is required. And as soon as we become convinced that we need to do more than we currently are, amazing things happen from a creativity and efficiency point of view. By way of example, several years ago I became involved with a small company that produces telephone poles. The plant manager, a very experienced man, assured me that the plant's capacity was 15,000 poles per year. For years it had so been. Without significant additional capital investment, that plant last year produced 24,000 poles and this year is expected to produce over 30,000. Necessity has opened minds to all kinds of options that had not previously been considered. This story is

replayed endlessly throughout the market economy, as well as in many aspects of human nature, cultural development, athletics, biological and organizational evolution, etc. Necessity is an almost magical force.

Celestial marriage is much more like the command economy than the market economy. There is lots of talk about creativity etc., but when push comes to shove the Mormon community does not justify leaving a marriage unless something defined as really bad has been done. That is, the prospect of a marriage ending through divorce, and being justified by the relevant community, creates the kind of necessity that will in many cases modify behaviour in ways that talk about being a better spouse will not. So we should examine where the "necessity" line is currently drawn with respect to Mormon marriage.

The current thought respecting Mormon marriage is that infidelity is enough to justify divorce, as is physical or extreme emotional abuse, or apostasy from the Mormon Church. But decades of unhappiness due to emotional absenteeism? That is not enough. Get some Prozac. Hence, many Mormon marriages become exercises in hanging on, and staying busy with all of the things Mormonism offers and encourages in that regard, such as temple attendance. Many Mormon spouses do not feel a need to direct their energy into meeting each other's emotional requirements, let alone trying to make life the wonder it could be. However, due to the requirements of Mormon life as set out above, a great need is felt to direct energy toward a multitude of tasks determined by, and for the benefit of, the Mormon Church. It is the faithfulness with which these tasks are performed that is perceived to have the most direct relevance to one's qualification for the Celestial Kingdom, and hence for Celestial marriage. The obedience to the Church tail, hence, ends up wagging the relationship dog.

An Alternative Approach

I long ago gave up trying to reform the Church, and hence will not purport here to suggest how the Church should proceed with regard to marriage. However, I have determined that from now on my approach to marriage will differ from what my Mormon upbringing gave to me. What follows is the kind of thing I wish I had been taught about marriage, and is what I intend to use both to guide my own conduct and to teach my children:

Marriage is one of the highest states available to human kind. I hope that it will last past death, but most importantly I believe that it is through the perfection of the union of two people that some of life's highest and most ennobling satisfactions can be found. Joseph Campbell refers to this as the reunification of the eternal or primordial whole. I hope you are the kind of person for whom this is true, but recognize that this may not be the case. If it is not, I know little enough of the path on which you walk that I have nothing more to say to you respecting this matter, other than I love you and wish you well.

Given the potential importance of marriage, great care and thought should be given to choosing your partner. In most cases, this is a process that can only be performed properly over a period of years as you come to know the innermost parts of another's life in an attempt to discern the whole you wish to create together, and know the faithfulness of each to the other.

If you are like me and most of the people I know, building up your partner is one of the most important tasks of your life. Religious organizations may provide you with

resources both in terms of information and chances to participate in activities that may help you along this path. There are many other sources of these things as well, many of them better thought out and more useful than those provided by the religious organizations with which I am familiar. Remember that you get what you pay for in almost all cases, and there are many ways in which you may end up paying.

Understand that marriage is first and foremost a privilege and an opportunity. Hence, if you do not devote substantial resources each week to making your marriage healthy, you may fail to meet your partner's and your needs. If that goes on for long enough, you will have failed to create the only kind of marriage worth having. In that case, either you or your partner would be justified in terminating your marriage. The same rules apply to both partners.

No religious or any other organization has the right or the ability to arbitrate who is wrong when one of you decides that your marriage is not working. All such organizations should counsel is that marriage is of great importance, and that you should turn over every stone you can find in search of a solution before walking away. I counsel the same. The period of trying to find a solution before leaving this relationship should be measured in almost all cases in terms of years, rather than weeks or months. But if after having done your best in this regard you find that your marriage still does not work for you, walk away.

And finally and most importantly, you should let nothing get in the way of the discharge of your primary responsibility to your spouse. Not work. Not your children. Not your perceived duty to any organization. Nothing should be permitted to get in your way in this regard. If you both act this way, life will be sweet. However, for periods of time (some of them probably long) only one or neither of you likely will. These will test your resolve, and the manner in which you deal with them will largely determine your happiness.

I suggest that advice of this type coupled with community behaviour supportive of it would orientate couples toward the nature of their relationship. Were the Church to proffer this advice, it would redirect massive amounts of energy away from the Church and toward individual and family activities. For this reason alone it is highly unlikely in my view that the Church will go this route.

Lest I be accused of counseling narcissism, I note the primary directional flow of energy the above advice requires. My first priority is to build up my spouse. However, if my own needs are not being met, at some point that fact will register with me and I should deal with it instead of suppressing it.

And I finally note that in my view, the above conception of marriage applies to all human kind, not only those inclined toward heterosexual coupling. That is, if one of my children is gay or lesbian, I would provide him or her with precisely the advice outlined above. And whether the partnership I refer to as marriage is sanctioned by the state or not is of less consequence from my point of view than the nature of the relationship itself.

Conclusion

And so we return to our original questions. What kind of marriage is required of those who aspire to live forever in Mormonism's Celestial Kingdom? How desirable is the lifestyle that goes with that type of marriage? And in the end, what price is paid for speculative Celestial rewards, and is that price worth paying?

Mormon Celestial marriage, as it now stands, is much more about strengthening the Mormon Church than it is about creating happy marriages and strong individuals. This is a shame since there are some rare, if not unique, ideas associated with the institution of marriage as interpreted by Mormons that could be used to foster the kind of high quality marital relationship that Celestial marriage is assumed by many to now represent. And in my view, the price to be paid in terms of missing this life's joys in order to be obedient to Mormonism's temple covenants is far higher than is warranted by the chance that the promised Celestial blessings are obtainable. I should add that many joys Mormons miss are, ironically, precisely those advertised by the Church as reasons for membership, such as enjoying time and activities with spouse and other family members.

As is the case with many aspects of Mormonism, as far as Celestial marriage is concerned, Mormon talk and walk bear little relationship to each other. The reality of Celestial marriage is as far from its theory as is the Church's constant preaching of honesty distant from its long-standing policy of dishonestly telling its own history. And faithful Mormons can no more be counted on to give an accurate account of their experience than faithful Taliban or Hutterites. To find out what is going on, both faithful Mormons and those interested in understanding them must find ways to get outside the world that has been constructed within Mormonism. This is hard to do, and I feel most fortunate to have been able to do it to the extent I have.

Mormon representations, through the media, missionaries, to each other, etc., about the life that should be expected as a result of Mormon temple marriage are classic Madison Avenue marketing, or worse – they promise what cannot possibly be delivered. And at least when we succumb to our human tendency to believe the impossible and buy cosmetics that promise super model looks or golf clubs that promise Tiger's swing, reality soon sets in and we realize that we are short a little money and long some experience. Mormonism's promises are not falsifiable in this way. When does one find out that paying tithing and spending most of one's discretionary time on Church matters instead of with family or doing other things, does or does not get one into the Celestial Kingdom? Hence, those who truly believe usually stay in the harness until death, at which time the game is over. And while harnessed they often have the dim awareness that something is not quite right, but cannot put their finger on what bothers them in this regard.

As noted at the outset, the purpose of this essay was to frame Mormon experience so as to help those who have nagging (or not so nagging) doubts respecting the nature of their Mormon experience put their finger on what is wrong. I hope I have been successful in that regard. In writing this, I am trying to repay the debt I owe to others who, in various ways, helped me to "wake up". For those who have read this far and are interested in Mormonism for other reasons, I hope you have found something useful here as well.

