

McLue's

November 10, 2002

Dear Dave:

This is one of a series of tough letters I have had to write in the last little while.

As you may have heard by now, I am in the process of changing in fundamental ways the manner in which our religious beliefs operate in my life. Since word of my "apostasy" is circulating quickly, as information of this nature tends to do, I thought it important that I write to you so that you would know what is going on, and why.

I understand that this will be upsetting for you and other members of our family, and I regret that. I hope that what I am sending to you will provide enough context for what I am doing that you will be able to understand me. I do not ask that you agree with me, and in fact expect that few if any of the members of my family will. However, I wish to be understood, and believe that unless I am it will be difficult for us to maintain the kind of respectful, loving relationship that I hope to be able to continue to have with you and your family. Hence, I have gone to the trouble of committing to writing a fairly full summary of my experience to date, and a fair bit of the reasoning/spiritual discernment process I have been through.

I will leave it to you to decide how much, and how, you wish to share things with the members of your family. I also recognize that what I have written has become quite a volume and that it may take quite some time for you to go through it. I also accept that you may wish not to consider some of the information contained in this document because you know that you will find it upsetting. If that is your decision, I am OK with that, but fear that lack of understanding may make it difficult in that case for our relationship to continue as it has been. I hope you will find the energy to try to understand why I have done what I have.

There is no easy way to do this, so I will plunge right in. The bottom line is this: Many of the important things you and I have been taught about our Church and the gospel are in my view false – things like, for example, the Book of Mormon is a real history. I believe that book to contain great truths and to be tremendously important, but it is not real history. It is not what it has been held out to us to be. The Book of Abraham and the Book of Moses are in the same position, in my view. This means that Joseph Smith did not translate any of these books from ancient records. He may have thought he was translating, but he was doing something else. I believe he received significant divinely inspired truths in the course of writing the above books, and that he wrote them in a way that indicates something well beyond the norm was in operation. I believe that they should play an important role in helping us to understand God and find him in our lives.

More troubling than the concerns I have with Joseph's role as a translator is the fact that the Church systematically suppresses truthful information respecting our own history,

how our doctrines have developed and other useful and relevant things that could help us to understand how God relates to us and the Church's leaders. This policy is designed to minimize the questions we ask, and our inclination to disobey the Church's leaders after finding out how often they have been wrong about important things in the past. The position that the Church has adopted is, essentially, this: The Church routinely withholds truths that might incline us to do things that the Church is sure would not be good for us, thereby manipulating us toward doing the things it thinks are right. Whose plan does that sound like?

Before getting into how I came to believe as I now do, I want to make sure you understand the following points:

- I want to assure you that I love you unconditionally. You will react to what I am doing as you feel you should, and I will do my best to accept that. All I ask is that you try to understand my point of view, and allow me to do what I think is right.
- Nothing I have discovered has caused me to question the importance or the validity of the promises I made to Juli when we married. I remain faithful to her, and intend to continue to do so. In fact, the process of discovering how faith and God should function in my life is making me more sensitive and understanding with respect to the diversity of behaviour we have in our family. My belief in the eternal nature of family and other relationships remains intact, and is stronger than ever.
- The Church teaches that the loss of testimony is usually due to sin, and some people will leap to that conclusion in my case. I want you to know that my only "sin", if it can be called that, is too much praying, thinking and reading.
- The other issue I have heard a lot about lately is the tendency of "intellectuals" to rely upon learning instead of God, and so to "think their way out of the Church". All I can say in response to that charge is that I have tried as hard as I can to approach these critically important issues using all of the same tools that have served me well in spiritual matters throughout my adult life, and that I am experiencing the same feelings of peace as I walk down this path that I have learned to associate with God's spirit.
- I am still stunned by the efficacy of the conditioning process the Church uses. I don't believe that there is any conscious attempt on the Church's part to brainwash us. But the effect of the process the Church uses is similar to brainwashing. Later in this letter and in the attached Appendix, I go through in some detail how that process works. I was, and you are now, in a position where it is extremely difficult to assess in an objective, accurate fashion certain types of information.
- I believe that there is a God and that spiritual experience is real. That is, I do not question the legitimacy or the reality of the experiences both you and I have had with the Book of Mormon or God himself. These are real and important experiences. The news for me is that this type of experience is every bit as real, valid, divine etc. in many cases involving Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Australian Bushmen, etc.

- Much of what the Church has to offer us is still, in my view, of great importance. I still accept that Joseph Smith and those who came after him as leaders of the Church are prophetic, inspired men in some aspects of their lives. I want to keep as much of their teachings and our tradition in my life as possible, while protecting myself and my family from what I have come to understand are some truly toxic aspects of Church culture that are passed off as part of the Gospel.

Having assured you (I hope) that I am proceeding in a thoughtful manner with this difficult process, I will come back to an overview of some of the important conclusions I have reached, and how I reached them. The best way for me to start to do that is to tell you a little about Leonard Arrington, the only professional historian to have served as the official historian of the Church, and someone for whom I have immense respect.

- Leonard Arrington had some interesting things to say respecting the issues with which I have been struggling. He, by the way, was appointed Church Historian because, in the words of Howard Hunter, the Church was at the time (1972) finally mature enough to tell the truth with regard to its history. About ten years later, he and his staff were removed from the Church Historian's office because the Church was in fact not ready to have its story told in the way professional historians are compelled by academic standards of objectivity and honesty to tell it. If you go to Church Headquarters today and look at the wall on which pictures of all of the Church's official historians hang, you will not find Arrington's. It is fair to say that he had a trying time during his experience with the Church's leaders as he tried to tell its story in a fashion that would be acceptable by academic standards of truthful scholarship, and would not unduly offend the Church's sensitivity to having the more colourful parts of its past made public.
- Despite the difficulties Arrington experienced at the hands of Church officials and all he knew about the troubling aspects of the Church's history, he remained a faithful member to the end of his days. I recently read his biography, called "Adventures of a Church Historian". One would not think the life of a church historian would be that interesting. His was.
- Arrington read more of the Church's original documents, diaries and private correspondence of general authorities and other significant figures in Church history, etc. than all but a handful of people, and wrote more frankly about what he read than any of them up to his time. He said that there was nothing in what he read that threatened his testimony, and much that illustrated to his satisfaction that God's hand was often involved in what the Church and its leaders did. There is no question in my mind that he was aware of all of the troubling facts outlined in the attached Appendix, and many more facts that I and most other Church members would find troubling. His insightful comment, addressing this very point, was that truth is never threatening to real testimony, but is often threatening to testimony built on false assumptions or expectations. His biography, interestingly, does not contain his testimony but I found it published elsewhere in an essay he wrote to address spiritual matters. It is clear from his testimony that he had a full understanding of the Church leaders' error prone nature, and that he was able to accept that God can and does use people of like that as his conduits for divine inspiration.

- Arrington's testimony also makes it clear to me that he did not necessarily believe that the Book of Mormon and other latter day scriptures, the Church's official version of the First Vision, etc. were all exactly what the Church says they are. His comment relevant to this point is that he determined relatively early that whether certain significant things in his life were literally true or mythically true was not important. That is, he did not need to believe that the Book of Mormon was literally true to accept it as important scripture, just as is the case with the Bible. He chose his words carefully. His position as a faithful member of the Church and a leading academic required him to do that in order to maintain his good standing in both camps. I am virtually certain, however, that this is what he meant. This explains why his testimony was not threatened by the information he came across.
- The biggest problem I have with the Church is that it is responsible for most of what creates the gap between what Arrington calls a real testimony (the kind of testimony he had) and the kind of testimony most Church members (including me) have been taught to have. As a young man, Arrington studied in Church sponsored Institute of Religion programs at the University of Idaho when the writings of Lowell Bennion formed at least some of the basis for the course of study. Bennion was later dismissed by the Church Education System because his writing and teaching addressed the very things I am writing to you about in a much more direct fashion that the Church was prepared to allow. The manuals he created and used for that purpose were removed from the CES system, and replaced by the kind of misleading, half-truth stuff you and I have been fed. Arrington was encouraged by his course of study to read widely respecting science, history, philosophy, etc., and his worldview and how the Church fit into it was formed in that way. That is exactly what I have been going through during the past six months, having been effectively prevented from doing so back when I was a university student (more on that below) by the way in which my obedience to Church leaders directed my studies.
- The attached Appendix deals at some length with the idea of "higher criticism" in scripture studies relating to the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Higher criticism, by the way, is not a pejorative term. It is just careful reading, and reading in the context of historical research regarding the social customs of the times during which the book was written, in light of translations of the book other than the one we usually use, etc.
- Higher criticism has proved to the satisfaction of most academics (and me) things like the first five books of the Bible were not written by any one man (least of all a man named Moses), but rather were written by at least four different persons (more likely four different groups of people) who lived in different periods of time and had quite different beliefs. This is the only way to make sense out of the conflicting styles and ideologies different parts of those books use. It also shows virtually beyond doubt that Paul did not write many of the letters attributed to him in the New Testament. Many of those were likely written long after Paul died by people who wanted to use his name to promote their own ideas. Whether the ideas attributed to Paul are inspired or not is another question. They may well be. Many people (including me) have found inspiration in them.

- Higher criticism has made it difficult for anyone who has seriously considered it to accept the Bible for what it was represented to be for centuries by well-intentioned people. These very things are what led Joseph Smith to declare that we believe the Bible to be the word of God, but only so far as it is translated correctly. Nonetheless, the Bible is an important source of truth and inspiration as we try to decide how to live our lives.
- Some of the most respected thinkers the Church has produced, including people like BH Roberts and John Widstoe, have stated that our latter day scripture must submit to all of the forms of higher criticism that mankind can muster. While I have not found record of this, I strongly suspect Joseph Smith believed the same thing. These men believed that the Book of Mormon, etc. would pass any higher criticism tests that could be devised for them. As the Appendix notes in detail, the Book of Mormon has not passed these tests. As they did with the Bible, they show the Book of Mormon to be something other than an ancient record written by the people who are purported to be its authors and then translated and delivered to us in English. I am sure that Arrington understood that and was not bothered by it.
- I came to most of the views expressed in this letter and the attached Appendix before I found the things in Arrington's writings that I have summarized above. However, I take significant comfort from the fact that I am in his company with regard to many of the conclusions I have reached.

One might say that having decided that it is OK for Joseph Smith's main writings to be mythically true, as opposed to being literally true, we can just continue to worship and believe as we have in the past. It might even be possible to draw that conclusion from a review of Arrington's life and consideration of his testimony. I don't, however, think that is correct. As the Appendix explains in detail, there is a huge difference in the worldview that results from the Church's insistence that it is the "one true and only church of God", the degree of obedience required by our Church leaders, and literally interpreting scripture, as they largely require we do, instead of mythically or metaphorically interpreting it. One example of this will suffice for the moment.

- A literal interpretation of the apocalypse followed by the millennium causes us to believe that the world is under the control of evil forces that will cause it to become more and more wicked until it is destroyed, probably sometime in the near future, and then the millennium will be ushered in. Therefore, we are inclined not to participate in most things outside of our Church community, despite some encouragement from the Church to do so. We have become exceptionally inward looking and fearful of what is around us. As the Appendix notes, I think this does profoundly bad things for us.
- A mythical interpretation of the same concepts could open us to a wonderful world. We could see the world as it is - full of good things, and getting better at a surprisingly rapid rate, despite pockets of evil that will always be with us. We would see the possibility of the good parts of our life ending in apocalyptic evil as being largely a personal issue - one that can be avoided by the way in which we choose to live our lives. The arrival of a metaphoric, personal millennium could

likewise be determined by our personal behaviour. This metaphoric understanding of scriptural reality could cause us to see life through a lens that teaches us not to hide our light under a bushel, to act as the leaven of the world, etc. We would be more likely to embrace the good around us, and play a role in making it even better.

- Which one of these visions of life is more attractive to you? I have felt the first one being cast out, and the second one taking root in my life in fascinating ways during the past few months.
- Bearing in mind the manner in which the Church and other fundamentalist religious organizations seek to control their members in so many ways, it is not hard to make sense out of the literal interpretation of scripture. This interpretation, in my friend Drew Galbraith's words, "scares us straight". That is, the belief that the apocalypse and second coming are imminent is terrifying, and it makes us more willing to do what our leaders tell us to do in preparation for that event. The same could be said regarding many other aspects of the literal interpretation of scripture.
- During the past few months I have come to appreciate more than ever before how important my religious beliefs are. They create the lens through which I see all of life; they largely determine my worldview. The better I understand the worldview the Church has given me, and possible alternative worldviews, the more certain I am that I have been severely short changed. My Church experience has not done for me what Leonard Arrington's did for him. This is largely the result of the Church's increasingly control oriented nature as it gets larger and more complex, and as its leaders fight a losing battle against things like the Internet that make information available to members and investigators, and cause them to ask more troubling questions.

I note that all organizations that use information control to maintain power have been dealt a heavy blow by the Internet. The Church is in that group. The same forces that toppled communist regimes around the world, and forced many others to change "voluntarily" (China?) are also at work on the Church. When I was released eight months ago as Stake Mission President baptismal rates in North America had dropped to between one half and one third of their rate three years previous. I used to think that this was a coincidence and that they will come back up. I now think that information on the Internet is making many people disinclined to listen to the missionaries' message, or discontinue the discussions after they have commenced. And there are many people who believe as I now do (more or less) but who attend Church and keep their mouths shut because it is too hard to "come out of the closet" respecting these matters. As difficult as this is proving to be for me, I understand that approach and am not critical of it.

As noted above, I believe that much of what Joseph Smith and those who followed him taught us is inspired, tremendously important, and that we should follow those teachings. However, we are dealing with a complicated mixture of truth and error, and there is no question about the fact that the Church spends huge resources to keep us from understanding the reality of our faith's origins, and to prevent us from considering other truths that would be helpful to our understanding of how God works in our lives, but

might lead us to question the authority of our church leaders. I am still struggling to determine how, on a day-to-day basis, I should live my life in light of what I now know.

Despite the assurances I gave you above that I am doing all that I can to proceed in a thoughtful, careful manner, you may rightly wonder if I have gone off the deep end. You might ask how it is possible that I came to change basic aspects of my belief system that I held for so long, and advocated so passionately? That is a question I have wondered about a lot. Here are my thoughts in that regard. I hope they will help you to put your own experience in a broader context where you can understand it better than you have until now.

- Before he left on his mission a short time ago, my son asked me about anti-Mormon stuff at which a school friend was trying to get him to look. His question was, basically, what should he do about that sort of thing. I assured him that on many occasions I had been forced to work through material of that nature, and had always been able to sort through the issues and determine that the so-called problems with our doctrine etc. were not really problems. I said that given how many times I had done that, I was sure that with the right amount of work I could do that with each "problem" that was brought to me, but had decided that my time was better used doing more positive things. Hence, I did not feel the need to take seriously things of that sort.
- What I now understand is that so many of my key relationships and so much of my self image and world view were tied to the Church being "true", that I could not assess any claims made against it in a rational fashion. This is a well-understood psychological phenomenon. For this reason, doctors are advised never to attempt to treat family members. Their professional judgement cannot be trusted when it must work in conjunction with the emotions they feel, for example, upon considering the possibility that a loved one might be seriously ill.
- Some of the anti stuff is pretty weak. They take things out of context, fabricate facts to support their case etc. I saw plenty of their arguments go down in flames on that basis. But some of their arguments were solid, such as those relating to the Book of Mormon and the Book Abraham's historicity. On these points, I used to accept what I now have to acknowledge were terribly weak arguments put forward by people like Hugh Nibley. He has produced some great stuff. But he has also produced some really weak stuff that I have now seen refuted. He has withdrawn his position on a number of the refuted points (this happened many years ago, although I only became aware of it this summer) and has not published rebuttal arguments. I relied upon some writings he had withdrawn long after this occurred because the Church of course does not publicize his confession of errors, and I was not plugged into the community that does. Some of Nibley's biggest fans have said that his defense of the Book of Abraham is a black mark on an otherwise great academic record. He, like I, could not accept the fact that the Book of Abraham was not what Joseph Smith said it was.
- The pattern the Church (and other fundamentalist religious groups) uses to bind us to it works more or less as follows. Information that contradicts the official position is suppressed to the extent possible. People who insist upon circulating this type of information are excommunicated, and the rest are led to believe that

those who are excommunicated can't be trusted, communication with them is cut off etc. Then, those who remain in the group are encouraged to constantly tell each other that they are right and everyone else is wrong. They do this after having real, legitimate religious experiences that allow them to feel the goodness and reality of God. More in the Appendix about these real and very important feelings. The members are told that such feelings are a sign that they are in God's only true Church; the Book of Mormon is literally true, etc. A multitude of questionable or false ideas are accepted as "true" on the basis of the good feelings we get from participating in an exercise that brings us closer to God and feeling good as a result, even though people of many religious traditions do the same thing and have virtually identical experiences. We are told that we are God's chosen people, and therefore that we are "right", "have the truth" and everyone else is inferior and wrong. This appeals to the dark side of human nature. I have come to understand that most of what is bad about religion today, including the tragedy last Sept. 11, is rooted in this ancient, tribal idea. I have come to believe that it is deeply wrong, and is displeasing to God.

- Since I felt good feelings about the Church and heard my Dad and other people who I knew to be intelligent and trustworthy bear testimony to the "truthfulness of the Church", I accepted it as such. They in turn accepted it initially on the basis of those same good feelings and the say so of trustworthy people in their lives. You should be able to see by now the nature of the circle that is created and maintained.
- I went on my mission without ever being exposed to a well-considered contrary point of view respecting the Church. During my mission, I testified for two solid years that the Church and all it stands for is "true", and had many more positive spiritual experiences. I was prevented in the mission field from reading anything that might contradict what I was being told by my leaders, and was teaching to my investigators. I came home in a state of extremely high denial. It was almost impossible for me to consider any point of view that contradicted the beliefs I held.
- As you may know, my university minor was religious studies. During the course of those studies, I was taught and rejected all sorts of things that I have come back to recently, and with great difficulty have finally understood. For example, the Church accepts the literal truth of the teachings in the Bible, except for the creation which most of us have rationalized with science. But what about Noah and his Ark? The Church accepts that as a literal happening. I have suppressed that idea because it makes so little sense. If all animal life on this planet started 3,500 years ago more or less with the animals that could be fit onto a large boat, how can we explain what we see around us? There are dozens if not hundreds of examples of this type in the Bible. These things don't make sense if taken literally. However, if understood as sacred teachings that are intended to convey important lessons, but are not literal history, they make a great deal of sense. Some writers call teachings of this type "mythos". More on this topic in the Appendix.
- During the past six months I have gradually gotten into a mental space that would permit me to revisit the things I studied in university, and finally understand

them. The same allegoric, metaphoric tools I learned to use in university with regard to the Bible as I studied higher criticism in that context can be applied to the Book of Mormon and our other latter day scriptures. We are generally taught to interpret literally what, in my view, should be interpreted figuratively or metaphorically. The real, life enriching meanings of these stories only open up, in my recent experience, to this kind of approach.

- Anyway, while in university I was so busy with family, Church and part time work that I did not have the time to consider anything but what was in front of me. The Church and the lifestyle it encourages us to follow keep us so busy that it is difficult to stand back from the fray and consider the big picture. So I got all the way through university in a deep state of denial regarding spiritual things. The few brushes I had with the concepts mentioned above were immediately relegated to the back of my mind on the basis that they were mysteries and that the Lord would reveal his will respecting that kind of thing in due time. Remember this idea when you get to the story about BH Roberts below.
- We then moved to Vancouver, and it was more of the same. As Bishop I dealt with some anti stuff, but as noted above, I was so busy and testifying so often that the Church was "true" etc. that I could not have been reasonably expected to be able to see the truth through denial's fog.
- In Calgary, after we moved to the country, I gradually began to find the time and space to think. The more I thought the less comfortable I felt about the Church's authority structure and certain other things. Finally, after certain family related issues settled down last winter and Juli and I had asked to be released from our callings to deal with things at home, I had time to read and think a fair bit. It is rumoured that all I did on my sabbatical was golf, but I got in a lot of thinking and studying during that period of time as well.
- The authority issue has troubled me for some time, but I was prepared to deal with that largely on the basis of sacrifice. I recognized that our leaders were often wrong, and part of the sacrifice required of me was to go along with them for the most part in any event.
- I then heard last summer that one of my young men while I was Bishop had left the Church as a result of things he ran into on the Internet. I thought I would help him, and so spent some time reading things that I understood he found troubling. Some were new to me, others old. The only real difference was that I had the space and time to deal with them carefully.
- Initially, my contact with the issues I found in the Internet while trying to help Brian produced the same kind of reaction I had as Bishop when dealing with anti materials – a feeling of being sick to my stomach when I ran into something that actually might show that JS, for example, made some serious mistakes, followed by a scramble for stuff from Church related authors like Nibley that would bring peace. However, this time after reading the best the Church had to offer on several points, I remained unsatisfied.

- At first I accepted the weak arguments the pro-Church scholars put forward, but was drawn back to look at the issues in question again after a few days because the peace I sought had not come. This process went on for months, and I now recognize that in my case a lengthy procedure was required to peel back the many layers of conditioning experience I have gone through so that my mind could objectively consider the questions before it. When I finally got to that point, the lid blew off my denial. I started reading all kinds of things I have been taught to avoid because they are testimony threatening, and found many of them to be rich sources of truth. I am not talking about anti material. I am talking about history, sociology, anthropology and psychology – all sources of information that would have helped me all along to understand my own religious experience, and all things the Church has taught me to avoid. In any event, for the past three months more or less I have been in a position to squarely face the questions that have been before me my entire adult life, and the answers I am finding are shocking. They require me to reassess much of my belief system.
- One of the turning points for me came when I learned of the concept of "faithful history". That is the Church's systematic suppression of information related to its past that might cause the average member to question the wisdom of following current leaders because past leaders have been wrong so often on important points. After reading some things about that, I began to compare the Church's version of certain important events (such as the martyrdom of Joseph Smith) to the versions of those events published by respected historians whom the Church tries hard (and at times unethically, I might add) to discredit. The results were astounding. I had to admit that the Church related materials were just as bad as the worst anti materials – they both told half-truths, and very misleading half-truths at that. The best source of truth regarding our history, including the development of our doctrine, is a small group of LDS and non-LDS historians who publish things the Church suppresses.
- The following story illustrates exactly how a self-reinforcing denial cycle works to keep people like you and me in the dark.
 - I read about an experience involving BH Roberts (most people in the know would say that he was one of our greatest, if not our greatest, intellectuals) and his confreres in the 12 in which BH was given the job of responding to some tough questions about the BofM that a young returned missionary had written to the first presidency concerning. The returned missionary had introduced the BofM to a scientist with whom he worked, and in due course was asked these questions. He needed help to find answers. This occurred in the 1920s.
 - BH Roberts could not answer the questions put to him, and as a result prepared a 150-page study outlining his concerns with the Book of Mormon's historicity. This study was presented to the first presidency and the 12, and was considered by them during a meeting that lasted three solid days. Members of BH's family who thought it should be made public published the study a few years ago. This is the type of thing the Church has in its possession, but does not make public.

- After agonizing over these questions and the study he produced respecting them and related questions for some time, discussing them with the other members of the 12 and finding their responses wholly unsatisfactory, BH wrote a letter to the young returned missionary who had raised the questions in which he gave assurance that the young man should not be concerned about the Book of Mormon's literal truth. He gave some of the answers to the questions that had been raised, answers that his own study termed "weak" and "unconvincing", and assured the returned missionary nonetheless that the BofM's "truthfulness" was on solid ground.
- BH Roberts then completed the rest of his public ministry giving regular testimony to the "truthfulness" of the BofM, presumably on the same basis as the "unsatisfactory" answers his brethren of the 12 gave him, while privately questioning the Book of Mormon's historicity and hoping for further light and knowledge from the Lord on that subject. The 12's unsatisfactory response, according to BH, was to simply bear testimony to him that they knew the BofM to be "true" on the basis of spiritual experience, and that even though the questions he raised were deeply troubling to them, they would trust in the Lord to provide the answers on his timetable. They then carefully kept those troubling questions from coming to the attention of the public at large. That is, their faith required the suppression of evidence deemed relevant and troubling to them, precisely because it would be relevant and troubling to others.
- My Dad, who is a professional historian and wise and fine man, has been aware for many years of most of the problems of which I am now aware. He never seriously considered bringing these things to my attention. His belief is much like BH Roberts' and the members of the 12 I mentioned above. He feels that he has a spiritual assurance that the book is true, and while the questions trouble him (the questions now are much more difficult and numerous than they were during BH's day), he is prepared to wait and hope that the Lord will provide answers at some future time. Hence, I followed his example and obeyed in part because I assumed he was on solid ground, and members of my family and others followed my lead and have obeyed (at least in part I assume) because they thought I was on solid ground. Well, guess what? The ground we are on is not solid, and I am going to break the cycle.
- I would now say that Dad, BH and the Apostles I referred to above all made the same fundamental error, caused by the denial resulting from many years of Church conditioning. They assumed on the basis of the good feelings that came from their experience with the BofM that it is a literal translation of ancient records. I suggest that their good feelings came from the fact that the book contains lots of divinely inspired, very important material that made them feel God's spirit. You and I have both felt these things. Their feelings in that regard are no different from those many people get who connect with God through the Koran, the Upanishads (sacred Indian writings), some of Ralph Waldo Emerson's wonderfully spiritual material, etc. They mistakenly assumed that because Joseph Smith said the book was a translation, and they felt good about that book, that it must be what he said it is. They assumed that it must be either all true, or all false; that Joseph must be either a prophet or a fraud. Now that I

know more about Joseph Smith and the complex mix of good and bad that comprised his life, and have read what psychologists say about people of his level of creative genius (they are almost always psychologically unstable), I have no trouble with the idea that he could have been divinely inspired on the one hand, and mistaken on the other with regard to such things as whether the BofM is a literal translation of golden plates or the product of his wonderfully creative mind and divine inspiration.

- This way of looking at things is the only one that allows me to understand and make sense out of the conflicting evidence that I have come across as I have carefully studied our history, doctrine and Church culture during the past several months. A great deal of evidence from many different sources all points in this direction.

As noted above, I am going to break the cycle of generation after generation of well intentioned but uninformed people leading each other down the garden path. Therefore, my children are going to hear from me exactly what is going on, as I see it. I am sure I will make some mistakes, and that not all of the information I will give them will be accurate. But I am sure that they will have much better information than I had, and that the general thrust of that information is accurate. I will not put them in the position I and countless others have been put in by well intentioned people like BH Roberts and the other members of other 12 in his day. The answers that they hoped for 80 years ago have not come. In fact, the case against the historicity of the BofM is much stronger now than it was in their day. The right approach, in my view, is to abandon the position that it is literal history and find a way nonetheless to retain it as an important part of our lives. I have done that to my satisfaction, as the Appendix to this letter indicates.

I have only discussed these things with a few people outside of our family. I chose them for that because I felt they might have enough knowledge of the things that concern me, and a strong enough testimony, that they could help me find a better way to interpret the evidence I have found. A few have been helpful, but none have offered any approaches that are much different from my own, or that taken by BH Roberts and others as described above. However, several of them have raised a good point to which I have given a lot of thought. That is the possibility that I may be obsessing over some negative details respecting the Church, and may therefore be about to throw the baby out with the bath water. That possibility has concerned me from the moment the first big issues respecting the Church's claims for itself popped up a number of months ago. For that reason I spent (and continue to spend) a massive amount of time trying to look at these things from different points of view (including the Church's) to make it as unlikely as possible that I am deceiving myself.

The main, and fair, point of the folks who raise this issue with me is that much of what the Church teaches is good, and LDS people are among the best intentioned on earth. I agree with that. However, if some of my best friends with all the good intentions in the world decide to get on a bus and go to a place I think is dangerous and ultimately bad because I have been there, whereas they have not, it will not matter to me how many good and interesting things they plan to do while on the bus and travelling in the wrong direction. I won't get on the bus. Hence, I would say that things at the micro level at Church are good in most respects (good, well intentioned people, teaching honesty, etc.), while we are in terrible trouble at the macro level (narrow worldview; literal

interpretation of scripture; suppression of our history and intellectual enquiry that might be faith threatening, etc.). We are trying to play the right game, but on the wrong playing field and with the wrong equipment. I am tired of playing basketball on a soccer field using a tennis ball, and particularly so since I have now had a taste of the game as I believe it was always intended to be played. It is as likely that you can understand this experience as you sit reading this letter as you could understand parenthood without having experienced it. It will take some time, and experience, for you to be able to understand the message I am trying to convey.

The more I read, think and pray about these things with a broad range of information now available to me, the weaker the Church's position seems, and the better I understand why the Church has done the wrong things it has in terms of controlling us and trying to make us into good followers. This is not a new concept. Other religions have been doing to their members from time immemorial precisely what the Church has done to us. Reading about religious experience in general, and religious history in particular, is an experience for me akin to having someone open the curtains to allow light into a dark room. The word "revelatory" is not too strong for what I have felt. There is no justification for this information to have been kept from us, other than to keep us obediently in line. And I am prepared to give our leaders the benefit of the doubt, and believe that they did this to us with good intent. I do not subscribe to an evil conspiracy theory of some sort. The most dangerous people are often those who sincerely believe that the wrong-headed things they do are right, or worse yet, mandated by God.

At the risk of being unduly repetitive, I will again note that our leaders, for what in their wisdom is our own good, have limited the information available to us ostensibly so that we would not make poor decisions with it. However, to the extent that they control our perception of our history and therefore our understanding of the divine mandate they have received, they control us. This is how dynastic, religious and political leaders have controlled the masses ever since people started to keep track of these things. Our democratic rights of free speech and freedom of the press are of fundamental importance in modern society precisely because they counter act those who seek to control information and have historically wielded power as a result. As the Appendix notes, one of the things that led to JS's martyrdom was his destruction of a printing press that was in the course of exposing to the world the fact that he had been lying to members of the Church and the public for years by saying that he was not practising polygamy when in fact he was. Secrecy and information control are at the Church's roots.

I again ask you: Whose plan does the one I describe above sound like? I believe in much of the theology JS left us, and I particularly believe in the primacy of free agency. The Church has nicely abridged that for us. They were wrong to do so, in my view. Unfortunately, both they and we will now pay a high price for that as we, one by one, adjust to reality. I am paying that price right now. The higher the price gets, the more difficult it becomes for me to be civil respecting those who have put me in the position in which I find myself, regardless of how well intentioned they may have been.

I want you to understand the depth of study I have given this matter and have a real flavour for how deep and broad the concerns I feel are. I expect that it will be painful for you to look the issues that I am raising in face, and I apologize for doing this to you. However, my relationship to you is of great importance to me, and I doubt that we will be

able to sustain that relationship if you do not understand why I am doing something that from where you sit right now probably looks crazy. It took several months of feeling physically ill off and on for me to get to the point where I could look these issues in the eye, and months of intensive work after that to get to where I am now.

The attached appendix is very long and covers things from nuts to soup. I hope you will read it, but understand that you may not have the energy to do so. I will therefore give you one strong taste of the kind of information it contains to help you decide whether you should struggle through it or not. Here is the section entitled "Theocratic Ethics".

- The following is a quote from Michael Quinn's "Mormon Hierarchy – The Origins of Power" (p. 88). Quinn is a respected historian. Some argue that he draws inappropriately broad conclusions as he writes history (this is a common criticism among historians as they review each others work), but his factual research is generally very good. In the following quotation, he both draws conclusions and summarizes some facts that are difficult to understand if one must believe that JS was a prophet in the sense Church members think of Gordon Hinkley as a prophet. As is always the case, we must take what historians (even good ones like Quinn) say with a grain of salt. Having done so, in my view there is more than enough in this one quote to shatter the image the Church would have us carry around of the Prophet Joseph.

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

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

This ethical independence is essential for understanding certain seemingly inconsistent manifestations in Mormonism. Some had already occurred - reversals in doctrine and divinely revealed procedures, and the publication of unannounced changes in written revelations and historical texts. The Knight marriage was a public example of Joseph Smith's violation of laws and cultural norms regarding marriage and sexual behavior - the performance of civil marriages by legally unauthorized officiators, monogamous marriage ceremonies in which one or both partners were undivorced from legal spouses, polygamous marriage of a man with more than one living wife, his marriage proposals to females as young as twelve, his sexual relationships with polygamous wives as young as fourteen, polyandry of women with more than one husband, marriage and cohabitation with foster daughters, and Mormon marriages of first cousins, brother-sister, and uncle-niece. Other manifestations of Mormonism's theocratic ethics would soon begin in Kirkland and continue intermittently for decades - the official denials of actual events, the alternating condemnation and tolerance for counterfeiting and stealing from non-Mormons, threats and physical attacks

against dissenters or other alleged enemies, the killing and castration of sex offenders, the killing of anti-Mormons, the bribery of government officials, and business ethics at odds with church standards."

As noted above, Quinn is generally a reliable historian, and that is why I have been prepared to share this quote with you while I have not shared many others that make sensational claims. The authors of the other quotes do not have Quinn's history of reliable scholarship. However, I note that there is one point that he states unequivocally in the above quote respecting which I have seen conflicting evidence. That is the age of the youngest of JS's wives with whom he had sexual intercourse. Quinn above says 14. That could be the case with either Fanny Alger or Helen Kimball (Heber C. Kimball's daughter). However, in both cases the evidence I have seen is inconclusive. I would say it is possible, perhaps likely, that 14 was the youngest age, and certain that 16 was. I am not aware of any evidence that conflicts with anything else in the quote. Some of what JS did is somewhat understandable in light of certain circumstances and conditions of his time. Most of it, however, is only understandable in light of the theocratic ethics term that Quinn, in my view, has usefully coined.

In any event, the above quote paints a disturbing, but unfortunately pretty accurate, picture of some of the events related to our Church's origins. The practise of theocratic ethics continued off and on for a long time within the Church. The fact, noted below, that Church officials lied about their continuing illegal practise of polygamy for 15 years after the Manifesto in 1890 is another illustration of this phenomenon.

The rule of law is one of those things that is fundamental to democratic society. Therefore, anyone who holds himself up as being an authority above the law is an extremely dangerous person. The Church's Articles of Faith proclaim that we subject ourselves to the law of the land. JS of course wrote those. In modern times, we do abide by the rule of law. JS's behaviour in personally living above the law, and lying about it for years, and encouraging his close associates at first and others later to do so as well, is one of the most troubling aspects of his character from my point of view. I can accept that God could use such a man as an instrument for divine inspiration, but I would not feel bound to follow such a man without carefully verifying the good sense of the particular teaching I was being asked to follow, and making sure that I felt personally inspired by God to follow. That is why it is essential, in my view, that the members of the Church understand the things I am writing to you about, and that they make their decisions to follow with knowledge of the imprecise nature of the revelatory process our church leaders use. It is obvious that this knowledge will make many people reluctant to obey, and hence we should not be surprised that the Church's leaders have rationalized a policy of covering up the facts that lead people like me to ask troubling questions.

I found the above quote in Quinn's book on the Mormon power structure after I had been prepared for it by hundreds of hours of reading related material. Even then it shocked me. I imagine that it might cause you significant discomfort to read it.

One writer described the process I have gone through and you may be regrettably about to start as being similar to grieving after the death of a loved one. We experience denial, anger, frustration, and eventually acceptance. If you need to express anger toward me, I want you to do so. I have felt a lot of anger toward well-intentioned church leaders who were doing what they thought was right. I do not presume to guess how you will react to these things. But you will take them into account in one way or another as you proceed through life.

What I am going through right now, and what you may be about to start, is analogous the economic process known as "creative destruction". Many economic theorists believe that the way this phenomenon occurs within capitalism explains most of why that system is more efficient in the long term than other economic systems. In a capitalist economy, businesses are allowed to fail much more quickly than in government controlled economies. This puts people out of work, causes investors to lose money, and sometimes forces the depopulation of large areas of the country as the economy changes and people have to move away to find work. This is why, at the moment, the largest city in Newfoundland is Fort McMurray, Alberta - no jobs in Newfoundland, and lots in Fort McMurray that people living in Alberta are not too excited about. The painful process of having part of my belief system torn down is the first stage of creating something new, and I believe, much better in my life. I can feel the good parts of the new structure already beginning to influence me in positive ways, and the bad parts of the old structure fading away. But boy, is it painful.

Love,

Bob

Appendix

During the past six or so months, I have spent hundreds of hours reading thousands of pages of information from sources that I have been told by our Church leaders to avoid. I am not talking about anti-Mormon sources. Most of the helpful things I have found are based on solid scholarship related to either LDS history or scientific disciplines such as sociology and psychology. In those sources I have found information that has been extremely uplifting, and has answered questions about my life experience that have nagged at me ever since I can remember. I can feel some of the more negative aspects of my personality changing for the better as I come to understand how God really works in my life, and the importance of embracing and connecting with the world around me instead of fearing it and waiting for it to crumble and fade away as the largely apocalyptic view the LDS Church and other fundamentalist religious groups have of the world suggests we should.

The views I have come to can be summarized as follows:

- **Is there a God?**

There is a God, but his nature and his connection to his "prophets" and us is different than the Church teaches. Our main problems in this regard can be traced to our habit of literally interpreting scripture and our general ignorance of how our prophets regularly misunderstand the instructions they think they hear from God, and therefore misguide the Church. Our history is full of this sort of thing, but the Church's leaders try to keep that as quiet as they can because of the negative effect this information would have on the members' obedience. It is as clear, in my view, that our leaders are sometimes guided by God as it is that they are sometimes mistaken when they think they have been so guided.

- **How can we understand God's nature?**

Our understanding of God can only come from two sources. First, what we experience ourselves. Second, what we understand other people to have experienced. Both of these categories of information are tricky.

Our own experiences with God are highly subjective, of course. As I think of my experiences in this regard, I recognize how influenced they were by who I was with at the time, what I was going through in my life, my understanding of things related to God and the word in general, etc. For example, things that earlier in my life I would have unhesitatingly attributed to God I might perceive differently now. In many cases, our perception of God is no more than a collection of our own (or our society's) fears, desires, hopes etc. This type of God is more frequently the one people experience, perhaps, than any other. However, some manifestations of God cannot be explained that way, and these are frequent and important enough to in my view to allow us to believe in a divine being, who is independent of our projected hopes and fears, whom we might call God, or as King Lamoni called him in Alma 18:26, the "Great Spirit". In that and related passages, Ammon was trying to help Lamoni understand who God was. Their conversation went as follows:

"[Ammon said:] Believest thou that there is a God? And [Lamoni] answered him: I do not know what that meaneth. And then Ammon said: Believest thou that there is a Great Spirit? And he said, Yea. And Ammon said: This is God." (Alma 18:24 – 28).

Alma then proceeded to walk Lamoni through his conception of the Great Spirit and to teach him which parts of that conception were consistent with Ammon's conception of God, and to offer Lamoni some new information with respect to what his Great Spirit might be. Lamoni recognized the truth being communicated by Ammon, and was uplifted by it. This is a good example of how to accept and understand other people's conception of God. Lamoni went on to have a personal experience with God that is very similar to many other epiphanies that have been recorded throughout history. I don't believe that Lamoni is an historic person, or therefore that what is described with respect to him really happened. However, the description of his experience is "mythically true", as Leonard Arrington might say. That is, it is the kind of thing that can and does happen, and it is a good thing for us to seek this kind of personal experience.

Things get really tricky when we come to consider how we can understand God based on our understanding of the experiences other people have with respect to him. The biggest problem here is that other people more often than not exaggerate or simply lie about these experiences. This is done for a variety of reasons; some innocent but most not. It is possible, however, to learn much of importance about God from listening to what other people have to say about their experience, reading and otherwise trying to understand what acting as their belief system requires has done for different groups of people, and finally experimenting with the things other people say have brought them into contact with their conception of God.

In trying to understand these things, therefore, I have found it helpful to become familiar with how other people experience religious phenomena. Ironically, much of the information I have found helpful is in sources that I became familiar with over twenty years ago while in university, but did not understand at that time. One of the important sources is the psychology of religious phenomena. The most interesting book I have read so far in that field is the classic: "The Varieties of Religious Experience" by William James. More about that book below. The sociology of religion also has a lot of important things to teach us. The dominant writer there is Max Weber. And finally, the history of religion is fascinating. The most useful book I have read in that regard is "The History of God" by Karen Armstrong. I am not quite finished it at this point. I have read others like it before. They all make essentially the same points, but Armstrong makes them particularly well. There is far too much interesting material in these areas for me to do it justice in even a long letter (short book?) like this one. But I will try to give you a taste.

You might think, "Why do I care how other people have perceived God? I know what my own experience is, and that is good enough for me." In case what I wrote above did not adequately answer this question, let me say a little more respecting it. I think it is fair to say that this is the attitude that kept me in denial as I went through university and until recently. As noted in my letter to you, our Church gets a lot of mileage out of the garden-variety type of religious

experience we have that people of many faiths also have. We are taught that our religious experiences are unique, and that these experiences mean that we are God's chosen people, the Book of Mormon is literal history, etc. It is eye opening to read and think about the experiences that other people have had that seem to be, practically speaking, identical to our own experience, and also to read about the leaders of other religions who use the experiences of their followers in much the way our leaders use ours. So, are all those other people throughout the ages as well as right now deceived by their leaders, whereas ours do not deceive us? To accept this conclusion would be to violate Occam's Razor, a principle of logic used in scientific research and elsewhere. It basically says that the simplest answer is usually the right one. That is, if in order for one answer to be right we must make complicated assumptions, unusual conditions have to exist, etc. whereas a competing answer would require few and sensible assumptions, the competing answer is probably the right answer.

It is a lot easier for me believe that God speaks to all people, and that they have experiences with him as I do because he loves them as he loves me, than it is for me to believe that the people in my little group and I are right and the rest of the world is wrong, and therefore by implication God loves and favours us more than the rest. The only thing that kept me locked into the "I am right and all of the rest are wrong" mindset was the Church telling me it had to be so and my believing that on the basis of the good feelings I had about the Book of Mormon and JS as a prophet. Once I came across the kind of information I have summarized below for you, it became relatively easy for me to accept that I did not have to believe everything JS said, because he was so obviously wrong regarding some things at least. This freed me from many ideological positions with which I have long been uncomfortable, the "we are the only true church" position being at the front of the line. I won't refer to Occam's Razor again, but bear it in mind as you think about the positions I put forward regarding the various points discussed below and the positions that we have to accept in order to believe what the Church has told us.

We don't need to talk any more about my religious experience – it is outlined in the letter above. For the moment, lets talk about the religious experience of other people, in general.

- **How do other people perceive God?**

Even within any of the major religious traditions, like the Judeo-Christian tradition for example, the idea of God has evolved back and forth in breathtaking manner over the years. However, the majority of persons in each generation has somehow managed to believe that their conception of God was the right one, and most often have projected their own idea of God back onto all of their "righteous" predecessors, leaving only the unrighteous in the past with a God other than the one they happen to worship in their present. In this effort, the masses are always aided and abetted by religious leaders who often amend old religious texts so that they will read in a manner consistent with the current conception of God. This is part of the "control/authority" theme, and explains how the Old Testament came to be such a confusing mishmash of different ideas. More on that below.

Armstrong quotes Peter Berger as saying that:

we often have a double standard when we compare the past with our own time. Where the past is analysed and made relative, the present is rendered immune to this process and our current position becomes an absolute [truth]: thus "the New Testament writers are seen as afflicted with a false consciousness rooted in their time, but the analyst takes the consciousness of his time as an unmixed intellectual blessing" (The History of God" p 377).

God has meant so many things to different peoples throughout the ages that he is impossible to define by reference to human experience. However, the experience of mankind through the ages and across many different cultures trying to understand God and incorporate him into life does present some broad and consistent themes.

Power and Control. One is clearly power and control. Religion is a powerful force, and has been harnessed by those in power to subjugate the masses ever since the dawn of recorded history. What our Church does in that regard has been done countless times in different ways by other religions. I review below in detail how this process works.

Universality of Experience with God. Mircea Eliade, the dominant religious sociologist of the last century, describes another pervasive theme as follows:

The greatest [religious] experiences are not only alike in content, but often also alike in their expression. ... almost all the religious attitudes man has, he has had from the most primitive times. From one point of view there has been no break in continuity from the "primitives" to Christianity." (Patterns in Comparative Religion, pp. 3 and 463).

God manifests himself to most peoples throughout the ages who seek him, and to many who don't. In fact, there is a good case to be made that the impulse to seek God is one of mankind's most basic impulses. It is hardwired into the core of most human beings. Eliade calls us "homo religiosus" instead of "homo sapiens".

Armstrong has a number of interesting things to say on this topic. She paraphrases St. Augustine, acknowledges by most to be the primary source of western Christian theology (including a lot of Mormon theology by the way) to have said that God's nature is somehow imprinted on our minds or souls – that he is our Archetype in that sense. Therefore:

...we yearn toward our Archetype – the original pattern on which we were formed. (The History of God, p 122)

Armstrong also puts it this way:

In all cultures, human beings have been driven by the same imperatives: to be intelligent, responsible, reasonable, loving and, if necessary, to change. The very nature of humanity, therefore, demands that we transcend ourselves and our current perceptions, and this principle indicates the presence of what has been called the divine in the very nature of serious human inquiry." (The History of God, p 385).

She continues later in the same chapter:

The atheists who complained that the idea of God was unnatural were not entirely correct. [She had previously noted that some atheists' reaction to the vengeful, hateful God of some branches of religion was understandable] We have seen that Jews, Christians and Muslims have developed remarkably similar ideas of God, which also resemble other conceptions of the Absolute [developed by Buddhists, mystics of all religious traditions, and philosophers of many types, etc.]. When people try to find an ultimate meaning and value in human life, their minds seem to go in a certain direction. They have not been coerced to do this; it is something that seems natural to humanity. (History of God, p. 394)

I note that the track the Church has us on at present looks much more toward the literal, vengeful God Armstrong thought the atheists right to reject than the one most religious traditions of the world (including ours, I would argue) grope toward. There is a lot in our theology and the writing of our great thinkers that is on the right track, but much that is not. In particular, the idea that we are the chosen people creates a divide between us and the rest of the world that no amount of "love thy neighbour" talk can bridge. Think about how contradictory those two ideas are.

The underlying and unifying force Armstrong and Eliade speak of above is, in my view, the aspect of our nature that causes all mankind to grope toward God, and reach radically differing conclusions as to what he is, how he operates in their lives etc., but nonetheless to grope and continue groping.

Competing Theories respecting the Universality of Experience with God.

Within the literature our Church produces, there are two primary competing theories that explain the universality of experience with God. The one usually rejected is advocated best by Eliade and others, like C.C. Jung. This is the so-called "Archetype theory" which posits that a collective unconscious exists that is populated by archetypal images. These images are part of the unconscious of all men, and hence the appearance of common themes in dream, worship, creation myths etc. across many cultures and throughout the ages can be explained.

The competing theory, usually accepted by the Church and most ably promoted by Hugh Nibley, is the so-called "common source" theory. I know you have read Nibley's "The Temple and the Cosmos" collection of essays, and hence are familiar with this idea. Nibley posits that many important ideas came to us from Adam by way of the dispersion of the human race across the planet and the occasional restoration of lost knowledge by God to prophets in different locales. Hence, for example, temple rituals in the ancient Near East, Egypt, China etc. have certain themes in common. That these themes often relate to similar creation myths found in many cultures, he points out, is consistent with this theory. The idea of the pre-existence is often included with this theory. That is, we brought certain dim recollections of our prior life and belief system with us, and hence are drawn toward similar religious experience. I note that the pre-existence is actually supportive of both theories.

Until recently, I was more persuaded by Nibley than Eliade and Jung. This is one of the many ideas I have revisited. First, I have read some pretty convincing stuff that indicates that Nibley was stretching his sources. A lot of the parallels he has

found are not really parallels when they are put in context. I think his research and writing is still valuable, but not nearly so as I once thought. I continue to think, however, that it is possible that the echoes of an ancient temple ceremony etc. may be found in more than one culture and that Nibley's theory is correct as far as it goes. The real problem with this idea is that it does not explain so many other religious behaviours we see around us and are exhibited by people throughout the ages and across a multitude of cultures, and ultimately I think Nibley's analysis points us in the wrong direction.

Nibley's writing assumes that there is one right way to do things; that God gave his chosen people, for example, a pure and undefiled temple ceremony at some time in the distant past and that various peoples have since that time heard and followed echoes of that ceremony until it was restored in its fullness to JS. (The restoration of the temple ceremony, its Masonic origins, and how it has been radically changed since JS "restored" it are another story. I won't get into that for now)

Hence, the direction in which Nibley points is the "chosen people" and "one true church" direction. He encourages us to interpret the data available to us with that in mind. There is much data, however, that this theory does not explain. For example, if there is one chosen people, why do so many different peoples, all of whom think that they are chosen, have such similar personal experiences with God? And when we look at creation myths, temple ceremonies, other forms of ritual worship, etc. we find so much diversity that the weak common themes Nibley posits are virtually imperceptible. Some scholars say that once Nibley's "parallels" are put properly in context that they disclose no common theme, for example. However, amid all this diversity of religious form, the personal religious experience is remarkably consistent. And we note that these very similar experiences become the basis for the various groups of "chosen" people to deem themselves chosen, and to persecute, look down upon, kill etc. the other chosen people in particular because they have the audacity to think that they are the chosen ones. If God exists at all, as I believe he does, either he is very different from what all of these groups think him to be (this is possible) or they are not hearing his voice accurately.

The dreams/archetype analysis of Jung and Eliade satisfactorily explains the common religious experience phenomenon and many like it. In my view, the dreams and religious behaviours of a wide range of people as well as our own personal experience now is much more consistent with some kind of collective unconsciousness or instinct that it is with divine knowledge transmitted culturally or prophetically restored from time to time.

I am stepping into water over my head here, but let me in any event suggest an analogy that recently occurred to me. I had trouble with Jung's terms "collective unconscious" and "archetype". I had trouble grasping what they meant, and relating them to my own experience. It was helpful for me to read as broadly as I have recently with respect to how many people in different cultures have similar religious experiences. However, I did not really grasp this concept until I began to think of it in terms of "instinct".

We are familiar with a broad range of instincts. One dictionary defines the term as follows:

The innate capacity of an animal to respond to a given stimulus in a relatively fixed way;

I could choose lots of behaviours from the animal kingdom, or even some human behaviours to illustrate the point. I have chosen the migration pattern of the salmon, since I learned something about that as a result of growing up on the coast.

Salmon are born, generally speaking, in a shallow inland streams many miles from the ocean. After birth they are carried by the downstream current from their small stream, to larger streams, to small rivers, to larger rivers, and finally out to sea. They then spend a number of years travelling thousands of miles at sea, and if they live long enough, reach sexual maturity. At this point, an instinct kicks in that the scientists are still trying to understand. Of all the thousands of rivers that empty into the sea in the area that this salmon has travelled around, this salmon returns directly to the one that disgorged it. It does not swim around looking, smelling, etc. for the right river. It just swims directly from where it is when the urge strikes to its river. It then swims upriver and takes the correct turn at many corners, eventually ending up very near the place it hatched. It then does its best to reproduce.

Scientists who study this phenomenon have determined the a salmon's acute sense of smell has something to do with the process, but this does not explain many aspects of what salmon do as the migrate. There is also another theory that the earth's gravity and position are somehow imprinted on the salmon at birth and, at the right time of year, can act like an inbuilt GPS to guide it back to its birthplace. There are lots of interesting questions still to be answered on this point.

In any event, when I consider the behaviour of a salmon migrating toward its place of birth upon reaching sexual maturity, impelled by forces well beyond its comprehension, whatever they may be, I am drawn to a set of parallel behaviours we find in mankind respecting religious matters. Well before coming to the ideas in this section of the Appendix, I wrote the passages above about man's continual "groping" toward God. If salmon can be born with a complex set of instincts that are designed to produce certain critically important behaviours at certain points in their life cycle, why not the same with man? The behavioural patterns are certainly similar, although much less precise in man's case.

Darwin and others of his school would say that salmon evolved their migrational ability in order to deal with some important imperative in their environment. I would not disagree. I have no trouble with the idea that God could have used evolution as his process to create us and the world around us, and agree with Talmage and Widstoe in this regard while disagreeing with Joseph F. Smith and many of his relatives. If we accept evolutionary theory, and the huge amount of evidence of the religious questing/groping etc. of man, does this not lead to the conclusion that an important part of our nature impels us to search for God and try to involve him in our lives (no matter how awkwardly), and that this aspect of our character was naturally selected by evolutionary forces because it performed

an important role? The question of what that role may be is a fascinating one that I don't have time to address here. This Appendix is far too long already.

I also note that both the "common source" theory and the "archetypal or instinct" theory are supported by the idea of a pre-existence. If we assume that each human being existed with God before coming to this earth, and carries with him or her a dim recollection of that experience, that could supply some of the archetypes, collective unconscious and instinct I have noted above. Also, the LDS and Christian conceptions of the "Light of Christ" or "holy ghost" are consistent with this idea. Perhaps there are all different ways of saying the same thing. In any event, I found thinking about the behaviour of salmon to help me grasp these ideas.

Man's Perception of God Evolves in Various Ways. This is consistent with and explanatory of another of Eliade's observations. He notes that:

whether or not a [religion] comes into contact with another religious form, like or unlike itself, it will tend, in the religious consciousness of those who perceive it as such, to be expressed as totally, as fully as possible. This fact explains a phenomenon which we find everywhere from end to end of the history of religions: the ability of very religious form to rise, to be purified, to become nobler. (Patterns in Comparative Religion, p 463).

Eliade would not be surprised to see how much better our religion is in some ways now than when it was formed. You will read more about our troubled past below. He would also say that the very things I am advocating (move away from literalism; accept the errors of our past; allow for the greater operation of free agency; stop claiming we are the only "true" church and by so doing causing us to see members of other faiths as enemies to a greater or lesser extent of God and truth; etc.) are part of the natural, healthy evolution of our religious tradition. Our ecclesiastical leaders, as has almost always been the case with fundamentalist ecclesiastical leaders, will not see things this way. Their job is to hold the fort, and make sure that the religious tradition that was passed on to them stays intact to be passed on to the next generation. They believe that religious traditions should not change, even though history clearly indicates that they do, and our faith in particular includes the doctrine of continuing revelation.

It is precisely this authoritarian attitude among religious leaders that has made the finding of lost writings of prior religious leaders such a commonplace in religious history. I am sure you did not know that the best evidence available to us indicates that much of the Old and New Testaments have come to us this way. Unnamed reformers knew that the best way to effect change was to "find" an old scroll written by Moses, or Paul, etc. and convince the ruling religious authorities that old truth had been discovered that contradicted current practises. Those who were successful at this game, at a time when forgery was much more difficult to detect than it is now, were able to have their teachings circulated to the populace and eventually canonized under a name that had much more weight than their own. Many of these writings contain a lot of good material, and may be inspired. As the scriptures tell us, God works in mysterious ways. But it is best to know what likely happened, and to take all of what we read with a large grain of salt.

Most often God seems to require the people to do and believe things that, oddly enough, help them to cope with the challenges life presents them. This is in part at least the "God as a reflection of our own hopes and fears" phenomenon. As those challenges change, religious beliefs either change from within their own organizational current, or are abandoned for a worldview that does provide answers to the pressing questions life presents. It is amazing how flexible the Judeo-Christian tradition has been in this regard. Joseph Smith is best understood, in my view, as an inspired innovator within this tradition. When I think about my own experience with religion and why I am where I am at the moment, I have to admit that I am driven by unanswered questions. The narrowness of our leaders' approach to our own history and theology has led me to feel dissatisfaction with the answers provided to me, therefore to question, and to find information that shows to my satisfaction that I should no longer follow many of the things our leaders tell us. Hence, my religious beliefs and worldview are undergoing fundamental, and in my view, positive change.

Even most of the atheist philosophers who defined themselves contrary to certain religious currents of their day end up with a notion somewhere in their theoretical systems of life that strikingly resembles God. The evolution of much of philosophy can be seen as another type of change in the modern religious landscape.

- **So after all that, what is God like? Define his nature.** I can't. I could tell you what I believe right now, but don't think that would be worth much to you. I have now read volumes about different impressions of God that he has seen fit to allow to exist for eons that seem to have served the people who have used them quite well. Who am I to say that their conceptions of God are invalid? I suspect that God's true nature is something that we cannot comprehend, but that he allows himself to be understood by different peoples at different times in different ways, and is OK with that. This is how I explain that many people from vastly different times and cultures using numerous completely different conceptions of him have had the same sort of experience I have had using my conception of God. I still don't buy the Nicean Creed, with all of its mumbo jumbo. But I think I understand what those people were getting at, and I think that we sell ourselves short if we limit God to something we can understand. He manifests himself in ways that we can understand, but in my view cannot be fully understood by our mortal, mental equipment. It would be easy to find quotes from Church leaders to support this point.

A big part of what JS offered the people of his day was certainty and simplicity, as a result of the authority they believed he restored. He delivered certainty respecting the nature of God and a wide range of other difficult notions. The people then craved simplicity, and we still do now. The more uncertain the world appears, the more attractive it is to have someone offer a solution that is relatively certain. This is why the growth of fundamentalist organizations of all kinds has skyrocketed since the 1960s. We thought it was our Church finally coming into its own, the truth winning out, etc. In fact, the JW's and the Seventh Day Adventists, among others, have grown faster than we have during that time and the Pentacostals have grown exponentially faster than all of us. Jewish and Muslim fundamentalist groups have also grown rapidly during the same period.

Once again, the Church is not doing something special that identifies it as "God's Own Church", but rather is part of a larger human dynamic.

In any event, there is now more than enough evidence to satisfy me that the simple version of events JS told, and the Church has magnified and amplified, is not the whole truth. The truth is much more complex than the story as the Church tells it, or as JS himself told it. Our theology and the Church's teachings with regard to the nature of God are part of that story. And, the tradeoff that comes with simplicity and authority is the very kind of stupefying intellectual environment and narrow-minded worldview that comprise the most serious of my concerns with the Church and its affect on us. Even if simplicity and certainty could be delivered, the price required for them is much too high. And in any event, I am convinced that they can't be delivered. All that can be delivered is the perception of simplicity and certainty. Eventually, reality will come crashing in and cause great disappointment and a lot of pain for the people who think they are living in a simple and certain religious world. You and I are experiencing that pain right now.

I think that admitting a bunch of things - that we don't really understand God; that most of the teachings in the scriptures are to be metaphorically interpreted; that we are probably still on scratching the surface of their meaning; that we are not God's chosen people - will have a powerful and positive effect on our worldview. To start with, we will become much more humble than we have often been.

- **Spiritual Experience is Real.**

Is Spiritual Experience Real? Yes. I do not question the legitimacy or the reality of the experiences both you and I have had with the Book of Mormon, God himself, or what you feel when you help someone to gain a testimony. These are real and important experiences.

The news for me, as noted above, is that this type of experience is every bit as real, valid, divine etc. in many cases involving Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Australian Bushmen, etc. In fact, there is pretty good evidence to suggest that some of the most spiritually connected people on earth are found in the Australian Outback and have nothing to do with our Church.

The most helpful book I have read in this regard is William James "The Varieties of Religious Experience". In it, he chronicles his studies of people who have experienced religious phenomena and makes a convincing case for the reality of such phenomena. He also shows how religious belief can bring real power and vitality into human life, and posits that certain highly desirable experiences cannot be obtained in any other way. He writes:

This sort of happiness in the absolute and everlasting is what we find nowhere but in religion. It is parted off from all mere animal happiness, all mere enjoyment of the present, by that element of solemnity of which I have already made so much account. Solemnity is a hard thing to define abstractly, but certain of its marks are patent enough. A solemn state of mind is never crude or simple – it seems to contain a certain measure of its own opposites in solution. A solemn joy preserves a sort of bitter in its sweetness; a solemn sorrow is one to which we intimately consent. But there are writers, who,

realizing that happiness of a supreme sort is the prerogative of religions, forget this complication, and call all happiness, as such, religious. [He goes on to argue this is shallow and incorrect]. (Varieties of Religious Experience, p 9 Ch. 3, Web Version].

I think you and I both understand this, and I felt something special the first time I read it, and again as I reread it before deciding to incorporate it into this letter to you. Let us use that "spiritual experience" that I just had to illustrate an important point respecting spiritual experience in general.

The above quote from James is true to my life's experience, and as I read it and think about it my soul resonates with the feeling that I have just learned, or have been reminded of, something true and of profound importance. Am I misled? Perhaps, but the reality of the situation is this: I can do no better than to rely upon the kind of feeling I get when I read or hear things of this sort. The truth speaks to me, and I both hear and feel it. In part, I hear and feel only what I have been conditioned by my experience to hear and feel. And sometimes to my surprise the divine will break unexpectedly through the harshest conditioning. All any of us can do is search for the things that sound and feel like the truth to us, and be guided by them when we find them. This is why the experiences you and I have had with the BofM are valid, real, important divine experiences. The continual searching and striving Armstrong describes is what drives this process forward.

This line of thought leads in an important direction. The Plan of Salvation as JS taught it to us includes that idea that man is judged on the basis of the light and knowledge available to him. This is an extremely important idea for me. It means that the poor Andeans of Peru I worked with who had no real chance to accept the Gospel because of their conditioning experiences, drug addictions etc. would eventually be "judged" (rethink this in metaphoric terms) only on the basis of the chances to understand and work with truth that life provided them, and would at some point be given all of the opportunities the most privileged of us have to become familiar with and accept the truth.

This idea is taking on new meaning for me. What it means is that religious truth, in an important sense, is relative. I have always thought of religious truth in absolute terms. This is part of the worldview the belief in a "true" church gave me. It now occurs to me that I have always believed in relative religious truth in the sense that what God expects from us varies with our experience. That is, since the poor Indian living in the Andes has been insulated from certain truths by his life experience, he will not be judged in accordance with them, but rather will be judged in accordance with the lower forms of truth respecting which he had the chance to exercise his free agency. His religious truth will therefore be the highest form of truth he encounters during his life, and has a realistic chance to accept. Each time he encounters a higher truth that it is possible for him to accept, he will feel its draw – it will call to him. He will then have the opportunity to exercise his free agency with respect to the use of that truth in his life.

Now that I have the scales of being a member of the "true" church removed from my eyes, I can see that this concept applies to me as much as it does any Peruvian peasant. There is all sorts of truth out there that had previously escaped my view. As I encounter it, I feel its call. Some of it is extremely difficult to accept, but once I have felt its call, I am responsible for it.

I think it important that we distinguish in this discussion between what might be called "factual truth", and the kind of metaphysical or religious truth we are talking about. It is possible to say that there is only one "true" answer to certain questions like, for example, did JS translate the Book of Mormon from golden plates in his possession at the time of translation, or did the information contained in that book come to him in other ways? I don't think there is any room for relative truth in the answer to that question. However, when we discuss the merits of different conceptions of God or religious belief systems, it has become my view that the only way to make sense out of what history and my personal experience tells me about mankind's relationship to God over the millennia is to use something like the idea I have tried to express above.

The upshot of this line of reasoning is that just because I have found what feels to me like religious truth, and have acted on it for a long time and found that it does good things in my life, that does not mean that this is all the truth that I will find, or that the same thing will perform the function of religious truth in the life of some other person. Therefore, my religious truth – what brings me into contact with God and produces the deep happiness James described in my life – is not an absolute form of truth. I have not read about this anywhere. I am just making it up as I go based on the reading I have done and my life experience. But I bet this is not a new idea. I will try to find someone who has developed it, and perhaps we can discuss this further at some future point.

This idea has important implication for the Church's missionary work. I have no trouble with the idea of trying to assist others to upgrade their religious truth. However, with the idea described above firmly in mind, my guess is that a missionary would be much more accepting and understanding of those who are not able to understand his or her message. I think it is wrong to ever suggest to anyone that the experiences they have had with God are illegitimate. I have come to the conclusion that it is the arrogant, narrow minded, dangerous and very displeasing to God when an LDS missionary says to one of his or her investigators that the investigator's experience of having God tell him that his church is the right one for him is the result of the devil's deception or some other form of misunderstanding because the LDS church is God's one true Church, and therefore God will never say that any other form of religious belief is of Him. And when someone does choose to listen to a missionary and accept what he or she has to offer, I would not assume that he or she is required to jettison anywhere near as much of his or her former belief systems as I would have assumed a year ago.

I also note that this idea has a fairly recent scientific parallel. I have pulled a quote off the Internet that explains this more thoroughly and succinctly than I can.

Man is, in some cases, a key component in the formation of the reality of the natural world. Although there are many phenomena that are strictly the result of natural causes such as the action of waves in shaping beaches or of rain and wind in shaping mountains, there are some which are not. One is the particle-wave duality of quantum physics. In the 1920s, experiments were carried out which demonstrated that the particle and wave characteristics of electrons never manifest themselves together at the same time. Each of these features would show themselves separately depending on which one

the experimenter decided to study. In other words, if the experimenter chose to study the electron as particle, it appeared as particle by eliminating the wave features; if he decided to study it as wave, it appeared as wave by eliminating the particle features. To the Danish physicist and Nobel laureate Niels Bohr this unique characteristic meant that waves and particles, rather than being contradictory and mutually exclusive features, were in fact complementary aspects of the same reality and that both were needed for a complete understanding of the quantum world. .

In 1927, the German theoretical physicist and Nobel laureate Werner Heisenberg published a paper, the content of which was to become the most controversial and arguably the most important aspect of subatomic physics. This feature was so strange that even the great Albert Einstein never fully accepted it. Heisenberg proved that it is not possible to determine simultaneously and with accuracy the position and momentum (mass x velocity) of an electron. Before a measurement is taken only an approximate calculation of the electron's position and momentum can be made. He showed that if an experimenter attempts to measure the position of an electron, the act of measurement will change its velocity and therefore its momentum. Conversely, if the experimenter attempts to measure its velocity, the measurement will change its position. This is because the light waves produced in the process of measurement by the measuring instrument will affect the electron. This fundamental reality, called the principle of indeterminacy or Uncertainty Principle, implies that the properties of particles do not manifest themselves until they are observed. They are potential (latent), but do not become actual (real) until an observation is made.

So, at the most fundamental level of our physical world science has reached to this point, the very nature of matter is relative. That is, the act of observation affects the physical nature of the matter observed. There are all kinds of other ideas related to this one that I find interesting and am starting to think about. JS was ahead of his time in this area, for example. But these ideas, while interesting, are too complicated and not germane enough to what I am writing to you about to be dealt with at this point. Suffice it to say that the idea that some of our physical "truths" are determined by the nature of their observation lends support to the idea that religious truth may also be determined by the nature of the person who observes or experiences it. I am not prepared to say that this is so and my belief system is in no way tied to it. I simply note it as an interesting sideline that merits more thought, and may yield what for me could be groundbreaking insights.

This all points to the importance of being open to experiences, like the one I am going through now, that will help us refine the religious truth that operates in our lives. These will aid us to more accurately understand what our prior religious experience meant, and how we should guide ourselves in the future. Sometimes this will result in a reinterpretation or refocusing of the prior experience. Other times it may result in the admission that we were listening to our own voice inside our head, or were deceived by a third party. As Eliade notes (quote above), religions tend to spontaneously improve because of man's driving need to understand more and more of the divine. This happens, in my view, on the personal plane first, and as a consequence Eliade observed what he did with respect to large, organized religious groups.

We have lots of writers who show us how religion can and often is abused to repress our creative powers and the joy we experience in life, and many who posit atheism in various forms. And James sounds a cautionary note. He writes:

There are moments of sentimental and mystical experience – we shall hereafter hear much of them – that carry an enormous sense of inner authority and illumination with them when they come. But they come seldom, and they do not come to every one; and the rest of life makes either no connection with them, or tends to contradict them more than it confirms them. Some persons follow more the voice of the moment in these cases, some prefer to be guided by the average results. Hence the sad discordancy of so many of the spiritual judgements of human beings; a discordancy which will be brought home to us acutely enough before these lectures end." (Varieties of Religious Experience, p 6, Ch. 2, Web Version)

However, when I combine the psychology of James and others like him with the bigger picture (group behaviour) writings of the religious historians and sociologists like Max Weber and then consider my personal experience, I am left with the picture of a powerful, fascinating landscape within our lives and am drawn to it. JS's teachings are an important, but relatively small part, of that landscape. On the whole, I am sure that I can find a way to believe in God, and use that belief to help open up life's wonders.

Case Study: Patriarchal Blessings. One of my daughters has not been the easiest member of our family to help to feel spiritual things. She is a wonderful girl, and at this stage of her life she is not spiritually inclined. That may change, or it may not. This is not a question of good or bad. This is simply a question of what is.

When she and I were talking about some of the things in this letter the other day, she asked me if I thought that her patriarchal blessing was "real". I asked her how she felt while she was with the Patriarch and he gave her that blessing. She said that she felt really good, and felt some things that she had never felt before. I was with her when she received her blessing, felt many of the same things she did, and could see that this was a special and rare experience for her.

I told her that the kind of feelings she received while she was with the Patriarch are, in my view, the best evidence she can have that she experienced something divine, and that God exists and cares for her personally. However, she should not read too much into the details of her blessing itself. The Patriarch told her the same things as we visited with him. The fact that he was clearly in contact with God before and during the blessing does not mean that it is comprehensive, or even that the few detailed things in it are correct. I warned her against making the same mistake that I and countless other members of the Church have made – that of feeling good things relative to something we had experienced with respect to the Church and then assuming on that basis all kinds of other things to be true.

I reminded my daughter of the story I relate below respecting an unnamed former LDS church leader. He carried the spirit with him. I felt it, and can have no better proof than that. At the same time, he was sexually abusing young people. It is probable that the good feelings he was able to project helped him to do that. He came across as the most trustworthy, kind man on earth.

I would hope that if my daughter were in the position of one of the young people the church leader abused, that she would recognize a change in the feeling that

he projected when he started to do things that were wrong, and would not allow the earlier good things she felt to make her accept bad things. This is a difficult trap to avoid unless you are quite spiritually mature, and have a lot of life experience. And even if you are that type of person, it is still a difficult trap to avoid as my experience with the Church indicates.

I also told her that her patriarchal blessing is one of those "mythical" things that can take on new meaning for her as she passes through life. She may well find sound guidance in it as she refers to it from time to time while making important life decisions. However, I warned her against using it as some kind of magic Liahona. I think some Church members rely much too heavily on their patriarchal blessings, and therefore they become blinders instead of useful guides. It is possible to see life too narrowly if we look at it through any kind of definition we might put on our patriarchal blessings. I think it is much wiser to try to see life as broadly as possible first, and once that broadest possible view is well established, see what our patriarchal blessing has to say that may guide us.

For example, my daughter's blessing said some quite specific things about her life's work that she found disturbing at the time because they point in a direction toward which she feels no inclination. There are some people who might reorientate their education etc. in light of what her blessing said. I don't think that would be wise for her. I think she should pursue what her heart tells her to pursue, and from time to time check back with the blessing to see if it speaks differently to her – to see what she feels as she rereads that part of it. It may be that she reaches the end of her life and has to acknowledge that that part of her blessing was not meaningful. She should not assume that she has lived unworthily and that therefore she missed something she should have had. It is much more likely that the Patriarch, good man though he is and inspired though he was in general while we were with him (we felt it, and can have no better proof than that), got that part of her blessing wrong.

I can now say that JS was inspired and did great things and as well got lots of things wrong, and I can say the same thing about every other Church leader we deal with. There is nothing wrong with that point of view. The amazing thing is that they get so much right. We should expect them to get some of it wrong. The history of our prophets' behaviour makes this clear.

This approach is, in my view, the only one that works. And it has the positive effect of making us stand firmly on our own two feet when it comes to the receipt of divine guidance. This is as it should be.

The only "true" church? The idea that many kinds of spiritual experience are real points to one of the false ideas promoted by the LDS Church and other fundamentalist organizations within Christianity, the Muslim faith and the Jewish faith. That is, many religious organizations say that their way is the only "true" way.

Some of our Church's current and former leaders for whom I have the most respect are reluctant to use that language. They speak in terms of our belief system having something useful to offer just about everyone else. I think that is true. However, we have been far too closed to the good things others have to

offer us. I do not believe that the claim the Church makes to being "God's only true church" is accurate in the way we have traditionally understood it.

Assumptions we are encouraged to make on the basis of spiritual experiences. Another false idea we are fed is that because you and I have real, spiritual experiences with the Book of Mormon, through prayer etc., that our Church is God's only "true" Church. This is simply not true. God has many different ways for many different peoples, and while it is appropriate to offer everyone the opportunity to investigate what we have to see if it will be helpful to them, it is not appropriate to encourage them in the way we do to discard their traditions holus bolus and adopt ours because we are the "only true church" and by implication their belief system is false. Culture and human worldviews are far too complex to make that an appropriate way to do things.

Fundamentalism, Literal Interpretation of Scripture, the Only "True" Church. Here is what Armstrong has to say about fundamentalism, literal interpretation of scripture etc.

"One of the most characteristic new developments since the 1970s has been the rise of a type of religiosity that we usually call "fundamentalism" in most of the major world religions, including the three religions of God [Jewish, Christian and Muslim – the only major monotheistic religious traditions on earth]. A highly political spirituality, it is literal and intolerant in its vision. In the United States, which has always been prone to extremist and apocalyptic enthusiasm, Christian fundamentalism has attached itself to the New Right. ... Christian fundamentalists seem to have little regard to the loving compassion of Christ. They are swift to condemn the people they see as the "enemies of God". Most would consider Jews and Muslims destined for hellfire, and Urquhart [a UK based fundamentalist] has argued that all oriental religions are inspired by the devil.

There have been similar developments in the Muslim world, which have been much publicized in the West. [This was written before Sept. 11]. Muslim fundamentalists have toppled governments and either assassinated or threatened the enemies of Islam with the death penalty. Similarly, Jewish fundamentalists have settled in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with the avowed intention of driving out the Arab inhabitants, using force if necessary. Thus they believe that they are paving a way for the advent of the Messiah, which is at hand. In all its forms, fundamentalism is a fiercely reductive faith. Thus Rabbi Meir Kahane, the most extreme member of Israel's Far Right until his assassination in New York in 1990, [said]:

"There are not several messages in Judaism. There is only one. And this message is to do what God wants. Sometimes God wants us to go to war, sometimes he wants us to live in peace ... But here is only one message: God wanted us to come to this country to create a Jewish state."

This wipes out centuries of Jewish development, returning to the Deuteronomist perspective of the Book of Joshua [one of those reformers mentioned above who passed off a hard line reform agenda on "ancient", newly discovered writings of Moses that caused the Old Testament to be amended]. It is not surprising that people who heard this kind of profanity, which makes "God" deny other people's human rights, think that the sooner we relinquish him the better.

Yet, as we saw in the last chapter, this type of religiosity is actually a retreat from God. To make such human, historical phenomenon as Christian "Family Values", "Islam" or the "Holy Land" the focus of religious devotion is a new form of idolatry. This type of

belligerent righteousness has been a constant temptation to monotheists throughout the long history of God. It must be rejected as inauthentic. The God of the Jews, Christians and Muslims got off to an unfortunate start, since the tribal deity Yahweh was murderously partial to his own people. Latter-day crusaders who return to this primitive ethos are elevating the values of the tribe to an unacceptably high status and substituting man-made ideals for the transcendent reality [of God] which should challenge our prejudices. They are also denying a crucial monotheistic theme. Ever since the prophets of Israel reformed the old pagan cult of Yahweh [this is part of the story you have not heard yet – I think Armstrong is right on this issue as well as the more general idea this quote addresses], the God of monotheists has promoted the idea of compassion." (The History of God, pp 390- 391)

I think Armstrong is right on all of this. We need to get off the fundamentalist bandwagon. I am already off it, and will not get back on.

Differing Spiritual Abilities. Different people have varying degrees of innate spiritual ability. Scientists are in the process of understanding the part of the brain that allows humans to experience spiritual phenomena, and have produced some interesting preliminary data that strongly supports this conclusion. Common sense and my life experience also support it. This leads to the inference that those who do not feel the spirit are not necessary bad people. In some cases their lack of spiritual sensitivity may be the result of sin. In many cases, however, that will not be the case. They are just different than we are.

I consider another on my children in this regard. She and I have recently been in the same place, listened to the same things, and had completely different spiritual experiences. This comes after a long period of time during which she has tried as hard as anyone I have seen to become spiritual. She is spiritual and intuitive in ways I am not, but she does not feel some of the spiritual currents in the air around her that I feel. She is doing well in all important ways at the moment. I am certain that her differing experience is a mark of a different character, not a poor character or continuing sin.

I have read the description of many people who were present when Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery had their amazing experience in the Kirkland Temple that is recorded in the D&C. Many of them saw and felt nothing while the marvellous things recorded in the D&C occurred, after having been told to come and experience a second day of Pentecost. Some of them said the whole thing was a fraud and rejected JS as a prophet as a result of that experience. I say different people have different capacities for these things, and we should not expect to feel what others feel. It is very difficult to question the spiritual experience another person has, except when it is used to cause them to do things that are harmful for them. Then, I believe, we should raise concerns.

This sword cuts the other way as well. Great sinners are sometimes very spiritual people (in a certain sense of that word), while continuing to sin. Joseph Smith was, in my view, a prime example of this type of person. More on this point later. An example you will find easier to relate to came to my attention a short time ago. It deals with a prominent former member of the Church in Calgary. He was a member of Juli's Stake Presidency when she was a teenager, and interviewed her for her Temple Recommend when she and I married. When he found out that no one had spoken in detail with Juli and I about how the

sexual side of marriage works, he spent about three hours with us on that topic and in a wonderful fashion educated us as to how that part of our lives would work. He did this in a delicate, professional manner, and yet gave the information we needed. We were most grateful to him for taking the time, and making the effort, to do that. Few people on earth are talented enough and confident enough in their own selves to undertake such a task and do it as well as he did. I have dealt with him on numerous other occasions since we moved to Calgary, and if I were asked to name my "top 10" spiritual people with whom I have had personal experience, he would have been high on the list. I learned a short time ago that this man pleaded guilty in 1989 to various acts of sexual assault involving minors. The charges related to incidents that occurred over a number of years immediately prior to Juli's and my interview with him. More charges are now being brought. He kept the matter quiet enough in 1989 that it did not come to the Church's attention, and he continued in leadership responsibility. He was recently excommunicated. He did a tremendous amount of good, while doing other very bad things. Life is much more like that than I suspected until recently. The picture the Church paints for us is far too simplistic. It teaches us to see life too much as a good/bad, true/false, prophet/fraud dichotomy. This is not the best way to look at things. We need to accept the fact that good comes mixed with bad in most places, and to learn to protect ourselves from the bad while embracing and enjoying the good. There is, I am convinced, much more good than bad in the world.

- **Joseph Smith.**

JS was one of those great spiritual people whose connection to God was much more substantial than is usual. Here is what I believe about him:

The First Vision. He had some sort of powerful experience with God when he was somewhere between 14 and 17 years of age. It is not clear exactly what kind of experience that was - whether he saw God the Father and Jesus, or just Jesus, or some other kind of heavenly messenger – what was said to him, etc. We have about eight differing accounts, at least four of which are in his own words, relating to what he experienced. His last two accounts (not recorded until 1838 and 1942 respectively) are the most specific and are now used exclusively by the Church for missionary and other purposes. They, however, differ in important respects from the earlier accounts. The later accounts appear to me, based on reviewing his earlier writings, summaries of correspondence and diaries of his contemporaries etc. to be significantly influenced by his evolving theology. That is, Joseph Smith was likely subject to the human tendency, well established in research related to the testimony of witnesses in legal proceedings given respecting relatively recent and mundane events such as car accidents, to have their memories of prior events influenced by subsequent personal experiences and personal interests.

The first vision does not seem to have been of much importance to early Church members. For them, the Book of Mormon was the important thing. This may be the result of the fact that during JS's time, there were numerous newspaper articles regarding people who reported seeing Jesus, angels etc. and receiving one divine commission or another from them. Interestingly, no newspaper accounts of JS's experience have been found, but the accounts of many other

similar and contemporaneous experiences did make the papers. In one case, six people signed affidavits testifying that they saw the angel Gabrielle (I think) standing on the roof of a house in front of them in broad daylight, and that he commissioned them to do some things that related to the founding of their church. I do not suggest (as some scholars do) that JS likely did not have the experience, and simply made the whole thing up. However, the evidence from the diaries, correspondence etc. of his contemporary close associates and area new reports indicate that both within the community at large and within his close circle, the experience he had was not remarkable when he had it, and that it became remarkable much later in his life.

Perhaps, the first vision was not initially considered to be that important, whereas the BofM, which was unique to JS, was without any question the centrepiece of the early Church. As Joseph's theology related to the character of God evolved near the end of his life, the first vision became important because it then seemed like evidence to support what Joseph came to believe about God's nature (anthropomorphic; physical body; etc.). Early in his ministry his beliefs about the character and nature of God were much more consistent with typical protestant beliefs of his time (God is unknowable, the trinity is "all in one and one in all"; etc.).

The Book of Mormon. He thought he translated the Book of Mormon, but in fact probably did not. The evidence is close to overwhelming that the BofM is not a translation of anything. However, as noted above, I believe that the BofM does contain a lot of divinely inspired teachings. The following are some of the evidences, pro and con, that in summary indicate to my satisfaction that the BofM was not a literal translation of an ancient record, but is a fascinating, important book.

Much of what follows results from the application of so-called "higher criticism", developed in scripture studies relating to the Bible, to the Book of Mormon. Higher criticism is not a pejorative term. It is just more careful reading, and reading in the context of historical research regarding the social customs of the times during which the book was written, in light of other translations of the book than the one we usually use, etc. It is likely that higher criticism was a natural outgrowth of the fact that the Bible and other forms of scripture are the most carefully scrutinized documents on earth. People keep trying to find new ways to squeeze more information out of the same old texts, and each time new ancient documents (like the Dead Sea Scrolls) come to light that shed more light on the ancient world from which our scriptures come, they are re-read and more knowledge is gleaned from and respecting them.

Higher criticism has, for example, proved to the satisfaction of most academics (and me) things like the first five books of the Bible were not written by any one man (least of all a man named Moses), but rather were written by at least four different persons (more likely four different groups of people) who lived in different periods of time and had quite different beliefs. This is the only way to make sense out of those books if they are read carefully. It also shows virtually beyond doubt that Paul did not write many of the letters attributed to him in the New Testament. Many of those were likely written long after Paul died by people who wanted to use his name to promote their ideas. Whether those ideas are

inspired or not is another question. They may well be. Many people (including me) have found inspiration in them. Higher criticism has made it difficult for anyone who has seriously considered it to accept the Bible for what it was represented to be for centuries by well-intentioned people. These very things are what led Joseph Smith to declare that we believe the Bible to be the word of God, but only so far as it is translated corrected.

Some of the most respected thinkers the Church has produced, including people like James Talmage and John Widstoe, stated that our latter day scripture must submit to all of the forms of higher criticism that mankind can muster. While I have not found record of this, I strongly suspect Joseph Smith believed the same thing. These men believed that the Book of Mormon, etc. would pass any higher criticism tests that could be devised for them. The Book of Mormon has not passed these tests. As they did with the Bible, they show the Book of Mormon to be something other than an ancient record, written by the people who are purported to be its authors, and then translated and delivered to us in English.

John Widstoe said:

"The Book of Mormon must submit to every test, literary criticism with the rest. Indeed, it must be submitted to every analysis and examination. It must submit to historical tests, to the tests of archaeological research and also to higher criticism." (B.H. Roberts, Senior President of the Seventy, The Improvement Era, 1911).

BH Roberts said:

"To Latter-day Saints there can be no objection to the careful and critical study of the scriptures, ancient or modern, provided only that it be an honest study - a search for truth." (Apostle John A. Widtsoe, In Search of Truth, 1930)

Near the end of his life Elder B.H. Roberts engaged in an in depth study of the Book of Mormon in order to answer questions he had come across respecting the historicity of that book. He said:

"If... the view be taken that the Book of Mormon is merely of human origin; that a person of Joseph Smith's limitations in experience and education, who was of the vicinage and of the period that produced the book - if it be assumed that he is the author of it, then it could be said there is much internal evidence in the book itself to sustain such a view. 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." (B.H. Roberts, Studies of the Book of Mormon, pg. 251).

The following is a sampling (there are at least several times as many issues as I have taken the time to note below) of the problems higher criticism offers respecting the BofM:

- **Metallurgy.** The BofM tells us many wars were fought using "steel" swords. No archaeological evidence of this has been found anywhere in the Americas. At the Hill Cumorah, in particular, it should be easy to find archaeological evidence of metal in light of the massive battle that

occurred there. Millions of warriors were involved in some of the battles described in the Book of Mormon (see, for example, the destruction of the Jaredite civilization), and many of them were supposed to have had swords and other metal armaments. Pro-church scholars have tried to say that Nephites had swords at first, and that somehow as their civilization developed they lost the ability to make metal swords and resorted to wood and obsidian, which then were also called swords in the Nephite record. One of the problems with that is that Nephites found the rusting swords of the dead Jaredites, identified them as swords and didn't seem to think that such metal swords were unusual. This means that the Jaredites too were producing steel swords on the American continent. Also, why with the constant warfare they had with the Lamanites would they discontinue making metal swords?

Nephi supposedly had a steel bow. The earliest use of a steel bow that is known today occurred in India between 500 and 400 B.C. The King James Version actually mentions a broken steel bow, but this is a mistranslation - the verse (Psalm 18:34) in the original refers to bending a copper bow, not breaking a steel one (see the Easton Bible Dictionary). JS may have gotten the idea for a broken steel bow from Psalms, and incorrectly used it in the BofM. There is much below on the theme of inaccuracies from the King James Version being transferred into the BofM.

- **Food.** There is no evidence of wheat or barley among ancient American civilizations during the time frame posited for BofM civilization, yet the Book of Mormon claims these existed. There was eventual limited domestication of indigenous barley in what is now Arizona, but the time and place of this occurrence makes it difficult to associate with Nephite civilization.

The Book of Mormon also does not describe the foods we know that ancient Americans did have - chocolate, lima beans, avocado, squash and potatoes among others.

- **Animals.** The Book of Mormon claims that the people had sheep, goats, cattle, pigs and horses. There is no evidence that such livestock existed in ancient America during the time of the Book of Mormon. For the Book of Mormon to be correct on this point, the Americas would be the only place in the world to have a large civilization raising pigs, goats and cattle that left absolutely no evidence that they had these animals.

There is a great deal of artwork from ancient American civilizations depicting many different animals, but none of them depict sheep, pigs, horses or cattle. Pro-church scholars have elaborate, complicated theories about how the deer we know to have been in the Americas were for some reason interpreted by JS to mean horses, etc. (more on this below). If there were only a few points like this, I could play along. There are so many, however, that eventually I gave up hope that the Church folks have any but the tiniest chance of being right on this point.

Before the arrival of Europeans, there was one domesticated mammal raised as livestock in the Americas - the llama. It was not mentioned in the BofM. Other animals that we know existed in the Americas are not mentioned either, such as deer, sloths, monkeys and jaguars.

Pro-church scholars suggest that cattle and oxen could refer to deer or bison; horses could mean deer or tapir; and asses could also mean tapir or llamas. They suggest that elephants could be mammoths, although they were extinct by the time any Book of Mormon people arrived on the continent. Flocks and herds described as domesticated in the Book of Mormon could have referred to deer, ducks, monkeys and even parrots. It takes severe denial to maintain this kind of interpretation. There is no evidence that ancient Americans ever domesticated these creatures, and I don't think that Mormon writing 'horse' when he means 'deer' is plausible. Even if this theory were correct, it would cast significant doubt on JS's abilities as a translator. Remember, this is supposed to be the most correct book on earth.

- **Wheels.** The Book of Mormon describes wheeled chariots when no wheeled vehicles were made in this hemisphere until long after the Book of Mormon story ends.

Some pro-Church scholars point out that there were wheeled toys in parts of Mexico, and thus Native Americans knew about the wheel. These toys though are not replicas of wheeled vehicles - they are ceramic animals, such as dogs, mounted on wheels. Anthropologists believe the wheeled vehicle was not developed in this hemisphere primarily because there were no large domesticated beasts of burden, such as horses or oxen to pull them (see Fiedel, Prehistory of the Americas, 2nd ed. (1992), p. 182-183).

The ruins left by civilisations that used the wheel are quite different in terms of roads, bridges etc. than those left by civilizations that did not use the wheel. There is no evidence in the Americas of civilizations that used the wheel until well after the BofM story concluded.

- **Genetics.** B.H. Roberts, who studied the Book of Mormon extensively, once stated:

"The Hebrew origin of those races in our book is so unequivocally stated and so emphasized that if the said American races could be proven beyond doubt to be of other than Hebrew origin, the claims of The Book of Mormon would be shattered." (New Witness for God, Vol. 3, p. 40)

In the introduction to the Book of Mormon we read that the Lamanites are the "principal ancestors of the American Indians." JS stated that the introduction to the BofM was divinely inspired. The Book of Mormon itself speaks of no other people in the Americas beyond the three groups from the Near East. The D&C speaks of Native Americans living on the US frontier as Lamanites (D&C 28:8-9, 54:8), Joseph Smith on many occasions referred to Lamanites and Nephites as having lived over the

entire hemisphere. There is an unpublished revelation by Joseph indicating that Lehi landed in Chile. Other prophets have spoken of South American and Polynesian populations as descendants of the Lamanites. The great success of Latin American missions is often attributed to these people's Lamanite ancestry. The Book of Mormon, while it makes no definitive claims, gives the impression that the land was empty when the Jaredites arrived. Nothing is mentioned about Book of Mormon peoples ever encountering other groups or civilizations who were there before the Jaredites. The Book of Mormon implies that the Lamanites and Nephites filled the land with great civilizations that included walled cities and temples, and gives the impression that the population of these civilizations was in the millions.

There are two ideas suggested by the Book of Mormon that can be tested genetically. One is that the Book of Mormon people were the principal ancestors of Native Americans in North and/or South America and the Pacific islands. If there are descendants of Lehi alive in the Western hemisphere today (as must be the case for the book's prophecies to be fulfilled), then genetic evidence of Semitic ancestry should exist. In fact, one would expect this evidence to be fairly widespread, considering that the Book of Mormon describes the most technologically advanced pre-Columbian civilization in the hemisphere, its size (as noted above), and the time the descendants of Lehi have had to interbreed with other native populations. So what does the genetic evidence tell us about the ancestry of Native Americans? The DNA of thousands of people in North, Central and South America has been analyzed over the years by many researchers, including a group at BYU that studied over 2000 Native Americans. All of the evidence so far indicates that the principal ancestors of Native Americans were groups of Asians that migrated to the Americas thousands of years before the Jaredites supposedly arrived in the Western hemisphere. There is evidence for one or multiple waves of migration from Asia, most, if not all of them occurring over 10,000 years ago. No genetic evidence of Semitic ancestry has been found in the Americas.

On the other hand, the same tests were used to evaluate the claims of a group of black Africans whose oral history indicated Jewish ancestry. Within that group, the genetic markers signifying Semitic ancestry were found.

Is it possible that evidence may yet be uncovered to support the BofM's claims on this point? This is always possible, but highly unlikely at this point since Native American populations have been studied extensively. In fact their ancestry has been studied more closely than just about any other group in the world. It is hard to believe that a civilization the size of those described in the Book of Mormon would have left no trace in the genetic record.

Finally, the genetic evidence we have is also consistent with cultural, linguistic and archaeological evidence, so scientists have no reason to doubt the validity of the genetic data. (For references see: The Origins of

Native Americans: evidence from anthropological genetics, by Michael H. Crawford, Cambridge University Press, 1998; "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy and Genetics", by Thomas H. Murphy in American Apocrypha, ed. Vogel and Metcalfe, 2002; The History and Geography of Human Genes, by L. Cavalli-Sforza and colleagues, Princeton University Press, 1994, and "DNA Genealogies of American Indians and the Book of Mormon", by Dr. Simon Southerton, a former member and bishop.)

- **Archaeology in general.** In light of all this evidence against the Book of Mormon, Yale scholar and renowned Mesoamerica archaeologist Michael Coe said:

"The bare facts of the matter are that nothing, absolutely nothing, has ever turned up in any New World excavation which would suggest to a dispassionate observer that the Book of Mormon, as claimed by Joseph Smith, is a historical document relating to the history of the early immigrants to our hemisphere." (Dialogue, Summer 1973, p. 46)

Twenty years later Coe again stated:

"I have seen no archaeological evidence before or since that date which would convince me that it is anything but a fanciful creation by an unusually gifted individual living in upstate New York in the early nineteenth century." (Larson, The Quest for the Gold Plates, p. 70)

Even more remarkable is a statement made by BYU archaeologist Ray Matheny:

"Mormons, in particular, have been grasping at straws for a very long time, trying to thread together all of these little esoteric finds that are out of context. If I were doing it cold, I would say in evaluating the Book of Mormon that it had no place in the New World whatsoever. It just doesn't seem to fit anything that I have been taught in my discipline in anthropology. It seems like these are anachronisms... As an archaeologist, what [can] I say ... that might be positive for the Book of Mormon? Well, really very little." (cited in Sides, "This is Not the Place", Doubletake, Spring 1999).

The Smithsonian has made a formal statement about the Book of Mormon. Tired of letters from Mormons who had heard rumours about use of the Book of Mormon by Smithsonian scientists, they created a form letter (which was used until the Mormon Congressional delegation got them to change it) that makes the following statements:

"1. The Smithsonian Institution has never used the Book of Mormon in any way as a scientific guide. The Smithsonian archaeologists see no direct connection between archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book."

"4. One of the main lines of evidence supporting the scientific finding that contacts with Old World civilizations, if indeed they occurred at all, were of very little significance for the development of American Indian civilizations, is the fact that none of the principal Old World domesticated food plants or animals (except the dog) occurred in the New World in pre-Columbian times. American Indians had no wheat, barley, oats, millet, rice, cattle, pigs, chickens, horses, donkeys, camels before 1492. (camels and horses were in the Americas, along with the

bison, mammoth, mastodon, but all these animals became extinct around 10,000 B.C. at the time the early big game hunters spread across the Americas.)"

"5. Iron, steel, glass, and silk were not used in the New World before 1492 (except for occasional use of unsmelted meteoric iron). Native copper was worked in various locations in pre-Columbian times, but true metallurgy was limited to southern Mexico and the Andean region, where its occurrence in late prehistoric times involved gold, silver, copper, and their alloys, but not iron."

"8. Reports of findings of ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, and other Old World writings in the New World in pre-Columbian contexts have frequently appeared in newspapers, magazines and sensational books. None of these claims has stood up to examination by reputable scholars. No inscriptions using Old World forms of writing have been shown to have occurred in any part of the Americas before 1492 except for a few Norse rune stones which have been found in Greenland."

- **Textual illogicalities.** Somehow Nephi is able to decapitate Laban, put on his bloody clothes and imitate his voice perfectly. Nephi coincidentally matches Laban in stature, age and facial features so that he can fool Laban's servants, who don't notice the bloody clothes. Nephi gets the brass plates from Laban, which were likely massive (hundreds of pounds) if they contained the entire Old Testament up to 600 BC (assuming, as Joseph did, that all the books were written in the order they appear in the KJV). These plates were made of brass, even though we have record of brass existing in Egypt or Palestine until Roman times. Interestingly, a Masonic legend with which JS was likely familiar included reference to brass plates that contained parts of the old testament, secret underground libraries of sacred records, the Urrim and Thummim, etc. and includes reference to someone's head being cut off with his own sword. This myth is like the source of some of the BofM story line, as well as some of JS's other ideas. More on this below.

- **Linguistic problems.**

The Book of Mormon people supposedly spoke Hebrew, and wrote in reformed Egyptian, but neither Hebrew nor Egyptian had a word for brass at that time. The KJV uses the word brass on occasion, but the original Hebrew says bronze or copper- why would the Book of Mormon continue to perpetuate this mistranslation? More on KJV mistranslations carried forward into the BofM below.

Jacob reveals the name of the Messiah to the Nephites (2 Nephi 10:3). The angel tells him that the name will be Christ - a Greek word derived from an Aramaic term that means roughly the same thing as Messiah does in Hebrew. Why would an angel reveal a Greek word for the Nephites to use as a proper name for the Messiah when the two words mean the same thing? Furthermore, in the first edition of the Book of Mormon the word Christ is used before this point, contradicting Jacob's assertion that an angel had to reveal it to him. Later editions fixed this by changing the earlier reference to Messiah.

At one point Joseph dictated what he claimed to be the original Hebrew phrases from which Jacob 5:13 and 7:27 were interpreted (see essay by Ashment in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, p. 334) Here is an example: "For it grieveth me that I should lose this tree and the fruit thereof." Joseph said the original Hebrew was "ofin Zimim ezmon E, Zu onis ifs veris etzer" In real Hebrew the phrase would be "ki car li ki yo'bad li ha'ec hazzeh upiryoy" (Ashment's transliteration). There are many other examples in Joseph's life where he made up something and claimed it was Egyptian or Hebrew. Once Joseph started learning Hebrew in Kirtland, he started using real Hebrew.

- **Problems with the use of the KJV (King James Version) in the BofM.**

On the brass plates were allegedly the five Books of Moses in spite of the fact that none of them except maybe Deuteronomy existed as a book until long after Lehi's family left Jerusalem. As noted above, biblical scholars have good evidence that Moses did not actually write five independent books. The Books of Moses as we have them in the Old Testament were compiled from earlier writings during the time of the second Temple, almost a century after Lehi left Jerusalem (see Richard E. Friedman's *Who Wrote the Bible*, esp. pg. 224).

The brass plates were said to contain many of the writings of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was the Old Testament prophet who would have been contemporary with Lehi. Yet the Book of Mormon claims that many of Jeremiah's words had been already written down, compiled in book form and inscribed on Laban's brass plates. This is possible, but highly unlikely. Nephi talks about Jeremiah already being thrown into prison (1 Nephi 7:14), when this did not occur until the tenth year of the reign of Zedekiah, years after Lehi's family were said to have left Jerusalem.

JS made heavy use of the KJV while creating the BofM, quoting extensively from Isaiah in various places, and the New Testament in others. The BofM perpetuates many translation errors that have now been clearly shown to exist in the KJV. The following comes from Dr. David Wright, a professor of Hebrew and Near Eastern studies at Brandeis University. He is a former BYU professor and was excommunicated from the Church for publishing his findings:

"The foregoing list makes clear that the KJV has grave deficiencies. Biblical scholarship has grown and advanced greatly since the early seventeenth century through the benefit of new archaeological, textual, and linguistic evidence and through improved methods of study and analysis. The developments are in their own way as revolutionary as those in the sciences (astronomy, physics, chemistry, medicine, etc.) since that time. The KJV, while having elegant language and conveying the meaning of the original texts adequately in many places, has been superseded like many of the scientific theories of its age. The BofM conserves many of the unacceptable translations of the KJV now clearly recognizable from the stance of modern research. If the former were a translation from an ancient text one would expect it to transcend the limitations of the KJV, and even the limitations of modern scholars who still find a number of the passages noted insoluble." (*American Apocrypha* (2002))

Some have claimed that these errors are doctrinally inconsequential, but they miss the point. It is not about the doctrine - it is the fact that the book contains errors unique to the KJV, which suggests the Book of Mormon was written after 1611.

One pattern that clearly emerges in JS's use of the KJV respecting the BofM is the attention he paid to the italicized words in the KJV. The italicization of these words in the KJV was known to JS to mean that they were not in the original Greek, and were added to the English to clarify the meaning of difficult to understand parts of the original. He often simply deleted these words in his re-rendering of KJV passages in the BofM, or substituted other words or phrases for them, but by doing so did not clarify the meaning of the original text. He also missed treating other areas of textual uncertainty that the KJV did not note with italics because of the inadequacies of that translation. JS's efforts to rework the KJV in the text of the BofM now appear much more like random guessing than anything else in light of the ancient biblical texts that were not available at the time the KJV was produced, and scholarship related to those texts.

○ **Other Environmental influences respecting the text and structure of the BofM.**

View of the Hebrews. One major source for the Book of Mormon was likely a book we know to have been available in JS's community, but do not have clear evidence he had in his possession. It was written by an acquaintance of Oliver Cowdery's father (Ethan Smith), and called "A View of the Hebrews". This book was one of the things that BH Roberts found most disturbing. It contains many striking parallels to the Book of Mormon, such as:

- native Americans were descendants of Israelites;
- native American languages grew out of Hebrew;
- native Americans once practiced Christian rites;
- native Americans once had an ancient book written in Hebrew that was subsequently lost;
- an exhortation to gentiles to restore native Americans to a knowledge of the Bible;
- 19th century native Americans were descendants of a savage people who hunted and roamed, who also wiped out a more peaceful, civilized branch of native Americans who farmed and worked metals
- all native Americans were once a white race;

- extensive quotations from many of the same chapters in Isaiah that Joseph uses in the BofM.

As noted above, BH Roberts presented to the First Presidency and the 12 a lengthy study concerning the BofM's historicity. Part of that study dealt with the likelihood that JS had access to View of the Hebrews. The following is a summary of some of BH's conclusions respecting whether JS had enough creative ability to weave together a narrative like the Book of Mormon using the framework provided by View of the Hebrews and other sources available to him:

" . . was Joseph Smith possessed of a sufficiently vivid and creative imagination as to produce such a work as the Book of Mormon from such materials as have been indicated in the preceding chapters . . .? That such power of imagination would have to be of a high order is conceded; that Joseph Smith possessed such a gift of mind there can be no question (BH Roberts Studies of the BofM, p. 243)."

One of the things that convinced Roberts of this is the testimony of JS's mother. She wrote:

"During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of travelings, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life among them."(BH Roberts, Studies of the BofM, p. 243).

BH points out JS was doing all this before he had supposedly received the gold plates from the angel Moroni (BH Roberts, Studies of the BofM, p. 244), and concludes:

"These evening recitals could come from no other source than the vivid, constructive imagination of Joseph Smith, a remarkable power which attended him through all his life. It was as strong and varied as Shakespeare's and no more to be accounted for than the English Bard's (BH Roberts, Studies of the BofM, p. 244).

I note that the stories JS told prior to receiving the plates were likely told during the period while JS said he was regularly receiving divine visitations and being educated about the ancient inhabitants of the Americas. That he could tell things about their lifestyle etc. is consistent with this. That he did not need golden plates to create a story about them is also consistent with this. That we know by his own testimony and that of other involved in the translation process that he often did not look at the plates, or even have them with him while "translating", is also consistent with this.

Masonic Legends. A legend that was part of the Masonic tradition was likely available to JS, and likely provided him other material for the creation of the BofM. I quote from a talk by Dr. Reed Durham, a former director of the University of Utah Institute, given to the Mormon History

Association in 1974 ("Is There No Help For The Widow's Son?") He was reportedly censured by the Church for publicizing this material, but no one has been able to establish that what he said is untrue. :

"Now let me just comment that the basic, introductory aspect of the legend is: that up in the pre-existence, there was a special Secret Doctrine that was given by Deity, and it was given down to the Earth first to Adam. Adam then was to carefully guard this Secret Doctrine because it contained all the Mysteries. It contained the knowledge of God, and the name it contained was the sacred name of God. Adam then bestowed it upon his son Seth who guarded it very carefully--only among the inner circle of believers--and then it was handed down until it came to Enoch. And, Enoch is the central figure in the legend. It is with Enoch that the remarkable resemblances with Joseph Smith and Mormon history become disconcertingly clear. The major details of the legend are outlined as follows:

1. Enoch, seventh in the line of patriarchs from Adam, was 25 years old when he received his call and vision.
2. He was taken up in vision onto a hill called Moriah.
3. In vision he saw a cavern in a hill, a sacred vault in the bowels of the earth. The cavity was symbolized as being a container for sacred treasures, like an holy ark, and it had a lid on it.
4. In vision, Enoch perceived a shiny gold plate containing unknown engravings and symbols.
5. He recognized the letter "M" upon the gold plate, which designated the name of the hill.
6. He further saw the sacred name of God, which had been lost to all mankind, and he was commissioned by Deity to preserve this knowledge.
7. He foresaw that a flood would come to destroy all mankind. Therefore, he felt it was his duty to preserve the Sacred Mystery.
8. He placed two pillars inside the hill:
 - (a) One of marble upon which, written in Egyptian hieroglyphics, were found the historical events connected with the tower of Babel; and
 - (b) One of brass, which contained the history of creation and the Secret Mysteries. These records were placed in the hill along with the treasure of the gold plate.
9. This brass pillar had a metal ball on its top, within which were contained maps, and directions of the world and of the universe, and which also acted as a sort of oracle.
10. Enoch then placed a stone lid, or slab, over the cavity into the hill.
11. Enoch predicted that on the other side of the deluge an Israelitish descendant would discover anew the Sacred buried treasure.
12. As predicted after the flood, a great king, named Solomon, came to power and desired to build a sacred house for the in-dwelling of the divine presence.

13. Solomon and his builders, the Masons, while building and excavating for the temple at Mt. Moriah, discovered the cavern and the sacred treasure.

14. After three attempts to obtain the treasure, they were finally successful. Those Masons were very rejoiceful upon receiving these preserved Mysteries.

15. But, three wicked men intervned and committed a horrible crime. They attempted to force one of the Masons, one of the faithful Masons who had discovered the treasure, Hiram Abif: or Hiram, the widow's son, to reveal the hiding (place) and the contents of the hidden treasure.

16. He would not reveal his knowledge and therefore they killed him.

17. While being slain, Hiram, with uplifted hands, cried out, "Oh Lord, My God, is there no help for the widow's son?" This has since become a general Masonic distress call. [This is the call some historians think Joseph was making at Carthage, to appeal to any Masons in the mob for help.]

18. Then three loyal Masons, seeking revenge, pursued the three evil ones.

19. One of the three faithful Masons overtook one of the arch villains. He was asleep with his sword, or knife, nearby.

20. The Mason slew the villain with his own knife by cutting off his head.

21. In Masonic ceremonies, the words "strike off his head" were employed.

22. Also in Masonic ceremonies. In revolutionary France, the re-acting of the killing of this villain, the tyrant's name was King Phillippe le Bel.

23. The loyal Mason was rewarded by King Solomon.

24. The recovered treasures then became part of the temple treasury. It consisted of the brass records, the gold plate, the metal ball, the breast plate and the urim and thummim."

The correlation between this legend and parts of the BofM and other teachings of JS are obvious.

- **Wordprint studies.** Computer analysis can be done of any writer's material and a "wordprint", much like a fingerprint, can be developed for that writer. That is, each writer has a unique style of using language that can be used to identify his writing from that of all other persons. The Book of Mormon has been carefully analyzed using this technique, and it appears clear that JS's word print is not in it. That is, he is not the author of the book in the usual sense. However, the word print of a number of other persons, whose writings have not been identified anywhere else, do so appear. This is consistent with the theory that the BofM was authored by multiple persons, and not by JS. It is my view that this can be explained by the phenomenon of automatic writing (more on that below), which might fairly in JS's case be linked to divine inspiration.
- **Other Cultural and Linguistic Evidences.**

LDS scholars have pointed out many examples of cultural and linguistic aspects of the BofM that indicate that its authors must have had an understanding of ancient Near Eastern customs, history, flora and fauna, literary forms etc. of which JS could not be reasonably expected to have been aware. Some of this scholarship has been effectively rebutted (some of the rebuttal is outlined above), but not all of it. In my view, it is fair to conclude that there is evidence in the BofM to support the idea that JS somehow had access to certain information from the ancient world that no one else in his day had. It is my view that this can be explained by the phenomenon of automatic writing, which might fairly in JS's case be linked to divine inspiration.

The Book of Mormon contains numerous names of people, places and things in both the Americas and the Near East that in Joseph Smith's time were not known to have been used in any language. Some studies have shown how names of this type can be simply made up by persons familiar with Biblical language. However, as archaeologists discover more about ancient Near Eastern and American history, they have found reference to these names or other like them. Recently, for example, the name "Nahom" was found inscribed on a stone in the Arabian desert. The inscription dates to about 700 BC. The Book of Mormon indicates that in about 600 BC certain events happened at a place called "Nahom" in the Arabian desert not far from where the stone was found. It is my view that this can be explained by the phenomenon of automatic writing, which might fairly in JS's case be linked to divine inspiration.

- **Automatic Writing.** My belief is that the theological core of the message the BofM contains was bubbling to the surface of JS's mind, and he gave it voice under the sincere belief that he was translating something.

There is a lot of precedent for relatively uneducated people suddenly being seized by some kind of "spirit" and writing down large amounts of sophisticated literature, some of it religious and other not. This is called "automatic writing" by the psychologists. They can't explain how it works, but it clearly does. I think Joseph Smith was in this category of people, as was Mohamed and other great religious figures. I believe that much of the information JS received through this medium was of a divinely inspired nature. A study of how Mohammed received his inspired message provides many interesting parallels to JS's experience. I highly recommend the relevant chapters of the "The History of God" in that regard.

One of the more interesting examples of automatic writing involved a reasonably well educated, but non-literary woman who lived in North America early last century. At some point in her life, the voice of another woman, who called herself "Patience Worth", came to her and began to dictate poetry. She wrote it down. She had never produced anything remotely resembling it on her own to that point in her life, or at anytime thereafter when she was not under the influence of "Patience Worth". This continued off and on for years. Eventually, Patience dictated to her

and she recorded full-length novels, plays that were professionally produced (including a particularly good one respecting the Passion of Christ), and huge volumes of poetry. Much of this writing was published under the name Patience Worth, and received high critical acclaim.

Patience eventually declared herself to be the spirit of a woman who lived in England during the 1300's, in a particular town that was eventually determined to have existed during that time. Psychologists, linguists, historians and others carefully studied the woman who had the alleged "spiritual" connection to Patience Worth. Their conclusions included the following: She produced the writings at such a rapid rate that she could not have been faking the process; they tested her in a number of interesting ways in this regard and were certain that all of what she said was spontaneously produced was in fact so produced; the written material she produced was linguistically consistent with the 1300's in England, and inconsistent with her own regular patterns of speech; her writing was consistent in terms of linguistic idioms, cultural and historical references etc. to the 1300's in England, and inconsistent with her own times; and she evidenced a form of information retrieval and split personality for which they had no explanation.

Many other persons are documented to have experienced similar phenomena. JS's experience fits comfortably into this genre.

- **Translation Process.** As noted above, JS likely used information in his environment to frame the BofM story. A lot of convincing research has been done to show how this likely occurred, some of which is noted above (View of the Hebrews, KJV, and the Masonic legends and traditions). It all makes sense when you look at it this way. I am not saying he made the BofM up or simply copied it from notes he had made. Royal Skousen at BYU has done some convincing work with the original transcripts of the BofM that are still available that show the "translation" process probably did work more or less as JS described it. That is, I think he did sit down and dictate the book during a short period of time probably without the aid of notes or anything else, and the information he had come in contact with during his life that was stored in his subconscious was part of what came out in an automatic writing kind of process. This is where the Masons, KJV and View of the Hebrews would come in. It is more difficult to explain how he managed to give special treatment to a large percentage of the italicized words in the KJV sections he quoted (sometimes convincingly but most times not). This points toward some form of note usage or specific prior preparation. However, I am nonetheless prepared to believe that most if not all of the information he produced that became the BofM came out in an automatic writing format, and that he was divinely inspired in much of what he did.
- **Divine source of at least some information in the BofM.** There is some information in the BofM that I doubt JS could have obtained from any means other than amazing coincidence or inspiration of some sort, and enough of it that amazing coincidence is a virtual impossibility. I would say the same thing respecting Patience Worth. The difference between

JS and Patience Worth is in the importance of the content of the information received by extraordinary means. To a significant extent, the proof of divine inspiration, for me, is not found in the circumstances (no matter how amazing) in which the information was received, but in the nature of the information itself. The ideas JS transmitted to us are of a rare nature. They contain the seeds and much of the infrastructure necessary to construct a powerful and positive worldview. The power of his ideas is evident in what the Church has done, despite its manifest failings.

Regardless of what the BofM is not, in my view it is a marvellous work and a wonder, and something that we need to take seriously. It will continue to have a big role to play in my life.

Not all of the BofM is, however, inspired. As I noted above, it purports to be real history. It is not. Also, some of its teachings are, in my view, false. For example, I have never been comfortable with the teaching in the BofM that God marks dark skinned people as a result of their ancestors' sins to prevent interracial sexual relationships and resulting racial pollution. This is a false teaching, in my view, and a reflection of societal attitudes in JS's day. It is also largely responsible for the error Brigham Young made respecting blacks and the priesthood. More on this topic below.

- **Culture of Magic.** JS was deeply involved in the culture of magic that was a part of mainstream religious culture during his time.

He did not translate much of the BofM with the Urim and Thummim. He used his "seer stone". This is a small, brown stone still in the possession of the first presidency that he placed in a hat, put his face over the hat to create darkness, and looked at in that darkness. He did not look at the golden plates through the Urim and Thummim, as most members of the Church assume. The plates were not even with him for much of the "translation". He said that the use of the seer stone was more convenient than using the Urim and Thummim. As he looked at the seer stone, the "translated" words he was to dictate to his scribe appeared. The plates themselves were often not present. This kind of process is remarkably similar to some of the best known and most thoroughly tested cases of automatic writing with which the academic community is familiar, such as that of Patience Worth noted above. It is also similar to the process Mohammed used to receive the Koran over a 23-year period. I also note that the see stone was the medium through which JS received many of the revelations still preserved (some in modified form – see below) in the D&C.

Before its use as a device to aid in the production of the BofM, the seer stone had been used by JS for years to look for lost objects, buried treasure etc. Even during his prophetic ministry there was at least one occasion during which he took some time off to look for treasure that was rumoured to have been buried in a particular local.

Another indication of the prevalence of magic in JS's time is a revelation in D&C 8:6 which speaks of Oliver Cowdery having the "gift of Aaron; behold it has told you many things." This is close to one my favourite scriptures – the one that described how revelation works, and so I have considered it carefully before. It used to confuse me, since I thought the gift of Aaron must have had something to do with the Aaronic Priesthood, or perhaps Aaron's role as a mouthpiece for Moses. In either of those cases I did not understand how that gift would "tell" Oliver anything. In my recent research I have learned a number things about this, and other D&C scriptures. The predecessor of the D&C is called the Book of Commandments. It contained all sorts of things that have been excluded from the D&C, such as the Lectures on Faith. In addition, many of the revelations that were in the Book of Commandments, and made it into the D&C, have been amended substantially to make them more palatable to modern tastes. The one referred to above is in this group. It originally referred to Oliver having the "gift of working the rod". This was the ability to use a divining rod to find things, like water for wells, lost objects etc. and to receive revelation. Oliver's father was also reported to have this gift, and Oliver brought his divining rod with him when he came to assist JS with the translation of the BofM. This sort of thing was not unusual in their day. The worlds of magic and religion co-existed comfortably. The revelation was eventually changed to its current wording, referring to the gift of Aaron, and presumably infers that Aaron also used his rod in the way Oliver did.

- **The Book of Abraham, Book of Moses etc.** These are not translations of anything. The evidence on this front is even clearer than it is respecting the BofM. JS thought he was translating Egyptian papyri that fell into his hands. It is now clear that he was not. In his day Egyptian could not be translated. Today it can be. The explanations for the discrepancy between the translation JS gave us and what the Egyptologists now say the papyri record are laughable. They only make sense to those who are in the state of denial I describe below. However, as is the case with the BofM, these inspired writings have many important things to teach us. They will continue to play an important role in my life.
- **Theocratic Ethics.** The following is a quote from Michael Quinn's "Mormon Hierarchy – The Origins of Power" (p. 88). Quinn is a respected historian. Some argue that he draws inappropriately broad conclusions as he writes history (this is a common criticism among historians as they review each others work), but his factual research is generally very good. In the following quotation, he both draws conclusions and summarizes some facts that are difficult to understand if one must believe that JS was a prophet in the sense Church members think of Gordon Hinkley as a prophet. As is always the case, we must take what historians (even good ones like Quinn) say with a grain of salt. Having done so, in my view there is more than enough in this one quote to shatter the image the Church would have us carry around of the Prophet Joseph.

"Smith remained aloof from civil office, but in November 1835 he announced a doctrine I [Quinn] call 'theocratic ethics'. He used this theology to justify his

violation of Ohio's marriage laws by performing a marriage for Newel Knight and the undivorced Lydia Goldthwaithe without legal authority to do so... In addition to the bigamous character of this marriage, Smith had no license to perform marriages in Ohio. "

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

This ethical independence is essential for understanding certain seemingly inconsistent manifestations in Mormonism. Some had already occurred - reversals in doctrine and divinely revealed procedures, and the publication of unannounced changes in written revelations and historical texts. The Knight marriage was a public example of Joseph Smith's violation of laws and cultural norms regarding marriage and sexual behavior - the performance of civil marriages by legally unauthorized officiators, monogamous marriage ceremonies in which one or both partners were undivorced from legal spouses, polygamous marriage of a man with more than one living wife, his marriage proposals to females as young as twelve, his sexual relationships with polygamous wives as young as fourteen, polyandry of women with more than one husband, marriage and cohabitation with foster daughters, and Mormon marriages of first cousins, brother-sister, and uncle-niece. Other manifestations of Mormonism's theocratic ethics would soon begin in Kirkland and continue intermittently for decades - the official denials of actual events, the alternating condemnation and tolerance for counterfeiting and stealing from non-Mormons, threats and physical attacks against dissenters or other alleged enemies, the killing and castration of sex offenders, the killing of anti-Mormons, the bribery of government officials, and business ethics at odds with church standards."

As noted above, Quinn is generally a reliable historian, and that is why I have been prepared to share this quote with you while I have not shared many others that make sensational claims. The authors of the other quotes do not have Quinn's history of reliable scholarship. However, I note that there is one point that he states unequivocally in the above quote respecting which I have seen conflicting evidence. That is the age of the youngest of JS's wives with whom he had sexual intercourse. Quinn above says 14. That could be the case with either Fanny Alger or Helen Kimball (Heber C. Kimball's daughter). However, in both cases the evidence I have seen is inconclusive. I would say it is possible, perhaps likely, that 14 was the youngest age, and certain that 16 was. I am not aware of any evidence that conflicts with anything else in the quote. Some of what JS did is somewhat understandable in light of certain circumstances and conditions of his time. Most of it, however, is only understandable in light of the theocratic ethics term that Quinn, in my view, has usefully coined.

In any event, the above quote paints a disturbing, but unfortunately pretty accurate, picture of some of the events related to our Church's origins. The practise of theocratic ethics continued off and on for a long time within the Church. The fact, noted below, that Church officials lied about

their continuing illegal practise of polygamy for 15 years after the Manifesto in 1890 is another illustration of this phenomenon.

The rule of law is one of those things that is fundamental to democratic society. Therefore, anyone who holds himself up as being an authority above the law is an extremely dangerous person. The Church's Articles of Faith proclaim that we subject ourselves to the law of the land. JS of course wrote those. In modern times, we do abide by the rule of law. JS's behaviour in personally living above the law, and lying about it for years, and encouraging his close associates at first and others later to do so as well, is one of the most troubling aspects of his character from my point of view. I can accept that God could use such a man as an instrument for divine inspiration, but I would not feel bound to follow such a man without carefully verifying the good sense of the particular teaching I was being asked to follow, and making sure that I felt personally inspired by God to follow. That is why it is essential, in my view, that the members of the Church understand the things I am writing to you about, and that they make their decisions to follow with knowledge of the imprecise nature of the revelatory process our church leaders use. It is obvious that this knowledge will make many people reluctant to obey, and hence we should not surprised that the Church's leaders have rationalized a policy of covering up the facts that lead people like me to ask troubling questions.

- **Polygamy.** I think polygamy was a huge mistake. I do not think it was inspired. I believe that JS was probably a philanderer who invented polygamy to cover up sexual misdeeds.

A few facts.

In Todd Compton's book, *In Sacred Loneliness*, the well-documented biographies of 33 of JS's wives are presented. Of JS's first twelve wives, nine were polyandrous (married to other men at the time JS indicated that they had been "given" to him by God and married them) and eleven of the 33 were 14 to 20 years old when they were married to him. It is not certain that he consummated his marriage with all of his wives. In particular, this is not clear with 14-year-old Helen Kimball, and it is not clear whether Fanny Alger was 14 or 16 years old when she married him. The best evidence, however, indicates that she was 14 years old. In most cases, the evidence is clear that he consummated his plural marriages and is particularly clear with respect to Fanny Alger. More on her below.

JS attempted to marry a number of other women who refused him. One, already married to one of his close associates who had agreed to allow JS to marry her, told him that she would not marry him – that she would rather be a chaste woman in hell than a whore in the celestial kingdom, if that is what it came to.

Polygamy was officially denied by Joseph Smith in speeches from the pulpit, newspaper articles and many private conversations for most of the

period between 1833, when his first known sexual relationship probably occurred that was later said to have become his first plural marriage (see below re Fanny Alger) and 1843 when the revelation on polygamy (celestial marriage) was made public.

Polygamy included a number of bizarre attributes. One, alluded to above, was the idea if a Church leader felt inspired to marry a woman already married to another man, he could ask her and if she said yes, she was his and his marriage to her annulled her prior marriage. She had the right, in essence, to trade up to what may have seemed like spiritually superior goods if given the opportunity.

Most historians who have looked at the question believe Fanny Alger, a 14 or 16-year-old (depending on the date of marriage accepted – the evidence is not clear on this point) living with JS and Emma to help Emma with her household, was JS's first plural wife. Quinn's "theocratic ethics" concept (see paragraph above) is essential to understanding how this came to be. It is not clear that a marriage ceremony between JS and Fanny ever occurred, or if it occurred that it preceded their initial sexual liaison. Oliver Cowdery, one of JS's closest confidants and an early participant in polygamy, referred to JS's relationship to Fanny as a "dirty affair" and accused JS of adultery respecting it. This was a large part of the wedge that was eventually driven between him and JS. If a ceremony was performed, the person who performed it did not have legal authority to do so.

Given what I have read, it appears likely to me that JS's relationship with Fanny started out as a standard extra-marital affair, which was rationalized as plural marriage ex post facto by JS. It is certain that Emma did not know about JS's relationship with Fanny until well after it was consummated, and there is some evidence that Emma found out about it when she caught them "in the act".

The concept of "theocratic ethics" is likely what JS used to rationalize all of this. If he felt that he was mandated by God and not to be bound by the law of the land, as he did in so many other ways as indicated by Quinn above, it is a small step from there to believing that having sexual relations with a woman to whom he was not yet quite married would be OK, as long as he was sure that God had "given" her to him and that they would be married in due course.

I think that the combination of a powerful intellect and a propensity for communication from God made him believe that he was inspired to do what he did. The study of psychology related to major religious figures indicates that the same type of genius and creative power that is part of someone capable of doing the things JS did, is also likely to create a personality that is unstable in many ways. Numerous examples of this type have been studied.

I read a book some time ago called "Shadow Syndromes" by Dr. John Rately of Harvard. The New Yorker magazine said it was the most

important book respecting psychology and psychiatry written during the 1990s. The review indicated that it might help me to understand a problem one of our kids was having at the time, so I bought it and found it to be one of the most insightful and important books I have ever read.

Dr. Ratey in his chapter on mild manic depression described how great, charismatic business and political leaders often suffer from mild manic depression, and when in the mild manic phase of their condition emit huge amounts of human energy which attracts people to them and the causes they espouse, and incidentally makes a great deal of sexual opportunity available to them. He describes Bill Clinton as the classic example. When I read this years ago, I quickly put aside the troubling idea that JS fits that bill quite well, as do the many other religious leaders who seem to often be inspired by God to have more than one sexual partner. I now believe that polygamy is likely the result of this aspect of JS's personality.

- **Increasing Instability.** Near the end JS's life, in particular, it is my view that he came off the rails.

He had many sexual relationships with women that eventually blossomed into "revelation" respecting polygamy.

He lied for many years to the members of the Church and public at large respecting polygamy. For years over the pulpit, in newspapers etc. he said he was not practising polygamy when in fact he was.

He formed a secret "Counsel of Fifty" to among other things, actually rule the earth. This violated the democratic rights of the members of the Church. When you read references in older church books, the D&C etc. to the "kingdom of God", what is usually being referred to is a political organization that would actually rule the earth from the City of Zion, at Independence, Missouri. JS believed that this was to be the literal fulfillment of the prophesy in Daniel that a little stone cut out of the mountain without hands would roll forth until it filled the whole earth. The Counsel of Fifty was set up to prepare for the fulfillment of that prophecy. JS, as leader of God's kingdom on earth, was to literally be the ruler (speaking as God's mouthpiece of course) of the entire earth. Brigham Young so ruled Utah through the Counsel of Fifty for years immediately after the Saints arrived there.

JS ordained his son, JS III, to succeed him as prophet and president of the Church. This is documented beyond doubt. JS III was then a young boy, and was to be under Hyrum's guardianship until he reached adulthood and was to then assume his prophetic and organizational role. JS stated on a number of occasions that he did this because his role as prophet was finished, and he was to move on to other things. What those things were is not clear. He was killed not long after these events transpired.

When some of the leading Saints in Nauvoo found out about polygamy and some of JS's other secret doctrines and practises, they tried to persuade him to change his ways because they feared he would destroy the Church. These people included his second counselor, William Law, two Nauvoo Stake Presidents and several other prominent Church members. When he refused, they founded the Nauvoo Expositor to make what was going on public, hoping that this would bring things to a head and force constructive change. The Nauvoo town counsel, with JS acting as Mayor, ordered the destruction of the Expositor. This violated important principles of US law related to the sanctity of private property and free speech, and led to JS's martyrdom.

I do not condone in any way what the people did to JS at Carthage. However, once you know the whole story, it makes much more sense. He commanded the largest army in the area, was widely believed to be lying about his sexual practises, and had just destroyed private property to suppress free speech and had recently set up an organization (the Counsel of Fifty) with the avowed purpose to "rule the world" in literal, not spiritual terms. Two of his close associates, Thomas March and Orson Hyde, swore affidavits in which they painted a horrific scene of the Saints killing people, preparing for war against their neighbours and intent of eventually ruling first the US and then the entire earth. They both later said that they should not have sworn those affidavits and that some details of what they swore to were inaccurate. However, the picture their affidavits paint conveys the terrifying image of a man and his followers out of control. Given what I have read, I believe that is an accurate image. March and Hyde can in my view be forgiven for acting in panic as they did, and much of the content of their affidavits is without doubt accurate. JS had become a frightenly powerful person with mega maniacal tendencies. So some of the rough types from neighbouring towns decided they had to get rid of him. They got liquored up, and went out and did the terrible deed.

In what you have above, I have written a summary of a fraction of the intrigue and outlandish things that happened during an unbelievably colourful chapter in Church history that has been systematically suppressed, for obvious reasons, by the leaders of our Church.

- **Toward a Mormon Mythos.** Here is an interesting idea that for me at this point represents one of the most powerful reasons to stay close to the Church to the extent I can.

One of the many books I have read in the last while is called "The Battle for God", also by Karen Armstrong, a former nun who is one of the world's most respected religious historians and also authored "The History of God" from which I quoted above. "The Battle for God" is one of the most powerful and important books I have read in a long time. Armstrong wrote it after writing "The History of God", and built on some of the themes she had only introduced in that book. Her main point is that "mythos" (allegorical stories, or myths, on which most religious belief

systems are based) was never intended to be interpreted using "logos" (scientific reasoning).

At one time, mythos was the primary lens through man viewed life. In recent time, logos has taken over. Since all we know is logos, it is hard for us to imagine people who saw the world quite differently than we see it. For them, the distinction between reality and what we would call myth was not at all clear. There are still primitive peoples for whom the world of dreams and myths is every bit as real as the world we would call "real".

For us who now use logos as the dominant lens through which we see life, the stories on which much of our religion is based look silly. Those stories were originally written and understood as mythos and therefore cannot be expected to make sense when interpreted using logos. For example, those Christians (including many members of our Church) who still believe that the earth is 6,000 years old struggle with what science (logos) has to say about that. Armstrong says that it would not have occurred to the ancients to enquire as to whether the creation took seven of the same kind of days they lived, or exactly how long ago (in real time) it occurred. Those were not relevant questions to a mythos-based worldview. Since the fundamentalists now believe those questions to be relevant, and to require logos based answers, they have come up with incredibly silly arguments to explain away what geology and archaeology tell us so that they can continue to believe that the earth is literally 6,000 years old. This is an example of people interpreting mythos (the biblical story of the creation of the world) literally, and then finding that modern logos (scientific) thinking makes life really difficult for them and being forced to invent ridiculous scientific theories to support their religious beliefs. The result, as Armstrong points out, is both bad religion and bad science. The response of the fundamentalists, who employ this use of logos with respect to mythos, is often to retrench, limit the information the members get respecting this issue, and try to create as much denial as possible to maintain the obedience and followership of those within their group. Armstrong does not mention the LDS Church, but I think you will recognize the pattern she describes.

"The Battle for God" makes a convincing case for the idea that the modern logos based approach to life has created great difficulty for religions in general, and is responsible for the relatively recent rise in the popularity and power of fundamentalism. Our Church's most rapid period of growth coincides with this worldwide ascendancy of fundamentalism of all types. Most religions have "modern" or "liberal" groups within them who have rejected most of their traditional beliefs on the basis that logos makes them look ridiculous. Ironically, it is usually the priests or professional clergy who lead this effort, since they are the ones who think about these things the most. So, for example, leading Lutheran and other clergyman in the US have for a long time taken the position that Christ was a real person, but was not literally the son of God, did not literally rise from the dead, did not literally perform the miracles attributed to him, etc. Rather, he was a great teacher whom we should follow. In fact, many of these people take the position that God is such an amorphous, vague

force (if he exists at all), that he has little to add to our lives. They take this position on the basis that the teachings of the Bible are manifestly false, from a logos point of view.

In reaction to teachings of this sort, the fundamentalists have become more and more strict in their literal interpretation of scripture. They offer certainty – concrete answers to the wishy-washy questions and positions the liberals put out. They say it all happened just as the Bible said it did – the creation, Jonah and the large fish, Noah and the Ark, the Tower of Babel, Moses and his miracles, etc. They are applying logos because they know of no other way to interpret the Bible. They have always been taught that the Bible is "true", and they can't escape the logos definition of what is "true". In a logos world, the opposite of "true" is "false". Since the Bible can't be false, they find that they must adopt extreme and seemingly ridiculous points of view to rationalize the Bible with the logos definition of "true". Remember what I said about how strong denial can be? Here we have more solid evidence of that.

Having been locked into a literal mindset creates all kinds of problems for the fundamentalists. There is a huge difference in the worldview that results from literally interpreting scripture, and mythically or metaphorically interpreting it.

A literal interpretation of the apocalypse followed by the millennium causes us to believe that the world is under the control of evil forces that will cause it to become more and more wicked until it is destroyed, probably sometime in the near future, and the millennium is ushered in. Therefore, we are inclined not to participate in most things outside of our Church community, despite some encouragement from the Church to do so. We have become exceptionally inward looking, and fearful of what is around us.

A mythical interpretation of the same concepts could open us to a wonderful world. We could see the world as being full of good things, and getting better at a surprisingly rapid rate, despite pockets of evil that will always be with us. We would see the possibility of the good parts of life ending in apocalyptic evil as being a personal issue - one that can be avoided by the way in which we choose to live our lives. The arrival of a metaphoric, personal millennium could likewise be determined by our personal behaviour. This metaphoric understanding of scripture could cause us to see life through the lens of passages that teach us not to hide our light under a bushel, to act as the leaven of the world, etc. We would be more likely to embrace the good around us, and play a role in making it even better.

The problems with literal interpretation move from taking a lot of the joy and fun out of life (as noted above) into much more serious territory when we talk about being God's "chosen people" and other concepts related to that. If we are literally his chosen ones, then all other people are his enemies and the scriptures (the Bible and others, like the Koran) are full in parts of graphic descriptions of what God does to his enemies. The

literal interpretation of these passages creates a particularly potent form of evil. Fundamentalists believe to a greater or lesser extent that God must take action against his enemies, and they are therefore justified in certain circumstances of acting on his behalf in that regard. The more extreme the group, the more violent and common the license to take such action in God's name. This is exactly the type of thinking that has escalated in some religions to the point where religious faith is used to motivate and justify terrorist acts.

Armstrong gives a number of examples of disasters having resulted from people from different religions taking action in an attempt to bring to pass biblical or other scriptural prophecies that they literally interpret. Many are illustrations of action taken to punish God's enemies. Others are subtler. The first that comes to mind is Israel being carved out of Palestine, and the Jews being sent back there. There are lots of others. Joseph Smith's Counsel of Fifty is one she does not mention.

"The Battle for God" points out that the use of logos in the place of mythos for religious purposes has resulted in many cases of an outright rejection of religion (logos makes it look to ridiculous to have any value), or fanatical religion coupled with ridiculous science that does arguably much more harm than good. Regrettably, it is my view that the Church's tendency to use literal interpretation of scripture and its other fundamentalist attributes (more on that below) at present put it in the camp of those who do more harm than good.

As noted above, since logos deals well with the "what and how", but not at all with the "why" of life, the dominance of logos over mythos strips life of most of its meaning, and forces many people to either live without meaning (atheist/humanist at best and depressed nihilist at worst) or resort to a logos style interpretation of the scriptures (ie. literal), which renders them misleading, dangerous tools since they were not written with that in mind. According to Armstrong, this is what leads to the atrocities of Nazism on the one hand, and the worst of what the fundamentalists of all faiths have done on the other, such as Sept 11, and the fighting between Muslims and Jews over the Holy Land. I think she is bang on, as far as she goes. However, she does not suggest how mythos can find its way back onto our life's stage to again perform a meaningful role, and help us to maintain the meaning in our lives that is necessary to live in the kind of peace and with the kind of purpose for which we hope.

I observe that our Church uses a combination of literal and allegorical interpretation of the scriptures. The creation, most of us believe, is largely allegorical. However, the miracles of Jesus and the Book of Mormon are literally interpreted, for example. It appears that Joseph Smith used the insights he gleaned to answer all of the major theological questions that were outstanding in his day (nature of God and the Godhead; infant baptism; how the creation occurred; etc.). That is, by the time he arrived on the scene, logos had already proven mythos "wrong" in many ways, and he introduced a system of theology that resolved that conflict by showing that the old religions were silly and established new

beliefs that made sense in light of logos as he perceived it. However, he fell into the same trap that had caught other religions eons before. He adopted a literal interpretation ("logos" styled interpretation) of the belief system he established. This meant that as logos advanced, many of the positions he put forward would eventually appear as foolish as those he was so critical of the churches of his day respecting. For example, the translation of the Book of Abraham. On that front, we are beating a retreat on the basis of things like the entire book was a mnemonic system to help initiates remember the story of Abraham, or maybe JS was inspired to write the book as a result of symbolism that real Egyptologists cannot see in the hieroglyphs. This is straw grasping. As noted above, the same can be said of the defense put forward for the BofM, but the case is not yet quite so certain.

In any event, it seems to me that the mythos imbedded in Joseph Smith's writings, if we accept them as divinely inspired to at least some extent, can be interpreted to open the way for us to live in the modern world, embracing science and its advances, while believing in a God who is part of that system and still has a plan of which we are part that inspires noble (and socially useful) conduct at individual, family unit, and societal levels. The key parts of our theology or mythos in that regard are (a) Man can become like God (remember, this is mythos and is therefore not literally interpreted - I don't think it means what most Church members take it to mean); (b) Man is that he might have joy; (c) Marriage, family and other relationships are eternal and are our primary source of joy; (d) Man is a free agent; and perhaps most importantly, (e) God is subject to eternal law, and does what he does by working within those laws - hence the problem of evil is largely resolved. God cannot do away with evil because it conflicts with the principle of free agency. I note in this regard that we are again forced to agree with Talmage and Widstoe, and to disagree with BR McConkie and many other more current leaders; (e) There are lots of others I could make note of, but I think you get the idea. To the extent JS was wrong, we simply acknowledge that and move on. This is not much of a progression from things like his belief that the Book of Mormon was played out in most of North and South America and that the North American Indians are literal descendants of the Lamanites. These things have been proven with close to certainty to be false. I suggest that it is a small step from where the faithful members in know are now, to where I suggest we should be. Regrettably, not long ago other members were excommunicated for teaching these very things, without to my knowledge linking them to the mythos idea I have outlined above. In my view, the mythos is much more important than whether JS did everything we have been taught he did.

It seems to me that this mythos is a significant contribution to mankind. Even in my present state I would say that it is an inspired contribution and that Joseph Smith was one of those rare people whose ability to communicate with God was extraordinary. As a result, he provided us with some insights that can be used for purposes much more important than Joseph likely understood when these things came to him, and in fact did not become apparent for many years thereafter. At the same time, I

acknowledge that JS made spectacular mistakes, and did not understand much of the information that was bouncing around in his head. Did God mislead him on purpose? I don't think so. I think the relationship between God and man is much less direct and specific than I previously suspected.

I note that John Nash (great scientist – won a Nobel Prize a while ago – went crazy at one point and had to be institutionalized) said that the reason he believed his delusions was that they seemed to come to him in the same way as his most brilliant mathematical ideas. And I read elsewhere that the ways in which great physicists and mystics explain their experiences are very similar. Many great scientists have described a revelatory process by which they made their breakthroughs. I believe that when we get into the realm of true genius and divine inspiration, it is sometimes impossible for the type of person who is subject to receiving these breakthroughs to accurately interpret them and role God plays in them. This goes back to the idea I mentioned above, that the psychologists tell us that creative genius of the type that can do what JS did usually comes clothed in an unstable personality.

As an exercise, assume that (a) JS was a philanderer who felt inspired to create polygamy, and inspired to lie about it; (b) JS did not translate things like the Book of Abraham and the Book of Mormon; (c) JS did a whole bunch of other uninspired and in some cases harmful, wrong things; (d) The Church since JS has been largely been involved in the ordinary routinization that occurs when the charismatic genius who inspires a movement departs. We have to acknowledge that the Church has been extraordinarily successful from an organizational point of view in that effort, but not as successful in recent times as a few other churches that started at more or less the same time ours did, such as the Seventh Day Adventists and the JWs. Furthermore, the much more loose knit Pentecostal churches, which tap more directly into a charismatic "mythos" kind of experience, have grown in recent times so rapidly that they have dwarfed our Church and the other two mentioned above.

In essence, let's assume for discussion purposes that it is likely that JS not only made some huge human errors, but that he also did not understand the nature of the divine communication he received and therefore honestly misrepresented it as translation, in some cases, when it was not. I won't get into the minutiae of arguments pro and con the positions state above. Lets just assume those positions to be correct, and see where that leaves us.

I can respect and attach great value to the mythos JS left us even while acknowledging the degree of imperfection and misunderstanding or misrepresentation noted above. As I worked through this idea after reading "The Battle for God", I was surprised at the degree of imperfection etc. I could tolerate while still accepting the divine source of his most important ideas, and feeling a compelling need to keep them in my life and wanting to pass them on to my children. As I thought about that, I realized that I was in the process of peeling away yet another layer

of false conditioning that has resulted from my life long membership in the Church. We are conditioned to see JS and our other leaders as idealized symbols rather than real people, despite what they themselves have told us in that regard. Most of the fight between the forces pro and con regarding the Church focuses on this issue or things related to it. We seem to have forgotten how imperfect the Old Testament shows the patriarchs and other epochal leaders to have been. Moses was a murderer; the children of Israel tricked an entire nation into accepting circumcision, and then slaughtered them while their men were still recovering; David killed a man to take Bathsheda; Jacob's birthright was based on a fraud perpetrated on his father and brother; Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael into the desert to die because Sariah was jealous of them; the scriptures are full of things that show the greats of the past to have been riddled with superstition and magical ideas. And yet we still accept the wisdom that comes from those inspired, but imperfect, sources. I think this approach is much more realistic with regard to our leaders, and that JS in particular can reasonably be said to have provided us with some groundbreaking concepts that address the "missing mythos" problem Armstrong so eloquently pointed out.

I think that the loud debate about different theories respecting how the Book of Abraham and Book of Mormon came into being and other issues of this sort are secondary in nature, though we can be forgiven for having it since we need to get past the many incorrect things we have been led to believe about the B of M, our history etc. I have seen enough evidence to be convinced that things did not happen as we have been led to believe they did, even though JS (I think) and many others believed virtually all that he told us. I also recognize that we do not now, and probably never will, know exactly what happened and which parts are true, part true, and false. I think it would best to move past the position of feeling that we need defend all of the positions he took, and those of the GAs on various points, and rather focus on more basic issues. The approach that I think is counter productive is best illustrated by what I see with the B of M. Pro-Church forces are expending huge resources of various types arguing about whether it is a literal translation, as they do with the B of A. However, the pro-Church camp now acknowledges that JS was wrong in many of his beliefs respecting the B of M (geography, Lamanite dependency of North American Indians, for eg.) because they have no choice in that regard, and they say that JS could be wrong (human) respecting those things while being right (inspired) on many others. That admission opens the door to the correct approach, in my view. So really, the question seems to me to have become: Where do we draw the human v. inspired line, and the problem is that for generations allegedly inspired people have said that the book is a literal translation. Well, we know that they can be wrong too. JS and they can be wrong on lots of things while being right on some of the big ones - the ones that create the core of our ideology. I, for one, don't think that that the literal historicity of the book is one of the important things. I further believe that those who base their testimony of the Gospel on this point are in for trouble. They are the ones most likely to become atheists when that point of faith collapses. It would be much better for all of us move to

the position of accepting JS's mythos without needing to literally interpret and accept as the truth the rest of what he told us.

- **Conclusion re JS.** In summary re JS, I accept much of what he did as inspired in spite of the many serious errors he committed. I have noted a few of the most significant above. There are many others. He also, however, provided us with a number of fundamentally important things. These things are largely responsible for the Church's success in spite of its organizational shortcomings. More on those below. In short, the system for living or worldview JS left us has the potential to work as well or better than any other system with which I am familiar. It is that simple. I therefore honour him and am prepared to follow his teachings, despite what I have pointed out above respecting his deficiencies.

Life is not as simple as most Church members need to believe. Church members want to feel that they are on firm, certain ground and so they ignore the things I have recently learned. This is not a wise way to proceed, however, because it gives us a misleading picture of life. Life and our relationship to God are not simple and straightforward. We cannot rely upon our leaders to tell us what to do, because their inspiration is often worse than our own. We need to learn much more about how to find God's spirit and guide ourselves, respecting and paying attention to the counsel of our leaders, but not following them unless we have given careful thought to what makes sense on our own before proceeding.

- **Other Church Leaders and Major Policy Errors.** Here is how I feel about other Church leaders and some of the Church's main policies and programs. Just as JS made many mistakes, so did (and do) our other leaders. I pointed out some of JS's problems above. Here are a few of the other big ones:
 - **Blacks and the Priesthood.** JS gave the priesthood to blacks. No one, except BY many years after the fact, ever mentioned JS teaching that the blacks could not hold the priesthood. BY brought that policy in at the same time as slavery was being made legal in Utah for a variety of political reasons. Later Church leaders, including David McKay and Spencer Kimball, stated that the denial of the priesthood to the blacks was a "practise" not a "doctrine" and as early as 1954 were talking about changing it. This practise was supported by a wide array of unbelievably racist ideas, all of course attributed to God in different ways over the years. Finally, it was done away with in 1978, and some general authorities (Bruce McKonkie in particular) told us to ignore everything they ever said on the topic – that they had been simply wrong as to the divine reasons for the policy. In my view the answer as to why this played out as it did is simple – the whole thing was a mistake. JS was right. Blacks should have held the priesthood from the beginning of the Church's history and continuously, as he had started things out. BY was wrong, and this caused a great deal of hardship for many members and non-members of the Church. I can accept an error of this magnitude, spoken in "the name of the Lord" by a man who sincerely thought he was inspired, and still believe that on other occasions he did things that were

inspired. The lines of communication between God and man (even those who are prophets) is not as clear as most members of our Church would like to believe.

- **Attitudes respecting race in general.** While we have extended the priesthood to all races, the attitudes underlying the former policy re the blacks continue to have significant influence within the Church. This is largely due to the passages in the BofM noted above which say that colored skin is a sign of ancestral sin. While Church leaders are more careful in this regard now than in the past, and the BofM itself has even been amended to minimize the problem (the passage that used to say that the Lamanites would become a "white and delightsome" people now says that they will become "pure and delightsome" – See 2 Nephi 5:21 and 30:6), we still hear echoes of these bad ideas, and a relatively short time ago the confused nature of LDS leadership thinking was clearly apparent for all to see. One of my used-to-be favorite prophets, Spencer Kimball, said at the October 1960 General Conference Report, as quoted in the December 1960, Improvement ERA:

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

While I do not question Kimball's intentions, it should not be clear that they was badly misinformed. In my view, the BofM's racist teachings contradict many other scriptures and even the teachings of JS himself, and are simply wrong. Our leaders now try to support a racially tolerant position, but that has not always been the case. JS and BY made numerous outrageous racial comments, when judged by the standards of our time. Many other GA's are in the same camp, including Mark Peterson and Ezra Benson in particular. One of BY's most inflammatory statements was that God's penalty for a black man having sex with a white woman was death on the spot. This statement is thought to have encouraged violent vigilante style killings of black men in Utah that were a problem there for some time.

- **Polygamy.** You read above what I had to say about JS and polygamy. After polygamy was abolished in 1890, for about 15 years the Church leaders publicly over pulpit, through newspapers etc. said that the Church no longer condoned polygamy, when at the same time the first presidency and the quorum of the 12 authorized and performed hundreds of polygamous marriages. They justified this by the fact that at the time the Church was in a virtual state of war with the US, and that in a state of war they were not required to tell the truth to the opposing party. This necessitated their lying to everyone. This led to the second manifesto in 1904 with which they reaffirmed the no polygamy rule, and falsely blamed all of the problems on two "renegade" members of the 12. In fact, it has

been proven that every single member of the 12 and the first presidency, except 2, were directly involved, and it is likely that the other 2 were as well. Many current Mormon polygamist groups base their practises on what the Church's leaders said during this 15-year period of time. That is, when the Church leaders say that no polygamy is allowed, they don't really mean it – the "true" church will always practise polygamy regardless of what the leaders say in public since this is what these groups were told by men they regarded as inspired leaders during the period between 1890 and 1904.

- **Suppression of history and testimony threatening materials.** There is a Church policy of only permitting "faithful history" to be published and of discouraging members from reading anything that might cause them to question the authority or wisdom of Church leaders. Many academics who write honest, well-researched and documented history and science that conflict with the teachings of the Church from time to time have been ex communicated. I was taught that these people were evil and their writings should be avoided. I have now read a lot of what these folks have written, and have found much of it to be far better than what the Church produces on the topics in question. The following are my thoughts on this important topic:

The thing that most disturbs me as the reality of my religious experience comes into better focus is that a well educated, enquiring person such as myself could have been for so many years effectively sealed off from important sources of information that are critically relevant to his world view. I have always said that the most important thing about the Church is that it helps us on a regular basis to check our bearings and maintain an "eternal" perspective as we work our way through life. Now, it seems to me that the Church's understandable (but uninspired, human) desire to minimize certain types of disruption has caused it to suppress both information and enquiry, and by so doing has created an environment for its members that limits their perspective, thereby working strongly against the very thing that I thought (and still do think) was so important.

I have said in more places than I can count (to my children, to those who I have counselled as a Church leader, in missionary discussions, to non-member friends, from the pulpit etc.) that my understanding of history indicates that the main purpose of religion is usually to control the masses, leading the Marx's famous and generally accurate "religion is the opiate of the masses" statement. I have assured many people that our religion was different - that we embraced all truth - and that our religion was empowering, not controlling or limiting. This is clearly what our ideology teaches. I now feel that I was the subject of an almost unbelievably ironic joke. I was kept ignorant of my own history while being relatively knowledgeable regarding that of others, and was subject to many of the same forces I could see operating in other religions while being certain, and assuring others, that we were not so subject. I am still staggered by that realization. As I suspect you have heard, "He who does not know history is condemned to repeat it". I feel that I was so condemned. And "He who controls the past controls the future". This

used to be said of old time kings, who controlled what their people knew about the past in order to retain power over them. For example, the Inca kings made sure their people all understood that the king was a literal descendant of the Sun, and therefore must be obeyed. By inculcating this belief, the king maintained his power. I feel that others have for some time controlled my perception of part of the past that is deeply relevant to me, and so have controlled me.

As I have thought about the concerns I have, as expressed above, it has become clear that they are all related to free agency. I think it important to the exercise of free agency that the Church make all of the information it has available to us that is likely relevant to our understanding of the nature of the Church, the relationship our leaders have to God, and therefore the role that the Church and its leaders should play in our lives. The fact that man is a free agent is, in my view, a fundamental part of our ideology. Anything that tampers with that is therefore to be taken seriously.

The Church's rationale for the "faithful history" etc. policy is that they need to protect the members' testimonies from truths that are too hard to take. I think I can go along with the idea that it is not wise to introduce the whole truth to everyone at the same time. There are certain types of information that should have limited distribution, but not many types. Those I can think of sitting here are: certain information related to national security issues (if widely circulated, this might fall into hands of the enemy and be used against us); information related to sexual matters should be carefully introduced to children (at certain ages the information would be irrelevant and confusing); etc. It seems to me that in those and similar cases where the withholding of information is justified, it is usually so on the basis that the information is either not relevant to the people to whom it might be disclosed, or could not be used by them for productive purposes in any event, and the information could have harmful results if disclosed. So, no or little advantage is gained by disclosure, and some harm might be done. Thus, non-disclosure is justified.

I don't believe non-disclosure of information of the type discussed above is justified in the Church's case, except respecting children whose spiritual needs are met at a very basic level. I agree that concepts should be introduced slowly and carefully to them. The sex education model (or at least my version of it) would be a close fit in that regard.

Adults need the information the Church has to assess the merits of the very claims the Church makes to us in its attempt to persuade us and potential converts to dedicate resources of various sorts to the Church. I think the Church is in a position much closer to that of a company issuing securities, to which the "full, plain and true" disclosure rules of securities law would apply, than it is to the repository of national security information. The full plain and true disclosure law are designed to make sure that companies who issue shares to the public don't just tell the good and leave out the bad side of their history, so that investors have as accurate as possible a picture of what they are getting into. In my view,

the Church does not come close to meeting this standard. This is particularly important with respect to investigators. Given what you now know about our history, do you think that it is reasonable, or fair, or honest, to allow someone to make a decision with respect to the dedication of significant resources in terms of time, emotional energy and money that is intended to last many years on the basis of the information in the discussions and the testimony of innocent young people like you?

This does not mean I reject out of hand everything the brethren say, but it unfortunately puts me in a position where I can't trust them without doing a bunch of homework. In fact, I have found that when trying to find as much of the "truth" as I can on any particular point, I treat what the anti's say and what the General Authorities say in much the same way respecting historical matters. Experience has taught me that they both tell half-truths that mislead, and sometimes even lie (with the best of intentions, of course) to further their agenda. As I have thought about this, it occurs to me that it is not surprising. Both groups are less than objective, are not necessarily skilled in the ways required to produce good analysis and accurate history, and their actions are largely driven by organizational imperatives that often auger against the production of truth. And finally, they are both comprised of error prone humans. We assume that the GAs are inspired, and so these obvious deficiencies will be overcome in their case. Unfortunately, my experience does not support this conclusion. I will grant, by the way, that I am not aware of any recent outright lies told by GA's. The last I am personally aware of (although I suspect there have been some since) were the "faith promoting" stories of Paul Dunn (the former GI and pro baseball player who became a GA). He was a great storyteller. It is a short hop, as he illustrated, from "faithful history", to exaggeration, to outright lies, all told to promote faith. They all mislead, and I am not sure that there is a way to meaningfully differentiate between part truths that mislead, and lies that mislead.

The position that the Church has adopted is, essentially, this: The Church routinely withholds information that might incline us to do things that the Church is sure would not be right for us, thereby manipulating us toward doing the things it thinks are right. Whose plan does that sound like? We don't need to discuss the public lying I have mentioned before, since it could be written off as the mistakes of a few people. The "faithful history" concept and general restriction of information is far broader than that. It is an institutional characteristic.

It occurred to me as I drove to work for an early meeting a while ago that the core of my concern comes down to this: I have for my entire adult life been prepared to believe the brethren and be obedient across a wide range of things because all of the evidence I had seen led me to believe that they were inspired in what they told us to do. Now that I have read a lot of the material they have discouraged me from reading, I have access to much more evidence and am aware of many occasions on which they misguided the Church, and understand the organizational imperatives related to control and dealing with a huge, world-wide, complex

organization that drive much of their decision making. This calls into question the wisdom of following their current counsel in many matters respecting which I have long had reservations. Until recently, I was prepared (somewhat reluctantly on occasion) to continue to dedicate large portions of my time and other resources to activities that I felt were of questionable value on the basis that they were the product of inspiration. I am no longer prepared to do that because of evidence I now have of the tenuous connection between our leaders and God.

The other concerns I have are related to this idea. If our church leaders were wrong so often on important things in the past, why must I assume that the literal interpretation of scripture they posit is correct when it has never seemed to me to answer the important questions of life? All of the norms our leaders hold out for us now have to be examined.

In short, I no longer believe that "follow the Prophet" mantra to be good advice. We should pay respectful attention to what he and the other leaders of the Church say, but we unfortunately cannot trust them to tell us other than what they think it is best that we hear. If we want the truth, particularly when it concerns things that might weaken our resolve to be obedient to them, we have to seek that information on our own, and sometimes ignore their advice in order to get it.

- **The authoritarian, narrow-minded worldview promoted by the Church.** With the best of intentions, the Church has built walls around us in an attempt to protect us from information that it thinks will be harmful to us, and has heavily promoted obedience to Church leadership on the same basis. Here is what I think about this part of our culture:

I have already discussed the idea that is reasonably documented, and true to my experience, that the Church believes that it has a duty to tell a one sided story respecting its origins etc. This is the "faithful history" concept. At a conference for Church educators in August of 1985 Dallin Oaks was talking about the importance of interpreting Church history in context etc., and that church members should not be fooled by the misleading half truths some historians, journalists etc. put out respecting the Church. Then, amazingly, he makes the following statement will purporting to lecture professional historians respecting the importance of balance in the writing of scholarly history:

Balance is telling both sides. This is not the mission of the official Church literature or avowedly anti-Mormon literature. Neither has any responsibility to present both sides.

This makes me sick, but is perfectly consistent with the pattern of deception I now clearly see. Why does not the Church occupy the moral high ground of truth? I was taught my entire life that this is what we were all about.

In any event, Oaks then went on to say that academics are required to give balanced treatment to both sides of the question. This quote was

used in one of the New Mormon History (historians who are resisting the "faithful history" approach, many of whom have been excommunicated for publishing accurate, scholarly papers discussing the kinds of things I have outlined for you above) essays I read to support that idea that at one time, at least, the Church recognized the importance of having academics publish to the standard required by their profession, and that this was appropriate given the nature of the academic audience. I note that this idea may also be related to the clear discouragement at Church re-reading academic materials, and what might fairly be called an anti-intellectual attitude by Church members. If at one time the discussion of our "real" history was relegated to academia, one way to deal with that may have been to discourage lay membership from reading what academics write.

I am starting to ramble a bit. I apologize for that.

In any event, it used to be a common practise among Church members to attend private gospel study groups organized informally by the members themselves. Basically, Church members who were friends or had similar Gospel related interests would get together once a month more or less for some socializing, and to talk about some aspect of Church history, or the Gospel, or science as it related to the Gospel etc. That sounds like a good thing, right? Church members who love the Gospel so much that they use some of their socializing time to engage in independent study. This activity was shut down by the Church because at these private discussion groups too much of the kind of information I have in this letter was being discussed, and the Church officials found that some people who attended these groups became less active as a result. So, the Church began to heavily and actively discourage the formation and continuation of these groups. Some church members who resisted the command to disband their study groups were disciplined by the Church for failure to support the church leaders. In place of these gospel study groups now stand adult institute classes, where the agenda and content of discussion can be Church controlled. This is another indication of how the Church feels the need to control what its members look at, and think about.

A non-LDS (but sympathetic) historian noted that one of the interesting things about the LDS culture is the way in which its members use the Church as the exclusive prism through which to see much of life - to a believing Latter-day Saint, the Church has the answer for everything within its purview and there is therefore no need to look elsewhere regarding spiritual or religious matters. Add to that the tacit and overt pressure to stay away from "testimony threatening" materials of all types, and you have a tremendously powerful system of insulation. Another writer used the term "proclamationist" to describe the LDS (and fundamentalist Christian) way of dealing with things. The truth is "proclaimed", and once that is done the faithful must only seek evidence consistent with the proclamation. If enough people do that, and produce plenty of interesting evidence, and then regularly bear testimony to the adequacy of such evidence and the fact that the members of the group

are "right", have the truth etc. (while everyone else is wrong), few in the group will feel the need to look outside the small circle the group has drawn, and when forced to do so are so conditioned by their experience that the weakest, half truth kind of evidence will generally satisfy their concerns. Anyone who does look outside and raises serious questions is given the chance to quickly get back in line, or is excised from the group, and from then on is deemed untrustworthy and ignored. The operating assumption is that such persons have sinned in some way, have become dead to the spirit and therefore are misled, and furthermore are contaminated in such a dangerous way that they should not be dealt with. In this environment, things change very slowly. It is arch conservatism, and leads to a leaden intellectual life. As I have shoved those concepts away from me during the past few months, the feeling of having a clamp removed from my brain has followed. It has been an amazing experience. I now understand how someone of my enquiring temperament could be so effectively prevented from considering anything outside a narrow range of options. As a result of the mental changes I have gone through during the past few months, I have felt more love toward members of my family, and have become more interested in engaging in meaningful activities within our non-church community. I did not realize how much my actions and attitudes had been affected by the idea that the world around us is basically evil, we need to protect ourselves from it, and it is going to pass away soon in any event so we should not spend much effort to make it a better place. This is a profoundly false and insular notion that the Church inadvertently encourages.

Consider how the temple ceremony works in light of concepts related to duress and conditioning.

- We talk the temple up to our children from a young age. They attend for the first time at a relatively young age, and after a flood of information that they cannot possibly be expected to understand, they make sweeping covenants including one that requires that they obey the Church's leaders in all important things, while surrounded by expectantly watching friends and relatives who are reaffirming the same commitment. They are then encouraged to go back again and again to participate in the same process. In each case, the subtle but powerful influence of groupthink is a big part of what occurs.
- The young people who make these covenants are carefully kept from the Church from much information that most objective observers would consider relevant to an understanding of how inspired the leaders who the young people are covenanting to follow are, or how direct their connection to God is.
- Were we to treat the covenant made in the temple as a legal contract, I have no doubt that it could not be enforced because of our laws related to duress and misrepresentation. You may think I am being legalistic and that is inappropriate in religious matters. I would disagree. Our legal system imposes a lowest common

denominator kind of morality on us. Religious values should be far above legal morality. When we can look at the practises of a religious institution and have legitimate concerns about the use of duress, that should cause the alarm bells to start ringing.

- If a client came to me to discuss joining a religious organization that uses group pressure in the way the Church does, I would have all sorts of warnings to offer him. But I was blind to those concerns respecting our Church until recently.

And what do we make of the virtually continual affirmation at Church meetings that we are right and everyone else is wrong?

And what about the idea that we must follow our leaders who are for all practical purposes always right? In fact, we are taught that we are wrong when we disagree with them, and that we should follow them even when we have misgivings.

To be more clear, we are told that the Lord will always confirm what is right and wrong to us personally, and then we are put in a double bind (between a rock and a hard place) by being told that if we don't hear the same message our leaders hear, it is because we don't have the spirit and are wrong. Life fills with cognitive dissonance for most people at this point. Denial is one of the psychological tools we all come equipped with to deal with this type of dissonance.

Think of Emma Smith and polygamy. In theory she had the right to hear the Lord's voice on that topic. But the Lord allegedly told her, as recorded in the D&C, that if she did not hear the same thing Joseph had heard (polygamy was OK), she would be "destroyed".

When I couple the weekly or even daily in many cases (seminary?) "we are the true church" conditioning described above with what happens at the temple, and link that to Rene Girard's (well known sociologist/historian) writings about the deeply imitative nature of human beings, a troubling picture comes into focus. This is an organization that is controlled oriented right to the base of many of its institutions.

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

The conditioning I mention above starts at a young age (we sing "Follow the Prophet, don't go astray" in primary, etc.), and continues unabated to the grave ("Endure to the end" is my 70 year old father's mantra).

As I have considered different aspects of our culture, from the BofM, through primary, seminary, the functioning of priesthood, the way in which dissent is dealt with, etc., it is hard to resist the conclusion that authority and control is the Church's most powerful unifying theme. It has not always been that way, but certainly is now and appears to be becoming more so as the Church grows larger and more complex.

- **The Church in General.** The Church, in my view, is a complex mix of good and bad. That does not surprise me on reflection. It is a human organization. I used to assume that most of the bad was filtered out by divine inspiration. I was wrong about that. Most of the problems I have would be solved by simply changing the Church's authoritarian attitude. If the members were allowed to speak their minds and follow their consciences and were encouraged to seek truth from diverse sources, I would be an enthusiastic participant because of the powerful doctrines the Church has available to it, the kind of people who belong, and all of the good things you and I both point out. Regrettably, this choice is not open.

Our current problems, as well as almost all of the most important things the Church has, can be traced in my view to JS himself. There is no doubt that he was a creative genius. There is acceptable evidence (in my view) that he received divine inspiration respecting a wide range of the religious issues of his day and many relevant to us and probably to generations to follow. It is even more clear that he also wandered off in a variety of uninspired directions. Those who followed him canonized much of the good he taught, and a lot of the bad, while rejecting the most silly of his ideas. The conservative nature of the organization grew over the years until we are where we are today - in a straight jacket. Those who want to use the good JS left us while protecting themselves from the harmful, insular culture of the Church have trouble finding a way to do that while staying within the Church. This realization deeply saddens me. I am still in mourning.

The authoritarian streak outlined above, combined with the "faithful history" policy, the belief that we are the only "true" church, our literal interpretation of scripture (including such things as the nearing apocalypse brought on by the "cascading forces of evil" as Gordon Hinckley recently put it), puts us in some ways near the dangerous end of the fundamentalist spectrum. My thoughts in this regard are as follows:

We are not prepared to look to anyone other than Church members in good standing and Church leaders to understand our religious experience. This is how well educated people like me can find themselves half way through life with incredibly naïve views about religious matters and their own spiritual life, while be well educated with respect to most other aspects of life that are relevant to their experience.

We think we are right, and by definition all others are wrong, leading to judgemental, authoritarian attitudes respecting other groups of people. This "tribal", "us v. them" mentality is the antithesis of Christ's teachings, as well as the highest of moral teachings from most other cultures. This view is maintained by discouraging us from studying the religious experiences of others. Since we do not do that, it is almost impossible for us to place our own experience in a

broad enough context to understand it. We are, to some extent, like those poor people I met in Peru who are literally unaware of anything outside the valley in which they live, and make what seem to us to be absurd life decisions because of their limited perspective. Some of the things I have done look equally absurd to me now that my perspective is broader. I am not proud of, and deeply regret, some of the things I have done that were without question at least aided and abetted, if not motivated by, the narrow minded attitudes and worldview the Church inculcated in me. I have reached the conclusion that it is impossible for me to understand my own religious experience without understanding that of others. And once I understand the broad range of legitimate religious phenomenon out there, I will not be so inclined to accept the far reaching conclusions our Church leaders suggest to us on the basis that we have had the same sort of wonderful, uplifting religious experiences that people from most faiths, cultures and walks of life also have. It is simply not wise, or even ethical, to claim that we are God's chosen people, the BofM is literally true, etc. on the basis of precisely the same kind of experience with the BofM that many people of other faiths throughout the millennia have had with the documents that contain their mythology. The first point we have to grasp is that our foundational documents contain mythology too, and that we are upgrading our belief system as we accept that point, not downgrading it.

Our literal interpretation of scripture, both ancient and modern, is a serious problem. Much of the trouble with our worldview, in my opinion, can be ascribed to the authoritarian problem and this. Our scriptures were written by people who believed that the end of the world and second coming of Christ were imminent. JS and his followers believed this, as did Christ's followers immediately after his life. The literal interpretation of passages related to the second coming and the apocalypse are designed to move us to good actions, but in my experience they cause us to have an unduly pessimistic view of the world. We seek to insulate ourselves from it. At best, we try to be "in" it, but not "of" it. We (fundamentalists of all types) home school our kids more than anyone else. We withhold our energies from the broader community because of our deeply held, seldom articulated, feeling that the community is rotten to the core anyways and getting worse, so why bother – it won't be around long enough to matter what we do in any event. I am using hyperbole, but not too much. So we don't get involved. A metaphoric interpretation of these same passages, coupled with others, leads to the opposite result. We are the leaven that could guide the world. The world is full of beauty and light, as well as some bad things. It offers much more good than bad. By most measures, it is a better place now than ever, and is getting better at a rapid rate. It is our personal encounter with God that could happen at any time, not some apocalypse brought on by increasing evil, and so we should develop our spiritual selves to the greatest extent possible by spreading his influence throughout the world, not retreating to the comfortable confines of our narrow minded, inward looking, insignificant in most ways, little community. I could go on for some time, but will spare you that.

On the whole, it is my view that our theology needs to be decoupled from a lot of its history and much of our current culture within the Church. Our theology provides the basic material to create a great way of life. However, the Church is so narrow and rigid at the moment that I am not sure that it is possible to use the theology from within the Church because of its culture of authority, obedience

etc. as outlined above. Ironically, I think that within my lifetime many of the ideas I am writing to you about will be accepted by a significant number of Church members, if not the mainstream. I think the internet will speed this process up, and the Church will be forced to change its views or it will lose large numbers of members and the stream of converts will dry up, except in areas so poor that the internet is not widely available.

I can cite plenty of examples of how the Church's basic teachings have changed over time. This is not unique to our religion. Religions change when they cease to answer the important questions put to them. Our Church is failing in that regard now. All that is saving it so far is its effective program of suppressing the questions, and the information that leads to them. Religions usually change slowly, and quietly. A good example of this with our Church is Gordon Hinckley's recent dealings with the press respecting the "man can become God" idea within our theology. He said that he wasn't sure about that idea, and did not know that we teach that or emphasize that. He later joked at General Conference about that answer, assuring Church members that he does know about these things. Everyone had a good laugh over that one. Well, some of my well placed friends in Utah tell me that the thinking among the intellectuals and some GA's down there is that this concept, introduced at the end of JS's life, is too difficult to understand to be an important part of our doctrine and it brings us into conflict with most other Christian churches. Hence, it will be downplayed for the foreseeable future. This has the benefit of making the Church seem more like the rest of the protestant churches, and will help us to be accepted by them in the multi-church organizations in which the Church wishes to participate. This doctrine is likely to go the same way as the Adam God doctrine (which you probably have not heard of) and other ideas taught by BY, as well as the really controversial parts of polygamy. In my view, the "man can become like God" idea is one of the most important that JS left us. I think it is sad that it may not be part of the Church's belief system for coming generations. As you can tell, there are lots of other parts of our belief system that I would rather change.

- **What do we do?** So what do people like you and I do with all of this? I have to admit that I am not sure. I want to remain as close to the Church as I can, and am trying to find out how close that is. The first thing I have to do is decide how much of what I am thinking I should share with those around me. This raises a serious moral question respecting how my (or your) actions will effect those closest to us. I have struggled with that one (including while deciding whether to write this letter and what to put in it), and finally have come to the conclusion that while I am uncertain of many things, I am certain of a few. The few certainties are what have the greatest effect on my actions. One of those is that the relationship between God and man is more uncertain than I suspected it to be. My beliefs used to be based largely in that regard on what the Church leaders told me about their relationship to God. I knew my relationship to him was pretty uncertain, but thought theirs to be much more definite. I have now read enough Church history to know that the leaders' relationship to God is not much more certain than mine is, given the nature of the spectacular errors they have made. This leads to the following conclusions:
 - I think it is critical that my children understand this uncertainty, and live their lives in light of that reality instead of on the assumption that

someone other than them hears God's voice in clear and unequivocal terms.

- I think it important that I not mislead them or anyone else by my tacit approval of the attitudes promoted by the Church, or to obey leaders who give the impression (often innocently, and more often still have that impression given for them by well meaning other members) that they have clear cut, certain, inspiration when they often simply reflect the social attitudes of the day, and not always even the more enlightened of those.
- Guidance by personal conscience is much more important than I realized. I don't think my children and others I love will internalize that message unless they understand that the primary alternative promoted by the Church (following inspired leaders) cannot shed as much light on any topic as most active Church members wish or need to believe.
- I think following obediently as the Church teaches us to is likely to produce much more narrow mindedness in my children than is good for them. My sons are likely to become more authoritarian in their personal lives than they should (D&C 121 is a great code of conduct, but is at fundamental odds with much of the reality of Church culture), and my daughters too passive and unambitious (our culture is confusing, if not schizophrenic, on this point).
- While my decision to open my children's eyes to these things (at an appropriate age) will cause me to do things that will be painful for me, them, other family members and friends etc., I believe paying that price is the lesser of evils. I have carefully considered the various factors that related to my perception of the long term, best interest and happiness of my children and their children in making this decision. I cannot do more than that. And I believe that in making this difficult decision, I am following the most important parts of our theology, which is right, not our culture, which is wrong.
- In any event, many of my children and those I love will find out about these problems on their own because the Internet is such a powerful information tool. Do I want them to be surprised and hurt by this information as I have been, or should I do my best to prepare them for what in my view is inevitable? The answer to that question is obvious.
- Having said all of that, I am still trying to find a way to continue to participate in the Church for all of the reasons I have noted above and many more. I think our tradition has a great deal of value, and want to discard only what I feel I must. However, it is possible that I will have to give up my membership in the Church because my views are now what most would call "apostate". By the way, the definition of "apostasy" is quite fluid. Years ago people were excommunicated for teaching things that are now commonplace within the Church. But nonetheless, I am clearly out of step with current beliefs and may be disciplined by Church authorities.

- Most importantly, I have come to recognize the long-term effect our choice of religious belief has on our worldview, and how our worldview affects our life experience in fundamental ways. I am afraid that I have innocently misled my children and others who know me well in that regard, and I will try hard to remedy that. We all need to take a hard look around us and make some choices as to the nature of the lens through which we see life. I hope we can use as much of our tradition as possible in that regard, but think it is more important that we make the right choice about our worldview than we follow the traditions that have been passed down to us by well intentioned ancestors.

- The thing we admire most about our ancestors who followed JS is that they recognized something that had the potential to provide a new and better life for them and their posterity, and then made tremendous sacrifices to take it into their lives. I am following their example in what I am doing now. Unfortunately, the further I get into the process the higher the personal price it appears that I will be required to pay in order to do what I believe is right. In the short term at least, I will see painful ruptures in my relationships with family members and my closest friends, and I will lose some opportunity at work since many of my key business and professional relationships are rooted in the Church as well. I don't know how long these things will last. They may last a life time - I may be required to completely rebuild my personal and professional life. I am prepared to do that if necessary because of how important the worldview I pass on to my family is.