

McLue's

Dear *:

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 have decided to write to you as an LDS friend who may well be asked about this in order that you get the goods straight from the horse's mouth instead of having to rely upon the rumour mill.

There is no easy way to do this, so I will plunge right in. The bottom line is this: I have come to disbelieve many of the claims the Mormon Church makes for itself. For example, I do not believe that the Book of Mormon is real history. I believe that book to contain great truths and to be tremendously important, but it was not translated from ancient records in the manner we are led to believe. The same applies to the Book of Abraham. I do not believe that the Mormon Church is the only "true" church, but rather that there are many forms of religious truth with equal or greater claim on God's sanction. I have found incontrovertible evidence of a Mormon Church policy of systematically hiding certain aspects of the Church's history that show how human its leaders are. I believe that this is done to encourage obedience since an understanding how often the Church's leaders have been wrong on important issues in the past would be corrosive to the members willingness to follow the current leaders' dictates. I believe that the Church's leaders are often inspired, and sometimes are wrong on critically important issues even when they are sure they are right and purport to speak in God's name. The historical record, once one finally looks at it, admits of no other conclusion. And so on. On the other hand, I have the utmost respect for most individual members of the Church in my life, including you.

I don't write this for the purpose of upsetting you or in an attempt to try to persuade you to change your beliefs. I write only for the purpose of allowing you to hear from me what I believe, and how I reached the conclusions I have, instead of relying upon the rumour mill which I understand is now operating at a nice clip.

Since this question has already come up a number of times and is bound to continue to come up, let me assure you that I have not sinned, unless excessive reading, thinking and prayer can be so termed. 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.

This process started about a year ago. For six months it bubbled along without doing much. Then, last summer circumstances conspired to make me take a hard look at my beliefs in an effort to help a young friend who I thought had been deceived by material he found on the Internet. Since then I have spent many hundreds of hours studying, thinking, writing and praying, and have read something in excess of 7,000 pages of

literature in an attempt to reconcile the conflicting evidence I found when I probed beneath the surface of the Church sanctioned sources I have always studied. I have not read much anti-Mormon literature. Most of what I have found helpful has been published by respected historians, including past members of the official Church Historian's Office, and respected scholars in the fields of psychology, sociology and anthropology.

I have proceeded in the most careful, spiritual manner possible from my point of view. I do not exaggerate when I say that the decision I have made to change the manner in which the Church functions in my life is the most careful, spiritual decision I have ever made. And as this process has progressed, I have felt wonderful things happen inside of me. I believe that I am becoming a better person as a result of what I am learning and the change in worldview it is causing. The only dark side of this process is the conflict it produces in the relationships I have with my family and friends within the Church.

I hope to remain connected to the Church to the extent I can. I believe that it offers a lot of good, and as I indicated above, that Joseph Smith in particular gave us some important and inspired ideas. However, I also believe that some aspects of the worldview the Church encourages its members to adopt are toxic, and I have decided to eliminate those from my life and to the extent that I can, that of my family. This has brought me into conflict with Church authority and led me to the position where I feel the need to write this letter.

Were the Church open enough to accept a diversity of opinion and the expression of same, as it was during the presidency of David O. McKay and at certain other times, all would be well with me. Sadly, that does not appear to be the case. I am not the type to sneak around and act like something I am not. Hence, it was not an option for me to pretend that I still believed while acting and speaking in private contrary to the Church's position.

I have the greatest respect for you and for your beliefs and do not seek to change them. That is why I have not provided in this letter any details respecting the reasoning process I have gone through or the evidence I relied upon during that process. If you feel the need to understand why I am acting as I am, I will send you a copy of a 70 page (more or less) document that I circulated to my family, since I felt that I owed them the courtesy of a complete explanation. However, I suggest that you only ask me for it if you have a high tolerance for testimony threatening material. It contains a lot of positive things about spirituality in general that I compiled while convincing myself that God does indeed exist and that the spiritual experiences I and most other members of the human race have are legitimate and should be sought out, but it presents a damning view of many of the main claims the Church makes with regard to itself and some aspects of the worldview the Church promotes. I prepared that document as I reasoned my way through the thicket I found myself in last summer, since I think more clearly when I write down, and critique, my thoughts as I go.

One of the things I am most concerned about is the phenomenon I have witnessed many times as a member of the Church while watching other people go through what I am now going through. The Church has built an extensive defense mechanism around its members designed to protect them from "testimony threatening" experiences. Part of this mechanism is the tendency of anyone who disagrees with the group (as I am doing) to be excised like a cancer, and put in a position where members of the group will not communicate with him respecting anything beyond the mundane because he is an

influence that threatens testimony, and is therefore defined by the group to be evil. Some of my closest associates have reacted to what I am doing in this way while at the same time refusing to attempt to understand my point of view on the basis of the knee jerk reaction described above. That is, they are so fearful that what I have to say will threaten what must be acknowledged to be a precarious faith in their lives, that they cannot afford to give any consideration to the sincere effort I have made to find the right spiritual path for me (without saying that it is the right path for them). As I see it, this approach is virtually guaranteed to end relationships that are important to me. I grieve as a result of this, but am unfortunately in the position where I must choose between a life of hypocrisy and pretence, and those relationships. While this is a painful choice, it is one I have made. I hope that you will recognize this well intended, but toxic, aspect of LDS culture and resist its influence in my case at least.

In an effort to convince you that what I am doing is not all bad, I want you to know that in addition to my own thought, study, prayer etc. referred to above, I have consulted with active members of the Church who I felt were in a position as a result of their own study and testimony to straighten me out if anyone could. Their efforts did not change my point of view. However, some of the people with whom I communicated found what I am doing helpful. One of my most knowledgeable and respected friends told me that he is going to steal (with my permission) much of what I have written about spirituality in general for the firesides and church talks he is regularly called upon to give (he marvels that I could be so misled and so right at the same time – go figure), and another active member who is a graduate student in micro biology studying in the Eastern US indicated to me that the information I provided to him respecting Joseph Smith's contributions to theology in general, despite his manifest failings, gave him a reason to continue to be active in the Church at a time when he was having trouble finding a reason to do that in light of his recent understanding of the same issues I have wrestled with. There is a lot of the positive in what I am doing, even for those who may completely disagree with the main conclusions I have reached.

As indicated above, I do not ask that you agree with me, but hope that you will be able to accept the choices I have made as the best I can do in terms of seeking and following truth, and respect this exercise of my agency. I have appreciated our association, and hope that my current decision will affect it as little as possible. I also hope that we will be able to continue to share with each the positive things we find along life's path.

Best regards,

Bob McCue