

McLue's

Delivered by Hand

December 15, 2002

Bishop William Tilleman
Calgary, Alberta

Dear Bill:

Re: My Membership

I regret that it has come to this Bill, but I am in a position where I feel compelled to formally request that you remove my name from the records of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This letter constitutes such request.

For the record, I wish to set out some of my reasons for taking this seemingly drastic step. I am sending a copy of this letter to our Stake President, John Swendsen, with whom I have been dealing respecting this matter. I ask that you and he correct any errors in the following summary of my understanding of his and the Church's position. This letter will be an important part of my personal history, and I want to make sure that it is accurate.

Let me first say that I feel that both you and John have treated me with respect and in a fashion that is worthy of my respect. I appreciate that, and thank you both for it.

I have gone out of my way to make sure that you and John have known what I believe, and that John has known for the most part with whom I have been sharing my beliefs and to what extent. I feel that it is important that I not support what I now believe to be the Church's coordinated effort to prevent information that contradicts the Church's position regarding a variety of doctrinal and historical matters to circulate among its membership. The Church takes this position (commonly referred to as the "faithful history" policy) even respecting matters that are accepted as accurate by its own historians, such as for example Joseph Smith's marriage to other men's wives, his consummation of those marriages, and his statements over the course of many years in public and private that he was not practising polygamy or engaging in immoral conduct while he was in fact doing at least one and arguably both of those things. I believe that the faithful history policy deprives the Church's members of an important part of their free agency, and is deeply displeasing to God. I will not play along with it.

Hence, I communicated my change in belief to my family, and approximately 30 of my LDS friends with whom I have business and social relationships outside of regular

Church contact. Only one of these (Drew Galbraith) lives in our Ward. After doing this, I from time to time spoke with or sent email correspondence to members of the Church who contacted me to ask questions about why I was proceeding as I am. I have not attempted in any way to “proselyte” for the purpose of encouraging anyone to agree with my beliefs, and in fact I have warned each person who has contacted me that they should not communicate with me unless their testimony had a high tolerance for information that disagreed with Church orthodoxy. And while communicating with them, I in each case told them that I still believed that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, that the Book of Mormon contained much important information inspired by God, and other things that are consistent with the Church’s orthodox position.

John kindly arranged for Juli and me to meet with Bob White, a local General Authority whom I have known for about 20 years, for the purpose of allowing him to share with me the manner in which he reconciles his testimony with the kind of information I now have. While I appreciated the obvious effort and sincerity he brought to this meeting, nothing he said was new to me except for his use of a distinction between “deductive” and “inductive” logic when analyzing information related to religion, which after I thought about it seemed to me to greatly support my position and weaken his. I wrote him a lengthy letter to thank him for taking the time to meet with us, and to follow up on a number of things we discussed. If he still cares to respond, I will carefully consider anything he has to say.

There were a few things Bob had to say that I found offensive. One was the way in which he attempted to dismiss the recently published book “American Apocrypha” as unworthy of consideration on the basis of what now looks to me like a classic straw man argument, and the way in which he alternatively stated that the above described faithful history policy did not exist, and that if I did not know about the things he did respecting Church history and the development of its doctrine, that was my fault instead of the Church’s. His comments respecting both of these points were not grounded in the reality with which I am familiar.

After the meeting with Bob White, John and I met to discuss the terms on which he felt I could keep my membership in the Church. We agreed that according to the definition with which he feels compelled to work, I have apostate beliefs. We also agreed that my sharing of those beliefs with members of the Church amounts to teaching apostate beliefs, again in accordance with his definition of that term. John indicated to me that this requires him to hold a Church disciplinary counsel in my case unless I repent of my offensive actions and do not repeat them. In the absence of repentance, this will result in my excommunication from the Church. He made it clear that I can believe whatever I want, but that I can’t talk or write about my heterodox beliefs with or to any member of the Church, whether they ask me to do so or not.

In response, I told John that, as I had previously indicated to him, I was prepared to agree not to speak in public or publish things related to my beliefs, but that I would not agree to refuse to share my beliefs with those who came to me, and after being warned in the manner described above, insisted that I explain why I choose to behave and believe as I now do. It is my view that the Church’s insistence that I refuse to share my beliefs in that context is an unwarranted, unrighteous restriction of my freedom of speech. I am taking care to only speak with people who seek me out, and to respect their beliefs as I explain mine. I cannot see how God could approve of what I am being asked to do, and I therefore simply will not go along. John told me that in that case, I

would have to choose between sending you a letter like this one and facing Church disciplinary action as described above. Since I see no benefit to be gained by either me or the Church from going through the proposed disciplinary action, I am sending you this letter.

I deeply regret that the Church's position respecting freedom of speech and the suppression of intellectual enquiry has reached its current low ebb. It has not always been so. I previously on two occasions sent John a summary of a story about David O. McKay in which he approached a much more serious case of "apostasy" in quite a different manner, and one that is much more in keeping with my understanding of the Gospel.

President McKay had been pressured for some time by Joseph Fielding Smith and others to excommunicate Sterling McMurrin, a high profile, respected, and widely published LDS professor of philosophy at the University of Utah who was by most definitions (mine included) an atheist, and actively taught his views. Pres. McKay met with McMurrin, quizzed him about various things (evolution, blacks and the priesthood, etc.), listened to McMurrin's views that clearly contradicted the official church position, and then told him: "Don't ever let anybody tell you what to think or what to believe", and promised to be a witness in his favour if anyone ever convened a church court against him. This insulated McMurrin from Church discipline for the rest of his life. He died a heterodox member of the Church. Pres. McKay also told McMurrin (this was in 1954) that the Church's position against the blacks was a "practise" not a doctrine, and that it would be changed.

Several weeks after Pres. McKay's meeting with McMurrin, he spoke at general conference and said:

Ours is the responsibility ... to proclaim the truth that each individual is a child of God and important in his sight; that he is entitled to freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly; that he has the right to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience. In this positive declaration, we imply that organizations or churches which deprive the individual of these inherent rights are not in harmony with God's will nor with his revealed word.

It was well known that Pres. McKay was referring to the McMurrin case, and that the degree of diversity of opinion he advocated included McMurrin's well-known humanist/atheist stance and his very public avocation of it. Four days after general conference, M. Lynn Bennion, Superintendent of Salt Lake City Schools wrote to Pres. McKay as follows:

Our recent conference impressed upon me more than ever that Religion is a constant struggle between the formalistic and the traditional on the one hand and the unending stimulation of the spirit. Your conference messages are based on laws and commandments, but the great stress is upon love, freedom, and compassion. I wish to congratulate you again on your prophetic leadership...

There is a fundamental issue at stake in the case being formulated against [Sterling McMurrin]. You expressed it directly when you spoke of man's right of freedom to think and to worship within the Church. God bless you for taking this stand. It is our most precious possession and worth every sacrifice to maintain. I noted with joy that a number of the brethren caught your spirit and spoke in the same vein...

The quote from Lynn Bennion is provided because I agree with its content, and to make it clear that it was well known in Salt Lake what had precipitated Pres. McKay's remarks at conference, and the meaning they were intended to convey.

It seems to me that the Church has drifted a long way from the moorings Pres. McKay established during his day. I regret this, but cannot change it, and hence feel that I should give up my membership. I will continue outside the Church to practise those aspects of what I still consider to be my religion that agree with common sense, and I will of course not feel bound to refrain from publishing and speaking in public about my religious beliefs (including my views respecting the Church's stifling requirements for membership), as well as talking on occasion to those members who wish to call me to find out why I have felt it necessary to proceed as I am.

I would also like to go on the record to predict that 50 to 100 years from now, most of my beliefs that compel John's counsel to me, as summarized above, will be accepted by the main body of the Church. Those beliefs include: (1) That while Joseph Smith and other presidents of the Church are prophets of God and have delivered important truths to mankind, they have also made terrific mistakes while purporting to act as prophets (polygamy, the denial of the priesthoods to blacks, and the Church's current attitude respecting homosexuals being arguably chief among these), and hence the members of the Church should rely much more heavily upon their own connection to God than they are currently taught to rely; (2) that the Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham are not literal history, but are important, inspired (at least to a point) literature through an appreciation of which we can draw closer to God; and (3) that while the Church is a significant source of truth and light, it is not the "one and only true church of God" on the earth. I note that the church formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has already adopted substantially all of the above positions. Our Church, I predict, will only be able to ignore gravity for so long.

Thank you again Bill for all the ways in which you and other members of our Ward have reached out to and assisted members of my family.

Best regards,

Bob McCue