

The Creation and Erosion of False Faith

A Timeline

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November 28, 2005

<http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm>

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Rack, n. An argumentative implement formerly much used in persuading devotees of a false faith to embrace the living truth. Ambrose Bierce

A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming. Ralph Waldo Emerson:

Introduction

I was doing some file cleaning today and ran across a number of letters I wrote while leaving Mormonism. This prompted some thought with regard to how my faith was created and eroded, and I decided to record them since I have not thought about the details of this process for a long time and the perspective I have now allowed me to see some things that I had not previously seen. Most of this has to do with how pressure was building that I could even perceive until I was at the end of the process and could look back.

Some have criticized me for sharing deeply personal information in what I write. I have made the conscious decision to do this (within limits in some cases determined by my wife where events involve her) because this is precisely the kind of communication that Mormonism cuts off, and I believe that I would have benefited tremendously had others been willing and able to share experience of this kind with me.

Hence, I don't say that I did things the "right" way or that others should follow my example. In fact, it seems clear to me now that I could have proceeded more wisely (much more wisely in some cases) had I known more about the nature of the process. So all I offer here is a review of what happened in my case and hope that this will be helpful to some others as they attempt to hear their own voices and see the path ahead of them.

And, I note that I no longer hold many of the beliefs that are contained in the several letters that are included below. A worldview can only change so fast.

Finally, I have included several letters in full because I want a record of them in this format. To make the timeline easier to follow, I have noted these letters and attached them at the end of the piece.

Principles

After writing the timeline below, I decided that it would be helpful for those reading it to appreciate the context within which I now see events before reading them. Here is a summary of that context.

We all start somewhere with inherited beliefs of many kinds. Religions beliefs are a form of inherited beliefs.

There is a powerful correlation between inherited beliefs and persistent perceptual error. That is, Mormons can spot the silliness and the JW's can spot Mormonism's silliness, but neither can see their own problems. Inherited beliefs often create blind spots. This is attributed to various cognitive biases, the most important of which is likely the confirmation bias. Once you have committed to any particular position, this commitment makes it difficult for you to process information contra that position.

Interestingly, the smarter you are the harder the confirmation bias bites. This is thought to be because smart people are better able to find patterns in complex data sets and persuade other people to their point of view, both of which tend to support their beliefs no matter how crazy they may be to people who do not start out encumbered by them.

I would suggest that this is a reason for humility for those of us who have escaped. It is likely that we did not leave because we are the "smart one" who "thought our way out". Rather, it is likely that we have questioning, authority resisting personalities as a result of our nature and nurture and these allowed us to see more of what is obvious to almost all those who are not subject to the confirmation bias with regard to Mormonism.

Cognitive dissonance (see <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.do%20smart%20mormons%20make%20mormonism%20true.pdf> at page 39) lies at the bases of the cognitive biases, including the confirmation bias. It fires up whenever any information challenges our inherited beliefs and the social networks, our conditioning, education, etc. that go along with them. All of this is, in effect, a weight that holds our existing religious beliefs in place regardless of whether they are correct.

Whether we can overcome that cognitive dissonance, and how long that will take, depends on our ability to learn and change, as determined by genetics and conditioning. Michael Shermer in his book "How We Believe" cites extensive social science research that shows that the more open a person is to new experience, as measured by a personality trait called "openness", the more likely it is that she will become less certain or more liberal in her religious views as time passes. I have collected data in the post-Mormon community online that indicates that certain Meyers-Briggs personality types are more likely to question their religious beliefs than others. Particularly, those who are introverted (as opposed to extroverted); intuitive (as opposed to sensing); and thinking (as opposed to feeling) are more likely to seriously question Mormonism. My data sample size and the manner in which it was collected, however, were such that these conclusions are tentative at best. I am in the process of preparing a larger and more reliable survey that will address the same issue.

Our psychology seems to be designed to promote stability – to cause us not to change social groups unless the cost benefit advantages are obvious, and often not even then. This makes sense in light of the importance of being part of a well functioning group to our survival throughout most of humankind's evolutionary history. Hence, the threat of expulsion from our primary social group causes profound fear. This buttresses cognitive dissonance and makes information that challenges our beliefs more difficult to rationally evaluate. This irrational fear of leaving the group is exploited to a tee by Mormonism and other similar groups.

It takes a massive amount of learning for even a personality type predisposed toward change to overcome the weight I have described in the case of a well-conditioned Mormon. I visualize this as an old fashioned set of scales, like the scales of justice. Disconfirming experience and evidence has to be piled on the side of our scales opposite religious belief until they begin to tip. That is, we have to experience enough cognitive dissonance to make us finally question the reality we have assumed to exist. The epiphany experience many people have as they leave a controlling religious faith is related to what happens when we reach the "tipping point" on our scale. Then, suddenly, it is as if a switch were thrown and we can see all kinds of things that have been building up just out of view as a result of the work our mind has been doing to keep us in denial. Suddenly, much of this information and insight is released into the conscious mind because the unconscious can no longer hold it back. It is as if the lights suddenly came on. This experience changes most people irrevocably. Afterwards, they can perhaps fake being who they were, but they are and always will be different in fundamental ways.

For the reasons just indicated, I doubt very much that I could have thought my way out of Mormonism without several years of decompression after my stint as Bishop, which ended just over a decade ago. I needed that much time, space and energy to slowly take weight off the Mormon side of the scale and to experience cognitive dissonance producing things that would add weight to the other side.

And, perhaps most importantly, I needed time to become sentient again. I was so busy for so long that I no longer felt much outside of a narrow range of the emotional spectrum. It was the realization that something had died inside of me that got my conscious attention first. I was depressed but not so badly that I could be diagnosed as such. I went to various doctors, assuming that something was physically wrong with me. I checked out clean in each case. Only as I emerged from Mormonism did my vitality come back.

The question of limited time raised another important perspective from which to consider the phenomenon of Mormon belief.

There is only so much time. If a large percentage (almost 100%) of a person's discretionary time is devoted to Mormon activities, there will be little chance to place life in a broad perspective and hence see Mormonism in context so that one might question whether it is what it purports to be.

This is a classic magician's trick called "misdirection". See <http://www.leirpoll.com/misdirection/misdirection.htm>. As the legendary magician Jean Hugard said, "The principle of misdirection plays such an important role in magic that one might say that Magic is misdirection and misdirection is Magic". That is, magic is performed by the magician using tendencies in human perception to make us look at his left hand while his right hand (or foot, or assistant, etc.) does something that we do not notice and gives the impression that something magical has occurred.

So, if we are focused on the minutiae of living a Mormon life, the big picture will not be questioned. Hence, Mormonism (and many other religions that use the same system) are all about the details of daily living, and result in such a busy day to day existence that there is no opportunity to think about where the train is headed.

This is not the result of the plan of some evil men sitting around in the Salt Lake Temple. Rather, this is how human social organizations of all types to some extent function. They spontaneously organize to protect themselves, find the resources they need to flourish, etc. The

reason that the rules of modern democracies are so important is that they run against the hierarchical gain of human groups, and so force human organizations in an unnatural direction. This requires leaders to account to members; this restrains the natural direction of power; this requires information about how and why leadership decisions are made to be disclosed to the members. Perhaps the clearest lesson from human history is that absent the constraints that democracy imposes on the power of those at the top of the social pyramid, power will be abused.

The Timeline

In any event, here is the timeline as I now see it.

1971-74

I was aged 13 to 16 during this period and in all out rebellion against Mormonism and its restrictive standards. I did not commit terrible sin, but engaged in a lot of the usual teenage experimentation – some drinking, smoking tobacco, marijuana and hashish, etc. This caused tremendous conflict with my parents. The pain this caused eventually broke me. I could see how I was hurting them and my younger brothers and sisters. I felt great guilt as a result of this and my “deviant”, “sinful” (from a Mormon point of view) behaviour that would consign to my life outside the Celestial Kingdom. As I lit up a cigarette one day I recall thinking that this life was not so bad, and since the Celestial Kingdom was like this life I would be OK. But the pain I seemed to be inflicting on my family and thought of being separated from them throughout the eternities eventually became too much for me to bear.

1974-76

I was trying to “straighten up” and eventually did so. This healed the rift with my family. I was a classic returned prodigal who was celebrated in many ways.

1977-79

I served a Mormon mission in southern Peru. I was a completely straight arrow missionary. The pain I experienced while playing at the edges of the teenage road made me decide that the only way to go was straight up the middle.

1979-88

I continued as a straight arrow. God blesses those who are obedient and who sacrifice for him. I was committed to doing all I was asked to do by the Mormon Church. My wife and I married. Our family started 10 months later. We had four kids while I earned three university degrees. I served as various class and quorum instructors, stake missionary, YM pres., Stake YM presidency, High Counsellor. I did not miss a single home teaching visit. The law firm I joined, the nature of legal practice I choose (tax), the city where we lived, the part of city where we lived, and many other foundational decisions were made on the basis of what would be best from a “service to the kingdom” perspective. My main goal in life was to experience the receipt of God’s confidence and power described in Helaman 10.

I was acutely aware that from the time I had “gone straight” I had succeeded in virtually everything I had attempted, and believed that my success had been negligible prior to that. This I attributed to God’s blessing and cursing. I had not yet noticed how ill my wife was, and how

desolate our relationship was. This was largely the result of my neglect and the ridiculous burden she imposed on herself as a result of constant pregnancy and effectively raising our children alone. Her individuality had dissolved.

Late 1988

We decided to leave Vancouver, British Columbia. Living there required too much commuting and not enough time at home. The realization of how bad our marriage situation was slowly dawning. The realization that the pace at church was too great was buried in the background, but starting to call for attention and being pushed down. I accepted job in another city and was called as Bishop two days later. I told the SP about why had decided to leave Vancouver, etc. He told me that God had work for me to do there and that if I had the faith to accept I would be blessed to be able to deal with my problems. I told him to go away and fast, pray etc. and tell me he was sure that he was speaking for God. He did, and called me early in the morning the following day at work to tell me so. So I told him I would serve as required, hung up the phone, knelt down and begged God to make me equal to the task. I believed he would, but was terrified.

I then called the law firm whose offer of employment I had accepted a few days before and asked to be released from my contractual commitment to them, and then went to the firm I worked for (where I had resigned a couple of days before) and asked for my old job back. I am sure both firms thought I was nuts, but one released me and the other gave me my job back.

1989-93

I served as Bishop. We had two more kids. The pace of life went from frenetic to crazy. Our marriage and my wife's health continued to decline without being noticed. Exhaustion set in. But being constantly admitted into the most intimate details of other peoples' lives, being trusted, obeyed, and told how wonderful you are has a way of buoying one up. I am deeply conflicted now with regard to many of the friendships that were formed during this time. They were based, in my view, on false pretences. To continue, each has had to be placed on a new and completely different footing. This is a difficult process that I have only been able to successfully negotiate in a few cases.

I was still completely obedient to Mormon authority. For example, after about three years as Bishop I told the SP that we had decided that after six kids that it was time for me to have a vasectomy. The Handbook of Instructions indicated that this decision should not be made without the counsel of ecclesiastical leaders, and counselled against it. To make sure my memory on this point is accurate, I looked the GHI up to. Here is what it says:

“Surgical Sterilization (Including Vasectomy). ‘Surgical sterilization should only be considered (1) where medical conditions seriously jeopardize life or health, or (2) where birth defects or serious trauma have rendered a person mentally incompetent and not responsible for his or her actions. Such conditions must be determined by competent medical judgment and in accordance with law. Even then, the person or persons responsible for this decision should consult with each other and with their bishop (or branch president) and receive divine confirmation through prayer’ (11-5).”

I told him that my wife was not coping well; etc. He questioned the wisdom of taking this step, noting that my wife and I were young (35 and 32 respectively), and that he and his wife had 8 kids and one of his counsellors had 10 and the other 7. The second counsellor's wife had her

children all in circumstances of difficult health. Her referred me to the GHI (see above) where it counsels against vasectomy and suggested that we continue to use the forms of birth control that had so far resulted in four pregnancies. He noted that if my wife's health was that bad, that perhaps a hysterectomy might be in order. I was irritated, but changed my plans according to his advice.

Later, as the end of my five year term as Bishop approached I told the SP that my wife and I had decided to move to a different and smaller city after I was released because our family situation (commuting, too much time on church stuff etc.) was killing our marriage and family life. The SP told me that the stake presidency would be reorganized shortly (stake split) and that I was likely to be called to new SPresidency. He told me that he felt that God had work for me to do in the new SPresidency. In my first small act of defiance of Mormon authority, I told him that I was confident that we should move, and would do so despite what he told me. I told him that when I fasted and prayed (and I had done a lot of that) about this issue I felt perfectly at peace with moving and my stomach churned at the thought of staying. I asked him if he was in a position to extend a calling to me (knowing that he was not) and said that absent that, I would leave. I felt comfortable with the idea that God had accepted that our family's needs would be better met in another city, and that there I would do what I could to take low profile church callings that would not require the time away from my family that had I to put as Bishop. We parted on friendly terms and a few months later, I accepted a job in a new city, told the SP when I would be leaving, was duly released, and left.

One of my last acts as Bishop was to deal with a man who resigned his membership on the basis of things he had learned about Joseph Smith's polygamous activities. I counselled him unsuccessfully several times, did not read the literature he gave me on the basis that history is so uncertain that you can't know what to believe, and gave him some Hugh Nibley books. I was not fazed in the slightest as far as I could tell by this encounter. However, I had started to question some doctrinal matters that did not make sense to me. These were minor questions, from my point of view then - inconsistencies that would be eventually cleared up. I took the approach of Camilla Kimball (see her biography – she also drank wine while with Spencer on a Church trip to France) with regard to these matters. That is, I had a few “chestnuts” that I kept up on a mental shelf that I occasionally took down and chewed on, and then put back up. They didn't bother me in a material way as far as I knew. I made no connection between what I had been told about Smith (teenage girls; huge number of wives; lying; etc.) and my other concerns.

1993-2001

Once in Calgary I was exhausted and went to see several doctors in an effort to find a medical reason for how I felt. I was told that I was simply exhausted and that should stop trying to do so much. I now realize that I was close to a nervous breakdown. The effort required to be Bishop had completely sapped my strength and I while I acknowledged that I could not acknowledge how close to the brink I was.

It took several years for my energy to gradually come back. I think that I had in some ways hit a “growth” wall as well. The administrative challenge of making life work as Bishop was more than enough to fully occupy me. But once that was gone and I needed to find meaning in the practice and study of Mormonism as a regular member, I found more and more that did not make sense and so shied away from study. I now know that I need a relatively high level of intellectual stimulation unless I am so busy that I don't notice this need. And it is not healthy for me to be that busy.

Attending Sunday School and Priesthood classes was painful because of their repetitious nature and ridiculous things that were often taught there. Human nature, as far as I can tell, is strongly orientated toward innovation and leaning. Mormon discourages this beyond the basics, and encourages a deadening attitude of “enduring to the end”. This causes death from the head down at an early age, and is likely connected to the statistics regarding Mormon anti-depressant use.

But the problems with Mormonism I had found were all ignorable. I had still not read anything but the Nibley kind of stuff. And anyway, the Gospel is perfect, not the Church or the people. This was the place for me to exercise my spiritual muscles precisely because the people were so imperfect.

In our new ward I was immediately called as scout master. Our oldest son was about to become a scout so I accepted. About a year later I was called to be the YM pres. in same ward, which would have resulted in my having to leave my son and take care of someone else's kids. I begged the Bishop to reconsider on basis that I wished to spend my “church time” with my son. I still believed that if called, after explaining the circumstances fully to the person issuing the call, I must accept. The Bishop allowed me to remain with the scouts. Had he not, this might have put me over the edge. During this period I missed the first few home teaching visits of my adult life and felt terribly guilty about that. I tended to form close relationships with the families I home taught, and these misses came after my “route” was arbitrarily changed. I blamed my derogation of duty on still being tired, but could hear a little voice telling me that it was because I was pissed at the HP group leader who had made these nonsensical changes after I had invested so heavily in service to and friendship with “my” families. This little voice scared me.

After three years with the scouts we moved to a new ward in the same city and Stake. I was immediately called to the Stake YM presidency. After a year in that position, I was called to be Stake Mission Pres. I accepted on condition that I did not have to put in the 10 hours per week technically required by the calling, and would have not to call other stake missionaries to account for this. I had always felt this time requirement was a ridiculous rule that hardly anyone obeyed and hence caused many people to feel guilty. I had not required it of the stake missionaries in my ward while I was bishop.

After about six months as Stake Mission President the SPresidency went through two successive reorganizations. On both occasions a number of people approached me and indicated that they had heard, or were sure, that I was about to be called into the SPresidency. I pleaded with God not to do that to me. Our family situation was worsening in some ways as the seeds of my neglect came home to roost. Our oldest daughter was going through all kinds of trouble; my wife continued in relatively ill health but resisted seeking treatment, etc. I had my speech prepared in the event I was called, but felt that if the calling was extended in any event I would have to accept. In neither case was I called. The relief I felt was tremendous. I suspect I missed that bullet in part because of the clear conditions I had put around my calling as Stake Mission President that related to what I perceived to be my needs at home at the time. Had I been called into the SPresidency, I would have given it my best shot and likely not been in the mental space required to make the changes I later did.

July - Sept 2001

I had a three month sabbatical from the practice of law during which for the first time since my teenage years I had time to think and fully unwind. This was a wonderful, new experience. I visited my mission field with my family and had a wonderful time connecting with families I had

converted while there, all of whom were still "faithful". I was unaware of any spiritual "trouble" on the horizon, but loosened up in a number of ways in terms of my commitment to work and realized how frenetic our lifestyle still was. I could tell that the time to think about what I was doing in life was healthy, and committed to making that more a part of how I lived. Ironically, this was encouraged by a seminar I attended at BYU while on a Marriott School of Management program that focused on how modern society (of course not the Mormon Church) tended to make us into "human doings" instead of "human beings". I committed to try to become better at "being".

November 2001

Our eldest son (my little scouting buddy) left for a Mormon mission in the Ukraine. My remarks at his farewell can be found at <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/brayden%20farewell%20talk.pdf>. I was still serving as Stake Mission Pres. I had some extremely irritating experiences while trying to arrange for his departure to occur so that he could return without losing a full year of university. His departure was, it seemed, eventually designed to do precisely what I had diplomatically tried to avoid. In the end, he lost a full academic year. I wondered at the time if someone was attempting to teach me humility as a result of the polite request I had made. But I wrote it off as not a big deal and did not think or worry about it. People are sometimes petty. The Gospel is true; the people are imperfect, etc.

Sometime in 2001

The Mission President with whom I worked as Stake Mission President tried to introduce a new proselytizing program that required more than the usual extreme use of guilt and fear on member missionaries (i.e. all members). I refused to cooperate on the basis that carrots work better than sticks, and I found the proposed approach personally objectionable. In a carefully controlled meeting with the other Stake Mission Presidents in our and an adjoining Region, I was shown a video during which Spencer Kimball (I think) clearly advocated the tactics the Mission Pres. wanted us to use. The other Stake Mission presidents in attendance agreed to go along. I surprised myself by flatly, on the spot and in public, refusing to have my Stake participate. I was particularly irritated at the attempt to manipulate me and the others present through the use of group dynamics (show the film; ask for public commitment one by one starting with those known to be ready to commit; etc.). I invited the Mission Pres. to take the matter up with my Stake Pres. if he wished. Mouths dropped all over the room. The Mission Pres. was a former senior executive with the O.C. Tanner company, and was clearly irritated with my unwillingness to get in line and march when told to do so. His counsellor, one of my long time friends, took my aside afterwards and begged me to not make his life any more difficult than I already had.

I still had no concerns with regard to the Mormon Church as an institution, but was not prepared to bow to authority as I had been. My SP never spoke to me about the matter.

I recognized at the time that the manner in which I had simply and publicly defied the Mission Pres. meant that I had crossed some kind of a line, but I did not think enough about this to recognize what was happening. My relationship to Mormon authority was changing. I believe that this would have happened much earlier had I not been on the authority side of the equation for so long. The study of cognitive biases (the "principle of insufficient justification" in particular) explains why this should be expected to be the case. See <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.do%20smart%20mormons%20make%20mormonism%20true.pdf> at page 48.

I had also become a “regular” home teacher. That is, I did my home teaching about as often as the other members of the HP quorum – maybe 50%. I still felt guilty about this, but excused myself on the basis of how tough things still were around our home with first one daughter and then another running into huge problems.

February - March 2002

I resigned as Stake Mission President for “family reasons”. We had a number of challenges with a couple of our children and my wife and I felt that we needed to focus on things at home. However, things were no more difficult at this point than they had been for a couple of years. I was unaware of any changes to my faith that may have been then occurring. However, I wonder now if a New Yorker article that one of my Mormon partners passed on to me for comment may have had something to do with this. You can find it at http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?020121fa_FACT1. I wrote a lengthy Nibleyesque critique and gave it back to my partner and invited him to circulate it. He later reported that his father-in-law (a General Authority) had commented favourably with regard to my analysis. I was perceived in the Mormon community as one of the intellectual “defenders of the faith” and for that reason my partner had given the article to me. However, some of the questions that New Yorker article raised did not simply go away. And I felt like I had been kicked in the stomach as I read it for the first time. After writing my rebuttal, however, I felt fine on the surface at least. The questions, I now believe, percolated in my subconscious.

July 2002

A friend called me to tell me that his son had left Mormonism as a result of things he had found on the Internet. He had been our Bishop before I was called to take his place and has done numerous kind things for us over the years. I had been his son’s bishop, his Venturer leader, had counselled him through some tough times as a rebellious youth, and sent him on a mission. I was very close to both father and son. I thought, “That kid is in over his head. I will get on the Internet, find the stuff that concerned him and straighten him out.”

The next morning, a Monday, I typed “anti-Mormon” into Google. I had never read anything about religion on the Internet or any anti-Mormon literature except as Bishop some of the “Godmakers” while helping a ward member with that while Bishop. The “Godmakers” strengthened my Mormon testimony. That book uses the wrong approach to reach Mormons. It is designed to keep Baptists out of Mormonism, not help Mormonism to see the weakness of their own position.

In any event, for the next three weeks I did very little legal work or anything else, other than read Mormonism (pro and con) from early awakening to late and troubled falling into bed. I went back and forth between FARMS and academic sources, having quickly determined that the General Authorities and most strident of the anti-Mormons were not worth paying attention to. I had diarrhoea during most of that period, and off and on for many months following.

I stopped attending Church, but found work and family travel excuses each week to excuse that.

I mentioned to my wife that I was seriously questioning some aspects of our beliefs, and the emotional nature of her response warned me not to say anything else until I was sure what I needed to do.

August 2002

My surrender is described <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.revelation.pdf>. This is not exactly how it occurred, but the emotional impact is accurately conveyed. Then I had to decide what to do.

I started to frantically try to find the bottom of the pool in terms of "truth", and entered what I will always remember of one of the most exciting phases of my life. That is, as terrifying as the "destruction" of false faith is, the construction of a realistic worldview that is truly one's own is wonderful. I spontaneously teared up at least one a week at the joy of discovering how connected I was to humanity; how sensible science was; how rich other faith and philosophical traditions were, etc.

And the joy of freedom! This did not hit home fully until I was able to come out of the closet. A gay friend who is familiar with my experience tells me that the emotional territory I was travelling at this point is almost identical to what many gays experience as they "come out".

October 2, 2002

With an incredibly poor sense of timing that my wife will never let me forget, I took her away for an overnight trip to celebrate our 21st wedding anniversary and told her that I no longer believed; was not going to participate in Mormon services anymore; would teach our children about my beliefs; was breaching my temple covenants of obedience; and that I loved her more than ever and wanted to recommit to her as a marriage partner on terms by which we could both live. She went ballistic, and for many months that followed we struggled to determine whether our marriage would survive.

October 2002

After Juli and I had our talk and spent a miserable night together, we returned home and the next day I called the kids together and told them what I had decided to do and let them ask any questions they wanted. This went surprisingly well. Two daughters aged 16 and 21 at the time told me how happy they were; that they had never believed. They still say that they felt like being let out of prison. Both immediately began to be more open with me about what was going on in their lives.

The younger kids (aged 12, 10 and 8) were concerned because they could tell that uncertainty was in the air as far as our family was concerned. However, they have each adjusted well. None of them has any inclination to return to Mormon activity. Our son in the mission field and daughter at BYU took the news very badly and are both still active Mormons.

I told the kids at home that we should not talk to others about what I had decided to do because they would not understand. I was still not sure about whether I would attend LDS services on some basis, etc.

October 24, 2002

I sent a letter to my friend and Bishop resigning my callings. It is attached as Appendix A.

October - November 2002

Shortly after I sent the letter to the Bishop, one of my Mormon partners (I am a partner in a large law firm; in our office at the time we had about 40 partners of whom five were LDS) came into my office, closed the door and told me that he had heard I was having an affair with my secretary and that he understood how these things happen, etc. and wanted to assure me that he was still my friend, was there for me, etc. It then came out that he had also heard that I was questioning my Mormon beliefs, which would make sense if I was having an affair. One of my daughters, it turned out, had told one of her friends "in confidence" about our family meeting, and the word had spread like wildfire. My partner lived two stakes away on the far side of a city of 1,000,000 people. Adultery was a much more palatable explanation for my change in belief than the most careful, prayer, consideration of my like.

As a result, I sent a letter to 30 of my Mormon business associates that was designed to make sure that I was not savaged by the rumour mill. It is found in Appendix B.

November - December 2002

Within a week of the above letter going out, my SP contacted me. We met once alone, and once with a local GA. The day after the meeting with the GA, I sent him the letter attached as Appendix C.

A couple of days later the SP told me that after consulting with the GA and others in Salt Lake City that he felt that he had no choice but to require that I agree not to talk to anyone outside my immediately family about my beliefs, or resign my membership, or go through the "court of love" process.

I immediately resigned. My resignation letter is attached as Appendix D.

Conclusion: December 2002 – November 2005

My beliefs have continued to evolve toward secular humanism. My beliefs are broadly consistent with those espoused by organizations like The Institute for Religion in an Age of Science (see <http://www.religiousnaturalism.org/>)

I am thrilled with life. Robert Ingersoll expresses much of what I feel at page 80 of <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.religious%20faith%20-%20enlightening%20or%20blinding.pdf>.

My marriage survived (thank goodness) and my wife is doing better emotionally and physically than at any other time during our life together.

This process has not been easy, but now that I understand it I would not hesitate to go down the same road again. We are programmed to fear what we don't understand, and since we have no experience with what is on the outside of Mormonism, there is no way for us to appreciate the good things that await those who are prepared to challenge Mormonism's false authority. I am grateful to whatever it is that allowed me to have this experience.

Appendix A

Dear *:

This is a tough note to write, and one that I put off writing for a long time.

I have been doing a lot of thinking for many months, and have decided to ask you to release me from my callings. I am not ready to discuss this matter with you yet, but will in due course. I can assure you that I have not committed any sins of which you need to be concerned respecting me or my family, except for the sin of doing a lot of reading, thinking and praying. And I would ask that you keep this in confidence. I do not want to have to talk about this with [SP] or anyone else until I am ready to do so.

I have reached the conclusion that many of the claims the Church makes for itself cannot be supported, and am especially concerned with the way in which the Church systematically suppresses important information respecting its history, the development of its doctrine and other matters. In my view, this restricts our free agency, and leads to a dangerously narrow world view and a deference to authority that is unhealthy. I am still staggered by the fact that an enquiring, well educated person such as me could have been so effectively insulated from things deeply relevant to my own beliefs, while being so well informed about the beliefs of many other people. As you may know, my minor in university was religious studies, and I have read about other belief systems off and on for years. My mind is still open respecting these issues. If there is one point that has been driven home to me over the past few months it is the importance of maintaining a perpetually open mind.

I have the utmost respect for you as a friend and professional colleague, am deeply appreciative of all of the good things you have done for me and my family as our Bishop, and plan for the time being at least to continue to attend Church. However, feeling as I do I should not be a teacher (home or otherwise) any longer, and should not be a ward missionary [note: I had resigned as stake SP a while before without giving reasons and the Bishop had asked me to consider taking a calling as a ward missionary, teach the Gospel Essentials class etc.]. This may sound like an abrupt turn around from a few weeks ago when we spoke about the ward missionary calling. It is not. I was not ready during our recent meeting to let you know how I felt, and thought as we spoke that I could present the plain vanilla version of the gospel as required in the Gospel Essentials class or at least sit by while someone else did so. I have decided on reflection that it would be an act of hypocrisy to do this, and so I needed to write you this note. I feel the same way about the High Priest Group lessons [note: I was teaching on HP less per month]. I could teach them and stay away from controversy (I have done that for a while), but that is not the right thing to do given the fact that I no longer sustain the general leaders of the Church. I will continue to stay in touch with ** [individual I was home teaching], as her friend instead of her home teacher. And I won't raise the issues I am writing to you about with her unless asked about them. In that case, I will be frank.

I still believe Joseph Smith was divinely inspired to do much of what he did, that many of his teachings are of great value and can be used to form a powerful world view (one I intend to continue to use), and that the kind of people who attend our church (of which you and your family are great examples) are the type with whom I wish to be associated. I hope to find a way to continue to be an active member of the Church. However, I am having trouble coming up with a way in which I can continue to be part of the Church community without either regularly upsetting other members with my views (i.e. mentioning my belief that the BofM is probably not

literal history, but does contain a lot of important, revealed truth; our past prophetic leaders have made many more serious mistakes than we ever imagined, so following current leaders without thinking carefully is probably not a good idea and disobeying them on occasion is probably a good thing; and lots more - too many to go through here), or alternatively pretending to go along with what I do not believe. I think I could lead a double life, but I would find this deeply distasteful, spiritually deadening, and it would put my children in great difficulty. They would hear one thing from me at home, and if they repeated it innocently at Church it would upset people and put the folks at Church in a position where they are likely to try to save my children from my evil influence. I refuse to teach my children to keep the truth a secret in order not to upset others. That would make me guilty of the same conduct that I believe to be so wrong on the Church's part.

It is my impression that the Church is so control and authority oriented at this stage of its existence that it will not tolerate dissent of the type I feel, whether based in the truth or not. This has not always been the case, but it appears to me to clearly be the case now. The suppression of information, in my view, is related to this issue as well. The less troubling information there is around, the fewer questions are asked and the fewer people like me pop out of the wood work. When I am ready to talk about these and related matters with you and/or [SP], my main question will likely relate to how tolerant the Church can be at present with respect to conscientious dissenters such as me. If you wish to sound the authorities out respecting that question on a no-names basis and let me know what you learn, that would be fine with me.

I need more time to think through these things before you and I talk. It is possible that the pendulum will swing back in the direction of conventional Church activity, but very unlikely. This is a process that has been going on for a long time, and while the pendulum swing widely at some points, it has for the last while been pretty stable.

I have spoken or written about these things with a few people whose judgement I trust (your leadership position ironically excluded you from consideration - I do trust you and consider you to be my friend), and find that among well informed church members the things I have recently learned are relatively well understood, the concerns I have are felt much as I feel them by many of this small group, and the response is generally either to remain quiet and hope for future light and knowledge, or leave the Church. No one I have spoken to has yet been able to offer a middle ground, or more acceptable alternative. My father, a former professor of history, is one of those who has been in the know for most of his life and shares my concerns. He is in the wait for future light and knowledge camp. I have not, so far, been able to see my way clear to do that. I also note that the wait for further light and knowledge camp has existed at least since the early part of the last century within the Church, and that the case the Church has to meet respecting the matters that concern me has become much more difficult during that time. B.H. Roberts was the first prominent member of the Church of whom I am aware to learn of some of these problems and to continue to bear public testimony while privately expressing serious doubts about the BofM and other things. On one occasion after spending three solid days with the other members of the 12 and the first presidency reviewing his concerns, he concluded that their responses to him had been "wholly unsatisfactory". All they did was bear tearful testimony, and tell him that the Lord would eventually provide answers to the vexing questions he raised. His concerns were not made public until well after his death (his 150 more or less page report to the first presidency has now been published), and he continued during the balance of his life to wrestle in private with this troubling information and doubts it raised for him while expressing public testimony, presumably on the same basis that he found wholly unsatisfactory in his colleagues. In many quarters, this type of conduct would be labelled denial. In some others (think of the full, plain and true disclosure standard in securities law) it would be labelled fraud. I

think I was in denial for years, and have decided that it would not be healthy to continue to live in that manner. I will ensure that my children have a full deck of information to play with, and will allow them to decide how to involve the Church in their lives.

All of this is terrifically upsetting [Bishop], despite the blithe way in which my note to you might read. I was at one point very angry at the Church as an institution and the small group of people who have played the information control game with us. I have pretty much worked that out of my system now, but it still flares up a bit when I think of the pain my family and I will go through during the next while as we square ourselves to the reality that has been kept from our view and deal with the stress in all kinds of relationships that will result from that process.

I am sorry to dump this on you [Bishop]. I went through this process near the end of my term as Bishop with one of the members of our ward, and remember all of the feelings that accompanied that difficult experience. As I tried to persuade him of the error of his ways, I was certain he was deluded and I was right and that he would be persuaded of my position's merits if he would only read the things I offered him (Hugh Nibley et al). I now find that much of the stuff I thought so helpful while in denial and persuading others that the Church was right, only tells half the story and as a result presents a grossly misleading picture. Nibley has written some great stuff, and some that is downright misleading. If I had not relied so blindly on Hugh Nibley while dealing with my then soon to be non-member friend, this crisis of my faith might have come much sooner. In any event, it is more than ironic that I am writing this letter to you while holding the opposite end of the stick that I held as Bishop.

I know you have lots of things on your plate. While this is easier said than done since I know you are a conscientious and good Bishop, please don't spend a material amount of time or energy on this matter until after I am ready to sit down for a chat with you. At that point, you will of course do what you feel is appropriate. In the meantime, if there is anything I feel that you can help me with, I will get in touch.

I have read thousands of pages of material during the past ten months as I have looked at these issues from every angle I could find - Church, non-Church and academic (very little anti). I have also prayed and sought the Lord's guidance more fervently than I have in years, and have had regular encounters with wonderful spiritual feelings. I have corresponded with people from different parts of Canada, the US and Europe whose perspective is broader than mine in an attempt to find someone who can explain to me how I can interpret the information I have found in a more positive way than I have with respect to the Church. One of them, who created a large pro-Church website, is now in precisely the same position I will be in after writing this letter. In part as a result of my correspondence with him, he decided that he had been in denial for years and is now sitting back and trying to figure out what to do. Given his seeming strength respecting the Church's position and obvious understanding of the issues that concerned me, I wrote to him in hopes that he could help me see my way back to full participation in the Church. It did not work out that way.

The exercise of working through my concerns with faithful church members was, however, useful. It brought me back from the brink of atheism (that was a wide and frightening pendulum swing - the world is incredibly bleak after one adopts that point of view) to the position I now hold, which is that Joseph Smith and those who followed him were both deeply flawed (even while speaking in the name of God), and in some cases inspired by God. The inspired part is great, and I will keep that in my life.

It would be difficult if not impossible for anyone to be helpful to me who is not familiar with most of the principal sources with which I am familiar. I would not ask you to invest the effort required in order to meet me where I am. And it will not do any good for anyone to bear me their testimony, unless they are also familiar with the information I have reviewed and can explain to me how their testimony accommodates that information. An uninformed testimony, I have determined, is a dangerous thing. It is the constant repetition of uninformed testimony that creates the Church membership's "we are right and everyone else is wrong" narrow mindedness and willingness to follow authority even when it points in the wrong direction. These are the things that most concern me about the Church's current trajectory.

Given the quality of the people I have already communicated with respecting these matters and the pro-Church reading I have done, it is highly unlikely in my view that there is a better rationale out there in defence of the Church's position than the ones I have heard or read about. The best in my view, as I noted above, is the acknowledgement of the problems I and many others have pointed out, and the expression of faith that against all odds we should wait for further light and knowledge. I have carefully considered that approach and have come to the conclusion that it is based in denial, not truth, and that I should not follow it even though the alternatives require much more effort and will cause a lot of discomfort both for me and for many people I love. That choice was hard to make. This is a classic "rock and a hard place" decision.

Again, I think the world of you personally [Bishop], and will continue to support you as the leader of our community to the extent I am able.

Best regards,

Bob

Appendix B

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 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 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 defence 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

Appendix C

I enjoyed our meeting last night, and found a number of the comments you made helpful. To the extent you have the time and energy, I think it would be useful to correspond. I am certain that I will not change your mind, and doubt that you will change my mind respecting the basic conclusions I have reached, but think that we might each learn some useful things from the other. To that end, let me follow a few of the threads we were discussing last night, and invite your response.

You mentioned that you might provide me with some of your views respecting American Apocrypha. That would be great. Let me tell you what I think would be useful, and what would not be. It would not be useful for you to do as FARMS does, which is to pick the weakest parts of the weakest article, set them up as a straw man, knock them down and dismiss the entire work. I suggest that you address the things in that book that were worth dealing with. I don't recall all of what I read in that book, but I do recall that much of what David Wright wrote impressed me. I was also impressed by the genetics stuff, and have read what I think is the best BYU/FARMS has produced in response. It appears to me that there is no good explanation for this point that supports the Church's position.

And I found the automatic writing theory persuasive. I have not read Patience Worth, but no that I know you have, I will do so. But even if her writing is unimpressive, what about all of the other stuff that article goes into? We have great writers who produced many of their works in an automatic writing kind of way. What about Mohammed? And what about the 13th century stuff that was imbedded in Patience Worth's writing, even if it is poorly written? From what I have seen, dismissing this material as nonsense it not fair or advisable.

The more I study the Book of Mormon, the more convinced I am that no one will ever prove it to be a complete fraud, but that it will be proven not to be entirely correct. The evidence as to its non-historicity is already very strong, in my view.

This leads to my next point. I agree with you that it is dangerous to accept hearsay or to make decisions based on deductive reasoning. I agree that inductive reasoning is a good way to get to know the world. However, I accept that we can sometimes learn important things by considering both hearsay and circumstantial evidence, while dealing carefully with both. Professional historians have their own rules of evidence, and I am comfortable reading history and making my own assessment of how seriously to take what they say, depending on how well a particular historian follows those rules.

Since we are on the same ground here, I will be interested to hear how you deal with a religious system that is based almost entirely on hearsay and deductive reasoning. How much of what comes to us in the Bible is direct evidence? The New Testament was written many years after Jesus died. Most of it is the worst kind of hearsay. Many of Paul's letters are strongly suspected to have been authored by other people who wanted the authority of Paul's name behind their views. The Old Testament suffers from the same type of problem, or worse. Much of it only makes sense as mythology (in the positive sense of that word). In order to be a Christian, let alone a Mormon, a lot of hearsay and deductive reasoning must be accepted. So, having allowed those processes to get you into the system, it does not seem reasonable to me to completely exclude them in deciding whether to remain, particularly when the default position

(remaining faithful) means that you must accept a position that depends almost wholly on those things.

My study and life experience has led me to believe that the only thing we really know about God and our religious experience is just that – what we experience. The rest is all assumptions that we are prepared to make based on deductive reasoning, what other people tell us about their personal experience, and hearsay. As I noted last night, this is what Pascal believed. This is explained at pages 297 – 99 of a book you would enjoy reading called “A History of God”, by Karen Armstrong. By age 11 he had worked out by himself the first 23 propositions of Euclid. A genius by any definition, he went on to become one the greatest scientific innovators of all time. At age 31, he had a powerful “divine” experience similar to some I have had. He lived at a time when everyone believed in God, and started with the premise that God exists. He interpreted his experience to show him that his faith had been “too remote and academic”. While I am nowhere near as smart as Pascal, my experience over the past several months has led me down the road he travelled hundreds of years ago. I agree with and had already reached, before I knew anything about Pascal’s religious beliefs, each of the following positions Armstrong attributes to him. (1) He did not believe God’s existence could be “proved” in the manner many theologians cum philosophers attempted to prove it. Hence, he rejected what Armstrong calls of the god of the philosophers. His position was: “We are incapable of knowing either what [God] is or whether he is ... Reason cannot decide this question.” He also held that it cannot be proven that God does not exist. He was in that sense, an agnostic. (2) However, his direct experience meant that as far as he was concerned, God existed. That is, he believed in a God of personal revelation. (3) He believed that it made sense to bet that God existed and act as if he did because “as the Christian progresses in the Faith, he or she will become aware of a continuous enlightenment, an awareness of God’s presence that is a sure sign of salvation. It is no good relying on external authority; each Christian is on his own.” (p. 299 HofG). I would add to that the idea that once we have made the leap of faith, we are able to experience the God of revelation more frequently and powerfully. Hence, while we must walk by faith in the sense that logical proofs don’t work, we are not left without proof. Our personal, subjective experience is what matters most; (4) Humanity cannot barter its way to the distant God by arguments and logic or by accepting the teaching of an institutional church. But by making the personal decision to surrender to God, the faithful feel themselves transformed, becoming “faithful, honest, humble, grateful, full of good works, a true friend.” Somehow the Christian will find that life has acquired meaning and significance, having created faith and constructed a sense of God in the face of meaninglessness and despair; (5) God is a reality because he works; (6) Faith is not intellectual certainty but a leap into the dark and an experience that brings a moral enlightenment.

The last two are the most important to me. Pascal has nicely summarized for me, hundreds of years in advance of my own experience, how to handle the matters with which I am struggling. I feel the whisperings of the spirit as I read what Armstrong writes about him beliefs.

This leads to my next point. I don't think you understood what I was trying to say at the conclusion our meeting respecting the inverted triangle of assumptions on top of the core divine experience. It is my position that the common denominator of the world's major religions is what I call "basic divine experience", and the golden rule. Every major world religion or moral system includes both of these. All the rest are assumptions about doctrine, dogma and practise that differ from one to another. Mircea Eliade has observed that religions tend to spontaneously improve as a result of what he thinks is some kind of an impulse within all mankind to express their religious beliefs as full as possible. Hence, over time the assumptions, dogmas etc. of a religion tend to improve. One can certainly say this about the LDS faith.

I would go on to say that the system of dogmas, assumptions etc. of each of the religions that have stood the test of time are complex enough, and sufficiently oriented toward helping people to live the golden rule and have basic divine experiences, that they can live religiously fulfilling lives. This is where you and I disagreed. I said that the way in which you described your religious experience was very similar to the way in which a devout, good Muslim/Hindu/Jew/Catholic/Buddhist etc. might describe his. You indicated that having adopted the "inverted pyramid" approach, I could not reverse ground. Here is why I think I can. The inverted pyramid in each case is complex enough to permit a person who sincerely seeks God's presence to find it, just as you have found him and accessed his power in your life through the LDS tradition. Your way works for you (as Pascal might say), and the Buddhist's works for him (and me, I might add). It takes a lot of gall, in my respectful position, to say in that case based on nothing more than what you have (basic divine experience, living the golden rule, and a lot of assumptions and questionable deductive reasoning) that your system is better than the Buddhist's in an absolute sense.

The ethnocentricity of the LDS worldview, and even its cosmology, is mind boggling to me. God's only chosen people just happens to be my people. Therefore, my way of seeing the world, among the millions of options available in that regard, just happens to be the only right one. And while I acknowledge that there are planets unnumbered on which life like mine exists, I live on the only one to which the Saviour of all mankind came. On each of the rest of those unnumbered planets, the same stories of the Saviour are told, but with respect to his visit to my planet, which of all those unnumbered planets was selected as his special place of abode. This form of thinking and seeing the world is as old as man himself, and is in my view rooted in a narrow-minded tribalism that has nothing to do with God. This is something that limits any people who are subject to it. It is therefore a bad thing, and should be left behind on history's garbage heap.

I have found that I have left this idea behind I have related to those around me in more positive ways. Discarding this idea has made me a better, more open minded and flexible thinking person. This works for me.

I read my first Sunstone Magazine last week. I subscribed three months ago, and it took this long for the first three issues to arrive. There is a wealth of interesting, useful information in those three publications. As I noted, I have never read them before because I was told I should not look at testimony threatening material of that nature. You indicated that the people who taught me those things were wrong, and that you teach otherwise. I am glad to hear that. However, the sample of people with whom I deal indicates that the Church (wittingly or unwittingly) does a very effective job of having bright, enquiring people grow to maturity without any idea of their own history, and therefore a distorted image of what a prophet is, how God deals with his prophets and people, and therefore what God himself is. I noted that [two Calgary Stake Presidents] and Bob McCue are among the many well-educated, faithful members of the Church I know personally who reached near middle age without the most basic understanding of these things. You suggested, essentially, that the problem was mine, not the Church's because the information was there and easy to get. Whether the Church has the effect I allege it does on its members is a question social science could shed some light on using the inductive process both you and I prefer to use. BYU has an army of sociologists (the largest in the US, I am told). Perhaps you could find out through the official channels you have access to whether this question has ever been studied. If it has not, I suggest that you see if you can encourage the Brethren to have it studied.

It is my experience that the Church has failed me in this regard. I find official statements of people like Dallin Oaks to indicate that this practise is purposeful. I find grossly misleading descriptions of history in books sold in church bookstores and in church manuals. I find that the "real" history books are not sold in church bookstores. Our only real historian to hold the office of Church Historian was moved out, it appears to me, because the church could not tolerate the standards by which he insisted its history must be published. Etc. The church is not unique in this regard. Most fundamentalist churches are literal in their interpretation of scripture, and anti-historical. The LDS church fits into this group nicely. Both of those habits are in my view limiting and damaging in terms of the worldview they encourage church members to develop and maintain.

While I recognize that you do not agree with me, I hope you take me seriously respecting the above paragraph. When I read Sunstone, Dialogue, and visit Internet discussion boards that service the same community as they do, I find many people who express the same feelings I do. When I speak with well know intellectuals and writers who are trying their best to remain active members of the church, they tell me the same thing on condition of confidentiality, since if it were to get out that they believe as I do, active members of the church would stop buying their books. I care about the church and would love to continue to participate and hope that the church will change some of its dysfunctional practises, like this one. I bring these things to your attention in this spirit.

You used the term cognitive dissonance and said some things about it. I agree that it is part of most religions. The greater the gulf between reality and the story the church insists on telling, the greater this cognitive dissonance will be. This does not affect many members because of the church's success in suppressing reality. Because of the Internet, more and more members will reach the position I have, and will suffer immense cognitive dissonance.

Again, this is not a new problem. For example, the term "atheist" has been used mostly throughout history to label people who believed in god differently than those using the label. The Romans called the early Christians atheists. In the sixteen century, the term was used respecting people who began to reject some of the societal standards that had become closely associated with Christian life, even through they still believed in god. As Lucien Fabvre pointed out in his classic "The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century" (summarized by Armstrong in "The History of God" at p. 287) during that period of time "God and religion were so ubiquitous that nobody thought to say: 'So our life, the whole of our life, is dominated by Christianity! How tiny is the area of our lives that is already secularized, compared to everything that is still governed, regulated and shaped by religion!' Even if an exceptional man could have achieved the objectivity to question the nature of religion and the existence of God, he would have found no support in either the philosophy or science of his time. A vernacular langue such as French lacked either the vocabulary or the syntax for scepticism. Such words as "absolute", "relative", "causality", "concept" or "intuition" were not yet in use. No society on earth had to that point seriously questioned the existence of God and the role of God in man's life. In such an environment, how could one feel cognitive dissonance about ambiguities respecting religious and secular life, or the conflict between god and science? There was no conflict.

In our day, it is my opinion that the Church has knowingly or not constructed a closed system within which it strongly encourages its members to live that is similar in many ways to the 16th century Christian environment. For much of the Church's history, its system was closed because of the snails pace at which information of any kind travelled, physical isolation in the intermountain west, etc. As the modern world has impinged more and more on LDS society, artificial (intellectual, one might say) barriers have been erected "to protect tender testimonies",

including those of 45 year old former bishops with three university degrees like me. As long as a member stays within the closed system, only listening to and thinking about information purveyed by the Church, there is no cognitive dissonance and it is impossible to understand someone who experiences it.

Many of my friends have for that reason seriously expressed the view that I am currently suffering from some form of mental illness. The very power of that closed system, once it is seen for what it is, produces massive cognitive dissonance when one tries to live and relate to people who live within it while having values that are inconsistent with the values it promotes as article of faith. The more powerful the closed system and black and white the values it espouses, the more cognitive dissonance it creates for those who choose to live outside side it, particularly when they wish to retain close ties to people who live with it.

Consider the case of my 12-year-old son, Dallin, one of God's most tender, faithful and obedient spirits. His Dad, whom he loves, no longer attends Church because he does not believe many of the things that are taught there, is not spiritually fed when he goes, and rejects the worldview it inculcates among its members. His Dad teaches such of those things to him as are appropriate for a boy of 12. At Church, he hears nice people passionately teach the opposite. In fact, since those well-intentioned, nice people now fear for his soul since he is living with an evil influence, he is subjected to more of those teachings than ever. And try as they might not to do so, the good people at Church occasionally let something slip that leads him to understand that his Dad, who seems wise and loving to him, is somewhere between evil incarnate and misled by the devil/wrong (while "doing his best"). What is a boy of 12 to make of all that? Massive cognitive dissonance will result from his being put in this situation. Consciously deciding to leave a child in an environment like this is akin to naming him "Sue" to make sure he grows up tough. I do not see how cognitive dissonance of this type can be good for anyone.

I want to find an environment for my children and me in which we will be encouraged to find and use the best parts of our heritage. Since the Church has developed to a position where, in my view, this is not possible within the Church, I have decided to find this type of community somewhere else, allowing for the possibility that I may come back in the future if the Church changes sufficiently to accommodate me. I am not holding my breath while I wait for that to happen.

I also note that on p. 76 of a recent Sunstone issue, it is stated that Utah has the highest per capita use of Prozac in the US. Various reasons for this are trotted out. The most obvious is not. Mormon life is stressful, and laced with cognitive dissonance even for those who do not know and would never admit they are subject to it. Occam's razor would support this conclusion. Each of the reasons proffered by this little article require handspings to sustain.

*, I hope that did not seem like too much of a rant. If you have the time and energy to explain your point of view respecting the above matters, I will pay close attention. If not, I hope in any event that understanding my point of view may help you to be of assistance to the growing community of people within the Church who to a greater or lesser degree feel as I do. The vast majority of them will either go quietly inactive or just stop giving of themselves instead of reacting in the way I have. In any case, you at least have the chance to see what is going on.

Thanks again for taking the time to be with Juli and me the other night. I have taken the liberty of copying this message to John, since he was in on our conversation.

Best regards,

Bob McCue

Appendix D

December 15, 2002

Bishop *
Calgary, Alberta

Dear *:

Re: My Membership

I regret that it has come to this *, 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, **, 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 ** 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 ** have known what I believe, and that ** 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 (***) 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.

** kindly arranged for Juli and me to meet with \$, 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 \$ 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 \$, ** 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. ** 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 ** 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. ** 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 ** 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 **'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 * 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