

THE AUTHORITARIAN TEMPTATION, Francis Nelson Henderson. Salt Lake City Sunstone Symposium, 27-30 July, 2005, Session #325, Saturday 30 July, 10 - 11 AM

There is a bi-directional “social contract” of sorts between individuals and the Church, not just a one-way commitment from the member to the Church. This paper asks what changes of attitude and actions of Church members are needed to restore a respectful balance of power between the individual and the church.

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Executive Summary

Authoritarianism is tempting because it is efficient and because of its ability to impose order. However, absent an effective pluralism to hold it in check, it is by nature abusive. This paper argues that members of the church are responsible by force of popular will, one person at a time, to produce a pluralistic society where differing views compete for influence. Key to such a correction is that members lay claim to their individual freedom and power.

In the contemporary struggle for human rights¹ the dividing line in that struggle is whether a particular society allows or bans the right to dissent. In *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Terror*, Natan Sharansky points out that the right to dissent is more important than the content

¹ Natan Sharansky, The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror, Published by Public Affairs, ISBN 1-58648-261-02004, p XVIII

of dissent.² Mormon church prohibitions and sanctions against public dissent violate the right to Freedom of Speech of its members and offend their sense of dignity and worth.

Absent a democratic constitution or bill of rights, church members need a "social contract" of their own making between themselves and the church, not just a one-way commitment from themselves given to the church. These contracts require a reciprocal commitment from the church to the member of complete honesty, the exercise of no other power than love, and the protection of individual freedoms above the self-interest of the church. I will point out during this paper, specific rights you may wish to add to your "social contract."

Authoritarianism works inherently to defeat the inner development of the fully empowered individual. I propose that church members ought to take responsibility to change the church by claiming their rights and power. To support the case, I will discuss the following:

First: I will contrast, Democratic, Totalitarian, and Authoritarian organizations and give Latter-day Saint examples.

Second: I will discuss Power: The use of Coercion, Truth Claims, and Promises in the struggle to impose the mind of one person (or an organization) upon the mind of another.

Third: I will discuss the collusion of church members with the victory of authoritarianism over Freedom of Speech and Self-determination.

Fourth: Finally, I ask church members to claim their freedom by speaking out publicly in order to change the balance of power between the Individual and the Church, thus making the church a more democratic organization, more respectful of the rights and needs of its members. To be an individual is important and that loneliness has to be braved³.

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² The Case for Democracy, p XII

³ Anonymous

The Authoritarian Temptation

Liberal democracy:

Liberal democracy is a form of government where the people have power over decision makers. In the United States a constitution and a Bill of Rights form of social contract, protecting individual liberties and the rights of minorities in society, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, citizens informed of their rights and responsibilities, the right of privacy, as well as equality before the law and due process under the rule of law, and more.

Such constitutional rights (also named liberal rights) prohibit the will of the majority from unjustly violating the rights of individuals and minorities.”

A key concept developed by John Locke in the 1700’s holds that individuals should be allowed complete freedom of action as long as they do not infringe on the freedom of others.

I am calling attention to the formation of your “social contract.” You may wish to require of your church that it no longer infringe or threaten to infringe on your individual freedoms.

Libertarians believe that governing organizations should be held to the same moral standards as the individuals of which they are composed.⁴ Liberal democracy is also based on the notions of the willingness to recognize and respect the beliefs and practices of others, tolerance and pluralism. This means that differing views within society are permitted to co-exist and compete for influence.⁵

One of the key aspects of a democratic culture is the concept of a “loyal opposition.” Competitors may disagree, but they must tolerate one another and acknowledge the legitimate and important role that each has to play. The ground rules of the society must encourage tolerance and civility in public debate.⁶

In spite of the authoritarian stance in Mormonism today, I taught a young adults class from a Mutual Improvement Association (MIA) manual written during the presidency of David O McKay⁷ that

⁴ <http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/L/Li/Libertarianism.htm>

⁵ http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/l/li/liberal_democracy.htm

⁶ <http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/d/de/democracy.htm>

supported democratic ideals and liberties in the church. It said, “The democratic spirit is consistent with the spirit, teachings and purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . Dictatorial methods anywhere – in the state, church, family or school – will crush or greatly limit man’s creative living. Creation presupposes freedom.” The lesson goes on to say, “In a democratic situation man senses his dignity. He is recognized for his inherent worth as a man among men.”

Voltaire’s right of communication is also quoted, “I do not agree with a word that you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”⁸

The MIA lesson offers the Latter-Day Saint Eleventh Article of Faith⁹ to back up the point of one holding both a strong conviction yet being tolerant.

‘We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where or what they may.’¹⁰

This claim to the privilege of worshipping according to one’s conscience applies first to church members. However, following the period of liberal Church President David O. McKay, when this lesson material was written, the church took a hard turn back towards authoritarianism. Women could not offer the sacrament meeting prayer, and men undergoing a vasectomy were disqualified for temple recommends under President Joseph Fielding Smith. Under President Harold B. Lee the Correlation Committee began its long service as tool of a “conservative convergence.”¹¹ Under President Spencer W. Kimball family planning was opposed saying, marital sexual intercourse could occur only at the “hazard” of

⁷ David O. McKay, at the General Conference just after his famous encounter with Sterling McMurrin and in reference to it, said (124th Annual Conference, p. 24):

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.

⁸ 1967 - 1968 M Man – Gleaner Manual, Mutual Improvement Associations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, SLC Utah, 342

⁹ http://scriptures.lds.org/a_of_f/1

¹⁰ M Man – Gleaner Manual, 342

¹¹ J. Bonner Ritchie, “The Institutional Church and the Individual”, Sunstone, May/June, p 28

pregnancy.¹² More recently, prominent church leader, Apostle Boyd K. Packer denies there is any such thing as a democratic “Loyal Opposition” in Mormonism.¹³

Due to time constraints I skip Communitarianism, Collectivism, Individualism, and the Anarchist. Before skipping to Totalitarianism, it is worth noting that Mormonism experimented in the 1800’s with an egalitarian form of collectivism called the United Order.

Communitarianism:

Communitarianism and authoritarianism sometimes endorse similar levels of organizational power. The two philosophies differ, however, on the source and proper uses of that power. Communitarianism is majoritarian, advocating democracy and a decentralization of power to the community. In contrast, authoritarians prefer a strong, highly centralized society, and feel no inherent reason to consult the views of the people.

The communitarian vs. liberal democratic dichotomy can be viewed as a balance of the rights of the majority of people to make collective decisions *versus* the rights of individuals who may find themselves in the minority. At the communitarian extreme, one could have a majoritarian totalitarian government, where a 51% majority could impose anything on the minority.

Majoritarian communitarians tend to side with the rights of the people as a group, through a democratic government, to act collectively for the perceived good of the greater society, whereas libertarians tend to support the rights of individuals. A classic example is the discussion in the United States about *gun control*: communitarians generally support it on the grounds that it would reduce gun-related violence. They believe that the people as a whole have the rights to pass such laws. Libertarians, however would be concerned for the rights of individual gun owners, and would oppose such measures.

Communitarians shift the focus towards communities away from individuals, thus emphasizing the role of the community in defining and shaping individuals, as opposed to libertarians, who construe communities as originating from the voluntary acts of self-defined individuals.¹⁴

¹² Spencer W. Kimball quoting J. Ruben Clark, “The Marriage Decision”, *Ensign* Feb 1975, 4

¹³ Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling. Mormon America: The Power and the Promise. New York: Harper San Francisco, 1999

Latter-Day Saints are communitarian in their voting: By “Common Consent”¹⁵, usually 100%. As stated in the Book of Mormon, “Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.” (Mosiah 29:26)

Collectivism: Collectivism is also an emphasis on the group (this is too vague to be an effective opening description of this term), as opposed to what may be seen by opponents to be at the expense of the individual. It is thus directly opposed to individualism. It should be noted, however, that many collectivists also derive their philosophy from a concern for the well being of the individual.

Some types of collectivism state that the good of the group is more important than the good of the individual, while others argue that, since any group is ultimately made up of individuals, the individual serves her own interests by serving the group's interests (in other words, as the group prospers, all members of the group prosper.¹⁶

Israeli kibbutzim are voluntary communes where people live and farm together without private ownership. Latter-Day Saint’s practice of the “United Order” was a form of collectivism. Its egalitarian philosophy lingers on in LDS scriptures, known then as the Law of Consecration.¹⁷ Maybe one important difference is that membership in the Mormon United Order was appointed as opposed to voluntary?

¹⁴ <http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/c/co/communitarianism.htm>

¹⁵ Doctrine and Covenants, 28:13 “For all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the church, by the prayer of faith.”

¹⁶ <http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/c/co/collectivism.htm>

¹⁷ On-line Guide to the Scriptures. <http://scriptures.lds.org/gsc/cnsctrlw>

- a.) “To dedicate, to make holy, or to become righteous. The **law of consecration** is a divine principle whereby men and women voluntarily dedicate their time, talents, and material wealth to the establishment and building up of God’s kingdom.”
- b.) All that believed had all things common, Acts 2: 44-45.
- c.) They had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, 4 Ne. 1: 3
- d.) The Lord explained the principles of **consecration**, D&C 42: 30-39 (D&C 51: 2-19; 58: 35-36).
- e.) One man should not possess more than another, D&C 49: 20.
- f.) Every man was given an equal portion according to his family, D&C 51: 3.
- g.) An order was established so that the Saints could be equal in bonds of heavenly and earthly things, D&C 78: 4-5
- h.) Every man was to have equal claim according to his wants and needs, D&C 82: 17-19
- i.) The people of Enoch were of one heart and one mind and dwelt in righteousness, and there were no poor among them, Moses 7: 18.

Totalitarianism:

Totalitarian societies prohibit all activities contrary to the goals of its leaders. They maintain power through propaganda and suppression of open criticism. They exploit real or imaginary threats to itself as threats to the people and as excuses for persecution of dissidents and other enemies of the people. In a Totalitarian system, the ruling ideology requires that every aspect of an individual's life become subordinated to the survival of the system.¹⁸ The popular will is manipulated by propaganda and suppression of free speech.

Totalitarianism systems frequently have a charismatic leader but do not require one. Whether a newly installed leader possesses natural charisma or not, the totalitarian system acts as if the leader does possess it.

In a Mormon example, Joseph Smith commonly characterized any criticism, for any reason, by Mormons or non-Mormons as persecution¹⁹. When the Nauvoo Expositor newspaper was founded to oppose his secret polygamy, he and the Nauvoo city council ordered the press smashed. However, it printed the truth, not slander. This act remains unrenounced.

Authoritarianism:

According to the dictionary, "Authoritarian" is a concentration of power in a leader or an elite not constitutionally responsible to the people, favoring blind submission. Authoritarianism often arises from the governing body's presumption that they know what is right or wrong for the individual, and thus is intolerant of dissent. The organization then enforces what it thinks is right, and often coercively. Dissenting voices are ignored²⁰, or, more strikingly, are considered to be plotting against the best interests of the people.

¹⁸ Richard Vetterli and William E. Fort, Jr, The Essence of Totalitarianism, University Press of America, 1997, ISBN 0-7618-0615-6, p 2

¹⁹ John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, Cultures in Conflict, Utah State University Press, 1995, 5

²⁰ A Declaration (signed by 50 LDS women, including Respondent: Sonja Farnsworth, San Jose, CA)
<http://www.geocities.com/mormonfeminist/bostonglobe.html?20057>

The Roman Catholic Church can be accurately described as authoritarian. In modern times it is not totalitarian because it lacks the means to use force to enforce its edicts.²¹

Authoritarian power often commands popular support such that the leader may claim that his rule is a form of democracy. This is achieved through a combination of ideology with its promise of security and future utopia, as well as a daily dose of perpetual indoctrination. Without the checks and balances of diffuse pluralistic decision-making, a real possibility of mass manipulation develops. In fact, members of a complex society may demand that the problems of modern life be dealt with centrally.

Indeed, Mormonism's governing body presumes to know what is right or wrong for all its members, men and women. It uses church resources and organization in attempts to impose by force of state and national laws, its beliefs onto all citizens on issues such as the equal rights of women, the sexual rights of consenting adults, gay and lesbian civil unions. Although its leadership lives protected in Utah within a liberal democracy that respects Freedom of Speech and public expression, it is itself at the same time intolerant of public dissent as in the excommunication of Janice Allred, for speaking her views publicly on the rights and power of women in the church.²²

As is characteristic of authoritarian tendencies towards control of information, Mormonism prohibits critical examination of its truth claims and undermines intellectual honesty as in its treatment of BYU Professor David P Wright²³ who applied his training in the method of "Historical Criticism" to the Book of Mormon. He was excommunicated after publishing his results, which concluded, "... A critical

"When recently asked, "Will there ever be women priests in the Mormon church?" LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley answered, "Insofar as I can see, no. The women have their place...they have a voice in determining policy and doing many things in the church. I haven't found any complaint among our women. I'm sure there are a few, a handful somewhere who may be disaffected for one reason or another, but I've never seen any evidence of it." ["The Spiritual Life," Boston Globe 9/2/2000]

With all due respect to our remarkable 90-year-old church leader, we find his words unfathomable in the face of reality. Many Mormon women have expressed profound dissatisfaction, for generations, loudly and clearly, in print and in person, alone and in numbers. Thus, we write to correct a misconception repeatedly set forth by LDS Church leaders in the media: We Mormon women are not content, we do have complaints.

In fact, so many women have expressed dissatisfaction, that numerous feminist efforts have come and gone, and women have been disciplined by the church--some so publicized that every LDS leader is likely aware of these difficulties. For example, in 1988, "hundreds" of women contacted LDS church headquarters asking why they couldn't participate in the priesthood blessing of their own babies. During the following years, women who tested this or other priesthood issues were censured or disciplined. Between 1993-96, some of these women were excommunicated. "

²¹ <http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/a/au/authoritarianism.htm>

²² <http://www.mormonalliance.org/casereports/volume2/part4/v2p4.htm>

²³ <http://www.mormonalliance.org/casereports/volume3/part5/v3p5ch23.htm>

study of the Book of Mormon ... shows that *Joseph Smith was its author* [italic added] ...²⁴” The lengthy and gripping account is posted at the Mormon Alliance web site²⁵, Volume 3, Part 5 in which Dr Wright writes to his bishop, “the problems I addressed with regard to the Book of Mormon and other scriptural works were (and are) real and required (and still require) rigorous logical answers. My excommunication will give only brief illusory satisfaction that the problems have been addressed.”²⁶ Dr Wright had also suggested Latter-Day Saints hold unfounded notions that are injurious to Native Americans.

On the dome of the Jefferson Memorial are inscribed the words, “I have sworn upon the alter of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.” Yes, the authoritarians in control of the Mormon Church do use excommunication, or the threat of it, to intimidate and control members. However, difference of ideas in the ‘mind of man’ cannot be the basis of separation among God’s children.²⁷

Indeed, to the democrat, libertarian, or individualist, such authoritarian acts of excommunication are inherently illegitimate because they subordinate the dignity of the individual by denying the right to Freedom of Speech.

I call attention to a key addition to your “social contract.” You may wish to claim the right to Freedom of Speech, right or wrong, to say or to advocate publicly your religious opinions.

There are those of us who, when newly encountering an authoritarian system or living comfortably in one, feel we have found our home, feel inspired as though we have finally found what we have always been searching for. The certainty of “knowing” the truth, the uniformity, the order, the safety, the unquestioning, the guidance from above, the belonging to an obedient society can feel so obviously natural and right, even divine. However, such comfort tempts the individual to relinquish their individuality and the important freedoms I am describing.

Power:

²⁴ David P. Wright, “Historical Criticism: A necessary Element in the Search for Religious Truth,” *Sunstone*, September 1992, 35

²⁵ <http://www.mormonalliance.org/casereports/volume3/part5/V3P5.htm>

²⁶ <http://www.mormonalliance.org/casereports/volume3/part5/v3p5ch23.htm#President%20Wheeler's%20Letter,%20April%2006,%201994>

²⁷ A Course in Miracles

The source of power and the use of power, either coercive or persuasive, identify the organizational type more than any other single attribute. Hence, the necessity of discussing coercion, force, pressure in a religious context:

The concept of coercion is defined broadly here to include not only the threat of physical force in compelling a person to act, but also the threat of “moral force”, or duress, or reprisal (as discharging from employment), or controlling the flow of information, or creating a perceived threat, or controlling the circumstances of a person so that, to avoid a greater perceived evil, the person is compelled to act not according to a voluntary plan of ones own, but to serve the intentions of another²⁸ even if those intentions are noble. Coercion is not the use of actual force, but is the threat or fear of a perceived harm that is used to gain compliance.

Power comprises anything that establishes and maintains the control of one person over another. Thus power covers all religious and social relationships, which serve the end of a person (or an organization) to control another, from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another. Power covers the domination of a person by another, both when it is disciplined by moral ends and controlled by constitutional safeguards, as in Western democracies, or when it is that untamed and barbaric force²⁹ in which strength is the soul justification.

Authority maintained by coercion is ultimately untenable. People have needs which must be satisfied and which cannot be suppressed. Power always rests on the acquiescence of the subject.

An oft-used example of coercion is "putting a gun to someone's head" to compel action. Even in this situation, the person being coerced still has and must make use of “free will.” Even if it is known that the choice is between death and some alternative (e.g. handing over a wallet), this is still a choice, [albeit coercive]. It is known as Hobson’s choice. It is not really a choice at all. In real world situations, there is sometimes the possibility of rejecting the coercion, by calling the coercer's bluff or by fighting back. (Although the probability of a successful outcome from these choices may be low, they are still choices.)

Hobson’s choice is becoming the definition of freedom in the Mormon Church. It is put like this, with a smile, “You are free to choose to obey, to live the commandments, to follow the brethren, or to lose your

²⁸ F.A. Hayek, The Constitution of Liberty, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960, p 20 – 21, 133, 135

²⁹ <http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/threats.jsp>

eternal exaltation.” You are free to choose. That is your free agency. However, even if the threat were known to be true (loss of exaltation) it wrongly defines the compulsion of Hobson’s choice as freedom.

Mormon authoritarians are claiming it is a known truth “without a shadow of doubt” that there is a future after life, there is an exaltation in that future after life, and they have the basic specification of what anyone must do in this life to get that future reward. If one can be convinced to believe these truth claims, then one might be compelled to obey the authoritarian’s system of rules in this life in order to avoid the future loss.

Of course, obedience is a totalitarian principle and by claiming one has certain knowledge, one has entered into a pact with the devil. Because even in Mormon mythology it was Satan’s plan to compel obedience through certain knowledge of truth as the authoritarians are trying to do. Rather, the mythical veil of uncertainty between our memory of a preexistence life and our mortal life does in fact represent the reality. We do not “know.” We sin when we say we “know.” This is quite different from acting as if we “know,” which can be a demonstration of faith. We should recognize the virtue in our uncertainty, and we should live our lives freely and authentically.

In psychological coercion the threatened injury is in regards to the victim’s relationships with other people. The most obvious example is “blackmail,” where the threat consists of the dissemination of damaging information. But many other cases are possible, including purposeful threats of rejection from or disapproval by a peer group, or even mere anger or displeasure by a loved one.³⁰ Mormon examples are rejection or expulsion from one’s religious community, otherwise known as disfellowship or excommunication. Such discipline may disrupt families or produce divorce. In Utah and other densely populated Mormon communities, church discipline may be accompanied by the prejudice of neighbors, or economic harm in the work place.

Even more seriously to believing Latter-day Saints, excommunication is perceived to threaten their eternal well being (exaltation in the next life), the highest purpose of their mortal lives. Hence, the protection of one’s status in the religious community is perceived to be of eternal importance.

Mormonism experiences a kind of ideological or thought coercion in which its ideology cannot be publicly challenged or opposed on threat of excommunication. The individual faces a perpetual stream

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coercion#Psychological_coercion

of church meetings, group classes, testimony meetings, temple attendance in which the highest purpose is to strengthen religious certainty, “testimony.” The only two choices offered are to either accept the ideology, or silence, prayer, and repentance, until worthy to accept. Non-acceptance is not an offered option.

Self-censorship is widely practiced as church members and church employees become more finely attuned to what is acceptable. For example, members are generally compliant to church instructions as to what is the proper content, and what is not, when they speak their testimony.

Disciplinary coercion is used as the main coordination tool of command systems, such as a military organization. Each individual member is typically forced into altruistic behaviour in the interest of the whole group.³¹

In Mormonism the command system is illustrated by the practice of making every boy and man into an officer of the church, i.e., a member of the Priesthood. And thus the chain of command is established between most male members and the church leadership. However, which hat is the member wearing? His personhood hat or his priesthood hat? Is not the person’s individuality trumped by his high priesthood office? Does the boy Priest conceptually recognize the separation between himself and the church? If so, which should he put first? Which is he taught to put first? If the church command system has established in his mind that priesthood is over personhood, then command coercion is at work.

In the law of contracts, the contract is void when coercion, duress, or unfair persuasion is used to procure an agreement. This concept may give pause to Latter-Day Saints who have entered into their secret temple covenants without a full and advanced disclosure. Otherwise, since these covenants are normally first taken at rites of passage (like temple marriage or missionary service), without advance foreknowledge, the decision to take the covenants may be pressured or coercive.

At common law, one who is coerced may be excused from accountability for ones actions or may have ones contract nullified. This concept of accountability may also give pause to Latter-day Saints whose very obedient actions are compelled by religious pressures and fears. Though obedient, the resultant quality of in-authenticity can nullify the moral virtue of one’s actions.

³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coercion#Psychological_coercion

The “Taking Children Seriously” movement attempts to extend the concept of coercion to include the relationships between parents and children. It holds that it is possible and desirable to act in such a way with a child that all activities are consensual.³²

I call attention to two additions to your “social contract.” First, you may wish your relationship to the church be adult-to-adult, not parent-to-child. Second, you may wish your relationship to the church be consensual, not coercive.

The Coercive Power of Truth Claims:

As an adolescent in sacrament meeting I wondered, what made the church unique? Was it about having the Truth, or was it about the community of people. I went with Truth.

So it is too in the minds of many church members. Paraphrasing comments from a member, “Today, the recent proclamation from the apostles and prophets was passed out in sacrament meeting about their authority coming directly from Jesus Christ, and if the church has that Truth, then end of discussion.”

Authoritarian Apostle Boyd K. Packer has charged LDS historians to tell a faith promoting history demonstrating “the hand of the Lord [has been] in every hour and every moment of the Church from its beginning till now”. This “faithful history” policy is in itself, alone, a violation of trust. The policy has a long tradition.

As a young married man I was horrified when the authoritarians in church leadership set about reversing the libertarian principles I was taught and deeply believed from the time of church President David O. McKay and his counselor Hugh B. Brown. This crisis provoked me to more widely examine my church and its history. I was resolute in my stance on human liberty, be it government or church. I had always expected Joseph Smith’s claims would be strengthened by the passage of time. However, upon my close examination of the church and its history as an adult, the scope of the collapse remains shocking to me. During my investigation I slowly came to the astonishing conclusion that most of what I had been taught my entire life by my church leaders, comprising my entire faith foundation, was probably false and certainly misleading. [I skip examples for lack of time. However, references are provided on page 15 & 16 in the text of the speech available afterwards, or on the web.]

³² www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/c/co/coercion.htm

Church historian B.H. Roberts Studies of the Book of Mormon.³³ A confidential advisory of problems given to church leaders in 1922 that was unpublished during my time as a missionary; Mitochondrial DNA genealogy of American Indians tracing not to Hebrew origins as Joseph Smith taught, but to origins more than 12,000 years back to people in Asia, to southern Siberia near Mongolia;”³⁴ The absence of evidence in Thomas Ferguson’s Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon;³⁵ Smithsonian Institute statement speaking of a complete lack of evidence for any connection between the Old World and the New World;³⁶ The rediscovery and translation of the Book of Abraham Egyptian papyri,³⁷ Unlike the gold plates, the papyri allow an examination of Joseph Smiths claims. They “depict the most common objects in the mortuary religion of Egypt”³⁸ from a period about 200 AD, far from the time of Abraham; John D. Lee’s defense attorney persuaded him to make his account of the Mountain Meadows Massacre.³⁹ It and other accounts⁴⁰ are far from what I was taught and with which I defended the church as a missionary; Joseph Smith’s dishonorable introduction of polygamy⁴¹ was untold to me. Likewise, 50 years later the broken promises to end new polygamous marriages that continued for another 14 years;⁴² The Masonic origins of the Mormon Temple ceremony.⁴³

The church is not justified in telling its story as it does to people who trust it completely. Dallin Oak’s indication that the Church has no duty to tell both sides of the Story is simply wrong. Members are led to believe church leaders are looking after their interests and so leaders have put themselves in a position analogous to, if not in fact, that of a trustee.⁴⁴ While the church is soliciting contributions of time and money, one wonders if the misrepresentations produced by its “faithful history” policy could result in a class action lawsuit?

I call attention to several additions to your “social contract.” You may wish to require a church policy of full disclosure, openness, and a best effort at an objective and honest history.

³³ B. H. Roberts, Studies of the Book of Mormon, Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 1985, ISBN 1-56085-027-2

³⁴ Simon Southerton, “DNA Genealogies of American Indians and the Book of Mormon,” 2000, p 10
www.inertialsolutions.us/personal/DNA.pdf

³⁵ Stan Larson, Quest for the Gold Plates, Free Thinker Press, Salt Lake City, 1996, ISBN 0-96349732-1-2

³⁶ “DNA Genealogies,” P 9

³⁷ Charles M. Larson, By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus, Grand Rapids MI, 1985, ISBN 0-960963-2-6

³⁸ Rt. Rev. F.S. Spalding, DD, Joseph Smith Jr., As a Translator, 1912, 26-7

³⁹ John D. Lee, Mormonism Unveiled; or the Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop John D. Lee, 1877

⁴⁰ a.) Juanita Brooks, The Mountain Meadows Massacre, University of Oklahoma Press, 1950, ISBN 0-8061-0549-6

b.) Will Bagley, Blood of the Prophets, University of Oklahoma Press, 2002, ISBN 0-8061-3426-7

⁴¹ Todd Compton, In Sacred Loneliness, Signature Books, 1997, ISBN 1-56085-085-X

⁴² B. Carmon Hardy, Solemn Covenant, University of Illinois Press, 1992, ISBN 0-252-01833-8

⁴³ David John Buerger, The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship, 1994

⁴⁴ Robert McCue, “Open letter to Jeffrey R Holland,” 2003
http://www.i4m.com/think/intro/Bishops_letter2.pdf

An error in perception can result in an unintended coercion. [As Ashleigh Brilliant puts it, “If you don’t like how I sound, the trouble may be with how you are listening.”⁴⁵] However, authoritarians in the church make their intentions crystal clear by the excommunication of teachers⁴⁶, historians, writers, intellectuals, and feminist⁴⁷ whose public speaking or writing differs from the beliefs of church leaders. These are acts of spiritual abuse⁴⁸. They are unchristlike and unbecoming of a church.

Public renunciation of these acts and restoration of membership to those who have suffered from them are needed in order to clearly remove the implied threat of excommunication from the minds of all church members.

The truth claims must be seen for what they are: They are an act of “being right.” “Being right” is always an attempt at control. Hence, it is an unholy claim to power. The claim is false on the face of it, if only because it was made and without further appeal to its content, or to church history or to doctrine.

I believe more relevant is to look at the nature of the church today. These questions need not go back 165 years. Is it honest with me? Does it wish to define my life for me or does it encourage my own self-determination? Is it domineering, manipulative, or controlling? Does it make its institutional needs, its image, and its measures of its own well being more important than needs of the individual member? Does it respect my time? Will it reveal itself to me, openly? Will it give me all the information it has and trust me to make up my own mind? Does it encourage open debate? Will it respect that my individual freedoms are never consigned to it? Does it respect me as an individual, my loves, my interest, my human nature, my sexuality, my personhood?

Is it quick to see and to correct social injustice? Does it see God’s love as unconditional⁴⁹? Is it first to see and to publicly acknowledge its mistakes? Will church leaders accept public criticism?

Complicity:

⁴⁵ Ashleigh Brilliant, We’ve Been Through so much Together and Most of it was Your Fault, Woodbridge Press Santa Barbara, CA, 1990, ISBN 0-88007-183-4, Pot Shot 4787, p 36

⁴⁶ <http://www.mormonalliance.org/casereports/volume3/part5/V3P5.htm>

⁴⁷ <http://www.mormonalliance.org/casereports/volume2/part4/v2p4e.htm>

⁴⁸ David Johnson & Jeff VanVonderen, Chapter 5 - Identifying the Abusive System, The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse, 1991, 63 - 71

⁴⁹ http://www.mormonalliance.org/newsletter/jul_2003.htm

Church members are in deep collusion with the victory of authoritarianism as Erich Fromm explains in his book Escape from Freedom. I was stunned the first time I read Fromm's descriptions of submission and the authoritarian character. [As if to say: "How kind of you to want to live my life for me."⁵⁰]

The Mormon authoritarian character would probably disagree that there is an escape from freedom and responsibility because one may consciously conceive of oneself as free and subject only to oneself. However, that this escape has indeed occurred is illustrated, first, by the total absence of financial accountability for tithing required by the contributing membership of their church leadership. That no lay tithe payers require, or are provided this information, is shocking. Or that the tithe payers feel any authorization to decide for themselves whether or not they should pay.

Secondly, the faithful Mormon authoritarian character will say their individual freedom and autonomy are fundamental religious precepts⁵¹, yet they are silent about or supportive of the forceful repression of the freedom of speech, as when churchwomen are excommunicated for public expression of their opposing views about the place of women in the church. Even among the Mormon Intelligentsia this culture of public silence is justified as "the Mormon way."⁵²

However, by this loyalty to authority the development of one's character is stunted. Normally, love is based on freedom and an equality of power. But, in the authoritarian system, the meaning of love, and self-love are confounded by submission. An attitude of self-denial for the sake of communal unity, and the surrender of one's own rights and power are perceived as examples of "great love," duty, and devotion. However, just the opposite is true in that loyalty and *obedience* are placed ahead of self-trust. Because, love, self-love, and self-interest (rather than self-denial) are the essential affirmations of one's own life, happiness, growth, freedom, purpose, and worth.

Likewise, the teaching of *sacrifice* is a perversion of true sacrifice if the individual self is in submission to the higher power of an authoritarian system. Rather, sacrifice has moral authority only when individuals act freely in the sense of spontaneity, acknowledging no higher authority or motive than from within oneself.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ashley Brilliant's Pot Shot 533

⁵¹ J. Fredric Voros Jr., Freedom of Speech in the House Household of Faith, *Sunstone*, Oct 1991, Volume 15:4, 16 - 22

⁵² Orson Scott Card, Walking the Tightrope, *Sunstone*, April 1989, Volume 13:2, 41

⁵³ Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, 1941, 19,21,177,178,182, 266, 295

Indeed, one of the most obvious losses of individual self within Mormonism is the submission of “Endowed” temple goers to the church laws of *obedience*⁵⁴ and *sacrifice*⁵⁵.

Implicit in that sweeping temple covenant to obey and sacrifice, is the expectation that those calling you to church service will understand your circumstances.⁵⁶ You implicitly expect that the church will know your needs and respect your needs. You expect the other persons in your life and the church to know the limitations of how much you can give. You are entrusting the boundaries and the shape and the direction and the inspiration of your life to others.

Thus, you have issued a sweeping invitation to someone else to make free with your life. You expect to be protected from your own openness, your own generosity. But you are not really being generous and kind. When you give up what you want, when you expect an organization to be in charge of what you can give, you are placing an impossible demand. You have participated in the setting of a trap.

What have the Iron Rodders⁵⁷ got right? They know they have won. Iron Rodders own the church. Liahonas⁵⁸ typically don't even realize there is a contest. Iron Rodders have the intellectual honesty to know Joseph Smith founded the Church on his truth claims.

It seems to me Liahonas dishonestly cop out (especially the smartest ones) by failing to confront their internal dissonance for what it is, and instead, by redefining the fundamental truth claims of the church as non-literal, symbolic, or revelatory, despite the direct contradiction to the intent of Joseph Smith's representations.

⁵⁴ 1. “Obedience”, Family home evening Manual, Gospel Principles, Published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978, 213 – 219

2. “All That Thou Commandest Us We Will Do,” Melchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide 1980 – 81, Choose You This Day, Published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979, 1

3. “Obedience Is The First Law of Heaven”, Choose You This Day, 1979, 125 – 130

4. “First Law of Heaven”, In His Footsteps Today, For the Sunday Schools of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1969, 49, 156 - 162

5. “What Does It Mean to Sustain the Lord's Servants?”, A Personal Study Guide for the Melchizedek Priesthood 1975 – 1976, A Royal Priesthood, Published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975, 38 – 39

⁵⁵ 1. “Sacrifice”, Gospel Principles, 1978, 161 – 167

2. A Royal Priesthood, 1975, 77, 80

3. “The Law of Sacrifice”, Melchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide 1979 – 1980, He That Receiveth My Servants Receiveth Me, Published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978, 86 - 91

⁵⁶ Mildred Newman and Bernard Berkowitz, How to Take Charge of your Life, USA, 1977, 34

⁵⁷ Euphemism for a Mormon Authoritarian, 1 Ne. 8: 30 “... continually holding fast to the **rod of iron**”

⁵⁸ Euphemism for a Mormon Libertarian

However, what is required is not redefinition of the original, but renunciation of the original authoritarian principles and claims to power, followed by a new religious foundation to rise out of a new openness and intellectual freedom.⁵⁹

Who communicates the “social contract” to the church? Religion is private and personal, hence the personal morality expressed to oneself within the “social contract” need not necessarily be shared. But if you share it, then share it in the context of a respectful adult-to-adult communication with church officers, not in the context of a submissive worthiness interview, and not in the context of a church court of excommunication.

Who enforces your “social contract?” You do. You formed it. You hold the church accountable through your gifts and offerings of time and money.

Reestablishing the Balance of Power:

Milton Mayer argues in his book, On Liberty, Man v The State, that even liberal democratic governments will ultimately make their own survival the first priority. Treason is a high crime. Few people who govern nations or churches have enough integrity to voluntarily give up power. The American Civil War started because the Federal government forcefully denied a State the right to secede from the Union. However, there are exceptions. Mikhail Gorbachev of the former Soviet Union is a remarkably principled statesman because he held to the use of persuasion not military force while the Baltic Republics seceded.

Church leaders have made the mistake of insisting the truth of their religion depends entirely on the factual truth of their historical claims. The truth of those claims is held to be absolutely crucial. This is the position in which the Church has, by its own official pronouncements, voluntarily placed itself.⁶⁰

Then if not true, should the church be dissolved? Yes, by its own pronouncements the truth claims are crucial. Could it be dissolved? No, not easily. Mormonism is more than its dogmatic claims to “being right.” It is a community of human relationships, shared values, ethics of virtue, institutional wealth, and a physical presence that will not vanish. The only practical approach is to reform itself from within,

⁵⁹ <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.first%20holland%20lt.pdf> ,p19-20

⁶⁰ Studies of the Book of Mormon, p xv

as Gorbachev initiated in the Soviet Union, and as did Mormonism's cousin, the Reorganized Church of Jesus of Latter-Day Saints (RLDS).

The RLDS church chose to face up to the facts of Joseph Smith's polygamy, acknowledge the Book of Mormon problems and downgrade the book's status, include women in its priesthood, stop its condemnation of homosexuality, and forgo its exclusive claims to priesthood power. Mormonism should do the same.

The power of religious organizations is maintained by the cooperation of its members. Claim your power. A person who can be given their freedom doesn't have it to begin with. Take it.

Some members must argue for change from within the church. First we must argue for the right to argue, freely and publicly. As attorney Jerry Spence puts it, Argument is the affirmation of our being.⁶¹ "We commit homicide against the self when we deliver our authority to others – to the church, to a political party, to a creed, ... who advise us what our experience of joy and the meaning of our lives should be. Having abdicated our own authority ... what is left of us? ... "⁶²

Some of us must sacrifice membership to argue for change from outside the church. As Spence says, "... we may have an obligation to argue directly into the face of the prejudice, even though there is no chance to win. If someone argues that ... women, because of their emotional nature, are less qualified than men to hold responsible positions, [or because God is opposed], we incur an obligation to ourselves, the duty to argue against the prejudice with all our skill and our power – whether we can win or not."⁶³

"It is a curious sight ... ", he says, " – we ourselves – locked in our closets with the key to our freedom clasped tightly in our fists. The key, of course, is permission, our permission to peer out of our closets, ... to ask questions, to demand respect, to share our creativity, our ideas, to speak out, to search for love, to seek justice – to be."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Gerry Spence, How to Argue and Win Every Time, 1995, ISBN 0-312-14477-6, p 5, 12,

⁶² How to Argue

⁶³ How to Argue, p 92

⁶⁴ How to Argue, p 13

The passing's of public figures, friends and family from the generation preceding mine are frequent reminders that my time is coming too. Long ago I contemplated for myself the eternal implications (if any) of risking my own self-definition, to live freely and authentically, rather than in submission. I choose to speak publicly my conscience. I speak to Prophet, King, God, or Devil these rights of personhood are what I think is good.

.....THE END.....