

MORTAL MORMONISM

How Mormons are taught to do right, then betrayed and shamed by their upper leaders.

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A personal journal & explanation.

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Introduction

After twenty-six years as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, former missionary, temple worker, Melchizedec priesthood holder, and Sunday School president I've decided to leave. For years I had concerns about the Church, but dismissed them because of my core belief that God did restore His Church to Joseph Smith. On my mission especially I was a strong believer. However in the last year or so my concerns have grown to where I've decided to have my name removed from the membership rolls.

The views in this book are based on my personal experiences and philosophy of life. The Mormon religion sets up a cycle of failure for their members, which in turn draws them back to the Church for forgiveness. This shaming is rampant throughout their culture. There is also great hypocrisy in the upper echelons of power. Here I hope to describe the basic tenants and beliefs of Mormonism, my experiences with it, and show why I've decided to leave. Mormonism worked for me for a while, but no longer.

The pat response by some would be that I must make Mormonism work for me, and not just sit back and expect things to always go my way. But they are in denial. They cannot accept that in order to make Mormonism work for me I would have to ignore the irony, hypocrisy, and unchristlike oligarchy of Church leaders in key positions of power. I am not willing to do this, nor will I keep silent about my concerns.

To all family & friends who are still members: I recognize that Mormonism may be working for you and helping your life be happy. However, I have come to the realization that Mormonism has not worked for me. I love you and hope you will find joy in whatever world view you pursue.

Jonathan
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This book was originally written as an explanation of what Mormonism is, my experiences with it, why I left, and what I feel now, as first told to my sister, the first black sheep in my family, and an exemplar (along with a gay uncle) that there are many ways of looking at the world.

Beginnings (4-8 years)

I was raised to believe that Jesus Christ was someone who loved me - that I should look to & reverence him. This core belief was taught from the earliest times in Sunday School classes. I learned other simple tenants & history, including information about the Bible and Book of Mormon. Mormons believe the Book of Mormon is a sacred text revealed to Joseph Smith (the first Mormon prophet) similar in format to the Bible. It tells the story of an Israelite family who comes to America to escape religious persecution in 400 B.C. The family develops into two great nations which see Christ and eventually destroy each other. They also have many great and righteous prophets which Mormons revere. Mormons do believe in the Bible, but they realize that it has been translated by men several times and has some errors. Overall they accept the Bible as the word of God.

Sunday School teachers are generally devoted to their calling. Many believe they are doing the right thing in helping Mormon children learn more about their faith. Children are often lead in songs dealing with Christ, Joseph Smith, biblical and Book of Mormon prophets, and other related subjects. They also participate in games & other fun activities. Some of the fun activities I remember were: eating non-toxic glue, pasting with glue, doing art related projects, singing, being obnoxious (not a formal activity).

I only have good memories of my early Sunday School experiences in the Mormon Church. Some early teachers have followed my life's progress. I hope that as they read this book they will realize that *they* were the type of people that drew me to the Church and kept me in for as long as I could stay. A lot of the negativity I received and feel about Mormonism has emanated from the culture as a whole and short-sighted leaders in key places of power.

At the age of eight I was expected to be baptized into the faith. Baptism involves a simple ceremony where a child is brought into a font, the words "(child's name), having been commissioned of Jesus Christ I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen" are said, and then they are dunked in the font. After the dunking the baptism is confirmed when their father or bishop lays their hands on the child's head and says: "(child's name), by the authority of the Holy Melchizedec priesthood and in the name of Jesus Christ, I confirm you a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and say unto you: receive the Holy Ghost, Amen."

Before the baptismal ceremony the child's bishop meets with them to help insure their readiness. I vaguely remember my interview. While some children's baptism may be deferred by their bishop, I believe that most are passed through the interview process with only a surface understanding of what is occurring. As a child I had a strong desire for acceptance by adults and would often give answers that were "expected." But I also remember somewhat blindly believing in what they were telling me, as I had no reason or strong ability to question what was happening.

Mormon doctrine dictates that children reaching the age of eight can be accountable for their actions. I was told that after my baptism my sins would be forgotten by God, and that I must endeavor to do good so that my slate wouldn't become sullied. Mormon parents are usually very pleased and proud with their children at baptism. I remember being in a large room with several other children to be baptized. Our parents were there too. My father and I were dressed in white.

My parents and Church leaders believed they had my best interest at heart when I was taught in early Sunday School and baptized. They did what they believed to be right. The Mormon faith is an all encompassing thing. One does something in the faith because one believes it is what God wants, as directed by His prophets, whether ancient or modern. The Mormon faith prescribes that God gave divine knowledge to certain men who were or are prophets. They therefore strive to follow what these men have to say. Their world view is mostly exclusive of other views; it is seen that others may have a part of the truth, but Mormons claim to have access to all truth necessary for eternal salvation. This view is subtly taught early on, and not so subtly later in Sunday School class, other Church meetings, and the culture of the Church. Their exclusivity sometimes irritates those who live around them.

Often for example, Utah nonmembers feel excluded from their Mormon neighbors. The local leaders make some effort to eliminate friction causing activities & attitudes of members, but the irritation continues. Some in other religions think the idea of having only one true Church as repugnant. But to Mormons this concept is highly valued and treasured. They simply believe they have found where God has restored His Church to the earth - the same Church which Jesus Christ established some 2000 years ago, but which was lost once Peter, James, & John were killed or died. From their perspective, the logical progression for a truth seeking Christian is coming to the Mormon Church door for baptism and eternal progression toward eventual godhood. They believe they have the truth from God; about God's eternal plan for us - how Jesus Christ came to save us from spiritual & physical death, and how we can return to God someday and glorify Him by participating in His eternal increase with an eternal increase of our own. This eternal increase is learned about and prepared for by participating in earthly marriage sanctioned in a Mormon temple, and then leading a good and serviceable life to God.

Do Mormons brainwash their children? No more than any other religion or culture. Children are taught things which comfort them and may help them be happy. But they also learn their Church is the only true one. Thus any non-member friends the child may have can be seen as foreign, or not part of the main group. Outside of Utah though Mormon children are often ridiculed, perhaps even more severely than non-Mormons are in Utah.

Adolescence (8-18 years)

After baptism I did a pretty good job of doing what God wanted. Sometimes I got angry with my parents and would feel bad for it. At the time I didn't fully understand the purpose of the Mormon sacrament (bread & water taken each week representing Christ's body & blood). Mormons believe they can repent for minor sins, pray for forgiveness, and be forgiven as they take the sacrament. But it took a while for this belief to filter through to me as an eight year old, and soon I would have more reason to repent than just getting upset occasionally would require.

As with many children approaching the age of ten or twelve certain strange changes began to occur. At nine while climbing my hut in the back yard an incredibly strange and new feeling came over me. I later learned to resent and constantly resist feelings like those I felt at the tender age of nine.

When I was eleven my father once briefly talked to me about masturbation. He had apparently been advised to do so in his priesthood class at Church. I was mystified that he would discuss something like that. Clearly he was concerned and he felt the practice was wrong. Now years later he is more open minded and is not concerned the way he was. Nevertheless as an eleven year old it seemed strange he would ever mention something like that.

A few months later I attended a group lecture given by my bishop. He talked at length about the evils of masturbation, petting, fornication (pre-marital sex), and adultery. My bishop told us to come and confess any of these sins to him since they were not sanctioned by God. Later I heard from other Church members that confession was necessary for sex sins more serious than masturbation, but that masturbation could be repented for via confession in prayer to God. I was therefore often confused and worried about the necessary method of forgiveness for masturbation.

After the lecture I came to feel that masturbation was a weighty sin and dreaded having to talk to my bishop about it. I remember feeling better after confessing, at least for a while until the natural processes of my body required another confession. I am glad I can talk and write openly about this subject now, not because I am confessing what I still feel to be a sin, but because the practice is so common and natural, yet still considered incredibly repugnant in the Mormon Church and culture. In my experience Mormons talk about the sexual functions of the human body with about the same frequency as those excretory. Some consider both types of bodily functions to be "dirty." Why is this so? Why are so many people afraid of their sexuality?

I have now come to feel denial of the inherent nature of human sexuality is wrong. Humans are sexual beings. In the general Christian tradition sex is often regarded as a necessary evil. In Mormonism it is regarded as good, but only within the bounds of marriage; thus those engaging in sex of any kind outside of marriage are committing sin.

Masturbation and thoughts about extra-marital sex are considered to be on the lower end of the sex-sin scale, but they are often weightily referred to as being directly akin to the more serious sins of adultery and fornication. Although masturbation is a lesser sin, it is often confusing to know how weighty it is, especially to the young adolescent. The Mormon General Authorities (current leaders in Salt Lake) have declared that no Mormon may enter into a temple if they are "possessed" of the habit of masturbation.

On the one hand Mormons are taught that sex is good. Yet they are dually taught that the feelings, actions, and thoughts of sex are bad outside of marriage, and even in marriage "restraint" is to be used. However, I think it's unfortunate, tragic, and abusive that children in some western religions, and in Mormonism specifically, are taught to not even think about sex, but to wait some 10 to 15 years until they're married before they can feel "free" to engage in any form of it, assuming puberty starting at 10 & the common marriage occurring around 20-25.

Certainly many adolescents engage in sex and produce unwanted children at a time when they're not prepared for them. But in some cultures adolescent sexual play is more accepted[†]. I have come to believe that children should be taught that sex is fundamentally good, and that its effects should be and often are pleasure, joy, and sometimes children. How each culture deals with when children are to be created varies. In some cultures it is a great disadvantage to parent and child to have a child around when the parent is not sufficiently prepared. Even so, that doesn't mean sex should be regarded as evil, or something to be avoided in all forms when a person may not be prepared for children.

Suppressing natural adolescent thoughts of sex, or harmless actions such as masturbation by the idea that sex is evil or a sin leads to psychological problems in the person so suppressed. How can they then feel that sex is good when they are married? They've been taught that the sexual feelings they've been having for 10 to 15 years should be suppressed, and are inferred as bad.

Mormons do not consider masturbation to be harmless. The same bishop who gave me my first lecture on the subject also told me that masturbation may lead to homosexuality. If this were true, why are there not 98% or more homosexuals in the world? They also believe it's evil because their prophets tell them it is - if you believe Joseph Smith was a prophet, then you better believe masturbation is a tool of the devil.

If there is a devil, suppression of masturbation and thoughts of sex is a tool he uses to destroy the self esteem of young humans, and help set up a cycle of constant shaming by those who believe they have their best interest at heart. In other words, those who are to care for children & help them succeed unwittingly help them fail through shaming and requiring them to adhere to an abusive system of beliefs in which the child/adolescent cannot fully succeed. The youth often fails to resist the "evil temptation," feels bad for it, and comes to associate this bad feeling with the physical sexual experience.

This duality is claimed to be resolved in Mormon doctrine in the belief that our bodies are in a physical state which is prone to "lustful" thoughts and feelings. The goal is therefore to overcome such feelings in order to prepare and be worthy for higher physical states which are not prone to lust. Thus at the tender age of nine I began having natural sexual feelings. At ten or eleven I learned these feelings must be suppressed and are bad (except in marriage of course, and even then it depends on the teller). I then came to fear and resent the times when my body would desire sexual release.

[†]Mead, Margaret, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, pg.33 & entire book.

At twelve years of age I entered the boy scout program the Church endorses & supports. My friends and I would go on various outings & activities. Our leaders did their best to insure we had a good time, but in Sunday School & on outings some of my friends would be rather cruel to certain other friends. This one-upmanship, controlling, and excluding behavior is common among children (and adults), but I never enjoyed seeing the under-dog get hurt. This behavior is of course discouraged and admonished against by Mormon Church doctrine, but I think some leaders didn't pay enough attention, or may have figured "boys will be boys."

The Mormon Church not only devotes a lot of time and energy to the scouting program in general, but also to sports and other youth activities. In some Church scouting groups there's not much else besides sports that goes on, especially in the Explorer program (ca. 15-18 years old). I'm sure the purpose for scouting & sports is a benevolent one: they want to improve their youth through these activities. But the negative results that are prone to occur in them are not recognized by enough leaders.

Sports, being competitive, is where someone wins and someone loses. If you don't play a sport well, you're either on the losing team, or you don't play at all. Even though it may appear that competitive sporting activities are good church events, I've come to believe that they foster more negative feelings and results than they are worth (unless carefully supervised). Some may argue that it's good to let children compete so they'll be stronger & more successful. But a church sponsored program that is conducive to the failure of some is not appropriate for an organization that wants to help all its members feel and be successful, not just the ones that can shoot hoop. Thus in scouting activities & Church sports I often felt that others were being inappropriately excluded, or was occasionally excluded myself because of my & others non-proficiency at a given activity.

I must say here that I still believe most of my scouting and Church leaders were concerned about my well being. It is difficult to deal with a group of backbiting one-upping youngsters. Most all Mormon Church leaders want the best for those in their stewardship. But apparently not enough recognize the detrimental effects of competitive sports in the context of a church which wants its members to succeed.

At one particular basketball game I was asked to play because they were short on players. Several times during the game the opposing team members would make degrading abusive comments. I was shocked at such rude unchristlike behavior occurring in God's supposed Church. "Such comments may be appropriate outside the Church", I thought, "but they certainly weren't appropriate here." Because of this and other related experiences, I came to resent Church sports. People often get too worked up, mad, or abusive at Mormon Church sporting activities. The Church leadership has addressed the issue, but it's too bad that in God's supposed Church games aren't called on account of behavior unbecoming a Christian, in addition to rain or snow.

At twelve I also entered the Mormon priesthood. Mormon males are prepared for this event all their lives up to this point. There are two main levels of priesthood: Aaronic & Melchezedec. Mormons consider the priesthood to be the authority to act in the name of God. Those who hold the Aaronic priesthood do things like pass the sacrament, bless the sacrament, obtain fast offerings

(donations for the poor) once a month from members, baptize, and support the Melchizedec priesthood leadership. The Melchizedec priesthood gives the authority to do things like bless the sick, give names to babies, give the priesthood to others, confirm baptisms, and lead the Church, whether locally, worldwide, or universe wide. Thus the priesthood is literally considered to be God's authority to govern and direct all things according to His will and plan.

I received the Aaronic priesthood at the hand of my father. My first duties as an Aaronic priesthood holder were to pass the sacrament. I considered this an honor, and was a bit timid at first. The sacrament, consisting of bread & water (representing Christ's body & blood), is passed out in trays in Mormon Church services called sacrament meetings. As I grew older (16 years old) the God given ordinances (sacred ceremonies) I could perform were gradually expanded. I was given the opportunity to bless the sacrament, and had the authority to baptize.

When I was 12 I was allowed to enter the Salt Lake Temple for the first time and do baptisms for the dead. Mormons believe that people can be saved from spiritual death (separation from God) and be put on the road to eternal life by baptism. They believe that God, being merciful, has made it possible for all His children to be baptized; those who have not had the opportunity to be authoritatively baptized when they were alive, can be baptized while dead, as performed by proxy in a temple. The baptismal font in the Salt Lake Temple is quite beautiful. It sits on the back of several carved oxen in a room with intricate hand carved molding, white walls, and mirrors.

I and my priesthood class friends came in on one side of the room and sat on a row of benches. On the other side of the room, young ladies* of our same age were also waiting to enter the font. We were all dressed in white.

We were brought up to the top of the font one by one. Each of us were led down into the water and the following was said: "(individuals name), having been commissioned of Jesus Christ I baptize you for and in behalf of (dead persons name), in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen," and then we were dunked. Each of us did about 50 baptisms for 50 different dead people.

Mormons believe all their temple ceremonies are based around their core belief in Jesus Christ. They consider the ceremonies to be the means by which God can encourage His children to come back to His kingdom. Their doctrine states:

The purpose of baptism for the dead is to insure that all God's children have the opportunity to be baptized; thus even though a child or person may die without baptism, they can still be saved.

*While women in the Mormon Church are not ordained to the priesthood, they can supposedly share in it through their husbands and by participation in temple ceremonies.

I enjoyed going to the temple to do baptisms for the dead and continued to do so on my own regularly until I was thirteen. I received a lot of praise from my family for going to the temple, and believed it would bring me closer to God & Jesus, since the temple is considered to be His or Their house. However, being a hormonally bursting youth, I ended up committing the sin of masturbation again, which of course made me feel unworthy to go to the temple. This experience was devastating to me. I stopped going to the temple regularly and didn't return much until I was eighteen.

According to Mormon doctrine my body was (and is) in a "carnal" state with is subject to "fleshy lusts," which are considered evil. As noted earlier, I have now to come to reject the idea that the sexual drive in me and every other mostly normal human is bad or evil. Certainly people should not engage in abusive or coercive behavior regarding sex or anything else. But the normal sexual drive and functions of the human body are good. Among some Christian religions, it is believed that the fruit Satan offered Eve, and Eve offered Adam was sex. Mormons claim to absolutely reject this idea, and replace it with the notion that after Adam & Eve partook of the forbidden fruit they were cast out of God's presence & their bodies changed to a Telestial state. In this state their & our bodies our subject to "fleshy lusts." It's not clear what type of fruit was forbidden or what forbidden fruit may symbolize, but I've heard many Mormon teachers say whatever it was, it wasn't sex.

When I was fourteen or fifteen I went to my first seminary class. There I learned more about the details of Mormonism. In Utah there are seminaries associated with most all the high schools and junior highs. The seminary buildings are off school property so as to avoid legal issues of mixing church & state. Elsewhere in the Church seminary is often taught in the early morning before school starts.

In seminary I learned more fully about God's plan of salvation. The plan, as told to me by various teachers is briefly as follows:

In the beginning God organized us into spirit children from some nebulous mass of intelligence stuff. We lived with God and were happy. He knew each one of us individually by name. Elohim⁰ wanted us to become like Him.

Elohim wanted us to share in the same joy He has in creating worlds and spirit children without number. Becoming like Elohim would not detract from His dominion, prestige, or status, but would add to them (just as earthly children add to the status, prestige, and dominion of their parents by being "good", raising their own families, & etc). So He presented a plan for us to be able to choose to become like Him or not. Jesus Christ was Elohim's first born spirit child. He was and is literally our elder brother. Elohim through Jesus presented a plan whereby we would come to earth and be able to choose for ourselves

⁰In Mormon doctrine the name Elohim usually refers to God the Father, but once in a while certain more obscure Mormon teachers who give symposia at Brigham Young University (such as "Education Week") remind you that Elohim is a plural term which could imply God the Father AND God the Mother. This plural usage is uncommon and not well known or thought of. I realize the inherent problems of presenting a solely male god who seems to be able to create children all by himself. Even though Mormons believe in a Mother God, the feeling from leaders is not to discuss Her much. The male geared phraseology I use here is the common usage, and not necessarily how I look at things now. But when I was in seminary I thought God could do anything, regardless of His gender. I was also taught to not be especially concerned about what any sort of Mother God might do.

good from evil. But the second spirit child of God, whose name was Lucifer, did not like Elohim's plan. Lucifer wanted us to be able to return to God, but not to have a choice between good and evil; he therefore wanted to do away with free agency[∞]. Several of our spirit brothers & sisters liked Lucifer's plan. For their rebellion against God they were cast down to earth without physical bodies. Lucifer became Satan, and he and his followers became our tempters. The rest of us got to come to earth with physical bodies. Physical bodies are necessary in God's plan because we can be tempted, can resist or repent, can look to Jesus for Salvation, can do what He says, and can return to God, all if we choose. Those who followed Satan could not be tested as we are because they don't have physical bodies, and thus cannot return to God. Elohim sent another spirit child called Michael to be the first man on earth. In the Garden of Eden Michael, having received a physical body, was now called Adam. Out of his rib Elohim & Jesus created Eve. Elohim & Jesus caused Adam & Eve (& all of us as we come to earth) to forget their previous lives with God. Adam & Eve were told to reproduce and to not to eat of the forbidden fruit. Satan tempted them into eating the fruit and they were then cast out of the garden for their rebellion. In the garden they were free to do what they wanted, except eat the forbidden fruit. They could also not have children in the garden (for some unexplained reason by my teachers).

But Adam & Eve did eat the forbidden fruit & were cast out into the world. Eating the fruit caused them to know good from evil. Their casting out changed their bodily state to a Telesstial one, which is subject to fleshy lusts, hunger, pain, and other "nasty" things like that. Since they were now able to choose good from evil, a savior was provided for them: Jesus Christ. If they and their children looked to Jesus & followed His teachings, they could return to God and with Them partake of eternal life.

The creation of the earth took six days, and one day to rest. The length of a day is unclear. It was inferred by some teachers that one of God's days are 1000 years to us. However with the increasing popularity of evolution some have expanded the figure.

Six of God's days after the fall of Adam (when he left the garden) the millennium will start. This will be a period of 1000 years where Satan & his followers will be bound and prevented from tempting us. Jesus will reign as king over all the earth (not just as theologic king, but as governmental king as well) and there will be peace.

At the beginning of the millennium those who are worthy to go to the Terrestrial and Celestial kingdoms of God will be resurrected, where their spirits are reunited with their bodies such that they can never die again. At the end of the millennium those worthy of the

[∞]In Utah, especially in Utah County the local governments try & force all residents to adhere to puritanical & prudish moral standards by enacting laws which for example make it illegal to rent adult videos to adults. Thus they are following Satan's plan of forcing people to do their god's will, rather than trying to exemplify the plan set forward by their god which allows people to choose for themselves. Free agency must be free, not by the sword, otherwise it's Satan's plan - according to my understanding of their doctrine based on my 26 years as a strong believing Mormon.

Telestial kingdom will be resurrected, and Satan and his followers (who never had physical bodies in the first place) will be loosed. Then a great and final war between good and evil will take place, and in the end Satan and his followers will be banished forever to Outer Darkness, a place outside of God's kingdoms.

There are three levels in heaven: Telestial, Terrestrial, and Celestial. The Celestial Kingdom is where God lives, and is where people will go after the Millennium who are worthy of it. To enter the Celestial Kingdom one must have been authoritatively baptized. To be worthy for the highest reaches of the Celestial Kingdom or "exaltation", one must have gone through the temple and been "endowed" (a ceremony I'll discuss later) and have been married in the temple (ie: sealed for time and all eternity to your spouse).

Exaltation is where you and your eternal spouse can create world's without end, and spirit children to boot. The method of spirit children creation has not been revealed by God, but some teachers I had inferred it occurred similarly to the current method of human procreation. Therefore you and your spouse literally become like Elohim. Only those exalted can create spirit children. It's not clear whether non-exalted resurrected personages can have any sexual experiences at all, but I'm sure the prudent Mormon would hope not.

Elohim is believed to have a goddess wife. Elohim is also supposedly a plural term so the word may be implied to mean God the Father AND God the Mother in advanced Mormon doctrine. But the name is commonly thought of as referring to God the Father.

Those worthy of the Terrestrial Kingdom will be the "good" people who basically did the right thing all or the majority of their life. Non-Mormon good-Christians who rejected Mormon baptism (alive or dead) would be candidates for the Terrestrial Kingdom. Jesus can visit there, but Elohim will not. This part of heaven is seen as quite suitable for your average Christian who rejects the notion of wanting to be like God, but wants to nebulously "be with Jesus." The Terrestrial Kingdom is the place for them.

The Telestial kingdom is for murderers, Adolf Hitler's, and other evil types. Elohim and Jesus will never visit there, but the Holy Ghost can. I was told that Joseph Smith once said that if we could see the Telestial kingdom we would kill ourselves to get there - this because by the grace of God even the Telestial kingdom is so much better than our existence now.

[The preceding Mormon plan of salvation is outlined in the "endowment" temple ceremony, excluding some parts, expanding others.]

As you can see by now Mormon doctrine is very complex. All the beliefs can be boiled down to a few simple principles, some of which I generally accept. The main things I have problems with are some intermediate and complex doctrines which seem ridiculous to me now. But if one is to be a faithful Mormon, one must not only adhere to the simple doctrines (ie: be nice to your neighbor), but more complex doctrines as well (ie: priesthood withheld from blacks still being justified & defended, and women still not to hold priesthood). A complete and exhaustive description of the whole of Mormon doctrine would take more space or time than I have. I've presented so far a brief view as told to me by my seminary teachers.

When I was learning all these things about God's plan for me I was intrigued. I wanted more than ever to partake of eternal life and live with God and be like Him in His Celestial Kingdom. This core feeling never really left me until recently. Currently I see of the Mormon plan of salvation as being a mixture of old biblical views of God's plan mixed with the hopes and dreams of Mormon prophets and apostles, especially Joseph Smith. Everyone wants to be happy. The Mormon world view assures that you will be if you only do what God wants as directed by His prophets, ancient and modern. Since humans can apparently come up with some pretty elaborate cultures it's no surprise to me that Mormon doctrine is as complex as it is.

In Mormon doctrine, there is an idea that we existed for an eternity before our life here, and will exist for an eternity after. This concept always boggled my mind. If an infinite amount of time exists between now and our beginning, how did we ever make it here? This question is unanswered in Mormonism, perhaps because many upper leaders haven't studied current big bang theories and how there may in fact be no beginning point in time. Nevertheless Mormons view this earthly life as our final chance to be tested to see if we are worthy to be like God.

But could a just god in the span of eternity only give one finite chance? After this life we will supposedly be assigned to specific kingdoms. There is some speculation in Mormonism that after death & resurrection, if you're assigned to one kingdom you may be able to progress to another. But some Mormon leaders vehemently deny this. They claim if you're in the Terrestrial you can never move to the Celestial and eventually become like God. Even if you're in the lower parts of Celestial, you clearly have shown you rejected God's Eternal Marriage covenant, and therefore you will be eternally barred from exaltation, or the ability to live the type of life God does now.

If there is a god and she/he/it is testing me, I would hope first of all their aspirations for me would really make me happy; and would hope this wouldn't be the only test to see if I would be a good candidate for this infinite amount of happiness this god wanted to give me. How could I consider a god that would give only one test which would have bearing on my existence for the rest of eternity to be just, and the kind of god that really had my interests at heart? The Hindu view that we have an endless number of chances to reach Nirvana is much more palatable.

The hope that there is a god or gods out there who really care about us may stem from the human needs for security, love, and acceptance. Perhaps some extraterrestrial being gave certain religions to man to torment him and help him feel he's never good enough. In any case I view the Mormon plan of salvation as being an exhaustive attempt to help resolve several human fears, including death and separation. It tells of a way these fears can be resolved, but in the context of a one chance scenario.

At 15 or 16 I became concerned about how blacks were at one time denied the priesthood. Church president Spencer Kimball had a revelation in the Salt Lake Temple in the 1970s which then allowed black males to be ordained. I was concerned that they had ever been denied the priesthood in the first place, having grown up in a country where all men were supposedly created equal. How could God being just have ever denied the priesthood from the blacks? "Certainly the Church could not be wrong," I thought. I had trouble reconciling the following Mormon doctrines: God is just; all children are innocent at birth; and God withheld priesthood from blacks. But I was entrenched. All those around me who loved me believed in the Church. How could they be wrong? So after praying about my concerns for several days I finally felt I should dismiss my concerns and not worry them. I didn't receive any great revelation from God telling me the Church was right even though that part was wrong. I just finally felt I should drop the matter & not be concerned.

When black men were not allowed to be ordained Mormon leaders still claimed they could inherit the Celestial Kingdom. In light of my current knowledge about the temple & the importance of the priesthood to Mormons, I'm not sure how this was to be done. But certainly God had kept blacks from the priesthood for "His Eternal Purposes," and thus could deal with them as he pleased, right? - at least that's what Mormons leaders claimed [& still claim].

At seventeen I became less active in the Church for about six months. I continued attending, but would hang out in the outer foyer during sacrament meeting. As with most seventeen-year-olds my sex hormones were in high gear. I felt burned out from the requisite resistance and eventual failures, but eventually managed to suppress these feelings enough to feel I could return to regular Church attendance.

After graduating from high school I went to a Mormon Church sponsored institute of religion at a local college. There I learned much of the whole of Mormon doctrine. One mostly enjoyable series of classes was Preparation for Celestial Marriage, where I was taught about the Mormon view of marriage, and toward the end of the series about sex.

While still a strong Mormon I believed sex outside of marriage was wrong but thought sex in marriage was OK and even ordained of God. Even though my first institute of religion dating & marriage teacher seemed to have a mostly healthy view of sex in marriage, he told us there are still those in Mormonism who either consider sex to be a necessary evil, or that it's sole purpose is procreation. Thus some married Mormons either feel deep within their soul that marital sex is somehow bad and/or that they should only engage in it when it's time to make babies. Either view is tragic. But even if you're a Mormon who buys into the idea that sex is good in marriage your leaders still tell you to use "restraint." My first dating & marriage teacher read to us the wording from the General Authorities which goes sometime like: "Use abstinence before marriage, and restraint after."

This wording of theirs always bothered me. I absolutely do not condone violence or abuse in sexual relationships. But sex should be fun - nobody should tell you how to conduct your sexual acts★. The restraint in marriage idea inferred to me that if you have too much fun having sex, God is displeased. I found such a notion to be strange. My marriage teacher interpreted the restraint in marital sex precept to be synonymous with the Mormon health code against overeating and gluttony. Mormons may claim they believe in healthy sex in marriage, but their leaders should clarify exactly what "restraint in marriage" means. If it means use loving courtesy I would certainly agree. But it can also easily infer that too much fun in sex is bad, which I believed then and now is an unhealthy view.

★An important thing to note about the Mormon view of sexuality is how it relates to human females being able to achieve orgasm. Reportedly in order for human females to be able to achieve orgasm they often need to first be familiar with how to manipulate their genitalia in such a way that makes them feel good. However self manipulation of one's genitalia (ie: masturbation) is forbidden, both in and out of marriage. Additionally oral sex, while not outlawed in doctrine, is frowned upon by certain key Mormon leaders. Thus I wonder how many Mormon females are denied orgasm because they are not familiar enough with their own bodies to know what is required for them to reach orgasm? A related reference is at http://www.lds-mormon.com/worthy_letter.shtml

Do Mormons really believe sex is bad? Some do, some don't. Officially they don't, but also officially in a way they do. If having too much fun at marital sex is bad, exactly what parts are bad? If you have sex three times a day with your spouse, is that bad? If you extend the time or sex, is that bad? While I was taking the marital classes I was disheartened at all this, but now believe it's all so much bologna. It's not just any kind of bologna, but the kind that destroys people's soul to the very core.

I remember my marriage teacher also discussed birth control, and espoused the Mormon view:

Birth control should not be used for selfish reasons. A couple should consider together when to have children, and should consider the health and well being of the mother in the decision.

This policy is often interpreted by various teachers to mean that financial concerns should play less of a role in the decision as compared to how the mother is feeling and is. As for the method, my marriage teacher thought the natural way was best (menstrual cycle timed), and read a few old Church magazine articles backing this up. He felt that using a condom or diaphragm was inappropriate because it could lead to "over indulgence," which God would not approve of. The last time I checked, nothing about the method of birth control is mentioned in the current Mormon General Handbook of Instructions, a handbook given to bishops to help them advise members. In the past Mormon leaders talked much more firmly about birth control, and about the preferred use of the menstrual cycle timing. But at least now their policy considers how the mother feels about the deal.

At eighteen I decided I should go on a mission. All Mormon young men, some young women, and all older couples are encouraged to go on missions. Certainly the strongest pressure is put on young men. I didn't feel coerced to go on a mission, but just felt it was the right thing to do at the time. Earlier I had received the Melchizedec priesthood from my father. I therefore had the authority to bless the sick, confirm baptisms, confer the Aaronic and Melchizedec priesthood on others, and lead the Church locally if called to do so by current Church leaders. Since I had received the Melchizedec priesthood I could now go through the temple and receive my "endowment." I thought this was a great opportunity and decided to go through the Salt Lake Temple. My brother came with me to help explain what was occurring.

I was given a pair of temple garments to take with me. Temple garments resemble old style white underwear that cover your entire torso, and legs to your knees. They also have some marks on them which you learn the meaning of during the endowment ceremony. I was mystified by my own endowment. Since Mormons aren't supposed to talk much about what goes on in their temples, I found the experience completely new and different. Before I left on my mission I returned several more times to do endowments for the dead.

The Temple

Here is a description of what occurs in the Mormon Temple based on my personal experience & knowledge. The full text of each ceremony is not included here, but can be found in other works.

The ceremonies which take place in the temple for the general Church membership are as follows:

- Baptism for the dead
- Washing & Anointing, for the living and dead
- Endowments, for the living and dead
- Eternal Marriage, for the living and dead
- And possibly one other: Calling & election made sure for the living and possibly for the dead.

Baptism for the dead:

Mormons believe baptism is required to enter God's Celestial Kingdom. They do baptisms for the dead because they believe it helps with the salvation opportunities of all of God's children; so that all can choose between good and evil - either choose to be baptized and start on the path to eternal life, or not. Since dead people generally don't let it be known how they've chosen, Mormons do baptisms for as many dead people as they can. The motivation for doing this ceremony and other temple ceremonies for the dead is claimed to be multifold: by helping others be saved, they are helping themselves be saved; further spiritual enlightenment can be gained by the experience; and ambiguous forgiveness of sins will occur for the person doing the ceremony in behalf of the dead. Thus the average temple going Mormon goes because he knows God wants him to; because she knows she's helping her kindred spirit brothers & sisters be saved; and because he is seeking further spiritual enlightenment.

Baptisms for the dead are performed by proxy. Church members represent the dead as they go into the font and are baptized.

Washing & anointing:

After baptism, the living & dead must be washed and anointed in preparation for receiving the endowment. This is done by taking the person into a set of small rooms where they are anointed with oil and water on several parts of their body, including: head, shoulders, back, legs, feet, hands, and arms.

Several conditional promises are made to the person being washed & anointed. These promises deal with inheriting God's dominions & power if they remain worthy & do what God wants. Also temple garments are placed on the person and they are instructed never to remove them - that they are a protection against the power of the Destroyer (ie: Satan) so long as they remain worthy & wear them.

In spite of myths promulgated by some, neither this nor any other ceremony I ever experienced or heard about is done in a distasteful manner. Men are washed and anointed by men and women are washed and anointed by women near their respective locker rooms out of view of each other. While in the temple women are considered to have a share in the priesthood in some way. Therefore they are permitted to wash and anoint those of their own gender. I wonder however if men ever washed and anointed women back in Joseph Smith or Brigham Young's time. Joseph Smith was the first Mormon prophet, Brigham was the second. Although my loins were referred to during the ceremony, they were never touched. Also I've never heard of people engaging in sex in the temple. Some early presidents of the Church did live in the temple for a time, but there's no sinister sex scenarios that I ever heard of or saw dealing with naked couples and alters, as claimed by a guy I met on my mission.

My first washing & anointing was quite strange. Later I came to accept it as one of God's ceremonies, but it was definitely a new experience. So many people deal with you & do things to you in the temple that sometimes you feel more like a pawn in some elaborate chess game than an active participant. Sure you're moving around & doing things, but your role is still a passive one. Those representing God do and say things to you - you don't reply accept to commit to do what God wants or to show you've learned what God taught.

Endowment:

After being washed and anointed the person receives their endowment (a ceremony lasting between 1.5 and 2 hours). The word endowment means gift. People there for their own endowment are in the same room with those going through for the dead. The ceremony tells about God's plan of salvation and asks that participants commit to certain gospel principles associated with that plan. Something very similar to the biblical account of the creation is shown, either in movie form, or by live actors in the Salt Lake Temple & other older temples. The most recent movie version I saw was quite impressive, and it's apparent that significant effort went into it's production.

Elohim and Jesus (God the Father, God the Son) are shown to create the world. In the movie this is done fairly realistically with lots of volcanos, nature shots, and impressive multi-track audio. Then Adam shows up in the garden, and then Eve. They're told not to eat the forbidden fruit, but do anyway. They're cast out of the garden. Elohim and Jesus comment that since Adam & Eve were cast out They will make a savior for them, give them various laws to obey, and thereby make it possible for them to return to Their presence and with Them partake of eternal life.

During the ceremony several commitments are asked to be made. These are: wives obey husbands so long as husbands obey God; husbands obey God; obey the law of sacrifice as outlined in the Old Testament; obey the law of the gospel as outlined in the New Testament; obey the law of chastity, which is that no man or women shall engage in sexual relations outside the bounds of marriage; and obey the law of consecration, or being willing to commit all time, talents, and resources to the Church for the building of the kingdom of God and the establishment of Zion. Note that many Mormons give 10% of their gross income to the Church, not 100%. It is inferred that someday 100% may be asked for, but such a law would never be enforced by the sword. The law of consecration enforced by the sword is tantamount to communism, but in Mormon doctrine, God's law of consecration is not enforced by the sword, but is voluntary. When Brigham Young was around the law of consecration was attempted, but eventually claimedly failed due to greed. They believe that when Christ returns and Zion is established, consecration will work because people will be more motivated by Christ's presence.

Endowees start out in the garden of Eden, then are symbolically cast out to the lone & dreary world, which represents the Telestial Kingdom. They move on to the Terrestrial Kingdom, and finally at the end of the ceremony move to a room representing the Celestial Kingdom. In temples where live actors play the parts of Adam, Eve, Elohim, Jesus, and Satan, the garden and kingdoms of God are represented by individual rooms with appropriate murals. In more modern temples where a movie is used, one room represents the Telestial and Terrestrial kingdoms, while another represents the Celestial.

Several hand shakes and hand/arm signals are given during the ceremony, which are called tokens and signs. They are used to verify the identity of ceremony players in the movie and at the end when participants go through the veil. These signs and tokens have relevance to the plan of salvation outlined in the ceremony, and participants are asked to commit to not reveal them or face somewhat ambiguous though serious divine penalties.

Here is an outline of how the commitments, signs, and tokens are given in the endowment (each token has a name, a sign, and a commitment):

Commitments: Wives follow husbands as husbands follow God. Husbands follow God. All follow law of sacrifice (in Old Testament).

Token given: First Token of the Aaronic priesthood, represented by a distinctive hand shake.

Name of token: The "new name," which is received just before the ceremony as they exit their locker rooms. The new name is a name to be kept secret, although most of the ones I've heard come from the Bible and Book of Mormon.

Sign of token: A distinctive arm positioning.

(Names and signs of tokens are shown simultaneously.)

Commitment: Not reveal token, it's name or sign, "except at a certain place to be shown hereafter [the veil]."

Commitment: Obey law of gospel, as outlined in the New Testament.

Token given: The second token of the Aaronic priesthood, represented by another distinctive handshake.

Name of token: "Your own first given name if you are going through for your own endowment, or the first name of the [dead] person for whom you are officiating [representing]."

Sign of token: Another distinctive arm positioning.

Commitment: Not reveal token or sign, "except at a certain place to be shown hereafter [the veil]."

- Commitment: Obey the law of chastity
(no sex outside marriage).
- Token given: First token of the Melchizedec priesthood, with an associated distinctive handshake (symbolic of the nail through Christ's palms).
- Name of token: "The Son, meaning the Son of God."
- Sign of token: Distinctive arm positioning.
- Commitment: Not reveal token or sign, "except at a certain place to be shown hereafter [the veil]."
- Commitment: Law of consecration (give 100% - if we should ask.)
- Token given: Second token of the Melchizedec priesthood, with a distinctive handshake (also used in the eternal marriage ceremony). This handshake is symbolic of the nail through Christ's wrists.
- Name of token: Not given now. It's given directly by [someone representing] Elohim at the veil.
- Sign of token: This is the one I still remember for sure. It's given by raising your hands high above your head and repeating the words "Oh God, hear the words of my mouth" while lowering your hands, all repeated three times^U.
- Commitment: From what I remember, no commitment is asked of for the revealance of this sign or token. But "serious divine penalties" are inferred for doing so.

At the conclusion of the ceremony the endowees are shown the method by which they must pass through "the veil." The veil is represented by a long white sheet with holes in it for hands to pass through. There are also several vertical cuts in the fabric for people to go through once they've been tested at the veil for information learned in the ceremony. There are also symbols on the veil which are the same as those which appear on Mormon temple garments. In the ceremony Mormons are told these symbols are to help them remember to do what God wants. From what I've seen they look exactly like the symbols that appear outside Masonic buildings.

^U A few years ago they instead would say "Pae Lae Ell" three times, which they would explain to us as being the "original Adamic" language version of "Oh God, hear the words of my mouth."

All the tokens (hand shakes) and their names are used at the veil. A helper stands to the side of each person to make sure they say the right things and use the right hand shakes. A person representing Elohim, or God the Father, stands on the other side of the veil.

At the veil endowees learn the name of the second token of the Melchizedec priesthood. During my first several endowments I found it difficult to remember, but once I became a veil worker it was easy. It is: "**Health in the navel, marrow in the bones, strength in the loins and in the sinews. Power in the priesthood be upon me and upon my posterity; through all generations of time, and throughout all eternity.**"

Once you've said the right things at the veil, you pass through to a room representing the Celestial Kingdom of God. In the Salt Lake Temple this room is exquisitely ornate and beautiful. Also, gold and white molding & trim appear everywhere in the room along with several mirrors. Several sealing rooms (mentioned later) are connected to the Celestial Room. There is also a doorway (usually blocked) which leads to the Holy of Holies (also mentioned later).

Once in the Celestial Room people usually talk peacefully in quiet whispers about any spiritual experiences they might have had, or deep thoughts about the temple experience or their lives. Some people don't talk much at all, but meditate silently. After five to thirty minutes most people depart and either go through another endowment ceremony, some other temple ceremony, or leave.

The tokens and their names are not only used each time patrons go through the temple veil, they will be required knowledge for those expecting to enter the highest level of the Celestial Kingdom, or exaltation. After death (according to Mormonism), God's angels will stand as sentinels and test your knowledge of the tokens before you can be exalted, or live the type of life God does. Some of my Mormon teachers implied that if you go to the temple often God will provide a helper so you can get the wording & hand shakes right. If you don't go often, God may not be so kind.

During the endowment and eternal marriage ceremonies people wear special temple robes. These consist of: an apron representing the fig leaves Adam & Eve wore; a robe; a hat (somewhat resembles a graduation hat); and a belt-sash. During my first endowment I thought the temple clothing was quite strange. The complete meaning of each piece of clothing is not explained in the endowment or eternal marriage ceremonies. While in the Celestial Room you may choose to ponder & pray to know the full meaning of the special clothing you're wearing.

Eternal Marriage:

After being endowed a couple to be married or a couple representing the dead come into a small room with an altar and mirrors on either side. The room is called a Sealing Room, where people are sealed together for time & all eternity. Note that temple divorce can occur so that you don't have to be stuck with someone you don't want to be with.

A temple worker (or sealer) who holds the Melchizedec priesthood directs the ceremony. If this is a live sealing (not for the dead) the sealer semi-informally counsels the couple on how to have a successful marriage. This can last for some time. At the sealings I've attended pretty reasonable advice was given. I never heard any cautions about birth control or over indulgence in marital sex. Such advice may occasionally be given (especially by older Temple Matrons to brides just before the ceremony), but I only heard general statements inferring that marital sex was God ordained and that the couple should do everything they can to make their partners happy.

After any advice the sealer directs the couple to join hands using the second token of the Melchizedec priesthood handshake learned in the endowment ceremony. They are then sealed for time and all eternity by the sealer. This is done by the speaking of certain phrases and the couple saying "yes" at certain times, like when they're asked questions relative to their desire to be married. Conditional promises are made similar to those used during the washing and anointing ceremonies.

Usually some of the couple's family is present in the room. As each partner looks across the altar, they see their betrothed dressed in white with a background of a recursive mirror image implying eternity. Their family members also often appear in the mirror images as well as the surroundings of an immaculate room similar in motif to each temple's Celestial Room. The site can be quite beautiful and moving.

Calling and Election Made Sure:

As I have only heard about this ceremony third hand, I cannot verify its existence in Mormon temples. One teacher I had at a Salt Lake LDS Institute of Religion once talked about how certain couples, after a lifetime of service to others in and out of the Church, are sometimes brought to the temple and are sealed unto eternal life and exaltation. Once sealed they are guaranteed salvation.

Normally in the Mormon Church salvation from spiritual death, or in other words being able to return to God, is dependent on whether good works follow faith. Mormons believe that faith unaccompanied by works is dead, or of no efficacy unto salvation. Certain Christian groups claim that one can be ambiguously "saved" if one merely verbally confesses that "Jesus is the Christ." Mormons however believe there are two types of salvation: Salvation from physical death and salvation from spiritual death. In detail their belief is:

Since Jesus was put on a cross and came up three days later from the dead, all men and women will be resurrected, or have their spirits and bodies permanently reunited. This is a free gift given to all by the grace of God. Spiritual death is what happened to Adam and Eve when they were cast out of the garden of Eden - they were cut off from God's presence. Salvation from spiritual death is being able to return to God, and is not free. It must be earned by good works, which are evidence of faith in Jesus Christ.

Having one's calling and election made sure implies that one has done sufficient good works to show readiness & worthiness for exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom of God, or the ability to be with and like God and create worlds and spirit children like He does now.

Being baptized in the Mormon Church gives you the opportunity for the companionship of the Holy Ghost, who will guide and direct you so long as you're worthy. But once your calling and election is sure you receive the "second comforter" who is Jesus Christ. Thus those sealed unto eternal life have the opportunity to be personally visited and comforted by Christ himself.

The institute teacher said some older couples who had lived long and serviceable lives to God and his kingdom would be called to their local temple, or possibly the Salt Lake Temple, and have their calling & election made sure. He also said calling and election can take place after death or during the millennium.

Other ceremonies:

The previously mentioned ceremonies are all I know of for the general Church membership. The General Authorities (main leaders) of the Mormon Church often meet in the Salt Lake Temple though. There they discuss "weighty" matters regarding the Church, it's members, and doctrine, and may do some priesthood ordaining.

There is also a special room in the temple into which only the Prophet of the Church may go (and possibly the occasional janitor). It is called the Holy of Holies. In the Salt Lake Temple I've heard the room is quite small, has stain glass windows with a picture of Joseph Smith and other ornate handiwork. The entrance is the middle of three doors in the Salt Lake Temple Celestial room, and is usually blocked by flowers on a table. The prophet goes there to pray, ponder, and mediate. Not all temples have Holy of Holies.

Early Temple Experiences

My first experiences with the endowment ceremony were mystifying and intriguing, however I did not receive as much fulfillment as I had imagined I would. My first baptisms for the dead at twelve were exciting. I had been built up for the experience.

Even though I didn't find the temple to be a panacea for all my ills, it was usually enjoyable. But I was awed at first. I thought I might see God or a spirit, but never did to my knowledge. I have heard stories about people seeing spirits of those they were doing temple work for, and a few claim to have seen Jesus. But whether they did or not I cannot verify. To my knowledge all the people I saw were mortal beings. But I was a very strong Mormon at that time and certainly would have welcomed the experience.

I started to have a desire to see other parts of the Salt Lake Temple which would not normally be seen in the course of an endowment ceremony. However to my surprise I received a pat response that no tours could be given. I didn't want a history lesson, just to be shown areas I wouldn't see everyday, such as the large assembly room on the top floor, or the spiral staircases (both in the Salt Lake Temple). At the Jordan River Temple (located in the south part of the Salt Lake valley) I once asked the Temple President if I could see the rooms where the movie projection equipment was, and was told that was absolutely out of the question.

Mormons devote a great deal of time serving in the temple. They spend hours and hours doing endowments, baptisms, and marriage sealings for the dead, all because they believe they are helping their kindred spirit brothers & sisters. Yet their leaders in Salt Lake iron fistedly deny them the opportunity to see all of the temple rooms they wish. Also verbal prayer is not allowed for normal temple patrons; not in the Celestial Room nor anywhere else, except during one part of the endowment where a formal prayer is said as part of the ceremony. I was shocked to learn these things. Why wouldn't God's house have a place for members to go and pray out loud? Why couldn't I see other parts of the temple not directly associated with the endowment? I didn't want to see the Holy of Holies where only the prophet goes, just the other intriguing parts I'd heard about. Mormon temples are generally architecturally intriguing, but it's ironic that the non-members who view the temples before they are dedicated sometimes see more than members ever do after.

My response to this rejection was to start to hope that when Jesus returned someday perhaps he would be able to see into my heart and allow me to see all the parts of his house - would lovingly show me around, and make me feel at home. While I did enjoy most of my trips to the temple, I never felt "at home." I always felt a strong controlling atmosphere regarding seeing parts of the temple not associated with the ceremonies outlined in the previous chapter. I even had several dreams about visiting other parts of the temple. In spite of this rejection, I continued to rely on my core belief that God and Jesus were real and that I was in God's Church, regardless of the stupid bullheadedness of some of it's leaders and members. During my last 10 years as a member I relied on this tactic a lot. I believed that God would sort out the bad apples in the end, whether in or out of the Church. If the Mormon Church leaders want to encourage their members to go to the temple, they should be more open to the suggestions & concerns of temple patrons, rather than believe their iron fisted controlling oppressive policies are written in stone by Elohim Himself.

Mormons are taught not to reveal or talk about what goes on in their temples. Some Mormons claim this secrecy is based on the belief that God will judge people according to their knowledge of good and evil, inferring that if everyone knows what goes on in Mormon temples, then everyone would be held accountable by God for this knowledge. Another reason is the casting pearls before swine idea: that non-members will consider Mormon temple ceremonies ridiculous and ridicule them. This situation is similar to not wanting to reveal special personal experiences to people you don't know, or who won't appreciate them. To Mormons, the endowment ceremony teaches what God's plan is and gives the specific information needed to return to God and be like Him. Because they are strongly motivated by these beliefs, they often have special spiritual experiences, revelations, or periods of heightened enlightenment where they feel they're getting more in touch with the truth of the universe or themselves. Certainly (it is thought) the outside world would reject such things, or consider them as naught, otherwise why keep them secret? Another reason for the secrecy is because "God says so;" so do it, or else.

One time in 1992 I was especially moved by the movie portion of the endowment. I became emotional about the beauty of the creation and God's plan for me. While I still regard my life and existence in the universe as glorious and wonderful, I am no longer convinced of the existence of a personal God who adheres to the Mormon world view. While their God is considered loving, he seems psychopathic to me. He justifies having a man killed in the Old Testament for picking up sticks on the Sabbath, subtle iron fisted control by his present leaders, and strict judgments for those who would even dare to question His intentions or logic. I reject such a self-satisfied know-it-all god who claims to be just, but is really a hypocrite. More on this later.

After I was heavily moved by the temple movie I wondered why the rest of the world couldn't share in the beauty of such a ceremony. Upon further reflection though I realize that much of the world participates and shares in the beauty of everyday existence on this planet. Clearly there are many satisfying ways to look at the world, many equally or even more beautiful than the good parts of the Mormon temple movie.

Mission (19-21 years)

Most Mormon missionaries start their missions at the Missionary Training Center (MTC) in Provo, Utah, right next to BYU (Brigham Young University). I didn't know exactly what to expect at the MTC, but thought it would be boot-campish. They put us in dorm rooms and we each had a companion which we were required to stay with at all times. Some of the strict rules we were required to obey were: no dating, no pizza deliveries, no loud music, & etc. We also went through classes for seven hours a day six days a week learning more about the Church and how to teach others about it.

My MTC stay was mostly enjoyable. I had several spiritual experiences where I felt the concepts of the Mormon faith verified to me. One particularly moving experience occurred when they put several Church public service announcements up on a big screen. These had themes of caring, home, & family, and were especially touching when viewed on a large screen.

Every Sunday we would go to sacrament meeting and other meetings. Meeting groups were comprised of about 100 missionaries each, male & female. My Church meeting leader was a nice man. I never had any problems with him, except once when I couldn't find my companion. One time though I did confess to a bit of masturbation to an assistant of my Church meeting leader. I never should have brought it up though because my sexual experience was probably more accurately described as a wet dream. At the time I was so concerned about sexual sin that I felt bad at the appearance of the slightest amount of semen, whatever the cause. Later on my mission I came to better accept wet dreams as a natural process. Sometimes I would confess borderline incidents to my mission president using general terms.

It's amazing to me how 30,000+ young males & females get together in the MTC and are able to stay "apart." There were less lady missionaries to go around though, and the required commitment to abstinence from pre-marital sex is very strong in Mormonism. But every once in a while you'd hear rumors of someone being sent home because of sex sin.

After the MTC I left for my mission in Alaska (1986-88). My first companion and mission president were both very controlling. At a local garage sale I obtained an answering machine & put a silly message on it. My mission president was not amused. He was usually nice but didn't like his missionaries to get out of line or act unprofessional. Though he was controlling, he wasn't half as bad as my first companion. This guy got up tight if I put my keys in my front pockets, or stored *anything* under my bed. Not surprisingly though this same guy was promoted to be an assistant to my semi-controlling mission president. They were two peas in a pod.

Fortunately my second missionary companion was excellent and showed me a great deal of love & allowance. He was a hard worker though and was an example I tried to follow for the rest of my mission. However the controlling first companion and mission president also had an effect. I ended up being a hard worker, but would at times get overly uptight at others slack. It was hard to be assertive in response to my first mission president and first companion's controlling ways. Had I given either of these two men any lip I probably would have been sent home, so I never did. The weight of the *Church* also suppressed or reversed any rebellion.

Most of my time was spent tracting (walking door to door) trying to teach people about the Church. Every once in a while we would get to teach someone, but most of the time I and my companions walked. Also local members would occasionally feed us and were very kind. My parents supported me on my mission for which I am still grateful, even though I no longer embrace their view of the world & universe.

Many doors were slammed in my face in Alaska, but most people were nice on the surface; and some who let us in were hospitable, even though they may not have wanted to hear the message per se. My belief in the Church was there before my mission, but during my mission it increased. I had to be prepared to teach about Mormonism on a daily basis. I therefore spent a lot of time studying & thinking about the Church, and had a few opportunities to teach about it. Being 3,000 miles away from home was a motivating factor as well. I was there to teach about Christ and His Church and therefore pulled myself up by my bootstraps and increased my testimony. I was also able to dismiss my earlier concerns about Mormonism, it's people & practices.

The claimed method used to convert people to the Mormon Church is by the "Spirit of God, or Holy Ghost." According to Mormon theology those who read the Book of Mormon, ponder about it, and pray to know if it's true are supposed to receive a witness from God via his Spirit - this witness occurs differently for different people.

I personally felt a warm feeling in my bosom (chest area), and felt a "certain peace" when teaching about the Church, reading certain scriptures, and praying. As people were being taught they were supposed to receive a spiritual witness that what they were learned about was true (if they were open to it and seeking the truth). In practical experience however, only a few of the people I taught on my mission felt the spirit so far as I could tell. Maybe they all did - I don't know. I put a lot of emotional effort into my lessons. I didn't scream or shout about the Church, but I strongly felt it was right and would be right for those I was teaching. This feeling must have carried through to some.

Currently I am skeptical about the absoluteness of my past "spiritual experiences." If you really believe you're in God's Church and that you have the answer to the world problems, then you *should* feel good when your learning or teaching others about it. With the information and beliefs I had on my mission I really did feel I was doing a great service for those I taught and contacted - I was trying to tell them about what I believed about God and His plan for us. "What greater thing could be taught or done to serve my fellow man," I thought.

Having spent 26 years in the Mormon faith I know that belief in it can be all encompassing. It's easy for some to dismiss "minor" concerns because they believe they're in God's Church and that everyone is learning how to be like God, even the leaders in Salt Lake. But my ability to dismiss my concerns deteriorated after my mission.

Masturbation occasionally played a role on my mission. It's pretty damn hard to ignore sexual feelings as a hormonally exploding young man. When the occasional indiscretion would occur I would confess to my mission president either in writing or in the occasional in-person interview. Initially I dreaded confessing just as much as when I was 12 or 13, but after a while I began to enjoy confessing. It gave me an additional emotion link to my mission president, and I was relieved to have the burden of my sin somewhat lifted. The whole experience did take a toll on my self esteem though.

Coming off my mission was a big let down. Members no longer revered me with the same status as the General Authorities (main leaders) in Salt Lake. Friendly people no longer adorned me with compliments or dinner appointments. At home I felt my parents were semi-heathenous. They didn't read the Book of Mormon every day, nor did they want to have family home evening (a weekly Church related family meeting prescribed in Mormon doctrine). I also didn't know how to relate to girls much. Having not dated much before my mission, I was even more unprepared after. One girl tried to suck me into a relationship I absolutely wasn't prepared for. She seemed a little nutty as well, so I bailed out quick when given the chance. It took me about six months to recover from my after-mission blues. I started going to college again, and started to feel more normal.

My mission was tough. Spending 65 hours a week walking door to door, going to members houses, and to Church, was not easy. I felt I had learned the value of hard work though and how to diligently serve my God.

After & beyond

A year and a half after my mission I went to Rick College in Rexburg, Idaho (ca. 1989) Ricks is a two year college owned and operated by the Church. I lived in an apartment with 6 other guys. We had three bedrooms & a reasonably sized living room. The guy in my own room was nice enough. He didn't have girls over late at night or play excessively loud abrasive music. My other roommates were not so pleasing to these sensibilities though. They would have women over late, sometimes overnight. They would play obnoxious abrasive music after 10pm. Most of them were insensitive jerks, or just too stupid to know the difference between courtesy and rude inconsiderate behavior.

In retrospect I probably wouldn't have been as bothered by the whole deal if they'd've kept the noise down. Even though I had been off my mission a year and a half, I still had the anti-relations-with-the-opposite-sex mentality. While I considered dating ok, I absolutely did not approve of women being over all night, and was mad enough about the whole noise & girls crap to eventually inform our landlords about them. However my roommates did not derive great pleasure from this leak. They retaliated with super glue on my and my immediate roommate's door and toilet. I was fortunate enough to discover the glue on the toilet before it was too late.

Ricks is a good school overall. It's had a reputation as being akin to a high school, but I found it to be more than that academically. After the classes are over however, the comparison is not too far off. In fact many Ricks students act like high school students away on a big vacation. Their parents are not around to see them fool around or jerk off, so they have a blast. This was of course at the expense of people like me and my immediate roommate who were there to do some no-nonsense learning and work. We became strong believing Mormons on our missions - we liked the rules about women & etc., and resented being subjected to such jerky heathenous behavior. But I had my own personal heathenous problems at Ricks, the same old recurring problem that plagued me before and during my mission.

My bishop at Ricks was a nice enough. I ended up confessing a few times to him about masturbation, but he seemed to take it pretty well. I also started attending the temple in Idaho Falls a lot. In going through the endowment ceremony I started wanting to be a veil worker. I desired extra spiritual enlightenment and thought I might see more of the temple than I would otherwise get to. I came to partially accept that God wanted me to see only the parts of his house in which I was directly working. Thus as a veil worker I would get to see a few extra parts of the temple, feel more important, and get to hang around temple workers who felt the same.

I went through a veil training class where I was taught exactly how to pass people off at the veil and bring them through. As a veil worker I represented Elohim, or God the Father. I tested people's knowledge of the tokens they received during the endowment. If they said the right things and used the right hand shakes I would admit them into the symbolic presence of God by gently taking their hand and bringing them through the veil. They would then walk into the Celestial Room. I really enjoyed being a veil worker while at Ricks. The temple was a sanctuary for me away from school & jerky roommates.

During my year at Ricks I started considering where to go next. My sister had gone to Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah several years back and I thought it might be good for me to go as well. Many Mormon children want to go to BYU, and many Mormon parents want to see their children go. So I applied to enter the Y^u. My immediate roommate at Ricks also applied. I was accepted, he was rejected.

Even though many Mormons want to go to BYU not all are admitted. The leaders in Salt Lake do not consider this to be a sufficient inequity to either close BYU or open more Church colleges. They say that since many universities already have Church sponsored institutes of religion close to each campus, Mormon's need not feel that God isn't being just because they can't get into BYU. In spite of this my immediate roommate was bitter about the rejection, and I believe many others have been as well. But at the time I was grateful to be able to go to BYU. My sister enjoyed it, so I should too.

My first semester at BYU (August, 1990) was spent in the back of an old house near campus. I lived alone. But I lived in a good ward (Church group) with lots of friendly people. I was still emotionally unprepared to date though so never did. The second semester I moved out of my lonely back room apartment and moved into an even more lonely single room at Deseret Towers (several large dorm buildings next to the Missionary Training Center). I lived alone - mostly to avoid contact with possibly jerky roommates like those at Ricks College.

Over 30,000 students were at the Y when I was there. I felt lost in the great crowds on the sidewalks, but found some nice people in my own department of Wildlife & Range Resources. As part of the curriculum for my degree I registered for Biology 200, an advanced class in biology. I found it to be overly hard though. There were many medical students in the class who seemed willing to thrash themselves with endless study. I couldn't keep up and dropped the class. Fortunately my departmental head later told me I didn't have to make it up. I could of course not receive any refund for the class. The next semester I tried Zoology 204, vertebrate & invertebrate zoology. I worked & worked in that class, and yet still only managed to pull off a D+. I thought I deserved at least a B- or C+, but as with Biology 200 the academic goals of the university got in the way of my personal success. When I went to the Y my parents spent about \$1000 per semester, and yet for all that money all I got was one kick in the face after another. My own experience with academic oppression was not isolated. I heard several students complain about the onerous pace of daily material in Biology 200, and somewhat less in Zoology 204.

In order to better control the fooling around activities similar to those I was exposed to at Ricks, BYU has set up a department called "Student Life." This department insures that students conform to BYU standards. They would often use overly harsh tactics though, as frequently reported in an off-campus unofficial newspaper dealing with Y culture.

At student life and other departments at the Y there is an attitude that all school policies are written in stone by God. If a student has some difficulty at registration, that's too bad - the rules are there, if you question them, you are questioning the validity of the Church - that's the strong

^uIn and around Utah "the Y" refers to BYU. "The U" refers to the University of Utah. These schools are heavy football rivals. All references to "the Y" or just plain "Y" in this book refer solely to Brigham Young University.

impression I got and saw others receive. Some good people do work at the Y, but any positive acts they may do are suppressed in the mire of control. This iron fistedness permeates itself from the administration to student life; from the religion department to the corridors of science, and on to the student body. The administration's policies are set in stone as if they were from God. The religion department gets mad at natural science for teaching about evolution, for example. And the student body suffers under the weight of overcrowding, oppressively hard academics, the student life department, lack of academic freedom, and on and on.

Did I like my year at BYU? No. Do I think BYU is a good school? Well, some people try to make it be, but in the current controlling iron fist atmosphere professors and students are subject to, I don't think it can or ever will be. While I was at the Y I also read in an unofficial off-campus newspaper that the married student housing units had a high level of child and/or wife abuse. I've not verified this but would not be surprised if it were true.

The very policies intended to improve BYU and it's students are in fact destroying them. It's no wonder some become abusive with the high pressured classes & academics they're put through. I'm not excusing any possible abuse, but if abuse levels are indeed high in the married student housing, I bet it's because the young parents there feel so damn worn out after a day at school that they psychologically crack when they get home.

While at BYU I was still able to hold on to my core beliefs about the Church, though they were eroded. I was disappointed at how BYU operated. I didn't think a school owned and operated by God's Church should be the way I found BYU. I also learned that I'd have to get a master's degree to have any sort of employment opportunities in range & wildlife resources, so I switched to computer science and transferred to Weber State University (WSU) in Ogden, Utah.

Weber State was at one time a Mormon Church school, but is now run by the State of Utah. I enjoyed Weber. My classes weren't too big or too hard. There were occasional glitches with the administration, but at least I wasn't at a Church sponsored school where administrative oppressiveness was iron fistedly approved. I also got good grades overall at Weber, and excellent grades in my major.

By the time I got to Weber I was partly burned out on the Church. I did attend a few classes at the Church sponsored institute of religion just north of the campus, but didn't really feel I fit in. I continued to attend the temple and starting going to Church in Salt Lake in the area where I grew up. Since I was over 18 and not married I went to a singles ward. A ward is an individual Church unit or group consisting of 100 to 500 members. In order to foster marriage, which Mormons value, they've set up a singles ward system to help those with similar interests & values have a better chance to meet.

However the fosterence of marriage idea is lost on some singles who have overly high expectations of the person they want to meet, and thus exclude many from their pool of available dates or mates. In my ward there were several older singles with a median age of 29, which is considered old for a single adult in the Mormon Church. Before I left my mission my mission president called me in and told me to get home and get married to the right woman. Some mission presidents even drop the "...right woman..." part. But my own emotional insecurity and

anti-dating-on-mission mentality kept me from feeling comfortable asking women out. I was never sure where the insecurity came from, but now believe some of it stems from years of constant shaming I received as a young pubescent Church member struggling to deal with conflicts between my own body and the strict sexual edicts of the Church.

Not being married in the Mormon Church is a disadvantage. Some singles may claim it's not, but in fact if you're not married you are delegated to "special" wards for your own "kind." If you never eternally marry in the Mormon Church you will be eternally barred from the highest reaches of God's Celestial Kingdom. So there is very strong pressure to get married, and some Mormon prophets have said that Mormon males over the age of 25 are a menace to society. In spite of this, there are many Mormon males and females over 25 still unmarried. In this atmosphere I tried to make my way.

I continued to struggle in the faith and still had my core belief that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and that I was a member of God's Church. My lifetime "problem" with masturbation continued to afflict me. Most of my bishops in the singles ward took my confessions rather well, but surprisingly one seemed particularly disgusted by it. Perhaps he couldn't conceive of a nice straight guy like me going home at night and doing such a thing, or perhaps while he was in, not as many honest people showed up to his office. The Mormon Church is very refined. In the general reverent setting of sacrament meeting or Sunday School, it's considered repugnant to imagine your class mates or Church associates engaging in the necessary details of sexual activity. After masturbating I always felt unworthy and ineligible for dating. I was in a vicious cycle of wanting to be with women, but almost never feeling worthy of their presence. And even when I did feel worthy I almost never felt secure enough to ask, or to fend off fears of rejection.

I never felt comfortable asking women out in my Salt Lake singles ward, except once just before I left it and the Church. I did date one girl outside the ward who my brother lined me up with, but she flopped. In 1992 I found an appealing girl in my ward who was nice and somewhat flirtatious. Around the same time the main Church leaders at 49 East South Temple Street in Salt Lake decided to hold a Church wide singles fireside. This was a special meeting for singles broadcast to Mormon meeting houses around the world. Our ward was given a special invitation to view the meeting in person at the Tabernacle in downtown Salt Lake on Temple Square. In the meeting we were told that men have the primary responsibility to find an eternal mate; if women fail, God will give them another chance, but if a man fails to get married in the temple during his lifetime, God will not be pleased and that man will be damned, or not allowed to enter the highest reaches of the Celestial Kingdom - exaltation. Men 30 and over were especially chastised and warned.

This meeting really hurt me, and was a key breaking point in my relationship with the Church. Before the meeting I had come to believe that the human courtship ritual of men having to ask women was a culturally based one. Thus in different cultures, women may be the primary askers instead of men. Not only were my Church leaders and their supposed god ignoring my own problems with dating, but were telling me that men having to ask was ordained by God, and not just a cultural edict of the west.

For years I struggled with my own insecurity about asking women out. From 18 to 25 I was a single adult in the Church. Yet in all that time I only managed to ask a women out from my own ward once, including living in Salt Lake before my mission, while going to Ricks, BYU, and Weber State after. Certain women came into view from other wards, but I never felt comfortable asking a women so close to home until I was 25. Would God recognize and appreciate my insecurity with dating? If he loved me, would he really require me to live in a church which ignored my own insecurity.

My Church leaders were telling me God would recognize the plight of women in dating, but would ignore my own insecurity, fear of asking, and anti-dating mentality gained from my mission, all with the insensitive warning: "Get married or else!" I thought: "Could the same God that loved me in early Sunday School now be telling me to obey a culturally based edict and ignore my feelings and situation? Why should women have less responsibility in courtship than men? Why should women get all the leeway and slack from God when it comes to dating? In the United States the belief that men must do the asking still prevails, but God's Church shouldn't have to adhere to the standards of 'the world,' or even of a country like the U.S. where only a small portion of this world's population lives. If God is just then both men & women should have equal responsibility in dating and marriage." Mormon leaders often pride themselves on how Church edicts are "not of the world." Why couldn't Mormon dating procedures also be "not of the world?" I rejected & still reject the idea that men must be the primary askers. They may be the way "it is" in the U.S., but that sure as hell doesn't mean that's the way is has to be, the way it should be, or the way God's supposed Church needs to be.

The girl in my singles ward who I finally felt comfortable asking turned out to be the schedule crazy kind. For example: even though she knew for a week that I was trying to call her, when I finally got a hold of her, she said flatly that she needed more notice. She flirted with me over and over. Yet when it came time for the asking she "needed more notice." Had she said "I'm not available to go out this weekend, but how about next week?" I could have understood, but being a person who doesn't keep a day planner tucked away for events 10 years in the future, or even a day, I like to do things spur of the moment. I was also pretty disturbed at the Church policy about men asking women out. This rejection was just another blow to my already tattered self esteem, and I felt her attitude was another example of Mormon double-talk about courtship, marriage, and God's justice. Still I continued to go to Church, but started to feel more and more like I was just going through the motions of Church membership with no deep feelings. In fact I felt pretty burned out about the whole deal.

Back at Weber I became intrigued by my physics classes. Relativity, quantum mechanics, and astrophysics were all very interesting. Instead of having to rely on an ambiguous model for my existence and world I could look to science and gain factual knowledge. I had already gained a strong conviction of the principles of evolution at BYU where I learned the Mormon hierarchy has taken no position on the method of creation (from a Mormon zoology professor).

I also became increasingly concerned about the blacks & priesthood issue. On PBS I saw a show "Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World," and also glanced at the book by same author, David Maybury-Lewis. I remember the series & book talking about how Europeans thought people from other lands were descendants of Cain. The realization of what a stupid backwards idea that was really hit me. Why did Joseph Smith & Brigham Young embrace such a ludicrous idea & claim it was from God? The culture at the time claimed blacks were from Cain, but why would God give this same information to early Mormon leaders and result in the priesthood being withheld from blacks for some 130 years?

Some responses to my concerns by my family & leaders were: God confined the priesthood to the Levites in the Old Testament, so why not the blacks; White people were not ready for blacks to be ordained - whites would have left the Church, so God kept the priesthood from the blacks to keep the whites in; Don't question what God does in this area - if you believe Joseph Smith was a prophet, then you must believe God withheld the priesthood from the blacks for "His Eternal Purposes." My father told me the Mormon leaders are human and make mistakes - God has to work with them just like he does with us. None of these explanations satisfied me, although my father's seemed the most reasonable.

Another thing that bothered me for years was the enforced isolation of the apostles in Salt Lake. I thought Christ would have a system where Church members could meet with him or his apostles & leaders most any time they wanted. Yet in General Conference (a semi-annual worldwide Mormon conference held via satellite) we were told to always go to our bishop first. Also at General Conference the ushers can be quite controlling and bossy. Thus even though the Mormon Church Apostles & Prophet work in a building in downtown Salt Lake, I felt a great barrier between them and me. They didn't want to see me - they just wanted to tell my bishop what to do, and have him tell me. All questions & concerns were to be directed to my bishop. Then if he thought it was appropriate he would bring the issue up with higher levels of leaders, theoretically eventually reaching the top. But I realized the reality would be that instead of having my questions answered by the top Church leadership, my bishop or other local leaders would give their best guess or interpretation. Some bishop or other local leader on an ego trip would do their best to answer my question then & there, just like many secretaries in large companies today do their best to defer and rebound all questions for the boss. I concluded that Christ would not have set up His Church in this way. When I was younger I learned that Christ would treat me like a brother & friend. Yet His apostles in His Church today were acting more like high business executives hiding in their offices, as opposed to down to earth open people whom I could approach and deal with on a one to one basis without fear of rejection.

In March or September of 1992 I started writing anonymous letters to the General Authorities of the Church. I told them I wanted them to publicly apologize for ever withholding the priesthood from the blacks. I argued that the 130 year withholding came from cultural bigotry and stupidity, instead of from God. I also told them of my concerns about courtship & marriage: that men shouldn't have a majority of the burden in the initial part of the relationship. I argued that Mormon women should be made to feel just as free to ask men as men do asking women, and that they should share equally the burden of finding an eternal mate before it's too late. I indicated I expected a reply during the upcoming General Conference.

The General Conference where I hoped my Church would finally come clean and show God was just instead turned out to be an even stronger tirade against apostasy. They apparently believed I was becoming an apostate, or maybe they never got my letter at all. It was hard to tell since it was anonymous. Maybe some deferritory secretary person simply threw it away, I don't know. I'm sure it would have been deferred had my name been on it. Since you're not supposed to contact them directly they often automatically forward your letter to your local leaders before the big cheeses have bothered to read it.

I wrote a few more times about my concerns to no avail. At Weber I took an anthropology course & finished up a minor in physics. I came to realize that there are many perceptions of the world, and that other's world view could be just as satisfying for them as I sometimes found Mormonism satisfying to me. I also pondered a great deal on what I was learning about the physical world. I marveled at the nature and structure of the universe, the beauty of it all, and of our existence. I found that science augmented with my own personal philosophy up to that point could be just as satisfying as the views I held while a strong Mormon. My philosophy of the universe progressed as my knowledge of physics and anthropology increased.

Back in my singles ward I finally got a call to leadership from my bishop. I had suspected for some time that I wasn't being asked to lead in the Church because of my periodic confessions of minor sexual indiscretion (ie: masturbation). Though I never knew for sure I suspected these confessions created a stigma against my progression in the Church. On my mission I often participated in the inner circles of ward leadership councils, but once home my opportunities to use my skills and intelligence in the Church were non-existent. Finally I was given the chance to lead and was asked to be the Sunday School president of my ward. I still had some emotional and spiritual fuel left to do my job for a while. I did my best to get all the classes organized, and once exhorted my teachers to follow the Spirit of God. But guess what happened? My body, which took billions of years of evolution to create, and according to the natural processes from which we are all derived, started to feel more and more ready to create creatures like itself. The eventual confessions necessary drew me down again. The weight of all my past experiences dealing with the Church and it's people was overwhelming. There were many good people who cared a great deal about me, but their concerns could not fill the gaping holes in my soul. I could not ignore the hypocrisy and irony of the Church any longer. So I quietly resigned my Sunday School post and became inactive. My parents didn't understand what was happening or why I was going inactive. My mother especially still believes strongly in the Church. But her experiences are not mine. At the time of my initial inactivity I was still hurting too much to risk revealing my inner thoughts and feelings to those who couldn't understand or would ridicule them.

My schooling continued. While driving up to Ogden around the end of `92 or beginning of `93 I heard about a new book by a Mormon semi-apostate on a local talk radio station[¥]. The book shows how Mormon women should have the priesthood using actual Mormon doctrinal sources. I went to a local library and picked up a copy. In the past I had accepted that women didn't need the priesthood, but now came to realize they should have it too. Why were only men leading the Church as a whole? Why were women excluded from the highest inner circles of Church leadership? What

[¥] Quinn, D. Michael, "Mormon women have had the priesthood," *in* *Women and authority, reemerging Mormon feminism*, Maxine Hanks, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992, 460 pp, Chapter pagination 365-409.

were Mormon women to learn from the concept of a Mother God? Only being able to lead their own "kind"? To not have direct participation in Church government? To not be able to bless their children and the sick using the power & authority of Father & Mother God? I didn't and don't think so.

Women in the Mormon Church should have the priesthood. Just as other religions have slowly dropped their ban on ordaining women out of a realization that the original exclusion was culturally based, Mormon leaders should do the same. The idea in Mormonism is that women get to have children and men get to have the priesthood. A better idea is that both get to have the children, and both get to have the priesthood. Women give birth, but men should play an equal role in raising them. Claiming men do now in the Mormon Church is a myth. Women have just as good a brains as men (some claim better). In the western world of technology and science, why can't men and women share equally the yoke of financial responsibility? Why are men forced to feel they are to be the primary providers *away* from the home?

With the advent of the industrial revolution men were forced to leave the home. But now that labor intensive work is not as much an issue, I would like to see both go out to work and stay home, but having each spend *less* time at work so they can spend *more* time at home. Or do as most people did before the industrial revolution and find a way to have both work at home - that's how I'd like to see things go anyway. Certainly the reality of our lives draws us away from the home and each other too much. Conscious effort must therefore be made to insure happiness. Some may have to choose a lower income level or different geographic location in order to have more time at home with their children and each other. Women and men should play an equal role in these decisions. Women in not being overly drawn to duties at home, and men not being overly drawn to work away from the home. Men should realize they don't have a monopoly on work or leadership away from home. And women should realize they don't have a monopoly on the home and children, and that they have to rely on men for their financial support. It is a two way street though. Perhaps women see the low pay they get in the workforce and feel they should stay home (when they can)... Such were my thoughts about women & men.

But Mormon leaders do not share my views on human relations. They feel that men and women have distinct roles. Men lead, and are thus the primary providers and have the priesthood. Women follow, and thus keep track of the children and the home. I mentioned my concerns about women & the priesthood in yet another anonymous letter, but by now I was too far out in left field to consider myself a close associate of the Church.

Several weeks went by and still the church I once loved never came clean and admitted to any mistakes. No one answered my concerns directly or indirectly, either at General Conference, or in some sort of letter to all the bishops. Mormons pride themselves on how they can receive modern revelation from God. Why couldn't my God tell them they were wrong?

My Church inactivity continued. I didn't want to have someone else touch the place where my pain sat - it was my pain, what did they know of it. And I didn't want a know-it-all leader to come over and tell me where I went wrong. It was the Church that went wrong, not me. So I wrote in and asked not to be contacted by my local ward leaders, except via mail. My concerns were more with the upper leadership anyway who were directing the whole show. A few months went by during

which I felt especially haunted by the cultural and emotional weight of 26 years as a Mormon; I wasn't ready to leave altogether, yet.

While writing this my parents still do not know or appreciate the extent of my pain derived from years of disappointments with and in the Mormon Church. My mother is especially disheartened at my departure. For several Sundays after I announced I would not return to Church she would have a good cry and be rather indignant. I tried many times to explain my position, but she could not accept it. I never felt comfortable telling her about my problems with masturbation. While a strong Church member I considered it a sin, but now that I was inactive my position was reversed. Masturbation is not a sin. Sexual desire is not a sin. Thoughts of sex are not a sin. Normal human sex is not a sin! What a concept! A concept many still reject to the destruction of their souls. My mother knows little of my shame received from 26 years as a young Mormon: from sex to women; from blacks & priesthood to oligarchic leaders; from believing and investing in a utopian ideal which come to find out has major flaws at its very foundation.

After about 6 months of inactivity I decided to leave altogether and thus wrote in to the Membership Department and asked to have my name removed from the membership rolls. But come to find out you can't get out of the Mormon Church without giving them a good reason. Recently my bishop in Salt Lake wrote back and said he'd heard of my letter to the First Presidency of the Church asking to have my name removed[Ⓢ]. My Bishop apparently believes my departure from the Church is linked to being hurt by individual members not following the doctrines of the Church. I would reply that my departure is based on disappointments with the Church and culture as a whole, as directed by those at 49 East South Temple. All the leaders there are certainly imperfect and would admit as much. But this imperfection invariably is carried into the overall doctrine of the Church, something which the higher-ups in Salt Lake would not admit to. The concerns I have are rooted in the irony, inequity, and injustice I find in Mormon doctrine. Individual members in an attempt to adhere to the good parts of the faith invariably are drawn to either embrace, tolerate, or dismiss the inequities. Thus any problem I may have with individual members stems from their embracing doctrine which I consider unjust and inequitable [note: like inequities but singular] - the main problems exist at the very core of Mormon belief as reinforced by those at 49 East South Temple Street in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Early in my life I was taught that God loved me, that Jesus loved me, and that because they loved me they set up a Church which would allow me to return to them. Later I found the reality of membership in God's supposed Church to boil down to two options: ignore the inequities one may find associated with the Church by believing God will sort things out, or realize that much of the emotional, physical, and spiritual energy you invest in the Mormon Church is for naught. My parents have been unwilling to accept the second option. Over a lifetime they've simply invested too much to leave now. I don't consider my life to this point to be a waste because I was a Mormon. I gained many insights into living and happiness. But I've come to reject the concepts which go against my common sense or inherent nature, which I believe to be good, not evil.

[Ⓢ]Later that year my Bishop confirmed that my name had in fact been removed.

Current views

Now that I have rejected Mormonism as a reasonable world view for me I am grateful for those who've helped me develop my own more satisfying view of the world which isn't soaked with irony or hypocrisy:

Religions often look to a god to explain things not explainable any other way. As science progresses religion adapts to fill in the gaps, and slowly adjusts old doctrines to fit the new reality & facts. An example of this is the Mormon view of creation.

I once heard that Joseph Smith said dinosaur bones were planted in the earth by the devil to deceive man into believing evolution. Whatever he thought, clearly the Mormon view of creation is changing. In the past Mormons believed the biblical account completely literally. But their view of man's origin has evolved. As evolution became more popular some Mormon leaders were worried and began rejecting the idea that Adam came from an ape, and said he was placed on the earth independent of them. The First Presidency of the Church, consisting of the Prophet and two counselors, has never said yea or nay about evolution. Some of the apostles have expressed doubts, but the Mormon prophets have always been neutral[‡]. In 1991 or '92 I heard in Church or the temple that the creation story is being increasingly considered as symbolic as portrayed in the temple endowment ceremony. It was not clear which parts were symbolic and which were literal. But after hearing this, I began to think that maybe Adam, Eve, & the forbidden fruit may all be symbolic of our past collective actions in a way we don't yet know about. In any case it's clear that the religious view of how man came to be is adapting to fit the facts & observations of science.

Some fundamentalists still consider evolution to be a great evil and lie. I was glad that the Mormon First Presidency at least left itself open to the possibility of evolution. As a strong Mormon my view for a long time was my one and only god *choose* evolution as the method of creation; this did not detract from my one and only god in any way - He choose it, so there it is.

We are literally the children of the stars. The matter which makes up our bodies came from past super nova explosions. Also the physical laws necessary for life as we know it are here. Had the basic laws for our universe been substantially different, we wouldn't be around to know of that possibility. Some feel a god set up the laws of the universe so that we could exist. I don't know if that's true or not. I cannot confirm the existence of any possible more-powerful aliens out there. However even if some alien is responsible for our existence, there's a long way from claiming as much to saying there's only one true religion, or "best" way of doing things.

In many other cultures, the people appear just as satisfied with themselves as I ever was, or see Mormons now. Certainly there are less successful cultures, such as some in poor sections of big cities where violence and abuse is prevalent. But there are cultures besides Mormonism or even Judeo-Christianism which service the various levels of human needs quite well.

[‡]At least according to my Mormon zoology professor at BYU.

Humans have a need to be *right*. The Europeans thought they were *right* when they considered blacks descents of Cain. Mormons think they are *right* when they go to church and the temple to worship & serve their god. Fundamentalist Christians think they are *right* when they reject evolution and call Mormons non-Christian. And I think I am *right* in realizing there are many world views, none having a monopoly on the best way to be happy; and that the laws of nature in our universe inexorably led to evolution and our existence, all of which is glorious and beautiful, and no less satisfying to me than any other world view I have been exposed to.

My current world view has been augmented by the teachings and writings of several people. In listing them here I am not inferring that they believe as I do, nor am I inferring they ever said anything negative about Mormonism - absolutely none of them did to my knowledge. But their works have helped fill the gaping holes in my soul resulting from my departure from the Church. They have helped replace the irony, hypocrisy, and pain with a view which is not so hurtful to me, and is in fact quite pleasing and satisfying:

- A natural science professor at BYU who's also a Church member. He taught and showed the Mormon First Presidency is neutral on evolution.
- Physics teachers at Weber State University and Ricks, who provided a glimpse of how the universe works.
- Carl Sagan, several books including: *COSMOS*, an excellent PBS TV series & book about life & the universe. "We are star stuff..."
- Stephen Hawking, "A Brief History of time," an excellent book discussing the big bang theory and it's implications. More fuel for the physics fire.
- David Maybury-Lewis, *Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*, an excellent book and PBS TV series illustrating several human cultures. This series helped me realize more fully that there are many views of the world no less valid or satisfying than my own.
- Anthropology teachers at Weber State University, who helped further bring home the diversity of human culture.
- A communications coach who occasionally appears on a Salt Lake talk radio station. He's talked at length about how humans have a need to be *right*, and has discussed ways to work through conflicts resulting from this need.

And others whom I can't recall now.

I never heard or read *anything* from the above people saying Mormonism was bad or wrong. I learned that completely on my own. They have said what they have said. My views and opinions in this chapter and book are my own. My current world view has been augmented by theirs; they've merely helped fill in the gaps left by my hurtful departure from the faith of my youth.

Any good in Mormonism?

Yes. As a Mormon I learned how to search out things which uplifted my inner soul: in music, art, location, and people. Because I was taught extra-marital sex was evil I never pursued sex as a spiritual uplift as a Mormon. During marital sex some Mormons may be spiritually uplifted, but because of shame about all forms of extra-marital sex this same spirituality may not accompany such sex for them. Perhaps one's "spirit" can be uplifted by loving non-abusive consensual sex, whether married or not.

Many Mormons are nice people. By saying nice here I don't mean the sense implying false good intentions. There really are a lot of good people who're Mormons, especially outside of Utah. In Utah there are so many of them packed together that there's a greater sense of being better than everyone else, or at least being closer than all the rest to the Source of all knowledge. There are good people who're Mormons in Utah, but Mormons outside Utah usually exist as much smaller proportions of the population in which they reside; thus they are able to devote more of their energies to being a truly good example and "light" to others, rather than being as stuck in the mire of self-importance and spiritual supremacy over all gentiles (non-Mormons).

Mormons now

What is the current status of the Mormon Church? Many Mormons continue to be satisfied with their faith & conviction. As long as they can keep their core beliefs in Christ, the restoration of the Church through Joseph Smith, and the continued existence of that Church today, then they'll probably be happy. However, if they consider the Church in the light of issues like the ones that bother me, perhaps not as many will be so willing to embrace everything that emanates from 49 East South Temple Street.

The General Authorities of the Church are becoming increasingly paranoid. Recently they've been bouncing out right wing members who have a survivalist slant, and also certain left-wing dissidents. Perhaps they really honestly feel Satan is trying to get the best of them; or perhaps the idea they are *wrong* is to inconceivable to imagine. Thus they make every attempt to expel all detractors: anyone who would suggest there's a problem is investigated & expelled unless they agree to tow the line.

I've stopped towing their line. The line they have is not for me. It's a line of hypocrisy and paranoia; of iron fisted control; of exclusionary tactics against their own members; of denying the true nature of human beings and destroying peoples self esteem in the process; and of looking to a nineteenth century man who was certainly less than perfect, but through a big ego trip ended up creating a 9 million member Church. Joseph had some good ideas, but he didn't have all the answers, or even those necessary to avoid the pitfalls the Mormon Church has fallen into today.

The Mormon Church of my youth was fun & intriguing. I was taught there was a one and only supreme god that loved me & wanted me to be happy. But I cannot accept that this same god runs BYU, keeps the priesthood from women & kept it from blacks, doesn't want me to see all of his house (no temple tours), doesn't want me around his apostles (deferritory tactics), wants me to have an unequal share of the dating & marriage initiation burden (men ask women being doctrinal principle), or teaches that the inescapable sexual nature of humans is in fact some sort of necessary evil, or at least considered dangerous so that "restraint" must always be on the mind of the married couple. I don't want any part of this ridiculous restrictive church.

A recurring theme throughout my adolescent and adult life as a Mormon has been masturbation. Sex is so intertwined into my and every other humans life that I am only now beginning to realize the damage done by years and years of shaming with regard to my body and it's natural inherent functions. Sex is supposed to be fun; it's supposed to be pleasurable; and sometimes it may create children (hopefully when wanted). I should be able to feel good about my body, every part of it, and especially my reproductive parts.

I hope the damage done by years of shaming won't be permanent. I am incredibly relieved that I can finally be free to feel good about something so indelibly welded to my soul as sex; and I don't have to ask some government or church for permission to engage in activities which took evolution billions of years to create, directed by a god or not. I am here, I am not ashamed of who I am, what I am, or how I am.

The shaming & destruction of the human spirit must stop! Start by stopping it in yourself!

November 2005 Addendum:

The preceding text has been unedited since 1998. Here's a November 2005 addendum:

My even more current views are as follows:

Naturalism: there is nothing but the natural. We should seek to be as natural as possible.

Atheism: the only god worth worshiping is sex. If there are more powerful aliens, we should not kiss their asses since they can be just as fallible and evil as any of us. We should not kiss the asses of Elohim or Jehovah or Allah. Conservative religion is particularly evil, but even liberal religion can serve as an enabling force for the abuses of fundamentalism. More information can be found in the works of Carl Sagan & Richard Dawkins & Sam Harris & Jonathan Miller.

Bonobo-ite: we'd be a lot happier in my view if we learned to be more like Bonobos and less like regular chimps. Related groups: www.blockbonobofoundation.org, sexuality.org, lovetribe.org, and wetspot.org.

Anarchism, & a social and political liberal. According to www.politicalcompass.org I'm a left leaning anarchist, but then again so is the Dalai Llama, and so was Gandhi, and so is the UK Green Party. I'm also an egalitarian. Nation states have been colossal mistakes. I much prefer egalitarian tribal societies. But in this modern world, I also prefer socialist states, such as presently exist in Western Europe – where they have nationalized health care, and where they're less insane and frantic about human nudity & sexuality. Communism gave Marxism and socialism bad names. But regardless of frantic hysterics, the bottom line is that Western Europe now serves as a key model of civil society which the rest of the world should be following. They really show to the rest of us the triumph of secularism.

For help learning more about Mormonism, check out the following sites:

<http://exmormonfoundation.org>

<http://www.exmormon.org>

The above sites are useful for when you're first leaving Mormonism. If you're a more rebellious type you may find these sites a bit milk-toasty & a bit too constraining. But they have their uses, at least during your first few months while you transition out.

Where you go after Mormonism in the long term depends on what you're into. Some people end up being unchurched, and hang out in clubs & bars & coffee shops. Some people go to more liberal religions such as Unitarianism and Anglicanism. And sadly a few jump from one form of brain washing to another via choosing some type of fundamentalism/evangelicalism. I recommend the more liberating routes - routes which are less angry, and which are healthier and happier.