

Religion and Sexuality: Creation, Transcendence, and Rules

University of Toronto
University College
HUM 199Y1-0021
Lecturer: Meredith Cartwright
November 24, 2005

Guest Lecture
by
bob mccue
Lecture Notes

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

Mormonism: Personal Experience and Religious Context

- Questionnaire:
 - Do you believe that God is real and is personal in the sense that he/she/it is aware of you and hears you when you pray? Yes or No
 - Do you believe that God is real and is somehow responsible for our existence but is impersonal force that is not aware of us, cannot hear us when we pray, etc. Yes or no
 - Do you have another definition of God? If so, please describe in a short paragraph.
 - In a short paragraph, describe what you believe religion to be.
- Mormonism's basics:
 - Has been compared to Islam in many ways.
 - Based on the Hebrew tradition.
 - Extends that tradition in novel ways.
 - Includes new revelation from God that was recorded in extraordinary circumstances in book form.
 - Commenced by a charismatic "revelatory" whose special relationship to God and personality provided the energy to found the tradition.
 - See Weber's classic "priest v. prophet" distinction in operation.
 - Conservative.
 - Male dominated.
 - Was initially at least liberating in many ways, and advanced the rights of oppressed groups such as women though as

time passed the initial gains of these groups were largely eliminated.

○ Beliefs:

- See Mormonism's "Articles of Faith" and other basic beliefs at <http://www.mormon.org/learn/0,8672,1082-1,00.html>
- God the Biblical father
- Jesus is his son.
- Physically as well as literally.
- That is, God has sexual intercourse with Mary and hence Jesus is her and his literal offspring.
- Mormons consider themselves deeply Christian and are in offended when other Christians say they are not.
 - Only those who accept Christ and live his teachings as interpreted by Mormon leaders can be saved.
 - Christians say Mormons are not Christian because they believe various things about Christ and humankind's relationship to God and Christ (man can become literally like God; God used to be like man; God is a perfected, physical man; etc.) that differ markedly from mainstream Christian beliefs.
 - Mormons respond that they can believe what they like about Christ and still be "Christians".
 - Other Christians respond that a guy who drives a Ford can say all he wants that he is driving a Chevy, but he shouldn't be surprised that Chevy aficionados won't accept him into their club.
- The Bible is literally true, except where it is obviously contrary to science. Days of creation, for example.
- The Virgin birth, resurrection, miracles of New Testament are all real.
- After Christ died, there was an apostasy – a great falling away. This was predicted by the apostles.
- During the Dark Ages and up until the early 1800s Christ's church was not on the earth.
- It was restored by God to Joseph Smith in the early 1800s.
- Smith translated a new scripture called the Book of Mormon.
 - This tells the story of a Christian people who travelled from Jerusalem to the Americas in 600 BC.
 - The narrative ends around 400 AD.
 - This people worshiped Christ.
 - Christ visited the Americas after his resurrection.
 - This accounts for the stories of white Gods in many native American traditions.
- Humanity lived with God before coming to Earth as individual spirit children.
- This earth was created by God as a place to test humanity.

- Emotional.
 - If I feel a certain way about something, it must be “true”.
 - Those who can control our emotions hence control our beliefs.
 - This is a competitive tool that only developed as religions needed to compete with each other.
 - Same as monopoly concepts. That is, as religions began to have to compete with each other, claims of spiritual monopoly arose. If my religion is the only one that can “really” deliver you to heaven, you won’t be so tempted by other religious claims.
 - This kind of claim is more a defensive than offensive strategy, since it works much better on those who already believe than those who do not.
 - However, in our current context of social and existential uncertainty, bold claims of this kind have an increasingly strong appeal.
 - We see the same kind of tactic used successfully in other kinds of marketing. That is, extremely bold claims made with regard to products of various kinds, whose efficacy cannot be tested such as cures for arthritis and other medical conditions that are subject to a strong placebo effect.
- This (epistemology) is a key to understanding Mormonism and many other religions.
- We will return to it later.
- Sociology:
 - Conservative.
 - Mormons adopt social trends a generation or two behind trend.
 - Uber American.
 - Mormons are extremely patriotic and display many prototypical American traits such as the need to spread their culture the world over.
 - See <http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/fig.shtml> map “Mapping Authority and Survival or Well Being”. Mormonism is only successful in missionary terms in cultures at or below the US level in terms of traditional v. secular values.
 - Most kinds of American success are equated to righteousness.
 - Achievement
 - Financial success

- Mormon leaders tend to be financially or professionally successful men.
- No professional priesthood
 - Hence lots of trust in each other and intimate community interaction.
 - But people without training are counselling with regard to things they should not touch with a barge pool.
 - Mental illness often mistaken for not enough prayer and obedience.
- The values of the Victorian period during which Mormonism was founded have been preserved within Mormonism to a much greater extent than in the broader culture because of Mormonism's conservative nature.
 - Relationship between men and women.
 - Attitudes toward authority.
 - The masses need to be governed with a firm hand or chaos will reign.
 - Deception is justified if it is in the interest of the masses, who often would run amok if they had all of the information.
 - Mormon prophets can err, but only a subsequent Mormon prophet can tell that an earlier one has erred.
 - Practically speaking, the current Mormon prophet has always been unquestionable.
 - Monist instead of pluralistic.
 - There is one way that is the true way, instead of many ways each of which are valid.
 - Attitudes regarding sexuality.
 - Sex was once considered within Mormonism to be for procreation only, and hence is somewhat dirty.
 - While this is changing, it is still apparent to an extent.
 - Attitudes regarding race.
 - Blacks were not permitted to have the Mormon priesthood until 1978.
 - Racist overtones in the Book of Mormon.
 - God "curses" people with dark skins because of "wickedness".
 - Many Mormon leaders up until a few decades ago were overtly racist.
 - Current Mormon leaders try to bury this.
 - Attitudes regarding freedom (you make one free choice – to obey or not) See

<http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.the%20mormon%20concept%20of%20freedom.pdf>.

- Attitudes toward what is healthy to eat and not healthy (coffee, tea, tobacco, alcohol, meat all to one extent or another prohibited).
- Attitudes toward progress (it is eternal).
- Strongly community oriented as opposed to individual oriented. See essay “Mormon Relationships” at <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.mormon%20relationships.pdf>.
 - Tithing.
 - Lots of time required.
 - Lots of ritual to remind members of their duty to god and community.
 - Emphasis on conformity.
 - If Mormonism does not work for you, you are defective.
 - Mormonism cannot be defective.
 - Gay people and others who don't fit in struggle with this.
 - People with ADD who don't like long meetings.
 - Women with career aspirations.
 - People with athletic aspirations that require play on Sunday.
 - Entertainers and other famous people are cut lots of slack. So, if successful (like Steve Young or some career women and politicians) are embraced despite disobedience (within limits).
 - But this only goes so far. For example, no gay people have been embraced in this way.
- Reverence for the Text
 - Strong. Bible as well as Book of Mormon.
- Sacraments and liturgy
 - Weekly sacraments, baptism, naming and blessing of infants, healing the sick, and special rites related to marriage and a higher level of commitment that occurs in Mormon temples.
 - This represents a far greater emphasis on liturgy than in most religions.
- Authority of priesthood
 - Extremely authoritarian.
 - All men have the priesthood.
 - But must obey those above you.
 - Hence men are ironically emasculated while being given ostensible authority.

- Mormons are in general gullible as a result.
- Utah leads the US in MLM and financial fraud as a result.
- Extreme emphasis of the group interest ahead of the individual.
 - Use gay example. High rates of suicide and depression. If admitted wrong about gay position, this would undermine institutional authority. Hence, trade lives of gay people for continued institutional strength.
- One of my favourite typologies for assessing religions comes from James Fowler's book "Stages of Faith". While it does not work so well for Eastern faiths, it is useful for Western faiths. It goes as follows:
 - Stage One: Intuitive-Projective faith.
 - It usually occurs between the ages of three and seven, and is characterized by the psyche's unprotected exposure to the unconscious. Imagination runs wild, uninhibited by logic and we absorb cultural taboos.
 - Stage one is also dangerous, though, in that the child's imagination can be "possessed" by unrestrained images of terror and destruction from the unconscious, and the exploitation of the fertile imagination by enforced taboos and indoctrination.
 - Stage Two: Mythic-Literal faith
 - Symbol and ritual begin to be integrated by the child.
 - These symbols, however, are one-dimensional (literal).
 - The runaway imagination of stage one is harnessed, and linear thinking engrained.
 - The stage usually lasts through the school years, but can be maintained for life.
 - Stage two persons have a strong belief in the justice and reciprocity of the universe.
 - Their gods are almost always anthropomorphic.
 - Critical evaluation of myth and symbol is impossible.
 - Fowler describes a person in this stage as being both carried by and trapped in their own narrative.
 - Stage two can be dangerous because its focus on justice and reciprocity tends toward control and perfectionism.

- A religious system that appeals to a person in this stage will tend to be legalistic and literalistic.
- Stage Three: Synthetic-Conventional faith.
 - The majority of the population finds its permanent home in this stage.
 - The third stage is characterized by conformity and strong identification with a group. It can be a social or ideological group, like jocks or preppies or musicians, or it can be a religious group.
 - Many people have more than one group with which they strongly identify. People in stage three tend to be overly concerned about what other members of their group think of them, and try hard to conform to expectations. It is in stage three that people are most likely to feel that their group's ideas and approach to life constitute the "one true way."
 - Fowler says, interestingly, that, "... many ways religious institutions 'work best' if they are peopled with a majority of committed folk best described as Stage 3."
 - We should not therefore be surprised to find that most religious institutions, and the Mormon church in particular, cultivate a stage three spirituality.
 - Fowler talks about a "locus of authority" – the source that people look to for knowledge about how to behave and what ideas are important. In childhood, the locus of authority is usually primarily parental with people holding positions of authority: presidents, policemen, bishops, etc.
 - In stage three, the "locus of authority" is split between the consensus of the group and the leaders of that group.
 - The important thing to note is that in stages one through three the locus of authority is outside the individual.
 - As people move toward stage four, they internalize values and become more likely to look to their own ideas and principles for moral guidance.

- This is when they start to notice conflicts between those principles and the general consensus of group members.
- The dangers of stage three include taking symbolic markers such as power, "goodness", and "badness" so literally and adopting the group's perspective so entirely that the objective evaluation of life's experience is impossible.
- Furthermore, while it is possible for us at this stage to have an intimate relationship with the divine, the group perspective makes this difficult to achieve.
- As spiritual maturity increases toward such intimacy, frustration and despair increase as a result of cognitive dissonance caused by the collision between reality and the perspective imposed by group.
- Stage Four: Individuative-Reflective faith.
 - This is primarily a stage of angst and struggle, in which one must face difficult questions regarding identity and belief.
 - Those that pass into stage four usually do so in their mid-thirties to early forties.
 - At this time, the personality gradually detaches from the defining group from which it formerly drew its identity.
 - The person is aware of him or herself as an individual and must - perhaps for the first time - take personal responsibility for his/her beliefs and feelings.
 - This is a stage of de-mythologizing, where what was once unquestioned is now subjected to critical scrutiny.
 - Stage four is oriented toward the existential, where nothing is certain but one's own existence.
 - As a result, disillusionment is the norm.
 - This stage is not a comfortable place to be and, although it can last for a long time, those who stay in it do so at risk of becoming bitter, suspicious characters who trust nothing and no one.
 - Most people, however, after entering this stage sense that not only is the world far more complex than stage three mentality would

admit, but that it is still more complex and numinous than the agnostic rationality of stage four can appreciate.

- This moves us along toward stage five.
- Stage Five: Conjunctive Faith.
 - This fits well with my understanding of what it is like to exist on the fringes of the LDS group.
 - It moves us from stage four's rationalism to the acknowledgement of paradox and transcendence.
 - In stage five, a person grasps the reality behind the symbols of his or her inherited belief systems, and is also drawn to and acknowledges of the symbols of other systems.
 - This stage makes room for mystery and the unconscious, and is fascinated by it while at the same time apprehensive of the power both of these phenomena. It sees the power behind the metaphors while simultaneously acknowledging their relativity.
 - In stage five, the world, demythologized in stage four, is re-sacrilized, and literally brims with vision.
 - It is also imbued with a new sense of justice that goes beyond justice defined by one's own culture and people.
 - Because one has begun to see "the bigger picture", the walls culture and tradition have built between us and others begin to erode.
 - It is not easy to live on the cusp of paradox, and due to its radical drive towards inclusivity, the mind struggles to assimilate and integrate faster than it can work through its cultural and psychological baggage.
 - It is initially at least an overwhelming, ecstatic stage in which one is radically opened to possibility and wonder.
- Stage Six: Universalizing faith.
 - Persons described by stage six typically exhibit qualities that shake our usual criteria of normalcy.
 - This is Buddha, Gandhi etc.
- What it feels like to be Mormon
 - Listen to Indie. arie, "God is real".
 - Let me tell you how I came to know that God is real.
 - Was taught from childhood that God is real.

- Was taught God appeared to Old Testament prophet.
- Was taught that God appear to modern prophets.
- Was taught that God would confirm to those who humbly sought him in prayer that he was real, and that he spoke to his prophets.
- When I became old enough to question, I waited for this experience.
- It did not come.
- My friends and family said they had experienced God, and knew he existed and that he was guiding his work on earth through prophets again.
- I tried, but could not feel what my friends and family felt.
- This produced a great distance between us.
- It was particularly painful to hear my mother cry and my younger brothers hug my legs and ask why I couldn't just stay at home.
- At age 18 on a November afternoon I was struggling to write a first year university English essay.
 - I was perhaps like some of you here.
 - Questioning what I had been taught; trying to determine what was "real".
 - School was not going well for some strange reason.
 - I was working part time, playing volleyball for the university team, playing basketball for a club team, and I liked to spend at least a couple of evenings a week with my girlfriend.
 - Though I didn't know it, I was exhausted.
 - I was trying to do far too much.
 - I finally put my pen down in frustration, and picked up the Book of Mormon, a book Mormons believe to have been written by a prophet who lived in the early 1800s, Joseph Smith.
 - I had been taught the Joseph Smith had translated this 535 page book while in his late teens and early 20s using golden plates an angel had delivered to him and that this took him about two months.
 - Joseph was close to illiterate and could only translate as a result of God's power that resided in him.
 - He had been chosen by God for this work.
 - Joseph Smith basically dictated the book without repeating himself or revising his work.
 - Witnesses have testified that this is how he produced the book.
 - Joseph Smith's production of the Book of Mormon is compared to Mohamed's production of the Koran.

- In the Book of Mormon God promises those who read the Book of Mormon with “pure intent” and ask God if it is true, that God will reveal his will to them though the feelings that they will have.
- I had tried this many times and had never felt anything unusual.
- My friends and family were deeply worried about me and I knew they praying for me.
- I had been taking a class at the church on Sundays about the Book of Mormon, and had recently been taught a lesson that illustrated how improbable it was that a young, uneducated man like Joseph Smith could have pretended to translate it, or somehow make it up.
- The lesson’s conclusion was that either Joseph must have actually translated the book the way he said he did, or written it during the course of about two months and pretended to translate it.
- The question that had been left with us at the end of that lesson was “It is possible that a boy like Joseph could have written this book in two months, or even two years?”
- As I read the Book of Mormon that afternoon in November, 1976, I found myself in a particularly insightful, beautiful passage in the Book of Mormon. And there are many like this.
- The teachers question came forcefully into my mind, with a clear answer.
- “IT IS NOT POSSIBLE!” The words reverberated through me. “It is not possible that Joseph could have made this up. He must have translated the Book of Mormon just as he said he did!”
- At this moment, I felt chills running through me. Then a sense of warmth, or love, enveloped me. I had never felt anything like this before.
- And then I started to cry. I was not an emotional person.
- I sat at Grandma’s dining table with tears that I did not understand running down my cheeks.
- Then it struck me that God had finally answered my prayers.
- These powerful feelings were unique in my experience, and were precisely what the Book of Mormon itself predicted would happen when a person

read that book and humbly asked God to reveal to him whether it is true or not.

- So, I knew the Book of Mormon was true.
 - And if the Book of Mormon was true, that means Joseph Smith really did translate it using God's power.
 - And these powerful, wonderful feelings were promised by the Book of Mormon to come from God, and they did come.
 - Therefore, God must be real.
 - And not any kind of God.
 - But precisely the God who appeared to Joseph Smith and commissioned him to translated the Book of Mormon and "restore" the gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth.
- What do you think about that?
 - How do you explain my experience?
 - What do experiences of this kind mean?
 - Karen Armstrong recently in "A History of God" tells of many mystics who had similar experiences from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions.
 - Similar accounts abound in the Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist traditions.
 - William James in "Varieties of Religious Experience" back in the early 1900s chronicled similar experiences.
 - Spinoza, Einstein and other scientific greats describe something similar.
 - Modern scientists like Ursula Goodenough ("The Sacred Depths of Nature"; www.meaningoflife.tv) and Brian Swimme (<http://www.brianswimme.org/> and www.meaningoflife.tv) speak of a similar reverence for all that is.
 - This appears to be a very common human experience in many religious and irreligious traditions.
 - What might cause this?
 - Andrew Newberg et al "Why God Won't Go Away". See http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1175/is_6_34/ai_82261860 and <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/out%20of%20my%20faith.pdf> starting at page 77.
 - Buddhist monks and catholic nuns in peak meditation.
 - Sympathetic and parasympathetic systems.
 - One usually down when the other is up.
 - When both up, amazing things occur.
 - This is what happens when making love.
 - Also happens when grieving or upset and sudden relief occurs.
 - This is what happened to me.
 - I could make it happen.

- When I was struggling with doubts regarding Mormonism, I would simply repeat the experience – read the Book of Mormon and ask myself if Smith could possibly have written it without God’s help.
- See <http://www.mormonstudies.com/criddle/rigdon.htm> for an alternative explanation that makes much more sense.
 - The ideas in this essay are so threatening to Mormons that they cannot be seriously considered.
- God spot research
 - Mild temporal lobe epilepsy
 - http://www.everything2.org/index.pl?node_id=1364273
 - For an Islamic perspective: <http://www.islamonline.net/English/Science/2005/04/article02.shtml>
 - Michael Persinger’s research is fascinating. See http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/7.11/persinger_pr.html
- Hypnosis and the perception of spiritual reality. See <http://www.atheists.org/Atheism/music.html>
- Artistic visions. See <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.a%20few%20therapy%20ideas%20for%20recovering%20Mormons.pdf>
- Sleep paralysis and alien abductions.
 - People believe these experiences are real.
 - Have been shown to have more pronounced physiological symptoms than war vets.
 - Richard McNally at Harvard is leading researcher. See <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/index.php?term=PTO-20030527-000002>
- The shaman and psychosis. See http://www.spiritualcompetency.com/dsm4/lesson3_8.html and http://theicarusproject.net/madness/diagnosis/shamanism_psychosis_and_hope_for_a_dying_world
 - Like intense dreams.
 - Perhaps metaphoric wisdom.
 - Taken literally can lead to people pouring acid on the faces of their children. Story from Peru.
- Memory reconstruction. See <http://faculty.washington.edu/eloftus/>
- “Saying is believing”

- This is part of the “principle of insufficient justification”. See <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.do%20smart%20ormons%20make%20mormonism%20true.pdf> at page 48.
 - If I say something, I am likely to come to believe it.
 - See separate notes re “Denial”. Many other perspectives shed light on this phenomena. Complexity theory approach. That is, with phenomena this complex no single paradigm will provide adequate perspective.
- Who is affected by this kind of thing?
 - Many of our geniuses.
 - Newton was working out the second coming of Christ using numerology at the same time he was revolutionizing science, and many of his critics said that both of these projects were equally mad.
 - These two ideas came from the same creative font.
 - Science proved one to be correct, and history proved the other to be incorrect.
 - People who are highly emotional.
 - People who have been conditioned to think magically. That is, accept the reality of things that have no basis in our natural experience.
 - There has never been a documented proof of a paranormal experience.
 - Countless psychics, mystics and miracle workers have attempted to prove that they could do supernatural things, and none can.
 - Many experiences that seem paranormal upon close examination are found not to be supernatural.
 - Story of the source of the fireman’s intuition from Malcolm Gladwell’s “Blink”.
- More about what it is like to grow up Mormon.
 - Don’t want to give the impression I was mistreated.
 - Had lots of fun.
 - Played lots of sports.
 - Lived mostly in small communities where I could come and go at will without parental supervision.
 - Parents loved me.
 - They did their best to raise me.
 - They put a great deal of energy into brining me up in the way they felt was right.
 - It is only looking back with enough perspective to appreciate the opportunities that were denied me by my parents because they sincerely believed that they

- were acting in my best interest that I can understand the extent to which I lived a narrow, unrealistic life.
- My earliest memories involve being taught that I was different from non-Mormons.
 - I was privileged to have special knowledge about my relationship to God.
 - I was to have God's priesthood as do all "worthy" Mormon males, and as such if I was worthy would be able to hear the sick, raise the dead and perform other miracles as long as it was God's will.
 - With privilege comes responsibility.
 - So, I accepted that my standards had to be higher than those of non-Mormons.
 - The world was divided into Mormons, "inactives" (Mormons who did not attend church as often as they should) and non-Mormons.
 - I was never explicitly taught that I was intrinsically "better" than the non-Mormon kids I went to school with or played with in the neighbourhood or on sports teams.
 - But it was hard to miss this message.
 - I was privileged.
 - My standards were higher.
 - I was my duty to teach them and help them to see the light by word and example.
 - If they could not understand my message it was because they were sinful, or were not among God's "chosen" because they were not "valiant" children of God before coming to this life.
 - Mormon families tend to be large and close.
 - That does not mean that there is a lot of love expressed.
 - When love is expressed it is said to be unconditional, but it is used to control.
 - When rules are broken, the pain the "sinner" causes to family and other communities members who love him is obvious.
 - The most difficult situation to bear is the one in which those who suffer this pain continue to closely associate and express their love for the "sinner" while obviously suffering.
 - The bonds of love make it hard to resist the silent appeal of family and community to stop "sinning" and hence to stop "inflicting" pain on those who "love" you.
 - This is an odd kind of love.

- Ironically, the better one is at demonstrating this kind of “unconditional” love, the more effective it is as a tool to control the behaviour of loved ones.
- But there is a lot of energy directed at making sure family members conform to family and community rules.
- There is a great deal of emphasis on tradition, and not letting down family, community and ancestors.
- See “The Blessing Chair” at <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.the%20blessing%20chair.pdf> for an idea of what I mean.
- The Mormon congregation is an Uber family.
 - Members refer to each other as “Brother” and “Sister”.
 - Each time my family moved we were welcomed with open arms into a new community – a new family.
 - In these times of alienation and uncertainty, the closeness of the Mormon group – the way they embrace all who declare themselves to be Mormon – is attractive and useful in many ways.
 - Being a member of the Mormon community gives the feeling of security and protection.
 - Mormons are good at looking after their own.
 - When babies are born, people are sick, etc. a great deal of help is offered.
 - Mormons who pay their tithing can rely upon the Church for some support in times of unemployment, ill health, etc.
 - When Mormons move they often rely upon other members to provide free labour.
 - Some Mormons take advantage of this.
 - The Mormon Church owns extensive farms and other businesses that are used to an extent to allow members who are being financially supported to donate labour in exchange for their support, thus retaining their sense of independence and self image.
 - Mormons tend to help each other find jobs and to prefer to do business with each other.
 - Mormons tend to not be as compliant with their business agreements than are non-Mormons.
 - I believe this is the result of being conditioned by the promises they make as Mormons of absolute obedience that cannot possibly be kept. See

<http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/temple%20marriage.pdf>

- Mormons are conditioned not to take their promises as seriously as others would.
- This is particularly so when they are dealing with each other.
- Mormon life is dominated by the belief that if we live righteously in this life, we will be worthy to life in the Celestial Kingdom (CK) after death.
 - Righteous living includes being fully obedient to the Mormon way of life.
 - The CK is a part of heaven where God lives.
 - It is too wonderful to be understood here.
 - Families can only be together in the CK.
 - Marriage will be polygamous in the CK.
 - The idea that sin will cause the sinner to be separated from his family is used to terrify Mormons into obedience.
 - Mormons will tell you that fear is not a part of their belief system.
 - Buddha tells us that fear and desire are two sides of the same coin.
 - Mormons will tell you that they do not fear, but rather only greatly desire the blessings of the CK.
 - This leads to the “future oriented” stance toward life.
 - This is, what is happening in the present, in the community and world around them, does not concern Mormons so much as how their obedience to Mormon rules will affect what will happen after death.
 - “Endure to the end” is their mantra.
 - This is why I did things like:
 - Went to Peru for two years as a missionary even though I was terrified of selling anything (let alone religion) to anyone.
 - Got married soon after returning home from Peru.
 - Immediately started a family.
 - Never encouraged my wife to work outside our home even though it was clear that being at home all the time was not good for her.
 - Continue to have children (we have seven) even though common sense should have told us that this was part of what was hurting my wife’s health.

- Consistently from age 21 to 44 spent on average between 10 and 20 hours per week attending to my responsibilities as Mormon leader.
- Passed up numerous career and athletic opportunities on the basis that they were inconsistent with my Mormon way of life.
 - For example, I turned down jobs in San Francisco and Los Angeles as a young lawyer.
 - I declined the chance to play for the U of Alberta volleyball team that won a Canadian national championship.
 - I declined the chance to play for a Lethbridge Community College basketball team that won a Canadian college championship.
 - I missed many social opportunities that could have led to lucrative legal work on the basis that I was not comfortable going to bars etc. with my clients and potential clients.
 - The amount of time I put in Mormon volunteer work harmed my career opportunities, my marriage and my relationship to my children.
- Mormon life is full of ritual – that is, actions that are prescribed.
 - This has the effect of focussing Mormon attention on the things Mormonism wants them to attend to many times each day.
 - Remember the magic trick? See the segment of the essay “Mormon Relationships” re. “misdirection” at <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.mormonism%20and%20misdirection.pdf>.
 - Personal, family and spousal prayers each day.
 - Prayers over meals.
 - Personal, family and spousal scripture reading.
 - Daily religious classes for teenagers in grades 9 –12.
 - Classes and activities for teenagers once a week.
 - Meetings on Sunday run for a minimum of 3 hours.
 - Often a total of 5 or 6 hours of meetings occur on Sunday.
 - Men are paired off and assigned to visit a few families each month to make sure their needs are taken care

of and to check on their attendance and other statistical matters.

- The women are paired off and given a similar assignment.
- Mormons are supposed to attend special meetings in the “temples” – special buildings that only the most faithful Mormons can enter.
- If Mormons sin they are required to confess to the bishop, the lay leader of the congregation.
- If the sin is serious enough (adultery, for example) their membership can be suspended.
- Mormons are required to pay 10% of their income annually as tithing. As a result the Mormon church is estimated to have revenues and assets that would rank it at about 200 on the Fortune 500 were it a corporation.
- I could keep going on the ritual thing.
 - The bottom line is that Mormons are kept very busy.
 - This is admitted and by design.
 - “Idle hands do the Devil’s work”
 - People who are not kept busy tend to drift into being not Mormon.
 - So it is assumed that leisure is bad.
 - Retired people are told not to “wander and play” instead of “ponder and pray”.
 - Retired people are strongly encouraged to leave home to serve “missions” of various types.
 - These range from recruiting missions to service missions that involve doing jobs for the Mormon church on an unpaid basis.
 - The value of volunteer hours donated by Mormons each year must be in the 100s of millions of dollars.
 - Also, programs like “Landmark” and others that cause people to question their basic values have been shown to cause people to leave Mormonism so Mormons are counselled to avoid them.
 - And the Mormon church found that when their members started going to visit psychologists, family counsellors etc. that the Mormon Church was often fingered as being a big part of the problem and this caused people to leave Mormonism.
 - So the Mormon Church trained and set up its own corps of family counsellors who take care of this for Mormons.

- These counsellors “understand” the Mormon way and since they are paid by the Mormon Church they oddly enough do not tell people that their Mormon beliefs are the problem.
- Overall, I think it is fair to say that the Mormon approach to life creates the feeling that one lives on a tightrope.
 - There are so many ways to sin.
 - If one sins, repentance is available but all old, forgiven sin comes back to roost if a new sin is created.
 - Perfection is the goal, but it is acknowledged that few if any ever reach it in this life.
 - That means that one has never done each.
 - Most Mormons struggle with feelings of inadequacy for this reason.
 - The more seriously one takes the Mormon belief system, the more it is likely to harm her.
 - That is, the best and most faithful are those most likely to be harmed.
 - Any system that works like this (those who follow the instructions the most carefully are those most likely to suffer individual damage) should be avoided.
 - Such systems promote freeloading.
 - They are the antithesis of what most of us seek in all other aspects of our lives.
- The world seemed to leap into Technicolor life for me as my Mormon mentality fell away.
 - I became excited and involved in all kinds of things by which I had been surrounded but in which I had not been interested and hence had not noticed.
 - In particular, I realized that the lives of my co-workers, neighbours, clients and community members were suddenly of great interest to me, and sadly realized that while Mormon I considered myself so different from them that their experience did not have a great deal to say to me.
- There are other aspects of Mormonism that tend to be invisible to those on the inside. This is the nature of human groups. One can seldom see what is going on until one is on the outside.
 - The Mormon governance system is not democratic.
 - A small group of men who appoint their own successors run the show.
 - Not surprisingly, there is a high percentage of blood and marriage overlap within this group.
 - There are no meaningful checks and balances on the exercise of power.

- Financial records are secret, except as required to be disclosed by law. Little disclosure is required.
- This means that the members are not accountable to the leaders.
- In Mormonism's early days it was more democratic.
- During periods of crisis, the leaders consolidated their power and became less accountable to the people.
- This is a lesson that modern democracies learned a long time ago.
- Power corrupts.
- Rank and file Mormons have been persuaded that Mormon leaders are immune from this law of social gravity.
- From a social statistical point of view, Utah does not fare well. It is at or near the top of the US re:
 - Some suicides
 - Personal bankruptcies
 - Anti-depressant use
 - Multilevel marketing (Amway) participation
 - Financial fraud
 - Tax fraud
 - Reported spousal abuse
 - Sexual abuse
- In response to report re Utah's high suicide rate the Mormon Church produced a report that alleged that active Mormons have a very low suicide rate.
 - Active Mormons are about 40% of Utah.
 - If you assume the low stats produced by the Mormon church are correct, this leaves an astronomical suicide rate for non-Mormons and inactive Mormons in Utah.
 - This is particular so for teenagers.
 - So, the question becomes, what is it about living in close quarters with large numbers of Mormons that makes non-Mormons commit suicide in large numbers.
- It is fair conclude that Mormon culture produces a great deal of stress.
 - And yet if asked, most Mormon will report high levels of satisfaction.
 - And the very people making the report will often be taking anti-depressants.
 - A Mormon who admits unhappiness is likely to be a Mormon who feels guilty.

- Pain, depression etc. are to some extent useful signals that things need to be changed.
- Mormons use more anti-depressants than any in the US.
- This keeps those signals from being heard.
- Mormonism is authoritarian, as are most social systems that originated in scarce resource environments.
 - This is the ancient Hebrew model, which originated in an environment of scarcity.
 - This is the military paradigm – we must strictly obey and cooperate to survive.
 - See “Shame and the Destruction of Agency” at http://www.postmormon.org/exp_e/index.php/papers/2004/10/19 for a summary of some of the problems related to authoritarian religious cultures.
 - This leads to a small space for the individual and large space for the group.
 - The individual is expected in many ways to sacrifice to the group.
 - Compliance with group norms is very important.
 - Mormons tend to look and behave more uniformly than other groups.
 - If don't fit the mould, it is hard for the individual.
 - Gay people.
 - Depression and suicide rates noted to be higher than average in the orthodox Jewish community. I assume the same is true of the gay Mormon community.
 - A
 - The gay Mormon community fights back. See <http://www.affirmation.org/>
- Mormons are conservative.
 - That is, they change but a generation or two behind the social norm in the US.
 - Evidence of this can be seen in Mormon attitudes toward birth control, racial equality, dress standards, family size, and a variety of other issues.
- Mormons are oriented toward obedience to authority figures. This, along with their emotion based epistemology, makes them easy to take advantage of.
- Mormonism is patriarchal in orientation.
- One of the many downsides of being conditioned to obey authority and think that one can reliably know things on the basis of emotion is that Mormons are notoriously easy marks for fraud artists.

- For this reason, US usually leads the US in the commission of financial fraud per capita.
- This does not mean that Mormons are necessarily committing the crimes.
- It means that naïve Mormon bait attracts con artists from all over the world.
- There is irony in this since Mormonism itself uses con artists techniques to sell itself.
- Having conditioned the flock, others take advantage of them.
- Mormon attitudes toward sexuality.
 - See <http://www.i4m.com/think/sexuality/> for an overview and some history.
 - The history of Mormon sexuality is wild.
 - Mormonism's founder Joseph Smith practised polygamy for over a decade while he and his colleagues who were gradually admitted into this secret practise lied about it.
 - They later said that God told them to lie because the people weren't ready to hear the truth about the importance polygamy.
 - It appears that Smith was caught in an illicit affair and made up the "God made me do it" line to get out of trouble.
 - Smith ended up "married" to over 30 women.
 - Many of them were teenage girls.
 - One was 14 years old.
 - Several were married to other men.
 - In some cases Smith had the gall to send husbands out of town on church business and then propositioning their wives.
 - These sexual arrangements were secret.
 - They amounted to no more than clandestine affairs as a matter of fact.
 - In at least a couple of cases, Smith's line to the woman in question was that an angel of God had appeared to him with a drawn sword and told him that both he and the woman would be destroyed if she would not consent to become his "spiritual wife".
 - After polygamy became public Mormons were taught only those who "lived the principle" as it was known would be permitted into the CK.
 - Many of my ancestors, including one great grandfather, were polygamists.

- Mormonism was distinguished largely by polygamy until the early 1900s when the US federal government threatened to bankrupt the Mormon Church if it did not change its ways.
- During a period of about 15 years while Mormon authorities were fighting with the US Feds between 1890 and the early 1900s, Mormon leaders in public said that polygamy was over while in private continuing to practise it and solemnize polygamous marriages on the basis that “god can’t change his mind, but we have to survive so lying is the lesser of evils”. Finally, in the early 1900s Mormon leaders said “Now we really mean it; no more polygamy”.
- Many Mormons did not believe God could be so clear in his commandment and then change his mind.
- This is what led to polygamous offshoots of Mormonism such as the group at Creston, B.C.
- This is also the roots of the mentality that Jon Krakauer nicely profiled in “Under the Banner of Heaven”.
- Sexuality is one of the many areas of Mormon life that is strictly controlled.
- Because Mormonism was invented in the early to mid-1800s, many ideas about health, male – female roles, sexuality etc. from that era were accepted as “eternal truth” and are still largely accepted by Mormons.
- One on one dating is prohibited until age 16.
- Steady dating at any time until one is ready to marry is heavily discouraged.
- Sex before marriage is sinful.
- Sex outside of marriage is sinful.
- Masturbation at any time is sinful. See http://www.i4m.com/think/sexuality/masturbation_help.htm for the perspective of an faithful Mormon medical doctor respecting this issue.
- Pornography of any kind is sinful.
- Thinking about sex at any time (other than when having sex with your spouse) is sinful.
- Mormons are much more likely to regard sex as necessary then something to be enjoyed.
 - Story of the temple garments and sexy underwear – “Why would she want those?”

They will look awfully funny over her garments”.

- Birth control used to be regarded as sinful, but that rule is not talked about any more and most Mormons regard birth control as OK as long as it is used to space children with a view to still having as many as possible.
- Mormons who have been through the Mormon temple wear special underwear that must be put back on after having sex and before falling asleep.
- Not long ago many Mormons believed that the garments should not be taken off during sex, and the garments were constructed with the “holes” necessary to permit sexual intercourse of a sort to occur.
- Mormons have many more sexual hang-ups than most other similarly educated and situated people.
 - This includes phobias, trouble enjoying the sexual aspect of their lives, etc.
- Mormons are encouraged to marry young, largely because sex outside of marriage is a terrible sin, next only to murder.
- So Mormons tend to marry young.
 - Divorce statistics make it clear that the younger the average marriage age the higher the probability of divorce and the more likely marital satisfaction is to suffer.
- Mormons believe that God will guide them to the “right” person to marry through feelings that they will have when they are with that person and ask God if they should marry.
- Hence, Mormon courtships are often amazingly short.
 - My wife and I became engaged after two weeks of dating, and were married within five months.
- Tell story of the Krikiva marriage:
 - One day courtship.
 - Hated each other until that day.
 - Wife still felt fear etc. but accepted God’s will.
 - Later grew to love each other.
 - To the best of my knowledge, they are still married.
- Mormon marriages are similar to arranged marriages in some ways.
 - Personal happiness, growth etc. not as important to Mormons as to many North American couples.

- Rather, the marriage unit as a basic building block of society if the issue of primary importance.
- This explains why the Mormon divorce rate similar to national average despite marrying so young, being relatively ill matched, etc.
- John Gottman's research shows that lack of respect is fatal to most marriages (see <http://www.gottman.com/> and <http://www.artsci.washington.edu/newsletter/Autumn00/Gottman.htm>).
 - Gottman has a 95% prediction rate of whether a couple will remain married for 7 years on the basis of a 30 minute interview.
 - My bet is that Mormons would be harder for him to predict because disrespect between spouses is much more tolerated within Mormon marriage than is generally the case because of the "endure to the end" mentality, and belief that even if it a marriage doesn't work well in this life somehow it will blossom in the life after death.
- Mormons are strongly encouraged not to delay having children.
 - Any delay beyond a year to two at the most is considered selfish.
- Most Mormon couples have their first child within 18 months of marriage.
 - Our first child was born 10 months after our marriage.
 - Mormon women are strongly encouraged not to work outside the home.
 - This is likely part of the cause of the sky high rates of Mormon depression and bankruptcy (See Martin Seligman, "Authentic Happiness" and www.authentichappiness.org for a summary of the concept of "flow" and why being a full time housewife does not supply it now as it used to).
- Mormon attitudes toward marriage.
 - See <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.a%20few%20thoughts%20about%20Mormon%20Marriage.pdf> and

<http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/temple%20marriage.pdf>

- Husband generally decides who God wishes him to marry and pursues her.
- Wife very seldom takes the initiative.
- The Mormon Church is a third party to each marriage.
- Husband and wife each promise obedience to the Mormon Church.
- Wife also promises obedience to her husband as long as he leads her in “righteousness”. That means as long as he is obedient to the Mormon Church.
- “Endure to the end” is the Mormon mantra with regard to many things.
- Mormon marriages are often exercises of “enduring to the end”.
- There is a terrible model for relationship, in my view.
- Only faithful Mormons can attend a marriage in a Mormon temple.
 - This alone keeps some older Mormons faithful and quiet about the concerns with Mormonism.
 - If they speak out, they will be prohibited from attending the marriages of children or grandchildren.
- The system of early marriage, early child bearing and stay at home moms and lives full of commitment has the consequence putting young Mormons in a position where they are so busy with family and other commitments that they don't have time to question the foundations of their belief.
 - Remember the magic trick. Attention is directed toward what the magician wants just to watch while other things happen elsewhere.
 - Once the “important” space has been defined for us, the human tendency is not to look elsewhere.
 - And when later in life a few do look up and are horrified at what they see, a life has been built on Mormonism.
 - Spouses often do not “wake up” at the same rate. In fact, a small percentage of Mormons (or any seriously conditioned religious people) are capable of breaking through their conditioning.
 - Hence, when one spouse wakes up and the other can't, often divorce results or the spouse that has woken up does not dare say anything for fear of divorce.

- This system is integral to Mormonism’s control over its people.
 - For the pros and cons of Mormonism see:
 - <http://www.lds.org/> for the Mormon Church’s official point of view and <http://www.fairlds.org/> for Mormon apologetic resources.
 - Compare this to the information found at:
 - <http://www.i4m.com/think/>
 - <http://www.trialsOfAscension.net/mormon.html>
 - <http://www.exmormon.org/>
 - A particularly interesting comparison of Mormon’s official position as set out in its missionary discussions and what historians have to say regarding the same points can be found at: <http://www.lds4u.com/>
 - The key issue, usually glossed over by Mormons, is whether Joseph Smith, their founder, was trustworthy. They depend so heavily on this word that he is the kind of person who would not under most circumstances be trusted, it is reasonable to simply dismiss Mormonism’s truth claims without further analysis. See <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.happy%20birthday%20Joseph%20Smith.pdf> and <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.mormon%20history%20in%20a%20nutshell.pdf>
 - That is more than enough about Mormonism.
- What is religion?
 - Let’s hear your ideas.
 - Belief in god.
 - But Buddhism, Taoism
 - A guide to the most important questions of being and meaning.
 - Where did we come from?
 - Why are we here?
 - Where are we going?
 - A guide to our relationship to the “sacred” – the most important things in life.
 - The Maple Leafs?
 - The Brazilian national soccer team?
 - A “can’t miss it” TV show?
 - Belief in spiritual beings
 - An ethical guide.
 - But perhaps only “in group”. Promotes unethical behaviour against “out groups” often.
 - Ways to find meaning in life.

- How do atheists and agnostics do this? Is that religion?
 - Ways to determine values.
 - Again, how do atheists and agnostics do this?
 - Answers ultimate questions of right and wrong, what is real and what is not.
 - This might simply be dogma, and again we find that atheists and agnostics have their dogmas.
 - Does everything that science cannot do.
 - Power and control systems.
 - Means of restraining chaos of various kinds.
- The leading sociological theories are:
 - Karl Marx:
 - Religion is an “opiate of the people,”
 - Religion [was] a spiritual response to a condition of alienation.”
 - Religion served to uphold the ideologies and cultural systems that foster oppressive capitalism.
 - Thus, “Religion was conceived to be a powerful conservative force that served to perpetuate the domination of one social class at the expense of others.”
 - “To abolish religion as the illusory happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness.”
 - Emile Durkheim:
 - “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”
 - We perceive as individuals a force greater than ourselves, which is our social life, and give that perception a supernatural face.
 - We then express ourselves religiously in groups, which for Durkheim makes the symbolic power greater.
 - Religion is an expression of our collective consciousness, which is the fusion of all of our individual consciousnesses, which then creates a reality of its own.
 - Rodney Stark:
 - Religions are systems of "compensators".
 - Compensators are a body of language and practices that compensate for some physical lack or frustrated goal. They can be divided into specific compensators (compensators for the failure to achieve specific

- goals), and general compensators (compensators for failure to achieve any goal).
- It has been observed that social or political movements that fail to achieve their goals will often transform into religions.
 - As it becomes clear that the goals of the movement will not be achieved by natural means (at least within their lifetimes), members of the movement will look to the supernatural to achieve what cannot be achieved naturally.
 - The new religious beliefs are compensators for the failure to achieve the original goals.
 - Examples of this include the counterculture movement in America: the early counterculture movement was intent on changing society and removing its injustice and boredom; but as members of the movement proved unable to achieve these goals they turned to Eastern and new religions as compensators.
- Seems like many perspectives are required to understand religion.
 - I have not heard any single definition of religions that captures it.
 - Religion will eventually be explained by the science of complexity better than in any other way.
 - See <http://www.calresco.org/info.htm>
 - See <http://www.calresco.org/sos/sosfaq.htm#1.1>
 - See <http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=sociology&domains=santafe.edu&q=inurl%3Awww.santafe.edu%2Fresearch%2Fpublications&sa=Search>
 - But we are a ways from that at this point so I am not going to take about it.
 - This is the future direction of the most interesting cultural research of which I am aware.
 - I like the division between religion, science and philosophy suggested at http://progressiveliving.org/religion/culture_war.htm
 - A Draw diagram on board
 - Science in inner circle.
 - Then social science and less certain science in a surrounding circle.
 - Then metaphysics (beyond science or beyond physics) in a huge surrounding area.
 - The idea that science should be accorded primacy makes sense.
 - Consider the relationship between science and inherited belief systems like religion throughout recorded history.

- Religions has retreated over and over.
- Most religions are now careful not to commit to anything that might conflict with science.
- Look at pattern of where various religions now are arguing against science.
 - Only where basic beliefs are in conflict with science.
 - Tend to accept all science that is not in conflict with basic beliefs.
 - Draw circles representing Mormons, Jews, Islam over the science v. metaphysics circles.
 - Clear trend.
 - Insiders accept stories that conflict with science in a way that no outsider would.
 - Insiders in one group can recognize the fallacy of similar problems in other groups, but not their own.
 - What are we to make of this?
 - Simplistically, if 99 out of 100 people look at three colour swatches and identify them as green, orange and brown, and the last person insists that they are all brown, what do we conclude?
 - Regardless of the loudly the 100th assures of us of what he sees and that he is right and we are wrong, we will assume him to be colour blind.
 - He has a perceptive defect that prevents him from seeing what is there.
 - If he is wise, he will eventually accept this to be the case and trust the judgement of others when it is important for him to be able to distinguish between these colours.
 - The study of cognitive bias, cognitive dissonance, denial and related subjects explains why most humans have blind spots when it comes to perceiving information that is relevant to the reality of their social groups. See separate notes re “Denial”.
 - We have some amazing abilities, like deciding who to trust and who not on the basis of a few minutes talking to someone.
 - And we have some amazing blind spots that some people have learned to exploit. Advertising does this consistently, as do conmen and magicians.
 - Cognitive biases.
 - Confirmation bias.

- We tend to have troubling letting go of any idea of which we have been convinced.
 - Authority bias.
 - We defer to authority and are influenced by authority
 - Milgram's pain infliction experiments (see <http://www.is.wayne.edu/mnissani/PAGEPUB/milgram.htm>)
 - Zimbardo's prison experiment (see <http://www.prisonexp.org/>)
 - Many other biases have been shown to exist.
- Cognitive dissonance is thought to be at the root of many biases.
 - See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_dissonance and <http://www.geocities.com/questioningpage/mhealth6.html>
 - CD means that when we are faced with uncertainty, we tend to resolve the uncertainty in favour the idea that is most important to us instead of the idea that is most likely to be correct on the basis of all of the relevant evidence.
- Evolutional theory explains this as follows:
 - Our instincts were formed long ago when human culture is radically different than it is today.
 - When our instincts formed, the relationship between the individual and the group was different than it is now.
 - If the individual was pushed out of the group or the group dissolved, the individual was likely to die.
 - It was there more important that we perceived the information presented to us in a way that was likely to help us get along within our group and keep our group together than we perceive it as accurately as possible.
 - This instinct causes us to be misperceive great amounts of data today even though we are no longer

- dependant on any social group as our ancestors were.
- This means that we are not well equipped to change any allegiance to any group to which we have been conditioned to obey.
 - Therefore the lot of many individuals will be determined by the lot of their group.
 - This is particularly the case for individuals who have been heavily conditioned to the belief system of any particular group. We are not designed to be very flexible in this regard.
- Science recognizes that it is susceptible to all of these forces.
 - Thomas Kuhn, great historian and philosopher of science, said that science progresses “one funeral at a time”.
 - So science takes the position that the most reliable knowledge is that which can be repeatably tested by a group of people who will cancel each others errors and biases.
 - Hence, science takes the position that all knowledge is subject to endless questioning, and that while we can never be certain that we are right, we are justified on the basis of evidence from time to time in acting on the belief that some ideas are more likely to be right than others.
 - Science has won the vast majority of its contests with traditional knowledge.
 - However, non-scientists (religious people, politicians, etc.) often use science to make non-scientific arguments.
 - Intelligent design, for example, is not science.
 - Arguments in favour of an earth that is 6,000 to 10,000 years old are not science, though some of them are made by people with PhD’s in geology.
 - Many of the arguments that suggest that global warming is not a problem yet, or we don’t know enough about it yet to be relatively sure, are no scientific.
 - And some kinds of science are much more reliable than others.
 - Social sciences deal with things that are so complex that they are hard to predict.

- The edges of other science such as physics are also speculative.
 - String theory, for example, is not supported by an empirical evidence.
- I also like the idea that religion can be helpful, or harmful.
 - Religion can be used to explore our potential, connect with others in meaningful ways, to form the glue that brings communities together and holds them together. And it can be used to trick and control people.
 - As society has become more complex, religion has grown in popularity.
 - Many sociologists predicted that this would occur.
 - As society continues to change more rapidly, the stabilizing nature of religious belief has more potential to do good.
 - However, religion needs to get out of science and philosophy.
 - Since religions has traditionally been largely about power, this may be too much to expect.
- There are many ways to assess whether a religion is “good” or “bad” for a particular person or in general.
 - Since I can’t speak for any particular person, I will stick to a general assessment that uses the basic norms of western society to assess religious beliefs.
 - The basic question to ask about a religion is using who? Is the individual using the religion, or is the religion or a leader or a group using the individual?”
 - Harmful religions are often referred to as “cults”. A useful checklist in that regard can be found at http://www.csj.org/infoserv_cult101/checklis.htm
 - The group displays excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.
 - Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.
 - Mind-altering practices (such as meditation, chanting, speaking in tongues, denunciation sessions, and debilitating work routines) are used in excess and serve to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).
 - The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel (for example, members must get permission to date, change jobs, marry—or leaders prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, whether or not to

have children, how to discipline children, and so forth).

- The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s) and members (for example, the leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar—or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity).
 - The group has an us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society.
 - The leader is not accountable to any authorities (unlike, for example, teachers, military commanders or ministers, priests, monks, and rabbis of mainstream religious denominations).
 - The group teaches or implies that its supposedly exalted ends justify whatever means it deems necessary. This may result in members' participating in behaviours or activities they would have considered reprehensible or unethical before joining the group (for example, lying to family or friends, or collecting money for bogus charities).
 - The leadership induces feelings of shame and/or guilt in order to influence and/or control members. Often, this is done through peer pressure and subtle forms of persuasion.
 - Subservience to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and radically alter the personal goals and activities they had before joining the group.
 - The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.
 - The group is preoccupied with making money.
 - Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group and group-related activities.
 - Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.
 - The most loyal members (the “true believers”) feel there can be no life outside the context of the group. They believe there is no other way to be, and often fear reprisals to themselves or others if they leave (or even consider leaving) the group.
- Cults should be avoided.
 - Often those in the grip of a cult cannot assess their own position. They are in a blind spot of the kind we discussed earlier.

- Sometimes counselling and the information produced by writers like Stephen Hassan (see <http://www.freedomofmind.com/>) is useful.
- The world is changing more rapidly now than ever. I believe some kinds of religions belief have an increasingly important role to play.
 - Technology changes much more quickly than human culture.
 - See “cyberbullying” for example. www.cyberbullying.org
 - Wisdom (how to wisely use power) is a function of human culture.
 - Wisdom is connected to values.
 - Our values and related wisdom needs to deal with things like:
 - Global connectedness from a disease, terrorism, financial markets, etc. point of view.
 - Global warming.
 - Population control.
 - Genetic technologies.
 - Bio-technologies.
 - Etc.
 - These are highly emotional, terrifying in some cases, issues.
 - The power we are developing is threatens humanity to an extent.
 - The emotional power, and wisdom, that religion of some kinds can bring to bear on these issues is potentially important.
 - I am particularly attracted to the ideas related to Eastern religions (see Levine, “The Positive Psychology of Buddhism and Yoga” for example) and “Religious Naturalism (see Goodenough “The Sacred Depths of Nature” and the resources at www.religiousnaturalism.org)
 - The greatest challenges humankind now faces according to many scientists and liberal theologians (see for example Paul Ehrlich, “Human Natures”) is to change how we are programmed by evolution to think in terms of small groups and short time frames to large groups (all of humanity over many generations into the future) and long time frames (thousands of years).
 - The most powerful motivational forces known to us are emotional. Intellectual concepts are rowboats against emotional battleships. Until religion is engaged in the effort to change minds in the manner just noted, I doubt that change will occur at anywhere near the rate required to make the Earth habitable by 6 to 10 B humans in the long term.

- I have great faith in humankind's, and this planet's, ability to adapt, and can't begin to imagine how the issues I have described in these last few paragraphs will play out.
- These are exciting, wonderful times.

