

Disaffected Mormons are expected to “doubt their doubts” and overlook the mistakes of LDS leaders

By Helen Radkey

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is generally perceived as an authoritarian religious corporation that has a history of squashing dissent. Prominent scholars and low-profile Church members, who have questioned Mormon history or theology, or refused to obey unreasonable Church edicts, have been treated with intolerance by Church leaders. The unwillingness of Mormon officials to recognize and respect differences in opinions or beliefs has resulted in the expulsion of many dissenters from Mormon ranks.

The LDS Church appears to be fine-tuning its attitude toward those who question. On October 5, 2013, at the 183rd Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, second counselor in the LDS Church’s governing First Presidency, encouraged doubters and defectors to return to the LDS fold. Uchtdorf admitted that mistakes have been made by members and some past Church leaders, ostensibly referring to wrongdoings that caused members to lose their faith, and, in some cases, experience loss of Church membership and ostracism.

Uchtdorf is throwing baited fish hooks to those who are swiveling on the edge of Mormonism. It is a one-sided “return on our terms” deal that offers little risk for the ruling Mormon oligarchy. Returning doubters and dissidents will be expected to resume their places within the lesser ranks of the Mormon pecking order. When push comes to shove, the ecclesiastical muscle of LDS leaders carries far more clout than the clamorings of lower-ranking members, who will be told, if they want to be a worthy part of the “one true” church, they must obey LDS teachings and not cause contention within the Church.

“Doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith,” urged Uchtdorf. This statement implies LDS-related disagreements must be the failing of the individual and not the fault of LDS history, scriptures, doctrine or policies. Uchtdorf’s quote reduces the value of personal autonomy by undermining conclusions arrived at through independent study. Church members should be encouraged to learn and study in an effort to find spiritual truth. Instead, they are expected to surrender their minds to the norms of the current Church.

Gentle persuasion will not alter questionable aspects of LDS history and theology that Mormons are easily finding on the Internet. Much of this information contradicts Church versions of Mormon history and teachings, such as details about the fraudulent nature of the Book of Abraham. This canonized Mormon scripture contains Smith’s purported

translation of Egyptian papyri that the patriarch Abraham supposedly wrote. The original papyri “translated” by Smith were found to be fragments of the Book of Breathing, common funeral papyri used in burying the dead. The type of Egyptian writing showed it was written long after Abraham’s time and the contents had nothing to do with Abraham.

Will returning Mormons be expected to deny their fact-based discoveries that may be at odds with the LDS Church, like the questionable contents of the Book of Abraham?

In his conference talk, Uchtdorf said the LDS Church “honors personal agency.” Such was not the case in the 1970s, when seven excommunications and thirty defections occurred in the Australian church, based on the LDS mandate requiring Sydney Mormons to sustain their local leaders “right or wrong.” “Personal agency” was not an option: http://www.parkromney.com/site/romney/docs/Blind_obedience_and_Mitt_Romney.pdf.

If presiding LDS authorities are aware of mistakes made by Mormon leaders—especially blunders that may have caused significant personal losses and harmed the reputations of innocent dissenters—those officials have a responsibility to address those circumstances.

Formal apologies should be issued to those who have been mistreated or misunderstood. Victims should not be expected to crawl back to church with their tails between their legs. The onus is on the LDS Church to openly acknowledge and make amends to former Mormons whose rights were trampled on because of the mistakes of Mormon leaders.

Many ex-Mormons deserve sincere apologies, and, in some cases, long-awaited ones.

No strings attached.

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