

How can we act responsibly toward discomfiting Church experiences?

THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH AND THE INDIVIDUAL

By J. Bonner Ritchie



Necessary, though uneasy, alliances exist between institutions and individuals. The underlying tension is fundamental:

A central purpose of mortality is to allow individual growth through the exercise of free agency. A central purpose of institutions generally is to maintain themselves with a minimum of disorder. Individual free agency, in its purest form, implies the existence of unlimited choice. Institutions, on the other hand, require a certain level of conformity in order to preserve their identity.

With this introduction, the B. H. Roberts Society, an independent Salt Lake City group devoted to “examining and discussing all aspects of the restored gospel as they relate to contemporary society,” announced its series of lectures to explore the benefits and costs the relationship between the institutional Church and the individual.

The series’ first lecture was delivered on 12 March 1981 by J. Bonner Ritchie. Professor Ritchie’s presentation was informal, lively, personal—and timely. To preserve the tone, the transcript of his speech has been only lightly edited.

TWENTY YEARS AGO, I WAS SERVING IN GERMANY as a young second lieutenant in the Army. In the middle of the night, as often happened, I received a telephone call to go pick up a couple of soldiers in my platoon who were drunk and in trouble. One had been hit by a train, and the other was not terribly rational. As I took them to the dispensary, I was intrigued and frightened by the comment of the uninjured one, “He’s probably better off dead than being a soldier in the Fiftieth Ordnance Company.” As a new platoon leader in that organization, I wondered what my role was going to be. How could I cope with that environment? How could I change that attitude? I think I can trace my beginning as a behavioral scientist to the reflections of that night. I began the process of making a long-term professional commitment—it has been reinforced over the years by many other events, some humorous and some more poignant—that I was going to dedicate my life to trying to *help people protect themselves from organizational abuse*. I didn’t know exactly how I was going to do it, what academic or professional route to follow. Besides I had another three years’ commitment to the Army, plenty of time to formulate career goals.

Another military experience: One morning, I told a young private what to do, and he said, “Hell, no, Lt. Ritchie. I’m not going to do that.” I started thinking about organizations a little further. Now I was really wondering. I had a piece of paper signed by General Dwight Eisenhower saying I was an officer and that people would do what I said. A few did, and I thought it was magic and everybody would obey. Then one day, an individual did not.

I didn’t know quite what I was going to do when I got out of the Army, but I ended up back in graduate school at Berkeley during the 1960s, trying to understand what universities were

doing to students and what students were doing to universities. As chairman of a doctoral student organization at Berkeley during the Free Speech Movement, I had an interesting perspective on what people sometimes force organizations to do to them. Then I was caught up in civil rights activities. Driving between West Point and Tupelo, Mississippi, one day with a group of black people who were trying to organize a catfish farm, we were trailed by a pickup truck with no license plate. The person sitting in the right hand seat had a shot gun that he began firing. I was reminded that organizations like the KKK sometimes provide an excuse for people to behave in ways that they might not behave in full public review. With those shots ringing out, I started to think about how you help a group of black farmers trying to make a living, but receiving only a third the return of white farmers producing the same product.

I suggest one more explanation for my perspectives—the family I grew up in. I distinctly recall the night when I was a young teenager that my mother either kept me up or stayed up with me—I’m not sure which—most of the night, debating whether or not God’s omniscience, foreknowledge, and perfect information took away individual freedom. I can remember that debate vividly. It started about eight o’clock at night. I remember the defiant stand I took. As my mother went through a series of arguments, I think she felt that she was teaching me a very final truth. What she was in fact doing was teaching me a process in which questioning is important, in which debate is useful and fun. A process in which having a different opinion is not a reason to reject but a reason to discuss. A process that demands rigor, that demands inquiry, that makes one uncomfortable with anything but carefully developed, even if sometimes defiant and rebellious, positions on any series of issues.

My father, on the other hand, was a very peaceful, easy-going, pleasant individual. I recall his behavior as a priesthood quorum advisor, where he put incredible effort into loving and helping people. He did not flaunt or neglect organizational procedures but rather placed in a secondary position sanctions, policies, and tenets of a theological system in favor of loving a group of boys, of which I was one. I have observed my dad as a bishop, a stake president, and in a temple presidency, but never have I learned a more important lesson than when I saw him, as my deacon’s quorum advisor, make people more important than organizations.

From that background, I arrived at a crusade of great importance to me. While I do not feel we can make organizations safe for people, I think we can help people protect themselves from organizational abuse. By doing so, we can free people to develop their creative potential using the organization as a resource, rather than as a limiting force. I would hope that we can make our organizations (especially the Church) more effective tools for noble purposes. This is especially important in a contemporary world where we so often see a dichotomy between a self-indulgent, narcissistic approach to organizations, on the one hand, and the noble dream of the idealist on the other. The individual and the organization are not inevitably pitted against each other, but there is always the high probability of a negative

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PAT BAGLEY

effect which must be guarded against. It is the latter point I would like to explore further.

If I were a better behavioral scientist, I would give a talk tonight on the messages I have received from all those who knew I was speaking. I've had enough prescriptions about what I should do that if I followed my normal pattern, which is to resist all such advice, I would have nothing left to say. I would have been preempted by people who told me that I should give a very careful and rigorous theological talk, because some are a little suspicious of my theological interpretations. Some told me I should give a very professional organizational theory talk in order to establish academic credibility. Others told me I should provide a historical trace of individual-church conflicts. Others said I should deal with purely contemporary conflicts in the institutional-individual battleground. Some said my only purpose should be to suggest a set of practical future strategies. It is interesting to compare those who said that I should present an objective, detached, academic value point of view with others who said that I should relate my own personal feelings.

As I look at such prescriptions, I wonder what they reveal about all of us and our agendas? What do they say about our pain or frustration with organizations? What about the attempt to skirt the issues by virtue of academic niceties? And, what about the demand to take on the issues with a gut-level confrontation? What is the process within each of us? Can we back off and identify those forces within us that make us so self-righteous in our apology for the organization or so defensive in our attack on it, so protective of individual prerogatives in light of organization encroachment or so defensive in terms of the right of the organization to dictate?

These ought to be some of the questions generated for each of us. What are our motives as we defend or attack a point of view in the individual-organization interface? Tonight, I will suggest a series of issues over which this interface can lead to serious dysfunctions for either the individual or the organization.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

"I am troubled when someone says you will not be held responsible because you are obeying legitimate authority."

THE first issue is the concept of responsibility. We sometimes use the organization as a default mechanism, absolving us of the responsibility of making moral choices. The organization becomes the repository of virtue or the repository of responsibility. One of the biggest "cop-outs"

ORGANIZATIONAL LOYALTY

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you can hear in any organizational context and especially in Mormon culture is the statement, “I will do what I am told, and if it’s wrong, the person who told me must bear the responsibility.” I am justified because I am obedient. If I am told to do something that turns out to be evil or inefficient or unproductive, my loyalty to the organization somehow absolves me of responsibility for the results of that choice.

I am very troubled when someone says you will not be held responsible because you are obeying legitimate authority or usurped authority. The degree of responsibility can, of course, be qualified in contexts such as war, limited information, constrained resources, or lack of ability. However, we still should be aware that while organizational loyalty can and should be a very positive force, it can turn into one of the most insidious forces in any social system when it binds the hands or the mind. It becomes a force which victimizes the individual, who feels freed from the burden of moral choice. And I know of nothing in political, ecclesiastical, social, athletic, academic, or military history which justifies that kind of philosophy of organizations. We cannot allow the dictates of anyone to relieve the burden, pain, or growth that goes with individual responsibility. A quote from John Taylor expresses the points succinctly:

“I was not born a slave! I cannot, will not be a slave. I would not be slave to God! . . . I’d go at His behest; but would not be His slave. I’d rather be extinct than be a slave. His friend I feel I am, and He is mine:—a slave! The manacles would pierce my very bones—the clanking chains would grate upon my soul—a poor, lost, servile, crawling wretch to lick the dust and fawn and smile upon the thing who gave the lash! Myself—perchance my wives, my children to dig the mud, to mould and tell the tale of brick and furnish our own straw! . . . But stop! I’m God’s free man: I will not, cannot be a slave! Living, I’ll be free here, or free in life above—free with the Gods, for they are free. . . .¹

This condition is expressed by Sartre: we are condemned to choose. We are condemned to be free in the sense that there is always a final choice that none of us can defer to anyone else.

If we do not abrogate our choices to leaders, what part should religion play in our lives? Gordon Allport described re-

ligion in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic criteria—the growth and security functions.² Security religion provides refuge. It builds an ecclesiastical wall which protects from the onslaught of questions and doubts and decisions. Growth religion, on the other hand, forces its adherents to grow, to accept responsibility, to assume the burden of proof, to move beyond extrinsic constraints. Growth religion provides not a wall but stepping stones to climb for the purpose of understanding, analyzing, serving, and making choices. We all seek the safe harbor at times. We need to be protected, to rest so we can go back for the battle. Security needn’t be an inhibiting force; it can and should be positive. Whether it is or not depends more on how the member responds to the system than how the system makes demands on the member.

One of my favorite talks (to a ward with a three o’clock sacrament meeting) begins with the question, “Where are you supposed to be at three o’clock on Sunday afternoon?” And the usual answer is “Well, you’re supposed to be at sacrament meeting.” While that is not the worst answer, my answer is a little more qualified. Yes, you’re supposed to be in sacrament meeting, *if* you have nothing better to do. Be careful what you regard as something better, but if you *never* have anything better to do, you may not be thinking. And if you never have anything better to do, you are not accepting the responsibility of choosing to go for a good reason. If the only reason you go is that sacrament meeting is happening every Sunday afternoon at that time, I would argue that you have defaulted in your responsibility. I remember one particular afternoon when I was a new bishop, and I had gone to the ward a half hour before sacrament meeting. The new elders quorum president was there. A call came from the wife of a California man who was in the University hospital with a rare blood condition. She asked if someone would come see him. I approached the elders quorum president, “There is a man at the hospital who is very ill. Would you go visit him?” He said, “Sure, I’ll go this evening.” I said, “No, maybe you’d better go right now.” He said, “You mean you’re asking me to miss sacrament meeting to go to the hospital?” I said, “Forget it; I’ll go to the hospital. You conduct sacrament meeting.” And I left. The sacrament meeting got conducted; I’m not sure by whom. I really wasn’t terribly concerned about it. I remember the next Sunday comments were made about passing a bleeding, starving, hungry

person to get to the synagogue to learn how to care for your fellow men. Where should you be on Sunday afternoon? If you never had a sick person, someone in need, a priority above and beyond institutional constraints, then you could be defaulting your responsibilities.

Sometimes we look at moral choices just in terms of choosing between good and evil. While these are important decisions, I think the higher moral responsibility comes not in choosing between good and evil, but in choosing between two goods. The essence of the issue comes in the process of *making* the choice, not simply in the external criterion measurement applied to the choice made. Some of the most difficult decisions I have had to make have been between spending time with a twelve-year-old boy or a seventeen-year-old girl.

I remember a program for a group of explorers years ago. We were trying to help them understand the organization of the Church and the role of the bishop. So we decided to have them role-play the bishop's job. We took the situations right off my bulletin board. The bishop comes home on Friday; a week-long vacation is planned with his family—time the family really needs away together. There have been several telephone calls for the bishop during the afternoon. Someone has broken into the Church and defaced a sacred picture. Someone else put a hose in the basement and flooded the church; the floor of

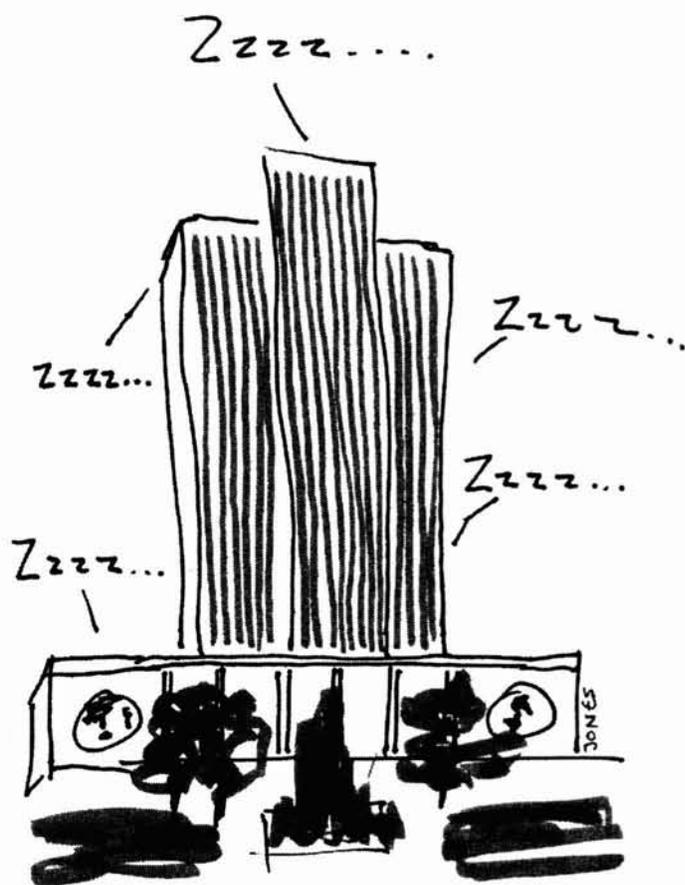
the recreation hall is buckling. A teenage girl is pregnant, needs counseling, and, subsequently, a marriage ceremony. The death of an older person has occurred, and of course, the family wants the bishop to conduct the funeral the following Tuesday. The local Unitarian church calls to ask the Mormon bishop to speak about Mormonism at their church the next Thursday night. The Relief Society president reports a person who has been receiving fast offering funds is using them to buy beer. Anyway, a typical week—items which demand the attention of the bishop. The situation was set up to provoke thought about the complications of the job. I remember that as we had these kids play out the role, to a person they said, "I'd cancel my vacation." I remember one young explorer looking at me and saying, "Well what would you do?" I said, "I'd go. I'd make at least one call to my first counselor; possibly three: to a counselor, the elders quorum president, and the Relief Society president." I remember that this nice-looking, humble, boy looked up at me and said, "Boy, I'm glad you're not my bishop." We do live in a world of multiple expectations.

The issue is whether or not we personally default on our responsibilities and instead allow systems or unanalyzed perceptions to dictate behavior. Then we become pawns in somebody else's chess game with a high probability of resentment. The willingness to make the choice—between a hospitalized seventy-year-old widow who needs visiting, a seventeen-year-old girl who needs to talk, or a twelve-year-old boy who doesn't want you to say you love him, he wants you to play football with him (borrowing Elder Marvin J. Ashton's poignant metaphor). These are choices between good alternatives. We can't do them all at the same time—and often not even sequentially. That's where growth comes, and that is an opportunity of the Church: teaching us to make those choices reasonably, rationally, intelligently, compassionately and to accept the responsibility for acting.

PERSONAL INTELLECT

"We need a dynamic tension to fight the conservative convergence in organizations."

ANOTHER issue is the expectation for individual intellectual resolution. In Mark Leone's interesting book, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*,³ he gives a convincing, if in my mind not altogether accurate, perspective on the dilemmas of Mormon theology and Mormon behavior. He says that one of the strengths and weaknesses of Mormonism is the process by which it transfers to the individual the burden of intellectual reconciliation: we are told not so much what to believe in detailed theological terms, but rather that we should all be in harmony and that it is up to each individual to get there through prayer or study. We assume that there is an integrated system that encompasses theology, politics, economics, interpersonal relations, and athletics (from listening to some students and alumni, I infer BYU football is a part of the system). Any time individuals



One effect of the growth of the Church in Latin America—the siesta.

JEFF JONES

WE CANNOT MAKE

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fall short of this synthesized, integrated philosophical system, it is their fault. When things do not fit, something is wrong. We demand answers *and* agreement. This is a difficult issue in the individual-organization relationship.

Another aspect of this problem comes as we carry the same logic into other dimensions of life: What if we all don't come up with the same recommendation on a political candidate? Or, if we don't come up with the same criterion for when it ought to rain? This drive for consensus can come from either the top or from the bottom of the organization. Going through my random files (those are the only kind I have really found worthwhile), I was intrigued by a quote from a July 1970 Church priesthood bulletin. Listen to the following statement by the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve on women's and girls' dress:

The Church has not attempted to indicate just how long women's or girls' dresses should be nor whether they should wear pant suits or other types of clothing. We have always counseled our members to be modest in their dress, maintaining such standards in connection therewith as would not be embarrassing to themselves and to their relatives, friends, and associates.

We have advised our people that when going to the temple they should not wear slacks, or mini-skirts, nor otherwise dress immodestly. We have not, however, felt it wise or necessary to give instructions on this subject relative to attendance at our church meetings, although we do feel that on such occasions they should have in mind that they are in the house of the Lord and should conduct themselves accordingly.

The fact that this institutional directive was, in some instances I am aware of, translated into a police-type situation with someone standing at the doors on Primary day keeping out little girls who were dressed in pants is one of the more insidious indications of the process by which a lower level organizational officer can generate a type of dominion.

I recall during the early 1970s when a young girl, who had been inactive in the Church, came into our warehouse wearing a mini-skirt and was quickly chastised by an indi-

vidual and instructed to go home. She left defiantly. We managed to reach another inactive girl in similar attire, before someone instructed her that she wasn't wanted. I performed a marriage for the first—a pregnant-fifteen-year old rejected by the Church because of noncompliance. I was pleased to receive a temple wedding announcement a few years ago from the second. She had not only worn a mini-skirt to Church, but reportedly she had smoked in the rest room. I remember the difficulty of convincing some of the parents of teenagers in the ward to love and help her for just a little while longer rather than judge and condemn.

Unfortunately, patience for the person who violates *someone's* organizational norm is not universal. In fact, there is a predictable tendency in organizations toward a conservative convergence. Picture this phenomenon as movement toward the point of a cone. Organizational membership carries with it a surrender of alternatives in many respects. I give up the choice of playing tennis and skiing every day from eight till five for some organizational benefits which are important. In the process, I may resent what I have given up, and I may wonder if I haven't made a bad trade. So I try to justify my organizational involvement, especially if I happen to have a leadership position, by converging on rules, criteria, and procedures that demand compliance by me and others in order to justify the fact that my position is important and worthwhile. In making sure other people benefit from my contribution, I may measure my success by the level of compliance of my organizational members and may even come up with rules to be used as tests even if they are not necessary.

In fact, we often think that we have to answer questions that may not even need to be asked. We go about creating the questions in order to make the answers fit—a contemporary critique of management says that managers are often solutions in search of problems.⁴ It's very pernicious to convince someone he or she has a problem in order to implement your solution. That kind of tactic is rampant in the world of high-pressure sales, and it works in Mormon culture as well. We induce guilt by insisting that we have the only solutions to problems which the person may not know he or she has until we

point them out. As Abraham Maslow said, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, then you treat everything as though it were a nail." If the only tool you have is one leadership process, you treat everything as though it ought to fit that model.

We need a type of dynamic tension to fight the conservative convergence in organizations. That's why we need those people who pull us out of the cone, though sometimes in unconventional ways. Students, feminists, racial minorities and other "useful radicals" have thus helped us over the years. Otherwise, we move too far down that cone. We get more and more control over less and less until finally we have perfect control over nothing. That is exactly the fate of most organizations. That is where systems find themselves as they attempt to run every aspect of the lives of people, as they attempt to dictate all policies, as they become weighted down by bureaucratic rules, with more and more tests of obedience, loyalty, and conformity.

Another quote. (This one may be apocryphal. I have not verified it. I agree with George Burns, "I never let the truth get in the way of a good story.") In Samuel Taylor's *Nightfall at Nauvoo*, the following incident is described. Someone asked Joseph Smith about the moon as he and Eliza Snow were going to a party. Were there people up there? Indeed, answered Joseph, and he proceeded to describe their dress, size, and age. After the party, Eliza asked Joseph how he knew so much about the moon and why he hadn't told the people about it before. He answered that he really had no idea about the moon. She should realize that a prophet always had to have an answer to every silly question.⁵ People do make some strange demands of prophets which demands create contradictory forces in the organizational process.



"Well, I'd say the Church has gone as far as it can in putting temples closer to the Saints."

This respect for the person who is supposed to give the answers, who is in the position of authority, can be a stabilizing force or can become a kind of adoration which is oppressive and frightening. This adoration from the bottom is poignantly referenced by Jerzy Kosinski in *The Painted Bird*. He describes the young Jewish vagabond struggling for survival in Poland, who encounters the Nazi officer:

Nonchalantly the officer approached me, beating a swagger stick against the seam of his freshly pressed breeches. The instant I saw him I could not tear my gaze from him. His entire person seemed to have something utterly superhuman about it. Against the background of bland colors he projected an unfadable blackness. In a world of men with harrowed faces, with smashed eyes, bloody, bruised and disfigured limbs, among the fetid, broken human bodies, of which I had already seen so many, he seemed an example of neat perfection that could not be sullied: the smooth, polished skin of his face, the bright golden hair showing under his peaked cap, his pure metal eyes. Every movement of his body seemed propelled by some tremendous internal force. The granite sound of his language was ideally suited to order the death of inferior, forlorn creatures. I was stung by a twinge of envy I had never experienced before, and I admired the glittering death's-head and crossbones that embellished his tall cap. I thought how good it would be to have such a gleaming and hairless skull instead of my Gypsy face which was feared and disliked by decent people.

The officer surveyed me sharply. I felt like a squashed caterpillar oozing in the dust, a creature that could not harm anyone yet aroused loathing and disgust. In the presence of such a resplendent being, armed in all the symbols of might and majesty, I was genuinely ashamed of my appearance. I had nothing against his killing me. I gazed at the ornate clasp of his officer's belt that was exactly at the level of my eyes, and awaited his wise decision.

The courtyard was silent again. The soldiers stood about obediently waiting for what would happen next. I knew my fate was being decided in some manner, but it was a matter of indifference to me. I placed infinite confidence in the decision of the man facing me. I knew that he possessed powers unattainable for ordinary people.

Another quick command rang

DO WE DEFAULT

on our personal responsibilities and instead allow
systems or unanalyzed perceptions to dictate our behaviors?

If so, we become pawns in somebody else's chess game.

out. The officer strode off. A soldier shoved me roughly toward the gate. Regretting that the splendid spectacle was over, I walked slowly through the gate and fell straight into the plump arms of the priest, who was waiting outside. He looked even shabbier than before. His cassock was a miserable thing in comparison with the uniform adorned by the death's-head, crossbones, and lightning bolts.⁶

As shown by this example, the *worship* of authority figures can put the individual in the ultimate subservient role. It doesn't matter if the person of authority is an officer, a church leader, an athlete, a teacher, or parent. Organizations are victimized from the bottom by people who do this. The Savior's response is instructive, "And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." (Matt. 19:16–17.)

THE PROPER ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS

Institutions can both destroy or liberate individuals—at their best, they push us toward greatness.

ANOTHER issue involves the idea of goals. A cruel myth in the world of institutions is that organizations have goals. Organizations don't have goals. Whom do you ask about an organizational goal? People have goals for organizations, and people use the mechanism of organizational goals to achieve their own noble or selfish purposes. When we impute an anthropomorphic nature to the organization and give it the dignity of needs, motives, value systems, and goals, we corrupt the process by which individuals control organizations rather than are controlled by them. Organizations are the vehicles by which we perform functions, but they don't have purposes.

A study done about the national foundation which sponsors the March of Dimes underscores this point. Why did the March of Dimes continue after the Salk vaccine eliminated polio and thus the espoused goal of the organization? After the Salk vaccine was developed, the people involved in the March of Dimes were asked what they were collecting money for. Some still said to eliminate polio. Others said it was for heart

research; others cancer—all good purposes. What the March of Dimes was actually collecting money for was research on birth defects. But, all of the people collecting the money didn't know that. So the goals were "situational" in terms of continuing the organizational activities. The organizational members had developed a myth of organizational goals which seemed to have a life of its own.

Sometimes the goal becomes merely a way for people to justify their involvement or their actions. An interesting example of this is found in Kafka's novel *The Trial*. When K. questioned them about the legitimacy of their action, guards making the arrest used a defense which presupposed that organizational decisions are based on worthwhile goals:

We are humble subordinates who can scarcely find our way through a legal document and have nothing to do with your case except to stand guard over you for ten hours a day and draw our pay for it. That's all we are, but we're quite capable of grasping the fact that the high authorities we serve, before they would order such an arrest as this, must be quite well informed about the reasons for the arrest and the person of the prisoner. There can be no mistake about that.⁷

Thus, the assumption that goals exist helps to enforce compliance.

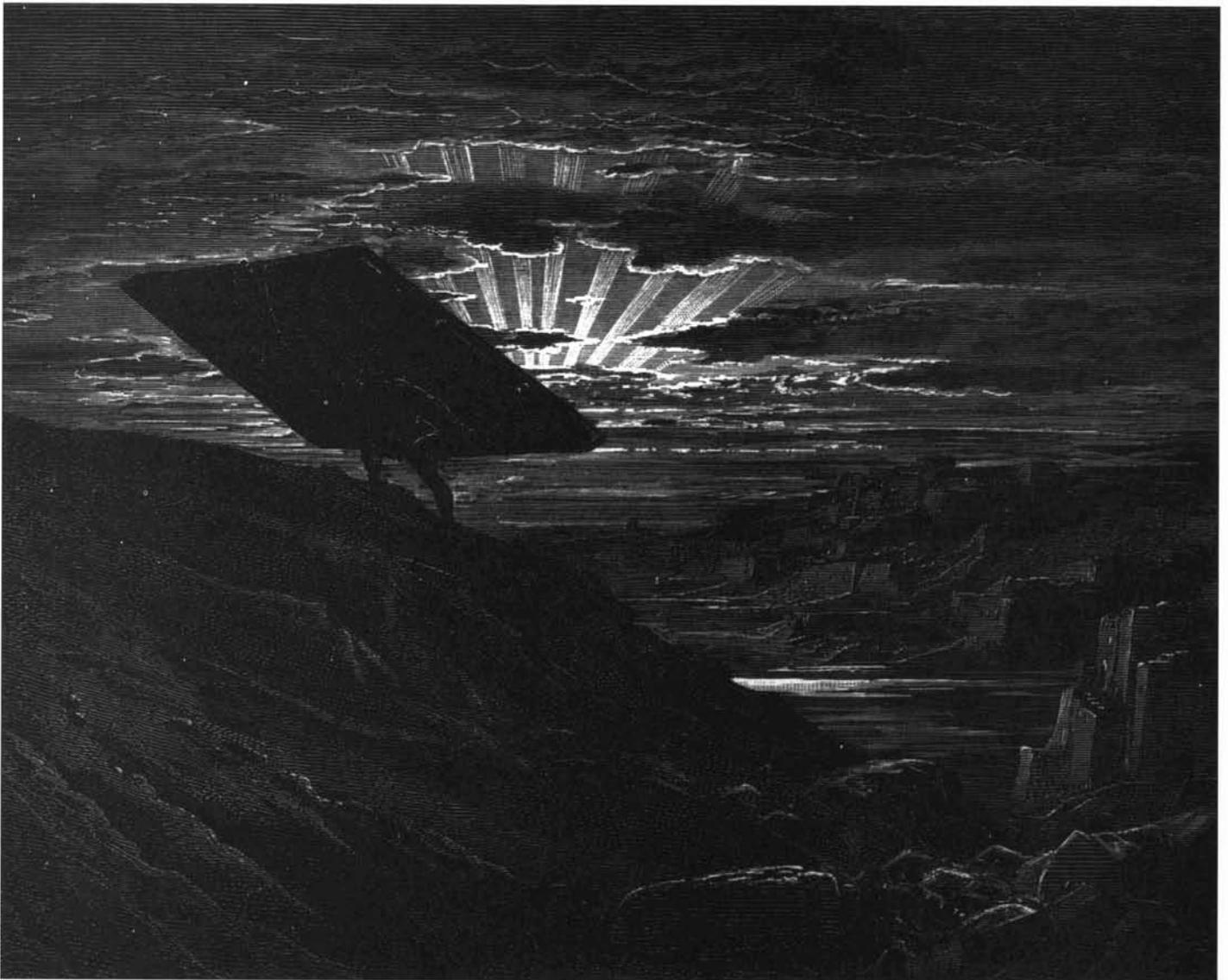
And compliance or discipline remains one of the basic underlying purposes of all organizations. In Hermann Hesse's novel *Beneath the Wheel*, the teacher explains his teaching role:

It is his duty and responsibility to control the raw energies and desires of his charges and replace them with calmer, more moderate ideals. What would many happy citizens and trustworthy officials have become but unruly, stormy innovators and dreamers of useless dreams, if not for the effort of their schools? In young beings there is something wild, ungovernable, uncultured which first has to be tamed. It is like a dangerous flame that has to be controlled or it will destroy. Natural man is unpredictable, opaque, dangerous, like a torrent cascading out of uncharted mountains. At the start, his soul is a jungle without paths or order. And, like a jungle, it must first be cleared and its growth thwarted. Thus it is the school's

task to subdue and control man with force and make him a useful member of society, to kindle those qualities in him whose development will bring him to triumphant completion.⁸

One way to conceptualize the role of the Church or of Mormon society, of course, is as creator or reinforcer of this discipline. Though discipline is often oppressive, it needn't be. The organization provides a vehicle for us to test ourselves and develop a disciplined identity—like the Indian tribe initiation which proves whether the person has the right to move through a transition phase based on some physical or mental feat which tests and proves abilities and strength. And in the process of creating that disciplined identity, we build a hard core within us rather than a marshmallow center which gives way to the pressures and forces of a random or contrived environment. This hard core becomes the nucleus around which we can orbit. And, when that nucleus is firm and the power is

great, we can spin out a long way and still be held in orbit. A similar disciplined identity comes from running, from practice of a piano, from the academic rigor of reading, writing, analyzing, mastering; it allows us to rise above, not stay within, a set of criteria. If staying within a discipline is our final goal, we become an enslaved student. If rising above it is our goal, we become a scholar. Chaim Potok, in the novel *My Name Is Asher Lev*, chronicles the young aspiring artist as he is struggling, confronting his Judaism and his aesthetic drives. The young man goes to his father, who chastises and condemns him. His mother is afraid and cries. The rabbi tells him he may lose his soul to the goyim if he continues—he may surrender his salvation to the Christian god if he doesn't give up his driving force. But, the rabbi also puts him in touch with the best artist as a teacher. The artist also tells him he will surrender his faith, will lose his soul, he may no longer be a good Jew. But then he disciplines the young man to become a master artist. The rabbi



GUSTAVE DORÉ

“They finally put all the commandments in one place!”

PEOPLE ARE

ultimately perfectible, we believe, but in the meantime,
the Church is led by imperfect people who make mistakes.

warns him at every turn about the danger of losing his soul but pushes him to become great.

I think that is one of the important functions organizations perform. And it is hard to do without organizations, I believe. It is also hard to do without the university. The same force in the classroom that can destroy the student can also free him.

Back to Hesse's *Beneath the Wheel*. The schoolmaster says he prefers to have a couple of dumbheads in his class rather than a genius. In one sense, he reflects all of our fears. There is nothing so threatening to a professor as having a student who may be smarter than the professor. The teacher's task, after all, is not to produce extravagant intellects, but rather decent, conforming folk. Two such geniuses are described in the story. Their personalities develop partly because of, and partly in spite of, the sometimes arbitrary and useless discipline of the school. Ironically, once the students are dead and remote, their memories are paraded before other generations of students as showpieces and noble examples. Thus, the struggle between rule and spirit repeats itself for each generation. Teachers go to great pains to nip the truly profound or valuable intellects in the bud, but they often fail. And then they reward the run-aways, those they expelled. But some, and who knows how many, don't rise above. Rather, they waste away and finally go under. Organizations do destroy. Is the price of one person's excellence someone else's destruction? Is the price of greatness the pain and discipline inflicted on the conforming masses out of which a few arise?

IMPERFECT ORGANIZATIONS

"Structures cannot be perfect. They must always be understood and adjusted to in the context of the people involved."

I RECALL a remark by Joseph Smith, which I like: "By proving contraries, truth is made manifest."⁹ By confronting the contradictory constraints of a system and pushing them to the limit, we develop the discipline and strength to function for ourselves. By confronting the process, by learning, by mastering, we rise above. By mastering the scales, we can play the sonata, but we don't start there. By converging to the discipline of medical school, we can rise out to the freedom of diagnosis and care, but we don't start as a medical researcher. We start with discipline and the system. We must converge before we can diverge. We must converge to the discipline before we can diverge to the discretionary skill. And the organization, the church, is the means to do that.

Unfortunately, many of us end up converged with the discipline as the end.

Our next challenge is to remain positive even after a long series of bureaucratic encounters. Picture a U-shaped curve. We begin at the top, naive, trusting, pristine. Bureaucratic entanglements may disenchant, frustrate, aggravate, and lead us to believe there is a malevolent force operating in this organization which wants to destroy us, to get us; we become paranoid. Or, we have a little learning, a little knowledge, a little truth—enough to want control but not enough to understand the dangers of control, enough to victimize but not enough to liberate. We are then sloshing at the bottom of the curve. And that is the worst place to be. It takes tremendous self-discipline to kick out of the trough of the curve and to rise beyond. To help people get out of the trough and up the other side of the curve is the challenge of my field, and a difficult one. We have a complex, cynical organizational society with a lot of people sloshing about in the bottom of the trough of bureaucratic encounters. We can no longer remain naive. We are all involved with organizations to such an extent that it is critical that we understand them. But, to rise above the trough takes study, patience, understanding, struggle, fighting, learning, praying, thinking, reading, talking, acting.

As previously discussed, the organizational process is by nature conservative. In fact, I would argue that a liberal organization is a contradiction in terms. Organizations, including the Church, must have liberal people to survive, but the organizational force is a conserving one. This seeming dilemma was discussed by Clark Kerr, president of the University of California. Responding to a critic who said we must eliminate all "evil" forces in the university, he stated that we can never make the university safe for students, we can only make the student safe for the university. You can not make any organization safe, you can only prepare people so they can safely function in the organization.

An important part of this issue is that a person must learn to deal with the power system of institutions. Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. My friend Carl Hawkins recently identified a scripture I had not been aware of which illuminates this point. Ecclesiastes 8:9: "And this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt." We must learn how to view ourselves or others performing the leader-role in a way which will minimize this potential problem. I like the concept of organization that flips the

organization chart upside down, that turns the pyramid with the leader at the top upside down and puts the leader at the bottom. Then the leader no longer simply pulls the strings in a puppet show but rather supports the organization by holding it up. Christ did not put himself at the pinnacle of the temple; he put himself at the cornerstone (or Paul put him there, Eph. 2:20). The pinnacle is a trivial adornment at the top of a building. The leader really should be at the bottom helping to hold up the whole structure. The leader must support, train, generate resources, and help others gain freedom to perform useful functions.

Others in the organization can nudge the leader into this role. The dynamic tension of the system puts honesty constraints on the leader. Member involvement and responsibility can help to free the leader from the potential destructive forces in an organization.

At this point, it should be clear I feel there is no such thing as a perfect organization. The Church is a *means* for the development of people. One of the most indicting comments I have heard about the Church is that the two best organizations on earth are the Prussian army and the Mormon church. As a kid, I used to cringe at that, but I didn't know why. Now I know why. Organizations can be strong and not good. Efficiency is a

limited and often bankrupt criterion. The Church was not made to be efficient; it was made to be a service vehicle. The two are not always compatible. Organizations are, therefore, only means, never ends. They must always be understood and adjusted to in the context of the people involved. Organizations are only mechanisms to enable people to facilitate growth, love, and service, to test, make mistakes, and rise above. What is a perfect organization? A system that allows opportunity for people to be free? That's not a perfect organization. That's people committed to the dignity of the individual, people creating organizational devices to facilitate the objective. Structures cannot be perfect. People can be, ultimately, I hope. But in the meantime, the organization is a vehicle driven by imperfect people making mistakes.

I hope that we can find in organizations a positive force to teach, to experiment, to love, to serve, to grow, to develop, to enjoy, to laugh, to cry. May we prevent abuse of organizations. May we permit ourselves and others with whom we work over, under, and alongside to make institutions servants of the individual, to make sanctions into testing grounds to rise above rather than be imprisoned by. In this difficult and exciting world, institutions can be instruments of good. But we must make this so.



CAL GRONDAHL



EIGHTEEN YEARS LATER

*"A firm commitment to what needs to be conserved,
a clear appreciation of what needs to be changed,
and a respect for those who may disagree."*

The following retrospective interview was conducted by Elbert Peck.

What was the response to your article?

The frequent response that makes me saddest is the one that asserts the absolute polarization. I know the culture well enough that it does not surprise me, but it still disappoints me. The assumption that there are right and wrong interpretations, that there is either total tension or there is none, and the assertion that no "good" Mormon can feel that way, all make constructive discourse difficult. These people do not want to hear about Bishop Woolley or about the Apostle Paul and his missionary companions, or about Peter. They feel that even these people "should" have had the "right" interpretation at the front end of the conflict. They do not like or accept the long and, hopefully but not always, constructive process of working out or working through the tension.

Another major thing to come out of this talk and article is the large number of people who have talked to me about it and fit into one of several approaches. One response is to deny the tension in the organization. These individuals say, "I don't feel it; I don't feel any tension. Where's the tension?" It's similar to Eric Hoffer's true-believer response. But as we get talking, they usually identify some problem they have with a statement, individual, teacher, or policy. Often I meet someone who will assert there is no conflict, and then they start complaining about a BYU policy, for example. They don't acknowledge that what they're talking about is an individual/organizational tension. They deny it—they think it's socially preferable to deny it, to not admit the tension—nevertheless, they describe it in detail in their conversation.

Then there's the person who publicly denies there's any tension but admits it privately. I meet a lot of those, people who say, "I'd never dare to say this to most people in church—to my bishop, to my family—but I really feel this frustration. I really feel this tension." So the first kind of person denies the tension generally in their descriptions of reality. The second one admits it privately but denies it publicly. I know a lot of leaders and professors who fit into this category. Many of us feel we have a public role to play, a public image to maintain, and therefore speak differently in public than in private. I can think of stake presidents who fight hard in dealing with these tensions but never admit it publicly.

Then there's a third group of people who publicly acknowledge that there are tensions, but they describe them simply as part of human existence. They say, "Yes, there is tension; people are human, and there are bound to be mistakes or differences of opinion. There are problems and rules I don't like, but eventually things may change. I like some things that have changed and don't like others. But that's just the way it goes." We saw this approach when the temple ceremony was changed. Some people said, "Well, I never said anything, but I really didn't feel comfortable with the deleted parts, and now I feel more comfortable." Some of those people were chastized for just saying that publicly. The point wasn't how they felt but where and how they said it.

The final category is people who don't just publicly acknowledge the tensions but publically fight them. Some of these people fight naively and some strategically, but they make a public crusade to air their position. Some are more mellow in private, and that's intriguing. In contrast, many in the second group are more mellow in public, more stoically conforming, but in private, they're angry. This final group reflects a more strident public image than is their private reality. I am thinking of a particular BYU professor, for example. Privately, he is one of the most loving, dedicated, kindest, sweetest, most committed Mormons in the world. As a bishop, he was incredibly dedicated, committed, loving, and supportive of both doctrine and Church programs. I heard some students in his ward expressing surprise at his public statements and wondering what was going on because that wasn't the person they saw in the ward.

So a range of Latter-day Saint responses have emerged following the address, but almost always people are uncomfortable with the concept of acknowledging Church/institutional tensions. Either they're feeling the pain of the tensions, or they're feeling the pain of admitting they feel the pain, or they're feeling the pain of confronting it openly and not being appreciated, accepted, or understood. They all validate my premise: it's a tension that is very real and very difficult to deal with.

If you were giving the talk today, what would you add?

To survive, all organizations have to converge to a conservative bias—that's what survival means. For humans to survive, we have to have a conservative convergence. We can't just eat any and every thing and go any and every where. We have to discipline ourselves—our food and lifestyle—we have to have some convergence to a constructive, conservative approach, or we don't survive. In fact, people and organizations die from their failure to establish equilibrium with their environment. We observe the tragedy of those who fail to manage this process, such as Janice Joplin or Kurt Cobain. So all systems have to converge to some degree of conservative equilibrium for survival. If there's anything an organization *has* to do in order to accomplish anything, it is to survive. So the convergence is to master the discipline, to take care of the details, to organize essential differences, to perpetuate the institu-

tion.

Today, I would talk more about that because as people come to understand the conservative force, they are usually more comfortable with the organizational tension. People ask, "Why can't we have a progressive, liberal organization?" and my point is we can have progressive, liberal people in the organization, but the organization itself will be conservative. My off-the-top-of-the-head theory is that an organization can have one in thirteen people who are liberal. If thirteen of out thirteen are liberals, no one's doing the organizational maintenance tasks. Environmental groups have learned that, and so have civil rights groups. You must have some people minding the store. But it's more than maintenance; it's conserving, literally, in the best sense of the term, the organization itself. Abraham Lincoln was a conservative in conserving the organization of the Union, but he was a liberal as an individual; so his organizational role was as a conservative, and his personal role was liberal—an ideology of changing the world. Effective organizational leaders must maintain and manage the conservative/liberal tension. They must conserve the essential organizational values and, at the same time, respond creatively to the needs of the individual and the changing environment.

So, if I were giving the talk today, I'd talk about that. How every good leader is both liberal and conservative at the same time. In the past, we've put liberal and conservative at opposite ends of the continuum. Now I put them as two different continuum axes in a matrix, where you can be high in one or both, or low in both. The worst leaders are low in both—they neither conserve anything nor change anything, and there are many of those. Then there are those who are high on liberal and low on conservative—they want to change lots of things.

They are the real crusaders. Then there are those who are high on conservative and low on liberal. Those are the ones who want to conserve everything. The really good leader hangs on to the things that need to be conserved and changes the things that need to be changed.

I believe that Franklin Roosevelt fits that model, as did Lincoln. All our great leaders were both at the same time, and the presidents who weren't as good were those who were one or the other. In the Church, I see President Spencer W. Kimball as one of those leaders who clearly knew what was important to conserve and what was important enough to think about and change. President Hinckley is similar; clearly his work with the media is a major departure from that of the past. Some may see it as a liberal step, a dangerous risk, but he plays the role well; he knows what needs conserving and what needs changing, such as his response to questions about polygamy as being "behind us." As a conservative, he doesn't directly challenge past teachings, and as a liberal, he says, "Let's move on and quit talking about it." That's the delicate balance I didn't talk about in the article. Maybe I didn't understand it well enough then. The delicate balance between keeping what you need to keep and changing what you need to change.

So liberals are naive in wanting the church to explicitly repudiate teachings of past prophets on blacks and the priesthood?

That is very hard for an organization to do. Witness the problem of the Soviet Union trying to deal with, or repudiate, the past. Individuals (leaders or members) try to manage it, but like Gorbachev, there is often a high price to pay for such action. Some individual leaders are able to go further than others in this regard. For example, President Hinckley, in his talk to the NAACP acknowledged continuing racism in American society and Mormon culture. In essence, he was repudiating past teachings, but he's not going to condemn Brigham Young, and he shouldn't. It's like a parable with multiple levels of interpretation: people can hear what they need to in President Hinckley's remarks, and yet the words need not offend those who wouldn't be comfortable with the statement of the new position. Of course, it always helps when we can claim revelation from God to support the change.

It's kind of a liberal obsession to feel you need to precisely articulate each point of the past to be able to move on to the future. For example, how far do we need to go in attacking Shakespeare's position on women in order to make his work politically correct in a contemporary



DANNA JACQUES

*"It's not that you're not a spiritual giant, Tom.
It's just that Alex knows God personally."*

CAN WE HAVE A LIBERAL ORGANIZATION?

We can have liberal people in the organization, but the organization itself will be conservative. My off-the-top-of-the-head theory is that an organization can have around one in thirteen people who are liberal.

English class. That's the liberal trap, feeling you must go overboard with change. The conservative trap is to not even understand that the past needs to be changed. The one who incorporates both aspects realizes you must go forward and change and that you don't spend time beating up the people who made the organization. If we've learned anything from organizational culture, which has become a major field since I gave the talk, it's that you must honor the past. And one way you honor it is by changing it without hurting those who created it, whether they're alive or dead.

Any other thoughts about the talk?

I don't know why I didn't mention Doctrine and Covenants 121. That's the obvious text, and it has become my ultimate retreat in talking about this topic with Mormons. When someone says, "Well, are you really talking about the Church?" I say, "Yes," and when they say, "But the Church is a perfect organization," I can cite section 121, which was given to priesthood leaders, and it says "almost all" will exercise unrighteous dominion. And then I ask, "Why does that happen?" Often, they don't have a good answer. My answer is simple: it's because people are not perfect, because they don't have perfect information. Sometimes they're evil, but not usually. Usually they intend well. Usually abuse is not intended; usually dominion is not intended. Usually it's people thinking about what's best for the organization; the collateral human consequences are not intended. There also are the negative, unintended reasons for unrighteous dominion—covering pride, exploiting people, sexual harassment—but in most instances, it is not intended. Regardless of the motive, abuse is still experienced by the individual as unrighteous dominion. My definition of abuse is: when anyone's best interest is not served by organizational action or policy. And since all people are different, there's never a time when one policy or program will serve all people's interests equally.

Doesn't calling the Church a human institution instead of God's Kingdom change people's allegiance to it as a divine organization?

It's useful to look at what people mean when they say the Church is a divine, perfect organization. Are we talking about the time of meetings? Certainly not. About sacrament meeting

talks? No, there are individuals who make mistakes. How it's organized? No, we change that all the time to fit the situation. What do we mean, when we get down to it? I mean that there is a reservoir of divine investiture. I assert there is that divine investiture and inspiration in the Church, in the Book of Mormon, and in the organization.

The inspiration is not encyclopedic, but it's enough for leaders to say, "We're supposed to get these people out West, and so we need to be more structured and disciplined than normal." At different points in time, the needs and problems differ dramatically, and so those decisions are strategic responses made by individual leaders in their circumstance. There is a divine dimension about Mormonism that is very comforting and very powerful but never complete—it's always a work in progress.

In order to address the needs of people in a particular place and time, organizations are always changing—what I call compensating variables. For example, during the Depression, Stake President Harold B. Lee said, "We need a welfare plan." That specific arrangement wasn't a detailed part of the original plan. Earlier, when young boys were acting up, Aurelia Rogers organized the Primary. That, too, wasn't part of the original revelation; it's a compensating variable. The same is true for the Young Women's Retrenchment Society and the Sunday School.

Recently, we created the mechanism of area authorities to address the challenges of a dispersed and diverse Church. My dad, who was a stake president, used to say we'd have to change Church structure at the time when every stake president doesn't have a personal relationship with a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. Forty years ago, he'd pick up the phone and call LeGrand Richards and say, "We have a problem; how do we solve it?" Because so few stake presidents have that kind of relationship with an apostle today, we have a compensating adjustment with our area and regional authorities.

Anything else?

Since I gave the talk, some creative ideas in management theory and leadership have emerged. One of the more useful ones is the difference between transactional and transformational leaders. A transactional leader simply transacts the ne-

gotiation between the individual and the organization: you do this work; you get this pay; you do this or that, and you get this incentive or punishment. You assign someone to do a job. You transact a deal.

In contrast, a transformational leader acts on the premise that the world needs to improve, that organizations need to change, and that people need to grow. The transformational leader says: I accept responsibility for teaching, for developing, for loving—for transforming a person, a culture, a nation, or the world. There's a great danger in that approach because everyone doesn't need to be transformed in the same way. The positive power, for example, comes from the leader who teaches people that racism is wrong and that they should change. The danger comes from the leader like the Ayatollah Khomeini who tries to transform a "secular, evil country" into his definition of a "God-fearing one." Any time you have a transformational leader, you have a debate over whether their vision of transformation fits everybody, and it usually doesn't. Transformational leadership runs the high probability of conflicting with the moral and ethical values of some set of people. It's a high-risk thing, but it's also the dynamic tension of change that describes all the great leaders. That's the dilemma

of leadership that's really important—the necessity and the pitfalls of effecting change. If you don't do anything, the organization sinks of its own weight (the conservative dilemma), but if you try to make it into something different—to change an American auto company into a Japanese one—you may well destroy the organization even faster (the liberal dilemma).

Can one be a transformational leader and still respect individual choice and responsibility?

Yes, but it takes an incredibly creative person. I think President Hinckley fits that role. He honors the past and, at the same time, sees the opportunities of the future. Politically, I think Abraham Lincoln would be one of my ultimate examples of this leadership characteristic. He honored freedom as he strategically acted to conserve and transform the nation. In England, Prime Minister Tony Blair is sensitive to his past, both to his labor/liberal past and also to the Thatcher conservatism that preceded him. Itzhak Rabin knew what needed to be conserved and what needed to be changed. As I have listened to former Relief Society General Presidency members Chieko Okazaki and Aileen Clyde, I felt they both had a firm commitment to what needed to be conserved and a clear appreciation of what needed to be changed as they defined the importance of diversity and a respect for those who may disagree and a commitment to working through a successful resolution.

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MATTHEW CHATTERLEY

"I always thought of myself as naturally polygamous, but unfortunately, the Church makes no distinction between that gift and adultery."