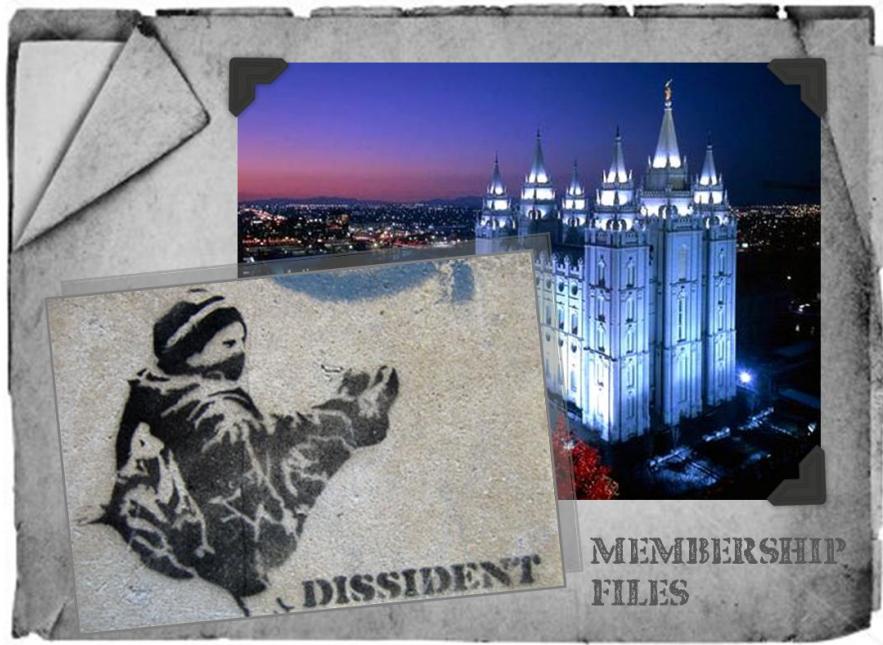


# Mormon Dissidents and Troublemakers



## INTRODUCTION

Mormon culture places immense emphasis on conformity to official doctrine and loyalty to the incumbent officers. In the words of BYU Law Professor Frederick Mark Gedicks, there is in the church:

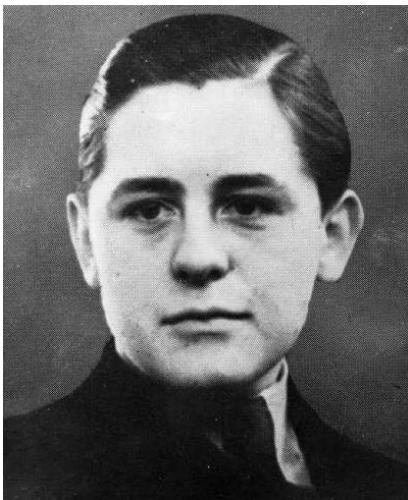
"an insistence that individual religious conscience be subordinated to the church's institutional interests.

...As Latter-day Saints know, contemporary general authority sermons emphasize obedience to ecclesiastical authority and loyalty to the institutional church above virtually every other value" ([1](#)).

To break the rules without apology, or to openly criticize the leadership, is to risk excommunication. Despite this risk, various members have mounted campaigns of public opposition against the ruling officers, doctrines, or practices of mainstream Mormonism. Let's take a look at some of the most influential members in this category, the motivations behind their dissent, and what they might have in common.

**10**

## Helmuth Hubener (1925-1942)



As a young Mormon kid from Hamburg Germany, Helmuth kicked some major Nazi tail in the year 1941. He waged an information war against the Third Reich, covertly spreading anti-war pamphlets, recording information from forbidden foreign radio broadcasts, and recruiting others to help him. In the words of Franz Ahrens, a noted German resistance fighter and author:

“What the Hubener group did in the year 1941 is simply inconceivable. Only someone who himself was active in the resistance movement can grasp what it means.” [\(2\)](#)

A consequence of Helmuth’s campaign, at least in the minds of some Mormons, is that his actions violated the 12th Article of Faith. This article of the canon requires Mormons to obey the laws of the land in which they live, and to yield to political authority.

In 1942, at age 17, Helmuth was caught and tortured by the Gestapo, convicted of treason, and executed by beheading. Arthur Zander, the Mormon officer who presided over Helmuth’s local congregation, summarily excommunicated Helmuth shortly after his capture, on the grounds that he had violated the 12th Article of Faith.

The impact of Helmuth’s life on mainstream Mormon culture is summarized in a 2003 BYU Law Review article as follows:

“More than a half century later, Hübener is celebrated in Germany as a hero of the resistance, while LDS church leaders remain ambivalent about his actions. ...Although the First Presidency approved the posthumous restoration of Hübener’s membership by German LDS leaders following the war, church authorities have declined to endorse the morality of his anti-Nazi resistance and seem uncomfortable with publicity given to Hübener in that respect.” [\(3\)](#)

Meanwhile, a rare vote of approval has been given by LDS professor Patrick Mason, Chair of Mormon Studies at Claremont Graduate University, in 2013:

"Did Helmuth Hubener violate the 12th Article of Faith, or did he actually fulfill the spirit of it? I would say the latter."(4)

In the final analysis, it can be argued that Helmuth didn't violate any written tenant of Mormonism. This is because there is a passage of Mormon canon that appears to qualify the 12th Article of Faith, and creates a common sense exception to it:

"We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside, while protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments; and that sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected, and should be punished accordingly; and that all governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest; at the same time, however, holding sacred the freedom of conscience." (Doctrine and Covenants 134:5)

In sum: when governments engage in clear and widespread violation of basic human rights, citizens don't have an obligation to give unreserved obedience or loyalty to those regimes.

**9**

## Natasha Helper Parker (LCMFT and Certified Sex Therapist)



Without a doubt, *masturbation* is one of the dirtiest words in Mormon society, and it is the subject of several important speeches and policies from Mormon history and current practice. Starting in approximately the late 19th century, Mormon leaders have taught that masturbation is a serious sin, and that strident steps should be taken to avoid and discourage it.

Natasha has [publicly opposed](#) the church's anti-masturbation policy, and has pointed to mental health issues and relationship problems that arise when aggressive shaming and masturbation abstinence regimes are undertaken. In her statement of dissent, she links to a [landmark research article](#) by Mark Malan and Vern Bullough, which represents the most extensive research on masturbation that has been completed within Mormon society to date.

One of the striking things about Natasha's statement of dissent is that it includes an apology that she waited so long to voice her concerns:

"I can no longer stay silent and consider myself to be an ethical mental health practitioner. In fact, I want to offer an official apology for not having spoken up in a more direct way sooner."

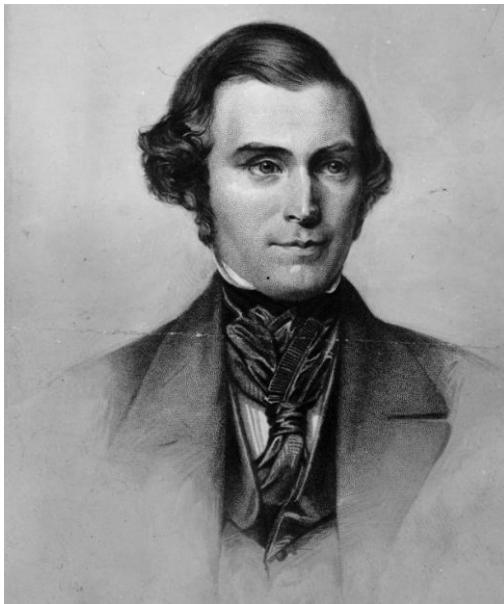
Implicit in this apology are the following points:

- that the specter of losing reputation within the church is a powerful deterrent against coming out in opposition to official policy
- that to some greater or lesser extent, silence involves complicity –that to let abusive or misguided teachings go unchallenged, is to support them

The fact that silence can be an act of complicity is a major theme in matters of dissent, and it's often one of the primary motivators of those who take up causes that are deeply unpopular.

**8**

## Orson Pratt (1811-1881)



Orson Pratt joined the Mormon church at age 19, just a few months after the church was organized in 1830, and would serve as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles for almost 40 years. During this time, he clashed with President Brigham Young (president from 1847-1877) on many occasions.

Several of their most important disagreements involved the issue of dissent:

- Is it a sin to publicly criticize the doctrines, policies, or officers of the church?
- If public criticism is a sin, what is the appropriate ecclesiastical punishment with which to meet it?
- Is it an essential element of Mormonism to believe or declare that all official church policies and doctrines represent the true will of God?
- If some doctrines are mistaken, is it an essential duty of members to overlook and support such mistakes (at least in public), and leave such matters primarily in the hands of God?

These were important matters to Orson because he deeply disagreed with a significant number of the policies and teachings put forward by Brigham Young, and he often felt that it was improper for him to give verbal approval in such situations, or even to give tacit approval by means of silence. (see [Conflict in the Quorum, 2002, by Gary James Bergera](#))

In sum, Orson favored a conscience-based, individualist approach to Mormonism, as opposed to a unity-at-any-price, subordination-based approach to Mormonism that most of his contemporaries appeared to favor. It is clearly the latter approach that holds sway within mainstream Mormonism today. The following quotes provide a comparison of the two differing schools of thought:

### **The individualist approach to Mormonism:**

- "We have hitherto acted too much as machines, as to following the Spirit\*. I will confess to my own shame that I have acted contrary to my own judgment many times. I mean hereafter not to demean myself, to not run contrary to my own judgment. ...When [President Young] says that the Spirit of the Lord says thus and so, I don't consider that all we should do is to say let it be so." (Elder Orson Pratt, 1847; *Conflict in the Quorum*, Gary James Bergera, pg 70.).

\*It is clear from the context that when Pratt uses the word "Spirit" in this instance, he is referring to when Brigham Young has claimed that the Spirit has communicated something to him (to Brigham Young). Pratt is not expressing any reservations about following his own impressions from the Spirit. He is expressing reservations about following the rules and doctrines that Brigham Young claimed were from the Spirit.

- "President Joseph Smith read the 14th chapter of Ezekiel—said the Lord had declared by the Prophet, that the people should each one stand for himself, and depend on no man or men in that state of corruption of the Jewish church—that righteous persons could only deliver their own souls—applied it to the present state of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—said if the people departed from the Lord, they must fall—that they were depending on the Prophet, hence were darkened in their minds, in consequence of neglecting the duties devolving upon themselves." (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, page 237-38).
- "You must work through the Spirit. If that leads you into conflict with the program of the Church, you follow the voice of the Spirit." (Elder S. Dilworth Young, First Council of the Seventy, 1945; D. Michael Quinn. *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*. Signature: Salt Lake City, 1997, p. 17).
- "We desire that the brethren and sisters will all feel the responsibility of expressing their feelings in relation to the propositions that may be put before you. We do not want any man or woman who is a member of the Church to violate their conscience. We would like all to vote as they feel, whether for or against. ...We desire that the Latter-day Saints will exercise the liberty wherewith they have been made free by the gospel of Jesus Christ; for they are entitled to know the right from the wrong, to see the truth and draw the line between it and error; and it is their privilege to judge for themselves and to act upon their own free agency with regard to their choice as to sustaining or otherwise those who should exercise the presiding functions among them. We desire the Latter-day Saints to exercise their prerogative, which is, to vote as the Spirit of the Lord prompts them on the measures and the men that may be presented to them." (1902 and 1904 General Conference, President Joseph F. Smith)

- “Men and women should become settled in the truth and rounded in a knowledge of the Gospel, depending upon no person for borrowed light, but trusting only upon the Holy Spirit, who is ever the same.” (President Joseph F. Smith; as quoted by Elder Samuel O. Bennion, General Conference, April 1941)
- “We can tell when the speakers are moved upon by the Holy Ghost only when we, ourselves, are moved upon by the Holy Ghost. In a way, this completely shifts the responsibility from them to us to determine when they so speak”. (President J. Rueben Clark, CN-7/31/54)
- “If we have presidents or apostles or anybody that we do not like, let us vote them out, and be free men, and cultivate and cherish in our bosoms the principles of liberty.” (President John Taylor, 7 October 1872; “Discourse,” The Deseret News Weekly, volume 21, number 48.)
- “And if thine eye which seeth for thee, him that is appointed to watch over thee to show thee light, become a transgressor and offend thee, pluck him out.” Mark 9:46, JST
- “Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost.” (2 Nephi 28:31)

***The subordination-based approach to Mormonism:***

- “Keep your eye on the President of the Church, and if he ever tells you to do anything, and it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it. But you don’t need to worry. The Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead the people astray” (current Aaronic Priesthood Manual, Lesson 24 “Follow the Prophet”; Conference Report, Oct. 1960, p. 78; ).
- “There is one thing which we should have exceedingly clear in our minds. Neither the President of the Church, nor the First Presidency, nor the united voice of the First Presidency and the Twelve will ever lead the Saints astray or send forth counsel to the world that is contrary to the mind and will of the Lord” (current Aaronic Priesthood Manual, Lesson 24 “Follow the Prophet”; Conference Report, Apr. 1972, p. 99)
- “The Saints can have faith in their leaders and vote unanimously on all propositions, knowing that the things presented for their sustaining vote were approved of the Lord to their leaders before being presented to the membership of the Church” (Ensign, May 1974, Alma P. Burton, BYU Professor of Church History and Doctrine).

- “When you vote affirmatively you make a solemn covenant with the Lord that you will sustain, that is, give your full loyalty and support, without equivocation or reservation, to the officer for whom you vote” (Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual, 2002, pg 54).

To finish our assessment of Orson’s case, it bears noting that in 1875, at the insistence of Brigham Young, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles voted to demote Orson’s seniority, which meant that he would not be allowed to advance to the presidency:

“No man that falter or rebels can ever attain to the presidency of the Church. And because they faltered, Orson Pratt and Orson Hyde lost their place of seniority in the quorum, and were consequently thrown out of the line to the presidency.”  
 (President Joseph F. Smith, 1901; pg. 280, *Conflict in the Quorum*, Bergera).

The reason for the 1875 disciplinary council was to punish Orson’s ongoing refusal to keep his dissenting opinions private.

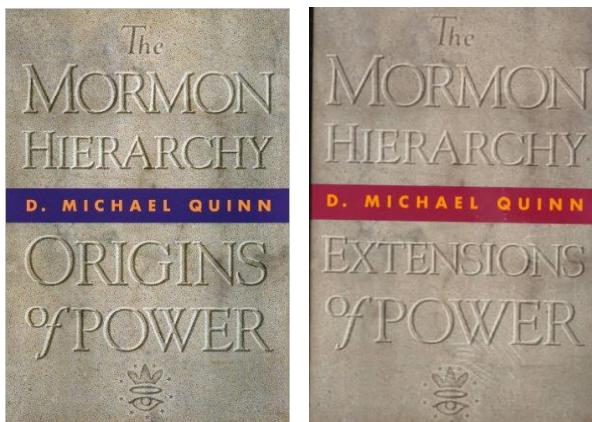
As noted by Todd Compton, the practice of forbidding open disagreement has led to “one of the most pervasive and unnecessary myths in Mormon culture: that church leaders are monolithically unified”. (5) For additional discussion on this point, see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

During one of his most bitter conflicts with President Young, in which pressure was being put on him to teach and support a doctrine with which he vigorously disagreed, Orson said:

“I am not a man to make a confession of what I do not believe. I am not going to crawl to Brigham Young and act the hypocrite. I will be a free man. It may cost me my fellowship, but I will stick to it. If I die tonight, I would say, O Lord God Almighty, I believe what I say.” (6)

In the end, he did lose a measure of fellowship, and it wasn’t because he lacked humility or virtue. It’s because the subordination-based approach to Mormonism is about bowing to men, and he wasn’t willing to do that. As Peter taught: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

One of the most well known passages in the Mormon canon implicitly predicts or foreshadows that Mormonism will struggle and fall often into subordination-based religion. In Doctrine and Covenants 121:39-46 we are warned that most officers will abuse the power they hold. It stands to reason then, that Mormon officers should be trusted no more than any other men, and should be treated with the same cautious respect that is appropriate to give to any other administrators, religious or otherwise.



Historian Jan Shipps once said of Michael Quinn:

"He may know more about the Mormon past than anybody alive. He could have had a successful career at Brigham Young University if he had been willing to give up his research in LDS Church history and just teach." [\(6\)](#)

But of course Michael wasn't willing to give up his research, and for the good of Mormonism, it was favorable that he didn't. In 1985, he produced one of the best Mormon history research papers that has ever been written: "Documenting Post-Manifesto Polygamy and How LDS Leaders Tried to Cover it Up" (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*)

The leadership, however, did not appreciate his work:

"[Jan] Shipps heard one church employee describe Quinn's piece as "two pages of saying, 'These men are prophets and I honor and respect them,' followed by 76 pages of 'They lied and lied and lied,' and then the last two pages of 'These are honorable men and prophets of my church.' "

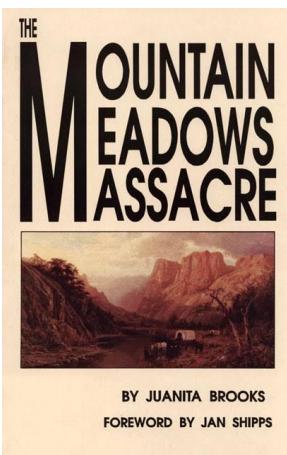
In response, Quinn's LDS stake president — who Quinn believes was directed to do so by [Boyd K.] Packer — reluctantly asked the professor to relinquish his Mormon "temple recommend."

....Three years after the Dialogue article, Quinn says, school officials were making his academic life tough, denying him sabbaticals and research time. The message seemed clear: Stop your work on Mormon history or lose your job. He resigned." [\(7\)](#)

There are distinct echoes here of what happened with Orson Pratt, and it's clear that the subordination-based approach to Mormonism was again the driving force behind the antagonism towards freedom of speech.

## 6

## Juanita Brooks (1898-1989)



It might be said that Juanita is a symbol for what it means to be a member of the *loyal opposition* within the Mormon church. Her masterwork, *Mountain Meadows Massacre*, overthrew the prevailing myths about what had happened, and forced the leaders to reconsider their official position about this dark event in Mormon history.

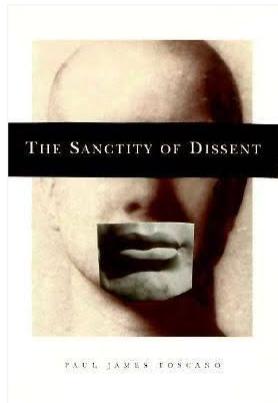
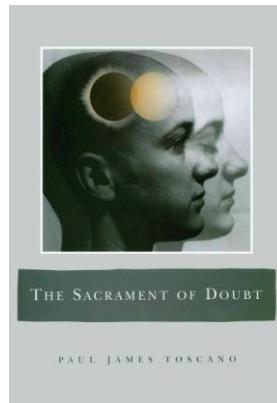
One of the reasons that Mountain Meadows is such an important event in Mormon history is because it demonstrates what can happen when the subordination approach to Mormonism takes over completely. Mob psychology comes into play, and “follow the leaders” becomes a war cry that drowns out everything that is good, honest, and virtuous.

Juanita was blacklisted and treated with hostility for her work, but refused to be intimidated. Her case is relatively similar to what happened with Lester Bush, whose important research about blacks and the priesthood also challenged the prevailing views. In the words of Gregory Prince, from his 2012 article “My Journey”:

“Three years after our move to Maryland, the Mormon world changed with Spencer Kimball’s revelation on Priesthood. JaLynn called me from the radio station where she was working and broke the news. We spent the evening at Lester [Bush’s] home as dozens of phone calls poured in from across the country to congratulate him. We learned later that his monograph had been even more important in the process than we then realized.

However, the whole episode turned out to be bittersweet, because I saw him become blacklisted by the church he had served so well. And, unlike Juanita Brooks who received similar treatment several decades earlier for her work on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, Lester eventually withdrew entirely from church activity.” (<http://trevorprice.net/2012/02/25/greg-prince-my-journey/>)

## 5 Paul Toscano



Two of the most underappreciated works in Mormon literature are Paul Toscano's books *The Sacrament of Doubt* (2007), and the *Sanctity of Dissent* (1994). In these works he argues powerfully for the conscience-based, individualist approach to Mormonism. His own life is a testament to that approach, and it's the reason he clashed with the leadership and was excommunicated in 1993.

His "crime" was to express public criticism of various aspects of the mainstream, including the white-washing of Mormon history, and the authoritarian attitudes and behaviors of the ranking officers. In addition, like Orson Pratt, he unapologetically asserted his own understanding of various doctrines, and was not willing to "make a confession of what he did not believe".

His wife Margaret was also excommunicated, for daring to publish her opinions about doctrinal and policy matters. She explains the impact her excommunication had on her:

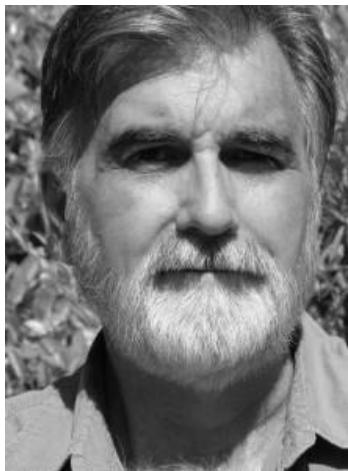
"...I was not expecting that I would have so much grief, but I cried for three days. I couldn't stop crying. ... Sometimes when I hear a Mormon hymn, I feel the grief. It's very primal. It really is." (9)

This is not the grief of a wicked person who has sinned and is pining over the punishment. This is the grief of a virtuous person who has given her best and most cherished gifts to her community, and been crushed and stepped on for offering those gifts. This is what inevitably happens within the subordination-based approach to Mormonism, is that it crushes the best and most unique flowers within the society, and treats them as poisonous weeds to be thrown out, annihilated, and forgotten.

There is a sanctity associated with dissent, and there is a sacrament associated with doubt. Without a proper understanding and application of these crucial elements of spirituality, true humility will never prevail within mainstream Mormonism, and progress will be damned.

## 4

## Rock Waterman



### Pure Mormonism

"We ought to obey God rather than men." -the Apostle Peter, Acts 5:29

In the eyes of a good number of the readers of his [Pure Mormonism](#) blog, Rock Waterman represents a scholarly and good-natured resistance against an imperious and often inconsistent Mormon hierarchy. His articles are meticulously researched and well argued. He rarely fails to both entertain and inform his readers with his posts.

Rock came into the national spotlight in 2014, just prior to his excommunication trial, when the New York Times ran an article: "[Mormons Say Critical Online Comments Draw Threats From Church](#)". A memorable post of his that is highlighted in the article includes the following plea or challenge that he issued to Mormon HQ:

"Stop making up your own rules and try preaching the Gospel of Christ for a change."

Within the context of conscience-based Mormonism, his [excommunication in 2015](#) represents another low point in modern Mormon history: an example of gross intolerance and authoritarianism.

Within the context of subordination-based Mormonism, the punishment was a long overdue comeuppance: the removal of a bad influence who deserved to be cast out.



## To The Remnant

...wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved. (1 Nephi 15:14)

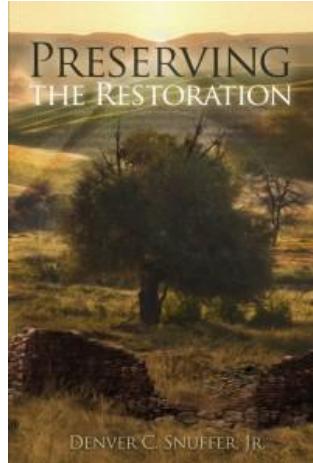
An exceptionally talented writer, formidable scriptorian, and publisher of the blog [To the Remnant](#), Adrian was [excommunicated in 2014](#) after being found guilty of apostasy.

He has written many unique and interesting posts, including the following:

- [An analysis of scriptures that are written in the sky](#), via movement of the constellations, which is a phenomenon the Mormon canon makes reference to, but which receives virtually no attention within the mainstream.
- [A revisionist take on several aspects of the Book of Mormon](#), and how the book is treated within the mainstream. Included in this series of posts is an outline of a [dream](#) that Adrian had during the highly stressful period surrounding his apostasy trial. It's one of the most impactful posts on the blog, and it explores a topic that most members have probably never thought about –what are the consequences and scriptures that relate to the highly conservative dress and grooming standards within mainstream Mormonism? It is a must read.
- [An in-depth look at the nature and purpose of prophets](#), reframing them as external forces outside the church (as well as within it), and offering a link to [Robert Sonntag's excellent study on the subject](#). The finishing post in this series is titled Prophets, Conclusion: [Manifesting the Gentile Affliction](#), and it is another must read.
- [An in-depth analysis into various controversial aspects of church history](#), and how various myths become accepted as reality over time.

As a thought leader within the emerging culture of "Uncorrelated Mormonism", Adrian might well be one of the most important iconoclasts within modern Mormon society.

## 2 Denver Snuffer, Jr.



A lawyer by vocation, and the author of [11 books](#), Denver joined the church as a young man, and for 40 years was by all accounts an exemplary member. The details of his excommunication in 2013 are [documented online](#), and are troubling to some members for the reason that high level officers appear to have been involved in making it happen, which violates the disciplinary protocols of the church.

Some within the Mormon community consider his research and exposition regarding the teachings of Joseph Smith to be the most accurate available anywhere. Others find many faults and problems with his work.

One point that sets him apart from most Mormons, and from most other people in general, is [his assertion that he has met the resurrected Christ](#). He doesn't mean it figuratively, metaphorically, or anything like that. He means it literally, in the flesh, face-to-face, like when Christ appeared to his disciples after the resurrection in 33 AD.

Whatever conclusion one might come to on that particular point, it would be hard to deny that Denver's opposition to mainstream Mormon thinking has made a significant impact. His vision of a [decentralized approach to Zion](#), in which families and small fellowships take responsibility for their own spiritual welfare, is a revolutionary concept when compared to the highly structured blueprint of the mainstream. It has provoked a fair amount of interest, criticism, and praise among many different stripes of Mormons.

Within this vision of uncorrelated Mormonism, who exactly has the power or responsibility to lead others? To whom does one look for guidance? On this point, Denver's message is perfectly clear, and it goes like this: Don't follow me or anyone else around like you're a lost puppy. I'm not the arbiter of your salvation. Approach God on your own, get your own revelations, and become spiritually independent.

Meanwhile, the message from the mainstream leaders is of a very different tone, and it goes like this: We won't ever lead you astray; you can trust us 100 percent. If you ever disobey us you will risk damnation. Never trust your own conscience over what we proclaim to be right and wrong.

In the end, the underlying clash of ideas can be boiled down to the binary with which we are now quite familiar:

a conscience-based, individualist approach to Mormonism, with self as the locus of authority --relying on personal revelation from the Holy Ghost

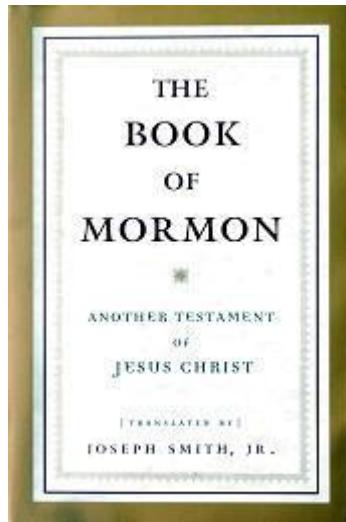
**versus**

a unity-at-all-costs, subordination-based approach to Mormonism, with other mortals as the locus of authority --relying on offices, titles, and traditions

This conflict is one of the deepest and longest-standing battles within Mormon theology, and it's far from being resolved. It involves the underlying nature of human conscience, and it's a conflict that plays out in the minds of millions of Mormons on a daily basis, whether or not they are consciously aware of it.

Within this conflict, it might be argued that Denver is in many ways a good example of the "everyman", the common member who has awoken to the necessity of choosing between those two basic constructs of authority. He has chosen the individualist approach, and it has disrupted and altered his life irrevocably, just as it did for Orson Pratt, and Helmuth Hubener, and every other person who has ever rejected the path of cultural conformity, and taken up the path of personal responsibility.

## 1 Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805-1844)



The founder of Mormonism, and translator of the [Book of Mormon](#), Joseph Smith belongs at the apex of this list for the reason that a fair number of his teachings are not welcome within present mainstream Mormon society. Some of his teachings have been causing backlash and resistance against the mainstream for a long time:

1. He taught people to engage in a conscience-based, individualist approach to Mormonism (see his quotes noted in #8 above, with additional discussion [here](#)). While it is true that some of his teachings support the subordination-based approach to Mormonism, it is a serious misrepresentation to cite those quotes without citing his other words that contradict and logically overthrow them. In addition to his direct quotations regarding the individualist approach, he taught that the Book of Mormon is the keystone of Mormonism, and in that book we find the conscience-based approach taught in a very powerful and repetitive way. A sampling of the relevant passages would include the following: 1 Nephi 10:19; 1 Nephi 11:1-3; 1 Nephi 15:8; 1 Nephi 16:24....Nephi stands up to his father; 2 Nephi 4:34-35; 2 Nephi 9:42; 2 Nephi 28:31, 2 Nephi 32:4-9; Enos 1; Mosiah 11-18...Abinidi & Alma the Elder stand up against King Noah; Mosiah 29:38; Alma 32; 3 Nephi 12:15-16; 3 Nephi 14:7-8; Helaman 13-15...Samuel the Lamanite stands up against the Nephite hierarchy; Moroni 7:15-16; Moroni 10:5.
2. He taught that each person should be open to the idea of trying to achieve a face-to-face meeting with God during their mortal life. See [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). This is an idea that has almost zero currency within the present mainstream, and in some cases it is actually [discouraged](#), much to the dismay of members who consider it to be an important aspect of the faith.

3. He taught that the Word of Wisdom is exactly what it claims to be within the canon: a recommendation, and not to be used as a coercive or exclusionary metric of worthiness (see [Section 89:2-3](#)). His position on this matter stands in sharp contrast to the current mainstream position, which is that select aspects of the Word of Wisdom are absolute requirements for full fellowship. Although it is understood within Mormonism that the canon can be expanded and contracted by new revelations, it appears that this particular change was a policy invention, with no revelation being presented, and no amendment to the original language in Section 89. In addition, the distinction between mild drinks (fermented beer and wine) as compared with strong drinks (distilled alcohol and hard liquor) has been [completely disregarded](#). This is an important consideration because Joseph Smith used wine for the Sacrament. In this regard, there are two different changes to the Word of Wisdom present within the mainstream: a qualitative change related to its former ecclesiastical neutrality, and a quantitative change related to the types and classes of substances that are allowable.

4. He publicly taught that monogamy was the only acceptable form of marital relationship. The legacy version of Section 101 of the Doctrine and Covenants (1835) states:

“Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.”

This was canonized during Joseph’s presidency. The monogamy-based concept of marriage was not publicly altered within the church until 1852, eighteen years after Joseph’s death, with the publication of Doctrine and Covenants 132. The current mainstream view in the matter is that plural marriage was approved of God for a period of about 50 years (1843-1890), and that for various reasons the leaders were justified in being secretive about it during the early years.

There is a small minority who consider the legacy version of Section 101 to be the inspired and final word on the topic of marriage (i.e., that monogamy was initially and always the divinely approved law of the church). They conclude that if Joseph secretly practiced polygamy, there is only one explanation for it: that he was acting improperly, and that there is [no good reason to defend his bad behavior](#).

There are of course many other schools of thought regarding what polygamy actually was, and who exactly practiced it. A rough cross section of the melee can be investigated [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Regardless of whether Joseph participated in polygamy or not, the fact remains that present mainstream Mormon culture rejects the public teachings of Joseph

Smith on the issue of monogamy circa 1830-1844, in favor of accepting the narrative that polygamy was a temporarily approved practice.

In sum: Joseph was an authentic *troublemaker*, which is to say, he was someone whose life work, behavior, or teachings cannot be judged as being such-and-such percentage virtuous, or such-and-such percentage immoral, without first undertaking a rather extensive investigation. The amount of contradictory evidence, and in some cases [intentional corruption of the historical record](#), creates a relatively steep barrier to entry.

Interestingly, Joseph claimed that early in his life an [angel told him](#) that his name would be known for good and evil among all people. And shortly before his death, he said this:

"You don't know me; you never knew my heart. No man knows my history. ...I don't blame anyone for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I would not have believed it myself. I never did harm any man since I was born in the world. My voice is always for peace." (Documentary History of the Church, 6:317.)

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## Honorable Mentions



A more complete survey of Mormon dissent would involve at least a "Top 500" list, and probably closer to a "Top 5,000" list, because there are many individuals and groups who have attempted to impact Mormon culture in a positive way, and more than a few of them have lost their standing or reputation in the church as a result of their efforts. Below is an incomplete, first blush list intended to identify a rough cross section of who has been involved in recent years. The list is ordered alphabetically by first name.

It's worth noting that the ultimate religious dissenter of all time was Jesus of Nazareth. He openly defied the religious authorities of his time, and unleashed torrents of public criticism upon them, while acknowledging that they did indeed "sit in the seat of Moses".

He seemed to be trying to communicate something like this to them: Hey guys, your positions of influence are important, and you came to power through God's will, but you aren't honoring your offices very well. Your titles and offices don't obligate anyone to give you obedience or respect. Please repent and do better --a lot better. I'm willing to risk my life in trying to help you see the light, but I can't force you to see it, --you have to open your eyes.

Along these lines, it seems that in order to follow the example of Christ in many different contexts and situations, it is necessary to become a dissenter against the status quo, or an agent of opposition towards the institutions and administrators that are upholding the status quo (see Matthew 10:34-38).

With that in mind, it makes sense that in order to find the best and brightest individuals in Mormon society, one must look among those who have been labeled by the mainstream as apostates, traitors, doubters, and critics.

This dichotomy will remain in place until such time that a conscience-based, individualist approach to Mormonism somehow prevails over the deeply entrenched subordination-based approach to Mormonism that presently rules the day.

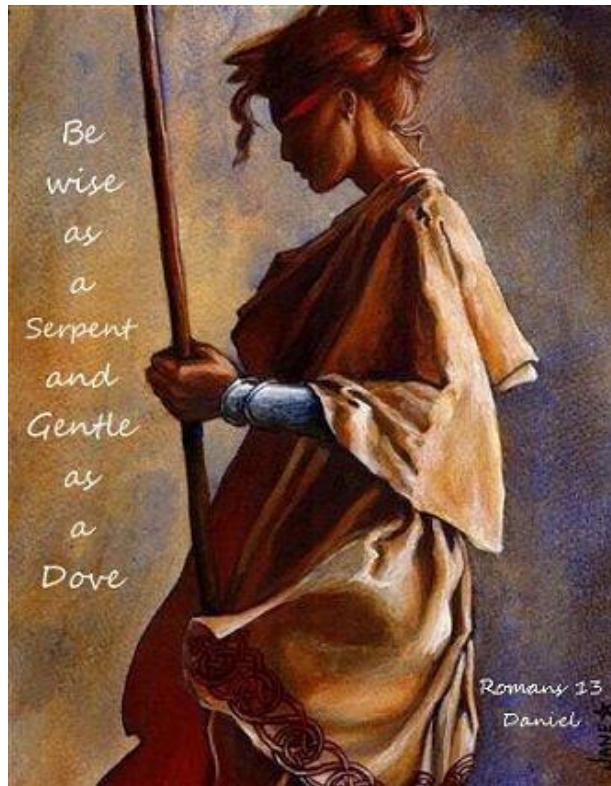
Imagine for a moment the unstoppable power of a people who have no self-righteousness about their traditions, who follow a conscience-based approach to religion, who do not place loyalty to titles or administrative offices above loyalty to what is right, who are willing to investigate their own weaknesses with honesty and openness, and who are willing to make frequent and significant changes in order to improve and repent.

What would be the result of such behavior? It would be Zion --the attainment of which is the official stated goal of the Mormon people. It is a goal towards which they have struggled for many years, but not yet attained. As long as Mormon culture continues to teach that all of its traditions and policies are by definition perfect and unimpeachable, and as long as it continues to hold that public dissent is fundamentally evil and destructive, progress towards Zion will remain limited and even damned.

## 50 Honorable Mentions

[Anonymous Bishop](#)  
[Anthony Larson](#)  
[April Young Bennett](#)  
[Alisha Worthington](#)  
[Armand Mauss](#)  
[Avraham Gileadi](#)  
[Bret Corbridge](#)  
[Caroline Kline](#)  
[Chelsea Shields Strayer](#)

[Christopher Bentley](#)  
[Claudia Bushman](#)  
[Connor Boyack](#)  
[D. Christian Markham](#)  
[Dan Wotherspoon](#)  
[Danielle Mooney](#)  
[Darius Gray](#)  
[David Mason](#)  
[Deanna Spingola](#)  
[Elisabeth Smith](#)  
[Emily Clyde Curtis](#)  
[Fiona Givens](#)  
[Gregory Prince](#)  
[Jack Monnett](#)  
[Janice Allred](#)  
[Jay Griffith](#)  
[Jefferey Nielsen](#)  
[Jenne Alderks](#)  
[Jessica Oberan Steed](#)  
[Joanna Brooks](#)  
[John Dehlin](#)  
[Kate Kelly](#)  
[Ken Bowers](#)  
[Kistin Hodson](#)  
[Kristine Haglund](#)  
[Lavina Andersen](#)  
[Lester Bush](#)  
[Lynne Kanavel Whitesides](#)  
[Meghan Raynes Matthews](#)  
[Maxine Hanks](#)  
[Mette Ivie Harrison](#)  
[Mormon Heretic](#)  
[Neylan McBaine](#)  
[Richard Bushman](#)  
[Robert Smith](#)  
[Ron Madson](#)  
[Scott Stover](#)  
[Sean Isaac May](#)  
[Thomas G. Harrison](#)  
[Tim Malone](#)  
[Tyrel Givens](#)



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