

Chapter 3 – Rhetoric: Words Don’t Make It So

The Latter-day Saints have been instructed to build Zion in preparation for the glorious Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have been given a prophet, apostles, priesthood, temples, scripture, and revelation to help them with this magnificent task.

Meanwhile Satan has assigned himself the task of disrupting the plan. He doesn’t necessarily need to make the Saints into sinners; he just needs to distract them from doing what they should be doing. He likes to set up decoys. He doesn’t care if we go to church, as long as church doesn’t affect our lives the rest of the week. He doesn’t mind if we recite scripture. He does it himself. He just doesn’t want us to truly understand and live the principles taught in the scriptures. He is not afraid of the words. The father of lies is a master manipulator of words. What scares him is the Truth.

Before we can examine the various ways in which Truth can be distorted, twisted, minimized, rationalized, and ignored, we must first return to the scriptures and discover what is meant by the word Truth (with a capital “T”).

In a revelation given to Joseph Smith at Kirkland Ohio on May 6th, 1833, the Lord gave a clear definition of truth. "And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come;" (D&C 93:24). This scripture settles, once and for all, the ages-old debate regarding subjectivity and objectivity. The debate has been over the question of whether there is an objective world, and if so, can it ever be known by the subjective human mind. The scripture states that there is a real, objective, existence – the way things are. The verse also states that reality can be known. Knowledge of reality, past, present, and future, is given as the very definition of truth.

The next verse points out that knowledge that is not literal, or, in other words, knowledge of things as they are not, were not, and will not be, is from Satan. "And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that one who was a liar from the beginning." (D&C 93:25).

Of course it is not possible in this life to gain a complete understanding of the entire past, present, and future. Two years earlier the Lord told Joseph Smith and his followers, "Behold, ye are little children and ye cannot bear all things now; ye must grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth." (D&C 50:40). The point is that we should be actively making an effort. We should be continually seeking and growing in Truth.

The only way one can grow in grace and truth is to believe in, and obey the commandments of, Jesus Christ. "I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying; He received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth; and no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. (D&C 93:26-28).

In the New Testament, Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the Truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32). And the Lord told Joseph Smith "The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth" (D&C 93: 36).

These scriptures imply a direct correlation between righteousness and advanced knowledge. If keeping the commandments results in one receiving truth and light, then it

follows that a person who is not growing in truth and light is not keeping the Lord's commandments.

This opens up a clear line of attack for Satan. If he cannot get us to commit great sins, it is enough that he keep us from learning and study – especially study of the scriptures. We cannot continue in the word of Christ if we never read it.

Joseph Smith and the Truth

It is important to remember that the Latter-day Saints differ from other religious traditions in the extreme literalness with which we understand our scriptures and our religious history. When we say that God and Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith we do not mean in some mystical, dreamlike, or “spiritual” sense. We mean that he saw and talked to them face to face, in the flesh, in a real place, in real time, using the spoken word, just as one person talks to another.

Of course, the exchange was far from ordinary. He mentions, for example, that their “brightness and glory defy all description” (Joseph Smith 2:17); and, of course, the message they gave was extraordinary. But the point is that believing Mormons accept that this event actually, really, truly happened. It is true that there are different accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision, and that they vary on some points, but Joseph Smith insists that the experience really, literally, happened.

Joseph Smith was not a mystic. He is either a true Prophet of God or an astonishingly effective liar. He can never be considered as just another frontier preacher, or just another revivalist reformer of his time, or just another visionary that started another American church. His challenge to us is his testimony, and the testimony of others of his contemporaries, and the testimony of millions of current day Latter-day Saints, that he saw and conversed with heavenly beings, that the Book of Mormon was given to him by Moroni, the resurrected son of Mormon who compiled the book around 400 B.C., that Joseph and Oliver Cowdery were given the authority to baptize by the same John who baptized Jesus, and that they were given the priesthood office of Apostle by the laying on of the hands of the resurrected Peter, James and John who once walked the Earth with Jesus.

Anyone is free to believe or to disbelieve the story of Joseph Smith, but it is an up or down proposition. It is either true or not true. Some may claim to accept some parts of his story and not other parts, but they are either rationalizing or confused. Because Joseph Smith himself insists on a strict literal interpretation of his claims, any other interpretation is a form of disbelief. The following is his testimony:

I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase; and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and by my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all the sects -all united to persecute me.

It caused me serious reflection then, and often has since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them the spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and it was often the cause of great sorrow to myself.

However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had beheld a vision. I have thought since, that I felt much like Paul, when he made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice; but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew, and would know to his latest breath, that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise.

So it was with me, I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation. (Joseph Smith History 22-25)

Clearly Joseph Smith felt bound to the reality of what he had seen and heard no matter how persecuted he was for telling the story. He could not deny what he knew to be true - even though he led a life of near constant persecution from that time until he was eventually murdered for his beliefs. His uncompromising mission to promote the Truth at all costs is the strongest indicator of his prophetic calling.

It seems as though the adversary was aware, at a very early period of my life, that I was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom; else why should the powers of darkness combine against me? Why the opposition and persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy?
(Joseph Smith History 20)

Jesus Christ and the Truth

Interestingly, many of the same accusations that were hurled against Joseph Smith were also hurled against Jesus Christ. He was an outsider, uneducated, a rabble-rouser, an itinerant, and a visionary (in the cynical sense). From the very beginning of their respective ministries their greatest enemies were the established clergy.

Ultimately, it was the chief priests and elders to whom Judas betrayed Christ. It was they who plotted to have Him killed. It was they who sent the temple guard to arrest Him. It was they who incited the crowd to cry out to Pilate for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus. It was the religious leaders of the Jews who incited the crowd to say, fatefully, “His blood be on us, and on our children.”

Jesus was arrested because the High Priest Caiaphas had persuaded the leaders of the council that Jesus was dangerous and should die. His teachings were too radical and his following was growing too large for these well-heeled Pharisees and Scribes to feel comfortable.

A mock trial was held to convict Jesus before the Sanhedrin. In the Matthew version, Jesus listens quietly to the proceedings, saying nothing, until the high priest asks him point blank, “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God” (Matthew 26:63).

In the next verse, Jesus answers the question affirmatively. “Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). The high priest made a great show of shock and offense by tearing his clothes and declaring Jesus guilty of blasphemy. The council agreed that Jesus was guilty of this capital offense.

At this point there were two problems before the council. The first was a religious problem and it was largely ignored. Perhaps a few members of the Sanhedrin privately wondered about the question, but there is no record of their bringing up the issue during the trial. This is the question of whether or not Jesus could possibly be telling the truth about himself.

Claiming to be the Messiah was, indeed, blasphemy unless, of course, one *was* the Messiah. As the religious leaders of a nation that had been (and still is) looking for the Messiah to come, one would think it would have been worth a little of their time to examine the evidence on this question. Since the inquiry began with the outcome already decided, the Sanhedrin managed to convict of blasphemy the one person who could *never* be guilty of blasphemy. They convicted Jehovah of claiming to be himself.

The second problem was a political problem. As a Roman-occupied nation, they had no legal power to execute anyone. Caiaphas and the other council leaders went to great effort to solve this problem. To get what they wanted, they had to persuade a Roman governor that Jesus deserved to die. They adopted two strategies that would have the maximum effect on swaying Pilate: 1. Question Pilate’s loyalty to Rome, and 2. Incite the crowd (i.e. popular opinion) against Jesus.

The story of Jesus before Pilate, as told in John chapters 18 and 19, is an instructive example of the rhetorical interaction between political expediency and the Truth. All of the politicians, from Annas, to Caiaphas, to Pilate, were primarily concerned with their image before the public, and with overcoming any perceived

challenges to their authority. When Jesus is first brought before Pilate, Pilate is annoyed at being dragged into a religious squabble between the High Priest of this strange provincial religion, and some itinerant preacher.

If Pilate had had any initial political interest in the case it would have been the question of whether this Jesus was any possible threat to Rome. This question was answered when Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world: If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” (John 18:36). This told Pilate that Jesus’ interests were religious, not political, and that His followers were not violent. Still Pilate asked a follow up question, just to be sure.

“Pilate therefore said unto him. Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and to this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” (John 18:37).

Pilate then asks the famous question “What is Truth?” Jesus refuses to answer the question not because it has no answer, and certainly not because he doesn’t know the answer, but because he recognizes that Pilate is not really interested in the answer. It’s an example of not casting your pearls before swine.

Jesus had spent his entire ministry teaching people as much Truth as they were prepared to hear. In the case of the religious leaders in Jerusalem, who had had him arrested and sent to Pilate, Jesus had actually taught *more* Truth than the audience was prepared to hear. But this pagan Roman politician posturing before Christ had no idea at all what was really going on (though perhaps his wife’s dream caused Pilate to be a bit wary). His question “What is Truth?” is an example of that ages-old tool of politicians known as the rhetorical question.

The rhetorical question is more of a debating posture than a genuine question. It is often defined as “a question posed for the sake of argument.” In other words, the questioner is not interested in an answer. The question is intended to say to the opponent “Your point doesn’t clarify anything,” “What you just said has no value,” and “No matter what you say I can top you.” More importantly, the rhetorical question is designed to impress the audience. The question is intended to show the audience that the speaker is smarter, wittier, and cleverer than his opponent.

Nevertheless, Pilate had the honesty to announce to the crowd, “I find in him no fault at all” (John 19:38). Pilate knew he had no reason, under Roman law, to execute Jesus. He tried several times to release him. He even came up with the clever strategy to release Jesus as the prisoner granted clemency in honor of the Passover holiday. But the crowd chose Barabbas. And Pilate washed his hands.

The ultimate test for any politician is when they have to choose between the Truth and pleasing the crowd. Sadly, for most politicians, throughout most of history, these types of decisions are not even difficult. Popularity wins out every time.

Rhetoric

In order to reconcile the ways of Babylon with the ways of Zion, it has been necessary to circumvent the inconvenient barriers of scripture and conscience by

the use of the tried and true device of rhetoric, defined by Plato as "the art of making true things seem false and false things seem true by the use of words." This invaluable art has, since the time of Cain, invested the ways of Babylon with an air of high purpose, solid virtue, and impeccable respectability." (Hugh Nibley, "What is Zion? A Distant View," *Approaching Zion*. p. 45)

The declining years of ancient civilization were beset by a feverish preoccupation with rhetoric which suggests nothing so much as a hopeless alcoholic's devotion to the bottle. Everywhere the ancient's give us to understand that rhetoric is their poison, that it is ruining their capacity to work and think, that it disgusts and wearies them, and that they cannot leave it alone, because it pays too well, and having destroyed everything else, it is all they have left of remembered grandeur. (Hugh Nibley, "Victoriosa Loquacitas: The Rise of Rhetoric and the Decline of Everything Else," *The Ancient State*, p. 243)

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. It has long been the key to success here in Satan's world (success, of course, being defined in terms of money). Satan himself is the leading master of the art. Rhetoric is the primary tool of heretics and anti-Christ in the scriptures. It is the weapon of shysters, con men, and embezzlers. It is the language of business, sales, marketing, advertising, and public relations. Rhetoric corrupts the workplace, the media, and even such important institutions as our schools and our churches.

Rhetoric, and the selfish materialism it engenders, has been the downfall of great civilizations. Its popularity grows from the simple fact that it is much easier, and pays much better, to *appear* virtuous than to actually *be* virtuous. The ancient Greeks discovered, for example, that the pursuit of truth through the study of philosophy was difficult, whereas the pursuit of money through the study of public speaking was easy. Hence, they married philosophy to rhetoric and created Sophistry.

Sophistry has a bad reputation today. The word implies "sophisticated lying" and it is used to accuse someone of being manipulative. The ironic point here is that while the word itself is no longer used to identify them, there are more sophists today than ever before and their goal of manipulating truth to make money is unchanged. The difference is that modern science and technology has given them tools far more pervasive, and far more insidious, than their predecessors could ever have dreamed of.

Sophisticated techniques of coercion and manipulation have moved from the interrogation room, to the sales floor, to the office, and into our homes. From the wearing of "power ties" to the use of "neuro-linguistic programming" techniques, simple human communication is increasingly being replaced by exploitation. Basic public discourse becomes corrupted as we increasingly see each other as "marks" and/or "manipulators" rather than as people. (See Douglas Rushkoff, *Coercion*, p. 63-65).

Rhetoric is the method by which our politicians lie to us. It is also the method by which they, in turn, are manipulated by moneyed interests. Because of the potential power of the masses, the powerful have always found it necessary to keep "the rabble" under control somehow. In less sophisticated societies control is done through force. Policemen are replaced with soldiers, the working class is kept hungry, and dissidents and intellectuals "disappear."

In our society, we have in place the institutional mechanisms of democracy, by which the people could potentially rule themselves. Thus, in our society it is important for the powerful to control the masses by controlling and manipulating public opinion. Those members of the public who actually participate in the political process are a potential threat to entrenched power unless they can be trained to believe and vote “correctly.”

Sophisticated, deliberate, scientifically tested, propaganda techniques are not limited to politics or to the expensive commercial ad campaigns we see on television. They have been a pervasive part of every aspect of our lives since at least the early part of the last century. It is vitally important that the Latter-day Saints become aware of how this insidious art infiltrates our society and how it works, not so that we can become rich, but so that we can keep our priorities straight and see through the smooth lies that surround us daily.

Rhetoricians understand that the easiest people to persuade are those who believe they are immune to persuasion. This group is so naive they become willing accomplices in their own seduction. The trick, known since ancient times, is to use flattery. This group can be won over to practically any point of view by telling them how special they are, how unique, how important.

The Book of Mormon repeatedly warns the Latter-day Saints about politicians who use “flattering words” to lead the hearts of the people away from the Lord and toward riches. King Noah (Mosiah 11:7), Korihor (Alma 30:47), Amalickiah (Alma 46:7), Morianton (Alma 50:35), and Gadianton (Helaman 2:4-5) are among the evil men described in the Book of Mormon as using “flattering words” to “lead the hearts of the people” away from the Truth. It was Samuel the Lamanite, an outsider, whom the Lord sent to the Nephites in Zarahemla to point out their habit of ignoring the prophets and rewarding the sophists:

Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil.

But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth—and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.

Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him. (Helaman 13:26-28.)

There is a scene in the farcical Monty Python film *The Life of Brian* in which Brian, whom many have mistaken for the Messiah, shouts to the crowd, "Don't follow

anyone. Think for yourself. You are all individuals." The crowd shouts back, in unison, "We are all individuals." To the moviegoer this scene is funny because of the incongruity between what the crowd is saying and what the crowd is doing.

In real life, however, this scene is not so funny because it illustrates how easily people can be manipulated. The key point is that the people in the crowd are completely unaware of the irony of their situation. They do not see the inconsistency between what they say and what they do. They have been skillfully manipulated and yet are completely unaware of it.

I'm sure, kind reader, that this idea will be hard to accept, but it is very likely that many of the ideas, opinions, and beliefs that you think of as your own, have been carefully and deliberately planted into your mind by corporate and political elites in order to make you easier to control. Before you dismiss this idea out of hand, may I suggest that it is certainly worth some of your time to examine this possibility? If you are truly committed, as a Latter-day Saint, to building the Kingdom of God on Earth, isn't it your solemn responsibility, as the Apostle Paul said, to "prove all things" and only "hold fast" to "that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5: 21)? Certainly we should all be more aware and more critical of the messages that we are fed by commercial and political interests.

Please understand. I am not saying that we (I include myself) are all stupid. I am saying that we are all victims. Satan's kingdom runs more smoothly when people just accept the status quo, believe what they are told, do what is expected, and don't ask difficult questions. Is it really surprising to learn that Satan uses the most advanced and sophisticated techniques possible to keep people from seeing the truth? Indeed, we should expect it from him. The challenge for the Latter-day Saints is to open our eyes and really see what is going on.

Labels

Every rhetorician knows that his most effective weapons by far are *labels*. He can demolish the opposition with simple and devastating labels such as communism, socialism, or atheism, popery, militarism, or Mormonism, or give his client's worst crimes a religious glow with noble labels such as integrity, old fashioned honesty, tough mindedness, or free competitive enterprise. "You can get away with anything if you just wave the flag," a business partner of my father once told me. He called that patriotism. (Hugh Nibley, "What is Zion: A Distant View," *Approaching Zion*, p. 53)

Modern political and commercial discourse is filled with labels that don't mean what they purport to mean. Certain labels have come to symbolize the precise opposite of what they represent in fact. This corruption of our language is the result of decades of professional rhetoricians refining and perfecting their techniques of manipulation. The public at large has proven to be practically helpless in the face of large-scale, psychologically sophisticated, and well-funded efforts to coerce them into becoming excessive, spoiled consumers and knee-jerk, non-thinking citizens.

Nevertheless, the public has still not completely lost its ability to smell a rat. One marketplace label that has almost completely lost its rhetorical, persuasive, usefulness is

the word, “Free.” The public has pretty much caught on to the fact that, in the marketplace, the word “Free” is an eye-catching, advertising gimmick, not a promise to give you something for nothing. Whenever one sees the word, “Free” it is now almost automatic for people to ask, “What’s the catch?” Advertising gimmicks of this sort have trained people to be cynical. (For missionaries trying to teach the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, this automatically suspicious reaction from people just makes their jobs harder).

My hope is that people will become more consciously aware of WHY labels like “Free” are misleading and manipulative. It is not enough to smell the rat and just ignore the sales come on (although that is an important step). I believe it is important to try to understand and see through the manipulative technique being used on you. Those who merely “sense” the manipulations going on in politics and the marketplace easily become fatalistic and cynical. They tend to drop out of the system rather than stay and try to improve it. These are those who say, “Nothing will change anyway,” and “All politicians are crooked.” These are the people who allow the corrupt system to continue because they surrender to it rather than fight it.

I believe the Latter-day Saints, if we are to fulfill our important mission to build Zion (see chapter 2), must become active agents of change. We do not have the option to become apolitical or cynical. We must work to improve things. A good starting point is to reevaluate our understanding of and feelings toward two emotionally charged and often misunderstood political labels – “Conservative” and “Liberal.”

The political labels “Conservative” and “Liberal” carry a lot of baggage. To many people in Utah “Conservative” has come to mean “good” while “Liberal” has come to mean “bad.” This absurd reductionism in the definitions of two words that used to have real meaning would do the thought police of George Orwell’s *1984* proud. The success of this label manipulation is a tribute to the effectiveness of the Utah Republican image machine since Cleon Skousen began redefining the Constitution for Utahns back in the 1960’s.

Let’s first look at the word “Conservative.” The word implies restraint, preservation, and protection – the maintaining of traditional values. Mormons tend to think of Nephi raising the “Title of Liberty,” during a time of political crisis in the Book of Mormon as a “conservative” action. The banner read: “In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children” (Alma 46:12). Certainly those of us who have homes and families and freedom would agree that preserving them is a noble cause.

But we must ask the question, do the actions of those modern politicians who call themselves “Conservatives” really promote the values they claim to hold so dear? Do the so-called “Conservatives” really “conserve?”

The easiest area in which to see through the deception of modern political “Conservatives” is in environmental issues. Why don’t “Conservatives” believe in the conservation of our natural environment? Aren’t clean air and water traditional values? Why do they dislike, and even make fun of, Conservationists?

Another revealing area is in the “conservative” attitude toward the poor. When did “traditional values” come to mean, “I got mine and I ain’t sharing with nobody!”? Why do modern political “Conservatives” often choose to emphasize their “Christianity” by being intolerant, even bigoted, toward other religions, races, beliefs, and lifestyles?

And if “conservative” implies “restraint,” why are modern so-called “Conservatives” always the first to want to go to war over anything?

For people like Dick Armey, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Newt Gingrich, Rush Limbaugh, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and the Bush family to call themselves “Conservative” is a mind-boggling rhetorical stretch of what used to be a noble word. And for Mormons to politically support these scary people, the same kind of people who burned our homes, hounded and killed our Prophet, and exiled us from the mid-West to Utah, astonishes and frightens me every day.

The word “Liberal” means “generous.” It implies giving, abundance, and unselfishness. Forgive me if the following statement seems outrageous, but in my view, without question, both God and Jesus are liberal – thankfully, gratefully, generously so. Everything we are, everything we have, everything we ever hope to become, is an abundant, generous, and undeserved gift from God.

The Mormon Church was founded because Joseph Smith had a vision after praying about this Bible scripture:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. (James 1:5)

This verse of scripture is quoted often in Mormon teaching. It is an essential part of the Joseph Smith story. However, we rarely consider its full import because we are usually more interested in moving ahead to the part of the story wherein Joseph Smith receives an amazing answer to his prayer. Let’s consider the verse a bit more deeply here. It is surprisingly revealing about the nature of God.

This verse points out that God gives blessings to everyone, without qualification. Not only that, but He gives liberally, meaning generously and in abundant quantity. In addition to all the blessings He provides naturally, He actually encourages us to ask for more. And the most delightful guarantee about asking God for blessings is that He will never upbraid you for it! To upbraid means to reproach, to find fault with. This verse promises that God will never criticize us for seeking blessings. He will simply bless us! God’s unselfish generosity is an example of liberality we all should emulate.

In fairness I should admit that political liberals often don’t measure up to the standard of generosity and unselfishness any better than political conservatives measure up to the standard of restraint and preservation. The challenge I am presenting in this book is for the Latter-day Saints to consider which standard is more worth pursuing? Which one is more in line with our stated goals? Where should we be directing our efforts?

Modern Conservatives and Liberals have very different attitudes and approaches to change. Conservatives tend to have the attitude “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” This approach supports and upholds the status quo situation of Satan’s world. Modern American Liberals tend to focus on injustice and ask what can be done about it. Many were greatly influenced by, can easily quote, John F. Kennedy’s inaugural challenge: “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” Which of these attitudes, making excuses for the state of the world, or actively working to improve the world, is truly more worthy of a people claiming the title of “Latter-day Saints?”

Propaganda

Support our troops. Who can be against that? Or yellow ribbons. Who can be against that? The issue was, Do you support our policy? But you don't want people to think about that issue. That's the whole point of good propaganda. You want to create a slogan that nobody's going to be against, and everybody's going to be for. Nobody knows what it means because it doesn't mean anything. Its crucial value is that it diverts your attention from a question that does mean something. Do you support our policy? That's the one you're not allowed to talk about. So you have people arguing about support for the troops? "Of course I don't *not* support them." Then you've won. (Noam Chomsky, "Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda," *Open Magazine Pamphlet Series*, quoted in Douglas Rushkoff, *Coercion*, p. 144)

We are living through end-stage propaganda, a culture which has been subjected to so much assertion of authority – so much programming – that it exhibits pathological symptoms. Those of us who have been coerced into submission find ourselves feeling powerless, passive, or depressed, and we may even resort to medication. Those of us compelled to resist these authorities tend to become suspicious and cynical.

(Douglas Rushkoff, *Coercion: Why We Listen to What "They" Say*, p.23)

As I write this, a Republican candidate for Congress from Utah is using the campaign slogan "Less Government, More Opportunity." This same candidate has TV ads bragging about all he has done for education while in the Utah state legislature. Anyone who knows the record of this candidate knows he is no friend of education, but that is seemingly irrelevant in an election campaign where slogans, and having the money to spread them, are far more important than the facts.

"Less Government, More Opportunity" is a clever, well-researched campaign slogan that should work well in a political climate wherein the government has been demonized for more than 30 years as the cause of all that is wrong with anything. It will be especially effective among the Utah Republican faithful in the Primary election this candidate is facing. The problem I have with this nice-sounding slogan is that it is an outrageous, bald-faced, lie.

Remember, the electorate (and, I would submit, especially the Utah electorate) has been trained to be completely uncritical when it comes to anything political. We allow an outrageous political slogan like "Less Government, More Opportunity" to slide right by us without even thinking to ask the two obvious questions: 1. Less of what part of government? and, 2. More opportunity for whom? What this candidate literally means, and his voting record clearly shows, is lower taxes for the wealthy (so he will have more money to spend on himself - no matter who gets hurt), less government regulation of any kind (so he can do as he darn well pleases in his business without the government trying to keep him honest), and fewer government services for everyone (because the rich people he really represents can afford their own services).

As far as opportunity goes, less government means LESS opportunity for most Americans. I find it shocking that people even need to be reminded of this. Here is just a quick, partial list of government programs that provide opportunity: Public education, Roads and highways, Municipal water and sewer, College grants and loans, Peace Corps, Military service, Environmental protection, Food and Drug safety, Mail service, Police and Fire protection, Parks, Voting rights, Disability rights, Medicare, Social Security, Non-discrimination laws, Public libraries, Food stamps... on and on.

Can you imagine life in this country without the programs listed above? Just what part of government do these Republicans propose to eliminate? If they would be specific, the public could fairly evaluate whether or not to agree with them. For this reason you will rarely find a Republican being specific during a campaign about what part of government they want to cut. That might cause the voters to actually begin to think critically about policy questions rather than simply react to slogans. The one thing we can't afford in this country is an informed electorate. If voters were to open their eyes, politicians might have to start telling the truth!

So who gets "More opportunity" when there is "Less government?" The idle super rich and the greedy "wannabe" rich are the only ones who benefit from less government, and they, of course, are the primary constituents of the Republican Party.

Clearly, the phrase "less government" is not meant to be analyzed critically by the voter. It is, rather, a catch phrase, or label, by which the candidate identifies himself as a political "conservative." The reason this candidate wants that identification is that the majority of voters in his district (especially primary election voters) identify themselves that way and he is signaling that he is "one of them," that he supports their "values," that he will vote in Congress as they would vote

The truth is that very few of the voters in this candidate's district live in the style he does, support the "corporate values" he keeps hidden, or would vote for the extreme partisan positions this guy promotes. They just lack the ability to see through his carefully crafted, slickly produced, rhetoric. The entire campaign may turn out to be effective politics, but the claims being made have nothing at all to do with the truth and, in fact, very little to do with reality.

From now on I would like to see truth tellers speak up every time some Republican starts to bad mouth the government, again, or talks about cutting taxes, again. It could easily be done in a friendly way, with grace and humor.

I like the scene in the Monty Python film, *The Life of Brian*, in which the rebels are plotting against Rome and their leader says, "They take everything that we have... And what have *THEY* ever given *US* in return?" There is a pause and one of the rebels says, "The aquaduct?" The leader says, "Oh, yeah, yeah, they did give us that. Ah, that's true, yeah." "And sanitation," says another. "Yeah, alright, I'll grant you the aquaduct and the sanitation are two things the Romans have done." "And the roads." someone pipes up. "Well yeah obviously the roads, I mean the roads go without saying, don't they? But apart from the sanitation, the aquaduct, and the roads..." "Irrigation?" "Medicine?" "Education!" Others chime in. The list gets longer until the leader finally says, "All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh water system, and public health, *WHAT* have the Romans ever done for *US*?"

The next time you hear a Republican complain about the government, speak up. Tell him some things the government has done for you and then ask him to be specific about his complaints. If he is a candidate, ask why, if the government is so evil, is he so anxious to be a part of it?

I'm not advocating that Democrats start arguments everywhere they go, but I believe it is time to point out that the Republican Emperor is missing some clothes. There are far more Mormon Democrats than most people suspect. It is high time to end the silence and speak out boldly. I remember dating a woman in college who was a bit surprised that I, a returned Mormon missionary, could be so strongly a Democrat. She went home to tell her parents this surprising news and learned for the first time that her faithful Mormon father, a railroad employee, was himself a strong Democrat!

Brainwashing

It would be better not to know so many things than to know so many things that are not so. (Felix Okoye, *The American Image of Africa: Myth and Reality*, quoted in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, by James W. Loewen, p.11)

The process of creating and entrenching highly selective, reshaped or completely fabricated memories of the past is what we call "indoctrination" or "propaganda" when it is conducted by official enemies, and "education," "moral instruction" or "character building," when we do it ourselves. It is a valuable mechanism of control, since it effectively blocks any understanding of what is happening in the world. One crucial goal of successful education is to deflect attention elsewhere – say, to Vietnam, or Central America, or the Middle East, where our problems allegedly lie – and away from our own institutions and their systematic functioning and behavior, the real source of a great deal of the violence and suffering in the world. It is crucially important to prevent understanding and to divert attention from the sources of our own conduct, so that the elite groups can act without popular constraints to achieve their goals--which are called "The national interest" in academic theology. (Noam Chomsky, "The Manufacture of Consent," *The Chomsky Reader*, p.114)

The insidious thing about brainwashing is that, if it is done correctly, the victim is completely unaware that the beliefs and attitudes they think of as theirs have actually been "implanted" in their minds by an external force. This fact should give us pause since it means that any of us may, in fact, be brainwashed to some degree or another. Unless we are in the habit of periodically challenging our own assumptions and honestly examining the roots of our own beliefs, we are at the mercy of those who desire to control our thoughts and feelings.

In fact, any form of indoctrination by which our beliefs and attitudes have been manipulated by external forces may be considered to be "brainwashing" to the extent that said indoctrination has occurred without our awareness. I don't mean to sound like a "conspiracy nut," but the fact is that for decades major social, commercial, and political forces in our society have spent millions of hours and billions of dollars in, mostly

successful, efforts to “control the public mind” (See Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, p. 17). They have become quite good at it, and the fact that we generally seem unaware of being manipulated is a sign of their effectiveness.

This may seem like a circular argument at first. I appear to be saying that the proof that we have all been brainwashed is the fact that most of us would strongly insist that our opinions and beliefs are exclusively our own – that we have definitely NOT been brainwashed. Actually I am just trying to point out that advertising and public relations would not be multi-billion dollar industries if they were ineffective. The folks with big money are getting exactly what they want from all those jingles, and slogans, and logos, and billboards, and ads, and commercials, and junk mail, and intrusive phone calls, and Internet pop-ups, or they simply would not continue. And we (and our wallets and our votes) are the victims, the marks, the target, the prize.

The cultural, economic, political, educational, and social fabric of our modern American society has been deliberately created for us by powerful interests and big money. We have been told “Big Lies” (a propaganda technique) such as: “In any given situation, the United States is always the good guy,” “Tax cuts are good for the average citizen,” “The private sector is more effective than the government sector,” “Congress represents the will of the people,” “War is good for the economy,” “Unions are bad for the economy,” “Money is the measure of success,” etc. We believe these lies, not because we are stupid, but because they have been drummed into us since the day we were born. We believe them because there is no political or economic incentive for anyone to speak out against these lies. We believe them because it is nearly impossible for anyone to stand against the tide of official propaganda in a society in which practically everyone has been socialized to adopt the official line.

In the book “Lies My Teacher Told Me,” James W. Loewen points out that the history textbooks used in our schools consistently ignore, distort, or whitewash any aspect of American history that may contradict the “big lies” mentioned above. These books “portray the past as a simple-minded morality play.” (p. 14).

We like to think of education as a mix of thoughtful learning processes. Allegiance and socialization, however, are intrinsic to the role of schooling in our society or any hierarchical society. Socialist leaders such as Fidel Castro and Mao Tse-tung vastly extended schooling in Cuba and China in part because they knew that an educated people is a socialized populace and a bulwark of allegiance. Education works the same way here: it encourages students not to think about society but merely to trust that it is good.

To the degree that American history in particular is celebratory, it offers no way to understand any problem – such as the Vietnam War, poverty, inequality, international haves and have-nots, environmental degradation, or changing sex roles – that has historical roots. Therefore we might expect that the *more* traditional schooling in history that Americans have, the *less* they will understand Vietnam or any other historically based problem. That is why educated people were more hawkish on the Vietnam War. (James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, p.308)

An interesting story about brainwashing occurred during the Presidential election of 1968. One of the candidates in the Republican primary was the governor of Michigan, and former chair of American Motors, George Romney (father of the Salt Lake 2002 Olympic Organizing Committee Chairman, Mitt Romney, who became the Governor of Massachusetts in 2002). The elder Governor Romney (who passed away in 1995) was an active Mormon who served a Mission in England and Scotland in the 1920's. Many Mormons were pleased to see one of our own being seriously considered for the Presidency. Unfortunately, his three-month Presidential campaign came to an abrupt halt two weeks before the New Hampshire primary.

During the campaign Romney was dogged by a televised statement that his initial support for the Vietnam War was due to being "brainwashed" by the U.S. Military during a tour of that war-torn country. He was questioned, even ridiculed, about the remark constantly, and his campaign never recovered. Though he later served as HUD Secretary under Nixon, and founded the National Volunteer Center (which later merged with the Points of Light Foundation), Romney was always remembered, sometimes with a cynical snicker, as "the politician who thought he was brainwashed."

My point is that George Romney was an honest man. The *Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology* defines Brainwashing as: "A systematic, coercive effort to alter an individual's beliefs and attitudes, usually by physical and/or psychological means; also referred to as "thought control.'" In hindsight, can anyone doubt that the U.S. Military used "systematic, coercive efforts" to influence people's "beliefs and attitudes" about the Vietnam War? Weren't most of us brainwashed at the time? Wasn't Romney telling the complete and honest truth? In fact, since he saw through the lies told by the military earlier than most of us, isn't that an indicator that he would have made a good leader? Instead, the public (whose opinions were guided by the media) decided he was unfit for the Presidency. Just who was brainwashed in this story, the candidate or the public?

Romney later called the Vietnam War "the most tragic foreign policy mistake in the nation's history" (Bret Barnes, "Obituaries," *Washington Post*, July 27, 1995). It's hard to argue with that statement. My point is that if this Mormon politician had the integrity to reexamine his own preconceptions about a controversial political issue, if he had the honesty to recognize and admit that he had been lied to, if he had the courage to change his mind and state publicly that he had been wrong, if he destroyed his own political ambitions by simply stating the truth, that he had been brainwashed, can we, as Latter-day Saints, do any less?

Advertising

Commercialism has permeated nearly every nook and cranny of our society. It conditions the corruption of politics by vested-interest money. It propels the diversion of public budgets from human need to corporate greed, and it distorts the declared purposes of our universities. (Ralph Nader, *Crashing the Party: How to Tell the Truth and Still Run for President*, p. xiii)

Advertising is the science of persuading people to spend money. It is important to remember that in the world of advertising the actual quality, utility, and durability of the product is irrelevant. These characteristics may even get in the way. (“Planned obsolescence” is the marketing strategy wherein a product is actually designed to fail after a certain amount of time so the consumer will have to buy a new one). What is important in advertising is not the actual value of the product to the consumer, but the “perceived value” of the product. In other words, it doesn’t matter if the product is good or useful as long as the consumer *believes* it is good or useful.

Clearly there is room for much mischief here. In the world of advertising the truth is a liability. The goal is to make the sale at all costs. And the costs are enormous. Advertising is a multi-billion dollar business. The frightening thing is that it works. People are highly susceptible to carefully crafted, psychologically based, response-group tested, sales pitches. The Capitalists would not invest their billions unless it paid off for them.

Advertising is so pervasive in our culture, we are hardly aware of it any more. The original roadside billboards led to radio commercials and then TV commercials, which were soon supplemented by the never-ending avalanche of junk mail. Now everything you buy contains advertising for the next thing they want you to buy.

I can actually remember a time when it was controversial for clothing manufacturers to emblazon their company logo prominently across their shirts because it, in effect, turned the customer into a walking billboard. Now, our youth wear the Nike “swoosh” logo as a status symbol.

The first rule of advertising is to “keep it simple and say it often.” The goal is to ingrain the message into the recipient’s brain so deeply it becomes a part of their autonomous background knowledge. When presented with the correct stimulus, you want the victim to unconsciously come up with the correct response. For example, if I were to say the words, “you deserve a break today,” how many Americans (indeed, people around the world!) would NOT think of a specific fast food chain.

The insidious thing about these five words (and what makes it such a brilliant and successful advertising slogan) is how deeply they truly bury themselves into the brain. Remember, the food chain doesn’t just want the consumer to think of them when he hears or sees the commercial; they want people to think of them when they are hungry (or bored, or tired, or with friends, or lonely). This slogan works to create a link in one’s brain between the name of this company and the words “a break.” Everyone works hard (or thinks they do), but the human body can only push so long before it needs rest – usually several times a day. The common phrase we use to describe the act of stopping work in order to rest is “taking a break.” Now, as a businessperson, wouldn’t you like people to think of your company every time they were tired?

The first two words of the slogan, “you deserve” are just as calculated. They appeal to our vanity and they personalize the slogan directly to the individual. This message is not to the guy next to you, it is to YOU. And the message is that you are a special person, you are a hard worker, you have been very productive today, and you DESERVE something special.

It is important to note that there is absolutely no discussion of whether or not eating at this particular chain is, in fact, a special treat. That potentially debatable point is simply presumed to be true. The slogan skips completely over any mention of the

company's products, and their quality, taste, or value, and directly links the idea that you deserve a break and the name of the company. Of course, the question of whether or not fast food will satisfy the body's need for a break is never considered at all. Perhaps all that our overworked consumer really needs is a good nap!

Finally, the fifth word in this slogan is crucial. It meets the salesman's need to finalize the sale, to close the deal. It is the action step, the motivator. You not only deserve a break, you hard worker you, but you deserve it now, TODAY! Get out of that chair, off that couch, exit that freeway, and visit our convenient drive up window now! And, of course, the slogan is cemented into our head with a catchy little tune that we can sing over and over until we get there and take the first bite.

Some might say that the anticipation of going to this place of business is far more exciting than actually eating there. If you think about it, this is nearly always true. Advertisers heighten emotional needs with the implication that their product will meet those needs. Rarely can a material object satisfy those artificially heightened emotional needs. How often are you disappointed with a purchase as soon as you get it home? Did the new dress really make you look like the model on TV? Did the new car really turn you into James Bond? How often is reality as exciting as fantasy?

To make matters worse, research shows that that vague sense of dissatisfaction you feel actually makes you more susceptible to the next commercial appeal that comes along. (See Douglas Rushkoff, *Coercion*, p.17). Thus, the consumer becomes trapped in a cycle of endless impulse shopping to try and satisfy needs that are never satisfied. Ironically, it is when this pathological cycle of mindless materialism is running at its highest levels that the economy is considered to be the most "healthy."

Public Relations

Woodrow Wilson was elected president in 1916 on the platform "Peace Without Victory." That was right in the middle of the World War I. The population was extremely pacifistic and saw no reason to become involved in a European war. The Wilson administration was actually committed to war and had to do something about it. They established a government propaganda commission, called the Creel Commission, which succeeded, within six months, in turning a pacifist population into a hysterical, war-mongering population which wanted to destroy everything German, to tear the Germans limb from limb, go to war and save the world. That was a major achievement, and it led to a further achievement.

Right at that time and after the war the same techniques were used to whip up a hysterical Red Scare, as it was called, which succeeded pretty much in destroying unions and eliminating such dangerous problems as freedom of the press and freedom of political thought. There was very strong support from the media, from the business establishment, which in fact organized, pushed much of this work, and it was, in general, a great success. (Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, p.7)

Public Relations is an industry whose purpose is to make their clients look good to the public. Again, as with the advertising industry, success (and profits) in this industry is not based on the truth. It is not important to a public relations firm whether or not their client is really “good.” What matters is that the public *perceives* their client as good. Image is everything. In this business truth is not just expendable, it is irrelevant.

This industry has very ancient roots. It has been around at least as long as commerce and politics because it is intricately tied in with both. The ancient Greek Sophists mentioned earlier in this chapter were essentially PR men. Like modern politicians, the product they were promoting was themselves. These men, using nothing more than words, and perhaps the occasional theatrical prop, were very persuasive and often grew very rich.

In our day, with the help of modern technology, the science of public relations is more pervasive, invasive, and persuasive than ever before. It has grown more sophisticated and, in some ways, more subtle. In my view this means the public relations industry has become more insidious and more dangerous.

The modern public relations industry was born in the United States in the 1920’s and 30’s. Dale Carnegie first published his book “How to Win Friends and Influence People” in (believe it or not) 1932. The success of the President Wilson’s Creel Commission, in manipulating public opinion to support the war with Germany in the nineteen teens, opened the eyes of many American businessmen to the possibility of using similar tactics to gain favorable public opinion for their various products.

Politicians, too, recognized the benefits they could gain by more carefully crafting their public image. They began to use public opinion polls to more closely measure what the public wanted to hear in order to present themselves in the most positive (or rather, “most popular”) light. George Gallup founded the American Institute of Public Opinion in Princeton, New Jersey in 1935. When he successfully predicted the outcome of the 1936 Presidential election, his reputation, and his client list, expanded dramatically. Though its founder died in 1984, the Gallup Organization is still highly successful today.

Walter Lippmann, was a well-known journalist who helped President Wilson draft his “Fourteen Points,” the principles which the President hoped would become the basis of the peace settlement at the end of World War I. In Lippmann’s 1922 book, *Public Opinion*, he discussed a concept he called “the manufacture of consent.” (This phrase later became the name of a well-known 1984 essay by Noam Chomsky dealing with these same issues). The idea is that “democracy” works best when far-sighted leaders guide the naïve public toward making correct decisions. This idea, that the public mind needs to be guided, controlled, even engineered, by those who know best, is the central purpose of the public relations industry.

By carefully combining the information gleaned through polling, the persuasive techniques discovered and refined using focus groups, and the communications technologies of the modern world, the ancient technique of using “flattering words” to manipulate the public has reached an unprecedented level of sophistication. Our American democracy may still be governed by majority opinion, but that majority opinion is rarely the natural outgrowth of enlightened self-interest that was anticipated by the Founding Fathers. Rather, it has been shaped and molded in the interests of powerful economic and political elites using the tools of modern rhetoric: labels, propaganda, brainwashing, advertising, and public relations.

The idea sounds outrageous, even paranoid, when stated plainly, but there really are people whose business it is to tell you what to think, and they have been very successful for decades. Even in the Church, Image too often seems more important than the Truth. Inspiring stories are more popular than true history (remember the Paul H. Dunn episode?). Faith is too often based on “faith promoting” emotion rather than on personal revelation. We prefer entertainment to education and, like the Sophists, we spend more energy cultivating our public image than we spend in honest self-assessment and improvement.

In the Book of Mormon, an ambitious politician named Kishkumen desired to become the chief judge of the people by murdering the incumbent Helaman. Kishkumen failed in his murder attempt and was killed, but his organized crime syndicate continued because it had been taken over by one known as Gadianton. The work of Gadianton’s band eventually led to the breakup of the Church and the complete collapse of the government (3 Nephi 7:2). What made Gadianton so powerful that he could eventually persuade an entire society to agree with his political views and join with him in the pursuit of unregulated power and wealth? According to the scripture, he “was exceedingly expert in many words” (Helaman 2:4). Gadianton was a gifted public relations man.

The Republican image machine

The lessons learned in the past century by the modern P.R. industry were certainly not lost on the politicians. They, like the corporations, have a vested interest in “looking good” to the public. The Republican Party in particular has invested heavily in public relations for several reasons. The first is fairly obvious. There is a great deal of interconnectedness between the large corporations and the Republican Party. Whenever a Republican holds the Presidency, large numbers of appointed government officials come from the corporate sector. (This “revolving door” situation often leads to the regulated becoming their own regulators). It should not be surprising that persuasive techniques would be shared among friends.

A second reason why Republicans tend toward PR techniques more than Democrats is that effective ad campaigns are very expensive and the Republicans overall seem to have more wealthy friends than the Democrats.

The major reason, however, in my view, is that Republican policies are harder to sell. For years in Utah polls have shown that given the choice between more money for schools or another tax cut, Utah citizens consistently support more money for the schools. Nevertheless, their Republican legislature has cut taxes repeatedly for decades and kept Utah perpetually at the bottom of national per-pupil spending.

Americans want good schools, good jobs, livable wages, and a clean environment. Republican policies, which consistently call for lower taxes, increased corporate profits, and less government regulation, invariably result in crowded schools, low wages, lost jobs, and increased pollution. The only way to get these unpopular policies into effect, and to elect those who support them, is to use the sophisticated rhetorical techniques of the advertising and PR industries to persuade people to vote against their own best interests.

During the Reagan years, the plan to rob the poor and give to the rich (which, by the way, was overwhelmingly successful) was sold to the public under the name of “supply-side economics.” What this meant, quite literally, was that government policies would be designed to directly benefit the rich under the unproven assumption that this would be the best way to help everyone.

A less flattering name for this plan was “trickle down economics.” This name had several sarcastic, and few obscene, variations among the many who were worse off under the program. Reagan’s vice-president, George Bush the First, as a candidate running against Reagan, once called the plan “Voodoo economics,” but that, of course, was before he was invited to join the team.

Still, the plan was enacted with a huge tax cut that overwhelmingly favored the richest Americans (Bush the Second has since done it again). The result was massive government deficits, a dramatic increase in the gap between rich and poor, and serious erosion of the social safety net. Yet, many Utahns still look back on the Reagan years with fondness. How can this be?

The key is rhetoric. The Reaganites demonized the government as the source of all evil and portrayed themselves as the heroes, the “Reagan revolution,” who were going to ride in and make things better by cutting off the source of money for the evil government. Tax cuts for the rich and the super rich were portrayed as giving “us” back “our money.” To pull off this raid they brought in an actor from “Death Valley Days” who knew how to ride a horse and charm a crowd.

Somehow this guy, who couldn’t even consistently put complete sentences together during Presidential debates, was given the nickname “The Great Communicator.” This is because he knew how to learn his lines (usually) and deliver them with great sincerity. It is also because, despite the damage his policies were doing to the country, he always reassured us that we were the greatest, that everything was going just fine, and he never asked us to sacrifice anything, or to become better people, or to work harder. In other words, like any Sophist, he was popular because he told us exactly what we wanted to hear. What saddens me is the extent to which the Latter-day Saints were enthralled by this image and blind to its substance. Utah voted overwhelmingly for Reagan twice.

Since Reagan, the Republican image machine has gone into overdrive. During the 1990’s, the “Get Clinton” fever can only be described as rabid. Multiple, well-funded, and ongoing muck-raking campaigns were launched. Truth was irrelevant as long as any accusation made the Clinton’s look bad and weakened the President’s ability to govern. When Hillary Clinton complained about the “vast right-wing conspiracy” that was trying to destroy her husband’s presidency, she was made to look foolish and paranoid. Interestingly, a book published in 2002 called *Blinded by the Right* by David Brock, establishes conclusively that Mrs. Clinton was telling the truth. There was, in fact, a right-wing conspiracy against Clinton. Brock was a participant in that conspiracy and he describes many of their activities in detail in his book.

During this time the “conservatives” had a spokesman on the radio, and briefly on TV, that kept up a constant drumbeat of hate speech thinly disguised as “wit.” Rush Limbaugh, the self-described “harmless little fuzz ball,” was a master at using labels to demonize those he despised. He used a belittling, demeaning, sarcastic tone to “poke fun” at people and groups he was hired to put down, and he pretended that his vicious,

personal attacks and lies were all just a form of good-natured teasing. He developed a devoted (even mindless) following of listeners and supporters who were so brainwashed by Limbaugh's words they actually, even proudly, referred to themselves as "ditto heads."

Mormons are not immune to the rhetorical tricks and manipulations of the economic and political marketplace. Knowing and accepting the truth of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ does not automatically protect us from the lies and distortions of the Telestial world in which we live. The confidence we have in the Savior and the trust we place in His church leaders, should not be blindly given to businessmen and politicians simply because they are members of the LDS church, or because they may claim to share our values.

The current level of political discussion in Utah is so polluted by Republican Party rhetoric people often express their political opinions using catch phrases that have been carefully fed to them, in chewy little sound bites, by the Republican PR machine. When you point out to them that the opinion they have just expressed is an exact quote from Rush Limbaugh or from a National Rifle Association TV commercial, they will briefly get a confused look on their face just before they get angry at you. No one likes to be told they have been brainwashed – especially those who have been.

Nevertheless, that is exactly what I am trying to do here in this book. I am trying to show my good-hearted, but often politically naïve, Mormon brothers and sisters that for decades the Republican Party has consciously, deliberately, and cynically manipulated their perspectives, their opinions, and their attitudes, in order to advance an agenda that has everything to do with Babylon and nothing to do with building up Zion.

Seeing through the fog

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. (Matthew 13:15)

He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22)

The agents of Satan's world have long ago set up a carefully constructed and smoothly maintained system that is deliberately designed to maintain the status quo. The weak serve the powerful, the suffering are ignored by the comfortable, and nothing talks like money. Any effort to deviate from the path of power and profit is quickly and ruthlessly suppressed. Any attempt to awaken the people to what is happening (such as this book) will be ignored, then suppressed, then ridiculed, and then castigated. If the effort cannot be stopped or sidelined, the messenger will be attacked personally and, if deemed necessary, physically.

I am not in any way claiming to be prophetic here. I am merely describing a sequence that has happened many times throughout history. Samuel, a convert Lamanite

(aren't they supposed to be the *bad* guys in the Book of Mormon?) came to the city of Zarahemla to call the Nephites to repentance. They threw stones and shot arrows at him (Helaman 13-16). The U.S. government has more than once deliberately and violently overthrown foreign governments that were "bad for business." Both Joseph Smith and Jesus Christ were killed by mob action incited by the established "religious" authorities. Those who believe in equality are enemies of the system and must be stopped.

Nor am I claiming that this book is important enough to cause Satan any grief. Whether or not these words cause anyone to change his or her opinions or behavior in any way is up to the individual reader. My personal belief is that the most "radical" writings in history, indeed writings that have changed and will continue to change the world, are the New Testament and the Book of Mormon. I am merely trying to share with my readers certain insights I have been blessed with in order to help them see through the "deceitfulness of riches," so that they might "understand with their hearts," and "be converted." As Jesus said, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 13:9)

The key to seeing through the fog of rhetoric that is blinding our society is to ask three questions: "Where is the heart of the speaker?" "What is the intent of this communication?" and "What will be the ultimate result of this action?"

It is not often easy to measure the "heart" of another. Indeed, the scriptures discourage us from trying to judge others because that is, ultimately, God's job not ours (Matthew 7: 1-5). Yet, it is necessary in our daily lives to decide when to place our trust in others. Certainly in the voting booth we have to make decisions one way or the other. I am suggesting that the best person to select at those times is the one who is the most Christ-like in his or her heart.

I realize that you, the reader, probably just laughed out loud trying to imagine a "Christ-like" politician. It seems like an oxymoron. However, I am serious on this point. In any political race, surely one candidate has a more "Christ-like" heart than the other. Even if one is cynical and sees voting as an act of "choosing the lesser of two evils," isn't it important that Latter-day Saint voters choose the "lesser evil" rather than the "greater evil"? And should we not then get to work to see that in the next election there is a "good" candidate to challenge the "lesser evil" incumbent?

As an active Utah Democrat for many years, I have met many "good-hearted" candidates for political office. Few have ever been elected. Isn't it time we change that? If you, dear reader, are cynical about all politicians, and claim to have never met an honest one, I humbly suggest you have been looking in the wrong party. And, if I may be so bold, may I ask my fellow Mormons to stop letting Republicans tell you what Democrats believe? Make the effort to talk (and listen) to some real Democrats. You will discover that they are real people with real lives and real concerns, that they love their families and their country just as much as the Republicans do (though they brag about it much less), and that some are just as committed to Mormonism as you are.

The next question one should ask often is, "What is the intent of this communication?" This question can actually simplify your life. We all know that unsolicited phone calls and "spam" emails have only one purpose and that is to sell you something. My suggestion is that you ignore them completely. Every time. The same advice goes for all TV and radio commercials. Turn them down, turn them off, change the station, read a book.

I can promise you that nothing that is important to your life or salvation will ever be missed by tuning commercial appeals out of your life. God's gifts are free. Satan will attempt to sell you anything. Focus on other things. Your life will be richer.

Now, once one has weeded commercial communications from one's life, it becomes easier to see that there are other types of communication as well: educational information, friendship, family, personal needs, work, relaxation, entertainment (be careful, money is often involved here!), and religious study and worship. Satan is perhaps less likely to be involved in these types of communications than he is in commercial communication, but one should remain alert. When unsure, ask the "heart" question above.

Finally, any decision or policy should be evaluated using the question, "What will be the ultimate result of this action?" Clearly, this is an extremely useful question to use in our personal lives. It should also be used frequently to evaluate every political decision or policy (including the act of voting). Does the policy help the rich or the poor? Does it empower the people or the corporations? Does it promote democracy or tyranny? Does it promote public health or illness? Does it centralize or decentralize power? Does the policy promote wise stewardship of the environment or irresponsible destruction? Is this decision in the best interests of children? The elderly? Does this program appeal to our highest aspirations or pander to our primitive fears?

Adopting these three questions will really change one's view of the headlines in a hurry. One should always examine the motives, intent, and long-term effect of any political or economic action in order to evaluate its true meaning.

An interesting trick one can use when reading or viewing the news is to assume for a minute that the opposite of what you are reading is the real truth. This mental exercise is good practice for one's critical and analytical skills and often reveals startling insight into what is really going on.

Let's look at some hypothetical examples. Suppose the headline reads: "Airline Seeks Gov't Bailout to Save Jobs." Now, assume for a minute the headline is a lie. What else could be the true explanation? Perhaps, "Airline Seeks Gov't Bailout to Save Investors Profits"? Ok, assume another headline says, "Legislature Meets to Deal With Budget Deficit." Is it possible that the legislature's own lack of foresight and planning *caused* the budget deficit? Should the headline really say, "Legislature Meets to Ignore the Budget Problems Again"?

The scriptures encourage us to evaluate would be leaders by taking a long-term view of their proposed program. If their program is good it should produce good results.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:15-16.)

Mormons, who believe in living prophets, tend to read this scripture too narrowly, as if it referred specifically and only to false "prophets." By so doing, they miss this

scripture's obvious usefulness in evaluating politicians. Since the rich consistently get richer, and the poor invariably get poorer under Republican administrations, isn't that an evil fruit that springs from an evil tree? And hasn't the struggle always been between the powerful and the poor? The scriptures are filled with the lamenting of prophets who are frustrated with the ongoing refusal of the people to see the truth and repent. Book of Mormon prophets often refer to the "stiff-neckedness" of the people. Even Christ lamented the stubbornness of the people of Jerusalem.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! (Matthew 23:37)

By now perhaps it is becoming clear that the positions I espouse in this book imply that the correct, true, righteous, Eternal, Mormon position on most social, economic, and political matters is the proletarian, or working class, position. Exactly so. The aristocratic, or privileged class, position on these matters, in most of the world, for most of history, is Satan's position, the Mahan principle, the pursuit of power and gain and blood and horror. After all, remember, this is Satan's world. The Saints' responsibility is to avoid the temptations of this world and build an infrastructure in preparation for the overthrow of Satan's kingdom when Christ comes again.

This book is an attempt to help my fellow Saints see that in backing the Republicans, the corporations, the capitalists, the Zoramites, consumerism, materialism, militarism, those who "seek power and gain," and those who "dress in fine apparel," they are backing the WRONG SIDE and they will ultimately be disappointed, since Satan will not support his followers in the end (Alma 30:60). The only way to navigate safely through the rhetoric of Satan's world is to frequently, diligently, prayerfully, and *seriously* study the scriptures and to live faithfully according to the gospel principles they teach.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32.)