

A Mormon Story

Authoritarianism Knows No Bounds

*The LDS Church's Un-American persecution
of the politically-active Stone family*

Stephen Stone

[January 28, 2012]

[Editor's note: The following account—still being written and edited—is true. It is based on hundreds of documents and detailed records, the unimpeachable testimony of numerous firsthand witnesses, and several audio recordings.]

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We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.

—Doctrine & Covenants 121:39

Introduction

Most Americans would likely be appalled to learn that a powerful, wealthy American-based church — one "absolutely prohibited" under IRS rules from interfering with the American political process, given its tax-exempt status — had repeatedly intimidated a politically-active family for refusing to quit working for national conservative leader Alan Keyes, and then excommunicated the father for rejecting the church's demands.

But that's exactly what happened to the Stephen Stone family — in the course of a decade-long ordeal that reveals serious disregard for the American political system by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon Church).

This is the shocking story of the family's unconscionable persecution at the hands of church leaders, high and low.

It reveals a culture, and institution, inordinately concerned with *appearance* above reality—refusing to correct its internal mistakes as it focuses on managing its public image—a tactic stemming from the church's desire to make itself more acceptable in view of its early practice of polygamy, its history of racism, its seeming elitism, and its unique claims regarding doctrine.

The church is so mindful of its elaborate marketing campaign that no one is minding the store, one might say, and things are literally not what they seem.

Among other things, this inordinate preoccupation with appearance over reality has led the church to *feign reverence for the principle of self-governance*, while treating lightly the God-given rights of its own people, and the protection of those rights guaranteed by its own official rules and principles.

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)

This simple prescription for liberty would disallow any manipulation of the individual or collective mind for any professed purpose, no matter how seemingly noble or justifiable. Americans demand, and deserve, to be told the truth about anything of fundamental consequence—including what the LDS church actually stands for.

We're not talking here about the church's need to put a positive or cheerful face on uncomfortable facts, as the church is entitled to do. All persons and institutions have a right to present an upbeat image that conforms with their "better self."

Unfortunately, the LDS church crosses the line of propriety and basic integrity, and seeks to control the response of members and observers by misrepresenting its virtues and covering its serious errors. That's not being true to Christ, His saving doctrine, or His laws.

The result is confusion and subservience, not liberty.

Which leads us to an even more troubling fact revealed by the following account of the church's dealings with a dedicated political family: the church's wholesale disregard for the *rule of law*, itself—including not only divine law, but civic.

While it officially claims to honor the laws of God and the laws of the American republic, in reality its behavior displays a disturbing rejection of those laws, as our story makes obvious.

Routinely, the church's leadership will issue a public statement or policy regarding what it claims to do, allow, sanction, or believe—and then ignore, in practice, that assurance by its verifiable actions.

The church's decade-long persecution of the Stone family underscores this deeply entrenched self-contradiction with disturbing clarity.

Undergirding and overarching these tendencies, however, is the one weakness of the church that guarantees such self-promotional, paradoxical behavior—a tendency wholly at odds with its professed purpose and mission: the church's *extreme authoritarianism*, starkly revealed by our story of officially-sanctioned mischief.

Everything in the institutional church—every official public announcement, every culturally-accepted precept, every dominating presumption and value—is centered in the need to obey human authority above the authority of God.

This misplaced emphasis begins with virtual worship of high church leaders as demigods, and trickles down to local leaders who see themselves as the chosen “prophet” for their “ward” or “stake” (local jurisdictions).

On the undoctinal premise that all church leaders are “called of God,” members are taught to obey their leaders because they automatically speak for God by virtue of their calling—another undoctinal notion. Both premises—neither of which can be found in the church's canon of scripture—are the undoing of the church, leading it unavoidably away from undiluted focus on Christ, and His saving laws and doctrines, to undue reliance on church authorities.

Since Christ—the Son of God—died for the sins of all, He alone has the right and authority to set the terms of salvation, all of which center in *obedience and subjection to Him, alone*.

Since no human being—LDS church leaders included—has given his life for the sins of the world, in a transcendent sacrifice by a sinless soul, no human authority of any kind, called of God or not, can rightfully set the terms of salvation, or otherwise act in Christ's stead as an “authority.” (See Matt. 20:25-28.)

Such reliance on man—no matter the issue at hand—is a form of idolatry, by definition. In Mormon scripture, it is nothing short of “priestcraft.” (See 2 Ne. 26:23-24, 29-30, and 28:31, which forbid such authoritarianism.)

It is reminiscent of the behavior of the errant children of Israel in Exodus 20, right after Moses came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments. In verses 18 through 20, we read:

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not *God* speak with us, lest we die.

And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: For God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. (emphasis added)

Similarly, “Mormons”—who claim to have a “living prophet,” and other leaders called of God—are reticent to follow God directly, and instead focus on following their leaders; they worship not the saving message of Christ, but the messenger.

Such is the backdrop for the account that follows.

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Chapter 1 — Meet the Stones

Stephen Stone is the President and Editor of RenewAmerica — a conservative media site dedicated to restoring respect for America's founding principles. This purpose includes not only respect for the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, but for the Creator and His laws.

From the time he was young, Stephen has considered himself a “born-again Christian,” having experienced—he believes—what the scriptures call the “baptism [of] the Holy Ghost” (see Matt. 3:11 and Acts 1:4-5, 8 and 2:1-47). This conversion was very real to him, and unshakable. Since then, he has devoted his life to understanding the mind and will of God through studying His Word and seeking His Spirit, and has sought to overcome his frailties through the sanctification of the Spirit, and thereby conform more fully to the character of Christ.

As a result, Steve has become somewhat of a religious philosopher — one committed to defining the truth of any subject (as well as applying it) by the clear standards of God's Word.

His religious testimony can be found in "[What does it mean to be converted to Jesus Christ?](#)"¹, a position statement he wrote for RenewAmerica.

Christ alone

Raised a member of the LDS church, Steve has long remained independent of the norms and traditions of the church — choosing instead to center his beliefs in an objective study of the scriptures. He therefore believes — as the Bible teaches — that salvation comes through relying alone on Jesus Christ, no matter one's professed religious affiliation.

God-centered education

Stephen's deeply-held faith in Christ led him years ago to become a strong advocate of moral conservatism, and an equally avid opponent of all forms and degrees of humanistic socialism. As an outgrowth of this commitment, he and his wife of 41 years, DeeAnn, homeschooled all eight of their children from birth to adulthood — through nurturing continual learning and dependence on God, utilizing an instructional approach Steve developed while working in tutorial education at Brigham Young University in the 1970's and 80's, where his immediate superior told him privately he was the school's foremost authority on tutorial education.

On the family's wall at home was the maxim “What is education? Self-education”—and all were taught they had a divine duty to learn from every opportunity they encountered and then share what they learned with others. Each child was taught to be responsible to help teach the next youngest.

To the Stones, there was no practical difference between the process of education and the religious pursuit of what the scriptures call “eternal life”—both centering in understanding God’s truths and living them through faith in Him.

As part of his family’s educational efforts, Steve has devoted countless hours to helping homeschool families who were threatened with legal action by overzealous local or state education officials, and as a result, he has become expert in Utah education law. When Utah’s compulsory education statute was undergoing revision a number of years ago, he wrote vital language that was adopted by the legislature.

As pioneers in Utah’s home education movement, Steve and DeeAnn presided early on over their county’s homeschooling organization. During that time, they joined hands with a family who headed a similar organization in Salt Lake City and formed the basis of what became the Utah Home Education Association.

Later, Steve was asked to take the reins of an innovative private school called Family-Centered Learning, which he directed for many years.

Political activism

The family’s homeschooling endeavors, and Steve’s efforts to protect Utah families’ rights under the law, led the Stones to become increasingly immersed in political activism—for which they found themselves well suited, and effective.

Their notable activities in the political arena include the following:

- In 1979, Steve testified before a joint committee of the legislature and helped persuade them to drop proposed restrictions on homeschooling families and private schools—citing Supreme Court language that declared the interest of the state in the education of children must yield to the right of parents to choose alternatives to public instruction.
- A few years later, he extemporaneously debated the state’s governor — during a buffet luncheon — over the inadvisability of the governor’s plan to raise taxes for public education by the largest increase in state history. Still working in tutorial education at BYU at the time, he apprised the governor of the cost-effectiveness of the self-instructional learning model he was using at BYU.
- In the late 80’s, Steve led the fight to overturn an oppressive 40-acre zoning requirement in his county — persuading public officials to adopt a 5-acre zone in the county’s unincorporated area that gave farmers reasonable control of their property and resulted in the creation of a fast-growing major city called Eagle Mountain (the third largest in the state based on land area).
- During much of the next decade, Steve spent considerable energy successfully blocking efforts by the Planning Commission to halt construction in the unincorporated county through unrealistic development standards. He also

persuaded county officials to add explicit language to the first page of its General Plan specifically guaranteeing the right of private property.

- Shortly after the above zone change, Steve and a colleague wrote the initial brochure for a newcomer to politics who was seeking a vacant seat on the County Commission. That candidate (who won, by the way, and who over the years has become a close friend in the political arena) is now the governor of Utah.
- Steve and daughter Stefani have both served on the state GOP's Central Committee and, along with DeeAnn, been delegates several times to county and state conventions.
- During the 2000 presidential election, Steve and his family ran the Utah campaign of Alan Keyes, and after helping Keyes gain his best showing of the GOP primaries — 21.3 percent in Utah — joined the candidate's national staff. Steve and Stefani represented Keyes at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia that year.
- Steve founded RenewAmerica in 2002 to lend support to Keyes' live MSNBC-TV show *Alan Keyes Is Making Sense*—and RenewAmerica.com has since grown to over a hundred contributing writers and been named by the New York Times Company's About.com² as one of the top ten conservative political websites in the U.S.
- Stefani was serving as chair of the Utah Young Republicans when RenewAmerica was launched, and in that position was also a member of the state GOP's Executive Committee. Soon afterward, she ran for Vice Chair of the state party, and her candidacy helped pave the way for a strong conservative associate to win over the establishment favorite under new “instant runoff” rules.
- The Stone family did the website for conservative congressional candidate John Swallow in 2002—who lost to the Democrat incumbent by only 1604 votes, after the Stones brought Alan Keyes to stump for Swallow in the final days of the campaign, succeeding in exposing in the media the incumbent's pro-abortion voting record in Congress.
- From 2002 to 2004, the family ran a gubernatorial campaign for a conservative candidate who lost to eventual winner Jon Huntsman, Jr., at the state convention.
- In an ironic twist, since the Stones' gubernatorial candidate had limited funds, much of their work on the campaign was counted as “in kind” donation under state rules. When their candidate submitted his campaign's financial report to election officials, the Stones were therefore listed as having donated over \$130,000 to the campaign (after deducting what the candidate paid them). As a result, Steve was included among the top ten political contributors in Utah that election—right behind billionaire donor Jon Huntsman, Sr.

- In 2004, the Stones created Alan Keyes' website (and did extensive writing and research) when Keyes ran against Barack Obama for the U.S. Senate from Illinois that year. This gave them a close-up view of the notorious “Chicago political machine” that ensured Keyes received only 27% of the vote in a state where even Republican Party leaders rejected his pro-life, pro-family emphasis.
- In 2005, the Stones designed and ran the website of California congressional candidate and Minuteman co-founder Jim Gilchrist, during a special off-year election in Orange County.
- In 2007 and 2008, Steve was CEO of Keyes' 2008 presidential committee — overseeing such things as the campaign's finances, logistics, organizing, and website. Members of the family traveled with Keyes throughout the country; worked endlessly to get him on state ballots; handled correspondence and media inquiries; helped mobilize supporters; and disbursed the campaign's funds.
- In addition to RenewAmerica and other projects, the family currently oversees the websites of [Jerome Corsi](#), a WorldNetDaily investigative writer credited with derailing the 2004 presidential campaign of John Kerry through the best-selling book *Unfit for Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry*; national conservative leader [Larry Klayman](#), founder of Freedom Watch and Judicial Watch who is well-known for his dogged legal challenges of corrupt public officials and oppressive liberal schemes; and [TeaParty.org](#).
- The family is also currently doing work on several websites connected to Alan Keyes.
- Interspersed throughout their political activism has been an ongoing series of influential events the family has staged for candidates and causes. They've sponsored GOP candidate debates and meet-the-candidate nights, a number of major rallies, important political speeches and press conferences, and similar gatherings to promote representative government—usually well attended and widely covered by the media.
- On the basis of their respected activism, a Utah congressman once told Stefani the Stone family “has done more for the Republican Party in Utah than any family [he] could name.”

Additional facts

Because of his deep interest in the scriptures, Steve has long been respected by LDS friends and acquaintances for his doctrinal knowledge. He made it a rule in his life years ago not to believe or do anything that was not harmonious with God's Word in the scriptures.

At one point early in his life, he served briefly as a religious educator, and before that, as a bread delivery man, his first “real job.”

He's never worked in the public sector (except when he was a teenager working on a summer street crew in his home town) — and he characterizes socialism as little more than "everyone working for government," something he believes should be carefully avoided in any form that goes beyond selfless public service.

Over the years, the Stones have undertaken a variety of challenging entrepreneurial pursuits in seeking the American dream of liberty, independence, and personal responsibility, and they have succeeded in building a home by themselves on a farm they own debt-free.

Chapter 2 — A glimpse into the LDS church

To most people, the Mormon church is an enigma.

On the one hand, the simple story of its origins—the one Mormon missionaries recite on porches and in living rooms—appears too incredible for most listeners to appreciate, and too unorthodox for most mainstream Christians to believe.

On the other hand, the inner workings of the church are kept so secretive and controlling—with regular members, for example, denied access to the church’s “unpublished” *Handbook*, by which their actions are often judged; with church curriculum deliberately cleansed of the need to rely solely upon God through knowing the scriptures firsthand; with countless euphemistic words and phrases routinely employed by church officials to cover the reality of what goes on—that most members themselves typically have little understanding of the church’s actual doctrines and policies.

As a result, both members and nonmembers alike are left with distorted—often naïve or wholly exaggerated—notions of what the church actually is, and does.

The way to judge

The premise of the following account of the church’s surprisingly insensitive mistreatment of a self-sacrificing family for over a decade is that *the only way to understand the church accurately is to gauge its beliefs and behavior against its own official canon of doctrine*—its so-called “standard works,” officially adopted by a vote of the church membership—then see how these things compare with accepted standards of biblical Christianity and Western culture.

In the American political system—to which the church has certain obligations—this also means comparing the church’s civic assurances with its actions.

This approach to examining the church—that is, holding the church up to its own official rules as a starting point, and then going from there—is consistent with the clear imperative set forth in the “law of the church” (as Section 42 of the Doctrine & Covenants is called), which states,

Thou shalt take the things which thou hast received, which have been given unto thee in my scriptures for a law, to be my law to govern the church. (verse 59; see also verse 60)

In other words, what the church officially claims to be, or believe, begins—and ends—with its official canon set forth in its standard works, no matter what anyone in or out of the church might say about such things.

In harmony with the above passage, former LDS church president Harold B. Lee repeatedly taught:

All that we teach in this church ought to be couched in the scriptures. It ought to be found in the scriptures. We ought to choose our texts from the scriptures. If we want to measure truth, we should measure it by the four standard works, regardless of who writes it. If it is not in the standard works, we may well assume that it is speculation, man's own personal opinion; and if it contradicts what is in the scriptures, it is not true. *This is the standard by which we measure all truth.* (“Using the Scriptures in Our Church Assignments,” *Improvement Era*, January 1969, pp. 12-14, emphasis added)

On such an authoritative basis—emphasizing authentic church doctrine, not mere cultural notions or evolving tradition—it’s possible to make reliable judgments regarding how well the church fulfills its claims, as well as the legitimacy of those claims themselves. Using this as the starting point, and constant backdrop, avoids needless judgments based on mistaken or naïve perceptions of the church.

It’s important to note at the outset that Mormons themselves are not well-versed in their own canon of doctrine—being led by many church leaders, contrary to that canon, to rely unduly on their leaders for knowledge and guidance. As a result, Mormons tend to adopt countless myths prevalent in the church that represent old “pioneer” traditions, rather than verifiable doctrine or legitimate church law.

Regarding this phenomenon of undue dependency on human authority, early church president Joseph F. Smith, son of church founder Joseph Smith’s brother Hyrum, observed,

One fault to be avoided by the Saints, young and old, is the tendency to live on borrowed light. . . .

Men and women should become settled in the truth, and founded in the knowledge of the gospel, *depending upon no person for borrowed or reflected light, but trusting only upon the Holy Spirit. . . .* They will then have light everlasting which cannot be obscured. By its shining in their lives, they shall cause others to glorify God. (*Gospel Doctrine*, 1975 ed., pp. 87-88, emphasis added.)

Being settled in the truth—of course—comes only from knowing firsthand what *the scriptures* teach about salvation and the commandments of God, knowledge no person can give another. Likewise, *understanding the church itself* requires the same kind of firsthand familiarity with the church’s own “standard works,” and avoiding the authoritarian trap of dependency.

The same president of the church, Joseph F. Smith, told his Mormon followers that—

I want no man to lean upon me nor to follow me, only so far as I am a consistent follower in the footsteps of the Master. (*Gospel Doctrine*, p. 4)

and—

I may tell you what I know, but that is not knowledge to you. If I have learned something through prayer, supplication, and perseverance in seeking to know the truth, and I tell it to you, it will not be knowledge unto you. *I can tell you how to obtain it*, but I cannot give it to you. (*Gospel Doctrine*, p. 52, emphasis added)

Such sentiments underscore the obvious reality that no person can expect to attain salvation, or otherwise please God, without knowing for themselves the saving doctrine of Christ as taught consistently in the scriptures.

But they also reveal the only reliable way to understand illusive “Mormonism.”

We cite these definitive statements to underscore that any person—Mormon or non-Mormon—who might wish to evaluate accurately the doctrinal core, membership duties, and institutional behavior of the LDS church must do so in the context of the church’s own officially-adopted canon. That’s the reference point for all reliable assessment of the church—and for appreciating what you are about to read.

Our purpose

That said—

Our purpose in laying out the brief history that follows of shocking mischief by the LDS church toward a God-fearing, politically-active family is not to diminish the church’s authentic doctrines or practices—most of which are sound and commendable, as well as largely misunderstood, both in and out of the church. Rather, our sole purpose is to tell patriotic, decent Americans a story that *deserves to be told—because of its far-reaching implications for America’s political system*.

There’s also the compelling fact that the following account *happens to be true*.

The fact that the story may be unflattering to the church is but a reflection of the church’s own choice to engage repeatedly in unlawful, un-American behavior toward the dedicated family at the heart of the controversy—despite ten years of earnest pleas by the family for relief.

If the church wanted to avoid having this story told, it could easily have ceased its unwarranted persecution years ago.

Instead, church officials at every level, acting as though they were unaccountable to anyone, refused to stop—and in fact escalated their threats and intimidation until they felt justified in exacting the church’s most extreme punishment—in direct consequence of the family’s efforts to end the conflict the church initiated over the family’s political livelihood.

That’s not the American way. Nor is it the way of Christ.

It's widely understood that Americans have a unique opportunity in the 2012 election to learn about the LDS church due to the candidacies of two "Mormons"—Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman, Jr. Never before in our nation's history have Americans been virtually forced to come to grips with the seemingly inscrutable culture and institution called "Mormonism."

The time has come, therefore, for the true story to be told of the church's interference with the Stone family—interference that has deprived the electorate of much of their right to be informed and inspired, in a free and open electoral process, by a family known for their skill in advocating the conservative message.

The narrative consists of three parts. Part 1 centers in Stephen's initial disfellowshipment, which was eventually overturned on appeal by the church's governing First Presidency. Part 2 describes events leading to Stephen's ultimate excommunication. And Part 3 looks at the aftermath of the ordeal and its meaning.

Read on.

Chapter 3 — ‘God wants you to quit working for Alan Keyes’

In August 2000, the Stone family's Mormon bishop told Stephen Stone, a national staffer for the Alan Keyes organization, that "God wants you and your family to quit working for Alan Keyes."

The reason the bishop gave was that the Keyes organization wasn't "paying the family enough" — when in reality the organization had been compensating the Stones for months well beyond what they had ever been paid from any other source of employment, including Stephen's previous work for LDS church-owned Brigham Young University, and when in fact the Keyes organization had also asked the Stones to remain permanently with the organization, making the family's opportunity long-term.

So the reason the bishop gave—insufficient compensation—was clearly contrived, as was his claim that “God” was behind the bishop’s demand.

The real reason likely stemmed from the bishop's inordinate desire to control the Stones, something he revealed on many prior occasions by his abusive treatment of the family — the direct result of aggressive lobbying by an antagonistic member of the congregation who wanted Stephen punished for his scripture-based view of church doctrine, and who worked closely with the bishop to bring about Stephen’s eventual censure.

At least, that's the most plausible explanation, in addition to the fact the bishop was a public school teacher who — like previous bishops — disliked the Stones' homeschooling efforts, as well as their refusal to conform to many customary (but not official) church norms.

The only other plausible explanation was that the bishop didn't like Alan Keyes — an outspoken pro-life advocate who happens to be black (bear in mind the church's well-known history of discrimination against blacks until a policy change 22 years earlier). The bishop's possible bigotry is not necessarily an unfair assumption, no matter any likely denial by the bishop.

It should be added, to flesh in the picture, that the family had long struggled to succeed with a variety of entrepreneurial endeavors and investments, and their opportunity with the Keyes organization therefore came at a time they needed a financial boost. Instead of welcoming this timely blessing for the family, the bishop demanded they abandon it.

Given the family's situation, Stephen's already-extensive political experience, and family members' unique talents and interests, working on the staff of the Keyes organization was a perfect fit — the best opportunity the family had ever had — and Stephen therefore told the bishop he refused to comply, as was his right under both church rules and governmental law.

Stephen also told the bishop he and his family believed God had led them to this opportunity — to which the bishop replied, "That makes me sick."

Not acting alone

As it turned out, the bishop was not acting alone, but had enlisted his church file leader, the newly-called "stake president," to support him in his desire to control the Stone family.

Thus, when Stephen and his wife DeeAnn met with the stake president a couple of days later to resolve the seeming misunderstanding that existed with the bishop, the stake president refused to let them speak, lectured them about the importance of "obedience" to church leaders, and told them—when Steve replied that obeying God's Spirit was church members' highest duty—"If members of the church were taught to follow the Holy Ghost, the church would fall apart," a common teaching among some church leaders.

He also said—twice—that dependence on God should be secondary to members' pursuit of material security, contradicting the very message of Jesus Christ.

DeeAnn was so distraught over the man's insensitivity, and apostate notions, that she cried as she walked home, refusing a ride. She said she had never been treated so degradingly.

More degradation

A few weeks later, members of the Stone family met with the bishop in an effort to resolve the controversy.

They did so at the insistence of their severely-diabetic daughter, Siena, who said the stress of the problem was damaging her health—even jeopardizing her life one particularly difficult night, following a disturbing and fruitless visit by DeeAnn with the bishop to discuss his claimed "revelation from God" about the family's work.

Once the family's meeting started, the bishop refused to discuss the controversy, and—without provocation from the Stones—announced the meeting was over. When Stephen reminded him that he had agreed before the meeting to discuss the growing problem in the interest of Siena's health, the bishop called the stake president to escort the Stones out, entirely misrepresenting the situation and falsely claiming the family was being "disruptive."

The stake president soon arrived, red-faced and visibly agitated, and placed the Stones' belongings out in the hall. He began by saying the family was apostate—with the "church over here and the Stones over there"—refusing to elaborate. He said Stephen "needed counseling"—a curious assertion since the man was a brand new stake president who had no previous dealings with Steve (in other words, he was relying on the bishop's mischaracterizations). He gave no reason or explanation when Steve asked.

He then turned to treating DeeAnn and Stefani—soon to be a member of the Utah Republican Party Executive Committee—with uncalled-for callousness, with even more

insensitivity than he treated Steve. (They said afterward he made them “feel like trash.”) When Stefani challenged his disparaging words about her family, he insisted that she, along with DeeAnn—neither of whom he knew—needed counseling.

In Mormonism, we should note, “counseling” means *submission to authority*—as well as modification of thinking or behavior through degrees of pressure. “You need to obey counsel” is a familiar refrain.

As the president talked, he exhibited a perceptibly threatening tone and demeanor.

With that, the man got up and left. DeeAnn, Stefani, and Steve agreed it was the most demeaning experience they’d ever had as church members. Stefani said she could sense the president “is going to hurt us.”

As the president attempted to leave, Steve stood in front of him and reprimanded him for treating DeeAnn and Stefani so condescendingly—saying it was one thing to be treated so badly himself, *but quite another for his wife and daughter to be insulted in such an “ugly” manner.*

Steve followed him down the hall and out the door. Standing by the president’s SUV, he asked, “What is this all about?”—to which the president replied, “Take it up with the Brethren.”

Threat of excommunication

In early October 2000, Stephen scheduled a follow-up meeting with the bishop in a good-faith effort to work things out, and the bishop agreed, but said the stake president wanted to be in attendance at all such meetings. Steve therefore arranged for the meeting to be held in the stake president’s office, with the president there.

When Steve and DeeAnn arrived, the stake president announced that he’d asked the bishop not to come. The president also claimed he’d set the meeting up—an incomprehensible claim, since Steve had taken all the initiative to arrange it.

Revealing anger at Steve’s reprimand a few weeks earlier, the president said he intended *to try Steve for his church membership*—in other words, he threatened Steve with excommunication. When Steve asked the president’s reason for such an extreme action, one that would ostensibly *deprive Steve of salvation*, under church tradition, the president said, “You won’t obey your leaders.”

Since the only controversy at issue regarding “obedience” centered in Steve’s refusal to quit working for Alan Keyes, the president, in actuality, threatened to punish Steve with loss of eternal life *for choosing his own employment and for exercising his right as a citizen to participate in the American political system.*

Anyone familiar with God’s Word, of course, would see such disregard for the worth of a human being, and for the rudiments of human law, for what it is: sheer apostasy from the things of God, as well as undoctinal delusions of authority by a prideful man.

“First do no harm”

A week later, the stake president arranged to visit the Stone family home to discuss his intention to try Steve for his membership in the church for “disobeying” him.

When the president entered the home—some members of the family commented afterward—he brought with him an oppressive spirit they said they could feel. He commenced to say that Stephen’s refusal to comply with the president’s requirements could be likened to a “diseased arm” that needed to be examined.

Seriously-ill Siena did most of the talking on behalf of the family (as Steve thought it wise for him just to listen), and she disputed the president’s analogy, as well as his claim that only by trying her father could the president determine if he had grounds for disciplinary action.

Struggling to keep her composure, Siena opened her scriptures and began reading passages that define godly leadership and the limitations of human authority, and the president rebuked her for implicitly challenging him. He then proceeded to compare the entire Stone family with excommunicated “polygamists,” because the family believed in “following the Holy Ghost”—and he reiterated his earlier claim that “if church members were taught to follow the Holy Ghost, the whole church would collapse.”

As Siena sat weeping uncontrollably, he exited the home without saying a word—with Steve following him. Steve reminded the president, an obstetrician, of his Hippocratic Oath, which requires of physicians: “First, do no harm.” The president ignored him, walked to his car, and drove away.

A Stone’s throw

Feeling not only oppressed by the church at this point, but increasingly tormented by an overzealous church leader, the Stones received a disturbing phone call from the obsessive president.

This occurred in mid-November. It followed by four weeks a meeting Siena arranged with the bishop in which he showed no concern for the effect the escalating controversy was having on her health (and in fact, this was the first time in the three years since he was called as bishop that he ever talked with her about anything, even though he was expected to get to know all members of his congregation as part of his duties).

In that meeting, the bishop confirmed he indeed believed he had a “revelation” from God about what the Stone family “needed to do” in their employment. He declined to elaborate.

The president said his reason for calling was to invite the family to sit together with him and view a recent video by church president Gordon B. Hinckley about the evils of tattoos, piercings, and pornography. Since the family already shunned such popular trends, Steve declined the invitation. He also had no interest in subjecting his family to the presence of a man he considered a menace to his family's peace.

When Steve asked why the president wanted the family to see the video, the president said it was because Steve was a "controlling father"—something the man had no basis for claiming, not personally knowing Steve. He also said that Steve's "strengths had become [his] weaknesses"—borrowing from the title of a popular talk by a high church official who argued (without doctrinal grounds) that seeking to follow the Holy Ghost "in all things" was inappropriate.

At this point, DeeAnn, who could overhear much of the conversation, took the phone and told the president to "leave us alone."

Siena then weighed in, and confronted the president for his unwanted intrusion into the family's wellbeing. She became so disturbed by his words to her that she threw the phone across the room. When Steve picked up the phone and asked the president if he appreciated what he had just done, the president hung up.

Mentally unstable

By now, it should be obvious that the stake president who threatened Steve with loss of salvation for doing nothing more than what he was entitled to do as both a human being and an American (that is, choose his own employment and pursue his own lawful political activism) was, himself, mentally and emotionally unstable—obsessed with grandiose notions of divine authority, as well as shockingly callous disregard for those who refused to do his bidding.

It is even fair to say that he—along with his cohort in abusing the Stone family, the above bishop—exhibited a disturbing fanaticism similar to that which motivated the Islamic terrorists of 9/11:

A day after the Twin Towers went down, Peter Jennings interviewed a Lebanese journalist and asked him what possible mindset could have possessed the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. The Middle-Eastern journalist said, *"They believe they have a divine right to impose their will on other people."*

Such an extreme—and ungodly—notion of self-importance and inordinate power is what lay at the root of the above church leaders' abusive treatment of the Stone family, as will become increasingly clear as the church's interference with the work of the Stone family unfolds in the following account.

It also characterized the behavior of at least a dozen high church officials who collaborated with, or condoned, these local leaders' unlawful abuse of the Stones, including the church's presiding First Presidency.

All because of two “crazy” local church leaders who initiated unbelievable abuse of the Stone family at the outset, and then were permitted by high church leaders to act out their indefensible mischief *with impunity*, and to enlist other leaders in that mischief—despite repeated pleas by the family to the church’s highest leaders for relief—leading to Stephen’s excommunication in October 2009, and ongoing harm to the family, and extended family, even to this day.

Seeds of authoritarianism

Nutty as the preceding scenario obviously is, the seeds of such extreme authoritarianism are deeply embedded in LDS church culture—in which members are widely taught to “sustain” and even idealize their leaders—all of whom, it should be noted, are merely “lay” members called to serve in the church at every level, including the First Presidency.

The result is a bureaucracy and a culture that reflect some of the worst tendencies of human nature. That is made clear in the church’s own official guidelines for leadership, Doctrine & Covenants 121:34-46, which most church members and leaders all but ignore, or fail to take seriously.

The passage begins:

Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?

Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—

That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, *or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness*, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. (verses 34-37, emphasis added)

What could be more plain than these definitive words—which provide the backdrop for the illuminating verses that follow? Unfortunately, this section of the D&C was not published until almost nine years after the foundations of the church’s culture and bureaucracy were laid, and undercurrents of extreme authoritarianism that formed early on still remain.

With that in mind, now consider the candid insight of the next two verses:

We have learned by sad experience that *it is the nature and disposition of almost all men*, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.

Hence many are called, but few are chosen. (verses 39 and 40, emphasis added)

It should go without saying that in a church where nearly all active members are given some kind of calling, and hence share some measure of authority, it is inevitable that widespread notions of unchecked authoritarianism would well up, even spill over—given human nature, and given the common belief in the church that *all callings come directly from God*.

Such tendencies easily explain what the church has done to the Stone family, and why there has been no real recourse for remedy, despite a decade of repeated requests by the family for an end to the abuses they've suffered at the hands of church officials at every level.

Chapter 4 — Initial outcomes

Some observers might be inclined to just shake their heads at the behavior of church officials at this point (chalking it up to the church's reputation as a cult), were it not for what was the *centerpiece of the controversy*—the family's political work—a matter with serious legal implications.

From the moment the abuse and threats began, *the Stone family found it virtually impossible to concentrate their normal energies on the time-consuming, high-intensity work* they were engaged in for the Alan Keyes organization, which they were being compelled to quit upon penalty of Stephen's excommunication.

Bear in mind that when the ordeal started, Stephen had just returned from a Keyes staff meeting at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia with the original plan of what later became RenewAmerica. He was immersed in fleshing in that plan when church leaders told him to drop his work for Keyes. He ultimately lost months of valuable time and effort on that project due to the church's political interference.

The week before the bishop injected himself (with the stake president's support) into the family's political work in August 2000, the family had also just arranged for Alan Keyes to be the keynote speaker at Utah's "Constitution Week" celebration, which they got permission to hold in Brigham Young University's 22,000-seat Marriott Center — a venue that promised to draw a large crowd of students and members of the community.

That March, the family had already staged the biggest Keyes-related event of the presidential primaries — drawing 5,000 enthusiastic supporters to Utah Valley University's McKay Events Center, along with the Lt. Governor and other public officials, and conservative writer W. Cleon Skousen, who introduced Keyes.

Then just days after the interference by the church began, BYU officials abruptly canceled the Marriott Center event — inexplicably disparaging the Stones in announcing that decision. The family was forced to scramble to find another venue, and at the last minute they secured the McKay Center, which required school officials to re-schedule a prior paid reservation. The widely-publicized Keyes event, which featured introductions of Keyes by Gov. Mike Leavitt and Sen. Orrin Hatch — and which was broadcast by C-SPAN as "America's Unity Call" just before the 2000 election — almost didn't take place.

Fortunately, the state's Constitution Week celebration went ahead as planned in its new venue — and a "Republican Wagon Train" event featuring Keyes earlier that day also proceeded as planned in Utah County. Meanwhile, the Stones were made to endure extreme duress, distraction, and humiliation by their church leaders as they tried to pull off these major public events (and as they devoted considerable energy afterward to getting a 30-minute version of the Unity Call on hundreds of conservative-Christian radio stations nationwide).

It's true to say that the church's untimely, intrusive interference with the work of the Stone family nearly cost Dr. Keyes his opportunity to participate. It certainly took its toll on the Stones, who worked as much as 40 hours at a stretch without rest to overcome the church's errant, politically-inappropriate, adversity.

Deceptive hearing into Steve's disobedience

The escalating controversy came to a head several weeks later when Stephen and DeeAnn were subjected to an unannounced "hearing" by the stake president and his two counselors—a deceptive meeting in which the president repeatedly lied and perjured himself in front of his associates to justify his intentions toward Steve.

In his testimony, the president focused on Steve's "disobedience" to his leaders, his claim that Steve's "strengths had become his weaknesses," Siena's reliance on faith to manage her diabetes, Steve's struggle to succeed with a series of entrepreneurial pursuits, the fact Steve had rebuked him for his disparagement of DeeAnn and Stefani, and a slanderous assertion that Steve "had mental and emotional problems" and therefore needed "mental counseling."

As the president recounted events of the controversy, he described many of the facts exactly backwards, in ways that could only be considered intentional. Steve and DeeAnn were shocked at his evident dishonesty.

Given minutes to respond, Steve dispelled—as best as he could with the limited opportunity he was given—each of the president's misrepresentations, which included an absurd claim that Steve monopolized the time in their brief meetings. He testified the president's allegations were not only false or misleading, but frivolous: none was a defensible basis for trying Steve for his membership.

Indelibly putting a metaphor on the hearing, one of the counselors privately asked Steve after the other leaders had left if he still believed the stake was a "spiritual black hole," as he'd once confided to the man. Steve assured him he did.

Upcoming church vote

In response to the above charade of a hearing by the stake presidency, the Stone family decided to do something allowed by Mormon scripture, but rarely taken advantage of by members: *vote against their leaders*.

They were influenced in this decision by the fact that Steve had maintained frequent contact with the president's counselors ever since the controversy began to escalate, and would periodically check with them to see if the president still planned to make good on his threat to try Steve for his membership. Each time, they responded "Yes."

The family was also influenced by the fact that both the president and the bishop had acted together at every significant point, the evidence revealed, reinforcing each other's controlling behavior—thus both were culpable.

A “ward conference” was to be held in February that would routinely conduct “sustainings,” and the Stones determined to cast negative votes (as was their right under church law) against the stake president and bishop for behavior unbecoming church members, based on the leaders’ abusive conduct.

Before doing so, however, Steve and other family members met first with the bishop, and then with the stake president, to inform them of the family’s intentions, and to try to work things out prior to ward conference.

The meeting with the bishop was disastrous, and ended with the bishop shoving Steve physically from his office while Steve attempted to answer a question the bishop had just asked him—as a group of ward members watched out in the hall—reprising aggressive behavior the bishop had exhibited on at least two prior occasions in recent years. Before this latest show of force, the bishop told the family that Siena was an “unworthy” person because she tried to control her diabetes through a rigorous diet and the grace of God, and she therefore “deserved to suffer.”

When Steve told the bishop that he and all other church leaders were subject to the laws of God as outlined in the scriptures, and that those laws should govern all their duties and actions, the bishop called Steve’s view “apostate”—reiterating what he’d said years earlier when Steve made the same point.

The meeting the next day with the stake president began with this compulsive individual acting flippantly toward the Stone family and their concerns, and ended with him making fun of the two sons Steve had brought with him, Ethan and Ellery. During the remainder of the brief meeting, the president showed little appreciation for the mischief his threats and intimidation had caused the family and their political work—denying he had done anything wrong—and he seemed likewise to have little respect for Steve’s rights as a person, as a member of the church, or as an American citizen.

These meetings left the Stones feeling they had no alternative but to exercise their rights under the church’s “Law of Common Consent” and vote against these two unworthy individuals—who by now, it should be said, had also enlisted many of their associates in the mischief, multiplying the stress on the family.

(A note about the use of the term “perjury” above and elsewhere in this narrative: Mormons vow at baptism, upon receipt of the priesthood, and in the temple to keep the commandments of God. Their oath is made before God and angels, and is binding upon all they do. To deliberately lie or bear false witness in a church disciplinary hearing can therefore be considered a form of perjury—the violation of a promise to be truthful.)

“Failure to communicate”

At ward conference, members of the Stone family did something they’d never done before: voted against church leaders—in this case, their bishop and stake president.

In voting against these men, the family felt they had ample doctrinal grounds for doing so from the church's scriptural canon, the "standard works"—including the stipulation in D&C 42:21 that "Thou shalt not lie; he that lieth and will not repent shall be cast out"; D&C 42:27: "Thou shalt not speak evil of thy neighbor, nor do him any harm"; Moroni 6:7: "[T]hey were strict to observe that there should be no iniquity among them; and whoso was found to commit iniquity, and three witnesses of the church did condemn them before the elders, . . . if they repented not, and confessed not, their names were blotted out, and they were not numbered among the people of Christ"; and similar laws and doctrines in LDS scripture that provide for holding to account all seriously transgressing members of the church, including leaders.

The Stones also felt they had ample *factual grounds* for their votes—including extensive evidence of lying, perjury, false witness, slander, cover-up, persecution, teaching of false doctrine, and interference with family members' rightful choices by the bishop and stake president, as these men undertook to control, intimidate, and discredit the family.

The family further felt they had ample *spiritual grounds* for their action—feeling that they were being prompted by God's Spirit to vote against these errant men.

Following the family's negative votes (there were eight family members so voting), the stake president stood before the large congregation, named Stephen Stone by name, and claimed Stephen was the source of the controversy that led to the negative votes because he had "misunderstood counsel"—leaving out his own hand in the matter and placing all responsibility for the family's ordeal on Steve.

Typical obfuscation by someone publicly humiliated, who—seeking to save face—failed to mention that *Stephen had taken the initiative at every opportunity to resolve the matter, in good faith*, and also that the "counsel" given by the stake president and bishop was not only clear and undeniable in its message, but unlawful.

The president lied to his sympathetic audience—many of whom viewed him as a prophetic man of God because of his high calling (even though he was just a lay member like themselves). Some later told the Stones how wonderful the president's remarks were.

After the meeting, the president designated one of his high councilors and one of the bishop's counselors to interview the Stone family. He did so in violation of church protocol, which required the matter to be forwarded to a presiding officer above the stake president for review, since the president was the object of negative votes.

When Steve pointed out this fact to the two interviewers—who began the interview by reprimanding the family for refusing to "sustain" their leaders—the hand-picked representatives of the president said they were just doing as they were instructed. Steve refused to give them any details of the controversy, and insisted—citing church guidelines—that they contact higher church authorities and report the family's votes. The counselors agreed to do so.

110-page complaint

A few days later, the high counselor came to the Stones' home and said the stake president had told him not to inform the church's governing authorities of the family's votes.

Feeling he had no other choice if he was to put an end to the president's mischief, Steve spent the next several months assembling facts and testimony from family members and others (while carefully avoiding his local leaders, to keep the controversy from expanding), as he wrote a detailed complaint describing the misconduct of the bishop and stake president over the preceding six months, and its effect on the family and its political activities.

He forwarded the 110-page document to the "Utah South Area President" in Salt Lake City on May 31, 2001.

It took Steve almost four months to research, write, and carefully edit the document—valuable time he needed to spend on RenewAmerica and other vital projects, including arranging a featured speech by Alan Keyes at Weber State University in April (which involved working with school officials and the sponsoring students, escorting Dr. Keyes to a VIP reception the night before, and then accompanying him to the speech itself and luncheon afterward—miraculously avoiding, by the way, a potentially-fatal collision on the snow-covered freeway the morning of the speech, as the family drove to meet Dr. Keyes).

During this time, Steve (along with Stefani) was a member of both the state GOP's Central Committee and the Utah County GOP's Central Committee, elected positions that required significant amounts of his time.

Preparing the 110-page complaint—because a high counselor abdicated his duty under church protocol—was a great frustration to Steve, as it added to the distraction and pain already suffered by the family, and severely hindered them in their work.

"Eloquent letter"

On July 31, 2001, the Stone family was called into the stake president's office by the president and the bishop and told that the "Brethren" had approved both local leaders to be tried for their membership—in a stake disciplinary council to be presided over by the president's first counselor, Bruce Young, if Steve desired to proceed. The family was told, however, that church authorities wanted the family to try to work things out personally between themselves and the two local leaders first, before deciding whether to go ahead.

In making these declarations, the stake president referred at least once to the presiding First Presidency as he read from a piece of paper, indicating his understanding of the decision's source. He also disparaged the validity of the May 31 complaint Steve submitted to the Area President, which led to this decision, by sarcastically referring to it as "the eloquent letter church headquarters received"—implying it succeeded on skill with words, not truth or substance.

The rest of the discussion centered in these local leaders' belief that they automatically enjoyed the inspiration of the Holy Ghost solely by virtue of their callings—something Steve challenged, since LDS scriptures do not teach such a notion, commonly held in the church. He referred the leaders to D&C 3 and D&C 121:36, which refute their undoctinal belief, a belief that lies at the heart of the controversy between these misguided men and the Stone family.

Let's wait and see

Being preoccupied with other things, including preparing an extensive “Strategic Plan for Renewing America”—a document that laid the groundwork for what became RenewAmerica six months later—Steve and his family were in no hurry to enforce the pre-approved disciplinary council of their two local leaders.

They also had no particular desire to see their local leaders punished for their abusive conduct; they just wanted the misconduct to end.

So they were content to let things sit a while, as they considered what to do, and as they looked for indications their local leaders were open to resolving the year-long controversy. The Stones were not anxious to get into an unproductive confrontation with either leader.

As it turned out, this wait-and-see, non-confrontational approach—consistent with presiding authorities' request that the family not proceed in haste, but try to work things out person-to-person with their leaders if possible—cost Steve his church membership, beginning with his disfellowshipment in February 2002, and his eventual excommunication in October 2009. Had the family gone ahead as they were given the pre-arranged right to do, this outcome likely never would have happened.

But their time was limited—due to the demands of their political work—and the family chose to do as they were asked by high church leaders.

Here's how things played out over the next several months.

Chapter 5 — ‘Too bad for you, Brother Stone’

Having never voted against church leaders before doing so at ward conference earlier in the year, the Stones weren't sure whether it would be considered appropriate to vote against the same leaders again when a "stake conference" came around that similarly asked members whether they sustained or opposed any of their leaders.

The stake conference was scheduled for November 4, 2001—and there had been no improvement in the controversy with the bishop and stake president. The two leaders had taken no steps to reconcile (as required by D&C 42:87-93), and the Stones were content with the relative peace and quiet they enjoyed from this lack of contact.

The upcoming stake conference, however, required the Stones to make a choice: either stay home from a meeting they were invited to attend, or go and vote their consciences, as they had done previously.

They opted to consult a local "area authority" who represented the office of the Area President. This man was already familiar with the Stones' problem with their leaders, they understood.

Stephen, Ethan, and Ellery met with the man in his office at BYU the morning of stake conference, and asked him if it would be considered "bad form" under the circumstances to vote against the bishop and stake president that afternoon, since the family had already voted months earlier and received a decision from the Brethren approving the two leaders to be tried for the membership, should the family wish to proceed.

The area authority—who indicated he was aware of the decision—simply advised, "Do what you feel guided by the Spirit to do." As the Stones were leaving, the man reminded them that the Area President was hopeful they could resolve the conflict with their local leaders "person-to-person," without the need to proceed with a disciplinary council.

With that tacit approval, Stephen and his two sons cast negative votes later that day at stake conference.

Afterward, Stephen and his sons were interviewed by two high councilors chosen by the stake president—a violation of church protocol as before, when the family voted at ward conference. These two interviewers repeatedly disparaged the Stones for stating facts they had no basis for judging—and they both displayed obvious prejudice toward the Stones throughout the interview.

Happy anniversary!

Three weeks later, two representatives of the stake president arrived on the Stones' doorstep with a letter informing Stephen that he was to be tried for his church membership in two weeks, "with the possibility of excommunication." The man who handed Steve the letter had a disturbing grin on his face. Steve told him that his participation in this errand

wasn't right—but the man simply continued grinning as he and his associate got into their car and left.

The occasion was Steve and DeeAnn's 31st wedding anniversary.

It was obvious that this letter was precipitated by the negative votes Steve and his sons had cast three weeks earlier against their leaders—since there was literally nothing else that could be cited as grounds for taking such action against Steve, considering that for almost a year he'd had virtually no contact with these two men.

Of course, the Stones had every right under church protocol to vote their consciences against these men, and that right could not be infringed upon—nor could their votes be used as a basis for church discipline.

But more fundamentally—

The stake president and bishop had literally *no authority*, under church protocol, to discipline Steve—since they themselves had already been approved by the Brethren to be tried for their membership, subject to Steve's go-ahead. Without question, *Steve himself could not justly, or appropriately, be tried for bringing valid charges against his leaders that resulted in their pre-arranged disciplinary councils.*

At least, not in a church that respects not only God's laws, but its own rules. In this case, the LDS church revealed shocking disrespect for both standards—as well as for a law-abiding family that had already suffered enough mistreatment at the hands of corrupt church leaders.

Steve has since been able to determine, on the basis of valid evidence, that the stake president succeeded in persuading a weak new presiding authority in the Area Presidency to bypass normal due process required by church protocol and prejudge the matter without sufficient basis.

According to church protocol, aggrieved persons—on either side of a controversy—can appeal to the church's presiding authorities AFTER a judgment is rendered in a disciplinary council. What the stake president did was persuade this uninformed new member of the Area Presidency to judge the matter BEFORE the normal presentation of evidence (as required by the procedures set forth in D&C 102) and to side, without grounds, with the stake president and bishop.

This meant that Steve was unfairly deprived of the opportunity to present his charges, evidence, and witnesses in the manner prescribed by church law. Such lawlessness is called apostasy from the ways of God. It is also called *elitism* and *favoritism*, an affront to God, who declares Himself to be “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34)—and who, according to LDS scripture, proclaims that “none shall be exempted from the justice and the laws of God, that all things may be done in order and in solemnity before him, according to truth and righteousness” (D&C 107:84).

In any case, such irregularity—stemming from a stake president’s desire to retaliate for being humiliated in front of the members of his stake on two occasions during routine voting, and for being earmarked for discipline at the discretion of a family he obsessively persecuted—was simply wrong, unreasonable, and reprehensible. Unfortunately, it reflected the kind of inordinate authoritarianism that persists in the LDS church.

Dueling disciplinary councils

Greatly disturbed at what was going on, Steve called the area authority he’d met with before stake conference and protested that he was now the subject of unjust discipline. The man responded, “Brother Stone, you should have gone ahead with a disciplinary council for your leaders when you had the chance.”

This, despite the presiding Brethren’s own wishes that Steve do exactly the opposite, and take his time in deciding whether to proceed to have his leaders tried for their membership.

“Dueling disciplinary councils”—as Steve described the situation to family and friends—is not the way of God, or of a godly church.

Face-to-face encounter

Steve had been reluctant to press for a person-to-person resolution of the conflict following the Brethren’s decision on July 31—feeling certain that premature in-person contact with his adversarial leaders would simply escalate things. So he waited until the time was right for doing so.

According to the area authority Steve called after receiving notice of his disciplinary council, the time was now. He recommended Steve arrange a meeting with the stake president as soon as possible to discuss the president’s intentions and try to work things out.

In agreeing to this suggestion, Steve cautioned the area authority that the meeting was likely to make matters worse, given the president’s already evident attitude toward the family.

On November 27, 2001, Steve, DeeAnn, Stefani, Ethan, and Ellery met with the president and his two counselors of the stake presidency. The president began the meeting by asking Steve to pray. Steve declined—feeling constrained by God from doing so in the face of the malevolence Steve felt in the room.

Angry, the president got up, said the meeting was over, and motioned his counselors to leave. Since Steve’s church membership was at stake, Steve implored the counselors to “act as adults” and remain—and he asked them to prevail upon the president to do the same. He reminded the stake presidency that the meeting was the area authority’s idea and they couldn’t justify being disrespectful to him or the Stone family by canceling the meeting for no valid reason.

At the insistence of his counselors, the president returned and the meeting resumed.

Steve was invited to speak, and he asked the president what charges he had in mind for trying Steve. The president said he had only one: Steve's belief—expressed to the Area President and a few leaders—that the president had repeatedly displayed malicious, even evil intent toward members of the Stone family.

Steve affirmed that he believed the president had, on occasion, shown some kind of detrimental, ungodly, evil influence—one contrary to the Spirit of God—that disturbed Steve and family members. He looked the president in the eye and testified that he and other family members had valid grounds for their belief, and added that he'd witnessed behavior by the president that was clearly ill-motivated and malicious, and seriously apostate.

Steve then pointed out that such a belief was not an excommunicable offense.

Stefani then asked the president why he'd claimed, on two occasions in the presence of her family, that "if members of the church were taught to follow the Holy Ghost, the church would collapse." The president became enraged, and he told Stefani (who at the age of 23 was a respected member of the Utah GOP's Executive Committee, due to her successful activism in the political arena) that she was "a liar." He angrily claimed that he'd never said such a thing.

Stefani told him her family can prove he did—through journal entries and valid testimony. He told Stefani that she was mentally "sick."

As he berated Stefani, the president leaned within inches of her face in a menacing manner—while she, unperturbed by such intimidation, repeated her allegations. It was the most shocking behavior by a church leader any of the family had ever witnessed (and that's saying a lot at this point, in view of the abuse they'd already experienced). Then the president led his counselors from the room—not to return (except to turn out the lights a little while later).

As the family sat in amazement, Steve's membership hanging in the balance, DeeAnn said to everyone, "Now I know the president is an evil man."

Steve added that the stake president's behavior amounted to perjury, given the seriousness of the meeting and the forcefulness of the president's denials in the presence of so many witnesses, including his counselors.

Steve called the area authority the next day and told him what happened, reminding him of Steve's concerns regarding the wisdom of holding the meeting.

Cancelation

While Steve was on the phone with the area authority describing the disastrous meeting of the night before, the stake president came to the door and left a note stating that if the

family had any charges against him, they should forward them to him for delivery to the Brethren.

The family spent the next few days preparing a list of charges, and—not trusting the president—faxed the list to the Area President, while also giving the president a sealed copy to pass on to church authorities. The charges were signed by six grown members of the family who had witnessed key events in the controversy.

The Stones later learned the request for charges had come from the Area President, in response to a November 27 fax Steve sent him protesting the upcoming disciplinary council.

Ten days later, the stake president came to the home again, this time to inform the family that Steve’s disciplinary council had been canceled—by the First Presidency, Steve ultimately learned—and that in lieu of that council, Steve was invited by a few representatives of the Brethren to meet with them at the stake center.

Incompetent hearing

Not knowing the purpose of the meeting he was invited to, but left to assume it, Steve met with three low-level area authorities the evening of his canceled disciplinary council. When he entered the room, the men seemed patronizing in their reception of Steve, and as the meeting progressed, Steve could sense they were just going through the motions of whatever it was they were assigned to do.

The presiding area authority (the man Steve had gotten to know) announced at the outset that Steve had 30 minutes to explain the controversy between himself and his leaders—in other words, to make a persuasive case against his bishop and stake president. This, with no prior notice of such time constraints so Steve could prepare a concise presentation.

The three men took several minutes to talk casually with Steve—then announced he had 25 minutes left. Such insensitive behavior signaled the meeting was not a serious attempt to understand the facts of the controversy.

In the absence of any guidelines that defined what these men wanted to know, Steve gave a general overview of the problem, adding whatever particulars he thought they might be interested in (out of literally dozens of vital facts he could cite), and clarifying only when asked. As he spoke, he saw skepticism and disbelief in his listeners.

When the time was up, Steve was interrogated for about 15 minutes more—mainly to explain his doctrinal views, which seemed the men’s main interest, especially after one man disputed Steve’s assertion that a member’s sole duty was to obey God. The man said that if this belief were generally held in the church, members might be unwilling to accept “callings.” In other words, the salvation of members was secondary to the operation of the church, to this representative of the church bureaucracy.

Steve told him that members had the right to do whatever God tells them individually to do, and that the institutional needs of the Church were less important than members' relationship with God. The man was obviously unpersuaded.

As Steve was excused, he felt uneasy about these men's ability to appreciate what he had told them about the challenging matter before them, given the insincerity of their final words. He also thought it strange they expressed no interest in interviewing other members of the family, most of whom were waiting outside the room and could corroborate any vital issue Steve raised about the family's charges against the bishop and stake president.

In assessing what had just transpired, Steve felt his interviewers were clearly prejudiced against the family, and in favor of the local leaders, who were presumed to know God's will and to have His Spirit.

Evidently, the two local leaders were also interviewed that evening, and they denied the family's charges. The bishop—the family later learned from the area authority who presided—specifically denied ever requiring the family to quit working for Alan Keyes, saying he'd only "advised" them to do so—implying they were free to "disobey" their leaders about their work without penalty or serious threat.

Since he was testifying before a hearing into his alleged wrongdoing, the bishop's deliberate lie was tantamount to perjury.

"Too bad for you"

After several weeks went by without any significant development—leading Steve to assume he was no longer under threat of excommunication—the Stone family was asked to meet with the stake president in his office. All adult family members attended except Siena.

The president began by inquiring about the family's work. He then pointedly asked if the family was "still working for Alan Keyes." Steve answered, "Yes."

The man responded, "Then you're a fanatic."

The president added, as he got up to leave, "By the way, Brother Stone—too bad for you. The Brethren have sided with me."

This cryptic, but intentionally ominous threat became clear the next day—when two stake officers came to the Stones' home at 10:35 p.m. with a letter stating Stephen was to be tried for his membership, "with the possibility of excommunication," that Sunday. The men had large grins, as previously.

Just a few days earlier, the younger of these two men had delivered a sermon before the Stones' congregation on "obedience," in which he recounted how his father's "mission president" had required all 200 of his missionaries to shave their right armpit as a test of

obedience to him. The father complied, the speaker said, along with most of the other missionaries, and “passed the test.”

This man laughed at Steve as the two men got into their car to leave the family’s home, after Steve predicted, “This will just be overturned.”

Chapter 6 — Why stay in the church?

To most observers, the outrageous abuse the Stones had suffered to this point would raise the obvious question: “Why not just leave the church and save yourself further grief?”

To Steve, however—someone who has always sought to be a peacemaker, as well as a problem-solver—running from the foolish, cruel actions of the church was not a feasible option. No matter how poorly he was treated, he felt a duty to God to hold a mirror up to the church so it would be forced to learn some things about itself—while also using all the avenues available to him within the church to bring the controversy to an end—as a real-life test (as opposed to the artificial measures favored by the church) to gauge the church’s very integrity.

He couldn’t do these kinds of things if he voluntarily left the church before the controversy had fully played out.

Steve was also confident, due to his faith in God, that he could handle any trial he might encounter, and he wasn’t about to cower in the face of ungodly cowardice by church officials. He certainly wasn’t about to let the church force him out over his political work.

So he and his family decided to remain on their previous course as politically-active church members, and see where it all headed.

Among other things, they chose to do so because the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—as *the very name suggests*—is as much the province of the members as of God himself, and Steve thus felt he had a “shareholder” interest in exerting his personal influence to correct serious church excesses and errors, just as any righteous leader in the church might feel. At the same time, in exercising his divinely-given right to influence the direction of the church, he felt God’s support and guidance, since the church was as much God’s as any member’s.

At least, that’s what’s the name of the church signifies—and that’s what its voting provisions, its lay nature, and its ultimate basis as defined in its official canon (all of which Steve was well-versed in) have long been in place to ensure.

As things continued to intensify, Steve would occasionally remind himself that since the church was as much his as any other human being’s, by the grace of God he was not going to let authoritarian bullies in the church’s lay leadership intimidate him into quitting, on the one hand, or giving in to their control, on the other.

Other considerations

There were other considerations that help explain why Steve and his family didn’t simply pull up “stakes” and join another denomination.

First—and foremost—is the fact that although Steve has never adopted the unscriptural, cultish, or inordinately controlling norms and traditions of “Mormonism” (so much so that he’s long not even thought of himself as a “Mormon,” which he says denotes a “cultural” devotee of Mormon myths), he still believes in the most basic message of the church.

According to the Book of Mormon, called the “keystone” of LDS teachings along with the Bible, the church’s basic message is that all persons must “come unto Christ” with their “whole souls”—sacrificing unto Him a “broken heart and a contrite spirit”—and *be spiritually “born again,”* thus becoming “new creatures” by the power of the Holy Ghost, if they want to be saved.

Following rebirth, the Book of Mormon teaches that the convert’s sole duty thereafter is to “rely alone upon the merits of Christ, who is the author and finisher of their faith” (see Moroni 6:4 and 2 Ne. 31:19), in harmony with the following simple, yet all-encompassing, precept:

For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do. Behold this is the doctrine of Christ. . . . (2 Ne 32:5-6)

This saving message appears repeatedly throughout the Book of Mormon with clarity and emphasis. While the Bible teaches the same fundamental message, the Book of Mormon teaches it with such plainness it is undeniable to a sincere seeker of truth.

The Book of Mormon also stresses that rebirth cannot be partial or pretended if the professed convert’s offering of his soul is to be acceptable to Christ. It must be accompanied by “full purpose of heart”; it must be genuine and total. The Bible teaches such depth of conversion, likening it to the faith and sincerity of a little child (see Matt. 18:3-4)—but the Book of Mormon adds meaning to this standard of true conversion by repeating it over and over, in exquisite language, in a way that is impossible to ignore.

That is the central message of the LDS church—a message all but ignored in the church, and explained away by the sophistry of those who do not believe it is real or even possible.

To most Mormons, the doctrine of “rebirth” is redefined and gutted of its scriptural significance to mean an incremental process of “progression,” rather than a miraculous, comprehensive, “mighty change of heart,” as taught by the Book of Mormon—one that irreversibly alters a person’s very nature and sets them firmly on the path to eternal life, establishing them immovably on the rock of Jesus Christ, from which they cannot fall if they are truly converted.

Such watered-down religion has no power to save—and is contrary to the clear teachings of both the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

It is because he appreciates the Book of Mormon’s plain teachings regarding the need for salvation through “being born again” that Steve has been unwilling to voluntarily leave the church.

Additional considerations would include the fact that the LDS church is unusually family-oriented, and when someone leaves the church, they cause significant pain and difficulty for both immediate and extended family in all directions. Better to keep the family unit together as much as possible, Steve feels, and teach all within his influence to accept the saving “doctrine of Christ,” as taught by both the Bible and the Book of Mormon, and thus be truly converted to the gospel.

Steve genuinely believes that no church can save—only Christ can save—and it will ultimately make little difference to God what denomination a person “belonged to” in life. In the judgment, all that will matter will be the quality of a person’s conversion to Jesus Christ—that is, the quality of their heart and mind—and the way that person lived his or her life in the face of a million tests, temptations, challenges, and seeming contradictions.

There is also the fact that LDS culture has a deep, historic pioneer heritage, to which many American Mormons can trace their ancestry. The Stones have deep roots in that heritage, and their predecessors in the church were among the early settlers of the West. In fact, the great-grandfather of Steve’s mother was Joseph Smith’s bodyguard, Levi Roberts; and one of DeeAnn’s pioneer ancestors was the keeper of Brigham Young’s cattle, William George Davis.

These sorts of family and “genealogical” connections make leaving the church over needless persecution by ill-informed, errant leaders not necessarily a wise solution to presumably-temporary difficulty.

Above all, Steve and his family chose to stay in the church because they felt that’s what God wanted them to do—just as they felt He led them to get involved in the national work of Alan Keyes.

Chapter 7 — Burned at the stake

Not willing to let the stake president's latest mischief go unchallenged, Steve again called the area authority he'd relied on before and protested this latest in a series of outrageous actions by the president.

Steve specifically asked if he might be given more than just *three days* to prepare his defense—especially since he had prior obligations (including a major meeting on Saturday of the state GOP Central Committee in far-away Ogden), and since he obviously had little time to contact and prepare any witnesses.

The area authority called the inept new presiding officer in the Area Presidency (cited earlier)—who knew little of the controversy—and the man denied Steve's request for additional time.

When the area authority called back to report this disappointing decision, he said he would come by the next day and deliver a letter written by the new presiding officer.

The letter—as it turned out—was signed by all three members of the Area Presidency. Dated January 31, 2002, it absolved the bishop and stake president of any misconduct—claiming, as its basis, that all members of the Stone family had been interviewed (an entirely false assertion), and as a result, it was determined there were no grounds for the family's charges.

The letter therefore “encouraged” Steve—in typical Mormon euphemistic style—to “cease making accusations” against his local leaders, and to “support” them.

It should be noted that Steve received this admonition belatedly, *since he was already scheduled to be punished for ignoring the directive.*

In addition to serious dishonesty and incompetence—and thus no basis—the letter showed incredible insensitivity to the long-suffering Stone family. It gave ill-motivated local leaders carte blanche to proceed to do whatever they pleased to the family, with impunity, including retaliate for being formally charged with wrongdoing.

Mockery of church discipline

After getting only three hours of sleep, Steve appeared at his 7 a.m. disciplinary council on February 3, 2002, for what turned out to be a twelve-hour *kangaroo court*—full of lies, irregularities, repeated false witness, slander, malicious actions, violations of church law, arbitrary decisions, and other indefensible behavior.

Since it was Mormons' monthly “Fast Sunday,” neither Steve nor his accompanying family members (other than diabetic Siena) had anything to eat during the entire ordeal.

The stake president began by reading to the assembled “high council” of a dozen men the January 31 letter by the newest member of the Area Presidency, which he said absolved him and the bishop of the Stone family’s allegations and gave them a green light to proceed to discipline Steve.

He said the charge against Steve was “repeatedly acting in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church and its leaders”—a surprise to Steve, since he had been discreet in keeping the problem confidential. The only people he’d discussed the problem with were other local leaders assigned by the bishop or stake president to talk with him about it, or other leaders routinely assigned to visit the family and take inventory of their needs and concerns (members called “home teachers” and “visiting teachers”), to whom the family privately appealed for help in persuading the bishop and stake president to sit down with the family and resolve the controversy.

The only exception was an occasion when Steve’s local “high priest” leadership called him in and pressed him to know what was bothering him. After being grilled intensely, he told them in a sentence or two what had been going on.

Contrast Steve’s discreet confidentiality with the behavior of the bishop and stake president—who made the conflict between them and the family PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE by opening their office doors on several occasions so others could overhear their threats against Steve; who stood before Steve’s congregation and blamed him by name for causing the problem at hand; and who acted through numerous other local officers in a way that ensured an ever-widening circle of members who were aware of the bishop and president’s slanderous misrepresentations against the Stone family.

To support his charge of “open opposition to the church and its leaders,” the president had his clerk interview some of the people who were aware of the problem and translate their statements into formal “testimonies” against Steve, which were read as though they were valid evidence authored by the persons named. Steve learned afterward from some of those interviewed that what they actually said was not what was reported by the overly-aggressive stake clerk, who embellished their words.

Under church rules, an accused member is entitled to confront his accusers in person at his disciplinary council. In Steve’s case, none of his accusers (many of whom had since moved away) were present in person for Steve to confront. Instead, he was left to challenge their written words, most of which were obviously inaccurate or exaggerated.

Steve pointed this out, and categorically denied the deceptive testimonies falsely offered as evidence of his “open opposition to the church.” The president responded by saying that it would be “unfair” for Steve to challenge these written accounts, since those named as authoring them were not available to be questioned.

By way of sheer volume and emphasis, however, the most dominating evidence in the council centered in eight documents that concerned a comment Steve made in a “Sunday School class” in January 1998 regarding the innocence of little children—a comment based on the church’s indisputable official doctrine. The teacher of the class threatened Steve

with punishment for his comment, and enlisted the bishop thereafter in persecuting Steve. The current controversy literally began with that needless dispute.

The eight lengthy documents (which were read into the record—along with a decade-old letter from a former stake official, a very secular economics professor at BYU who disliked Steve’s scriptural economic philosophy) were introduced as evidence by the bishop, who thought they would show Steve to be an apostate, when in reality they proved the bishop to be—to anyone familiar with the church’s official doctrine.

Additional false witness came from the spoken words of the bishop himself, who testified that members of the Stone family were guilty of “deceit” for bearing their “testimonies” of Christ on Fast Sunday when he happened not to be present at the meeting (due to health or other problems). Steve called the accusation false and mean-spirited, since the family had paid no attention to whether the bishop was present or not when they got up to speak—as all members were invited to do—but spoke from their heart about the saving principles of the gospel as they understood them.

Not only was his characterization of the family incorrect, but the bishop couldn’t possibly even know the truth of what he was claiming, since he wasn’t there to witness the alleged “deceit” he testified about.

This perjury by the bishop was a defining moment that epitomized the self-evident malice and dishonesty with which he had repeatedly treated the family from the outset of this needless problem.

A shameful sham

The final three hours of the meeting required the Stones to sit alone out in the hall, while the stake presidency and high council deliberated. The family was greatly disturbed to hear raucous laughter repeatedly emanate from the high council chambers.

Finally, Steve was escorted back in and allowed to make a comprehensive statement. He did so—detailing what had been going on for the past year and a half to cause the Stone family to feel that they were being mistreated by representatives of the church.

Steve was then informed that he was, henceforth, disfellowshipped. The president then invited Steve to stay and partake of the “sacrament”—the main privilege of membership denied a disfellowshipped member. Steve told him that would, of course, be inappropriate, since he had just been disfellowshipped.

Steve sat stunned until nearly everyone had left the room. Having finally gotten to hear his side of the controversy in a cohesive manner, many of the high councilors acted ashamed as they walked past him (since they’d failed in their duty to ensure the meeting was fair). He shook no hands—with the exception of a sympathetic new high councilor (it was his first day on the job) who’d leaned over midway through the meeting and told Steve he wanted to help him, because the proceedings were clearly unfair.

The most unfair aspect of the fraudulent “disciplinary council” was that it blatantly violated Steve’s right, under church law, to present his own defense *during* the consideration of evidence—rather than wait to make his case until *after* a decision had already been reached.

Steve was repeatedly told not to speak throughout the proceedings, and was resigned merely to dispute the endless false witness and slander offered as proof he was guilty of “repeatedly acting in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church and its leaders”—a catch-all phrase church leaders often use to punish and control members who are guilty of no obvious transgression.

To any fair-minded observer, it should be clear that without *obvious, proven transgression* by a member, church discipline is little more than a sham—one that discredits the church and its claim to God’s authority to “bind in heaven what it binds on earth,” something LDS scripture says must be accompanied by truth and righteousness to be valid (see D&C 82:10, 121:36, and 128:14).

This disturbing fact was revisited when Steve was later excommunicated over the same issues that led to his wrongful disfellowshipment.

The envelope, please

Several days after Steve’s disfellowshipment, the family found a letter illegally placed in their mailbox without postage. It was from the stake president.

The message was a “letter of conditions” by which Steve might be reinstated to full fellowship—something the president was expected by standard protocol to provide anyone receiving serious discipline.

Such a letter following disciplinary action would inform the transgressor of what he or she needed to do to repent and return to fellowship. Because the letter would stipulate specifically what was required for repentance, the violation itself would be apparent—or at least implied—in the language of the letter.

The president’s letter was therefore of great interest to the Stone family.

Containing mostly “boilerplate” language from the church’s “Handbook of Instructions”—language addressed generically to any transgressor—the letter actually said very little. There were two notable exceptions.

The first was a stipulation that Steve and his family not talk about the church problem in the privacy of their home.

Since this stipulation was obviously unfair, intrusive, and unenforceable—even beyond the purview of any organization to require of a family—the requirement was moot. It meant nothing.

Not so the other stipulation, which centered in the family's work. The president's "letter of conditions" revealed that—despite appearances—the president disfellowshipped Steve *solely for refusing to quit working for Alan Keyes*.

Here's how the president revealed himself—in ways that are unmistakable.

"Meaningful employment"

Since church rules don't allow a person's lawful employment to serve as a basis for discipline, the Stone family's work for Alan Keyes came up only in passing during Steve's disciplinary council. The president carefully avoided the issue, even though it was the precipitating cause of the council.

Instead, the president focused on an all-encompassing charge of "opposition" to the church and its leaders—permitting him, in his mind, to punish Steve solely for *disobeying* church officials, no matter the object of the disobedience.

Unfortunately for the president, church protocol required him to be more specific in his letter of conditions—forcing his hand. A victim of his own deceit, the president proceeded to identify, in veiled words, the real cause of his punitive action against Steve.

After first citing "template" language from the "church handbook" in his letter to obfuscate his actions and intent, and after telling the family not to talk about him or the bishop in the privacy of their home, the president then stipulated what Steve *specifically needed to do*—as required by a letter of conditions—if Steve was to satisfy the president.

So he wrote, in words he thought vague enough to obscure his meaning beyond the family, that for Steve's disfellowshipment to be lifted, Steve *must "seek meaningful employment,"* with a warning that refusal to do so would likely result in excommunication.

Of course, the *only* employment the family was then engaged in was working fulltime for Alan Keyes—something the president knew when the controversy began, and something he expressly confirmed just days before proceeding to punish Steve.

Foolishly, if the goal was to cover his actions, the president unwittingly provided the Stone family indisputable hard evidence that Steve was disfellowshipped specifically for refusing to quit his work for Alan Keyes. He cited no other significant conditions in the letter beyond the family's need to abandon their existing employment and find something more "meaningful" than working for Dr. Keyes.

The letter amounted to a still-warm "smoking gun."

It also amounted to clear evidence of serious violation of law by church officials, for their interference—sanctioned by the highest church authorities—with the Stones' political and employment rights.

Aside from the legal implications of the letter, the letter also dispelled any claim by the family's bishop that he merely "advised" the family to quit working for Alan Keyes—an obvious lie that amounted to perjury when the bishop asserted it before a tribunal of area authorities. "Advice" that is accompanied, first, by threats—and then by very real punishment—is not "advice," but compulsion, plain and simple.

"You won't obey your leaders"

After reading the president's "letter of conditions"—which obviously indicted the president and bishop for deceit, as well as unlawful behavior—Steve took his son Ethan to the president's house to discuss the letter.

Finding him home, Steve asked the president if the letter of conditions for reinstatement he wrote *in fact constituted a letter of conditions for reinstatement*—as it appeared to be.

The president denied it was, and said it was only "recommendations," even though the letter stated that if Steve refused to comply with them, he faced excommunication.

By now, it should be clear to any reader that the president enjoyed keeping Steve off balance and in the dark, and his words could never be taken as true on their face. It should also be clear that the president was rarely rational in his statements or behavior.

Regarding the president's denial that his letter of conditions amounted to *actual terms for reinstatement*—note that when the family and the president met together with the Area President a year later to discuss Steve's disfellowshipment, the president conceded what was obvious, after being pressed by Steve to admit it: the president's letter of conditions for reinstatement was in fact a letter of conditions for reinstatement.

What deviousness by a professed representative of Christ.

Knowing the president was lying in his home about something so undeniable—the nature and purpose of the president's letter—Steve asked him in that private conversation what "this whole controversy" that resulted in Steve's disfellowshipment was "all about."

Steve did so just after asking the president to define what "meaningful employment" was, and receiving an irrational answer about "digging ditches"—in contrast to the family's work for one of America's premier black leaders in the cause of preserving the republic.

The president's deadly-serious answer? "You won't obey your leaders."

Standing for something

At the annual ward conference that took place a few weeks later, all members of the Stone family—with the exception of Steve, who was no longer "in good standing" for his refusal to quit working for Alan Keyes—stood and cast votes against the bishop and stake president, when invited with the rest of the congregation to signify their approval or disapproval of these men.

Afterward, the family—including Steve—were interviewed by a counselor to the bishop, as well as the new high councilor who'd told Steve at his disciplinary council he wanted to help because the proceedings "weren't fair." After the interview, the high councilor promised to contact higher church authorities and pass on the Stones' account of their leaders' controlling, dishonest behavior. He later reported to the family that he was restrained from doing so by the stake president.

Chapter 8 — The significance of Steve’s disfellowshipment

When a “Mormon” is disfellowshipped, the main punishment the person suffers, besides humiliation, is loss of the “sacrament”—that is, the “Lord’s supper.” The person is also prohibited from engaging in other routine activities such as attending the temple, “exercising priesthood,” giving prayers in church meetings, etc. But the primary restriction is denial of the sacrament.

This loss is significant, since LDS scripture regards the sacrament as the central ritual of LDS worship.

The meaning of the sacrament

The Lord’s supper is defined in the Book of Mormon as the means by which those converted to Jesus Christ “witness” to God that they “do always remember [Christ]”—which, if they can truthfully testify before God that they do, entitles them to “have [Christ’s] Spirit to be with [them].” (See 3 Ne. 18:1-13.)

The sacrament thus has vital meaning to any true disciple who strives to live close enough to Jesus Christ to commune continually with His Spirit.

In LDS culture, the sacrament is widely viewed as a weekly opportunity to get momentarily closer to Christ by reflecting on His atonement during the ceremony—as well as a means by which members might “renew” their covenant of baptism (neither purpose being quite that emphasized in the Book of Mormon, but meaningful to Mormons nonetheless).

To any serious-minded, committed Christian—no matter their denomination—the sacrament of the Lord’s supper has transcendent personal meaning that helps them stay true to their faith in Christ. It follows that nothing could be more devastating to a regular recipient of the sacrament than to be denied that privilege *for no valid reason*.

Prostitution of sacred things

In Steve’s case, LDS church officials deliberately employed the sacred emblems of Christ’s flesh and blood *as tools of compulsion* to coerce him and his family to give up their lawful rights. There’s a word in the vernacular for such perversion of sacred things: prostitution.

Because the highest authorities of the church sanctioned local leaders’ prostitution of things so sacred for such an ungodly purpose, the church itself is subject to valid questions regarding the legitimacy of its claim to be “Christian,” let alone the only “true” church of God.

Such perversion of the symbols of Christ's redeeming sacrifice is of course the height of apostasy.

Chapter 9 — The church's 'Address to the World'

Now would be an appropriate time to examine the church's official position on members' right to choose their employment and their political pursuits, in light of the foregoing narrative.

In 1907, at a time when the church was under intense scrutiny over its reported continuation of polygamy in violation of law—and its reputation for being inordinately controlling, un-American, and unpatriotic—the church issued a landmark “Address to the World”³ to dispel the widespread criticism it was receiving.

At the center of the controversy was the U.S. Senate's refusal to seat Utah's first Mormon senator, apostle Reed Smoot, because he was a high leader in a religious organization widely believed to sanction the breaking of America's laws, and thought to disrespect America's most cherished institutions.

Issued just six weeks after the Senate voted to confirm Smoot, following four years of sensational public hearings that lampooned the church in the public mind, the Address was a serious attempt to salvage the church's long-disparaged public image.

Much of the indignant, lofty language of the Address—as might be expected from an organization weary of being constantly on the defensive—appears overstated, but that's not a significant criticism. On the whole, the Address amounts to a legitimate plea to the world to be fair and objective in assessing the church.

Taking for granted that the church published the Address in good faith, therefore—and sincerely intended to stand by its many assurances of fundamental decency, patriotism, and respect for law, as well as respect for the rights of its members—we have a serious incongruity. For, *were the Address issued today*, it would have to be considered fraudulent—intended to deflect and deceive, being deeply at odds with the truth in some of its most basic claims.

Very simply, the Address's favorable characterizations of the church institutionally, and its members culturally, are out of touch today with reality.

The disparity between what the church then professed to do in 1907 and what it has continued to do is so pronounced, in fact, that the church has long shelved its “Address to the World”—rarely quoting from it and keeping it largely under wraps.

Yet at the time it was published, *the Address was the single most important public relations statement in the church's history*, and by its far-reaching significance remains so today, no matter its current de-emphasis in the church. The Address is no less important than the church's currently-emphasized “Proclamation to the World on the Family.”

The fact that the 1907 “Address to the World” was *adopted by unanimous vote* in General Conference makes this position statement even *more* significant as a defining document of

church commitment than the broadly-publicized “Proclamation on the Family,” which has never been presented for a vote of the members. The Address is certainly no less important, and should be cited frequently by LDS teachers, leaders, and scholars in discussing what the church stands for, and stands behind.

Unfortunately, it is not given its due in Mormon lore. It has been all but cast aside.

Which we find symptomatic of the ever-controlling nature of the church’s leadership in recent decades—culminating in the kind of unbelievable, but officially sanctioned and defended, mistreatment the Stone family has endured from all levels of the church leadership, as our narrative will increasingly bear out.

Were the church to remain true to its landmark 1907 “Address to the World,” the long-running persecution of the Stone family for their employment and political choices would never have happened. Or if it happened, it would not still be going on as it is today. The Address wouldn’t condone such treatment of a family over such silly things—were the Address still held up as central to LDS policy and guiding principle.

The Address’s assurances

The most noteworthy assurance of the church’s 1907 “Address to the World” is a bold claim that the church welcomes “enlightened” scrutiny of its doctrines and fundamental character, and thus is open to honest, good-faith investigation of all aspects of the church. The Address says unequivocally:

[T]he charge that the Church . . . shuns enlightened investigation is contrary to reason and fact. Deceit and fraud in the perpetuation of any religion must end in failure. . . . *Enlightened investigation* is the very means through which the Church hopes to promote belief in her principles and extend the beneficent influence of her institutions. *From the beginning, enlightened investigation has been the one thing she has sought.* (p. 5, emphasis added).

For this bold invitation to truth-based investigation of the church to be meaningful and genuine—not just rhetorical—the church would need, of course, to institute internal policies that not only encourage it, but prevent punishing or discouraging any sincere truth-seeker who might wish to conduct a fair-minded examination of the church and submit their findings to a candid world.

Yet, a member of the church today who might undertake just such an examination and publish it widely risks excommunication for “apostasy,” no matter the truth of his or her findings.

By any reasonable standard, if what is published is *true*—and is not privileged communication—its writer should be protected by the church, even encouraged, under the clear sentiments of its 1907 Address, in the interest of promoting the “enlightened investigation” the Address categorically invites.

Instead, any member who goes public with truth about the church that is *significantly unflattering*—bearing in mind that the church, like any institution, is prone to error, excess, and self-contradiction—is likely to be censured, even cut off from the church, by overly-sensitive church officials.

Not long ago, a high church authority summed up this defensive posture among church leaders when he said during a PBS broadcast spotlighting the church that “it’s wrong to criticize leaders of the church, even if the criticism is true.”

Since *criticism of the church is unavoidably (or at least implicitly) criticism of its leaders*, such an extreme notion—one without a basis in doctrine—would proscribe all honest assessment of the church by those who know it best: its members. (It would also prohibit all negative votes by members during “sustainings”—depriving them of their divine right to hold their leaders to account. More on that later.)

Such insulation of a virtual ruling class in the church from honest, open criticism repudiates, and makes fraudulent, the church’s “Address to the World.”

Certainly it discourages the kind of “enlightened investigation”—in terms both positive and negative—the church said in its Address was “the one thing [it] has sought” of those genuinely interested in understanding the church.

The church’s oversensitivity to valid, honest criticism—well documented by many in and out of the church—reveals an inordinate desire by church authorities to “manage the church’s image,” or otherwise *cover their personal or institutional sins*—something absolutely prohibited by LDS doctrine. Christ is a God of Truth, not an advertising executive, and all who follow Him eschew mind control, manipulation, and illusion in favor of reality—in harmony with the refrain of a hymn adopted by Mormons: “Do what is right, let the consequence follow.”

No matter the reason for the church’s paranoia toward truthful criticism, the fact remains: any attempt to stifle truth-based examination of the church violates its official policy as published in its 1907 “Address to the World.”

That said, let’s look at two plain assurances in the Address that concern members’ employment and political rights.

Choice of employment

One of the accusations the church seeks to dispel in its “Address to the World” is the belief that the church is a “menace to free institutions”—due to the perception that church leaders exercise “arbitrary power” over members.

To counter this perception, the Address assures the world:

The charge that the Church . . . dictates its members *in their industrial activities and relations, and aims at absolute domination in temporal affairs*—all this we

emphatically deny. That the church claims the right to counsel her members in temporal as well as spiritual matters is admitted. . . . [But] this has been done without the exercise of arbitrary power. . . .

We deny the existence of arbitrary power in the Church; and this because its government is moral government purely, and its forces are applied through kindness, reason, and persuasion.

. . . Church government . . . operates upon the principle of *free will*. . . . (pp. 8, 10, emphasis added)

What this assurance means is that the church's claim that it is *not* a menace to a free society (as the church was widely considered in 1907) *hinges directly on whether the church interferes with members' choice of employment*, the church itself concedes. That is the central context in which the existence of "arbitrary power" in the church is raised. (See pages 8 and 9 of the Address.)

In the case of the Stone family, who have been punished by local church leaders—with the express approval of high church authorities—for *refusing to abandon their lawful employment*, the church has not only exercised the kind of arbitrary power that gave the church the reputation of being a "menace" years ago, but has shown itself today still to be the kind of menace once widely thought.

At least the Stones would say so—given the long-running persecution they've suffered for more than a decade from all levels of the church hierarchy for refusing to quit working for Alan Keyes.

Given the facts in the Stones' case—not just at this point in the controversy, but from years of abuse that continue even now—the "Address to the World" would seem fraudulent regarding its denial of "arbitrary power."

Very clearly, the church hasn't lived up to its professed respect for the rights of its members in something so basic as choice of employment, as the Stones can attest. And the reader can be assured that the church's controlling behavior toward the Stones is not an isolated incident. *Church leaders are given to believe that they know God's will by virtue of their callings*—and this undoctinal notion is a prescription for dictatorial behavior by leaders throughout the church, given the tendencies of human nature.

Individual political rights

After attempting to defuse criticism that it interferes with members' employment, the 1907 Address gives particular emphasis to dispelling the belief that the church controls members' *political choices*.

Declaring that “unquestionably, the ‘Mormon’ people [are] patriotic and loyal” (p. 11), the Address states,

The overthrow of earthly governments; the union of church and state; domination of the state by the church; ecclesiastical interference with political freedom and rights of the citizen—all such things are contrary to the principles and policy of the Church, and directly at variance with the oft repeated declarations of its chief presiding authorities and of the Church itself. . . . (p. 13)

The Address then asserts,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints holds to the doctrine of . . . the noninterference of Church authority in political matters; and the absolute freedom and independence of the individual in the performance of his political duties. If, at any time, there has been conduct at variance with this doctrine, it has been in violation of the well settled principles and policy of the Church.

We declare that from principle and policy, we favor . . . *the absolute freedom of the individual from the domination of ecclesiastical authority in political affairs.* (p. 14, emphasis added)

Nothing could be more clear on its face. The problem lies in the assurance’s apparently fraudulent nature, if it is assumed to be relevant today. By repeatedly intimidating, punishing, and harassing the Stone family for their refusal to quit their lawful political work—and thereafter ignoring their pleas for an end to this ongoing abuse, expressed countless times through normal church procedure and protocol—the Church has blatantly violated its professed policy regarding members’ “absolute freedom” to exercise their political rights, *as though the policy didn’t even exist.*

As the record shows, the church has done so with reckless disregard for the God-given freedom of the Stones, and for the foundations of the American republic.

Because this behavior by the Church, in direct violation of its 1907 Address, has been unremitting in the face of earnest protestations by the family for more than a decade, it’s reasonable to conclude that the Church’s “oft repeated declarations” of non-interference with members’ political rights are for public relations only, not meant to constrain Church leaders from interfering with those rights.

Furthermore, because the Church’s threatening behavior severely damaged the 2008 presidential campaign of Alan Keyes, as we will show—effectively depriving American citizens of the opportunity to vote for this articulate conservative candidate—and because the Church has damaged the family’s work in behalf of other candidates, the Church can justly be considered a threat to America’s political institutions, as well as a violator of federal and state laws protecting citizens from such intrusion into their most basic rights as Americans.

Is the church “disloyal” to the most vital principles of the American republic? Yes—as we shall see in its increasingly abusive treatment of the Stones, emanating from the highest levels, and the effect of this abuse on their respected political work—work that triggered the harassment.

For the church to counter, as it does in its “Address to the World,” that “If, at any time, there has been conduct at variance with this doctrine, it has been in violation of the well settled principles and policy of the Church,” *such words amount to empty rhetoric* when the church utterly disregards the continual appeals for relief expressed by those whose rights are being abused. In the case of the Stones, the family has *now suffered over eleven years of destructive abuse at the hands of the church, and the abuse continues!*

When allegations of serious error by church leaders are repeatedly ignored, even punished—on the pretext that “it’s wrong to criticize leaders of the church, even if the criticism is true”—the church cannot credibly claim to stand behind its lofty assurances regarding the political rights of its members.

The modern LDS church appears to view the 1907 Address as merely a strategic attempt at “damage control” necessitated by its early image—not a definitive statement of actual fact, or of genuine policy. The Church has shown that it actually has no policy of ensuring members’ “absolute freedom . . . from domination of ecclesiastical authority in political affairs.” It has only century-old, presumably fraudulent words claiming such.

This fact leaves the church open to valid claims that it is un-American for its cult-like control of its members—the same charge that existed when the 1907 “Address to the World” was issued, and the same tradition that still governs the church today.

Chapter 10 — Formal appeal

During Steve’s disturbing disciplinary council on February 3, 2002—which lasted twelve hours—Alan Keyes’ chief of staff tried calling the Stone home repeatedly. She had an urgent message for the family.

When the family arrived home after Steve’s disfellowshipment, they found an email from the chief of staff notifying them that RenewAmerica—which the family launched in mid-January—was just designated by the Keyes organization as its top priority, right behind Alan Keyes’ new live MSNBC TV show, “Alan Keyes Is Making Sense,” which the cable network launched January 21. The Keyes organization wanted to make full use of RenewAmerica to help publicize the new show.

The chief of staff also assured the family the Keyes organization would devote all the resources it could afford to financially assisting RA.

This message secured the Stones’ future with the Keyes organization, and represented an ironic response to the church’s demand that the family “seek meaningful employment” elsewhere.

It elated the Stones, and buoyed their resolve to continue their political work, no matter the challenges they might face in doing so—on what was otherwise the worst day of their lives.

With that implicit repudiation of the LDS church’s interference with the work of the Stone family—delivered the very day of Steve’s disfellowshipment for his refusal to drop that work—we now take up the protracted process of appeal.

The process was aggravating, humiliating, and inordinately time-consuming, given the complexity of the controversy, and given the lack of accountability—due to the presumption that leaders inherently speak and act for God, a notion contrary to Church doctrine—that shields the church’s bureaucracy.

‘You’re hurting your cause’

Two or three times during his disciplinary council, Stephen told local leaders that their groundless action against him would be overturned by the church’s presiding First Presidency, who were appointed under church rules to consider appeals of church discipline. Steve was right—and he was able to show presiding authorities they ultimately had no choice but to throw out his punishment under church law. But it took fifteen months of certifiable hell to accomplish this reversal—at a time when the family’s responsibilities continued steadily to grow in the political arena.

Unfortunately, the church has a rule that church discipline must be appealed within 30 days of its occurrence, and this presented a significant obstacle. Steve knew he had no way to make a persuasive case for dismissal of his disfellowshipment, in writing, to the First Presidency in that time-frame—in view not only of the extreme pressures on his time

(including helping Alan Keyes succeed with his new TV show), but the convoluted facts surrounding the controversy between the Stone family and its leaders.

So he called the Office of the First Presidency, explained some of the unique facts in the controversy, and asked for an extension of time to file. The man he talked with—the Assistant Secretary to the First Presidency, the second highest representative of that presiding body—turned him down, saying, “You’re hurting your cause, Brother Stone.”

Steve responded that he didn’t think of his appeal as “a cause”—since he’d been wrongfully disfellowshipped for his lawful political work—but needed a little more time to prepare an appeal in what was an usually difficult, complicated matter.

The Assistant Secretary—a paid employee of the church with no ecclesiastical authority—told Steve curtly, even rudely, he had the standard 30 days to file, and no more. His tone, and words, revealed a presumption that Steve’s local leaders were right, and Steve was wrong. He was clearly prejudiced—and antagonistic—toward Steve.

Steve later learned from a woman in the Office of the First Presidency that “everything the First Presidency sees” goes through the Assistant Secretary. That was not optimistic news.

As it turned out, this man had a direct hand in some of the most egregious cruelty the church visited upon the Stone family in upcoming years. In many ways, he *was* the First Presidency—greatly influencing the outcome of this controversy—acting in their stead as a judge without authority to do so under church law.

Last-minute filing

Because he and two other Stone family members were planning to make a special trip to Washington, D.C., to visit with Keyes’ chief of staff (and possibly see a live broadcast of “Alan Keyes Is Making Sense”), Steve did his best—under difficult circumstances—to submit an appeal of his wrongful disfellowshipment on time.

The appeal summarized the controversy, described in detail local leaders’ unjust behavior and the irregularity of Steve’s disciplinary council, stressed that the church’s interference had already greatly impeded the family’s political work, and then alerted the First Presidency that, given the complexity of the matter, Steve planned to submit follow-up installments, over time, so they might better appreciate a problem that required special attention before rendering a judgment.

He met the filing deadline he was given, left by car for D.C., where he and family members spent a week on political business, and returned with more work to do than he’d previously been burdened with—at a time when the demands on his energies were already considerable, amounting to over a 100 hours a week, mostly urgent, high-intensity work.

It therefore took him weeks, then months, to assemble, write, and submit the additional documents he felt were essential for presiding authorities to take into account in considering his unique case. He did so with no acknowledgement from the Office of the

First Presidency—for months—that it even received any of these, or his initial appeal letter.

In the meantime, the Stone family staged two major political debates for two heavily-contested Utah Republican congressional races—the largest events of their kind that election season—as well as a third event for local candidates in their county, all resulting in significant media and delegate attention.

The events were extremely difficult to put together under the distracting circumstances created by the LDS church—a fact Steve pointed out to the First Presidency in one of the documents of his appeal.

Among other notable Stone family activities that the “church problem” intruded into during this time was an excursion to Iowa, where family members assisted a former member of Alan Keyes’ national staff with an event he’d staged involving Republican candidates in the state, with Dr. Keyes as keynote speaker.

Not long afterward, the family refurbished the county GOP’s former parade float, which they’d acquired, and entered it—accompanied by banners for RenewAmerica, numerous supporters in patriotic outfits, live musicians, and a group of musket-firing Minutemen—in Provo Utah’s annual Freedom Festival parade, which draws hundreds of thousands of spectators each year.

Ironically, their float and lively procession of patriots followed shortly behind the “grand parade marshal”—the influential “Area President” who presided over the mishandling of this whole controversy from the outset.

The inept new member of the Area Presidency

After faxing a number of appeal documents totaling 60 pages to the First Presidency over several months and receiving no response, Steve was called in the middle of the summer by the high church authority who’d given the stake president a “green light” to punish Steve for “disobedience.”

This was the man who joined the Area Presidency *just after* the Stones were told by the stake president and bishop that Steve’s 110-page complaint to the Area Presidency had resulted in these men’s approval to be tried for their membership if Steve wanted to proceed, with a counselor in the stake presidency designated to preside.

In other words, the inept man who knew little of the facts at issue—yet was persuaded by the stake president to prejudge the controversy in favor of the local leaders and let them come after Steve in retaliation for the Stones’ charges against them.

He was the same man who’d authored the untruthful letter dated January 31, 2002, falsely claiming that all members of the Stone family had been interviewed and their charges against their local leaders therefore found to be groundless.

He was the last person Steve would choose to confide in, because of his demonstrated ineptitude, dishonesty, and favoritism.

The man called to say the First Presidency had assigned him to be its sole representative in dealing with Steve's appeal. He said Steve was henceforth to cease sending the First Presidency any further documents, and instead Steve was to send all communication in the matter exclusively to him.

Stunned by such unthinkable injustice, Steve told him this was unacceptable, since the man had—in reality—been the ultimate cause of his disfellowshipment and could not be trusted to be fair or honest in handling (or assessing) Steve's appeal. Steve said he would continue to send all elements of his appeal to the First Presidency, who alone, under church law, were authorized to consider his appeal.

It's noteworthy that the bureaucratic incompetence and profound insensitivity of this man were reflected by the First Presidency's decision to give the man sole authority in so difficult a matter.

It's also noteworthy that, had Steve "followed the prophet"—as Mormons are taught to do as a basic obligation of membership—and gone along with the above unjust plan, *his disfellowshipment would likely never have been overturned.* Fortunately for him, he placed the requirements of church law above the absurd demands of even the highest church authorities (as LDS scripture admonishes), and left the outcome in the hands of God.

As it was, the manipulation of the First Presidency by the above inept church authority added nearly a year to the difficult process it took Steve to get his disfellowshipment overturned. Nonetheless, Steve preferred that frustration to the alternative of not having it overturned at all.

A friend of Israel is silenced

Shortly after Steve learned the above inept church authority had been assigned to oversee Steve's appeal, MSNBC canceled Alan Keyes' TV show—one of the best of its kind on television.

The reason insiders cite for MSNBC's decision, since the show had respectable ratings, was vigorous lobbying against Keyes by Palestinian supporters and gay-rights activists. Keyes was unflinching in his defense of Israel night after night on his show—as well as vocal in his opposition to the gay rights agenda.

Keyes was the most conservative talk show host on MSNBC, arguably the most liberal news network on cable TV.

One of the highlights of the show was the broadcast when Keyes sat down separately with the ambassadors to the U.S. from India and Pakistan for significant talks—at a time when both countries were threatening each other with nuclear conflict.

Keyes did so with unusual skill and understanding as only a seasoned diplomat could—a role he learned as an ambassador to the UN in the Reagan administration.

During its five-month run, “[Alan Keyes Is Making Sense](#)” became increasingly polished, and its impact on Israeli-Palestinian relations steadily grew. Keyes regularly featured intense debates between outspoken Palestinian spokesmen and well-known Israeli representatives, including former Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the mayor of Jerusalem, Ehud Olmert. During these debates, Keyes would educate viewers on the issues—taking the moral-based Israeli position, but being fair and reasonable to the Palestinian spokesmen, who developed a grudging respect for Keyes.

The show was remarkable for a mainstream media offering.

Within days of the show’s cancelation, Dr. Keyes was flown by the State of Israel to receive an award for fairness and accuracy in journalism for his reports regarding Israel. He is the only person ever to receive such an honor.

The last day of the show was June 27, 2002.

With the Stones profoundly distracted by the time and effort involved in completing Steve’s appeal, as well as by the demeaning experience of encountering their local church leaders on Sundays (such as the time the bishop called the family into his office on March 24 of that year and threatened everyone—including ten-year-old Callan—with disfellowshipment for voting against him a month earlier at ward conference; or the time family members voted against the bishop and stake president at a recent stake conference and were degraded by the two stake high councilors assigned to interview them; or the time Steve learned, shortly afterward, that an area authority had menacingly intimidated a friend in the ward—a former bishop—who wanted to be a witness in Steve’s behalf and was told to “stay out of the matter, it’s none of your concern”)—with such distractions intruding into their work for Alan Keyes, the Stones were fortunate to keep up, on any significant basis, with the requests of Keyes’ chief of staff as they worked to help Alan’s show succeed.

Their energies were dissipated—and their effectiveness minimized—by the church’s dehumanizing treatment, which caused the family constant depression and deprived them of the focus needed to do their high-intensity political work with their usual skill.

Would Alan’s show have succeeded were the Stones not continually harassed and persecuted by the LDS church for refusing to quit working for Keyes? There’s no way to know. But they were robbed of much of their opportunity to *try* by a church that demands cult-like conformity of its members above the public’s right to be informed in America’s political system.

“That’s why we’re here”

Several weeks later, in August, the above inept church authority again called Steve and said he wanted to interview the Stone family in response to the latest submissions of Steve’s

appeal (which by now had become considerable—totaling over a dozen documents and a hundred pages that the First Presidency had forwarded to this errant man).

Steve reluctantly agreed—then wrote a letter to the First Presidency protesting the man’s role in mediating the matter because of his past dishonesty and insensitivity. Steve told them he would challenge the man’s report if he felt the interview was unfair or prejudiced.

Not long afterward, the family met with the man and an area authority he brought with him (one of the three church officials who’d incompetently interviewed Steve several weeks before his disfellowshipment). The Stones brought their youngest children with them, so these leaders could meet the whole family.

After introductions, Steve was interviewed first, in a discussion that focused on Steve’s claims regarding the presiding leader’s dishonesty and callousness, at the leader’s insistence. The man was visibly humiliated and angered by Steve’s recent letter to the First Presidency protesting the man’s untruthful, insensitive letter that led to Steve’s disfellowshipment.

Steve recited the verifiable facts about the man’s January 31, 2002, letter—in which the man absolved the stake president and bishop of any misconduct without considering the testimony of the Stone family, yet falsely claimed all members of the family who’d filed charges “had been listened to.”

Steve added that this leader’s refusal to give him more than three days to prepare for his disciplinary council could only be considered incredibly unfair, even cruel, given the complexity of the issues—including the history of malicious behavior by local leaders toward the family, as the Stones alleged in serious accusations against these men.

Steve told the church authority he was not blameless, as he claimed—and made it clear he’d severely wronged the Stone family by his untruthful, unjust actions.

At that point, Steve asked the man if he realized that, by meeting with the family, he was implicitly admitting these errors. He responded, “That’s why we’re here.”

Nutty buddies

The rest of Steve’s interview (which required a follow-up meeting because of its length) focused on matters of doctrine.

Both men disputed Steve’s claim that the *sole duty of church members was to obey God*—as well as his insistence that the *sole canon of church doctrine was limited to the church’s “standard works”* (that is, the published, voted-upon, official body of church scripture), even though both premises were settled doctrine, according to the church’s scriptures themselves, with which neither man appeared to be well versed.

As a result, they indicated they intended to report to the First Presidency that Steve was an apostate for these two unapologetic beliefs—which Steve told them were the root cause of the longstanding controversy between himself and his leaders.

At no time in talking with these men was Steve asked to give evidence in support of the family's charges against the bishop and stake president. The interviewers were disinterested in the charges—obviously having prejudged the matter—and centered the interview instead on authoritarian notions of obedience. The chief interviewer stressed the undoctinal belief—widespread in the church—that obeying church leaders was the same thing as obeying God, an extreme notion derived from misuse of scripture. Later, “bearing his testimony,” the man witnessed his most cherished personal beliefs, which sounded strangely mystical and New Age—causing Steve to wonder what religion the man believed in. It certainly was not a scriptural perspective, nor did it center in Christ.

Not long afterward, the traveling companion of this “authority”—who repeatedly seconded the presiding leader's words—was elevated to president of the church's influential Sunday School system, where he remained for years.

Don't speak negatively of your leaders

In a follow-up meeting, other members of the Stone family were asked to share their knowledge of the ongoing “church problem.” All five said afterward they were treated with condescension and prejudice by their interviewers. When family members testified of serious cruelty, lying, false witness, apostasy, malicious behavior, harassment over the family's political work, and other inappropriate conduct by the bishop and stake president, *they were chastised for speaking negatively about their leaders.*

Those who were interviewed wrote down their encounters, saying the interviewers “were just going through the motions and did not care about our charges,” “were not interested in investigating any of our claims,” “were not open-minded and seemed prejudiced,” etc.

In September, Steve sent the First Presidency a complaint protesting the interviewers' incompetent review and asking to be restored immediately to full fellowship. He ended one part of the complaint with the following words—underscoring the error the church kept making toward the Stone family:

“It is unfair to allow the instigators of mischief to also be the investigators of that mischief.”

Chapter 11 — More lay-bureaucratic fumbling

No doubt the reader wonders how much church authorities were really aware of the adverse effect their actions were having on the Stones' political work—since church leaders appeared oblivious to it, as though the family's work, and the church's impact on it, were inconsequential.

Be assured that Steve stressed the damage the church was causing the family and its work *at every opportunity*. The 110-page complaint, for instance, that led church authorities to approve the family's bishop and stake president to be tried for their membership contained a major section detailing the extensive harm local leaders had already done to the family's work for Alan Keyes and other political figures they represented.

Similarly, the initial documents of Steve's appeal, which were extensive, described the detrimental consequences of the church's abuse of the Stones on their political efforts, even stating at the outset:

The time I am taking to file even this incomplete appeal has *already severely diminished the work that I am obligated to fulfill, in turn damaging the interests of those I represent*. (emphasis added)

Follow-up documents of the appeal continued to stress the terrible toll the church's persecution of the family was causing the family's political work—work at the heart of the controversy.

On April 26, 2002, for example, Steve wrote a letter to the First Presidency describing several political events the family had staged for over 25 Republican candidates and said “our family is under such degrading circumstances that the staging of these events has been nearly impossible for us to accomplish.”

He ended the letter by emphasizing that “*this intolerable problem has made it very difficult for us to do any of the challenging work in which we are engaged.*”

On July 6, Steve wrote—in a document titled “The Significance of My Disfellowshipment,”

I wish to stress that this escalating problem continues to intrude into my own time and worthy pursuits in a way wholly unwanted and undeserved. I have important work that demands my attention, yet I am forced—by the cruelty of my leaders—to keep pursuing a fair and true resolution, not only for my sake, but for the sake of my family. And that takes time. Time I don't have.

A little later in the same document, he emphasized,

Since my February 3, 2002, disfellowshipment, *the productivity of my work has dropped to the point that I can hardly perform my duties and obligations with any*

consistent competence. The result has been detrimental to those I represent. [In my] political consulting—for Alan Keyes nationally and for various candidates in Utah— . . . the main issue is **creativity** and **energy**, as well as skilled, efficient writing and other communication, including effective use of computers. My productivity in these vital areas is now almost negligible. *Were it not for the support and assistance of my wife and adult children, our family's political work would be completely unproductive*—and hence of little value to those we work for.

In plain language, my unfair and illegitimate disfellowshipment at the hands of professed representatives of the Savior—and the likelihood that this action will ultimately result in my **excommunication** because I refuse to submit to the unrighteous control of my bishop and stake president—has sapped me of my normal strength and dissipated my concentration and confidence, vital to succeeding in my political activities.

The additional threat **to my family** of the same eventual fate has further distracted me.

In a related document titled “The Significance of My Disfellowshipment,” submitted the same day, Steve ended by saying,

Meanwhile, our family plods along—with all the energy we can muster under horrific conditions—to do the righteous work in which we are engaged, pleasing God in that effort and sacrificing whatever he requires of us in the cause of preserving our nation. How tragic and indefensible for *our greatest single adversary* in that righteous cause to be the Church of Jesus Christ [of Latter-day Saints]—whose own security and success, most ironically, are greatly dependent on a strong and stable America.

The written record is full of undeniable evidence that high church leaders were notified of what the church was doing to the Stones and their political work all along—but for reasons that are incomprehensible to reasonable (and freedom-loving) minds, they evidently did not care.

To underscore the compounding cruelty of the church’s ongoing interference with the Stones’ work, consider the following excerpt from Steve’s August 15, 2002, letter to the First Presidency protesting the interview the inept church authority was planning for the family—an excerpt that leaves no doubt about the church’s knowledge, and culpability:

Please file this letter with my appeal and use it as a basis for correcting any irregularities or inappropriate conclusions that may result from the Saturday meeting. Again, I am hoping for the best, and I am willing to give Elder [deleted] and Elder [deleted] a chance to fix things. Let's see what comes of the meeting.

So you know, there is even *greater urgency*—from my vantage point—*than before* to get this horrible situation finally over with. Our family is bringing Alan Keyes to

Utah for two back-to-back speeches in behalf of 2nd Congressional District GOP candidate John Swallow, one in the Wasatch Front area, the other in St. George.

If things go as planned, I will need to be central to the event, representing Dr. Keyes in dealing with numerous private and public officials. I won't be able to rely heavily on Stefani (as I have done since my disfellowshipment) to handle calls, attend meetings, or solve PR problems. I will personally need to be in good form and up to speed.

It is essential that my indefensible disfellowshipment be ended immediately. I have done nothing to merit this degrading action by cruel leaders of the Church, and I am weary of appealing. Let's get this mess cleared up.

The visit by Dr. Keyes is tentatively scheduled for September 17, 18, or 19th. I request that I be fully reinstated to good standing in the Church *well before then*.

These words make clear the effect of the church's unjust, ongoing abuse of the Stone family, and leave little room for the church to deny knowledge of that effect on the family's work.

Unfortunately, Steve's plea was met with further abuse by the church, and further contempt for America's political system. The First Presidency took no action to overturn Steve's disfellowshipment until *eight months later*.

Close election

The congressional candidate, by the way, lost in the November election by less than 1 percent of the vote, in a race that became neck and neck immediately following Dr. Keyes' widely-publicized criticism of the incumbent's little-known vote supporting partial-birth abortion. In the weeks prior to Keyes' two-day visit to Utah, the GOP candidate had been behind 15 percentage points.

In a tight, hotly-contested race as this was, any undue, unlawful interference with a candidate's staff or key supporters can be a potential factor in the outcome. The fact the Stones created and oversaw the GOP contender's website while under extreme duress caused by the church's escalating interference with their political work, and their distraction from degrading interviews by those assigned to evaluate Steve's appeal, cannot be ruled out as having a detrimental impact on the race.

Pulling the First Presidency's strings

Following the election—and several weeks after a phone conversation in which the inept presiding authority told Steve he deserved to be disciplined for criticizing church leaders—the presiding authority called to say the First Presidency had “reached a decision” in the matter of Steve's appeal. He assured Steve the decision—which he noted he “influenced”—was “fair and reasonable.”

Two days later, Steve and DeeAnn were invited by the stake president to his office. In the presence of his two counselors, he read a letter from the First Presidency stating these governing Brethren recommended that Steve’s status be changed from disfellowshipment to “formal probation”—a status that in some ways was worse than disfellowshipment, under church protocol, since local leaders can define it essentially any way they want, and can set any terms they “feel inspired” to create.

Disfellowshipment, by contrast, is clearly defined and its punishment clearly spelled out.

Steve responded, “This is Elder [deleted]’s doing.” He added, “The evil and the mischief just keep on going,” and declined to accept this arbitrary change of punishment—which would give the stake president and bishop more, not less, control over him and his family.

He said he would continue as before pursuing his appeal.

When Steve got home, he confronted the inept leader on the phone and reminded him of several assurances and facts he’d claimed on two or three occasions, statements Steve relied upon in communicating with the Office of the First Presidency. The man denied ever saying such things—contradicting what Steve had recorded in writing.

As he had done at least a few times previously, the man lied.

Overhearing the man call Steve a “controlling father”—a groundless notion he no doubt picked up from the stake president—Siena asked for the phone and got into an animated conversation with him that lasted over an hour, saying her father was guilty of no transgression, informing him that the stake president was “the most evil man I have ever met,” and catching the inept presiding authority in several disturbing contradictions and outright lies.

For several months after this conversation, Siena repeatedly told family members that the church’s latest actions were destroying her health and “made her heart hurt.” She spent hours each day severely despondent.

A friend indeed

Unbeknownst to the highest church leaders—who continued their charade of “disciplining” Steve for “disobedience” without once conducting anything resembling an objective review of his appeal—the Stone family was given an unexpected edge that ultimately helped them overturn Steve’s disfellowshipment.

That “edge” was the *half-full* dimension of a lay church that is much of the time *half empty*: a new bishop. The very thing that caused Steve’s disfellowshipment—unchecked authority in the hands of overbearing leaders—has a flip side: an occasional decent human being who has no desire to impose his will on others.

In a lay church—one ignorant of its own rules—you get both, in cycles.

And so it was that the man who initiated the persecution of the Stone family over Steve's belief in obeying Christ alone, as well as Steve's knowledge of scripture, was released in September 2002 and replaced by a man who was already deeply troubled by the well-known sufferings of the family.

Shortly after being called as bishop of the Stones' ward, the new bishop assigned himself to be the family's "home teacher," and came each month to listen to the family's grievances and help them get the long pattern of abuse ended. *On his first visit, he said he knew the family had been wronged, and he wanted to correct it.*

For as long as he was the bishop, the family was protected from any further outright mischief by the stake president—with the exception of things over which the bishop had little control. The stake president continued to harass and intimidate the family, but in most instances the family had the ear, and the protective arm, of the new bishop.

This was a remarkable man who was constantly torn between his loyalty to the family and his perceived obligation to obey his file leaders. Most of the time, the man acted as a buffer between the two allegiances—to the Stones' benefit.

The man served barely three years, then moved. After that, the mischief heightened as before, culminating in Steve's excommunication.

Had the new bishop remained in his position, that outcome likely never would have happened.

Chapter 12 — Light at the end of the funnel

As the cloud of destructive oppression continued to swirl around the Stone family following their recent meeting with the stake presidency, Steve wrote the longest single item of his appeal—24 pages—and hand-delivered it to an aide of LDS church president Gordon B. Hinckley, who was speaking at a large regional conference convened at BYU's 22,000-seat Marriott Center.

The letter was a detailed response to the First Presidency's recommendation that Steve's status be changed from disfellowshipment to "formal probation"—a meaningless decision Steve rejected, opting to remain disfellowshipped while he pressed forward with his appeal, so as to prevent the stake president from placing arbitrary new demands upon him.

Challenging the undoctrinal rationale the stake president told him was behind the presiding Brethren's recommendation—namely, that *Steve should be punished merely for alleging misconduct by church leaders*—Steve declared the truth of his family's charges against church officials, assured the First Presidency that the family can prove these charges to any competent review, and again stressed the harm the church continued to cause his family and its political work.

He pointed out that the family was now overseeing the campaign of a conservative candidate for governor of Utah, and that the demands on the family's time were now greater than ever before—adding,

I literally have no time, therefore, even to write you this letter. By taking time right now to do so, I am damaging this man's candidacy.

Steve then reminded the First Presidency:

As I have said repeatedly in the past, ***I have no time—as usual—to deal with the unjust persecution with which the Church continues to burden me and my family, persecution that is a constant detriment to our important and respected work.*** The Church's unremitting interference with our lives has cost numerous people for whom we work considerable loss.

He reiterated,

Indeed, the single greatest source of opposition to our family's dedicated, selfless work continues to be the Church.

The letter then described in detail a list of grievances, rehearsed the causes of the needless controversy, and appealed for an end to the unremitting abuse.

Finally, after so many submissions to the Office of the First Presidency, *Steve received a reply*—a letter from the Secretary to the First Presidency. In a rebuking tone, the letter told

Steve not to send anything further to their office, and directed Steve to deal solely with his stake president.

This, despite the requirements of church law, which clearly place sole responsibility for review of appeals of church discipline squarely on the First Presidency—particularly when a case is still under appeal, thus having received no definitive, ultimate judgment.

Meanwhile, just before Steve's receipt of this disappointing letter, Stefani phoned the office of the Area President *and succeeded in making an appointment with him to sit down with the family*. Evidently, the man was unaware of the stern reply the family received from the Office of the First Presidency. This fortuitous meeting—coupled with the sympathetic influence of the family's new bishop—paved the way to getting Steve's disfellowshipment finally thrown out.

“Sustain us” or else

On January 14, 2003, members of the Stone family met with the Area President in his office at LDS church headquarters in Salt Lake City. When the conversation began, he feigned ignorance of the family's long-running problem with the church, and asked to be filled in as though he were unfamiliar with it.

This seeming lack of familiarity surprised Steve, who briefly reviewed his unfair disfellowshipment and the mistreatment the family had experienced at the hands of church leaders.

Steve then told the man the First Presidency had adopted the recommendation of the man's associate in the Area Presidency to place Steve on “formal probation” for doing nothing but protest the church's ongoing persecution of the family.

The Area President responded, revealing personal knowledge of the situation: “The First Presidency determined that you hadn't done anything for which you should be disfellowshipped, but instead determined that you should be placed on formal probation *until you changed your thinking toward your local leaders and were willing to sustain them.*”

Steve said he refused to accept the penalty of formal probation *for committing no transgression*, and reminded the Area President that the church “*has no doctrine requiring members to sustain their leaders—it's not in the scriptures.*”

The man responded, “You may be right, but it's a church practice.”

Steve assured him that no amount of church punishment would force him to change his thinking toward his errant leaders, since he knew firsthand of their cruelty, false witness, and deceit.

To Steve's dismay, the conversation somehow shifted to the family's financial circumstances, and the family spent the rest of the meeting discussing how they'd miraculously gotten out of debt since the Area President wanted them to elaborate on it.

This, despite the fact that they'd specifically come to resolve the extreme burden the family continued to endure because of Steve's wrongful disfellowshipment.

They left without any resolution of the controversy—and family members said afterward the high church authority seemed indifferent to their plight. Nonetheless, he did suggest partway into the discussion that a meeting with all parties might offer a possible way of airing things out. That was all the opening the family needed to finally get Steve's disfellowshipment overturned.

A letter of thanks

A few days afterward, Steve sent a letter to the Area President thanking him for his kindness in giving the family an audience—and requesting that a meeting of all parties in the controversy be held, as the Area President had suggested, as a step toward resolving things.

Steve pointed out that daughter Stefani would be moving to Washington, D.C., in early March to serve as Alan Keyes' deputy chief of staff, and that it would be helpful if a meeting could be held before she left.

As a result of the letter, Steve succeeded in arranging a meeting of all involved—the Stones, the stake presidency, the former bishop, the new bishop, and the Area President—on January 29, 2003.

Besides requesting a meeting, Steve's letter took up the issue of "sustaining leaders" that the Area President said was behind the First Presidency's recommendation that Steve be placed indefinitely on "formal probation."

Steve reminded the man,

As you know, on Tuesday, you said that the First Presidency determined that I wasn't guilty of anything that should merit disfellowshipment. But you added that they also determined that I was guilty of "not supporting" my leaders and thus deserved to be **placed on formal probation indefinitely** until I changed my view toward [the stake president and the bishop].

I noted that this was a curious decision, considering that the Law of Common Consent **entitles—even requires**—a Church member to oppose any leader whom they sincerely consider unworthy of his office by virtue of serious transgression.

He added,

During our conversation, I pointed out that the Church has no doctrine in the standard works of "supporting our leaders," of the sort that I have been disciplined for violating. *You did not disagree.* You responded that, although the Church may not have an actual doctrine of "sustaining" our leaders, it nonetheless has a

longstanding "practice" regarding it, the violation of which I must be held accountable for. (emphasis added)

Steve then summed up the entire controversy at issue, based on that exchange:

The above discussion was at least useful in identifying the underpinnings of this whole problem. As I have maintained consistently, I have been persecuted and punished **for violating no definable Church law**. Violating an undoctinal Church "practice" that has absolutely no foundation in the Church's official canon, and that in fact directly conflicts with that canon, is not a transgression of anything.

He ended the letter with a challenge:

Such obsolete "fundamentalism," likely traceable to the formative pioneer era, has no relevance in [the Church]. . . . The universal message of the Church is the saving doctrine of Christ. The twisting of the scriptures to perpetuate a false tradition of "sustaining" and to justify persecuting those who take the gospel seriously . . . **cannot continue to be officially sanctioned by the Church.**

We'll take a closer look a little later at the fraudulent notion—prevalent in the church—of punishing (or intimidating) members for exercising their God-given right, under the Church's Law of Common Consent, not to "sustain" unworthy leaders.

For now, suffice it to say that the governing Brethren wanted Steve punished indefinitely for charging church leaders with misconduct—and *they wanted to use that arbitrary punishment to force Steve to vote, against his will, in favor of those leaders who persisted in abusing the Stone family and destroying their lawful political work.*

That was the substance of the First Presidency's position, as relayed by the Area President.

Shootout at the stake center

The January 29, 2003, meeting proceeded as planned between the local leaders, the Stone family, and the Area President—with the hitch that the Area President got stuck in freeway traffic and was quite late. This forced a second meeting of all parties several weeks later, a fortunate turn of events, since this particular meeting was chaotic and unnecessarily contentious, due to the litany of lies the bishop and stake president were permitted to utter without restraint.

But before the meeting became a virtual free-for-all, the Area President opened his LDS scriptures and read a passage from D&C 64—revealing he had little appreciation of the longstanding controversy:

Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.

I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. (verses 9 and 10)

The church authority sat across from the family at a large conference table where Steve was disfellowshipped a year earlier and where Stefani was angrily screamed at by the stake president two months before that, and directed his reading at the Stones. When he finished reading, he bore down on Steve and asked if he were willing to “forgive” his leaders and drop the whole matter.

This was curious, since the local leaders were the ones who persisted in acting without “forgiveness,” and who had in fact retaliated against Steve—for his 110-page letter seeking relief, as well as his votes against them when invited in church conferences—by punishing him unfairly with disfellowshipment.

Hence the purpose of the present meeting: to set aside the arbitrary, unfair punishment inflicted on Steve by his vindictive leaders, so the family might have some measure of peace. The Area President appeared to forget why he was there, as though the Stones were the perpetrators of cruel mischief against innocent, if imperfect, leaders.

Not about to allow such ironic turning of the tables, Steve responded that he had, in all honesty, long ago forgiven his leaders for what they had done and continued to do to him and his family—but he pointed out that the scriptures differentiate between forgiving others of their trespasses and holding them to account for *serious transgression*, especially if they persist in the sin and are unrepentant.

That in fact is the clear message of the verses that follow, which the Area President neglected to cite:

And him that repenteth not of his sins, and confesseth them not, ye shall bring before the church, and do with him as the scripture saith unto you, either by commandment or by revelation.

And this ye shall do that God may be glorified—*not because ye forgive not, having not compassion*, but that ye may be justified in the eyes of the law, that ye may not offend him who is your lawgiver—

Verily I say, for this cause ye shall do these things. (D&C 64:12-14, emphasis added)

Brushing off Steve’s response, the Area President asked Steve to recount what had caused the problem at issue.

Steve described in detail some of the petty jealousies and undoctinal notions that caused many leaders in the stake to behave unkindly, even abusively, toward the Stone family, going back many years. He told about a malicious letter he received years ago from a stake leader for his efforts to help a very poor single woman in the stake with two small children, who had little food and unusually desperate living conditions, and he described how his efforts in her behalf precipitated a lengthy letter threatening him with excommunication.

Although the letter was over ten years old—and although the family’s bishop told Steve and DeeAnn at the time to “throw it away, it’s mean and lacks love”—the letter was included among evidence against Steve at his disciplinary council, along with several similar letters from others in the stake who simply disliked Steve (most of whom had since moved away).

The Area President agreed with Steve that the letter was inappropriate and should have been discarded long ago by stake leaders.

After Steve brought things current by describing specific actions local leaders had more recently done to harm the Stone family, the Area President turned to the former bishop and asked him to give his side of the controversy.

The dishonest man proceeded to tell at least six or eight outright lies that can only be characterized as perjury, since the meeting was a formal hearing—while Steve protested his shocking, intentional distortions at every opportunity.

Since the former bishop was obviously not telling the truth—as should have been apparent to the presiding authority because of the bishop’s self-contradictions, evasiveness, and extremely uncomfortable body language—Steve thought the high leader would readily perceive the obvious deceit he was hearing. Apparently, he didn’t.

Had Steve not challenged the many false statements by the former bishop, and cited the true facts instead, the Area President made it clear he was biased enough to believe uncritically whatever he was told by the bishop.

When the church authority involved the stake president in many of the disputed facts, asking him to clarify things from his vantage point, the president was permitted to say almost anything he wanted without being asked to elaborate—despite his obvious evasiveness (bear in mind that his typical response to many questions the Stone family put to him was simply to refuse to answer).

In his notes afterward, Steve wrote that the Area President had “deliberately insulated [the stake president] from our grilling,” and that both the stake president and the bishop had clearly “perjured themselves in [the high church leader’s] presence.”

Similarly, Siena wrote: “In our January 29, 2003, meeting with [the Area President], [the] former bishop . . . repeatedly perjured himself, in what was essentially a hearing, to cover up his mistreatment of my family.”

One particularly revealing moment occurred just after the meeting ended and the Area President had left, when Steve and Siena stayed and talked with the former bishop.

As Steve was reiterating his view that the church’s “standard works” (body of scripture) constitute the sole official canon of church doctrine, the man said Steve “deserved to be disfellowshipped for that view, and for [his] refusal to obey [his] leaders.”

As Siena and Steve tried to reason with him, he slammed his car door in their faces and sped off.

Second time's a charm

Following a phone call from Stefani (who hadn't yet left for D.C., opting to remain in Utah a few more months to help with a gubernatorial campaign), and a letter from Siena, the Area President agreed to meet again with all parties in the controversy. The meeting took place April 13, 2003.

Also attending was a new stake clerk, who took notes.

In another of his ironic self-contradictions, the Area President began by saying that if the Stones "*would drop the matter of wrongdoing by their leaders*," Steve could immediately be *reinstated to fellowship*.

This stipulation confirmed what the Stones knew all along: that Steve was disfellowshipped in direct retaliation for the family's charges and votes against the stake president and bishop—which they made in response to these leaders' abusive behavior over Steve's "disobedience," disobedience that centered in the family's work for Alan Keyes.

The Area President's proposal amounted to a glaring violation of church law, since members *are entitled under church statutes to vote freely against any leader they choose*, when invited to do so, without interference from those opposed, or from anyone else in the church's leadership.

The high leader's "solution" indicated he was more intent on protecting the family's errant leaders from accountability than resolving the controversy, or being fair to the Stones.

Steve responded that he felt no ill will toward his leaders, and said he merely wanted them to desist from their continual persecution and intimidation of his family.

As before, he reminded the Area President that LDS scripture teaches that those who commit serious transgression must still be held to account, even if those they injure feel no animosity toward them. Steve also stressed that the issue at hand was not "forgiveness," per se, but "correcting the problem."

The topic then shifted, at Steve's urging, to the July 31, 2001, disciplinary "procedure" arranged by the presiding Brethren for trying the stake president and the former bishop for their membership, with a counselor in the stake presidency presiding, if Steve wished to proceed.

Steve was hoping the Area President would agree that, in all fairness, the Stones still had the right to proceed, *as originally arranged*, to have their local leaders tried, since Steve was deprived of that opportunity for no other reason than doing what church authorities requested—that is, move slowly, seeking person-to-person resolution first, and proceeding

to a disciplinary council against the stake president and bishop only if a personal approach failed to satisfy the Stones.

Throughout the discussion of this pre-arranged disciplinary council—which presiding authorities were persuaded by local leaders to *prejudge*, in violation of church protocol, allowing the stake president and bishop to punish Steve vindictively—the Area President pleaded ignorance, to the point of asking the stake president what the facts were, as though he himself were uninvolved.

This, despite the fact that the area authority who verified the procedure in his BYU office just before the November 2001 stake conference—when members of the Stone family voted the second time against their leaders—*specifically named the Area President by name* as requesting that the family try person-to-person resolution first, before proceeding with the pre-approved disciplinary council.

The man was fully aware of the details he feigned no knowledge about.

When pressed by the Area President to describe the Brethren’s arrangement, the stake president said, “I’m not going to attempt to respond,” adding derisively, “Unlike Brother Stone, I don’t have a photographic memory”—even though the president was knowledgeable enough about the details that night in 2001 to explain them clearly to the Stone family, as he read from a letter from his file leaders he no doubt still possessed.

So as to leave no question what was pre-approved by the highest church leaders on that occasion, Steve rehearsed to the Area President the particulars that the stake president undeniably shared with the family two years earlier.

Steve then protested his unjust disfellowshipment *as a result of church authorities’ unjust prejudgment of the outcome of his local leaders’ approved disciplinary council*—rather than letting due process take its course.

To this, the stake president derisively said to Steve, “You’re always right, and we’re always wrong. You’re always inspired, and we aren’t. You always have the facts, and we don’t” (as recorded in DeeAnn’s notes).

The stake president then defended his punishment of Steve by saying he had the active support and involvement of the inept new member of the Area Presidency.

White as ghosts

As things moved from one subject to another (including the fact that Steve had carefully avoided contact with his local leaders for most of a year after voting against them in the February 2001 ward conference, yet these men felt justified in coming after him for voting against them a second time at the November 2001 stake conference, claiming he was in “open opposition to the church and its leaders”), the issue of the stake president’s repeated claim that “the Church would fall apart if members were taught to follow the Holy Ghost” came up.

The president's response? "I never said that." Since the Stones can prove that he did say it at least twice to family members, the president's outright lie amounts to deliberate perjury in a very serious disciplinary hearing.

He made a number of other outlandish claims—such as equating the family with "polygamists in Manti," and calling Steve a "fanatic" for his work for Alan Keyes.

The subject of several documents Steve had written then came up, documents that were later submitted against him at his disciplinary council. The former bishop claimed these documents "made many members of the ward uncomfortable"—an exaggeration that turned out to refer to only two individuals who disliked Steve's scripture-based view of doctrine, and who therefore sought to have Steve disciplined.

The bishop then emphasized that he personally "was uncomfortable" with what Steve wrote. When Steve asked him to explain his basis, he said, "I'm not going to answer."

Siena then asked why "my father's writings were used against him." The stake president responded, "Brother Stone's writings speak for themselves."

It is worth noting that the new bishop—the man who appointed himself the family's "home teacher" and said he wanted to help the family end the wrongs church leaders had committed against them—later certified in writing that the documents in question were "doctrinally sound," in his judgment, and that "no Church member should be accused of apostasy for writing [them]—as Brother Stone evidently was."

Near the end of the meeting, the matter of the stake president's "letter of conditions" for Steve's reinstatement came up.

At first—as he had many times before—the president denied that the letter amounted to "conditions" Steve was required to meet in order to be restored to full fellowship. After Steve pointed out that he received no other letter and that he was entitled to some kind of statement of conditions, and after family members pressed him, the president reversed himself and admitted that his letter indeed constituted the official statement Steve was entitled to receive following his disfellowshipment, by which he might know how to be reinstated.

The needless pattern of evasion clearly amounted to a show of bad faith.

As the discussion wound down, Steve stressed that the meeting had accomplished nothing to resolve the conflict, because of the two local leaders' dishonesty and denials, and he re-invoked the family's prior right to have their local leaders tried for their membership.

The Area President conceded that Steve was within his rights in that desire, and he concurred that *the only feasible solution was disciplinary councils for the stake president and the former bishop.*

He then authorized the new bishop to try the former bishop (if the Stone family wished to proceed), authorization that was recorded by the stake clerk. The presiding authority said he would consult with the First Presidency concerning the procedure and venue for trying the stake president.

The presiding leader finished by saying he “was sorry the problem couldn’t be resolved in any other way but disciplinary councils.” As he left, the stake president and former bishop stood together at the end of the long table with sullen, horrified expressions—white as ghosts.

Chapter 13 — Predictable outcome

Just as Steve had predicted at his disciplinary council, the First Presidency decided to overturn his wrongful disfellowshipment, in a letter dated May 8, 2003. Fifteen months of distracting, condescending, incredibly unfair treatment by church officials following his groundless punishment—itsself the result of collaborative mischief by local leaders and high church authorities in violation of church law—finally ended.

In the end, the presiding Brethren were left with no other choice—since Steve had done nothing definably wrong under church rules, as became obvious during the Area President’s hearings, and since the Area President had concluded the Stones were entitled to have the two chief instigators of the mischief tried for their membership.

More bad faith from the stake president

When members of the Stone family were brought into the stake president’s office on May 18, 2003, and read the letter from the First Presidency “setting aside” Steve’s disfellowshipment—with a stipulation that local leaders refrain from bringing any further action against Steve unless they had a basis—the stake president revealed his deep anger at the presiding Brethren for their decision.

One of his counselors later confirmed this anger to the Stones, telling family members more than once that the president was “very upset at the First Presidency,” when the president’s resentment was becoming increasingly apparent.

In the May 18 meeting, this same counselor also told the family that Steve’s status was “as though [he] had never been disfellowshipped”—and on a separate occasion, he told Steve the First Presidency had obviously “overturned” Steve’s disfellowshipment on the merits of his appeal.

This was not the president’s view.

The president’s ire was evident from the outset of the above meeting when he asked Steve if he wanted to say anything—following the president’s reading of the First Presidency’s letter.

Steve responded by asking the president a question he’d asked him on other occasions: “Why did you disfellowship me?”

The president refused to answer, and instead asked others in the room if they wanted to speak. Steve reiterated the question several times and was ignored each time.

Finally, the president responded to Steve’s question by saying, “I don’t know.”

The president’s evasive answer was similar to an equally-evasive response he gave during the January 29, 2003, hearing with the Area President, when the Stone family asked the

president why he came after Steve on November 25, 2001, with notice of a disciplinary council—after Steve had carefully stayed away from him for most of a year—and the president answered, “I don’t remember.”

The rest of the meeting focused on ways to publicize the First Presidency’s decision, since many members in the stake knew of Steve’s disfellowshipment and the controversy surrounding it. The president said he would abide by any reasonable wish Steve had for publicizing the decision.

Steve asked if the First Presidency’s letter could simply be read, verbatim, in a general meeting of the stake (or in individual wards). The president said this was not an option, since the First Presidency doesn’t publicly release confidential letters.

Steve then suggested, as an alternative, that he and the new bishop draft language that could be used in place of the First Presidency’s letter. The president agreed.

After drawing up brief text a few days later that Steve thought would be appropriate, and after gaining the bishop’s input and approval, Steve, along with DeeAnn, hand-delivered the text to the stake president.

As DeeAnn and Steve were delivering the text, *the president inexplicably threatened to come after Steve again for his membership*—entirely unprovoked, beyond—evidently—deep-seated resentment toward the First Presidency.

A few days later, the bishop visited the Stone home with a copy of the text, with a handwritten note in the margin from the president, addressed to the Area President. In his message, the president told the church authority that Steve wrote the text without permission to do so, and he disavowed the language—*ending the note with a threat to Steve’s membership*.

The bishop said he was asked by the president to share with Steve the contents of the note. It was clearly an insensitive attempt by the president to intimidate Steve—to show “who’s the boss,” so to speak (*certainly not the First Presidency*, who’d already shown themselves easily manipulated by subordinate officials throughout the unnecessary controversy).

Déjà vu all over again

So here’s where things stand at this point in the narrative: *no sooner was Steve’s disfellowshipment thrown out by the church’s presiding Brethren* than the erratic stake president—who could accurately be described as obsessed with Steve and intent on harming him—started all over again with his threat to excommunicate Steve for literally nothing, in a way that intruded again into the family’s peace and day-to-day concentration.

Several weeks after these two incidents, Steve encountered the president in the halls of the stake center and asked him on what basis he threatened to try Steve again. The president answered, “I couldn’t tell you.”

The significance of this renewal of the president's capricious behavior was this: Just as Steve had lived a year and a half, from October 2000 to February 2002, under a very real threat of excommunication from the stake president—a threat that continued for fifteen months while he was disfellowshipped—so again he was forced to live under an equally real threat of excommunication *after his reinstatement*, from May 2003 until the threat's ultimate fulfillment in October 2009, due to the president's shocking obsession with the Stone family.

The more things stay the same, the less they change. To the Stones, it was “déjà vu all over again.”

(On that note, we end the first part of our narrative. Coming up: part two, which culminates in Steve's excommunication for refusing to “sustain” those who've harmed him, his family, and their lawful political work.)

Chapter 14 — Your vote is worth nothing

Although the controversy between the Mormon church and the Stephen Stone family was precipitated by *the family's work for Alan Keyes*—work that led directly to Stephen's disfellowshipment, and eventually his excommunication—the controversy grew to unthinkable proportions as a result of church leaders' *disregard for the family's rights under the church's own rules and doctrines*.

The church's incompetent, self-protective bureaucracy contributed inordinately to the controversy by refusing to follow church law and protocol in dealing with this unusual problem—raising serious questions about the integrity of the church, as well as its commitment to the most basic principles of self-governance upon which America was founded.

Foremost among the rules and doctrines ignored by church leaders has been the so-called “*Law of Common Consent*”—*with its God-ordained right to vote during church proceedings, and attendant right to have that vote taken seriously, in a timely and competent way*.

Because the church repeatedly disregarded the family's rights under this law, Stephen has been repeatedly threatened, intimidated, and punished for doing nothing but express his disapproval of local leaders' abusive behavior *by voting against them*, when invited, as was his right under the Law of Common Consent—followed by appealing to the presiding Brethren for relief when his votes were ignored in disrespect for that law, as church leaders (at every level) escalated their threats and intimidation.

Let's take a brief look at this law, and its role in the escalating controversy.

“The Law of Common Consent”

In LDS scripture, the “Law of Common Consent” is vital to establishing and preserving order in the Mormon church. The Doctrine & Covenants says:

And all things shall be done by *common consent* in the church. . . . (D&C 26:2, emphasis added)

[and]

For all things must be done *in order*, and by *common consent* in the church, by the prayer of faith. (D&C 28:13, emphasis added)

An example of the Law of Common Consent in practice appears in Section 20 of the Doctrine & Covenants:

No person is to be ordained to any office in this church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, *without the vote of that church*. (D&C 20:65, emphasis added).

In another equally-important passage, the Doctrine & Covenants says,

Again I say unto you, that it shall not be given to any one to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, *except he be ordained by some one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church.* (D&C 42:11, emphasis added)

These passages of LDS scripture suggest—at minimum—the following rights, protections, and protocols for members:

1. As a rule, members (at least those “in good standing”) should be permitted the *uninfringed* right to vote on any proposition presented to them before it is adopted by the church, if “all things [are to] be done by common consent.”

If voting members are in any way intimidated, interfered with, or penalized for exercising their right to vote their conscience, the Law of Common Consent does not exist in reality, an intolerable breach of church law.

2. For a member to have authority to act legitimately in a calling, that person must first be accepted by a “vote of the church” (that is, a vote of those over whom the person will preside), in which those voting have the right to accept or reject the proposal.

This protocol is required at least where “there is a regularly organized branch of the church.” (D&C 20:66 makes provision to bypass this protocol where a vote would be impossible for lack of existing organization.)

Exactly how the vote is to be interpreted by church officials is not specified in the scriptural record. There is no mention of a required threshold a proposal must meet to be adopted. Presumably, therefore, a vote must be unanimous to pass—or in the least, all those voting against the measure must be consulted in good faith by those having authority to judge the merits of their negative vote, so any relevant facts might come to light.

We can conclude that the Law of Common Consent is thus mainly a way for church authorities to *screen* all persons, and all proposals, before they are officially accepted—to keep the church pure and strong.

3. No member can rightfully function in a calling without first being “ordained” (or formally set apart) for that role by a person who himself has been “regularly ordained” under the above protocols.

This unbroken chain of recognized authority is needed if “all things [are to] be done in order, and by common consent in the church.”

Unfortunately, the church’s statutory protocols under the “Law of Common Consent” have never been followed in the case of the Stone family. Had these protocols been respected and followed by presiding authorities, the current controversy would not even exist.

As the previous narrative describes in part one, when church officials began increasingly to intrude into the lawful affairs and prerogatives of the family, the Stones—after appealing to church leaders to stop their interference—began voting against those who had most abused the family, and who continued to do so.

They did this for lack of any other recourse under church protocol (since members are expected to deal solely with local leaders, and not contact high church authorities). Yet at no time was their voting given impartial review by appropriate church representatives to determine its validity.

The result has been interminable suffering for the family, and profound damage to their chosen work in the American political process—suffering and damage that still persists today, and which has culminated in extreme hardship for the family.

Here's how things played out, due to such sustained violation of the Law of Common Consent—following the stake president's renewed threat to Steve's membership, issued just days after his disfellowshipment was set aside by the First Presidency for lack of grounds.

For the sake of time, we will highlight only the most important incidents and issues that occurred from April 2003 onward, after the stake president began again intimidating and interfering with the Stone family—keeping in mind that the church's intrusion proved an *ever-present distraction* to the family's work, diminishing its effectiveness and costing the Stones valuable time and effort.

Incompetent stake clerk

Since their final meeting with the Area President ended with his decision that the family had the right to proceed to have the stake president and former bishop tried for their membership, if the family wished to go ahead—in harmony with what the family was originally told on July 31, 2001—the Stones met with the new bishop shortly after this meeting to bring formal charges against the former bishop.

The Stones reminded the bishop that he'd been specifically assigned by the Area President to try his predecessor.

In response, the new bishop called the stake clerk, to find out what he'd written down when the Area President made this assignment. Because the bishop was sitting to the left of the man, and behind him when he leaned forward and told the Stones of his decision, the bishop said he hadn't heard the man's words distinctly and wanted the clerk to clarify things.

The clerk read him what he wrote, saying the Area President left the decision of whether to proceed *up to the bishop*.

In actuality, the Stones heard the Area President clearly *assign* the new bishop to proceed with a disciplinary council against the former bishop—and any reference to “conditions”

left the matter *up to the family*, as was the case back in July 2001. That is what the Stones, who distinctly heard the man's words, recorded afterward.

This discrepancy between the presiding authority's actual words and the clerk's written record—bearing in mind that the clerk was also off to the side and behind the Area President when the decision was issued—disappointed the family. Not only had the clerk gotten the new bishop's assignment technically incorrect, *but he entirely omitted any reference to the Area President's decision to have the stake president tried*, in accordance with whatever procedure the First Presidency might designate.

As a result of this discrepancy, the new bishop said he didn't recall the part about the stake president and couldn't vouch for its accuracy when the Stones mentioned it.

In any case, the lack of accuracy in the clerk's record was not an ultimate impediment to proceeding—but it considerably slowed down the process. Rather than proceed in a timely way to have the former bishop tried, the family was forced to focus on persuading the new bishop of the merits of the family's charges against his predecessor. This took considerable effort on the part of the Stones, in large measure because a vocal counselor of the bishop strongly opposed going ahead, challenging everything the Stones alleged, due to his authoritarian views, even ridiculing the Stones at one point.

Adding to the difficulty of convincing the bishop to try his predecessor was the fact the new bishop traveled frequently with BYU's athletic teams, since we was employed by the university as a physical trainer. *As often as they could*—sometimes literally on the run—the family met with the bishop and presented an ongoing body of evidence and testimony against the previous ward leader.

Eventually, the bishop agreed to proceed—after a number of starts and stops in the discussions leading up to this decision. Getting to this point consumed many months of the Stones' limited time. Had the clerk made an accurate record of the Area President's words at the outset, the considerable time this took could have been spared.

The stake president's meddling

The Stones have evidence the stake president deliberately obstructed the disciplining of the former bishop, as well as that of himself.

This occurred on a number of occasions, as the ensuing months became years, effectively destroying the family's opportunity to have their local leaders disciplined and their abusive behavior ended.

Under church rules, a stake president is in charge of all church discipline in his stake, and notwithstanding the Area President's approval to have both the president and former bishop tried for their membership, the president repeatedly sabotaged that decision. (This illustrates what happens when the Law of Common Consent—meant to ensure order—is ignored.)

On one occasion, with the Stone family sitting in front of him, the president told the bishop to drop any plans he had to discipline the former bishop.

On another occasion, the president refused to release to the bishop some one-of-a-kind documents he possessed that the family had requested for use as evidence, including the Brethren's July 2001 decision approving a stake disciplinary council for the president and former bishop—with a counselor in the stake presidency presiding—should the Stones wish to proceed.

On still another occasion, the president persuaded a high church authority to send a letter to Steve advising him to drop the Stone family's charges against the president and former bishop.

On yet another, the president said he wanted to show Steve a second letter from the same high church authority absolving the president of the family's charges—and when Steve sat down to review the letter with him, the president refused to let him see it, and instead threatened Steve.

At one crucial juncture, the president *ordered the stake clerk to expunge from the record the Area President's decision approving the bishop to try the previous bishop*—destroying vital evidence in what had already become an unnecessarily convoluted controversy.

Repeatedly, there were indications the new bishop was caught between the assignment he was given by the Area President to try the former bishop “if he saw the need,” after investigating the Stones' charges, and the manipulative demands of the stake president—complicating the Stone family's efforts to see the Area President's approvals implemented.

Nonetheless, by the time the bishop left the ward on January 1, 2006, he concluded that his predecessor in the bishopric was *guilty as charged*, and he told the family so—on at least four occasions during his last weeks as a “judge in Israel,” as Mormon bishops are called.

A visit with the stake president's bishop

During one of the Stone family's early meetings with their bishop, Steve asked him if the Area President had yet informed him of the manner the First Presidency chose to have the stake president tried. The bishop said he was told that the president was assigned to be *tried by his own bishop*, and that the Stones needed to work through that low-level church official to arrange a disciplinary council.

This greatly frustrated the family, since the president's bishop was likely to be partial to the president, and unsympathetic toward the Stones.

That turned out to be the case.

Steve and Ethan soon met with the president's bishop to discuss the family's charges against the president and found him hostile toward them, as well as frivolous and insulting. He gave them no opportunity to explain their charges, saying he wasn't interested. Steve

testified that the charges were true, and emphasized the family had ample witnesses and over a hundred documents of evidence to support their claims.

The bishop refused to listen, and made it obvious he was incapable of judging the matter impartially—as evidenced by a letter he wrote the family afterward indicating he had no serious intention of convening a disciplinary council.

The surprising resistance of the president’s bishop suggested that the bishop—who soon afterward became one of the president’s counselors in the stake presidency—had already been influenced by the president.

This is consistent with other indications the Stones saw—in the days and weeks following their April meeting with the Area President—that the stake president was successfully orchestrating his own escape from accountability. The Area President himself appeared to regret his April decision that the stake president merited a disciplinary council—a clear indication the stake president (to whom the presiding authority had been unduly friendly in the two hearings of those involved in the controversy) had talked the man out of allowing serious action to be taken against him.

The procedure of having the president’s bishop—a close friend of the president who was understandably loyal to him—nominally assigned to investigate the Stones’ charges and thereafter hold a disciplinary council for the president was an obvious sham intended to protect the president.

Among other things, it contradicted what the inept new member of the Area Presidency had earlier assured Steve: that any disciplinary council against the stake president would be held in a venue *outside the stake*, to ensure “impartiality,” as required of disciplinary councils under church law (see D&C 102:16, 20).

Just as the stake president had done back in the fall of 2001—shortly after he and the former bishop had been approved by the presiding Brethren to be tried for their membership—the man again lobbied his way out of well-deserved discipline by prevailing upon his file leaders to prejudge the matter, or at least prevent any possible chance the he would be forced to appear before an unbiased disciplinary council.

Months—then years—of compelling evidence

Knowing that the stake president was seemingly “untouchable” because of his behind-the-scenes manipulation of the situation—as he succeeded in persuading the Area President to let his stunning decision to have the stake president and former bishop tried for their membership *simply fall apart* for lack of cooperation by church officers—the Stones focused on persuading the new bishop that his assignment from the Area President took priority over the stake president’s stonewalling and intransigence.

In so doing, their premise was that if they could *make their case against the former bishop* to the satisfaction of the new bishop, *the stake president would implicitly be found culpable*, unable to hide from discipline, and his mischief would end.

So for the sake of their important political work, and their desire to obtain some semblance of relief from the ongoing harassment they continued to suffer at the hands of the stake president and other church leaders, they provided the bishop a continuous stream of documents, testimony, appeals, and common-sense arguments in an effort to convince him that the former bishop was guilty of their charges against him—including his interference with their lawful political work, which precipitated the controversy.

Over many months, members of the family met with the bishop formally and informally to present evidence and make their case against his predecessor. On some occasions, the bishop was clearly becoming persuaded—no small feat for the Stone family, since the stake president directly and subtly sought to undercut their efforts behind the scenes, as was evidenced throughout.

At some point, the bishop finally brought the former bishop into his office to give him a chance to defend himself, and for whatever reason, the new bishop was satisfied that the man was telling the truth.

He therefore declared the process over—something he clearly did prematurely.

As Steve and other family members countered what the former bishop had told the new bishop—in ways that made it obvious the man had committed perjury, an excommunicable offense—the bishop resumed the task of gathering further evidence, including hearing two highly credible witnesses in the stake who testified in behalf of the Stones, and examining for himself the record at church headquarters in Salt Lake City of the 12-hour proceedings of Steve’s disciplinary council, while he allowed the Stones to continue making their case.

He ultimately concluded the family had indeed “made their case” against the former bishop. He reached this judgment—in direct defiance of the stake president, who had insisted he drop the matter—during his last weeks as a bishop, in November and December 2005.

Because the president oversaw all discipline in the stake under church protocol, the bishop was otherwise powerless to enforce his findings.

There are many ways one could characterize the inherent contradictions and lack of checks and balances in such discipline of provable wrongdoing by church leaders, who obviously have been insulated from accountability throughout this controversy. But one of the most obvious would be *official contempt for the church’s Law of Common Consent*, since that law is at the heart of the matter, and is meant to prevent such disorderly behavior.

Chapter 15 — Struggling with constant distraction

From the moment the Stone family first began voting against their local leaders in an effort to put an end to the church’s mischief—only to see a long sequence of strange outcomes that served to insulate church leaders from accountability—they continued to vote their conscience at every opportunity, when invited to do so.

To them, it was their only recourse if the abusive mistreatment was to end.

It was also their divine right, under the church’s Law of Common Consent.

Under church protocol, any member who votes negatively during routine “sustainings” is entitled to be interviewed soon afterward by a presiding church officer *above* those they have voted against. A person voted against cannot, himself, rightfully control, or interfere with, that process.

This reasonable procedure is essential to ensuring the kind of objectivity and impartiality required by church law in matters of discipline.

In addition, under the church’s Law of Witnesses (see Moroni 6:7, Deut. 19:15, and 2 Cor. 13:1), if there is more than one member voting negatively against an individual, *all those* so voting are entitled to give testimony to support and explain their vote.

It is not appropriate to interview only one negative voter and assume their testimony and evidence against a person are identical to that of others voting negatively, or sufficient alone for evaluation. To do so is a clear violation of the Law of Witnesses.

Furthermore, church protocol requires any interviewing of those who have voted negatively to be *private*: interviews cannot be conducted within earshot of onlookers, and they certainly cannot be conducted in the presence of those voted against.

This is vital to prevent intimidating witnesses or suppressing evidence and testimony.

Yet—

At no time has the Stone family ever been interviewed by an appropriate church authority following their negative votes against their abusive local leaders—with one exception.

On that rare occasion, when a presiding church authority who was visiting a stake conference actually took the time to interview the family after their negative votes, *he insisted on talking only with Steve*—and only briefly. Although the man’s kindness was appreciated by the family, he could not possibly appreciate the validity of the family’s grievances against their local leaders in so limited a setting, and nothing positive or encouraging came of the encounter.

The man did nothing to help the family resolve the long-running problem.

On all other occasions, those the family voted against had a direct hand in assigning those designated to do the interviewing.

Most of the time, this meant the stake president picked two of his loyal subordinates to do the interviewing, and the results were predictable—as the interviewers contended openly with the Stone family over the truth of their claims, or showed themselves to be entirely partial toward those voted against.

On several of these occasions, interviewers degradingly insulted members of the family, calling them apostates for not “supporting” their errant leaders. The shocking disrespect and presumptuousness of those assigned by the stake president prevented any kind of appropriate due process.

On one particular occasion, a visiting low-level “area authority” refused to meet with the family and allowed the stake president instead to hand-pick two contentious interviewers—who proceeded to berate the family out in the open in a corner of the building, offering the family no privacy and no opportunity to make headway in resolving the controversy.

On another occasion, after a visiting area authority—an influential protégé of Mitt Romney at both Bain Capital and the Salt Lake Winter Olympics—refused to meet with the family or give them any respect, one of the biased interviewers from a meeting months earlier stepped up and pulled Steve’s hand from the man’s shoulder as Steve looked the visiting church officer in the face and politely requested fairness.

Such was the typical response the family received from overly-protective, even hostile, local and higher church representatives following their votes.

That doesn’t sound like what the church’s Law of Common Consent—or for that matter, its Law of Witnesses—was meant to ensure, but it certainly is understandable as a natural consequence of failure to respect church protocol from the outset, in the interest of resolving needless controversy.

No matter the inevitability of such behavior in a church that gives little emphasis to preserving order by adhering faithfully to its own Law of Common Consent, and in which members are taught they have a duty to “sustain,” and thus obey, their leaders as a requirement of membership, the effect of such lawless conduct and cultural disorder was *constant distraction*—not to mention repeated humiliation—for the Stone family, while they pressed forward with their work of trying to preserve the American republic, never losing faith in God or hope in His power and promises.

Gubernatorial race

During these frustrating distractions, members of the Stone family were invited into the local County Commission chambers by a man whose political career Steve had helped launch years earlier (by writing his initial literature) and were asked to help this longtime friend with his campaign for governor. The commissioner said he was impressed with the

family's work for Alan Keyes and wanted Steve and Stefani to create his website and be on his campaign staff.

Although the family ultimately opted to run the campaign of another gubernatorial candidate (the most outspokenly conservative of nine running as Republicans), the man who initially sought their help joined hands with the winning candidate, Jon Huntsman, as his Lt. Governor, and upon the appointment of Gov. Huntsman by President Obama to be U.S. Ambassador to China, became Utah's current governor.

Under the most horrific circumstances imaginable for a family unwilling to sacrifice their basic liberties to be left alone by the LDS church, the Stones began working for their chosen candidate in October 2002—while Steve was still disfellowshipped—until May 2004. They devoted considerable energy to this demanding effort, while also keeping up with RenewAmerica and various projects for Alan Keyes' chief of staff.

Among the Keyes-related projects they undertook during this time was an intense effort to counter the American judiciary's assault on displays of the Ten Commandments in public buildings, public prayers by elected officials, and other lawful expressions of respect for God in the public arena. Keyes gave numerous speeches throughout the country defending these rights, and the family spent significant time publicizing them, as well as covering the activism of other well-known figures at the center of the controversy like former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore.

Throughout this period, they also represented their gubernatorial candidate as his personal staff in the state legislature, where he served as a state senator.

For Steve, his still-unrescinded disfellowshippment sapped him of much of his ability to function effectively during this time, and he was frequently exasperated that he was forced to perform his duties while so profoundly handicapped.

The church's cruelty took a toll on the campaign itself—in essence stealing from the candidate the focus and energy of his otherwise highly capable staff. After Steve's disfellowshippment was thrown out midway through the gubernatorial race, the stake president's renewed threats and intrusion perpetuated, and in many ways compounded, the stressful persecution this compulsive man had engaged in from the beginning.

Knowing the church's presiding leadership sanctioned the president's abusive conduct, even protected it, made matters all the more insufferable for the Stones.

Nonetheless, the family gave it their all.

As the campaign got under way, members of the family traveled frequently throughout the state with the candidate, representing him at numerous meet-the-candidate events and debates. A half-dozen times, Steve filled in for the candidate—whose extensive literature and positions Steve had authored—at some of these events when the candidate was required to be at others.

On those occasions when he was required to give a speech, Steve shared the stage (and the microphone) with the other candidates. (Ironically, some people in the audience came up afterward and said they'd vote for Steve if he was the candidate instead of just a "surrogate.")

During these eighteen months of intense campaigning, the Stone family regularly worked 16 and 18 hour days, handling everything for the candidate's campaign—from creating signs and brochures, to keeping an ongoing photographic record, to writing speeches and strategy, to handling logistics and set-up at events, to maintaining a uniquely comprehensive, substantive, and appealing website, and everything else the campaign required, including organizing volunteers.

It soon became obvious that this production influenced the other candidates' message and presentation—since the Stone-based campaign was launched well ahead of the others. They all appeared to vie to be perceived as the "most conservative."

At one event near the end of the process (just before the state GOP convention), the mother of Jon Huntsman told members of the Stone family their candidate was "telling it like it is" in ways the other candidates greatly appreciated and applauded.

As was their plan from the beginning, the Stones arranged for Alan Keyes to come to Utah in behalf of their candidate, whom Keyes had officially endorsed—to introduce him at the state convention in Salt Lake, as well as to keynote a reception for the candidate the night before at the Riverwoods at Provo.

The state's media reported that Keyes "stole the show" at the state convention with his 4½-minute rousing speech in defense of the traditional family.

Following Keyes' speech, which drew a standing ovation, Keyes—along with Steve and Stefani—talked outside the convention center with Utah's next governor, Jon Huntsman, and his wife Mary Kaye. After the Huntsmans left, Keyes confided to Steve and Stefani two interesting insights: first, he said he believed the events on 9/11 were symbolic of the way the U.S. might collapse as a free republic—abruptly and shockingly after sufficient warnings from God; and second, he said he believed God had "raised the people and culture of Utah to help save the U.S." by virtue of their commitment to God, family, and country—particularly constitutional principle.

As a footnote—at a Tea Party rally in front of the state capitol in April 2010, Utah's soon-to-be freshman U.S. senator, Mike Lee, told Steve he vividly remembered Keyes' speech at the 2004 convention, which Lee attended as a delegate, and said he was deeply moved by Keyes' stirring message.

Independence Day "Family Freedom Fair"

In the spring of 2004, a conservative activist proposed to the Stones that they sponsor a family centered all-day event on Monday, July 5, a holiday that year since Independence Day fell on a Sunday.

On the strength of the activist's assurances that he would do much of the legwork in putting together the complex event—which was to involve numerous educational, creative, entertaining, and patriotic booths, along with a continuous live outdoor musical program and several food vendors—the Stones agreed to proceed, realizing the Fourth of July was fast approaching.

They felt a truly family-friendly Independence Day celebration would benefit the community, and they signed on despite the press on their time and the ongoing threats and interference they were forced to endure at the hands of the LDS church.

As plans progressed, the Stones decided to add workshops, presentations, and speeches on the main floor of the McKay Events Center, which they chose for the event, billed as Utah Valley's "Family Freedom Fair."

Before proceeding, however, because of the difficulty and expense of staging such a major event virtually at the last minute, the family first persuaded the head of the Provo Freedom Festival to publicize the event, and treat it as part of the Festival's many holiday activities.

After the family secured the McKay Center and lined up many of the event's participants, the Freedom Festival disappointingly backed out, leaving the Stones with added burdens on their energies and resources as they scrambled to make their ambitious, but worthy undertaking a success. Not long before this disappointment, the activist who originally promised to help with the extensive logistics also backed out, as did the producer of a popular northern Utah patriotic pageant, who was slated to provide a musical drama.

Nonetheless, the family rounded up three dozen booth sponsors—ranging from children's music to conservative political organizations to homeschool curriculum publishers to puppet shows. Main floor workshops included patriotic writers, educators, performers, and recording artists, and a teenage "Constitution Bowl" contest.

As a special attraction, the Stones persuaded the Osmonds—Second Generation to perform several numbers, in addition to a panel discussion on the life and contributions of Ronald Reagan, a panel that included Reagan's national GOP chairman Dick Richards, former California Lt. Governor John Harmer, Utah Republican Party chairman Joe Cannon, and Alan Keyes.

Keyes delivered the keynote address that evening, sharing the program with national political activist Rev. Rick Scarborough, Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff, and Alan Osmond of the original performing Osmonds.

To help publicize the event, which they were advertising through the state's conservative media, the Stones re-designed their float and entered it in the Provo Freedom Festival Parade, behind a large banner announcing Keyes' keynote address. The theme of the float was God-ordained marriage.

Difficult as it was to stage this multi-faceted event under unusually stressful circumstances, the Stones did as well as they could, and the event was a modest success.

Keyes-Obama U.S. Senate race

As the Stone family was immersed in a fundraising drive to make up a shortfall they experienced due to the limited success of their Family Freedom Fair, attended by many hundreds but not the thousands they expected, the Stones received word that Alan Keyes accepted an invitation from the Illinois Republican Party to be its nominee for the U.S. Senate against a little-known state senator named Barack Obama.

This was in early August 2004, just before Obama was catapulted by the media to stardom at the Democratic National Convention on the basis of his well-received keynote speech, and less than three months before the election (following the resignation of the GOP's previous candidate over a scandal). At this point, Obama already had the endorsement of all the state's major media, as well as the support of the powerful Chicago Democratic machine.

Keyes told the media he chose to run against Obama because of the candidate's refusal to support the state's "Born Alive Infant Protection Act," which was designed to prevent the intentional killing of babies who survived botched abortions.

To be eligible to run (since he was from Maryland), Keyes took up a second residence in a nondescript upstairs tenement outside Chicago.

During the 87-day campaign, the Stone family created Keyes' website and maintained it daily—spending countless hours scouring the media for articles favorable (or at least fair) to Keyes, as well as reporting on the candidate's day-to-day speeches, events, appearances, and interviews, doing all this from the family's base in Utah as they were fed continual information by the campaign.

Daughter Stefani also kept them informed from the campaign's office in Chicago, where she worked throughout the race.

In their activities during the campaign, the family also did considerable research and fulfilled other needs to help keep the Keyes camp up to date, working directly under Keyes' chief of staff.

This period was extremely difficult for the family as they worked *even harder and longer each day than usual* to keep up with the considerable demands on their time, in a race that was severely stacked against Dr. Keyes from the moment he entered. Aggravating the entire process was the fact that the media rarely reported accurately anything Keyes said or did—exaggerating and distorting his words and deeds to make him appear foolish. Meanwhile, the media gave Obama a "free ride," as they say, behaving as his *de facto* communications arm, much as the media have arguably done throughout his presidency.

On election day, Keyes drew 27 percent against Obama's lion's share of the vote. Some have commented that had Keyes been able to challenge Obama from the beginning—rather than just at the end—he might have done quite well. Still, Obama's political machine in Illinois was not likely to lose, no matter the opponent, or the length of the race.

A side note:

During the last days of the campaign, Keyes' chief of staff asked the Stones to assist with a short video for use by the campaign, and as they were delivering the raw footage to their son-in-law in Eagle Mountain for editing, their small car hit a divider in a just-completed—but poorly designed—stretch of road in the dark, and they flew through the air, landing upright in the center of the island.

The accident totaled their car and injured DeeAnn. After an ambulance ride, she was treated at a nearby hospital by the brother of football great Steve Young—who like his brother Steve was at one time a quarterback at BYU, a fact that made the accident at least an interesting diversion, despite its unwelcome nature. The loss of the car and DeeAnn's minor, but painful injuries, took a lot out of the family's exhausting efforts near the end of the campaign.

To the Stones, of course, *it was as though they didn't already have enough grief*, given the challenges already described in this personal history.

The death of Terri Schiavo

Soon after the Keyes-Obama Senate race, Alan Keyes got immersed in the public debate over the value of the life of a severely handicapped woman named Terri Schiavo, who had been on a "feeding tube" in a hospice in Florida for several years.

Her husband—who was accused of causing her the serious brain injury that created her condition—wanted to pull her feeding tube and starve her to death, and he enlisted the legal skills of an attorney who was long-time advocate of euthanasia and a trustee of the hospice. In turn, they persuaded a corrupt local judge to condemn the woman to death, on the basis of "expert" testimony from euthanasia supporters who claimed she was "brain dead"—contradicting persuasive evidence to the contrary, including video of Terri responding to family members' kindnesses.

Terri's family fought a highly-publicized battle to block the judge's order to remove her feeding tube, and lost their fight on March 31, 2005, when Terri died a horrible death after two weeks of deliberate starvation and dehydration by hospice caregivers.

There was evidence she knew what was happening.

Believing this landmark case would set a precedent that spawned future incidents of forced euthanasia, Keyes, his chief of staff, and the Stone family spent countless hours seeking to preserve Terri's life—attracting substantial attention to their efforts. They worked tenaciously to counter the liberal media's campaign to portray Terri as a virtual vegetable who didn't deserve to live.

Terri's death left the Stones devastated, since they'd sacrificed extensive time and effort in her behalf, working with a legal representative of her family in doing so. They wished they

could have done more to make a difference in the contentious—and heartless—public debate.

Chapter 16 — Barred from Stefani's wedding

As DeeAnn struggled throughout the above political work with the excruciating pain of stress-induced *shingles*—which she contracted just weeks after the stake president revived his obsessive threat to Steve's membership in May 2003—a condition aggravated by the family's one-car accident; and as the family struggled with the depression and shame of watching America's judicial system kill a helpless handicapped woman, DeeAnn was looking forward to participating in the April 2005 wedding of her daughter Stefani to a career Air Force officer she met through the family's work for Alan Keyes.

DeeAnn was anxious to have some semblance of peace, and some degree of happiness for her family, on this special occasion.

Adding shocking insult, however, to already considerable injury, *the church barred her and other family members from attending the couple's temple wedding.*

The reason?

The family refused to “sustain” their abusive leaders when routinely asked to express their view of these men during periodic church voting, something they did solely in the hope of ending the abuse, as it was their only recourse.

Under the church's rules for attending temples, *members are required to “sustain”* all “general and local authorities” of the church, including bishops and stake presidents, in order to be considered “worthy” to enter these buildings where marriages “for eternity” and other ceremonies are performed.

If a member votes against a church leader, or simply refuses to vote in favor of a leader (that is, abstains from voting)—no matter the reason—the member can be denied a “temple recommend” and thus be barred from the temple, until he or she is willing to ignore their conscience, as well as their understanding of God's will, and vote to sustain that leader.

This ironically-labeled “temple worthiness” policy *has no basis in church law or doctrine.* In fact, it indisputably violates both, plainly disrespecting God's commandments as published in the LDS canon.

Interestingly, Stefani and her fiancé Chuck were granted recommends by their leaders in Alexandria, Virginia—allowing them to get married in the temple—even though they mentioned in their recommend interviews that they couldn't sustain the Stone family's leaders in Utah because of these men's mistreatment of the family. Their local leaders shrugged off this technical violation of church policy regarding sustaining, and gave them recommends.

Not so the Stones' stake president.

He gathered family members together in the bishop's office days before the wedding and told them he refused to let them attend because they refused to sustain him.

Without the president's approval, they couldn't go—even though the bishop told the family he considered them worthy and would sign their recommends.

Such cruelty by a man who has repeatedly tormented the Stone family since August 2000, deliberately causing them indescribable pain and suffering *on the special occasion of daughter Stefani's wedding*, would under the circumstances offer further grounds for NOT sustaining him, of course—not the reverse.

How could the man expect the family to give in to such outright *extortion* and willingly “support” him? As should be abundantly clear, the man was wholly unworthy of his office—at least the Stones believed him to be.

Despite the self-evident meanness of doing so, the president invoked the carefully-worded language of the recommend interview—which requires members to “sustain” their leaders in order to attend the temple, in contravention of church law—and denied the Stones temple recommends, saying the First Presidency had set the rules and he was just enforcing them.

Clever deception by the president

To prevent the kind of heartless insensitivity that ultimately kept them from attending Stefani and Chuck's temple wedding for no valid reason, the Stone family worked especially hard during the months before the wedding to resolve the longstanding controversy, now almost five years old.

They felt the best way to ensure their opportunity to attend was to prove their charges against the previous bishop. Such an outcome would vindicate their votes against their leaders—including the stake president—and make it all but impossible for presiding authorities to claim they were “unworthy” to attend the temple.

In the weeks leading up to the wedding, the family therefore redoubled their efforts to prove to the bishop their case against his predecessor. As the wedding approached, the bishop conceded their allegations against the man were valid and unassailable, and he supported their desire to go to the temple.

He made it clear he could not, in good conscience, justify barring the family from Stefani and Chuck's wedding.

It is important to note that just after the president told the Stones they were unworthy to attend the temple because they disapproved of his egregious mistreatment of the family, the president read them and the bishop a letter he claimed was from “the Brethren,” which said “no basis exists on which to discipline [the former bishop] or [the stake president]”—and he instructed the bishop to drop the matter, saying, “This matter is closed.”

Recognizing the letter's wording to be from a personal letter he received a year earlier from a church attorney who had interviewed the family—a man with no ecclesiastical duties or authority—Steve told the president he had misrepresented what he was reading, and said it was not a directive from church authorities at all. He then added, “President, have you ever been approved to be tried for your membership?”

The president got up indignantly and walked out the door.

As it turned out, when the president misrepresented the letter's origin to the bishop, *he also deliberately omitted the part that emphasized the bishop's authority to make a decision or take action in the matter*—since reading that would part would prevent him from telling the bishop to drop the matter.

This deception was just another example in the president's long history of perjury and dishonesty toward other church leaders, and of cruelty toward the Stones.

When Steve first called the attorney a year earlier after the above letter—addressed to Steve—arrived, the attorney told Steve on the phone that, in his judgment, *the family's bishop was entitled to try his predecessor as assigned*, and that if the bishop were to find the man guilty, that outcome would dramatically change the Church's position in this dispute.

We should emphasize—parenthetically—that the attorney's letter contains language conceding that the church took disciplinary action against Steve *specifically for his political employment*, and it attempts to justify that unlawful interference by falsely claiming the Stones were “unpaid.”

Another smoking gun.

Urgent appeal to the First Presidency

With the approval of the family's supportive bishop, Steve contacted the Assistant Secretary to the First Presidency—the same man he had dealt with before—and asked him what could be done to enable the family to attend Stefani and Chuck's temple wedding.

This conversation took place April 6, 2005.

Steve told him the family's bishop had approved family members to attend the temple, saying they were worthy, but the stake president overruled him and wouldn't let them go because of their votes against the president. He asked the secretary to pass this information on to the First Presidency, and request that they consider allowing the family to attend the wedding out of simple fairness, on the strength of their bishop's support.

Steve added that the bishop considered the family's votes against their local leaders fully “valid,” and told him the bishop would confirm this if the Assistant Secretary were to call him—a fact the bishop wanted Steve to assure the man.

He also said the bishop affirmed the family's "divine right," under the Law of Common Consent, to refuse to sustain those leaders who had severely mistreated them, and said the bishop told him it was "inappropriate" to punish the family for voting against these men.

This led to a 45-minute conversation in which the secretary revealed his lack of understanding of the issues in the controversy—culminating in the secretary's surprising assertion that "The First Presidency can do whatever it wants."

Steve reminded this influential employee of church headquarters that LDS doctrine plainly teaches otherwise, and pointed out that D&C 107:81-84 stresses that that no one in the church is above the laws and statutes of the church's canon in the "standard works"—*including the First Presidency*.

Steve said the notion that the "First Presidency can do whatever it wants" is an affront to God, and rather than foster order, fosters disorder, confusion, and lawlessness. He then suggested the man become more knowledgeable about the church's official canon—so he might be of greater help to the church's governing leadership.

In the course of the conversation, Steve noted that the president and former bishop *had twice been approved "by the Brethren" to be tried for their membership*. The secretary flatly denied this verifiable fact, saying, "You're wrong, Brother Stone. It never happened."

Steve described some of the details supporting this claim, and the secretary again denied what the family can readily prove through reliable witnesses, accusing Steve of making up this pivotal information. Steve concluded afterward that the man was either covering up, or simply ignorant—but either way, he was seriously incompetent.

He was also *dishonest*, and thus unreliable as a representative of the Brethren (wait till the reader hears what the man did several months later)—since if he in fact knew the truth of what had actually occurred regarding "high-up" approval of the local leaders for disciplinary councils, and denied that truth, he was deliberately bearing false witness.

If, on the other hand, he was simply ignorant of what had occurred, he was likewise bearing false witness—since he falsely claimed something he did not know. That's seriously dishonest, as well as callous, considering the implications for the Stones.

Either way, again, he was incompetent to deal with so difficult a matter.

Steve checked back a day or two later and asked the Assistant Secretary if he had passed on his and the bishop's request to the First Presidency that the family be permitted to go to Stefani and Chuck's wedding. He said, "No."

Indescribable anguish

On April 9, 2005, Stefani and Chuck were married in the Salt Lake Temple, while the Stone family sat waiting for hours in an out-of-the-way corner of the church's "Visitor's Center" on Temple Square.

It was one of the most painful days in the life of the Stone family—who were denied recommends for no unworthiness on their part.

As is well known, the church places great emphasis on the importance of families, and on “eternal” principles, but in the Stone family’s case, the church all but destroyed a very sacred occasion that was meant to emphasize these very values. The contradiction was deeply hurtful to everyone in the family, including Stefani and Chuck.

It revealed the church was more concerned with *controlling* members than ensuring their eternal happiness.

That day, Steve resolved that he would never again let the church do such a thing to his family, if he had anything to say about it. This deeply-felt commitment led to his eventual excommunication—which was triggered by his sincere efforts to persuade new local leadership to allow the family to attend the temple wedding of another daughter, Abbey, in 2009.

Chapter 17 — Dealing with an unfortunate change of the guard

A month after the Stones were barred from Stefani and Chuck’s wedding for no reason beyond church leaders’ disrespect for the laws of God, Steve received a letter from a man who succeeded the Area President under a reshuffling of the church’s high leadership.

The man was the same individual who, when he was president of BYU, canceled the originally-approved keynote address by Alan Keyes at BYU’s Marriott Center, scheduled as part of Utah’s “Constitution Week” celebration in September 2000—cancellation that occurred just days after the church’s persecution of the Stone family began.

In announcing the cancellation, the president’s office made disparaging public statements about the Stones, to cover up the university’s inexplicable decision to drop what promised to be a popular event.

The letter this man sent Steve mirrored much of the letter Steve received from a church attorney in 2004—the same letter the stake president deceptively used in trying to persuade the bishop, in a meeting with the bishop and the Stones a week before the wedding, to drop his investigation and possible disciplining of the former bishop.

Given the timing and substance of the letter, it appeared to be something the stake president likely had a hand in, since it was clearly intended to intimidate the Stones and cause them to drop their effort to see the former bishop tried for his membership. That conclusion is consistent with the new presiding authority’s *unjust deference to the stake president throughout the man’s remaining tenure as an Area President*—virtual bigotry toward the Stones that greatly distressed them.

We should point out—in view of the letter’s disturbing substance—that during the 2004 election season, members of the Stone family attended a VIP reception sponsored by Sen. Bob Bennett at an avant-garde historic building in Salt Lake. They were there escorting their gubernatorial candidate.

As they milled about with other guests, they got into a conversation with a former BYU athletic director, under whom a brother of DeeAnn had once served as BYU’s sports information director.

In the course of the conversation, the former athletic director volunteered—with no prompting from the Stones—that he was continually treated abusively by the man who wrote Steve the above letter, during the four years the athletic director oversaw BYU’s sports program. He made a special point of telling the Stones that the president had a reputation for abusiveness toward subordinates when he ran the university—and that as a result of the constant mistreatment he received, the athletic director resigned what was a highly sought-after position after four years, saying he “couldn’t take it anymore.”

The sports administrator, we might add, had given up a 7-figure income as a corporate attorney to head BYU athletics—doing so at great sacrifice because he believed in the university and its lofty mission.

Bear in mind, also, that shortly after taking over the reins at BYU, the former president—now the Area President over the Stones—came under criticism for plagiarism in a major speech he gave that was published by the university. He later issued an apology for his “inattention” to detail.

Realizing that he was dealing with someone who had a reputation for not “playing fair,” Steve was disappointed to read the letter he received May 26, 2005, from this man.

Contrary to what the family knew to be true—and what the previous Area President was fully aware of—the new Area President claimed, among other inaccuracies:

Consistently, [the First Presidency’s] decision has been that no action will be taken against either [the stake president] or [the former bishop].

The claim that the highest church leadership has “consistently” determined that these two local leaders are undeserving of disciplinary councils is simply—and demonstrably—false. As the foregoing narrative makes abundantly clear, both men have been approved TWICE to be tried for their membership because of their continuing mistreatment of the Stone family.

The *first* of these occasions, of course, was on July 31, 2001, when the Stones were informed by the stake president and bishop that the “First Presidency” had approved these two leaders to be tried in a disciplinary council, if the Stone family wished to proceed, because of the family’s letter of grievances dated May 31 of that year.

In fact, in that meeting, the family was told a “three-step procedure” pre-arranged by the church’s governing leadership: (1) the First Presidency wanted the family to try to resolve the controversy person-to-person, to the extent that was possible; (2) if Stephen was not satisfied with the outcome of this person-to-person effort, then the two local leaders were to be brought before a stake disciplinary council—with first counselor Bruce Young of the stake presidency designated to preside—if Stephen chose to proceed; and (3) if Stephen was not satisfied with the decision of this council, the matter was to be decided by the First Presidency.

The family was actually called, as they consistently claimed, into the stake president’s office on July 31, 2001, and told this pre-approved procedure—a procedure that appeared fair and reasonable. This really *did* happen.

The second occasion occurred April 13, 2003, when the then-Area President—acting on authority of the First Presidency, he made clear—approved both men to be tried for their membership as the only feasibly way to resolve the longstanding controversy (a decision in harmony with church law and protocol).

That approval actually was given—as all members of the Stone family present at the meeting can attest—and any claim to the contrary is inaccurate, as well as unfair to the family, who have suffered enough harassment, abuse, and malicious persecution from overly-controlling church leaders in this matter.

All of this is true, and readily provable.

Yet the new Area President literally *made up* a false summation of the facts—unjustly asserting that which he could not possibly know: that the bishop and stake president have never been approved by the Brethren to be tried in disciplinary councils.

Such dishonesty, we might note, is consistent with the man’s reputation for being unjust, arbitrary, and unreliable.

It also amounts to serious false witness—since he forcefully claimed a verifiable falsehood, misrepresenting something he had no firsthand knowledge of, while undoubtedly aware of the pain he would cause the Stone family in doing so. That’s a transgression of God’s laws.

After claiming several other things that showed his lack of understanding of the facts in the matter, the dishonest new Area President then wrote: “I ask you to direct all further inquiries and concerns to your bishop or stake president.”

This curious directive—which the man no doubt thought would end the matter—actually served unwittingly to open the way for the Stones *to continue the course they had taken since their supportive bishop was called three years earlier*. Yet, it was precisely because they were engaged in directing their “inquiries and concerns to [their] bishop” that they received the new Area President’s letter of reprimand.

And it *was* a letter of reprimand—as a letter he wrote six months later made clear (more on that in a moment). That letter also revealed the man’s obvious incompetence, since he not only heightened his original reprimand, but did so *specifically because Steve did exactly as the man had requested*: he went to his bishop for resolution.

A canceled meeting

The new Area President’s May 26 letter arrived just as the family was undertaking to create and maintain the website for the special congressional campaign in California of Jim Gilchrist—co-founder of the “Minuteman Project,” a national movement calling for reasonable control of illegal immigration.

Because the unexpected letter proved a substantial distraction to the Stones, Steve called the Area President’s office to talk with him. Surprisingly, he was willing to discuss things.

Steve gave him a brief overview of the controversy—including the truth of the family’s claims regarding high-level approval of both local leaders to be tried for their membership—and arranged for the family to meet with the man in an effort to resolve the conflict.

Because the Area President seemed cordial enough as they talked, and because he'd served as president of BYU, Steve shared a fact told privately among his extended family for years—that Steve's father was twice among the finalists to be appointed BYU's president. The first occurred in 1964 when President Ernest Wilkinson was running for the U.S. Senate (he lost), the second in 1971 when Wilkinson retired.

To help the Area President better understand the controversy at issue, Steve faxed him afterward a letter outlining in some detail the facts of the matter, as a courtesy, so their meeting might be efficient and productive. A day or two later, the man's secretary called and said there would be no meeting.

So here's the situation—

Whereas the previous Area President was kind enough to meet three times with the Stone family to resolve the distracting conflict, and ultimately stepped in and ensured that Steve's wrongful disfellowshipment was set aside, his replacement not only sent Steve a disappointingly false letter of reprimand (with no basis upon which to issue it, other than the self-serving influence of the stake president), but after Steve did him the courtesy of sending him a list of facts so their upcoming meeting might not impose unduly on the man's time, the man canceled the interview.

When Steve tried repeatedly to arrange a meeting, the man turned him down.

This "change of the guard" at church headquarters was devastating to the family. The new Area President turned out to be an unwelcome—and shockingly obstinate—adversary in their efforts to persuade church leaders to cease persecuting and tormenting the Stones.

Corroborating testimony from two independent witnesses

After meeting several times with the bishop to make more emphatic and undeniable their case against his predecessor that summer—so the travesty of being prevented from attending a family wedding *for no valid reason* would not be allowed to happen again, and so the continuing distraction of the "church problem" might finally be put to rest, *notwithstanding the evident hostility of the new Area Authority*—the family persuaded the bishop to listen to two independent witnesses who were willing to testify of the truth of the family's claims.

The first of these witnesses was a former high councilor who witnessed Steve's disfellowshipment and who had attempted on several occasions to bring the church's persecution of the Stone family to an end—because he saw numerous instances of bad faith on the part of local leaders toward the family.

The second was a former bishop who preceded the errant bishop who set in motion the church's mistreatment of the family.

The meetings were held, in part, so the family could obtain written evidence to counter the false facts and premises in the new Area President's May 24 letter, should the need arise.

On July 24, 2005, the bishop, Steve, and Ethan met with the high councilor to hear his testimony of the facts, and to question him about “his perceptions of the church’s treatment of the Stone family.”

It was understood at the outset that the meeting was intended to gather evidence for a potential disciplinary council against the former bishop—and afterward, the results were written up and then signed (after everyone had a chance to make desired edits or changes) by all participants.

The meeting lasted more than two hours. The high councilor was the same man who leaned over during Steve’s disciplinary council and told him he was “going to help” him, because he felt the proceedings were unjust.

In his testimony, the high councilor reiterated his earlier comment that Steve had been “treated unfairly”—not only in his disciplinary council, but throughout the Stone family’s difficulties with the church. He said this unfairness had occurred “throughout or from the beginning” of the controversy, and that it wasn’t limited to the disciplinary council.

Concerning the disciplinary council, he testified that he did indeed feel “uneasy” about it as it unfolded, and that this led him to whisper to Steve that he would “help” him. As a result, he said he visited Steve on his own several times in the weeks and months afterward to comfort him, and also went to the stake president at least twice to voice his concerns about the unfairness of the disciplinary council.

The witness acknowledged the impact of a former member of the Stones’ ward who induced the former bishop to persecute Steve over Steve’s scripture-based views, even writing several letters against him in 1998 as a result of Steve’s belief in the innocence of little children—and noted that this aggressive individual’s influence on the bishop was a key factor in Steve’s disfellowshipment, *since the preponderance of the evidence submitted against Steve centered in this man’s letters against Steve and Steve’s written responses.*

This key witness also acknowledged that *Steve’s refusal to obey church leaders in his choice of livelihood* (which centered in working for Alan Keyes) was central to Steve’s disfellowshipment—in view of the fact that this refusal was cited as the “official” reason for that disciplinary action in a February 6, 2002, letter by the stake president.

At one point, Steve called the witness’s attention to the fact that, during the disciplinary council, Steve was prevented from responding to the written testimony submitted against him by the above aggressive adversary and others who had long ago left the ward (the latter testimony being written in most cases by a stake clerk)—denial of due process based on the fact that the accusers “weren’t there.” Before Steve could finish his statement, the witness finished it for him—since he was well aware firsthand of what had occurred. He then said emphatically that Steve had a right to confront his accusers, and that *he was “deprived of this fundamental right due to the questionable nature of the evidence.”*

The witness then described an impromptu meeting that took place on March 24, 2002, between himself, members of the Stone family, the former bishop, and the second

counselor in the bishopric. He testified that during the meeting, the bishop displayed deep animosity toward Steve—characterizing the bishop as “contentious” and showing a “bad attitude.” He said the bishop tried to pressure Steve to conform to his will, and then (as the family has repeatedly testified) *declared that he was going to disfellowship all members of the family* if they continued to stand with Steve in this controversy.

The high councilor went on to say that, out in the hall after this encounter, he told Steve, “Brother Stone, I saw evidence in that meeting that what you have said about your bishop is true.”

Near the end of the discussion, Steve asked the witness if he felt the Stone family “had legitimate grounds for voting against the president and former bishop,” and he said, “Yes.” Steve reiterated the question so there could be no mistaking its implications, and the man again said, “Yes.”

When Steve and Ethan visited the witness to have him sign the final draft of his testimony (after all involved had edited the document to their satisfaction), he affirmed that the Stones had “valid claims” against the president and former bishop “for serious misconduct.”

Interview with the earlier bishop

On July 31, 2005, the bishop, Steve, and Ethan met with the man who preceded the Stones’ former bishop.

This earlier bishop—who served one year, then asked to be released—told Steve privately a few years later he resigned from his calling “because the stake leadership is too controlling,” and he was not allowed to “be [himself].”

The man was Steve’s closest friend in the ward.

As with the meeting a week earlier with the former high councilor, this meeting was held to obtain evidence for use in a potential disciplinary council against the former bishop, as all understood. Afterward, the proceedings were drawn up and signed, after everyone had a chance to make edits or changes.

During the meeting, the witness attested to the following facts and observations:

He said at the outset that he was long aware that his successor (who at the time was one of his counselors) and Steve held profoundly different views of leadership—and that this counselor “believed strongly in the need to obey leaders.”

For emphasis, he reiterated this fact, saying the counselor and Steve were “on opposite ends of the spectrum” regarding who church members were obligated to obey. His successor “believed members were required to obey those placed over them, and [Steve] put higher value on obeying God”—a situation, he said, that would inevitably set the two at odds.

He then discussed an incident that was deceitfully handled by local leaders—including the successor bishop—during Steve’s disciplinary council, even to the point of constituting perjury by a key witness for the bishop and stake president. The incident involved the ward high priest leadership, of which the witness was a member, and occurred right after “priesthood meeting,” as the controversy between the Stone family and the church was beginning to escalate in the fall of 2000.

On that occasion, another member of the high priest leadership asked Steve to stay afterward and talk with the three or four leaders.

With the doors wide open, allowing those outside the room to overhear, the man laid into Steve for the fact he and his son Ellery were not currently “home teaching” (that is, visiting members’ homes each month to give them a brief message).

Steve explained to the man that “a problem” with his local leaders had so demoralized and degraded the family that he and Ellery couldn’t go into members’ homes without feeling extremely depressed.

The man (whom the witness interjected was even more controlling than his former counselor, then the bishop) demanded to know “what was bothering [Steve] enough that [he] wouldn’t feel like home teaching.”

Steve recounted how he gave the man a vague answer—in part because there was little privacy. He said the man then demanded to know specifics, and Steve again gave him a vague answer. Finally, the man pressed Steve to know exactly what the problem was, and in exasperation Steve told him in a nutshell—saying the bishop and stake president had been incredibly cruel to the Stone family, *more than any leaders they had ever encountered in the church*, and that this cruelty was devastating to them.

After Steve reprised these facts, the witness said he recalled the incident, and he stressed that the man at issue had initiated the meeting—and had also pressed Steve to summarize the controversy with his leaders, contrary to what he falsely reported.

So there could be no question regarding his testimony, Steve directly asked the witness if the above account of this incident was accurate according to his memory, and he said it was.

Steve then asked him if Steve’s behavior on the occasion at issue could accurately be characterized as “deliberate, open, public opposition to the Church and its leaders,” as the incident was made to appear during his disciplinary council.

The witness said, “No.”

Steve pointed out that the high priest leader, in an untruthful written account of the meeting, claimed otherwise, and his untruthful account was used unfairly against him—when Steve in fact did nothing in the abovementioned meeting but respond reluctantly when repeatedly borne down upon by the man.

Steve added that this kind of false witness was typical of the seriously-inaccurate testimony submitted against him, at the urging of local leaders, in his disciplinary council. He said others in the high priest leadership—including the witness—were reported to have submitted similar distorted accounts, in testimony gathered by the stake clerk, who embellished the facts.

The witness conceded this happened—something he had revealed to Steve years earlier he was aware was happening, emotionally saying at the time it was “wrong.”

Steve and the witness then talked at length about his perceptions of the Stone family’s long struggle over the years to succeed with various business ventures. He said he understood that Steve had “quit [his] previous job teaching English at BYU.” Steve let him know that he completely misunderstood the situation, since Steve had never quit, but instead was pushed out by a new English Department chairman because—unlike the chairman’s predecessor, who had hired Steve—he disapproved of blending scriptural principles with the teaching of English.

In recounting this, Steve emphasized that he had been conscientiously, but tactfully, making such illuminating connections in his teaching because of his belief in the *published mission of the school*—which invited such scripture-based instruction—and he did so with the express approval of the previous chairman.

As he and the witness discussed the family’s struggles, the witness conceded that when he was bishop, he substantially misunderstood the family’s endeavors—which family members pursued with great dedication, even though their efforts were largely unsuccessful. He acknowledged that these highly-principled endeavors could not be faulted.

The witness then noted that Steve’s personal standards were higher than those of others. Steve said that his standards were derived from the scriptures, and that he had a God-given right to live those standards without interference from persons who were committed to lower standards. He pointed out that he was disfellowshipped for doing nothing but live by his scripturally-sound ideals.

The discussion then turned, at the end, to an interview the witness had with a low-level area authority shortly after Steve’s disfellowshippment. This occurred in the spring of 2002. On that occasion, the area authority approached the witness because his name was mentioned in some of the documents Steve had submitted with his appeal, and he told the witness to “stay out of the matter.” He even threatened and intimidated the witness, the witness told Steve at the time.

As Steve and the witness rehearsed the facts of this encounter, the witness affirmed that they were accurate.

Several days after meeting, Steve gave the witness a detailed description he had written a few years earlier about the witness’s encounter with the area authority—now a presiding leader in the church—based on what the witness told Steve at the time, and Steve asked

him to read it. The next day, Steve followed up and asked him if it was accurate, and he said it was, adding that Steve was entitled to use it in describing what happened. He said he did not dispute anything in it.

The document—titled “The Failure of the Utah South Area Presidency,” dated July 6, 2002—was among the many items Steve submitted to the First Presidency in the course of his appeal.

A few weeks later, the witness again assured Steve that he endorsed what Steve wrote in the above document about the church official’s intimidation of him, intimidation he concurred amounted to “witness tampering.”

Steve kept the signed testimony of each witness on file, and later made both available to the First Presidency.

Chapter 18 — ‘Your bishop’s an apostate, and so are you’

As the family continued to meet with their supportive bishop after being barred from Stefani and Chuck’s wedding for no doctrinally-valid reason, they focused on basic facts the bishop was willing to “affirm” about the church’s disturbing mistreatment of the family.

They worked together on compiling a list of things they’d proven to the bishop’s satisfaction, so he might have a clear basis for ruling in favor of the family’s charges against the former bishop, and thus bring the controversy to closure.

After months of working toward this goal, the family and the bishop drew up a document the bishop was willing to sign affirming his understanding of the controversy, and the validity—and truth—of the Stones’ testimony, evidence, and assertions in their meetings together.

This critically-important document was drawn up by Steve from notes and recollections he made of the bishop’s statements, and from answers to questions the family put to him. *The bishop then edited the result, and a final copy was made, which he read carefully, and signed.*

In the four-page statement, dated September 4, 2005, *the bishop affirmed*, first, that—

1. The adult members of the Stone family are deserving of temple recommends “insofar as personal worthiness is concerned.”
2. The family’s claims are either “undeniably true” on their face, or otherwise “valid” and “irrefutable.”
3. The “difficult” nature of the problem between the church and the family warrants impartial review by the highest church leaders (or at least by competent persons outside the stake).
4. The family’s claim that, in July 2001, the Brethren approved the former bishop and stake president to be tried for their membership “cannot be denied.”
5. The Area President did in fact approve both the former bishop and the stake president to be tried for their membership on April 13, 2003, with the new bishop specifically authorized to initiate a disciplinary council against his predecessor.
6. The Stone family has valid reason not to sustain the stake president or the former bishop (at that time a member of the stake high council), or others who’ve shared in these men’s abusive behavior.

The statement then said the bishop did not dispute the family’s claim that those who disfellowshipped Steve “acted inappropriately, even maliciously”—and that at least some “behaved dishonestly, bore false witness, and conducted themselves in ways unbecoming of members of the church.”

The statement also affirmed that Steve’s disciplinary council was “inappropriate” and “disturbing.”

In his statement, the bishop further affirmed that the evidence submitted against Steve at his disciplinary council was “either irrelevant or unreliable”—and he added that several documents were introduced against Steve as a result of his comments in a 1998 Sunday School class about the innocence of little children to suggest Steve was an apostate, even though his comments, and several documents he wrote supporting them, were sound and merely offered scripture-based testimony of the “saving principles of the gospel.”

The bishop affirmed that he had seen evidence to suggest that the stake president and former bishop “did not act in good faith”—and that Steve may well “have been disfellowshipped not only for his view of [little children], but for his involvement in the family’s political livelihood, which centers in working for Alan Keyes and other political figures.”

His statement concluded by affirming: “I consider the Stone family to be truthful and honorable, and their testimony valid and unimpeachable. I would encourage the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, and the Presidency of the Seventy to permit the Stone family a full and impartial investigation of this matter, in whatever venue seems appropriate, in the interest of getting this serious problem truly resolved.”

In making this recommendation, the bishop acknowledged that the record suggests that the inept member of the Area Presidency and the Area President at the time both “seriously erred” in their handling of the problem, and that the Stone family “is within their rights, under the Law of Common Consent, not to sustain [them],” should they choose.

Steve forwarded a copy to the Office of the First Presidency a while later, in the sincere hope of ending the stake president’s interference with the bishop’s assignment to try the former bishop—so the bishop might be allowed to function without unreasonable constraint in fulfilling that role as a “judge in Israel.”

Interference with the bishop by the new Area President

Soon after the family’s bishop signed the above statement affirming basic facts in the controversy, he was contacted by the new Area President and asked to submit a replacement document, Steve learned a few weeks afterward.

The bishop apparently did so at church headquarters in Salt Lake City sometime in September or October 2005, under the supervision of the new Area President.

The Stones have never seen this alternative statement, but according to the bishop, it emphasized that his September 4 statement “was not worded the way [he] would choose to say things.”

Because the family considered the Area President's attempt to discredit the bishop's September 4 statement tantamount to *witness tampering*—as well as further evidence of the church's bad faith and unfairness in this controversy—the family ultimately drew up a clarifying statement for the First Presidency.

Among other things, the family emphasized that:

The [bishop's signed] statement was prepared *jointly* by the bishop and members of the Stone family over a period of several weeks of careful writing and re-writing, following months of discussion between the family, the bishop, and the family's principal witnesses.

The family described the process as follows:

After clarifying certain details of testimony and evidence with the bishop, the Stone family drew up a proposed draft of basic affirmations of fact and offered it to the bishop for his consideration—with a request that he revise it any way he chose. The bishop then made whatever corrections he wanted and gave the edited version back to the Stones. The Stones suggested a few final adjustments, which the bishop approved. The resulting *mutually-agreeable* document was then signed by the bishop of his own free will, after a significant period of discussion, writing, editing, and refinement. (emphasis added)

“What resulted was thus a collaboration in every important sense,” the Stones stressed, adding—

The signed document does not purport to be “the way the bishop would have worded things,” of course—but that could be said of countless written agreements, attestations, and contracts among various parties in and out of the Church and in the realm of law. *What matters is that the language is agreeable to all involved, and in this case, [the bishop] had every opportunity to ensure that this occurred, and he then attested to his formal approval of the document by his signature.* No attempt, therefore, by those seeking to protect the Church from the consequences of its actions can credibly dispel the validity—or profound significance—of [the bishop's] September 4, 2005, signed statement. (emphasis added)

By contrast, the family said,

[The Area President's] version did not involve members of the Stone family in its substance or wording, *and thus lacks the authority of the version prepared jointly by the family and their bishop.* The [replacement] version was also implicitly coerced—for [the Area President] had direct and influential jurisdiction over the bishop in the line of command for [the family's] area of the Church, and as a rule, bishops are expected to do as directed (or asked) by their file leaders.

It would indeed be rare for a bishop to defy or ignore a request by a General Authority who presides directly over him in the Church structure.

The [Area President's] alternative document is therefore insignificant in comparison to the jointly-prepared, completely uncoerced September 4, 2005, signed statement of [the bishop]. (emphasis added)

The family further stated,

[The bishop's] September 4, 2005, signed statement was the product of nearly three years of interviews and discussions with members of the Stone family, during which the bishop came to believe that the family's claims were at least "valid," "irrefutable," or "unimpeachable"—and in a large number of instances "undeniably true." He also concluded, after these conversations, that the Stone family's witnesses, testimony, and evidence met every standard of proof required by the scriptures.

One thing the Stones' letter of clarification does not say—but it bears saying now—is that the Area President was the bishop's former boss at BYU, where sports employees with significant responsibilities are both highly esteemed and privileged, on the one hand, and under continual pressure from the administration to perform and conform, on the other.

BYU also has a strict policy of terminating staff, faculty, or students who are perceived to be at odds with church leaders.

Whether the bishop would admit it or not, such considerations cannot be ignored in assessing whether his revised statement was made *entirely of his own free will*—uncoerced implicitly or directly—and thus equal in reliability to the statement prepared mutually with the Stones.

A reasonable observer would see the revised statement for what it obviously was: a dishonest attempt by the Area President to manipulate a witness and damage the Stones' case in the controversy with the church.

More interference by the new Area President

Sometime during the first week of October 2005, the new Area President sent a letter to the stake president saying that Steve had disobeyed the presiding authority's May 26, 2005, letter, because Steve was working closely with the bishop to resolve this difficult controversy.

Bear in mind that the Area President expressly told Steve in his May 26 letter: "I ask you to direct all further inquiries and concerns *to your bishop* [since he has] the keys to help you." (emphasis added)

As a result of the Area President's October letter, the bishop was called in by the stake president and instructed no longer to help the Stone family resolve the longstanding problem.

According to the bishop, the letter from the Area President was precipitated by the bishop's signed statement affirming that all of the family's basic claims in this matter were "valid" and "irrefutable." Note that Steve had sent the bishop's statement to the First Presidency just prior to General Conference (around the first of October), and the statement was evidently forwarded to the Area President—who responded with his letter to the stake president reprimanding the family for their efforts to resolve things through their bishop.

The paradox, of course, was obviously ironic. Here the Stones were doing precisely what the order of the church normally calls for (that is, dealing with local issues at the local level, in accordance with church protocol and doctrine)—yet were chastised for doing so.

Furthermore, they were doing exactly what the Area President had asked them to do in his May 26 letter—which told them to deal directly with the bishop.

We should stress that Steve was never permitted to see the letter, although the stake president read parts of it briefly to him in an impromptu meeting with him and the bishop. For weeks, Steve had resisted the president's request to read Steve the letter, since the president typically refused to allow him to speak when they met. On this occasion, they sat down to discuss a vote Steve had just cast in a priesthood meeting against an action of the president, and the president deceptively pulled out the letter and said he'd like to read it. (It was apparent that this was the real reason for the meeting.)

Steve agreed to the reading on condition that his bishop be allowed to read him the letter in its entirety later that day—as Steve had been promised by the presidents' counselors that morning would happen—in response to his repeated requests for such a non-threatening meeting. Steve therefore told the president he was not about to waive this long-awaited opportunity, and the president agreed, and then proceeded to read the letter.

From what Steve could tell without actually examining it, the Area President's letter appeared to restate errors he'd previously asserted in his May 26 letter, and offered no substantive new information—other than to accuse Steve of "disobedience" for repeatedly meeting with the bishop to seek his help, even though the Area President had clearly suggested Steve do so in his May 26 letter.

Later that day, when Steve met with the bishop to hear the October letter, the bishop said the president refused to honor their agreement concerning it. Steve was not allowed to review the letter with the bishop as promised.

Since the letter was implicitly ADDRESSED TO STEVE, even though it was sent only to the stake president, such intransigence (and outright deceit) obviously makes no sense. *Steve could hardly be expected to take seriously the substance of a letter to which he was denied reasonable access.*

When the bishop later told Steve in mid-December that his repeated efforts to gain access to the letter were futile, Steve told the bishop—in response to the president's manipulative behavior: "He tricked me."

Both the president's deceit and the Area President's willful collaboration could accurately be characterized as *treachery*, given what was unquestionably at stake, and the cruel escalation of the conflict they ensured.

At least that's way the baffled and beleaguered Stones looked at it. How could professed representatives of Jesus Christ act with such devious contempt toward a family whose members were guilty of no definable transgression of church law, and who sought only to end the church's mistreatment, the Stones wondered.

"Proven your case"

In the wake of the Area President's October 2005 letter to the stake president, and the president's self-serving exploitation of it, members of the Stone family met with the bishop to assess the situation. The date was November 27, 2005.

Of particular concern to the Stones was *the stake president's most recent directive that the bishop no longer help the family*—even though the Area President's letter, which was kept hidden from Steve, apparently said the opposite, consistent with the Area President's May 2005 letter.

After summarizing these facts, Steve read the bishop some scriptural passages about church discipline, the Law of Witnesses, and guidelines for "judges in Israel" (as LDS scripture defines bishops).

He also summarized the essence of the bishop's signed statement of September 4, 2005, affirming the validity of the family's charges against his predecessor following three years of meetings between the bishop and members of the family.

Steve then asked the bishop if, in his judgment, the family "had proven [their] case against [the former bishop], in accordance with the laws and doctrines in the standard works."

The bishop answered, "YES—according to the laws and standards in the scriptures."

He said this knowing full-well the significance of his statement, it was obvious as he and Steve talked.

This culminating judgment by the bishop, after so many starts and stops and continuing interference from the stake president and others, meant—for all intents and purposes—that the Stones' long nightmare should be over.

Unfortunately, it was made in the context of the bishop's confidential announcement that he was *moving from the ward in just a few weeks*, and would have little opportunity to do anything further to resolve the controversy, given the stake president's increasing pressure on him to abandon the assignment he'd been given by the previous Area President to try the former bishop.

*While he was still in his role as a bishop, however, the bishop's conclusions in the controversy were more reliable and authoritative, under church protocol, than the perspective of other church leaders—including the new Area President—whose role in discipline under church protocol is normally *appellate*, following a decision by a “judge in Israel.”*

To reasonable minds—and to those familiar with the church's “standard works”—the bishop's conclusions should set the matter to rest, once and for all, unless overturned on appeal by the First Presidency upon submission of valid evidence to the contrary by those found by the bishop to be guilty of misconduct.

Regarding the latter possibility, the Stone family has always maintained that their *only interest has been in seeing due process play out*—no matter the outcome—even if the highest leaders chose to set aside a judgment of a local disciplinary council.

What has disturbed them most throughout the controversy has been *pre-emptive judgment* issued by church authorities in flagrant disregard for due process—preventing the family from presenting their evidence and testimony in an orderly manner as provided by church law.

Such meddling—obviously an expression of disrespect for “regular” members by the church's governing elite—defies the very order that the Law of Common Consent, the Law of Witnesses, and related statutes are meant to preserve.

Hence the following. Read on.

A call to the Area President's office

On December 3, 2005—shortly after hearing the bishop's authoritative judgment—Steve called the Area President's office to learn what the man intended the family's bishop to do in dealing with the Stone family, in view of his two letters, and why his recent letter was being used by the stake president to obstruct the bishop's rightful prerogatives as a “judge in Israel.”

He also wanted to inform the man *that the bishop had told the family on November 27, 2005, that they had “proven [their] case against the former bishop.”*

His secretary, as she had on several other occasions, was rude to Steve from the outset. She told him the stake president had been “delegated all the authority in the matter,” and that Steve was to do whatever the president said regarding the bishop's involvement.

When Steve pointed out that the previous Area Authority had authorized the bishop to try the former bishop, she said the earlier church official's authorization “didn't matter,” since the man was “no longer a General Authority.”

Bear in mind that, by this way of thinking, persons set apart as bishops, for example, or missionaries, would lose their calling upon the release or retirement of the person who called them. Such thinking would result in complete chaos in the Church.

As Steve tried to explain this to her, she hung up on him.

Further affirmation from the bishop

Steve and Ethan met December 6 with the bishop to discuss the demeaning treatment Steve was given by the Area President's office and to consider the family's limited options.

In the context of these frustrations, Steve reminded the bishop of his assurance on November 27, 2005, that the Stones "had proven [their] case against [the former bishop]." Steve asked him if he would be willing to "re-affirm" this assurance—and Steve then reiterated basically the same question he put to him in November regarding the strength of the family's evidence.

Steve asked him if the family had "proven [their] case against [the prior bishop], according to the laws and standards in the scriptures."

The bishop said, "Yes."

"Your bishop's an apostate"

Because the Area President's office was uncooperative, Steve called the office of the Area President's file leader—the "Senior President of the Seventy"—the next day.

Steve had previously talked with two of the Senior President's secretaries in the past, to express his frustrations at the insensitivity of the Area President, and they'd always been respectful.

Steve described to the main secretary his frustration in trying to find out from the Area President's office why the Area President refused to honor the bishop's rights and authority as Steve worked with the bishop to resolve the church's mistreatment of his family.

Steve framed this frustration in the context of the bishop's recent acknowledgement that the Stones had *already proven their case against the former bishop*—and he asked her to see if the Senior President would be willing to call the bishop to clarify the bishop's prerogatives, especially regarding the disciplining of the previous bishop.

The woman presented Steve's request to the Senior President, then returned and said, "Elder [deleted] said you've received previous counsel, and I'm to hang up now," which she did.

Shocked at such treatment from what appeared to be one of the family's last avenues for recourse, Steve promptly called the *Assistant Secretary to the First Presidency*.

He told the Assistant Secretary that the family's bishop had concluded that the *family had "proven [their] case" in this disturbing matter*—especially their allegations of cruel, dishonest, malicious behavior by the former bishop toward members of the Stone family over several years.

Steve added that the bishop had affirmed this decision twice to family members.

The Assistant Secretary responded by saying, "Then your bishop's an apostate."

The man actually said this—despite the bishop's special rights and authority as a "judge in Israel," and the Assistant Secretary's *lack of any ecclesiastical authority whatever to judge the bishop, or the controversy the bishop thoroughly investigated and ruled concerning in favor of the Stones.*

In fact, this paid employee of the First Presidency had never been voted on and "sustained" to fulfill the influential role he played as a *de facto* member of the church's presiding body.

In making his bigoted pronouncement, the secretary not only revealed his apparent animosity toward the bishop for being exceptionally kind to the Stone family, but his own willingness to *assume authority he did not possess under the laws and order of the church.*

The man then said, "And so are you, Brother Stone" (an apostate)—again displaying his significant prejudice, ill will, incompetence, and doctrinal ignorance.

Steve reminded the secretary that the bishop had also signed a written statement—after meeting regularly with members of the Stone family for three years—affirming that all of the family's basic claims in the controversy were "valid and irrefutable." That September 4, 2005, statement was seen by the secretary in October.

Steve further told the secretary that the bishop had "more understanding of this matter than anyone else in the church," due to his extensive investment of time regarding it—in harmony with instructions from both Area Presidents.

In addition, Steve pointed out that two independent witnesses—one a former bishop of the family's ward, and the other a former stake high counselor who witnessed Steve's disfellowshipment—had also signed written statements verifying the family's most basic claims in the matter.

Without hesitation, the secretary rudely rejected—out of hand—what Steve told him, and hung up on him.

We should point out that this presumptuous, inept man is now the Secretary to the First Presidency, not merely the "assistant," following the retirement of his predecessor not long ago. This means he has even more of a hand in the church's internal dealings than before—and raises legitimate questions about who is "minding the store" at church headquarters.

Letter of complaint

On December 11, 2005, Steve sent a letter to the Secretary to the First Presidency—the above man’s superior—and protested the man’s disturbing behavior, which Steve considered inappropriate for anyone in his high position.

After describing what the man said about the family’s bishop, as well as about Steve himself, Steve wrote:

I believe that the above behavior by Brother [deleted] is the most deplorable and irresponsible behavior by a high Church official that I have ever witnessed, and I protest such degrading treatment.

Steve then asked,

Would you kindly pass this short expression of disgust to the First Presidency, along with my observation that Brother [deleted] has repeatedly treated me with inexplicable condescension and prejudice throughout this matter—beginning with our first conversation in March 2002, shortly after I was disfellowshipped.

It is irregular and inappropriate for someone who has not been sustained as a “judge” in his position to form opinions of any kind about facts or claims that he knows nothing of, firsthand, in a local matter. My bishop’s knowledge and judgment in this matter are nothing to trifle with, under the laws of God, and deserve respectful consideration by officers of the Church.

Steve ended by saying,

Given the highly-unusual facts in this controversy, it should be obvious that this matter warrants a full and thorough review by an impartial General Authority assigned by the First Presidency. To date, such impartiality has been absent—as two complicit Church leaders (Elders [deleted] and [deleted]) have been permitted in the past to cover up their serious errors at our family’s expense.

Fairness has also been absent by allowing President [deleted]—who is as responsible for this problem as former Bishop [deleted], and who has repeatedly obstructed its resolution through perjury and deceit—to control the investigative and disciplinary process.

Please prevail upon the First Presidency to end the cruel persecution our family continues to suffer in this needless conflict.

That same day, Steve and Ethan met again with the bishop to discuss the family’s evidence against his predecessor, and the bishop *affirmed a third time* that the family had “proven [their] case” against the former bishop.

In the family's last meeting with the bishop before he was released on January 1, 2006—an informal conversation in his office on December 18, 2005—Steve and Ethan, for good measure, asked the bishop to verify once more his view that the family “has proven [its] case against [the former bishop].” Steve pointedly asked the bishop, as before, if he believed that the family had done so, and the bishop said, “Yes.”

When Steve asked him if he would be willing to stand firm in the face of diligent inquiry and still defend this view, he said, “Yes.”

Chapter 19 — A constant threat of excommunication

In the months before the bishop left the ward, Steve drew up several documents to help the bishop appreciate the persecution the Stones had endured since it began in August 2000.

One of these, titled “A Constant Threat of Excommunication,” described the profound effect the stake president’s “standing threat” to excommunicate Steve had on his day-to-day life to that point in the controversy.

Before we look at that document, bear in mind that, under LDS tradition, an excommunicated member literally loses his salvation, unless he or she “repents” of the transgression that precipitated the extreme punishment. If the member refuses to repent, they are potentially “cast out” forever from what the scriptures call “eternal life.”

Of course, Steve has never believed such nonsense—because the church’s own canon of scripture undeniably teaches that salvation is not determined by any human being, no matter his office in any church, but only by God Himself, and because salvation is a free gift of God in consequence of a person’s *submission of their whole soul to Christ*, their resultant receipt of *spiritual “rebirth” and reconciliation with God* on terms plainly spelled out in the scriptures, and their remaining faithful in *bearing fruit acceptable to God* thereafter, as a result of their conversion.

It follows that if indeed a person has come unto Christ and truly been “reborn”—that is, “baptized by fire and the Holy Ghost,” thus becoming a “new creature,” redeemed from their fallen condition to a state of “righteousness,” having truly become an abode for the Holy Ghost and thereby naturally inclined to seek the guidance of the Spirit in all things, so they might please God in every detail of their life—that person, if so “converted,” cannot experience a reversal of the “mighty change of heart” he or she experienced by the surrender of their will to Christ, or otherwise become “unconverted,” *provided their conversion was genuine in the first place, and therefore permanent and irreversible.*

To suggest such a thing is to reject the atonement of Jesus Christ, for which He gave His life to make efficacious.

Put another way—a person truly converted to Christ cannot be made *unconverted* by a tribunal of errant LDS leaders who themselves are unconverted to Christ, and who do not even know what conversion means.

That being the case, “excommunication” is more accurately a way by which overbearing, overly-protective church officials *exercise control over others*. It has no necessary bearing on an individual’s salvation.

Most “Mormons” don’t know this, and out of real fear of losing their membership in the LDS church, and therefore their salvation, they are willing to do whatever is required to be considered “members in good standing” in the church.

To them, excommunication would amount to suffering spiritual death at the hands of mere human beings—a doctrinal impossibility.

On the other hand, because excommunication is so deeply feared by most members, and so attached in Mormon culture to presumptions of extreme transgression, an excommunicated member is looked upon with discernable condescension and pathos as *anathema*—out of belief the unrepentant excommunicant might corrupt those around them.

Hence the term “excommunication,” itself—which means, literally, “without communication”; ostracized.

In family-oriented Utah, such punishment for presumed extreme sin can tear families apart, including extended families. Indeed, when an LDS member is excommunicated, *the entire family is in essence excommunicated, too*, and this is intentional—to pressure the “transgressing” former member to give in to the demands of the church, or suffer hell on earth indefinitely in family relations.

LDS church discipline is, by design, a “family thing.”

Thankfully, the Stones are a tight-knit family that is centered in reliance on God directly, and not on the church, or on church leaders. Such is the way of *all truly converted persons*, by the way, according to the scriptures, no matter the denomination they associate with.

In fact, willingness to rely solely on Christ is the chief measure of conversion.

Nonetheless, Steve’s excommunication has made him feel estranged from many around him—even people who are unaware of his status in heavily-Mormon Utah, where LDS church membership is presumed of everybody, and where current church trends and traditions are easy topics for casual discussion, often leading to uncomfortable discussions. Steve usually avoids potential confrontation (or embarrassment) through his ready sense of humor—disarming those who pry.

Around those who *are* aware of his status, the pathetic looks Steve has received can be unsettling.

At extended family gatherings—where no one knows who’s privy to what gossip—there’s always the possibility of unintentional humiliation, so Steve keeps his attendance at such things to a minimum, to protect himself and his own close family from added destruction of their peace.

Again, all this is the way the church intends. The church relies on *family pressure* to rehabilitate those who “stray” and who are thus perceived to “harm” their family.

With these and similar considerations in mind when discussing what it means—in real or imagined terms—to be “excommunicated,” let’s look at what Steve wrote for his bishop, in

an effort to put into understandable language the incessant distraction posed by the stake president's heartless, unrestrained threat to Steve's membership.

If the reader thinks *disfellowshipment* might be a distraction to an undeserving LDS member, consider what *excommunication* is like. Knowing the one firsthand, Steve was not particularly anxious to experience the other.

Add to this the fact that the family's high-intensity political work relies heavily on the family's reputation and credibility, as well as their fully-focused creative talents, for its effectiveness, and it becomes clear that few things could destroy that endeavor more readily in Utah conservative circles than severe discipline from the LDS church—something Steve knows well.

The document shown the bishop

Being under a standing threat of excommunication for no definable reason over so many years took a constant toll on Steve and his family—diminishing their productivity, concentration, creativity, confidence, peace, health, and just about everything else most people take for granted.

To Steve, it was like spending every waking minute with the barrel of a shotgun taped to the back of his head, knowing that the obsessed person with his finger on the trigger was capable of blowing Steve's brains out—figuratively speaking—at any given moment, after tiring of tormenting Steve.

The fact that the man already tried to commit spiritual murder (a term in LDS scripture)—being forced to settle for disfellowshipping Steve only because the man lacked a clear basis for excommunicating him, having no credible grounds for punishing Steve at all—indicated he was capable of doing whatever he felt compelled to do to destroy Steve and his family.

The stake president was that compulsive, obsessed, and mentally disturbed.

In an effort to get across to his bishop the incessant burden the stake president's constant threat of excommunication imposed on him, Steve submitted to the bishop the following, in a document dated March 23, 2005, titled "A Constant Threat of Excommunication":

For over four and a half years, I have lived under a constant threat of excommunication, maliciously and utterly without cause.

*This threat has been a constant source of distraction—because it is *very real*—and its cruelty is indescribable. For reasons that should be obvious to any faithful member of the Church, the threat is constantly on my mind.*

*This arbitrary, incessant threat of excommunication—*which exists both in writing and in verbal communication*—has virtually destroyed our family's peace, as well as our family's high-intensity political livelihood.*

Steve then recounted how the threat began on October 3, 2000, when the stake president told him he intended to convene a stake disciplinary council against Steve because he refused to “obey him.”

From that point on—Steve emphasized—the president refused to rescind his threat, and he re-issued it several times, never giving a legitimate reason for doing so.

When Steve asked him, on one occasion, to explain why he had singled him out for discipline, he told Steve, “You won’t obey your leaders”—a comment made in the context of Steve’s employment.

Describing the president’s repeated threat of ultimate discipline, Steve wrote:

At least twice, [the president] has attempted to make good on his threat.

The *first* of these attempts occurred on November 25, 2001, when [the president] formally notified me in writing that I was to be tried for my membership in a disciplinary council scheduled for December 9, 2001, *with the possibility of excommunication*. That attempt was stopped by the First Presidency, in response to our family’s formal filing of charges against [the president] and [the bishop], charges we were asked by Elder [deleted] to submit after we protested our leaders’ plans.

Note that at this time, I was *charged with nothing, and had done nothing that could be identified as a transgression of Church law*. Nor had I initiated any contact with these men *for nearly a year* (and since I hadn’t heard otherwise, I assumed that [the president’s] initial threat was over).

Note further that this first of two outrageous attempts by my leaders to excommunicate me *amounted to a direct, defiant challenge by them of the First Presidency—who in July 2001 had approved these two men to be tried FOR THEIR OWN MEMBERSHIP*—in a pre-arranged procedure to be presided over by President Bruce Young of the stake presidency.

Steve continued—

The *second* attempt to excommunicate me occurred shortly after [the president] and [the former bishop] lied to representatives of the Utah South Area Presidency in interviews conducted December 9, 2001. On this occasion, [the former president] and [the bishop] deliberately misled three Area Authority Seventies, who in turn misinformed the Area Presidency. This resulted in Elder [deleted’s] shockingly untruthful letter of January 31, 2002, in which Elder [deleted] falsely claimed that all adult members of our family had been interviewed about our charges and that, as a result, our allegations were judged to be unfounded. As a direct consequence of this unjust letter, I was summarily disfellowshipped three days later—after my request for sufficient time to prepare a defense and gather witnesses was denied by both [the president] and Elder [deleted].

A few days later, I was given a further threat of excommunication—in a letter dated February 6, 2002. In this letter, [the president] told me that if I refused to obey him in the choice of my livelihood, I would be subject to excommunication. Since I have never complied with that absurd demand, or any other stipulation in the letter, this formal threat still stands, in principle.

Finally, as I have mentioned several times to our current bishop, [the president] menacingly reiterated his original threat to my membership—both in person and in writing—*immediately after my disfellowshipment was overturned by the First Presidency in May 2003.*

Since the stake president had never withdrawn this renewed threat—or his initial and continuing threat—and since he had clearly shown himself capable of unprovoked and unrestrained interference with the Stone family’s peace, Steve wrote that he had “every reason to believe that [the president’s] threat of excommunication still [stood], at his arbitrary discretion.”

Steve then noted in his words to the bishop—

In addition, there is the issue of my continuing opposition to [the president], and to any action proposed by him in church meetings.

Because of the president’s unworthy conduct—and because he has never been properly sustained in view of our opposing votes as a family (which have yet to be fully and impartially investigated by appropriate Church authority), I have repeatedly voted against [the president] at every opportunity—*now amounting to dozens of negative votes.* At some point, it is reasonable to assume that [the president] will seek to end my repeated votes by taking action against me.

The possibility of this, in fact, is very likely. . . . The only issue is *WHEN*, as my votes continue to mount. *The more that time passes, the more likely it is that [the president] will at some point retaliate.*

Any suggestion, therefore, that I am *not* under a very real, constant, even mounting threat of excommunication is simply untrue. . . .

Steve ended by stressing that he cannot rightfully be punished for his continuing votes against the stake president, under the Law of Common Consent, and added,

As long as I am a member of the Church in good standing, I have the right to answer those questions put to me [for a vote] as my conscience directs.

Of course, [the president] has already shown himself to consider this process—and my rights—irrelevant. When he first sent me written notification that I was to be tried for my membership in November 2001, he did *so just weeks after I voted*

against him the second time. There can be no question that my vote triggered his punitive response.

After so many negative votes by me against [the president], the reasonable response by Church leaders would be to conduct a bona fide investigation of my reasons for so voting, at the hands of neutral officials who have not been party to any mischief the Church has caused us. Since all adult members of my family concur in our opposition to [the president], the Church cannot forever ignore our earnest votes.

In the meantime, I have good reason to believe that [the president] may well still come after me again as I and my family continue to vote against him, as we feel duty-bound.

That final observation proved prophetic—in the form of those persons the president trained and prejudiced against the Stones, as we will see next.

Enter the last bishop

The family's supportive bishop was released on January 1, 2006, and replaced by a man who was an acolyte of the bishop who set in motion the persecution of the Stones.

The replacement bishop was also *the last bishop* of the ward—a membership unit presiding church authorities dismantled and assimilated into surrounding wards because of the man's disastrous tenure as bishop, which caused attendance and activity among the congregation virtually to dry up under his excessive authoritarianism, bureaucratic style, and indifference to his role as a bishop—a role the scriptures define as that of *minister*, not *administrator*, something he never understood.

So church headquarters shut the congregation down, concluding its serious problems were beyond remedy, and reassigned its members to nearby wards.

Bear in mind that during the supportive bishop's three-year tenure—following several years of obvious decline under his predecessor—the ward became a healthy congregation again, attendance doubled, and meetings focused on the saving doctrine of Jesus Christ. Under the last bishop, attendance and activity dropped below even that which existed under the initial bishop, as the ward fell into a spiritual malaise.

This is all true. *The legacy of the first bishop in this controversy was the ultimate demise of the ward at the hands of a man he tutored and heavily influenced, a man who cared little for church doctrine or duty, or for his fellow church members.* The last bishop's impersonal—even heartless—inattention to members' needs all but destroyed the ward.

At one point, several weeks into the man's tenure—after the man refused to give Steve more than fifteen minutes to explain the controversy between the church and the Stones (saying that's all the time he routinely gave anyone)—Steve took him aside in a hallway and told him, "Jesus is no bureaucrat."

It was through this disciple of the initial bishop that the threat to Steve’s membership was constantly perpetuated, increasingly intensified, and ultimately fulfilled—in consequence of the stake president’s influence. At Steve’s excommunication, this classic yes man was presented as the disciplinary council’s only witness against him.

(The reader might consider taking a break and watching the 1966 Best Picture *A Man for All Seasons*—paying special attention to John Hurt’s memorable portrayal of the sycophantic personality and behavior of Richard Rich. The parallel with the deceitful bishop is uncanny. Was Steve on a par with the film’s central character, Sir Thomas More? No. Was the bishop reminiscent of More’s nemesis, Richard Rich? Yes.)

First interview by the last bishop

Not long after the last bishop was installed, he called the Stone family into his office following negative votes they had cast that day during routine sustainings. This occurred the last Sunday of January 2006.

The family had voted against a proposed action by the stake president, since they considered him unworthy of his calling, and thus unqualified to *perform the duties of his office*.

They also felt the president had not been properly “sustained” for a number of years, since their prior votes against him had never been properly investigated—and *any action he proposed was therefore not legitimate, being out of harmony with the statutory order of the church*. At least, they believed his right to serve as a stake president was subject to serious question in the absence of appropriate review.

This interview was the family’s first with the ward’s new bishop since his ordination four weeks earlier.

Visibly perturbed, the bishop sat on his desk in front of the Stones and asked their reason for voting against the individual the stake president proposed to call.

Steve responded that the family hadn’t voted against any *person* at all, including the person proposed to be elevated to a new calling; they voted only against the *president’s action, per se*—that is, his right to propose anything for a vote, since his right to do so was, in their minds, subject to doubt under the laws of the church.

Steve then proceeded to explain that, under church rules, two things occur when a vote is taken in a meeting: (1) a person professing authority stands before the members and makes a proposal, and (2) the members are asked to indicate whether or not they support the proposal (which can involve any number of things—including calling someone to a new position, or presenting a significant matter of church business).

He pointed out that the “church handbook” confirms these two dimensions of any vote taken in a church setting.

Unfortunately, the bishop was unwilling even to listen to this explanation—*presuming already to know the basis for the family's votes*, that basis being a desire to embarrass the person proposed to be called.

Given the bishop's closed-mindedness, Steve again stressed that the family was *not voting against any person*—only challenging the right of the stake president to preside over the stake, or to conduct stake business of any kind, *since the laws of the church had been ignored on so many occasions previously when the family voted against him, leaving the man not properly sustained*.

Again, the bishop refused to consider Steve's basis—saying a proposed vote did not concern matters of authority, only the calling of someone to a position. Steve pointed out that church law stipulated otherwise, in D&C 20:65 and D&C 42:11, which Steve attempted to cite, but the bishop cut him off and continued to insist the family was opposing the *individual being called*.

In this exchange, the bishop gave Steve little opportunity to express the above rationale—and Steve was forced to clarify these things while being repeatedly interrupted, belittled, insulted, and talked over.

As Steve protested such disrespectful treatment, he said the *prior* bishop had at least been willing *to listen to the family*, in a sincere effort to understand their concerns and grievances—whereas the new bishop was behaving closed-mindedly and with clear prejudice.

He told the new bishop he had no real understanding of what the family had endured for so many years at the hands of the church, and that it was unfair for him to presume to know the nature of the controversy at issue.

The bishop then said *he'd been instructed by the stake president to shred all files in the bishop's office regarding the controversy*—and that he had done so—saying he didn't want to know anything about it.

In making this statement, he revealed the reason for his antagonistic, obstinate behavior: the prompting of the stake president.

As members of the family appealed for him to be fair, the bishop opened his door and walked out.

Requirements of bishops

Such intense prejudice as that just described indicated this new—"last"—bishop had little interest in his main role as a "judge in Israel," which required him to be fair, just, and impartial in dealing with all members of his congregation, in accordance with the following

instruction for bishops in LDS scripture:

And to judge his people by the testimony of the just, . . . according to the laws of the kingdom. . . .

For verily I say unto you, my law shall be kept on this land.

Let no man think he is ruler; but let God rule him that judgeth, . . . or, in other words, him that counseleth or sitteth upon the judgment seat. (D&C 58:18-21)

This instruction would require the bishop to adhere to the following admonitions of Jesus regarding godly judgment:

Judge not [unrighteously], that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. (Matt. 7:1-2)

[M]y judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. (John 5:30)

Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. (John 7:24)

Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. (John 8:15-16)

Judging righteously would also require the bishop to follow the “Law of Witnesses”—and thus open-mindedly consider the testimony of the Stone family and their independent witnesses—if he is to “judge his people by the testimony of the just,” according to the following passage from Section 42 of the Doctrine & Covenants:

[A]nd every word shall be established . . . by two witnesses of the church, and not of the enemy; but if there are more than two witnesses it is better. (D&C 42:80-83)

The shocking bigotry, refusal to listen, and dislike for the Stones that the bishop displayed in his first interview with them foreshadowed the cruelty with which he treated them throughout his four years as bishop, culminating in Steve’s excommunication.

Since he “had no dog in this fight,” his willingness to go along with the obsessive stake president in hurting the family—in violation of the laws of God—left them feeling like they had no bishop at all, and they decided to vote accordingly.

Chapter 20 — Vote early, vote often

At a ward conference on February 19, 2006, members of the Stone family voted against the stake president and the initial bishop (who was now a stake high councilor) for conduct unbecoming members of the church, and against the latest bishop for shocking dereliction of duty.

Afterward, the stake president asked those who voted negatively to meet in his office.

He began by suggesting Steve “hears voices in his head” and needs counseling—something Steve has evidence the president apparently tells others, including presiding church authorities. He then apologized to the Stone children “for the way [their] father has been acting in front of his children”—by being “pompous” and “condescending,” and “critical of church leaders,” refusing to do obey “counsel.”

He spent the meeting talking at—rather than interviewing—the family (in doing so, ignoring their rights following their negative vote). He focused on things he falsely claimed the new Area President said in his letters, twisting the man’s words in ways already noted in the foregoing narrative.

He also claimed Steve intimidated the previous bishop into signing the September 2005 document affirming the truth of the Stones’ basic allegations—a curious claim since Steve had no tangible or intangible means to “intimidate” him into anything, having no power over him beyond the *power of persuasion*. If Steve was accused of using verifiable fact and sound logic to persuade the supportive bishop, he would plead guilty to such “intimidation.”

Throughout the meeting, the president refused to answer questions Steve put to him—such as whether he’d ever been approved to be tried for his membership—and he brushed off probing inquiries and comments from the Stone children.

Family members present—which included the three youngest, who are normally not invited to such meetings—said afterward Steve “scared the daylights out of the stake president,” in whose eyes “they could see fear.”

19-year-old Abbey told family members when she got home that she felt like slapping the president in the face for the untruthful, “evil” things he said about the family.

Other family members sensed the president was preparing to retaliate against Steve for his negative votes.

The family’s only recourse

Believing they had—literally—no other option if they were to end the church’s persecution *than to exercise their God-given right to vote their conscience*, when invited to do so, under

the Law of Common Consent, the Stone family continued to vote at every opportunity against those who persisted in intimidating or abusing them.

As they predicted, their leaders used family members' rightful votes to justify *heightening the controversy*—entirely ignoring the intent of the Law of Common Consent, which is to ensure a periodic cleansing of the church, when negative votes are valid and when properly reviewed by church authorities.

In this case, the Law of Common Consent was used by local leaders to build a case against the Stone family of contrived “open opposition to the church and its leaders”—upon which local leaders could then take punitive action against them, to insulate themselves from any accountability.

Obviously, in the wrong hands—that is, the hands of those justly voted against, *when allowed by those above them to investigate their own alleged wrongdoing*—the Law of Common Consent can degenerate into a means of doing mischief, not positive good.

That's the crux of the controversy that began with church leaders' demand that the Stone family quit working for Alan Keyes, and that escalated every time the family voted—when asked—against their overbearing leaders.

That said, let's revisit the language of the church's 1907 “Address to the World,” which contains an implicit caveat regarding such perversion of the Law of Common Consent.

Another look at the 1907 “Address to the World”

After saying, “We deny the existence of arbitrary power in the Church; and this because its government is moral government purely, and its forces are applied through kindness, reason, and persuasion,” the 1907 Address to the World emphasizes:

Government by the consent of the governed is the rule of the Church. Following is a summary of the word of the Lord, setting forth the principles on which the Church government is to be administered. (p. 8, emphasis added)

The Address then cites D&C 121:36-37, 41-42, stating—

The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon men, is true: but when they undertake to cover their sins, or gratify their pride, their vain ambition, or exercise control, or dominion, or compulsion, upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, amen to the priesthood, or the authority of that man.

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long suffering, by gentleness, and meekness, and by love

unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy and without guile. (p. 8-9)

Continuing, the Address explains (citing D&C 20:65):

Nominations to Church office may be made by revelation; and the right of nomination is usually exercised by those holding high authority, but it is a law that *no person is to be ordained to any office in the Church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, without the vote of its members.* This law is operative as to all the officers of the Church, from the president down to the deacon.

The ecclesiastical government itself *exists by the will of the people; elections are frequent, and the members are at liberty to vote as they choose.* True, the elective principle here operates by popular acceptance, rather than through popular selection, but it is nonetheless real. Where the foregoing facts exist as to any system, it is not and cannot be [considered] arbitrary. (p. 9, emphasis added)

So there can be no question or confusion, the address then says,

The Church officers, in the exercise of their functions, *are answerable to the Church.* No officer, however exalted his position, is exempt from this law. All decisions, rulings and conduct of officials are subject to investigation, correction, revision and final rejection by the general assembly of the priesthood of the Church, its final court of appeal. Even the President, its highest officer, is subject to these laws, and special provision is made for his trial, and, if necessary, his deposition. (p. 9, emphasis added)

This section of the Address—official policy adopted by unanimous vote of the members in April 1907—ends with the following assertion:

Where these facts exist in any administration of government, it cannot be justly classed as a tyranny, nor considered a menace to free institutions. (p. 9, emphasis added)

In other words, the church's claim that it is not a tyranny or a "menace to free institutions" hinges—more than on any other thing—on whether in reality members are permitted to vote against their leaders without interference, intimidation, or retaliation.

Where significant interference, intimidation, or retaliation for so voting exists, the church can indeed be considered a tyranny and a menace to a free society.

Let's be plain here: *By what it has already done to the Stone family* for their rightful votes when invited to express their conscience during sustainings, the LDS church has *already proven itself un-American* in principle, as well as in deed. The reader needs no more proof.

But wait until the reader sees how the church further amplified its abuse of the Stones' right to vote, destroying the 2008 presidential campaign of Alan Keyes, and decimating any remaining connection the family had with the church.

Condemned to spiritual death for exercising the right to vote

After months of repeatedly voting their conscience during routine sustainings—followed by hostile “interviews” at the hands of the last bishop, who would typically accuse the Stones of opposing those persons proposed to be called, when in fact family members were specifically challenging the bishop’s and stake president’s dubious right to preside, *and they said so*, since these men had not be “properly sustained”—Steve and Ethan were asked to come to the stake president’s office in the fall of 2006.

The encounter took place a few months after Steve and Ellery participated in a widely-publicized “Minuteman” event at the U.S.-Mexican border near Tombstone, where they escorted Alan Keyes to a fence-raising project attended by Rep. Steve King of Iowa, co-founder of the Minuteman movement Chris Simcox, other national conservative leaders, and a large group of border-enforcement supporters. At this event, Steve had a chance to talk with Keyes about the possibility of another presidential run in 2008, and Alan said he was open to the idea—provided his finances were healthy enough and his family would not likely be made to suffer.

The border event was followed weeks later by an immigration-enforcement rally the Stones sponsored at the Provo City public library keynoted by Keyes and featuring speeches by several state candidates for national office, as well as coverage by the state’s largest newspaper. Afterward, the family widely disseminated a professional video they’d arranged of Keyes’ address.

In the stake chambers where Steve and Ethan were brought by the president stood about a dozen high councilors, clerks, and other local officers, including the family’s illegitimate bishop.

Saying the Stones had “abused their privileges under the Law of Common Consent,” the president declared Steve and Ethan guilty of “repeatedly acting in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the church and its leaders”—and thus apostasy—the penalty for which, according to the “church handbook,” was excommunication.

Of course, this meeting was meant only to *intimidate* the Stones—it turned out later—since the president never followed through with his threat by convening a disciplinary council for the express purpose of cutting Steve and Ethan off from the church (no doubt fearing his own provable misconduct could become the focus of the Stones’ defense and subsequent appeal).

Evidently, this compulsive man merely wanted to bully, and—to the extent possible—further torment the family.

After the meeting, a meeting in which Steve plainly told the president he had *no valid basis to interfere with the family's rights under the Law of Common Consent*—Steve took the president's first counselor, Bruce Young, aside in the empty stake offices and hit the concrete block wall near him with his fist as they talked, as he told him how incredibly exasperating such endless persecution was. This was the first, and only, time Steve had outwardly expressed such overflowing frustration with the president's unceasingly cruel designs.

Chapter 21 — Destruction of the Keyes 2008 presidential campaign

The inflammatory, unjust announcement by the president before a large group of stake leaders that Steve and Ethan were guilty of “open opposition to the church,” and thus deserving of summary excommunication, *came just one day after* Alan Keyes decided to pursue the possibility of running again for president—a decision followed shortly afterward by a conference call to some of his closest advisers and associates in which he assigned Steve to spearhead the preliminary phase of his 2008 campaign, leading Steve eventually to become the campaign’s CEO throughout the Republican primaries.

The timing of the stake president’s meeting was thus more than a distraction. It ultimately served to ensure that the 2008 Keyes campaign never got off the ground—by tying up Steve’s time for months with the task of preparing for a threatened disciplinary council that never came, as the president toyed with the Stones’ lives and day-to-day work, knowing full well the imposition on their concentration he was creating.

Not wanting to go through the protracted “appeal” process he endured when he was disfellowshipped, Steve spent much of November and December 2006, and of January 2007, going through hundreds of existing documents and editing them—as well as writing new ones—as he gathered a persuasive defense against the stake president’s expected attempt to excommunicate him and Ethan.

Under no circumstances did he want the Keyes campaign *disrupted midstream* by a time-consuming battle over the ongoing church problem. Better to preempt such untimely intrusion, Steve felt, by anticipating it—thereby cutting it short if it came as automatically mandated under church rules.

But Steve also wanted to protect Ethan—who stood with him when other family members had grown weary of what they considered a futile attempt to keep the church’s persecution in check. He didn’t want Ethan punished for courageously standing up to the stake president and the last bishop, and for doing nothing wrong under church rules, protocol, and law. Above all, he didn’t want Ethan to suffer as he had at the hands of capricious high church leaders who’d already proven themselves incompetent, uncaring, and prone to manipulation by devious subordinates.

So he had an extra reason to fend off (and thereafter appeal) the president’s expected excommunication of a working team.

The time Steve took preparing to defend his family against the most extreme form of church discipline imaginable was time he urgently needed to spend putting together the strategic plan, website, fundraising structure, and other critical elements of Keyes’ imminent presidential effort. He was forced to juggle both pressing pursuits simultaneously.

Unprecedented pace for a presidential election

The impact of this loss of time would not normally be so devastating were it not for the fact that the 2008 presidential election set records for pushing the primary process significantly forward—forcing numerous candidates to enter earlier than usual, so as not to be left behind.

The 2012 election process, by contrast, has been more like that of earlier electoral cycles—with some candidates not even deciding whether to run until late September.

Not so the 2008 election. A handful of candidates either announced—or prepared to announce—far earlier than normal. Among Republicans, Mitt Romney got his campaign underway almost immediately after the November 2006 election, and Barack Obama did much the same thing among Democrats. This set off a media and candidate frenzy that pushed the primaries—and the deadlines to qualify for them—way ahead of schedule.

The GOP debates, as well, began earlier than expected—to keep up with the unprecedented pace of the election season.

By the time the Keyes campaign got off the ground as a “test-the-waters” effort—complete with a media presence, effective website, campaign committee, basic staff, fundraising capability, and reasonably clear plan, the GOP debates had already started, and a few candidates had already dropped out.

For his part, Keyes himself wanted to make sure a strong foundation was in place before announcing, since he’d already run twice before (in 1996 and 2000), and he expected the media and the GOP establishment to resist his entry into the race.

Furthermore, as Keyes had already told Steve at the “Minuteman” fence-erecting event near Tombstone in May 2006, he would run for president only if enough elements were in place that his family and his financial strength wouldn’t be made to suffer—so he waited until he was satisfied that the time was right before entering the primaries in late summer, nine days after Fred Thompson’s much-awaited announcement.

The ultimate factor that persuaded Keyes to announce, of course, was the quality of the other Republicans running. Keyes felt none were truly conservative—or informed—enough, even though many arguably had done their best to appear so by adopting, in some cases, the actual wording of Keyes’ well-known positions. Before challenging them, however, he wanted to be certain he had sufficient grassroots support.

During the 2000 GOP primaries, Keyes was deemed by the media to have won the televised debates—due to his eloquence and principled appeal—and he became known by many as the party’s leading voice for moral conservatism. It was on the basis of his impressive showing in the 2000 debates that MSNBC signed him on to his live political show barely a year later.

Unfortunately, Keyes' brief battle against Obama for the U.S. Senate in Illinois in 2004 diminished his star among Republicans, due to the caricature the hostile media created of his statements, positions, and commitments.

Even so, Obama said afterward that he was profoundly affected by Keyes' suggestion that Jesus Himself would not be inclined to support Obama due to his well-known support for abortion and opposition to the "Born Alive Infant Protection Act." He said Keyes got into his head.

But many in the Republican establishment appeared to believe such media fabrications as "Keyes calls Mary Cheney [the Vice President's lesbian daughter] a sinner"—a widely-circulated headline without any basis in fact that the AP ran endlessly in one version or another.

It was because of these considerations that Steve was hoping to get the 2008 Keyes campaign up and running *in time for Alan to participate in the Republican debates*, so he could influence the direction they would take.

He told Alan at the Tombstone event that *America needed to hear his compelling arguments and oratory*—as well as his insights into the character and positions of both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, expected to vie for the Democratic nomination. *If Alan did well in the GOP debates*, he could be a formidable force in the wide-open primaries, Steve believed.

"You're too late"

Because the Keyes campaign got off to a late start—directly the result of the church's distracting interference with the energies and focus of the Stone family, loss that amounted to thousands of hours of lost productivity over many years, and to several hundred hours of lost time right after the stake president threatened Steve and Ethan with excommunication in November 2006—Keyes held off announcing until he felt it was providential to do so. By that time—September 13, 2007—Michigan had pushed its qualifying deadline ahead of schedule, and Keyes missed by three days (GOP officials claimed) the opportunity to appear on the state's primary ballot.

In turn, because Keyes missed that deadline, MSNBC refused to allow Keyes to participate in the vital Michigan debate—which would have been his first debate opportunity since announcing in mid-September.

Michigan's action induced Florida and a few other states (with urging from the sponsoring media) to take similar measures to keep Alan out of the remaining debates.

For all intents and purposes, Keyes lost the chance to be a credible, viable candidate *by three days*. This all but destroyed his presidential campaign.

When the first test of the primaries took place in the Iowa caucuses, Keyes—along with Steve, Ethan, and Callan, as well as numerous other supporters—worked hard to get his

message out and help him get a foot in the door, so to speak, in the rest of the primaries. Keyes was even allowed—miraculously—to be in the nationally-televised Iowa debate.

*Shockingly, the Iowa Republican Party refused to announce Alan's vote total from the caucuses, saying he was "too late" to participate—even though he qualified under state and party statutes to be on the ballot, and was in the *Des Moines Register* debate.*

As it turned out, Alan got more than twice the votes of conservative candidate Duncan Hunter, the well-respected chairman of the House Armed Services Committee—yet the media reported he received literally none, causing the voting public to assume Alan had dropped out.

In protest, Alan had Steve fly to Washington, D.C., a few days later to meet with National Republican Chairman Mike Duncan and ask for fair and objective treatment of the Keyes' effort. Mr. Duncan was unsympathetic and blamed the problem on the Iowa party leadership, who violated their state's rules.

Alan continued in the primaries until they were nearly over—spending a full month campaigning in his former home state of Texas at one point, along with the members of the Stone family—and the Stones succeeded in getting him on most of the GOP ballots, at considerable cost to the campaign. In mid-April, however, Keyes announced he was leaving the Republican Party because of its unfair and unrepresentative election practices. He's been an independent ever since.

Parting of the ways

After seeking the nomination of the Constitution Party—whose founder invited Alan to attend its convention in Kansas City, then misrepresented him as a "Neocon" in a 40-minute harangue before a largely libertarian ballroom full of delegates, who chose Chuck Baldwin—Keyes joined a fledgling offshoot of the American Independent Party, which was founded in the late sixties by Alabama Governor George Wallace, an offshoot Keyes lists in his WorldNetDaily bio as his main affiliation.

Keyes' flirtation with this vestige of George Wallace's original AIP caused a parting of the ways between Keyes and the Stone family, who remained staunch Republicans and had little interest in supporting what was to them an insignificant third party.

As a result, Keyes severed his longstanding relationship with the Stones and with RenewAmerica. In recent years, this relationship has improved—as the Stones are again doing web-related projects for Keyes' chief of staff—but both the work of the family and the public visibility of Alan Keyes have suffered since the disastrous outcome of the 2008 Keyes campaign.

That outcome took a significant financial toll on both the Stones—who were strong enough at one point to underwrite the initial phase of the campaign—and Alan Keyes, who spent a considerable amount of his own funds on his candidacy, which had raised a respectable

amount of money through donations, despite a lack of public awareness, but not enough for the campaign to afford broad-based advertising.

Steve was expecting the effort's fundraising to result mainly from Keyes' participation in the nationally-televised GOP debates—which Alan was barred from unexpectedly (with the exception of the Iowa debate and a Tavis Smiley PBS debate).

In the aftermath of the 2008 election, both the Keyes and Stone families are still struggling to recover financially.

Did the LDS church have a hand—directly or indirectly—in this outcome? You be the judge, in view of the foregoing and following narrative—which describes not only the church's interference with the Stones' work for Keyes just before and during the 2008 campaign, but in the years leading up to it.

Chapter 22 — Rubbing salt in the wound

As one of the dozen local church officials in the room when the stake president accused Steve and Ethan of apostasy for voting against their errant leaders, the last bishop felt compelled to mimic the president, and he leveled the same charge against them several weeks later.

Unlike the president, however, he made his accusation *public*.

He did so while conducting one of his perfunctory interviews following Steve and Ethan's negative votes during sustainings—votes cast for no other reason than to appeal for an end to the church's persecution.

After condemning the Stones for “voting against nice people in the ward” (when they again reiterated that they were voting *only* to express their view that the bishop and stake president lacked authority to preside—having not been properly sustained for lack of appropriate review), the bishop pronounced Steve and Ethan “apostates” for exercising their right to vote their conscience—parroting what he'd heard the stake president declare in November 2006.

He did so in an overflow part of the chapel, with dozens of people sitting just feet away on the other side of an accordion-style divider that offered no privacy.

This was where the bishop usually chose to interview family members after their votes—having done so a half-dozen times previously, in disregard for church guidelines that call for confidentiality.

This time, he condemned Steve and Ethan within earshot of several people sitting in the back pews waiting for the next meeting to start. He then walked off to his office, ignoring Steve's shocked protestations.

Feeling publicly slandered, Steve followed the bishop into his office and asked him if he appreciated what he had just done: openly accusing Steve and Ethan of apostasy.

With his door wide open, the bishop repeated his charge, and then walked out—reiterating his slanderous accusation as he walked past a group of onlookers.

As the bishop walked down the hall, Steve remained outside his office and—feeling the need to explain the humiliating spectacle to onlookers, including the bishop's wife and a few personal friends—described the nature of the ongoing controversy that had triggered the bishop's open slander, feeling he had no other choice if he was to protect himself from such public degradation.

He especially stressed to the bishop's wife that the man had violated the Stone family's lawful rights by perpetuating and escalating the church's interference with their political work—work church leaders used as a pretext for persecuting the family.

The stake president's ominous letter

A few days later, Steve received a letter from the stake president ominously threatening him with punishment for “disobeying the counsel” he'd received in the meeting of the local dozen.

The letter—dated January 23, 2007—advised Steve to seek counseling to deal with his growing frustrations, or suffer the consequences.

Not one to miss a golden opportunity (to paraphrase a famous quip by Rahm Immanuel), Steve got on the phone the next day and called the church's two professional counseling centers: LDS Social Services and BYU's Comprehensive Clinic. In both instances, he asked to speak with the director—and succeeded in talking with either the head of the organization or someone else high up.

In both calls, Steve told the high-level church professional that he'd been asked by his stake president to seek counseling.

They asked why.

Steve told them he refused to quit working for Alan Keyes, and thereafter was harassed and intimidated by his stake president for “refusing to obey” his leaders.

Steve gave the two men on the other end of the conversation enough detail that they could appreciate the kind of hell the Stone family had endured for seven years (by that point) at the hands of the stake president.

Their response?

“You don't need counseling.”

But do you know who they both agreed just might? They both concurred the stake president would do well to pay them a visit.

Ethan still “an apostate”?

A couple of months later—as Steve continued to lay the groundwork for Alan Keyes' presidential campaign under intolerable circumstances—DeeAnn was called by the bishop to serve as Primary Music Director (which would involve teaching songs to the ward's small children, something she did until 2000, when she was released in retaliation for standing with her husband as the problem with the church was unfolding).

Under church directives, a husband is normally interviewed with his wife when either is given a calling, so the bishop scheduled DeeAnn and Steve to meet with him. Steve agreed on condition that he be permitted not to comment—since he didn't want to get into a confrontation with the bishop.

DeeAnn and the bishop talked a few minutes—with the bishop asking if she felt worthy to accept the calling he proposed, and DeeAnn saying she did, but adding she thought the stake president might feel otherwise.

DeeAnn then turned to Steve, feeling constrained to do so, and asked if he had anything to say.

Steve said he didn't feel it was appropriate to expect DeeAnn to accept a calling under the circumstances that existed between the family and the church, and he said the church problem needed to be resolved in good faith first—so DeeAnn could serve wholeheartedly.

He then asked the bishop if he still felt Ethan was an “apostate,” as he'd accused him of being earlier.

The man said, “Yes.”

Steve asked why.

The man said, “Because the stake president said he is—for his voting.”

Steve then emphasized that Ethan had the right to vote his conscience under the Law of Common Consent, and that so voting could not be considered “apostasy” under church doctrine, according to the standard works.

The bishop said he disagreed.

Steve then asked him if he understood that a charge of apostasy requires excommunication, under church rules—and then pressed the man to give some idea of when he and the stake president planned to convene a disciplinary against Ethan for that purpose.

He indicated he hadn't thought any of this through.

With that, Steve and DeeAnn left.

In the intervening months, Steve and Ethan continued to vote against the right of the bishop and stake president to propose matters for a sustaining vote—and *their votes were repeatedly ignored*. This gave them little reason to attend church, since the main reason they went had long become *to vote*—in the hope of obtaining some kind of relief.

Also, as the Keyes campaign began increasingly to come together, they were both frequently on the road assisting Alan, and were thus often absent from the local ward.

As their work multiplied, the press of the campaign, and the deteriorating situation with their local leaders, persuaded them to avoid the distraction of encountering these insensitive men at church, so they would simply stay home—in order to keep their focus.

This pattern continued throughout most of the campaign, after Alan announced in September 2007.

Enamored of power

On one occasion when Steve was attending his ward during the presidential campaign—January 20, 2008—the stake president invited the Stone family to meet with him in his office. He said he wanted to talk about the family’s participation in the Iowa caucuses, held earlier that month.

The president sat on his desk and marveled “how great” it must have been to meet the various presidential candidates. His attitude and demeanor was one of undue fascination with ambitious, powerful individuals—not respect for our nation’s political process.

The family agreed afterward that the president tried to flatter them by focusing on their association with famous figures. He didn’t mention Alan Keyes.

He then asked Steve “what experiences” he had in the Iowa caucuses. Steve responded that the Iowa GOP refused to release the number of votes Keyes received in the balloting—as though he weren’t running—and *said this outcome was directly due to the stake president.*

He said that because the president had frivolously threatened him and Ethan in November 2006 and January 2007 with excommunication (saying they were guilty of apostasy), and therefore forced Steve to spend weeks preparing a defense—including paperwork for a possible lawsuit against the president—the family was weeks behind when Keyes publicly announced.

As a result—Steve said—the Michigan GOP excluded Keyes from its ballot, claiming he was “three days too late in announcing,” and in turn MSNBC excluded him from the televised Michigan debate, “because he wasn’t on the Michigan ballot.” The result was a chain of exclusions by other states and networks that virtually destroyed the Keyes campaign.

Steve stressed that the president’s groundless threats coincided with Alan’s initial decision to run (threats made November 12, 2006, the day after Alan indicated to close friends his intentions; and January 23, 2007—in a letter—the day after Keyes formally asked Steve to oversee the campaign), and he said he was severely distracted in his work of setting up the campaign.

He noted that because the president threatened him and Ethan specifically for their votes against him and his actions, *the president’s threats amounted to apostasy on his part*—since they had a divine right to vote against him under the Law of Common Consent.

Steve added he was still considering taking legal action against him for intimidation that was “imprisonable” under state statutes.

The president responded by ignoring what Steve told him and asked if there wasn’t some positive thing the family experienced. Steve said, “You weren’t listening.”

He emphasized again that the man’s interference with the family’s work had severely damaged the Keyes campaign—saying it was illegal and wrong, and not something to take lightly, as the president was doing.

DeeAnn then confirmed the chain of actions set in motion by the stake president that disadvantaged Keyes that election, and the meeting ended.

The death of President Hinckley

Just before Alan Keyes publicly announced his split with the Republican Party in April 2008, the long-time president of the LDS church—Gordon B. Hinckley—passed away, leaving Thomas S. Monson to succeed him.

Because the Keyes 2008 campaign had suffered irreparable damage due to the meddling of the church over so many years—and due especially to the distracting threat of excommunication leveled by the stake president at Steve and Ethan just as the campaign was coming together under Steve’s efforts (and reiterated by the president and bishop in the months afterward)—Steve could not let the leadership of the church change hands without registering his disgust with the church’s unlawful intrusion into the family’s work and political affairs.

He was especially disappointed in the First Presidency’s October 8, 2002, recommendation—signed by all members of the presidency at the time, including Thomas S. Monson—that Steve *be punished indefinitely for refusing to sustain those church leaders who had most harmed the family and its political endeavors*, a letter based on a demonstrably false tradition at odds with the church’s Law of Common Consent.

This change of the president of the church required Steve either to “sustain” the new man or vote against him. He chose the latter—feeling a duty to God, his family, and his country to do so.

He did so discretely—writing up a detailed letter of grievances against President Monson and sending it to the Office of the First Presidency during the April 2008 General Conference. He felt it was his duty to vote his conscience in the matter after so many years of mistreatment of his family by local and high church leaders acting with the express approval of the First Presidency.

He also did so aware that LDS scripture does not forbid or enjoin such voting by members in good standing against *any* church leader—no matter his office—and in fact (as already

cited) makes provision for even the president of the church to be tried of his membership in the event of proven violation of the laws of the church.

As D&C 107:81-84 plainly states—

There is not any person belonging to the church who is exempt from this council of the church.

And inasmuch as a President of the High Priesthood shall transgress, he shall be had in remembrance before the common council of the church, who shall be assisted by twelve counselors of the High Priesthood;

And their decision upon his head shall be an end of controversy concerning him.

Thus, *none shall be exempted from the justice and the laws of God*, that all things may be done in order and in solemnity before him, according to truth and righteousness. (emphasis added)

So Steve took valuable time he needed to spend preparing for Alan's appearance at the Constitution Party Convention writing the above letter of grievances. He did so in the hope of ending—once and for all—the church's intolerable mistreatment of the Stones and interference with their political work, praying President Monson would be moved to put a stop to the mischief, in turn permitting the Stones, *for the first time in nearly a decade*, to focus their considerable energies on assisting Keyes without deliberate distraction from the church.

As a result, a vital proposal the Keyes campaign was drafting for the convention never got completed in a timely manner, and the campaign submitted it on the run, with disastrous results.

Among the disastrous results was President Monson's rejection of Steve's entreaty for fairness, and his later refusal to overturn Steve's excommunication for his efforts to end this unnecessary controversy, a year and a half later.

Chapter 23 — Another wedding nightmare

With Alan Keyes' candidacy in the Republican primaries over, and his interest in the Constitution Party nullified by the shenanigans of its founder at its national convention, the Stones went back to a project they'd pretty much put on hold for a decade: finishing a home they started building years ago on their small farm in Utah.

They continued to maintain RenewAmerica, of course, but turned much of their time and attention to finishing their house, which they'd designed themselves.

The structure had long been framed (except for some interior construction details)—but still needed to be wired, plumbed, ducted, insulated, and sheetrocked. The main floor also needed a second layer of subflooring, as well as blocking at its original seams, due to weathering years earlier before the roof was completed.

We should point out that any spare time the Stones otherwise would have had over the years to spend on their home went to protecting themselves from the LDS church's unending harassment. Steve estimates the church's interference with their lives and work cost the family at least a thousand hours of productivity a year—often far more.

In addition to resuming construction of their farm home, they also revived their prior efforts—dating back to the late nineties—to sell their Provo home so they would have the funds to finish their uncompleted house.

To bring their “dream home” to fruition, they renewed its original building permit—and also undertook with a Provo neighbor to combine their lots and subdivide them for development under one of the city's creative zoning options, so the Stones might finally sell their Provo home, which zoning limitations had made difficult to sell.

With their farm home significantly on its way to completion on a limited budget, they unfortunately ran into difficulty dealing with city officials over their Provo development plan—which they ultimately abandoned after considerable investment. Instead, they sold their Provo home for much less than its value—and after getting out of debt, used the remaining funds to buy up all the materials needed to finish their farm house, much of which they've been storing until needed for installation.

The family is just about ready to move in—once they get final approvals.

The industrious, independent-minded Stones estimate their total cost of construction over the years—including their 11-acre farm—comes to about \$60,000.

That low figure is due to four things: (1) they designed, built, and finished the home entirely themselves as a “family project” (except for the siding, which they contracted out); (2) they worked for three years after buying their farm to get the zone changed, so they

could build in the highly-unpopular 40-acre zone that existed at the time; (3) after suing the county (without an attorney) and getting an illegal frontage requirement rescinded, they sold off five acres of their original 16 (at farm land prices) to give them the means to get their home started; and (4) they paid \$1,000 for the right to help demolish a commercial structure built in the sixties, and this gave them a large quantity of select-grade 2 by 6's (many 20 feet long) with which to frame the entire exterior of the large home, enough 1 1/8-inch plywood to cover the main floor, plenty of 2 by 4's and plywood for building the concrete forms of the unusual foundation, numerous 4 by 6's for framing the solarium, and countless other useful materials.

On paper, the amount they received from the sale of the five-acre parcel came almost exactly to what they'd paid for both their 16-acre farm and their half-acre property in Provo—meaning they ultimately got both properties for free.

It's worth noting that the zone change Steve successfully pursued *opened up development countywide*—allowing farmers to regain property rights taken from them years earlier by the county without “just compensation,” enabling their children to build homes nearby. Before the zone change, a farmer needed 80 acres in order to divide off just one “zoning lot” for a family member to build on. After the change—which created a five-acre zone in the unincorporated county—the farmer needed only 10 acres to do so.

The zone change also led to the creation of the third-largest city in the state (in terms of land mass): fast-growing Eagle Mountain, a major planned community between Salt Lake and Provo.

Abbey's engagement

As the family worked on selling their Provo home and finishing their farm house, Abbey announced that she and longtime family friend Andy McFadden were planning to get married in the temple on July 31, 2009. This announcement took place in mid-April.

Having vowed that the church's cruel destruction of the family's happiness at the time of Stefani and Chuck's wedding would not happen again, Steve undertook a sincere, heightened effort to persuade the church to drop its continuing abuse of the family—so family members might be permitted to attend the wedding.

As stressed earlier, the Stones were prevented from attending the temple wedding of Stefani and Chuck in April 2005 *not for any unworthiness, but for their votes of opposition* to those leaders who persisted in intimidating and harassing the family and damaging its political work.

Because they specifically refused to “sustain” the stake president, he refused to sign their “recommend”—even though their supportive bishop agreed to let them go, saying he considered them worthy.

This time around, Steve wanted to do everything possible to avoid such a demoralizing outcome.

Discreet website

Since local leaders, especially the “last” bishop, *had been unwilling even to listen to the family’s grievances against the church*—and since correspondence with high church officials created a mountain of paperwork their staffers most likely just filed away—Steve decided several months earlier to put together a *strictly private, confidential website* intended to share vital facts, evidence, testimony, and documents with the First Presidency and presiding church authorities *in a way they could access at their leisure*, in the hope these readily-accessible resources might finally persuade someone among the “Brethren” to step in and end the church’s incessant intrusion into the Stone family’s lives and activities.

To Steve, who’d pursued every other ecclesiastical avenue in seeking resolution, this was worth a shot.

A shot in the dark, maybe—given the church hierarchy’s amply-documented incompetence and dereliction throughout the matter—but one that at least offered the possibility of getting through to someone, nonetheless, who could help them end the “church problem.”

With some editing, sprucing up, and fleshing in, the site could also possibly lead to resolving things in time for the family to attend Abbey’s temple wedding, Steve was hoping.

As he’d always done, he was willing to give church authorities the “benefit of the doubt” regarding their basic decency and judgment—on the presumption they had at least some degree of common sense, human kindness, and spiritual sensibility, despite every indication to the contrary throughout the family’s ordeal.

The longsuffering family’s website *was thus a compliment* to the presiding Brethren—giving them a chance to make things right as Abbey’s wedding loomed.

So Steve and Ethan took their initial website design and turned it, first, into a full-blown website full of vital and persuasive information that supported the family’s claims against the church, and second, into a vehicle for earnestly persuading church leaders to resolve the conflict, so family members might be allowed to attend Abbey’s marriage.

A fact arguing in favor of putting together such a comprehensive archive was that if the governing Brethren weren’t interested in understanding the truth of the matter, at least an attorney or two might—as a last resort.

But that was not the website’s purpose. Its purpose was solely to make readily available to high church leaders a multitude of documents and facts, *so pursuing legal solutions would not be necessary.*

Steve also wanted the site for use, on a limited basis, to help in alerting a few close family members of the enormity of the church's persecution of the Stones—which by extension included them as potential or real victims of the far-reaching effects of the church's mischief.

At least, Steve wanted them to understand the extreme difficulty the Stones were going through, and why, since some were concerned.

The website was in essence the Stone family's last realistic hope of getting things resolved—since the whole problem ultimately came down to “failure by church leaders to communicate,” given their unwillingness to listen or work out an agreeable solution.

The site contained a statement of purpose; an explicit statement of the terms of use; an overview of the controversy; facts about the Stones' political activism, misrepresentations by the church that prolonged or aggravated the conflict; a discussion of violations of church policy at the heart of the controversy; a brief analysis of the implications of the church's own divine condemnation (according to its scriptural doctrine); a brief look at the church's official purpose; the current persecution the Stones were suffering at the hands of the church; and suggestions for ending the ordeal.

It also presented background information about the family; numerous photos of the family as they engaged in their political work; and a large number of supporting documents.

It was a lawyer's dream—should that purpose ultimately prove necessary—and an abusive church bureaucrat's worst nightmare.

To keep the site strictly private—so church officials could not dismiss it as evidence of “public opposition to the church,” and cruelly punish the Stones for merely trying to *communicate with them*—the site stated in clear terms at the outset:

This good-faith website is not meant for public viewing or dissemination — but is designed to be exclusively *private* and *confidential*. Internet search engines are blocked from indexing the site, and no unauthorized access is permitted.

The sensitive information herein is intended only for the eyes of Church leaders who have a “need to know” — as well as close family members (and a few trusted friends) who similarly have a direct stake in seeing the matter resolved.

The site then plainly warned:

This secure website is available by invitation only. All who visit the site agree, by their participation, to hold all information at the site in strictest confidence.

No person is authorized to share, disseminate, publish, distribute, or otherwise publicize any content posted at the site, or to invite others to view the site, without the express permission of the webmaster — and doing so will be considered a

violation of these terms of use, and could subject the violator to legal action.

The family reserves all reasonable and lawful fair-use and authorship rights regarding the website's content.

Since “public” means, by definition, “open to all,” or “exposed to general view,” this *deliberately confidential vehicle, designed solely for “inside communication,”* could hardly be mistaken for a public website by a reasonable person.

Yet the site was misrepresented by the church

From church leaders’ paranoid mindset that perceives any valid criticism as harmful to the church—no matter how reasonable, responsible, verifiable, or sincere—the website’s demonstrably private nature became irrelevant: *the site was deemed public because it could conceivably be hacked into by someone who didn’t even know it existed.*

Such misplaced concern—rather than lead to resolution—led to Steve’s excommunication for “going public” with the facts of the church’s abuse of the family.

Without presenting any evidence to show the website was in fact “open to the public,” the new stake president—trained by his predecessor to perpetuate the church’s abuses toward the Stones—arbitrarily judged it public, on the strength of his say-so alone.

His *allegation* became its own *proof*—because he was a stake president called of God, he believed, and therefore automatically inspired of Him. He needed no factual evidence.

On that basis, Steve was expelled from the church—for trying sincerely to resolve the longstanding “church problem,” so family members could attend Abbey’s wedding.

Chapter 24 — Play by play

Here's how things played out.

By the time Abbey went to the ward's last bishop early in May 2009 to discuss the possibility of getting a temple recommend, she'd had only limited prior dealings with the man—who didn't even know her name when she met with him, even though she attended church regularly.

Still, things didn't look optimistic for her to get approved, since she'd voted many times with her family in the past.

The same dilemma faced other family members, some of whom had been interviewed by the bishop following their votes at church, including a few against him.

The Stones therefore arranged a good-faith meeting with the bishop—at DeeAnn's request—in an effort to talk things out, the first meeting of its kind between the family and the bishop, who'd refused to hear them out previously (saying the then-stake president told him to "ignore the Stones").

The meeting took place in the bishop's office.

After giving family members little opportunity to speak—particularly Steve, whom he cut off repeatedly at the beginning—the bishop said no member of the family who refused to "sustain" him would be allowed to attend the wedding, and he stuck to this prejudgment throughout the meeting—no matter any appeal to reason anyone raised. He put his position in virtually extortionary terms, saying repeatedly, "If you don't sustain me, you can't go."

When Steve pointed out that family members had done nothing that could reasonably or justifiably bar them from attending the wedding, the bishop said "church policy" required him to deny the family entrance to the temple, because of the wording of the recommend question regarding the "sustaining" of leaders.

As Steve tried to explain some of the facts in the controversy that led the family to vote against certain leaders—*stressing that the previous bishop concluded the family was telling the truth in their claims regarding those they'd voted against, and were therefore worthy to attend the temple*—the bishop refused to listen, saying, incredibly, the family needed to "put this all behind [them]."

Steve reminded the man that he himself had recently threatened Ethan and him with excommunication—calling them "apostates" for voting their conscience in church meetings when invited to do so—and that this amounted to further harassment by church leaders, compounding years of persecution of the family. He asked the man how the family could be

expected to “put this conflict behind [them] *while still being threatened unjustly by the church.*”

The bishop had no answer—and repeated the mantra about sustaining him.

So obstinate was the bishop that after the meeting, he told Abbey’s fiancé, Andy McFadden, that he would not issue Steve a recommend “even if he could answer all the questions correctly.”

Knowing what they were up against in dealing with this hard-hearted, self-justifying man, Abbey arranged to have her “church records” sent to Andy’s ward, and she and Andy obtained recommends from his bishop just before their marriage on July 31.

Behind-the-scenes maneuvering by the Area President’s replacement

in 2008, the autocratic Area President who appeared to cater to every wish of the stake president, and who conspired with him to keep the Stones off balance, was made an “emeritus general authority”—an undoctinal designation by which older, passed-over, church authorities are given lifetime financial security and few, if any, influential duties governing the church.

His replacement was a former CEO of Huntsman Chemical, the Huntsman family’s multi-billion-dollar plastics enterprise, which reportedly made a fortune packaging McDonald’s original Big Mac.

This nine-year church authority—according to the ward’s last bishop—had contacted him and “inquired about the Stone family,” not long after Steve invited the First Presidency in April to examine the family’s detailed archive at the confidential website they created.

By all indications, this man—who’d been elevated to Senior President of the Seventy, but had charge of the Utah South Area and thus functioned as the Stones’ new Area President—also contacted the new stake president and instructed him to induce the family to take down their good-faith, private website, which was offered solely to persuade church leaders to end their persecution of the family.

Informed this man had made behind-the-scenes overtures regarding the church controversy, but not knowing their nature, Steve wrote him a brief letter dated June 15, 2009, two weeks after the disturbing meeting the family had with the last bishop—describing the family’s desire to attend Abbey’s wedding, explaining briefly the appalling refusal of the bishop to let them go *on the basis of their worthiness*, and appealing to him for help in resolving the church controversy, so the family could attend.

Additionally, Steve told the President of the Seventy how their supportive prior bishop judged them worthy to attend the temple—notwithstanding their negative votes against abusive leaders—and also determined the family’s charges against these errant leaders were valid, irrefutable, and true.

Steve ended the letter by inviting the man to read the information at the family's confidential website, and also suggested he sit down with the family and resolve the conflict.

The same day, Steve sent a similar, somewhat more detailed, letter to the new stake president—who possessed only limited understanding of the long-running church problem, and who'd been significantly prejudiced against the Stones by his mentor, the previous stake president, when he served a year as his counselor. Steve was aware of the new president's antagonism toward the family from two brief discussions Steve had with him months earlier.

Get into the harness

In response to Steve's introductory letter, the President of the Seventy apparently arranged to have the new stake president meet with Steve and DeeAnn. This fact was intimated by the stake president as they talked.

After an initial meeting in which the stake president asked only superficial questions and feigned genuine interest in the Stone family, Steve and DeeAnn met again with him several times before Abbey's wedding—which in the end he barred them from attending.

In the second of these meetings—which took place July 8, and in which Steve earnestly asked the president to help the family resolve the church conflict so they could attend the wedding—the president issued the Stones two "requests from the Brethren, if we're to make progress."

In doing so, *he misrepresented the real nature of these "requests."* In reality, they were *demands*—it turned out—and they were unattached to any interest by the church leadership in resolving the controversy.

But he made them appear otherwise—implicitly representing the "requests" as things church leaders would reciprocate regarding. As a show of good faith, the Stones complied immediately.

The presiding Brethren's "requests"?

1. Take down the family's website.
1. Refrain from writing presiding authorities (and instead submit all correspondence to them through the stake president).

The president gave Steve and DeeAnn to believe that if they did these two things, the church would be willing to consider letting them go to Abbey's wedding—as well as let Steve "ordain" his three sons to the Melchizedek priesthood, something they needed to possess in order to attend a temple wedding ceremony.

Regarding the family's second desired outcome—the ordination of their sons—it should be pointed out that the bishop of the sons' "singles" ward was waiting for Steve to be routinely approved to perform the ceremonies, so the sons could be advanced in the priesthood. Due to the preceding stake president's mischief, they had refused for years to be advanced—since that obsessive man was designated to preside over bearers of the high priesthood in his stake, and they didn't want to be under his influence.

In follow-up meetings, it became increasingly clear—from the stake president's words and actions—that he never intended to improve the situation with the Stone family, including letting them attend Abbey's wedding or allowing Steve to advance his sons in the priesthood, despite assurances that "progress could be made" (typical Mormon euphemism-ese). Instead, it was evident he was acting merely as an agent of presiding authorities *to control the Stones*—and to punish them if they balked at the church's demands.

If they refused to get into the church's harness, he was authorized to retaliate.

A detailed letter of protest to the stake president

When it became obvious the president had a hidden agenda for their "meetings," Steve wrote an eleven-page letter to the stake president on July 12, 2009—as Abbey's wedding fast approached—pointing out the self-serving, unjust character of the church's "requests," and seeking to clarify facts the president understood only partially.

By now, it was becoming apparent the Stones wouldn't be going to the marriage, no matter what they did short of "obeying" the arbitrary demands of church leaders regarding their private website—or their right to communicate with high church leaders in the face of deceitful behavior by local church officials going back years.

Such dishonorable leaders now included the new stake president, Steve was well aware by this time.

Seeking to put the controversy into simple, understandable terms for the benefit of the president—praying the man might be open to fact and reason—Steve began his letter with these words:

As I stressed when we talked July 8, I wanted to think about the things you proposed. Our family has suffered so many years of cruel persecution by the Church for doing nothing definably wrong—persecution that seriously violates both Church and secular law—that we'd like to be assured the Church sincerely intends to end its persecution and avoid causing our family further distress.

. . . [A]ny proposed resolution must [therefore] be *genuine*, as well as *consistent with the standard works*, as I've maintained repeatedly.

For the church's overtures to be sincere,

There can be no "token" resolution that doesn't correct the causes of the conflict and thus truly end it; no "one-sided" resolution wherein our family makes concessions not matched by the Church; and certainly no attempt by the Church to *cover up its cruel behavior toward our family* and thus avoid accountability, while the Church continues its abusive, controlling behavior.

. . . [C]onsidering what the Church has done to our family for so long with impunity, in violation of Church law and state and federal statutes, . . . the Church is in no position to suggest terms of reconciliation that amount to further mischief.

Why the website?

With that summary of "ground rules" (from the Stones' perspective) for resolving things, Steve then shared his sincere reservations about the church's request that the family *disable their website*—challenging the seeming rationale behind the request:

You indicated that the Church's leadership would like our family to take down our confidential, private website . . . —and you hinted that doing so was required before the Church would cooperate in ending this controversy.

As you may already be aware, we went ahead and complied with this request immediately as a gesture of good faith. But I have some questions and misgivings about this "condition" of reconciliation.

Steve was interested in *why* the church found the website offensive:

Because everything posted at the website is true, and can be verified with ample evidence and witnesses, why would the Church want the site hidden from all persons, including members of our family and also the very Church leaders we are seeking to enlighten in this conflict in the interest of getting it resolved?

The website is essential to making available to the Church the facts of its unlawful mistreatment of the Stone family. Without it, Church leaders are at a loss to understand with real clarity what the Church has done to us, and what is needed to correct it.

Indeed, taking down the website hindered the president's own efforts to seek resolution, Steve noted:

That is true of you, as well. Now that the website is off-line (at least for the time being), you, yourself, have no direct access to its content. That handicaps you in dealing with us.

He then pointed out the obvious:

There is, of course, the unavoidable implication in the Church's request that the Church seeks to *avoid any accountability* for its cruel, unlawful persecution of our family—persecution sanctioned by the highest Church authorities for most of the past decade. *Why else would the Church want factual, reliable evidence of its wrongful behavior removed from the view of all persons?*

If that is the Church's motivation, it would be contrary to the laws of God, including the requirements of Section 121:34-40, . . . regarding the "covering of sin."

He followed this observation by stressing what would seem reasonable to any objective observer:

If, on the other hand, the Church intends to conform to the laws of God, as well as merit the confidence of decent people, the Church has no reason to discourage the confidential, non-public presentation of the truth in this . . . matter in the interest of getting the matter resolved—a matter which at some point must result in a confession by the Church of its mistreatment of our family if reconciliation is to occur, according to the [Church's] standard works. (See D&C 42:88-89, D&C 64:12-14, Mosiah 26:34-37, and Moroni 6:7.)

As far as any "fear on the part of Church leaders" that

"too many" people may be privately invited to view the website (realizing that the site exists only to inform the highest Church representatives of the truth in this matter, in the hope of ending the Church's cruel persecution of our family), consider these words [from] D&C 42:90:

And if they brother or sister *offend many*, he or she shall be *chastened before many*. (emphasis added)

Because the Church's interference with our family's political work not only damaged American voters' right to choose their president this last election, but similarly has damaged voters' opportunities in previous elections as well—an allegation we can prove with reliable facts and witnesses—we assert that the Church's highest leaders have "*offended many*," not just our family. According to Church law, this requires that the Church be "*chastened before many*."

Having thus made the point that the church's interference with America's political system warranted a public rebuke, in view of church scripture, Steve stressed that the church's *integrity* was at issue in its behavior toward the family:

[Going public] is not something we intend to pursue—provided acceptable reconciliation can be reached in this matter. But the Church has no grounds for seeking to limit the number of those who view our website *to zero*. That's not right,

nor reasonable. It's not just extremely controlling, but incredibly self-serving, given the Church's many years of unlawful behavior toward our family, behavior the Church appears intent on covering up.

The very integrity of the Church is at stake here. What does the Church hope to gain by requiring us to remove our truthful, reasonable, dignified [and *strictly private*] website as a condition of ending its mistreatment of our family?

Open opposition?

With the church obviously in no position to dictate the family's options—or avoid all accountability for its mistreatment of the Stones—after so many years of indefensible interference with their lives and work, Steve addressed the charge of “open opposition to the church” that the family had been repeatedly accused of, and which the president now alleged for the first time.

Steve wrote,

You suggested at one point that while the website was up, it amounted to “open opposition to the Church.”

You undoubtedly had in mind the Church's official statement defining apostasy as “repeatedly act[ing] in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its leaders” (2006 *Church Handbook*, p. 110).

Here we have a profound irony that reveals a degree of bad faith on the part of the Church:

The Church initiated this cruel conflict, acting in “open opposition to our family” and actively destroying our political and vocational work; perpetuated this opposition against us for nine years without ceasing, despite our family's repeated requests for relief; condoned the opposition at the highest levels of authority, including the First Presidency; and even now continues to behave in a controlling, threatening manner that can reasonably be considered further opposition to us and our work.

As I've said many times throughout this unconscionable persecution, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints *has been the single biggest source of opposition to our family's lawful political endeavors.*

Steve elaborated:

This opposition by the Church has been open and public *from the outset*—due to the Church's insensitive behavior. On October 3, 2000, for example, President [deleted] opened his office door and allowed numerous onlookers to hear him threaten me with excommunication for several minutes (causing one zealous bishop to offer loudly to “throw [me] out.” A few months later, after members of our family voted

against [the president] in ward conference for his increasingly cruel behavior toward us, he stood before the congregation, named me by name, and said I had caused the controversy at issue. . . .

The prior bishop also did similar things that made public his own persecution of our family. (The above misconduct by ward and stake leaders is substantiated in detail in documents at our family's website.)

Thus, the Church cannot claim any right to accuse our family of "open opposition to the Church."

Steve then said,

Certainly, *OUR WEBSITE* cannot be accurately characterized as constituting such "open opposition." *As you would be able to verify if the site were still up*, the site is *private* and *confidential*—available by invitation only to a small number of Church leaders and family members—and anyone who shares its contents with others without express authorization from our family is subject to legal action, as the site itself cautions.

Furthermore, this private, confidential website is merely an accurate, dignified, reasonable description of the suffering our family has endured at the hands of the Church for nine years—suffering caused by the Church's illegal behavior—and it offers reliable evidence to prove this allegation, *all in the interest of encouraging the Church to put an end to this unnecessary conflict*. The *sole* reason we created the site was to persuade Church leaders to end their intrusive, cruel persecution of our family.

That's "open opposition"?

Steve added,

Note that even suggesting such a thing—under the circumstances—amounts to further threatening behavior toward us by the Church (since "open opposition" necessitates automatic Church discipline against us), hardly an indication of decency and good faith on the part of the Church.

No contact?

Because Steve's July 12 letter—written in response to the church's ill-motivated demands—is so definitive and compelling in summing up the "church problem," we present more excerpts from it, so the reader might more fully appreciate both the controversy itself and the lengths to which Steve went to clear things up so his family might still attend Abbey's wedding.

Touching on church authorities' "request" that the family have *no further contact with the presiding Brethren*, Steve wrote the stake president:

You indicated in our July 8 meeting that the highest authorities of the Church would prefer that our family no longer send letters or appeals to them, but would like us to deal exclusively with you as our stake president, and that you would forward to them any significant documents we wish these Church officials to see.

I told you I had no problem with that arrangement—since it reflects normal Church protocol—and I added that I would have preferred such an arrangement all along, but that President [deleted's] deceitful behavior made that impossible.

Steve then noted that because of the earlier stake president's outright violation of Church law (as well as the Church Handbook) following the family's initial votes against him, the family was forced to submit a 110-page grievance to the Area President in May 2001, "*if our votes against the president were to be counted and properly reviewed.*"

He added parenthetically that the Area President later told the family "he agreed with our assertion that we had the right to have our votes against [the stake president] reviewed by Church authorities *above* the stake president."

As a result of the family's 110-page complaint,

[the president] and his accomplice Bishop [deleted] were approved by Church authorities in July 2001 to be tried for their membership, with Bruce Young of the stake presidency designated to preside. Our family was told this on July 31, 2001, in person by [the president] and [the bishop], themselves, who said this was the decision of the First Presidency.

Thus, "from the outset, and throughout this conflict," Steve said,

our family has literally had no choice but to go over [the president's] head and communicate directly with the Area President, the Office of the Seventy, and the First Presidency, because [the president] was the object of our complaints, and because he had proven himself to be malicious and deceitful in our dealings with him.

"Standard Church protocol" . . . must yield to the real needs of real people in real life, if the scriptures are to be believed.

This was especially true during my appeal of my groundless disfellowshipment. According to the standard works, *I had the right to appeal that unjust action directly with the First Presidency*, which I proceeded to do. (See D&C 102:27.)

Yet—the First Presidency ultimately ignored Steve’s right to appeal that unjust action, he noted, saying,

Let me point out, however, that my divinely-appointed right to appeal directly to the First Presidency was violated in January 2003 when the Secretary to the First Presidency . . . sent me a shocking letter—before I had the opportunity to submit my full appeal regarding that difficult case—advising me that I was no longer to send any documents to the Office of the First Presidency, *and that I was to deal solely with [the stake president] in appealing my disfellowshipment.*

[The Secretary] wrote:

Jurisdiction for any disciplinary action against you, or for remedying the original decision, *has been reposed in your stake president.* Therefore, you should continue to work with him.

Because of this decision by the Brethren, the Office of the First Presidency will not respond to future correspondence from you on this matter. (January 17, 2003, letter, emphasis added)

“From then on,” Steve wrote in his letter,

I determined that I was not dealing with persons of good faith at the highest levels of the Church, because of the cruel significance of Brother [deleted’s] letter—which not only delegated resolution of my wrongful disfellowshipment *to the man most responsible for it* (who had already been approved to be tried for his own membership as a result of our complaint against him), but which also informed me that I was no longer welcome to communicate directly with the Office of the First Presidency in submitting my appeal.

Both of these unjust decisions violated Church law, as though the standard works were irrelevant. (emphasis added)

Steve then pointed out that—

Were it not for a meeting our daughter Stefani had already arranged between [the Area President] and our family before we received the above letter, I would likely still be disfellowshipped—or worse, I would be excommunicated—as a result of [the stake president’s] cruel, malicious misconduct.

Fortunately for our family, [the Area President] met three times with us, and his efforts persuaded the First Presidency to overturn my disfellowshipment. *This occurred because of our family’s refusal to “work with” [the stake president] as the First Presidency unjustly directed us to do.*

Official sanction of mischief by the First Presidency

Steve went on in his letter to the stake president to underscore one of the most shocking facts of the entire church controversy: the First Presidency's official, written approval of the continuing mischief of the previous stake president:

These implications of [the Secretary to the First Presidency's] letter were disturbing enough. *But the letter also indicated that the First Presidency officially condoned the cruel, unlawful actions of President [deleted].*

That letter—and subsequent actions by the First Presidency confirming its unjust, unlawful position—thus made the First Presidency COMPLICIT in the Church's interference with our family's political work and choice of employment. *This matter no longer centered in the reprehensible behavior of an errant stake president and bishop, alone, or a handful of insensitive general authorities. From then on, THE CHURCH ITSELF became officially involved in our family's persecution, persecution directly sanctioned by the First Presidency in writing.*

Steve then said,

Given the above realities in this difficult matter, I am not inclined to refrain from communicating directly with the Office of the First Presidency, or with other high Church authorities, in seeking to bring this unnecessary, degrading conflict to an end. If I see the need, I will of course communicate directly with them—*because they are ultimately responsible for the cruel persecution our family continues to suffer.* They cannot justifiably ignore our family's pleas directly for relief that they alone have the authority to grant.

And he noted:

... Our family's rights under [Church] rules continue to receive short shrift from the Church—including the Office of the First Presidency. The standard works indisputably guarantee my right to *deal directly with those who have harmed and mistreated our family.* (See D&C 42:88-93.)

The stake president's arbitrary discretion

Steve followed up the foregoing by pointing to the stake president's failure to forward the family's correspondence to the presiding Brethren.

Steve wrote,

A final thought on the subject of contacting Church authorities—

As we were leaving, I asked you if you intended to send to [the President of the Seventy] ... the document I gave you that evening. I was surprised by your answer.

You said you would consider doing so, but couldn't guarantee it. *That response leaves me no choice but to send documents of my choosing directly to the highest authorities of the Church.*

Then he said:

If you are to be the conduit for communication, you do not have my permission to pick and choose what you will send to the Church's leaders. Such discretion on your part requires me to lobby directly for our family's interests in resolving this outrageous conflict. I am not agreeable to your withholding from Church authorities any of our family's earnest documents.

The letter's closing thoughts

In closing, Steve raised the family's desire to have their three sons *advanced in the priesthood*, in the hope they might be allowed to attend Abbey's wedding. As their father, Steve wanted to have the privilege of ordaining them, as is customary for fathers, and as was also his sons' wish, yet the president was resistant.

Steve reminded him of his response: "You said you needed to 'think about it,'" even though at the time, Steve was considered a "member in good standing," and would normally be approved to perform the ordination.

Steve said the president's hesitancy to permit him to ordain his sons—and ultimate refusal to allow him to do so—suggested unnecessary bad faith on the part of the church, at a time the family was sincerely trying to resolve things with church leaders.

Why else would the man make an issue of something that *hadn't even been raised before*, as though he were straining to find fault, Steve felt.

Steve also told the president that, since the family had taken down its website and allowed the president to be the conduit for communication between the Stones and the Brethren, he couldn't understand why church officials wouldn't reciprocate in good faith *by approving the family to attend Abbey's wedding strictly on the basis of personal worthiness*—since the false issue of their votes couldn't be defended on the basis of church doctrine or law.

As it turned out, the president's meetings with the Stones to "resolve things" before Abbey's wedding were not only condescending and insincere, but one-sided—intended all along to manipulate the Stones into "sustaining"—that is, "obeying"—their leaders, an ungodly, undoctinal objective.

So there we have it: in just one of many letters he submitted to church leaders in the lead-up to Abbey's unjustly exclusionary temple wedding, Steve succinctly recapped the the deceitful machinations behind his excommunication—coming up soon.

Chapter 25 — Chest butt, anyone?

Not long after sending the above letter, and after being condemned for it by the stake president, Steve and Ethan re-activated the family's confidential website—refusing to be bullied by an overly-controlling, overly-image-minded LDS church.

The bottom-line reason?

Not only was the site confidential and non-public, as far as its audience, but it was literally *private property*—not the possession or jurisdiction of the church, which had no doctrinal or legal right to demand its closure, or otherwise usurp control of it by threat or other inducement. Steve justifiably believed the church overstepped its rightful interest in the site by *unreasonably requiring it be shut down over the remote possibility someone might stumble upon it*, even though Ethan made it undiscoverable.

The site was invitation-only—designed only for a handful of church leaders, in the hope of persuading them to end the church's unceasing persecution of the Stones. Leaving it down—without any good-faith reciprocity by the church—meant willfully allowing the church to take over the site, as well as dictate the Stone family's rightful choices.

Them's fightin' words to someone who believes in the God-given rights, freedoms, and responsibilities upon which our nation was founded. As stressed before, the church's unwarranted intrusion into the Stone family's lives has been *un-American in principle* from the start—disrespectful of their right to choose their own lawful options. That was especially true of the church's attempt to control the family's website *in the face of no credible claim of harm to the church incurred by the website's existence*.

Meanwhile, Steve inadvertently discovered that DeeAnn had invited the ward's last bishop to the wedding reception—to be held the evening of the temple marriage in the stake center's large "cultural hall."

Because Steve was planning to perform several musical numbers with a longtime friend who'd had a career as a professional singer, he told DeeAnn he couldn't possibly sing—something Steve does from his heart—with the seriously unkind bishop sitting in front of him, reminding him by his very presence of the family's unjust exclusion from Abbey's wedding.

So Steve and DeeAnn went to the bishop's office at the stake center on Sunday evening, July 12, and found him still there.

Steve politely explained his desire not to be distracted by the bishop's attendance at the reception since Steve would be performing with his musician friend. He tried to avoid being confrontational or disrespectful—just let the man know the untenable nature of his attendance, under sensitive circumstances that should be self-evident.

The man was angry—angry enough to raise this “disinvitation” at Steve’s excommunication trial three months later when he testified against Steve.

Steve’s straightforward words set the man off, and among other intentionally antagonizing insults, the bishop said derisively, “You don’t sustain anybody” when voting at church—when in reality Steve had only voted against him and few others who’d been repeatedly abusive toward the Stones.

As always, he refused to accept Steve’s explanation of his basis for voting, as though he understood it more fully than Steve, and refused to acknowledge the family’s belief that these men had not been properly sustained (since the family’s votes had been repeatedly ignored)—*and thus they had no right to conduct church business*, as far as the Stones were concerned.

Steve told the man his disrespectful, judgmental behavior was unworthy of his office—making clear he didn’t appreciate being maligned by a man who’d unjustly set in motion the destruction of the family’s happiness on the occasion of Abbey’s wedding.

At one point, the bishop walked in front of his desk and pushed his frame tauntingly within inches of Steve’s, as though he was going to give him a chest butt. Steve stood motionless, while DeeAnn watched.

The man then walked past Steve and out the door of the adjoining clerk’s office, unlocked his office door from the outside, and reentered the room.

Steve summed up what he thought of such immature antics—the worst he’d ever seen by a bishop—and left with DeeAnn.

On July 18, Steve sent a four-page statement protesting the bishop’s behavior to the stake president.

Further meetings

The more DeeAnn and Steve met with the stake president, the more disturbing their encounters.

What started as a superficial conversation about the Stone family—with no mention of the family’s struggles at the hands of church leaders, or their possible remedy—turned into an escalating exercise in futility, as the president repeatedly revealed his ulterior motives, ignored the family’s witness of continual wrongdoing against them by church leaders, and ultimately countered their every entreaty, behaving heartlessly in doing so.

Since he was acting under the direction of the presiding Brethren, the whole demeaning process spoke ill of their methods and lack of simple Christian decency.

Pulling strings at the heart of the “negotiations,” it was evident from things the stake president revealed, was the Senior President of the Seventy, the former Huntsman executive, whose insensitivity appalled the Stone family.

As the meetings increasingly resembled a growing web of deceit, the stake president—obviously feeling insulated from accountability because he was “on the Brethren’s errand”—told Steve and DeeAnn outright lies, as he sought to induce them against their will to conform with high leaders’ undoctinal demands.

The game the president played caused Steve and DeeAnn to lose any respect they exhibited at the outset toward him. He turned out to be, in some ways, a more devious personality than his predecessor.

He was in fact ruthless in implementing the Brethren’s guidelines and wishes, and under his watch, the suffering of the Stones multiplied.

As an indication of the man’s obvious bad faith, he wrote down any statement Steve made that could conceivably be used against him in the disciplinary council he was secretly planning—such as Steve’s belief that church leaders were not automatically called of God or inspired of Him by virtue of their calling; or his insistence that members were under no doctrinal duty to support any particular church leader, no matter how high up, if that leader flagrantly violated church law; or his view that the temple recommend question requiring “sustaining” of all church authorities, local and general, was at odds with the church’s canon, and disregarded members’ right to vote their conscience under the Law of Common Consent.

The fact that *everything Steve said in these interviews was in harmony with official church doctrine* was incidental to the president. As evidenced by his cleverly-worded questions, he was on a mission to discredit Steve. To this man who was by all indications a “cultural Mormon”—steeped in undoctinal myths, traditions, and norms—Steve’s scriptural perspective appeared heretical.

In the end, the meetings deteriorated for the Stones into exasperating conversations with a blank-staring brick wall.

A follow-up letter of protest

On July 18, Steve sent a follow-up letter to the stake president, relating his concerns after another of his and DeeAnn’s encounters with him.

The letter appealed to the president to faithfully follow the laws of God and the church in his dealings with the family—something Steve felt the president was disinclined to do.

After citing passages of LDS scripture that emphasized the need to obey divine law if God was to be pleased, Steve asserted,

[N]o person is above the laws of God in the Church—no matter their position—and all Church members are equally accountable to live in strict obedience to those laws. . . . [n]o exceptions.

Steve then expressed frustration that the president seemed resistant to such doctrinally-sound common sense, and he said,

Let me add that I've seen indications that you haven't read or impartially considered the things I've shared with you in the past. Please take the time to open-mindedly review the above verses from the standard works, since they set forth our family's rights—and your own divinely-appointed duties—in this controversy.

So there could be no mistaking, Steve reiterated "the *most basic issue* at the center of the Church's ongoing, unremitting persecution of our family: our right not to sustain any Church leader who has been continually cruel to us"—and told the president:

The Church leadership has no right whatsoever to punish or threaten Church members for refusing to sustain leaders who are engaged in transgression, abuse of authority, unrighteous dominion, or any other seriously inappropriate behavior. Members' God-given right of conscience under the Law of Common Consent cannot be interfered with by the Church! To do so is serious sin. Just as important, it throws the [Church] into chaos!

He added,

[You yourself have] indicated that the Church's insensitive mistreatment of our family will *not end* until we change our view of certain leaders and "sustain" them—something that depends on *their* repentance, not ours, according to the standard works. (See D&C 42:88-89, D&C 64:12-14, and Mosiah 26:34-36.)

Everything is out of order here, including your own behavior, which is unjust and indefensible under God's laws.

Steve ended by saying,

Here's the disappointing truth: Our family has been willing to make a gesture of good faith by taking down our website and refraining from sending letters to the highest Church leaders, as you said Church officials have requested—as a "first step" in seeking reconciliation—*yet you've offered us literally nothing in return*. In view of the fact that the Church has been the aggressor throughout this conflict, and even now refuses to stop its threats and intimidation toward our family, this amounts to obvious bad faith, even cruel deceit, on the part of the Church.

For our conciliatory gesture, we've been punished with further suffering for doing nothing wrong under Church law—adding to the mischief the Church has already caused throughout this demeaning controversy!

I again ask you to be reasonable and fair. . . .

Two days later, Steve called the office of the Senior President of the Seventy and asked for an urgent meeting between him and the Stone family to resolve things. Steve mentioned the stake president said he'd be out of town for a week and would be unavailable in the final days as Abbey's wedding approached.

The Senior President's secretary said, "You need to work with your stake president and bishop," ending virtually all hope for the family to attend Abbey's wedding.

Manipulative reprimand by the stake president

Away on family business, the stake president emailed a condescending, indignant letter to Steve dated July 21, in response to Steve's attempt to arrange an appointment with the Senior President, which presiding authorities informed him of.

The tone was cold, manipulative, and immature; and the substance illogical, unfactual, and insulting to Steve's intelligence.

The letter read like a stern—if absurd—reproof of a wayward child by an overbearing parent. (Note that in Mormon culture, church leaders are often seen as parent figures.)

It was as though the president hadn't even read or seriously considered Steve's letters—written earnestly in the hope of resolving the "church problem" for the benefit of his family.

To Steve, the most disturbing thing about the president's reprimand was its misuse of LDS scripture.

The few scriptures the president used to support his rebuke were irrelevant to their application, as though he simply looked them up in the church's "Topical Guide" as he wrote his chastisement of Steve, and had little appreciation of their meaning.

For instance, his scriptural evidence that Steve needed to "do" what the president demanded of him was a phrase in the middle of D&C 84:54-60—which is about the need for church members to *believe the saving doctrine of Christ and live it*, so God's "condemnation" of the "whole church" might be lifted. The president took entirely out of context the words "not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written," to justify his controlling behavior toward Steve in their interviews, and to condemn Steve for not obeying him.

Such "wresting" of scripture for the purpose of controlling another person's will is unChristlike.

In another part of his letter, the president cited a familiar passage in Alma 5 that appeals to church members to become “spiritually born of God”—though obtaining a “mighty change of heart” by the power of the Holy Ghost—and used the passage to support his presumption that Steve needed to “strip away pride” because of his refusal to conform to the president’s will.

The president used three other passages from the Book of Mormon to assure Steve that if he would “repent” of the “iniquity” of charging errant church leaders with wrongdoing, he might “begin with a clean slate” and be “healed” by the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Such disrespect for Christ’s atonement—in utter disregard for LDS law and doctrine—is repugnant.

In each of these last three passages, the focus is on how a person *guilty of serious violation of scriptural standards* can be redeemed and converted by “the power of Christ unto salvation.” The president trivialized the saving gospel by suggesting that *Steve’s disobedience to the president* indicated he was unredeemed, unconverted, and in need of spiritual “healing.”

Typical Mormon authoritarianism, nothing out of the ordinary.

Other unsound notions in the president’s letter

The president’s message centered in the need for Steve to “make progress” by setting aside his “unfounded accusations” against church leaders, an obsession the president suggested was caused by Steve’s tendency “to lay blame on others” due to “perceived offenses from the past” that had no basis in fact.

Accusing Steve of damaging their “progress together” by seeking to meet with the Senior President, the stake president condescendingly chided Steve as he would one of his own misguided children, saying they were now hindered in “working on substantive areas [needed] in order to see progress happen.”

Shades of word games from old Newhart re-runs: euphemistic manipulation by someone steeped in behaviorism.

Because Steve attempted to sit down with the Senior President and *finally*—after nine years—make *real* progress, the stake president therefore wrote, “The path we had embarked on in the June 24 and July 8 meetings had been detoured.”

Nonetheless, “I maintain an open mind and great hope,” he said, “that you will be *willing to make certain changes in your attitude and conduct*,” as though he were taking notes next to a patient on a couch (emphasis added).

And so on—implicitly foreshadowing dire consequences if Steve refused to comply.

The president then focused on his claim that “substantive discussion is made more difficult by accusations [you have made in writing] that I have punished your family for unwillingness to sustain leaders”—and he said he was hopeful “we will be able to put aside the distractions and focus on . . . real issues, *but that will happen only if you are . . . willing to alter your conduct*” to conform with church leaders’ demands regarding “sustaining” them (emphasis added).

Since Steve was not willing to “change,” the president said, “I do not foresee the temple recommend or permission for ordination [of your sons] being given [in] time” for Abbey’s wedding.

He added “there is simply not enough time” for Steve to be persuaded to alter his thinking.

Regarding the matter of “sustainings,” he said,

You . . . state that I have asked you to “change [your] view of certain leaders and ‘sustain’ them,” and once again I agree. . . . I do ask that you humbly seek to support and sustain [me and the bishop] . . . because I believe that is what the Lord has asked all of us to do”

—a sweeping generalization unsupported by the canon of LDS scripture.

He then said, not realizing the absurdity of his statement:

I am not in any way seeking to undercut your agency to vote as you wish and express yourself freely. You can obviously choose the course you will follow, and I will respect that. *We both understand, of course, there are consequences for our choices.* I cannot and will not shield you from those consequences. (emphasis added)

The president’s statement is absurd because if a member can in fact be made to suffer painful “consequences” in the church for voting their conscience, they literally have no real “freedom” to so vote, and the Law of Common Consent becomes a fraud.

It’s also absurd because it suggests there are somehow *unavoidable, inherent consequences* for voting one’s conscience—when in reality any such consequences, in the context of the church, are man-made, and man-inflicted.

It is therefore *not* a matter of “not shield[ing] you from those [unavoidable] consequences,” as the president claimed, *but of threatening to impose those consequences at his very hand in retaliation for negative voting.*

Such dishonest, controlling behavior is an affront to God—the author of the principle of “consent of the governed” at the heart of the Law of Common consent, as well as of the American political system.

And that principle implies a *right*—not merely a freedom.

The very premise of the president’s letter of rebuke is thus an absurdity on its face—wholly illogical and ridiculous.

The president ended by falsely accusing Steve of “acrimony and bad feelings” toward church leaders (feelings Steve has carefully avoided, opting to forgive but hold church leaders to account while they continue their abusiveness)—and he invited Steve to be “healed” by Christ’s atonement for his efforts to persuade his leaders to stop threatening and intimidating his family.

The nonsensical letter is a metaphor for all that is wrong with the church’s mistreatment of the Stones.

Chapter 26 — More sincere entreaties

So disappointed was the Stone family in the callous, undoctinal designs of the stake president that Steve sent a letter a few days later on behalf of the family to the Senior President of the Seventy, who evidently had a hand in the stake president's behavior.

The letter protested the "conduct of [the stake president] in this difficult and sensitive matter" and stressed the president "has ignored the laws and doctrines of the Church [and] been less than forthright and honest in revealing his agenda, motivation, and purpose in meeting with us."

In fact, Steve wrote,

[The stake president] has done nothing substantive to help our family attend the July 31 wedding of our daughter Abbey [and he] has been oblivious to that urgent need from the moment we began talking with him.

Steve reminded the Senior President that—

Because the Church initiated this conflict, and has repeatedly condoned and perpetuated it at the highest levels, our family is entitled to appeal directly to the highest Church authorities . . . who alone have the authority to end it [rather than be left to deal solely with the stake president].

Steve therefore included copies of the July 12 and July 18 letters he sent the stake president—which the stake president indicated he refused to forward to the Senior President, in disregard for his original agreement.

Additional letter to the Senior President

The same day, July 23, Steve sent a second letter to the Senior President of the Seventy, in which he described in detail the stake president's unacceptable behavior toward the Stone family and asked for "urgent action" by the Senior President in behalf of the family.

After saying "I understand that you've asked our stake president . . . to act as a go-between in bringing this conflict to an end," Steve wrote,

As you undoubtedly are aware, DeeAnn and I have met with [the president] four times in the past few weeks, and have made a sincere effort *on our part* to seek a genuine resolution of this difficult matter, so that we might be able to attend the temple wedding of our daughter Abbey on July 31.

Unfortunately, [the president] has indicated he has no desire to end the Church's mistreatment of our family, or to let us attend Abbey's wedding—both of which he

could do quite easily, *since our family has done nothing definably wrong* under Church law or doctrine in this troubling matter.

In fact—Steve continued—

Instead of undertaking a reasonable basis for resolution, the [president] has opted to do literally nothing to halt the Church’s mistreatment of our family, or to “reconcile” with us. Furthermore, he’s told DeeAnn and me that *no resolution will occur until our family agrees to “sustain” officials we consider unworthy of their offices.*

Steve then said:

It’s my understanding—from listening to [the president]—that his attitude and posture reflect *what he’s been told by your own office.* If so, that makes *you, yourself,* substantially accountable for the president’s unreasonable response to our family’s sincere efforts to end this controversy, and you therefore have an obligation to help repair the damage he’s done by his misguided approach to the matter.

Steve proceeded to identify three things the Senior President could prevail upon the stake president to do “forthrightly” to expedite a good-faith resolution:

1. Allow the Stones to attend the temple *on their own merits*—that is, solely on the basis of “personal worthiness”—without concern for undoctinal notions requiring them to “sustain” unworthy leaders;
2. Permit Steve to participate in advancing his three sons in the priesthood, *as is customary*—with no presumption of unworthiness to do so because of his rightful voting—so the sons might attend Abbey’s wedding; and
3. Give the family an opportunity to prove their claims against certain leaders with reliable evidence, testimony, and witnesses (including the previous bishop)—beginning with a *disciplinary council of the current bishop*, who has consistently abused and unjustly threatened the family.

The first two are things the stake president could do immediately to allow the Stones to attend their daughter’s wedding; the second offers a follow-up means of finally beginning to resolve the controversy, once and for all, since disciplinary councils—according to LDS scripture—are God’s means of resolving difficult conflict in the church, providing a venue for the orderly presentation of evidence against alleged misconduct.

All three are things the Stones have requested of the president from the outset of their conversations with him, and he has turned all three down without hearing the family out.

In fact, Steve wrote, the president has relied on the advice and perspective *of the bishop* to dictate the outcome of the matter—ignoring the fact the bishop was, at that time, the foremost cause of the controversy.

Instead of pursuing reasonable avenues of resolving the matter, the president—Steve said—has

insisted that our family *first make unilateral concessions*, which he said would be followed by positive steps on the part of the Church. *After we made his proposed concessions*, he announced that he could do nothing to help us, and that the price of resolution was “changing [our] thinking” toward our leaders, particularly our utterly-derelict current bishop.

As a result, Steve said,

[O]ur family is completely unsatisfied with our dealings with [the president]—*and we feel no obligation to make any concessions whatever in the face of the Church’s incessant intimidation, threats, and mistreatment of our family.*

In fact, we feel betrayed.

Steve then directed the Senior President to language in the church’s 1907 definitive policy statement “An Address to the World,” which undeniably supports the right of the Stone family to vote their conscience during sustainings without intimidation or punishment:

[I]t is a law that no person is to be ordained to any office in the Church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, *without the vote of its members*. This law is operative as to all the officers of the Church, from the president down to the deacon. The ecclesiastical government itself exists *by the will of the people*; elections are frequent, *and the members are at liberty to vote as they choose*. . . . Where the foregoing facts exist as to any system, it is not and cannot be [considered] arbitrary.

The Church officers, in the exercise of their functions, *are answerable to the Church*. No officer, however exalted his position, is exempt from this law. All decisions, rulings, and conduct of officials are subject to investigation, correction, revision, and final rejection by the general assembly of the priesthood of the Church, its final court of appeal. Even the President, its highest officer, is subject to these laws, and special provision is made for his trial, and, if necessary, his deposition. Where these facts exist in any administration of government, it cannot be justly classed as a tyranny, or considered a menace to free institutions. (April 1907 *Conference Report*, p. 9, emphasis added)

Stressing that the church’s very “credibility and beneficence—indeed, its good name—*directly hinge on allowing members to vote their conscience* regarding any Church leader” without interference by the Church, according to the above “Address,” Steve said,

In view of this published policy, which is as relevant today as ever, the Church has “no leg to stand on” in its cruel, undoctinal mistreatment of our family—mistreatment that centers in our right to vote without censure or penalty.

Indeed, the longstanding “practice” in the Church of denying temple recommends to those who refuse to “sustain” seriously errant, transgressing leaders *collides directly with official Church policy regarding members’ right to vote their conscience under the Law of Common Consent, affirmed in the above published Declaration.*

Steve then requested—

If you know of any published policy that supersedes the April 1907 “Address to the World”—or at least its assurances regarding members’ right to vote—I would appreciate a copy. Otherwise, I will continue to stand squarely on the above “Declaration” in asserting our family’s rights in this unconscionable controversy.

Steve ended by imploring the Senior President to “prevail on the First Presidency to end this matter *NOW* by respecting our family’s right not to sustain abusive, cruel members who happen to hold substantial Church positions. We’ve suffered enough *after nine years* of the Church’s mistreatment of our family!”

“As an alternative,” Steve said, he would appreciate “a written statement from you denying our family’s God-given right to vote our conscience in this matter, and defending the Church’s ‘practice’ of barring worthy members from the temple who similarly vote their conscience.”

As before, Steve heard never back from the man.

Denial by the stake president

On July 26, the stake president sent Steve a brief letter saying he had been forwarded a copy of the above July 23 letter (which was attached to Steve’s other letter of the same date) addressed to the Senior President of the Seventy, and that the First Presidency’s Office had instructed him to respond.

In a terse, carefully-worded statement, the stake president told Steve:

I deny any wrongdoing on my part, though you suggest I have been derelict. I am not aware of credible evidence of wrongdoing by any other church leaders, including Bishop [deleted]. Thus I do not believe your July 23 letter changes anything about the status of things I expressed to you in my July 21 letter.

The most striking thing about the above denial—besides being an arrogant exaggeration, since the president claimed he was innocent of *any* wrongdoing whatsoever in his dealings with the Stones, even though he deliberately misled them—is the president’s implicit

admission that *he did literally nothing to get to truth of the family's claims* against church leaders who have repeatedly oppressed them.

That is inherent in his declaration that he was “not aware of credible evidence of wrongdoing by any other church leaders, including Bishop [deleted].” The only reason he could make such a claim was that *he had unjustly refused to allow the Stones to present their considerable evidence—accumulated over nine years—of serious misconduct, even cruel persecution, against them by a handful of church leaders.*

He told Steve and DeeAnn more than once in their meetings: “I’m not interested in investigating your claims.”

Such refusal would not necessarily be a problem were it not for the fact the president felt entitled to judge the family’s allegations to be false without a valid basis in the facts.

According to LDS tradition (with scant scriptural basis), stake presidents—like bishops—are designated as “common judges,” acting as “judge[s] in Israel, to do the business of the church, to sit in judgment upon transgressors *upon testimony as it shall be laid before [them] according to the laws [of the church]*” (D&C 107:72, 74, emphasis added).

Similarly, D&C 58:18-20 stipulates that “a judge in Israel” is “to judge his people *by the testimony of the just, . . . according to the laws of the kingdom. . . .*”

The “laws of the kingdom” require disciplinary judgment to be based on the testimony of *reliable witnesses*. Deuteronomy 19:15-20—the first such reference in scripture—emphasizes that “judges shall make diligent inquisition” into serious disputes laid before them in which it is apparent that one or more claimants is a “false witness” who is testifying “that which is wrong.”

It is clear from this definitive passage that judges are to ascertain who is telling the truth *by hearing both sides*. There can be no presumption of innocence or guilt without “diligent inquisition” into the matter on the basis of sufficient testimony.

This principle of fairness and equity by judges is reiterated in D&C 102—which plainly directs that both the accuser and the accused are to have adequate opportunity to present their “evidences,” and that those high councilors participating in a disciplinary council are to see that “the evidences and pleadings” are heard “impartially,” to ensure “the evidence is examined, in its true light, . . . according to equity and justice” (verses 16, 18, and 20).

The intent of such passages is unmistakable: a judge in the church is to be fair-minded, not favoring either side of a serious controversy placed before him.

Yet the stake president unjustly ignored the Stone family’s pleas for such fairness—pleas that asked merely for the opportunity to substantiate their claims against those who persisted in harming them.

Instead, he listened only to one side—the side of those accused of serious mischief—and formed firm conclusions, violating his duties as a “common judge” in doing so.

In other words, he’s acted as a false judge by dismissing out of hand the family’s charges of continuing persecution, intimidation, and unlawful interference with their lives and work by several church officials—even though the family can prove these charges to any objective review.

Of course, the reason the president concluded the Stones’ charges were false on their face was that the previous stake president, under whom he served a year as a counselor, had misinformed him of the facts and prejudiced him against the Stones, much as that compulsive man had done with the current bishop—who has never taken any interest in understanding the family’s ordeal, and has no real knowledge of the controversy, having been told by the former president to “ignore the Stones.”

This is all indefensible under church doctrine and law.

The new stake president cannot justly be charged with “dereliction”? The Stones would disagree.

Steve’s candid response

And they did disagree.

In a letter dated July 29, 2009, just two days before Abbey’s disappointing wedding Steve sent the stake president a forthright response.

He began by pointing out that his July 23 letter was not addressed to the stake president, but was “directed solely” to the Senior President of the Seventy—as well as the First Presidency, who were given a courtesy copy—

since they are primarily accountable at this point for the Church’s continuing persecution of our family—not you—and since they alone have the authority to work out a reasonable solution to the cruel abuse this persecution represents.

He added,

In our view, these Church leaders cannot forever continue to treat our family with such unconscionable disrespect, or continue to disregard the Church’s own published laws, doctrines, and policies in this needless matter—

and said,

Your July 26 letter does nothing to remedy this conflict—*a conflict initiated and perpetuated by the Church*—and your denials of “wrongdoing” by yourself and Bishop [deleted] are irrelevant to the real issues and facts.

Steve then said—consistent with the doctrinal analysis of the man’s letter of denial, above—

You mention that you are “not aware of credible evidence of wrongdoing by any other church leaders.” That is because you have refused to allow us to present our evidence and witnesses of such wrongdoing, including the testimony of our former [supportive] bishop . . . ; former [stake] high councilor [deleted]; and a substantial number of others. In fact, you told DeeAnn and me you weren’t “interested” in such evidence and testimony.

That leaves you unqualified to judge the merits of our allegations of wrongdoing—all of which can be proven with evidence that meets the standard of evidence . . . in the standard works.

. . . . Denying us the right to present our evidence—while you presume the right and authority to judge our claims—is itself a serious act of dereliction on your part. As a “common judge,” *you are not entitled to reject our witness and testimony in advance of hearing it*. Nor is Elder [deleted], the First Presidency, or any other Church official. No one in the Church is above the laws of God.

It is this very kind of irregular behavior by Church officials that has perpetuated and compounded this conflict from the outset. (emphasis added)

Steve ended by noting,

Since you previously informed me of your intent to postpone any further communications between us until *after* Abbey’s wedding, so as not to distract us, our family was greatly disappointed in your latest letter. Was there any reason you could not wait until August 1 to defend yourself against the things I sincerely—and validly—expressed in my July 23 letter?

Neither you nor the Church can justify such continual intrusion into our family’s peace.

Temple wedding redux

On July 31, 2009, the Stone family gathered at the Timpanogos LDS Temple in American Fork, Utah, and waited outside while Abbey and Andy were married. It was a difficult time for family members—who were again denied entrance to the wedding for no valid reason under church doctrine.

As they walked through the large parking lot on their way to the temple grounds, the family ran into their longtime friend and political colleague, Gov. Gary Herbert, and his wife Jeanette. Steve said, “There’s a nasty rumor out there that you’re the new governor of Utah,” and Gary laughed. (At the time, Gov. Jon Huntsman was being confirmed by the Senate to become U.S. ambassador to China, and Lt. Gov. Herbert was slated to be sworn in

as governor within a matter days.) Steve said the family had come for the wedding of their daughter Abbey—without mentioning that the family wouldn't be allowed to attend.

A large group of extended family emerged from the temple an hour later with the new bride and groom, and everyone posed for numerous formal photos outside the temple, then had lunch under a nearby canopy. Steve—and other family members—did their best to hide their deep hurt and anguish at the incredibly callous treatment they'd received on this special occasion from a church that claims to value families, as well as the institution of marriage, yet would so cruelly punish a family “guilty” of nothing more than voting against abusive church leaders—as is their God-given right under church law—when asked to express their approval or disapproval of these men.

“Families can be together forever” is a popular (if undoctinal) slogan in Mormondom. How about being allowed to be together at the creation of a new family from an existing one?

Words like hypocrisy, fraud, and misrepresentation come to mind—as well as cold-hearted self-protection by bureaucratic church leaders.

That evening, Steve and his longtime professional musician friend performed several numbers at the reception, followed by a few organ solos by DeeAnn on the stake center's European-style tracker organ. DeeAnn, who had served 15 years as ward organist before being summarily dropped for siding with Steve when the church controversy began to unfold, hadn't touched the one-of-a-kind instrument since that time.

The three Stone sons also performed with their dad—and Ellery stunned everyone with a solo rendition of Coldplay's “The Scientist” that rivaled the original by lead singer Chris Martin. It was Ellery's first-ever public musical performance.

Chapter 27 — First glimpse at a tumbrel

[under construction]

Chapter 28 — Truth is no object here

[under construction]

Chapter 29 — Aftermath and meaning

[under construction]

Endnotes

- ¹ See "What does it mean to be converted to Jesus Christ?", RenewAmerica.com (<http://www.renewamerica.com/christian.htm>)
- ² See "Top 10 Conservative Web Sites," About.com (<http://usconservatives.about.com/od/conservativepolitics101/tp/Top-Conservative-Web-Sites.htm>)
- ³ See Appendix: "An Address: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the World," April 1907

Appendix

AN ADDRESS

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF
LATTER-DAY SAINTS TO
THE WORLD



"Let facts be submitted to a candid world."

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH,
APRIL, 1907.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the World,

GREETING:

In the hope of correcting misrepresentation, and of establishing a more perfect understanding respecting ourselves and our religion, we, the officers and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in General Conference assembled, issue this Declaration.

Such an action seems imperative. Never were our principles or our purposes more widely misrepresented, more seriously misunderstood. Our doctrines are distorted, the sacred ordinances of our religion ridiculed, our Christianity questioned, our history falsified, our character traduced, and our course of conduct as a people reprobated and condemned.

In answer to the charges made against us, for ourselves and for those who, under divine direction, founded our religion and our Church; for our posterity, to whom we shall transmit the faith, and into whose keeping we shall give the Church of Christ; and before mankind, whose opinions we respect, we solemnly declare the truth to be:

Our religion is founded on the revelations of God. The Gospel we proclaim is the Gospel of Christ, restored to earth in this the dispensation of the fulness of times. The high claim of the Church is declared in its title—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Established by divine direction, its name was prescribed by Him whose Church it is—Jesus the Christ.

The religion of this people is pure Christianity. Its creed is expressive of the duties of practical life. Its theology is based on the doctrines of the Redeemer.

If it be true Christianity to accept Jesus Christ in person and in mission as divine; to revere Him as the Son of God, the crucified and risen Lord, through whom alone can mankind attain salvation; to accept His teachings as a guide, to adopt as a standard and observe as a law the ethical code He promulgated; to comply with the requirements prescribed by

Him as essential to membership in His Church, namely, faith, repentance, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost,—if this be Christianity, then are we Christians, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a Christian church.

The theology of our Church is the theology taught by Jesus Christ and His apostles, the theology of scripture and reason. It not only acknowledges the sacredness of ancient scripture, and the binding force of divinely-inspired acts and utterances in ages past; but also declares that God now speaks to man in this final Gospel dispensation.

We believe in the Godhead, comprising the three individual personages, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

We hold that man is verily the child of God, formed in His image, endowed with divine attributes, and possessing power to rise from the gross desires of earth to the ennobling aspirations of heaven.

We believe in the pre-existence of man as a spirit, and in a future state of individual existence, in which every soul shall find its place, as determined by justice and mercy, with opportunities of endless progression, in the varied conditions of eternity.

We believe in the free agency of man, and therefore in his individual responsibility.

We believe that salvation is for no select few, but that all men may be saved through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.

We affirm that to administer in the ordinances of the Gospel, authority must be given of God; and that this authority is the power of the Holy Priesthood.

We affirm that through the ministration of immortal personages, the Holy Priesthood has been conferred upon men in the present age, and that under this divine authority the Church of Christ has been organized.

We proclaim the objects of this organization to be, the preaching of the Gospel in all the world, the gathering of scattered Israel, and the preparation of a people for the coming of the Lord.

“Mormonism” seeks its converts among all classes and conditions of society, and those who accept it are among the best men and women of the nations from which they come—honest, industrious, virtuous, and reverent. In their community life they are peaceable, law-abiding and exemplary. Their in-

instincts, traditions and training are opposed to vice and crime. The religion they have embraced, the Church of which they are members, condemns every form of evil, and their lives, with few exceptions, are exponents of righteousness. Many of the early proselytes to our faith were descendants of the Pilgrims and Puritans. Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other leaders among the Latter-day Saints, traced their lineage to the founders and first defenders of the nation. Joseph Smith was a native of Vermont, and by vocation a farmer. All trades and professions were drawn upon for the membership of the Church. In England, its first foreign mission field, it was mainly the middle and working classes that responded to the Gospel message. All over the world it has been the same,—our converts have been men and women of character, intelligence, and integrity. There is nothing in "Mormonism" to attract the selfish or the vile.

The effort to differentiate the "Mormon" priesthood and the "Mormon" people, by allowing that the latter are a good, honest, though misguided folk, while alleging that their leaders are the personification of all that is bad, is a most futile one. The great majority of the male members of the Church hold the priesthood, and though constituting the official body of the Church, they are a portion of the people. Priesthood and people are inseparable, and, vindicated or condemned, stand together.

The charge that the Church relies upon duplicity in the propagation of her doctrines, and shuns enlightened investigation, is contrary to reason and fact. Deceit and fraud in the perpetuation of any religion must end in failure. A system of religion, ethics, or philosophy, to attract and hold the attention of men, must be sincere in doctrine and honest in propaganda. That the Church employs deceptive methods; that she has one doctrine for the priesthood and another for the people; that she teaches one set of principles to her members in Zion, and another to the world, is not true. Enlightened investigation is the very means through which the Church hopes to promote belief in her principles, and extend the beneficent influence of her institutions. From the beginning, enlightened investigation has been the one thing she has sought. To secure this she has sent her missionaries into all parts of the world, especially to the centres of civilization and enlightenment, where her literature has been freely distributed; yet too frequently her claims have been disallowed without inves-

tigation, and judgment has been pronounced without a hearing. At the Columbian Exposition, which celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America, the religions of the world were represented in a great parliament, for the purpose of showing "in the most impressive way, what and how many important truths the various religions hold and teach in common; . . . to set forth by those most competent to speak, what are deemed the important distinctive truths held and taught by each religion; . . . to inquire what light each religion has afforded or may afford to the other religions of the world." To this gathering the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, though the most distinctively American church, was not invited; nevertheless she sought opportunity to place side by side with the creeds of all the great historic faiths, a presentation of her principles, and to voice to mankind the truths she deemed most important and most helpful. This opportunity was denied the Church, except upon such terms as were humiliating and subversive of the end sought—a wider publication and a more just consideration of her faith. After such an experience, and others of like kind, though of varying degree, we submit that it ill becomes our accusers to charge us with shunning enlightened investigation.

It has been charged that "Mormonism" is opposed to education. The history of the Church and the precepts of its leaders are a sufficient answer to that accusation. Joseph Smith, the first President of the Church, founded schools, and attended them as a student, as did many of his followers under his advice and influence. Brigham Young, who succeeded Joseph Smith, emulated him as a founder and patron of schools; and every subsequent President of the Church, his associates, and the people generally, have been equally zealous in that cause. In the course of their exodus from Illinois, our people built log school houses while halting on the Missouri river, then the frontier of the nation; and after they had traversed a thousand miles of wilderness, and planted their infant colony in the valley of the Great Salt Lake, school houses were among the first buildings they erected. Such has been the course pursued in every "Mormon" colony. The State of Utah, now dotted with free schools, academies, colleges, and universities, institutions which have given her marked educational prominence, furnishes indisputable evidence that her people—mostly

“Mormons”—are friends and promoters of education. To the Latter-day Saints, salvation itself, under the atonement of Christ, is a process of education. That knowledge is a means of eternal progress, was taught by Joseph Smith:— It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.—A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge.—The glory of God is intelligence.—Whatever principles of intelligence we attain to in this life, will rise with us in the resurrection.—He who gains in this life more knowledge than another, will have so much the advantage in the world to come. These were aphorisms with the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Neither is it true, as alleged, that “Mormonism” is destructive of the sanctity of the marriage relation; on the contrary it regards the lawful union of man and woman as the means through which they may realize their highest and holiest aspirations. To the Latter-day Saints, marriage is not designed by our heavenly Father to be merely an earthly union, but one that shall survive the vicissitudes of time, and endure for eternity, bestowing honor and joy in this world, glory and eternal lives in the worlds to come.

The typical “Mormon” home is the temple of the family, in which the members of the household gather morning and evening, for prayer and praise to God, offered in the name of Jesus Christ, and often accompanied by the reading of scripture and the singing of spiritual songs. Here are taught and gently enforced, the moral precepts and religious truths, which, taken together, make up that righteousness which exalteth a nation, and ward off that sin which is a reproach to any people. If such conditions are not a sufficient answer to the charge that our homes are un-Christian, subversive of moral influence, and destructive of the state’s stability, then we turn to the present generations, “Mormon” American citizens, products of our religion and our homes, for our vindication:— Here are our sons and daughters, submit them to any test of comparison you will: regard for truth, veneration for age, reverence for God, love of man, loyalty to country, respect for law, refinement of manners, and, lastly, in this issue between us and our accusers the crowning test of all, purity of mind and chastity of conduct. It is not inordinate self praise to say of the generations of our people, born and reared in “Mormon” homes, that they will compare favorably, in the Christian virtues, and in all that makes for good citizenship, with any community in this or any other country.

The charge that the Church is a commercial rather than a religious institution; that its aims are temporal rather than spiritual; that it dictates its members in their industrial activities and relations, and aims at absolute domination in temporal affairs,—all this we emphatically deny. That the Church claims the right to counsel and advise her members in temporal as well as in spiritual affairs is admitted. Leading Church officials, men of practical experience in pioneer life, have aided the people in establishing settlements throughout the inter-mountain west, and have given them, gratuitously, the benefit of their broader knowledge of things, through counsel and direction, which the people have followed to their advantage; and both the wisdom of the leaders and the good sense of the people are vindicated in the results achieved. All this has been done without the exercise of arbitrary power. It has resulted from wise counsels, persuasively given and willingly followed.

It has also been the policy of the Church to foster home industries. Where there has been a lack of confidence in some of these enterprises, and private capital has been afraid to invest, the Church has furnished funds that the practicability of the undertaking might be demonstrated; and repeatedly the wisdom of this policy has been made manifest. Thereby the resources of various localities have been developed, community industries diversified, and the people, especially the poor, given increased opportunity of employment and a better chance to become self-sustaining.

We deny the existence of arbitrary power in the Church; and this because its government is moral government purely, and its forces are applied through kindness, reason, and persuasion. Government by consent of the governed is the rule of the Church. Following is a summary of the word of the Lord, setting forth the principles on which the Church government is to be administered:

The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon men, is true; but when they undertake to cover their sins, or gratify their pride, their vain ambition, or exercise control, or dominion, or compulsion, upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of un-

righteousness, the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, amen to the priesthood, or the authority of that man. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long suffering, by gentleness, and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy and without guile.

Nominations to Church office may be made by revelation; and the right of nomination is usually exercised by those holding high authority, but it is a law that no person is to be ordained to any office in the Church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, without the vote of its members. This law is operative as to all the officers of the Church, from the president down to the deacon. The ecclesiastical government itself exists by the will of the people; elections are frequent, and the members are at liberty to vote as they choose. True, the elective principle here operates by popular acceptance, rather than through popular selection, but it is none the less real. Where the foregoing facts exist as to any system, it is not and cannot be arbitrary.

The Church officers, in the exercise of their functions, are answerable to the Church. No officer, however exalted his position, is exempt from this law. All decisions, rulings and conduct of officials are subject to investigation, correction, revision and final rejection by the general assembly of the priesthood of the Church, its final court of appeal. Even the President, its highest officer, is subject to these laws, and special provision is made for his trial, and, if necessary, his deposition. Where these facts exist in any administration of government, it cannot be justly classed as a tyranny, nor considered a menace to free institutions.

The tithing system of the Church, so often denounced as oppressive, and as imposing an arbitrary ecclesiastical tax, is in reality a system of free-will offerings. True, the members, by the law of the Church, are under moral obligation to pay one-tenth of their interest annually. But from the very nature of the principles on which churches exist, they being voluntary associations for the fostering of spiritual life, and the achievement of moral and charitable ends—in which associations membership cannot be compelled—there is no compulsory means of collecting this or any other church revenue. Tithing

is a voluntary offering for religious and charitable purposes, and not a scheme of extortion for the enrichment of the higher officials. Service in the interest of the Church is given, for the most part, without monetary compensation; where compensation is allowed it is moderate; the high Church officials are not rich, but in the majority of cases are men of limited means, and where it is otherwise their wealth did not come from the tithes of the people;—these facts are a complete refutation of the slander that our tithing is a system of extortion practiced upon the people for the enrichment of the priesthood. Like the Church government throughout, the tithing system operates upon the principle of free will and the consent of those who hold the faith to be divine.

Neither in mental attitude nor in conduct have we been disloyal to the government under whose guarantee of religious freedom our Church was founded. The Book of Mormon proclaims America to be the land of Zion; a land dedicated to righteousness and liberty; a land of promise to certain branches of the house of Israel, and also to the Gentiles. It declares that God will fortify this land against all other nations; and “he that fighteth against Zion shall perish.” By revelation to Joseph Smith the Prophet, the Lord declared that he had established the Constitution of the United States through “wise men raised up unto this very purpose.” It is also our belief that God has blessed and prospered this nation, and given unto it power to enforce the divine decrees concerning the land of Zion, that free institutions might not perish from the earth. Cherishing such convictions, we have no place in our hearts for disloyal sentiments, nor is there likelihood of treason in our conduct. Were we evil-disposed toward American institutions, or disloyal to the United States, we would be recreant to those principles to which by interest and education we are attached, and would repudiate the revelations of God concerning this land.

In reaffirming our belief in the high destiny of America, our attachment to American institutions, and our loyalty to the United States, we declare that these sentiments, this loyalty, have outlived the memory of all the wrongs inflicted upon our fathers and ourselves.

If patriotism and loyalty are qualities manifested in times of peace, by just, temperate, benevolent, industrious,

and virtuous living; in times of trial, by patience, resistance only by lawful means to real or fancied wrongs, and by final submission to the laws of the land, though involving distress and sorrow; and in time of war, by willingness to fight the battles of the nation,—then, unquestionably, are the “Mormon” people patriotic and loyal.

The only conduct seemingly inconsistent with our professions as loyal citizens, is that involved in our attitude during the controversies that have arisen respecting plural marriage. This principle was introduced by the Prophet Joseph Smith, at Nauvoo, Illinois. The practice was continued in Utah, and published to the world, as a doctrine of the Church, in 1852. In the face of these facts, Brigham Young, whose position in the matter was well known, was twice appointed, with the consent of the Senate, first by President Fillmore, and afterwards by President Pierce, to be the Governor of the Territory. It was not until 1862 that Congress enacted a law forbidding plural marriage. This law the Latter-day Saints conscientiously disregarded, in their observance of a principle sanctioned by their religion. Moreover they believed the enactment to be violative of the Constitution, which provides that Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion. Notwithstanding this attitude and conduct on the part of our people, no decision of the Supreme Court upon this question was secured until 1878, more than thirty years after the settlement of Utah; nor were determined efforts made to enforce the law until a further period of five or six years had elapsed. Surely this toleration, under which the practice of plural marriage became firmly established, binds the United States and its people, if indeed they are not bound by considerations of mercy and wisdom, to the exercise of patience and charity in dealing with this question.

If it be charged by those who find extenuation for offenses committed prior to the decision of 1878, that our subsequent duty as good citizens was clear and unmistakable, we reply that the situation, as viewed by some of our members, developed a conflict between duty to God and duty to the Government. Moreover, it was thought possible that the decision of the Supreme Court might be reversed, if what was regarded as a constitutional right were not too easily surrendered. What our people did in disregard of the law and of the decisions of the

Supreme Court affecting plural marriages, was in the spirit of maintaining religious rights under constitutional guaranties, and not in any spirit of defiance or disloyalty to the government.

The "Mormon" people have bowed in respectful submission to the laws enacted against plural marriage. While it is true that for many years they contested the constitutionality of the law of Congress, and during that time acted in harmony with their religious convictions in upholding by practice, as well as by spoken and written word, a principle committed to them from God, still, when every means of constitutional defense had been exhausted, the Church abandoned the controversy and announced its intention to be obedient to the laws of the land. Subsequently, when statehood for Utah became a possibility, on the condition that her constitution provide by ordinance, irrevocable without the consent of the United States, that plural marriages should be forever prohibited, the "Mormon" people accepted the condition by voting for the adoption of the constitution. From that time until now, the Church has been true to its pledge respecting the abandonment of the practice of plural marriage. If it be urged that there have been instances of the violation of the anti-polygamy laws, and that some persons within the Church have sought to evade the rule adopted by her, prohibiting plural marriages, the plain answer is that in every state and nation there are individuals who violate law in spite of all the vigilance that can be exercised; but it does not follow that the integrity of a community or a state is destroyed, because of such individual transgressions. All we ask is that the same common-sense judgment be exercised in relation to our community that is accorded to other communities. When all the circumstances are weighed, the wonder is, not that there have been sporadic cases of plural marriage, but that such cases have been so few. It should be remembered that a religious conviction existed among the people, holding this order of marriage to be divinely sanctioned. Little wonder then that there should appear, in a community as large as ours, and as sincere, a few over-zealous individuals who refused to submit even to the action of the Church in such a matter, or that these few should find others who sympathized with their view; the number, however, is small.

Those who refer to "Mormon polygamy" as a menace to

the American home, or as a serious factor in American problems, make themselves ridiculous. So far as plural marriage is concerned, the question is settled. The problem of polygamous living among our people is rapidly solving itself. It is a matter of record that in 1890, when the manifesto was issued, there were 2,451 plural families; in nine years this number had been reduced to 1,543. Four years later the number was 897; and many of these have since passed away.

In answer to the charge of disloyalty, founded upon alleged secret obligations against our government, we declare to all men that there is nothing treasonable or disloyal in any ordinance, ceremony, or ritual of the Church.

The overthrow of earthly governments; the union of church and state; domination of the state by the church; ecclesiastical interference with the political freedom and rights of the citizen,—all such things are contrary to the principles and policy of the Church, and directly at variance with the oft repeated declarations of its chief presiding authorities and of the Church itself, speaking through its general conferences. The doctrine of the Church on the subject of government, stands as follows:

“We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers and magistrates, in obeying, honoring and sustaining the law.”

Such is our acknowledgment of duty to civil governments.

Again:

“We believe that all governments necessarily require civil officers and magistrates to enforce the laws of the same, and that such as will administer law in equity and justice should be sought for and upheld by the voice of the people (if a republic), or the will of the sovereign.”

“We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government, whereby one religious society is fostered and another proscribed in its spiritual privileges, and the individual rights of its members, as citizens, denied.”

With reference to the laws of the Church, it is expressly said:

“Be subject to the powers that be, until He reigns whose right it is to reign, and subdues all enemies under His feet.

“Behold, the laws which ye have received from my hand are the laws of the Church, and in this light ye shall hold them forth.”

That is to say, no law or rule enacted, or revelation received by the Church, has been promulgated for the State. Such laws and revelations as have been given are solely for the government of the Church.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints holds to the doctrine of the separation of church and state; the non-interference of church authority in political matters; and the absolute freedom and independence of the individual in the performance of his political duties. If, at any time, there has been conduct at variance with this doctrine, it has been in violation of the well settled principles and policy of the Church.

We declare that from principle and policy, we favor:

The absolute separation of church and state;

No domination of the state by the church;

No church interference with the functions of the state;

No state interference with the functions of the church, or with the free exercise of religion;

The absolute freedom of the individual from the domination of ecclesiastical authority in political affairs;

The equality of all churches before the law.

The reaffirmation of this doctrine and policy, however, is predicated upon the express understanding that politics in the states where our people reside, shall be conducted as in other parts of the Union; that there shall be no interference by the State with the Church, nor with the free exercise of religion. Should political parties make war upon the Church, or menace the civil, political, or religious rights of its members as such,—against a policy of that kind, by any political party or set of men whatsoever, we assert the inherent right of self-preservation for the Church, and her right and duty to call upon all her children, and upon all who love justice, and desire the perpetuation of religious liberty, to come to her aid, to stand with her until the danger shall have passed. And this, openly, submitting the justice of our cause to the enlightened judgment of our fellow men, should such an issue unhappily arise. We desire to live in peace and confidence with our fellow citizens of all political parties and of all religions.

It is sometimes urged that the permanent realization of such a desire is impossible, since the Latter-day Saints hold as a principle of their faith that God now reveals Himself to man, as in ancient times; that the priesthood of the Church constitute a body of men who have, each for himself, in the sphere in

which he moves, special right to such revelation; that the President of the Church is recognized as the only person through whom divine communication will come as law and doctrine to the religious body; that such revelation may come at any time, upon any subject, spiritual or temporal, as God wills; and finally that, in the mind of every faithful Latter-day Saint, such revelation, in whatsoever it counsels, advises or commands, is paramount. Furthermore it is sometimes pointed out that the members of the Church are looking for the actual coming of a Kingdom of God on earth, that shall gather all the kingdoms of the world into one visible, divine empire, over which the risen Messiah shall reign.

All this, it is held, renders it impossible for a "Mormon" to give true allegiance to his country, or to any earthly government.

We refuse to be bound by the interpretations which others place upon our beliefs; or by what they allege must be the practical consequences of our doctrines. Men have no right to impute to us what they think may be the logical deduction from our beliefs, but which we ourselves do not accept. We are to be judged by our own interpretations, and by our actions, not by the logic of others, as to what is, or may be, the result of our faith. We deny that either our belief in divine revelation, or our anticipation of the coming kingdom of God, weakens in any degree the genuineness of our allegiance to our country. When the divine empire will be established, we may not know any more than other Christians who pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven;" but we do know that our allegiance and loyalty to country are strengthened by the fact that while awaiting the advent of the Messiah's kingdom, we are under a commandment from God to be subject to the powers that be, until He comes "whose right it is to reign."

"Mormonism" is in the world for the world's good. Teaching truth, inculcating morality, guarding the purity of the home, honoring authority and government, fostering education, and exalting man and woman, our religion denounces crime, and is a foe to tyranny in every form. "Mormonism" seeks to uplift, not to destroy society. She joins hands with the civilization of the age. Proclaiming herself a special harbinger of the Savior's second coming, she recognizes in all the great epochs and movements of the past, steps in the march of progress leading up to the looked for millennial reign. "Mormonism" lifts an ensign of

peace to all people. The predestined fruits of her proposed system are the sanctification of the earth and the salvation of the human family.

And now, to all the world: Having been commanded of God, as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men—we, in order to be obedient to the heavenly commandment, send forth this Declaration, that our position upon the various questions agitating the public mind concerning us may be known. We desire peace, and will do all in our power on fair and honorable principles to promote it. Our religion is interwoven with our lives, it has formed our character, and the truth of its principles is impressed upon our souls. We submit to you, our fellow-men, that there is nothing in those principles that calls for execration, no matter how widely in some respects they may differ from your conceptions of religious truth. Certainly there is nothing in them that may not stand within the wide circle of modern toleration of religious thought and practice. To us these principles are crystalizations of truth. They are as dear to us as your religious conceptions are to you. In their application to human conduct, we see the world's hope of redemption from sin and strife, from ignorance and unbelief. Our motives are not selfish; our purposes not petty and earth-bound; we contemplate the human race, past, present and yet to come, as immortal beings, for whose salvation it is our mission to labor, and to this work, broad as eternity and deep as the love of God, we devote ourselves, now, and forever. Amen.

JOSEPH F. SMITH,
JOHN R. WINDER,
ANTHON H. LUND,

In behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, March 26, 1907.

Adopted by vote of the Church, in General Conference, April 5, 1907.

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH.