

## Davis County Ex-Mormon's - No meetup Sunday Dec 14, 2025

[All links from Invitations.](#)

I will be out of Town Dec 14<sup>th</sup>, hence no Meetup. Regardless, contact is invited: Francis 'Nelson' Henderson, 858-668-6943, [francisnh12@gmail.com](mailto:francisnh12@gmail.com)

Sunday Dec 7<sup>th</sup> we had a good discussion on the subject:

### Joseph Smith: Narcissistic, Authoritarian

For Authoritarian leaders to have power there must be authoritarian followers, and there are. Why does it matter? Because a religion founded on obedience (which is not a virtue, but is morally neutral) has succeeded in neutering a key purpose of religion, the development of moral understanding and maturity.

Morality does not spring from obedience. That was Satan's plan in Mormon mythology of a pre-existence War in Heaven. However, in its Temples Mormonism seeks through covenants to misappropriated to itself the members right and duty to make moral choices for themselves.

The most Extreme example of "Obedience gone Wrong" in Mormonism are the actions of 55 obedient church members who followed the commands of their Stake President and High Council at Cedar City Utah, plus were obedient the Temple "Oath of Vengeance" when they slaughtered more than 120 innocent Men, Women, and Children of the Francher Wagon Train at [Mountain Meadows](#) in 1857. How did Mormonism eliminate their Conscience?

Or more recently, how did Church leaders defeat the moral judgement of members who obediently campaigned as advocates for Proposition 8 in California?

### Right-Wing Authoritarian Followers

Joseph Smith created the culture, but how was Smith's psychology passed on to subsequent leaders who have still followed and adopted the unhealthy authoritarian system. Does the existence of the Church offer a "hand in glove" choice to those other than the 30% of all population who prefer authoritarianism according to Canadian professor and researcher Dr Bob Altemeyer.

This question is pointing directly to what social psychologists call **authoritarian socialization** and **selection effects**.



#### ◆ 1. Two Complementary Processes: *Selection and Shaping*

##### 1. Selection (who joins and stays):

- The Church's culture attracts and retains people who already have **higher authoritarian tendencies** — that is, people who value order, loyalty, and certainty over autonomy or ambiguity.
- This is exactly what **Dr. [Bob Altemeyer's](#)** decades of research on *Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA)* shows: roughly 25–30% of people across societies naturally prefer **clear hierarchies, fixed moral codes, and a powerful leader to enforce them**.
- Mormonism provides this structure in spades — fixed gender roles, an inerrant prophet, and a clear us-vs-them worldview — so it resonates with those predispositions.

##### 2. Shaping (who people become after immersion):

- Once inside, the system reinforces those traits through **social rewards and punishments**.

- Obedience, conformity, and loyalty are praised as righteousness. Questioning, nuance, and independence are subtly (or openly) shamed.
- Over time, even non-authoritarian personalities begin to **internalize authoritarian habits** — suppressing doubt, avoiding conflict, deferring to hierarchy — in order to belong.
- In psychology, this is known as **situational authoritarianism**: ordinary people become compliant when embedded in systems that reward obedience and punish dissent.

## ◆ 2. Why Leaders Become Authoritarian Too

### 1. Institutional Filtering:

- Advancement in the LDS hierarchy requires demonstrable obedience.
- Bishops, stake presidents, and apostles are not chosen for moral imagination or compassion but for reliability and loyalty.
- Thus, as individuals rise, the Church filters out dissenters — producing leadership that is uniformly authoritarian in temperament, even if some are personally kind.

### 2. Role Absorption:

- Once in authority, psychological studies show that people *internalize* the traits of their role.
- The trappings of sacred office (titles, deference, prophetic aura) create **moral distance** and a sense of infallibility — the same dynamic studied in *Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment*.
- The leader's personality fuses with the role; empathy diminishes, certainty grows.

### 3. Sacralization of Control:

- Because all authority is presented as divine, exercising control is not seen as domination but as service to God.
- This moral inversion allows authoritarian behavior to persist with a clear conscience.

## ◆ 3. Followers: Why They Consent

- Authoritarian followers are not necessarily cruel; they are **afraid of chaos**.
- Altemeyer's data show that they crave safety, certainty, and belonging more than autonomy.
- In Mormonism, *certainty is sold as peace, obedience as virtue, hierarchy as divine order*.
- So long as leaders maintain the illusion of security and moral clarity, followers participate willingly — even enthusiastically — in their own control.

Putting Altemeyer's model in conversation with Mormonism:

- Smith was an original **social dominator** (high-ambition, manipulative, secretive). The [temple system](#) codified his psychological template into ritual.
- Leaders like Oaks, Nelson, and others are **drawn upward** by that system: they are filtered and rewarded for dominator-compatible traits (obedience, certitude, suppression of dissent).
- The temple system (covenants, secrecy, hierarchical obedience) is the ritual *scaffolding* that re-enacts Smith's dominance in every generation — normalizing it.
- Because the leaders operate inside the same ritual structure Smith created, **their psychology is continually shaped** by a system that valorizes control, not moral humility.
- Even well-intentioned leaders are captured by the system: the office grants them moral immunity, and the expectations of followers demand performance of strength over vulnerability.

## ◆ What Altemeyer's Work *Doesn't Guarantee, But Suggests*

- It doesn't mean every LDS leader is malicious — many may sincerely believe they are serving.
- But structural pressure means that the role privileges dominator traits, making alternatives difficult.

- Therefore, leadership reform is hard unless the **ritual and institutional logic itself** is reconsidered, not just personnel.

### **When Law Defends Power, Not Justice** (*The Modern Face of Authoritarian Religion*)

The most revealing evidence that Mormonism has never escaped Joseph Smith's authoritarian mind is found not in its scripture but in the public statements of its leaders. LDS Apostle Dallin H. Oaks — a former president of Brigham Young University (1971-1980), former acting dean of Univ Chicago law school (1962-64), and a former justice of the Utah Supreme Court (1980 – 1984) — once declared that *“it is wrong to criticize Church leaders, even if the criticism is true.”*<sup>1</sup> The statement is extraordinary, not only because it violates every standard of legal and ethical reasoning, but because it exposes the core pathology of authoritarian systems: the substitution of **loyalty for truth**<sup>2</sup>.

Bob Altemeyer, in [\*The Authoritarians\*](#) (Chapter 5), described this pattern precisely. Authoritarian leaders, he found, are typically “social dominators” — individuals who crave control, lack empathy for subordinates, and manipulate moral language to secure obedience. They demand immunity from criticism because criticism threatens the illusion of divine infallibility upon which their authority depends. Oaks's formulation is a textbook case: by redefining truth-telling as disloyalty, he transforms the moral act of honesty into the sin of rebellion. In this inversion, virtue is no longer measured by conscience but by conformity.

The tragedy is that the institution no longer needs a Joseph Smith. It has become self-replicating, a psychological machine that continually selects, shapes, and sanctifies authoritarian personalities. The task of reform, therefore, is not to replace the leaders but to **break the conditioning** that confuses obedience with virtue.

*Long after the prophet's voice has faded, his echo endures in the vows of the obedient. The walls of the temple still whisper his demand: kneel first, then believe. And so the ceremony continues—power calling itself holy, and holiness forgetting it was meant to set us free.*

--- The End ---

---

<sup>1</sup> From the Temple ritual, Brother Oaks says that [“It's wrong to criticize leaders”](#) (10:39) of the Church, even if the criticism is true.”

<sup>2</sup> Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance - Part4, [White Bird Flying](#): My Struggle for a More Loving, Tolerant, and Egalitarian Church. Janice M. Allred