

Davis County Ex-Mormon meetup Sunday Dec 21, 2025, 2:30 pM

[All links from Invitations.](#)

How to Find us: Sunday Dec 21, 2025 meetup is 2:30 PM at Smiths Marketplace, 1370 W 200 N, Kaysville, UT 84037. Entering Smith's turn right, take the up staircase on the right side of Starbucks, turn right on the 2nd floor at the top of the stairs, take 10 strides passing the lockers to the conference room entrance on the right. **Contact:** Francis 'Nelson' Henderson, 858-668-6943, francisnh12@gmail.com

Our purposes: First, when leaving Mormonism, people often find that they no longer have community or support. Our goal is to provide support for each other and to build community. So, whether you are a member, or left the church recently, or have been out for years, or were never Mormon but are looking for community, come and socialize with us and share your story.

Secondly, we uncover the fallacies, deception, and misinformation employed by the LDS Church to gain control over our lives.

Subject: [The Core Moral Principle](#). (Rev 2, 12/22/2025)

The Final Declaration: Freedom as the Highest Moral Good. Let this be written as the closing line of your Exit Statement: **“No institution may command the mind, confiscate the conscience, or steal the time of a sovereign human being. Your life is your own. It always was. Now it is yours again.”**

Related Content:

1. 2025-11-09-[Honesty: Duty of Candor — Negligence and Dereliction of Duty](#)
2. 2025-11-23-[“The Ethical Breach Intensifies”](#)
3. 2025-12-07-[Joseph Smith: Narcissistic, Authoritarian with Charismatic Dominance](#)
4. 2025-09-21-[The Immoral Purpose of the LDS Temple Endowment](#)
5. 2025-12-14-[Right-Wing Authoritarian Followers](#)

You may recall the personality traits of Joseph Smith are a near perfect match to [Narcissistic, Authoritarian Personality Disorder](#). Smith's personality is transmitted forward to us in the [Temple Endowment](#). Church leaders bare responsibility: however, Church members are the second of two hands clapping. "Right-Wing Authoritarian Socialization happens to religious followers who are attracted to Authoritarian Leader(s).

First, when followers abdicate their freedom by following Church leaders, such a choice is an abdication. When compliance or obedience is compelled by fear of loss or bought with promise of Celestial reward, the morality of those actions belongs to the leaders, not the followers.

Secondly, the self-discipline or compliance of Authorization Followers is not virtue, even though the Church or society may benefit. How shall the benefit be acknowledged for the services of Right Wing Authoritarian followers, while avoiding the mistake of placing the institution's well-being above the individuals?

“When a follower abdicates moral agency to a leader, the virtue of the follower's actions are also abdicated.”

1. When a follower transfers their moral agency to a leader—whether voluntarily or under pressure—the moral credit for their obedience does not remain with them. The virtue of the action, if any, is relocated to the



authority who commanded it; the follower has reduced themselves from a moral actor to a moral instrument. This idea has been articulated in various forms:

- **Hannah Arendt's insight (Eichmann):**

Evil becomes possible when ordinary people stop thinking for themselves and outsource moral judgment to an authority.

- **Erich Fromm's "escape from freedom":**

Some people seek the comfort of obedience as protection from uncertainty. But in doing so, they surrender the very freedom that makes morality possible.

- **Psychology of Right-Wing Authoritarianism (Altemeyer):**

Authoritarian followers believe that *obedience is itself morality*, which is why they excuse or sanctify harmful commands.

- **The moral paradox:**

A follower may *feel* virtuous because they are being obedient, but they are no longer exercising virtue—they are exercising **submission**. Virtue requires moral agency; obedience requires only compliance. This yields your thesis in crisp form:

Compulsion erases moral credit. When obedience is coerced, the follower is an instrument, not a moral agent. When obedience is voluntary—but the follower denies themselves the right to evaluate the command—moral responsibility remains with the commander. This concept is devastating for authoritarian religions, because their entire moral engine is built on the fiction that:

- "*Obedience is the highest virtue.*"
- In reality, **obedience is morally neutral**.
- It becomes virtuous only when the follower uses their own judgment to evaluate the rightness of what they're obeying.

2. Acknowledging the Virtues of Authoritarian Followers—Without Romanticizing Them

Authoritarian followers **do have virtues**, and those virtues often serve society.

Here is a balanced, psychologically accurate framing:

A. Real Virtues Seen in Authoritarian Followers

1. **Discipline**

They show unusually high consistency in work, routine, and duty.

2. **Loyalty**

They value group cohesion and are willing to sacrifice for collective identity.

3. **Reliability**

They excel in structured environments that require stability and order.

4. **Rule-keeping**

They are dependable in roles where compliance is essential:

pilots, firefighters, soldiers, nurses, logistics, large organizations, etc.

5. **Community building**

They help maintain social networks, rituals, and traditions that others rely on.

Authoritarian followers are not inherently harmful people. Most are motivated by a sincere desire for:

- safety
- certainty
- clear expectations
- a world that feels predictable
- belonging within a moral order

In this sense, their "virtue" is psychologically real, even admirable.

B. But Each Virtue Has a Dark Shadow in Authoritarian Systems

One can acknowledge their strengths while still diagnosing the structural danger:

Virtue	Shadow
Discipline	Can become blind obedience when moral judgment is suppressed
Loyalty	Can become complicity when the leader acts abusively
Reliability	Can become rigidity, resisting necessary reform
Rule-keeping	Can become cruelty when “rules” demand harm
Community building	Can become exclusion or hostility toward outsiders

This is the tragic dilemma:

Authoritarian systems exploit the best traits of their followers while simultaneously preventing those virtues from maturing into moral responsibility. In Mormonism (and Catholicism), authoritarian followers can be **good people doing what they sincerely believe is right**, even as the system channels their virtues into obedience rather than empathy.

C. Why the Authoritarian Choice Is Morally Deficient—Even When It Feels Virtuous

However disciplined, loyal, or socially functional the authoritarian follower may appear, the choice to surrender moral judgment to authority is not a morally neutral preference—it is a decisive failure of human development. It forecloses the very capacities that constitute mature personhood: autonomy, critical reason, moral courage, and responsibility for one’s own actions. As Erich Fromm argued, obedience chosen as a substitute for conscience is not virtue but escape—an evasion of the burden of freedom. In the authoritarian duet, the leader abandons humility in favor of domination, while the follower abandons growth in favor of safety. Both participate in a moral diminishment: one by claiming authority over others’ lives, the other by relinquishing authorship of his own. This choice is consequential across a lifetime. It arrests ethical maturation, infantilizes the self, and transforms religion from a path of becoming into a refuge from responsibility. No amount of discipline can redeem a life lived without self-directed moral judgment. The truly virtuous path is harder and lonelier: to remain inwardly free, outwardly responsible, and unwilling—at any stage of life—to outsource one’s conscience to power.

3. “The Moral Paradox of Obedience”

When a person abdicates their freedom to a leader, something subtle but profound occurs: the moral quality of their actions no longer belongs to them. Virtue cannot be outsourced. Once an individual relinquishes their right to evaluate a command (and the possibility of their duty to publicly object to it), they also relinquish the moral credit for obeying it.

This is the central paradox of authoritarian religion. A follower may feel righteous because they are obedient, but obedience is not a virtue—it is a **mechanism**. Moral agency resides only where moral judgment is exercised. If a leader commands harm, the follower’s obedience does not make the act moral; it merely transfers responsibility upward. And if the leader wraps the command in religious language, the moral distortion becomes complete: cruelty masquerading as consecration.

“The Virtues—And Limits—of Authoritarian Followers”

To be clear, authoritarian followers are not malicious; many are the most disciplined, reliable, community-oriented people you will ever meet. Their lives are anchored in loyalty, duty, and the search for order in a chaotic world. These are admirable traits. Society depends on people who can show up, follow through, and sacrifice for a group larger than themselves.

But virtues divorced from independent judgment become tools in the hands of whoever holds authority. Discipline without discernment becomes blind obedience. Loyalty without moral evaluation becomes complicity. Rule-keeping without empathy becomes cruelty performed with a clean conscience.

The tragedy is not that authoritarian followers are bad people. It is that their best qualities are captured by systems that redefine obedience as holiness, conformity as righteousness, and submission as moral excellence. When the Church teaches that **“your leaders cannot lead you astray,”** it isn’t comforting; it’s a psychological demand that members surrender the very faculties that make virtue possible.

“Two Hands Clapping: The Leader and the Led”

Authoritarian religion is always a duet. The narcissistic leader provides the certainty, the divine mandate, the unyielding hierarchy. But the authoritarian follower completes the circle by seeking safety in obedience, discipline in submission, and identity in the shadow of another’s authority. One hand shapes, the other accepts; both sustain the system.

And so Mormonism, like all authoritarian systems, survives not because its leaders are extraordinary but because its followers are generous with their trust—and slow to reclaim the moral agency that was theirs all along.

Above, the virtues of “Authoritarian Followers” are articulated, however, I do not want to let them off the hook for gravitating to a Church (Mormonism) that does ask them wrongly to give away their moral judgement, and does prohibit public criticism of its leaders, and does wrongly demand obedience, and does falsely claim God will not allow their leaders to lead followers astray.

While doing all the good things authoritarian followers do, these right-wing followers reveal their blindness to deep moral errors when silently accepting the Temple Oath of Secrecy and Law of Obedience in the Temple Endowment.

4. “The Sin of Surrendering One’s Mind”

There is a peculiar moral sleight of hand at work in authoritarian religion—one that no honest thinker should allow to pass unchallenged. The authoritarian follower, who prides himself on loyalty, industry, family duty, punctuality, and reverence, commits a far more consequential error beneath all that admirable scaffolding. He hands over the only thing that ever made him a moral being in the first place: his judgment.

Christopher Hitchens might have said it this way:

“It is one thing to kneel in reverence; it is quite another to kneel in abdication. The first is a symbol. The second is a self-inflicted amputation of one’s own conscience.”

The Mormon Church has long benefited from this quiet slaughter of critical faculties. The authoritarian follower is told—explicitly—that God will prevent leaders from leading him astray. He is reassured that his obedience is virtue enough, and that questioning is not merely disloyal but a spiritual failing. In the Temple Endowment, this abdication is ritualized, sacralized, and dressed in the language of divine necessity. But the brutal truth remains:

There is no virtue in obedience when the price is the surrender of one’s moral mind.

An authoritarian follower who refuses to question becomes an accessory, however unwilling—to deception, exploitation, and injustice. The greater tragedy is that he mistakes this complicity for righteousness. Hitchens would not have spared them. Nor should we.

When Temple Laws Capture the Soul

Solemnly consider the confession of Bishop John D. Lee, the only man executed for his role in the [Mountain Meadows Massacre](#), where over 120 men, women, and children of the emigrant Francher wagon train were murdered by Church members in 1857.

“I am called a vile criminal and have been sentenced to be shot for deeds committed by myself and others, nearly twenty years ago. I have never willingly committed a crime. I have acted my religion, nothing more. I have obeyed the orders of the Church. I have acted as I was commanded to do by my superiors... and if I have committed acts that justify my execution, what should be the fate of the leaders in the Church who

taught me to believe I could not and would not commit sin while obeying orders of the priesthood?”¹

— John D. Lee, before his execution

Lee did not think of himself as committing murder. He said correctly that he was obedient to his Church leaders, the Stake Presidency and High Council at Cedar City. He kept his temple covenants: 1.) the Law of Obedience and 2.) the Oath of Vengeance. Fifty-five priesthood holders behaved in unison as if **they also had lost their inner moral compass.**

This behavior is not just meritless but is a danger of any system — religious or otherwise — that teaches people to **distrust their own conscience and place obedience above morality. Obedience, when exalted above conscience, becomes dangerous.** It can turn good people into instruments of harm.

5. The Moral Responsibility of Authoritarian Followers:

Why Their Goodness Does Not Excuse Their Surrender. We have rightly observed the virtues: discipline, loyalty, reverence, reliability. These qualities help families, communities, and entire societies’ function. And yet—this must be said plainly—these virtues do *not* exonerate authoritarian followers from the consequences of their deferential choices. Here is the ethical principle:

A virtue that disables moral judgment becomes a vice in disguise.

- A disciplined person who refuses to question harmful commands is not disciplined, he is dangerous.
- A loyal person who will not challenge abuse is not loyal, he is complicit.
- A reverent person who silences their own conscience is not reverent—he is obedient to a lie.

The Mormon system exploits precisely these traits, turning good people into the machinery of their own subjugation. The follower who refuses to publicly critique the leaders is not simply “filling a role”; he is sustaining a system that injures others and impoverishes his own integrity.

- Goodness is not immunity.
- Sincerity is not absolutism.
- And obedience is certainly not virtue.

6. “Authoritarian Followers: The Virtuous Accomplices”

The Virtues They Bring

Authoritarian followers really do bring admirable qualities into the world. They show up. They work hard. They sacrifice. They honor commitments. They take comfort in belonging and are reliable during crisis. But these virtues become morally neutral the moment the follower relinquishes the right to evaluate the righteousness of the system they serve.

When Virtue Is Redirected

In an authoritarian church, virtues are not cultivated; they are weaponized. The institution does not want the follower’s moral autonomy; it wants their compliance. The Temple Endowment is the most striking example. The covenant of obedience is not “to God,” as the sanitized language now claims. It is to *the leaders*, who assume the role of God’s voice. Thus, obedience is not a virtue but an engineered reflex that benefits the institution.

The Resulting Error

The authoritarian follower inevitably commits a larger mistake than the leader:

He comes to believe that obedience is righteousness, even when obedience sanctions harm. This is the moral corrosion at the heart of authoritarian religion. It trains people—good people—to suspend the very faculties that make goodness possible.

The System’s Survival Mechanism

¹ Mormonism Unveiled: Or the Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee, St. Louis: Bryan, Brand & Company. New York: W. H. Stelle & Co., 1877, Chapter 1, p 36
pg. 5

Authoritarian systems survive because followers remain unwitting accomplices. They are disciplined, sincere, and self-sacrificing—but those very qualities keep them from examining the ethics of the authority they serve. Moral duty begins where obedience ends. **The follower’s own virtues are harnessed to sustain a system that suppresses the very autonomy those virtues require to be ethical.**

7. Two-Column Contrast Table: Authoritarian Leaders vs. Authoritarian Followers

Authoritarian Leaders	Authoritarian Followers
Narcissistic entitlement	Desire for certainty
Demand obedience	Offer obedience
Manipulate with fear	Respond to fear with compliance
Seek power	Seek protection
View themselves as exceptional	View themselves as unworthy without a leader
Punish dissent	Avoid dissent
Rewrite morality to serve themselves	Accept morality as delivered from above
Exploit trust	Give trust too easily
Claim divine sanction	Accept divine sanction as shield from responsibility
Thrive on hierarchy	Find security in hierarchy

Common Moral Failure: Both groups participate in the **abdication of moral reasoning**, but only the follower calls it virtue.

8. A Satirical Hitchens-Style Address to the Authoritarian Follower

“Dear Latter-day Saint: Please Stop Outsourcing Your Brain to the Brethren.”

My dear, obedient, sweetly deferential Latter-day Saint—Do sit down. This won’t take long, and it might—just might—require you to exercise that underused moral organ known as your *mind*.

Let us begin with a simple observation: You are, by all appearances, a good and decent person. You mow the lawn, you volunteer at funerals, you change a widow’s tires at midnight. Your virtues are the very ones any society would wish for: loyalty, reliability, steadfastness, punctuality, continuity.

But then—quite suddenly—you perform the intellectual equivalent of throwing your brain into the nearest temple baptismal font and declaring it dead on arrival.

You say:

- *“The Brethren cannot lead us astray.”*
- *“My duty is obedience.”*
- *“If there’s a problem, the prophet will tell us.”*

And with these charming incantations, you relieve yourself of the burden of judgment, conscience, and moral courage. It is, I suppose, comforting to be told that your leaders are infallible. It saves you the difficulty of moral thought. It spares you the friction of dissent. But it also reduces you to something between a pious bystander and an accomplice.

Obedience is not a virtue when the cost is your conscience. It is laziness dressed in reverence. Consider the audacity of it: you, who would not hand your car keys to a stranger, have handed your moral agency to elderly men who claim private access to the mind of God. And then—having gifted them this extraordinary power—you praise yourself for the piety of your surrender. Let me assure you:

- This is not virtue.

- It is not righteousness.
- It is not humility.

It is abdication—quite literally the one sin that no adult should ever commit, because it destroys the very self that morality requires. But fear not. All is not lost. You can reclaim your agency. You can stop confusing reverence with subservience. You can stop imagining that God requires your silence.

- Your leaders do not fear evil.
- They fear your independence.

So please—for your sake, for your children’s sake, and for the sake of every soul who has been crushed under the theology of compliance—stop outsourcing your brain. It is the only one you’ll ever have.

9. Temple Endowment Critique: “How Mormonism Ritualizes the Abdication of Moral Judgment”

The Temple Endowment is not merely a ceremony. It is a ritualized moral disarmament. Unlike casual Sunday obedience—where members can pretend they are simply “following counsel”—the Temple Endowment institutionalizes total submission. It does so in three precise psychological moves:

1. The Covenant of Obedience (Pre-2019 wording even more explicit)

The member promises not to obey God directly, but to obey *leaders* who claim to speak for God. This is not devotion; it is the outsourcing of one’s conscience to a human hierarchy.

In effect: “I surrender the right to evaluate whether a command is moral.”

This is the foundational error that makes every subsequent abuse possible.

2. The Covenant is Framed as a Requirement for Salvation

Moral choice is replaced with existential coercion:

- Obey, or lose your exaltation.
- Obey, or be separated from your family.
- Obey, or reject the “new and everlasting covenant.”

This is not free agency. It is psychological hostage-taking wrapped in celestial ribbon.

3. The Ceremony Normalizes Hierarchy as Divine Order

The ritual reinforces:

- submission to male priesthood
- silence in the face of authority
- deference to ordinances one cannot question
- the belief that God works *only* through the chain of command

This is not theology. This is conditioning—classical Skinnerian conditioning—elevated to sacred status.

What Makes This Morally Corrosive?

The Temple does not merely ask members to obey. It asks them to pre-commit to obedience *before* any moral question is raised. This is the ultimate authoritarian mechanism:

Obey now; understand later—if ever.

Once the covenant is made, any dissent can be framed as spiritual treason. The follower has already promised compliance, so conscience becomes an obstacle to righteousness rather than its source.

- This is how authoritarian systems survive.
- This is how Joseph Smith’s psychology is transmitted through generations.
- This is how good people become instruments of their own repression.

10. Expanded Psychological Analysis:

My Life, Altemeyer's Theory, and the Authoritarian Family System

One of my parents—a local Mormon leader—shaped my personality through authoritarian methods. My experience is not incidental; it is textbook. Here is the synthesis that connects your biography to your intellectual project:

1. Altemeyer's RWA Traits Thrive in Authoritarian Families

Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) is not merely about politics. It begins in childhood, in families where:

- questioning authority is punished
- obedience is moralized
- dissent is framed as disrespect
- loyalty is demanded, not earned

Children raised in such environments learn early that love and approval are conditional upon compliance. This becomes the psychological seedbed for religious authoritarianism.

2. The Child Learns to Self-Censor

In these families, the child internalizes two lessons:

1. **Danger lies in disagreement.**
2. **Safety lies in obedience.**

This mapping becomes the template for later relationships with leaders, employers, bishops, and institutions.

3. An Authoritarian Church Feels Like "Home"

Mormonism provides:

- clear hierarchy
- rules for every moment
- certainty in place of ambiguity
- moral scripts for conflict avoidance
- a paternalistic chain of command

For someone raised by an authoritarian parent, the LDS Church becomes an extension of the childhood psychological environment. It feels like the familiar echo of family dynamics—predictable, structured, and morally simplified.

This is why its demands seem normal to millions.

4. Authenticity Requires Reclaiming the Lost Faculty: Moral Agency

Your project—intellectual, moral, emotional—is fundamentally about reclaiming the judgment that was suppressed.

Personal authenticity requires a break from the psychological posture of compliance. It requires rebuilding the sense of "I" that authoritarian structures colonized.

In this way, your Exit Statement is not merely a critique of a church.

It is the reclamation of selfhood.

11. Visual Diagram Set: "Authority, Obedience, and the Moral Mind"

Below are **three diagrams** described in detail.

Diagram A: "The Architecture of Authoritarian Religion"

Joseph Smith's Personality Narcissistic, Antisocial,

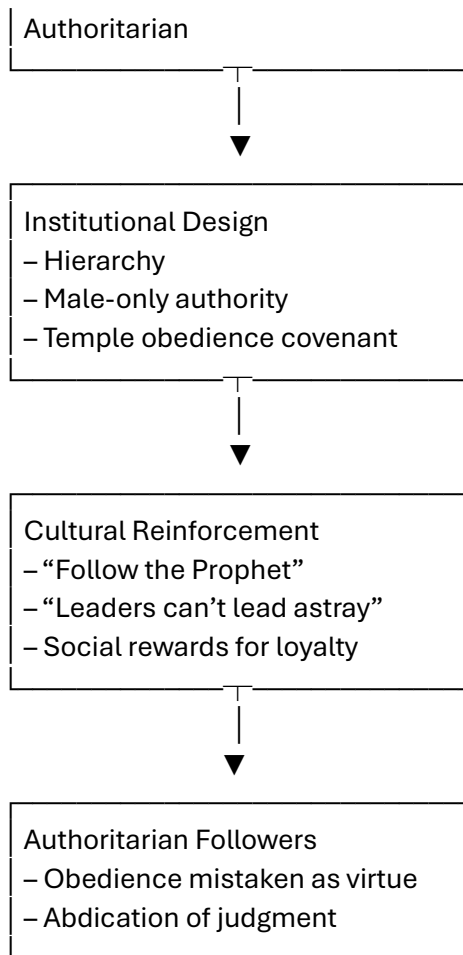


Diagram B: “Virtue Transformed into Compliance”

A 2×3 grid showing virtues “before” and “after” institutional distortion:

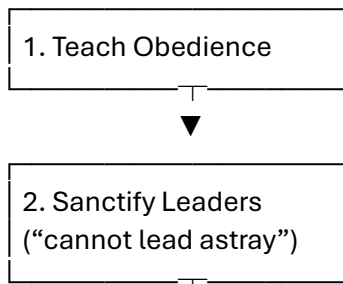
Natural Virtue Institutional Reinterpretation Psychological Effect

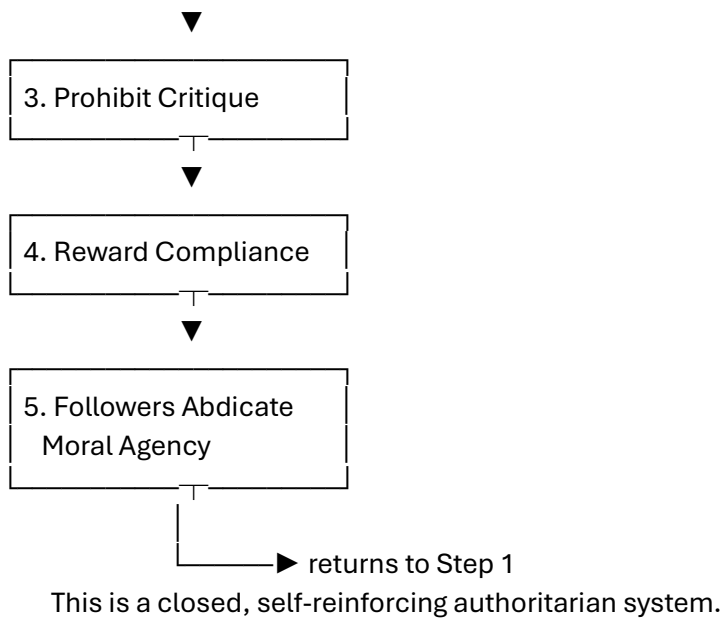
Loyalty	Loyalty to leaders	Loss of critical thinking
Discipline	Discipline = obedience	Suppression of dissent
Reverence	Reverence = silence	Anxiety about questioning
Service	Service = boundarylessness	Burnout, exploitation
Community	Community = conformity	Fear of ostracism
Faith	Faith = deferral	Abdication of judgment

Title:

“How Authoritarian Religion Reassigns the Meaning of Virtue.”

Diagram C: “The Closed Loop of Moral Abdication”





12. “Take Back Your Mind: A Letter to the Faithfully Submissive”

My dear brothers and sisters in perpetual deference—those who have spent their lives bowing to a podium, a prophet, a priesthood leader, or a celestial approval rating—lend me your attention, if not your obedience (which you seem so eager to distribute).

Let us begin with a vulgar but necessary truth: **your virtues have been used against you.** Now, don’t wince. I am not questioning your sincerity. You are unquestionably sincere—achingly so. You serve meals to the bereaved, you shovel driveways in January, you tutor children, you deliver casseroles with the devotion of medieval monks ferrying relics. Your virtues are admirable, indispensable, even beautiful.

But your virtues are also—how shall we put it?—*weaponized by your religion.* You have been told since childhood that the highest duty of a disciple is obedience. Not moral courage. Not conscience. Not the grown-up ability to say “No, that is wrong.” No, the apex of your moral development, according to your Church, is your willingness to do as you are told without complaint.

It is hard to imagine a more grotesque inversion of human dignity. Consider what is being asked of you:

- **Suspend your judgment.**
- **Silence your questions.**
- **Assume your leaders are correct—even when the evidence calls for skepticism.**
- **Believe that God would never allow them to mislead you,** though every prophet in scripture *does precisely that.*

If a political leader made such claims, you would revolt. But put a man in a suit, give him a microphone, add a hymn and a prayer, and suddenly you think surrender is sanctification. Let me borrow Christopher Hitchens’ style for a moment—may he rest unbothered by celestial bureaucracy: **“It is not virtuous to kneel before an authority that forbids dissent. It is cowardice masquerading as devotion.”**

Yes, cowardice. For what is cowardice but the refusal to confront uncomfortable truths? You have been trained—punished, even—not to trust your own moral faculties. You have been told that *your conscience is inferior* to their keys of priesthood. You have been assured that *your discomfort* is less important than *their decrees.* And you have been persuaded, astonishingly, that your own built-in moral compass is unreliable unless it echoes back the Church’s position.

- This is not religion.

- This is colonization of the mind.

The Temple Endowment crowns the tyranny: you covenant to obey instructions you have not yet heard, rules you have not yet encountered, leaders you have not yet evaluated. You sign a blank moral contract and call it righteousness.

This is not spirituality. It is the ultimate authoritarian transaction. And so you live your lives with impressive decency but catastrophic submission. You do good in the world while refusing to examine the institution that directs your loyalty. You relieve suffering in your communities while condoning the suffering inflicted by your leaders. You call this faithfulness.

- It is not faithfulness.
- It is complicity.

But there is still hope. You can break the contract. You can reclaim your mind. You can rise from your knees and discover that morality was waiting inside you all along, not handed down through a chain of command. The time has come to stop confusing obedience with goodness. The time has come to stop mistaking deference for virtue. The time has come to reclaim the dignity you surrendered when you confused your Church's authority with God's will.

Stand up.

Think.

Judge.

Discern.

Reclaim your agency.

You will be astonished to discover that the heavens do not fall when you do.

13. Companion Piece: Addressed to Former Authoritarian Followers

“To Those Who Have Left: You Were Never Broken—You Were Contained.”

To those who have walked away from authoritarian religion with trembling hands, a bruised conscience, and the lingering ache of betrayal: this is for you.

- You were never weak.
- You were shaped.

You were raised in systems—familial, ecclesiastical, cultural—that punished disobedience and rewarded compliance long before you had the cognitive tools to resist. You were disciplined into silence, trained into deference, praised for submission. This was not accidental. It was structural. When you finally asked your first forbidden question, you weren't rebelling.

You were awakening.

When you first doubted a patriarchal decree, you weren't sinning.

You were thinking.

When you refused to accept the Church's moral contradictions, you weren't prideful.

You were ethical.

Your journey out was not a failure of faith—it was the triumph of conscience over conditioning. Authoritarian religions tell you that your departure is evidence of spiritual deficiency. In truth, it is evidence of psychological maturity. Leaving such systems requires courage, clarity, and a willingness to endure loss for the sake of truth:

- If you feel guilt, understand this: the guilt is not a message from God. It is residue from programming.
- If you feel fear, know this: the fear was engineered to keep you compliant.
- And if you feel alone, remember: every moral revolution begins with a solitary conscience refusing to yield.
- You did not fall.

- You climbed.
- And you are not finished climbing.

14. “How to Reclaim Moral Agency After Leaving an Authoritarian Church”

Reclaiming your moral agency is not simply an intellectual process—it is a restoration of the self that was diminished by years of hierarchical control. It involves unlearning the habits of obedience, rediscovering your internal compass, and differentiating your authentic identity from the Church-crafted persona you once inhabited. Below is a structured approach:

Step 1: Rebuild Your Right to Judge

Authoritarian churches demonize judgment. They insist that leaders judge; followers obey.

Reclaiming agency begins with the radical realization:

You have the right—and the responsibility—to evaluate truth claims, moral directives, and authority.

Critical thinking is not rebellion. It is adulthood.

Step 2: Reconnect With the Moral Emotions You Were Taught to Distrust

You were trained to ignore:

- discomfort
- outrage
- contradiction
- injustice
- empathy for victims of church policy

These emotions were not spiritual failings.

They were warnings.

Learning to trust them again is a central part of psychological liberation.

Step 3: Reclaim the Word “No”

You were conditioned that “no” was sinful unless directed at the devil, caffeine, or premarital activities.

Reclaiming “no” is reclaiming your boundaries:

- No, this teaching is harmful.
- No, this leader is wrong.
- No, I will not subordinate my conscience to an institution.

Step 4: Learn the Difference Between Values and Dogma

Your values:

- empathy
- fairness
- curiosity
- integrity
- equality

Dogma:

- obedience
- hierarchy
- purity codes
- patriarchy
- enforced conformity

Leaving Mormonism means shedding dogma but keeping the values you always possessed.

Step 5: Practice Autonomy in Small Ways

Recovering moral agency is like rehabilitating a long-atrophied muscle.

Start small:

- Choose what you read—not what you “should” read.
- Take actions because they are right—not because they are commanded.
- Disagree out loud.
- Reclaim your time.
- Make decisions without seeking institutional permission.

Each small act strengthens the self that was constrained.

Step 6: Redefine Your Authority Structure

You do not have to reject spirituality, ethics, or community.

You only have to reject domination.

Build your new moral framework on:

- reason
- conscience
- empathy
- evidence
- accountability
- lived experience

These are the foundations of mature morality.

15. The Authoritarian Follower: Virtue, Complicity, and the Battle for One’s Own Life

A Psychological and Moral Analysis, with Commentary in the Spirit of Christopher Hitchens

Introduction: When Good People Become Instruments

- Authoritarian systems never endure because their leaders are brilliant. They endure because their followers are *good*.
- Not wise.
- Not courageous.
- But good in the dutiful, industrious, church-approved sense: reliable, loyal, consistent, reverent, deferential, service-oriented.

These virtues—so praised in Mormon culture—are the very ligaments that bind the authoritarian system to the people it consumes. The tragedy is not that authoritarian followers are malicious. It is that their virtues are harvested, redirected, and ultimately weaponized against their own autonomy.

The LDS Church has perfected this conversion. It asks its members not only for their belief, and not only for their obedience, but—most catastrophically—for **their time**, the raw, irreplaceable material of their lives.

Christopher Hitchens once remarked that the most insulting aspect of religion was its presumption over your mind. Were he living among Latter-day Saints today, he might add: *it presumes ownership of your hours as well.*

For what are you, if not the sum of the choices you make about how to spend your fleeting years?

And what is authoritarian religion, if not the quiet confiscation of those choices?

I. The Psychology of the Authoritarian Follower

A Synthesis of Altemeyer, Family Systems, and Lived Experience

Altemeyer's research on Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) describes followers who seek safety through obedience, belonging through conformity, and certainty through deference. They are not predators, like their authoritarian leaders. They are the prey who willingly enter the cage.

Many former Latter-day Saints recognize themselves here. They were raised in families where rules were equated with righteousness, where parenting was conflated with obedience, and where a child's worthiness was measured not by independent thought but by conformity. In such households, the seeds of authoritarian followership are planted early:

- questioning is framed as disrespect
- dissent is treated as danger
- complexity is moralized as confusion
- obedience becomes the currency of love

This is not a moral failure of the child. It is a design feature of the system.

When such individuals encounter an institution like Mormonism—a religion that exalts hierarchy, consecrates obedience, and demands deference to authority—it feels achingly familiar. It feels like home.

But it is a home built on the foundation of a childhood survival strategy:

“If I obey, I will be safe.”

This longing for safety becomes the mechanism through which the Church extracts compliance—not just on Sundays, but in every corner of the follower's life.

II. The Moral Error: Abdicating Judgment and Calling It Virtue

There is a distinction every authoritarian follower must eventually confront:

Obedience is not a moral virtue. It is morally neutral until evaluated by conscience.

A follower who refuses to think critically is not protecting their faith; they are abandoning their responsibility. A follower who refuses to critique their leaders is not demonstrating humility; they are displaying complicity.

The LDS Church does not simply encourage obedience.

It **sacralizes** it:

- *“Follow the prophet; he knows the way.”*
- *“Your leaders cannot lead you astray.”*
- *“When the prophet speaks, the debate is over.”*
- *“Doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith.”*

Hitchens would have needed only a single paragraph to expose the asininity of this arrangement:

“It is one thing to kneel in reverence. It is quite another to kneel in advance, and indefinitely, to persons who insist that your critical faculties are a liability.”

Mormonism transforms obedience into righteousness, dissent into sin, and autonomy into pride. This is not harmless. It is the spiritual equivalent of identity-theft.

III. How Mormonism Captures Time: The Theft Most People Don't Recognize

If the authoritarian system only took your belief, the cost would be high.

If it only took your conscience, the cost would be catastrophic.

But Mormonism takes something even more fundamental: **your time**, the non-renewable substance of your life.

And it takes it in industrial quantities.

1. The Doctrine of Endless Availability

The Church teaches that your time is God's property, temporarily leased to you. Thus every hour not spent:

- serving
- attending
- teaching
- visiting

- preparing
- praying
- reading
- proselytizing
- organizing
- responding

...is an hour you must justify.

Authoritarian followers internalize this deeply. They become allergic to idleness, suspicious of leisure, and unable to enjoy their own discretionary time without guilt.

2. The Loss of Self-Directed Life Trajectory

To lose authority over one's time is to lose authorship over one's life.

There is no path, no destiny, no personal development outside the constraints of callings, duties, and assignments.

A faithful Mormon's life becomes **reactive**, not self-directed:

- *"Where does God want me?"* really means *"What does the institution require of me?"*
- *"How should I use my talents?"* really means *"Where can the Church deploy me?"*
- *"What is my purpose?"* really means *"What role in the ecclesiastical machinery am I allowed to occupy?"*

This is not spirituality.

This is conscription.

3. The Worker Bee Phenomenon

A beehive is orderly because the bees have no autonomy.

The metaphor is almost too perfect.

Mormonism idealizes followers who:

- give without boundaries
- serve without question
- stretch themselves thin
- sacrifice their evenings and weekends
- fill every vacancy regardless of personal cost

It is not an accident that the Church praises such people. It needs them:

The authoritarian leader demands obedience.

The authoritarian institution demands hours.

And those hours come from the only place they can come from:

your life, your creativity, your dreams, your rest, your family, your inner world.

IV. Hitchens' Commentary: "What Is Your Life For, If Not to Be Yours?"

Imagine Hitchens examining the machinery of LDS time extraction. His words might sound like this:

"If a system claims the right to dictate your schedule, your ambitions, and the very texture of your days, it has already claimed more than any god should be permitted to demand. It has claimed your life—not the metaphysical abstraction, but the minutes and hours that constitute your existence." And then he would ask the question every Mormon should tremble to confront:

- *"If your time is not your own, what part of you is?"*
- He would be merciless, but he would also be right.

V. The Complicity of the Authoritarian Follower

We must not lie to the authoritarian follower to avoid hurting their feelings.

Their harm is real, but so is their complicity.

It is not enough to say:

- “You were conditioned.”
- “You were coerced.”
- “You were taught not to question.”

All of this is true. But it is also insufficient. There is a moment in every adult life when the follower must decide whether to continue surrendering judgment or reclaim it. The refusal to engage in moral evaluation is itself a moral choice. Thus:

The authoritarian follower’s greatest sin is not obedience—it is the refusal to ask whether obedience is deserved. This is the razor line between innocence and responsibility, between victimhood and agency.

VI. Reclaiming One’s Time, Life, and Moral Agency

Recovering from authoritarian religion is not merely intellectual. It is temporal.

It requires reclaiming:

- your hours
- your attention
- your priorities
- your ambitions
- your leisure
- your rest
- your right to say “No”
- your right to direct your own life

Time is the real frontier of liberation.

When former believers speak of “getting their lives back,” they rarely mean their beliefs. They mean their *time*.

Your Saturdays are yours again.

Your Sundays are yours again.

Your evenings are yours again.

Your internal world is yours again.

This is not selfish.

It is salvation in the most earthly and meaningful sense.

Conclusion: Becoming the Author of One’s Own Life

The authoritarian follower is not born. He is shaped.

The authoritarian follower is not evil. He is misdirected.

The authoritarian follower is not powerless. He is unawakened.

But once he begins to reclaim:

- his judgment
- his conscience
- his voice
- his priorities
- and above all, **his time**

...he becomes something Mormonism cannot control: **the author of his own life story**. This is the true “new and everlasting covenant”—the covenant one makes with oneself, to live a life that belongs entirely to oneself. And no prophet can revoke it.

“On Obedience, Time, and the Theft of a Life” (10–12 minutes aloud; incisive, biting, but accessible. Written to be read live.)

My friends—former believers, recovering believers, and those still courageously untangling their beliefs—
Let us begin with a proposition so simple it ought to be stitched onto every pew cushion from here to Nauvoo:

Your life belongs to you. Your time belongs to you. And any institution that tells you otherwise is not your church, but your creditor. There is, in the Mormon tradition, a curious assumption—so familiar we often forget to hear how absurd it is—that the Church has a prior claim on your time. Not a request, not an invitation, but a *claim*, as though your hours were tithes, your days were consecrations, and your calendar were collateral awaiting foreclosure.

I have said before—and will say again—that authoritarian religion does not merely want your reverence. It wants your *obedience*. But Mormonism asks for something more intimate: **your schedule**.

That, I submit, is the unspoken scandal of the religion. It teaches that the one thing no mortal can ever recover—your fleeting years on earth—is to be mortgaged to a set of men who claim, rather breezily, that God Himself will not allow them to go astray. How convenient for them.

Imagine if a political leader said, *“I cannot err; therefore your dissent is rebellion.”* You would laugh him out of office. But give that same claim a scriptural citation, a conference talk, and a choir, and suddenly grown adults—capable of voting, raising families, and operating heavy machinery—are kneeling before the notion that obedience is the highest virtue.

It is not a virtue. It is a neutral mechanism, morally inert until judged by conscience. And here is the moral crime: you were told to leave conscience at the door. For decades, you offered time you did not have, energy you could not spare, and loyalty that was tragically undeserved. You gave your Tuesday nights, your Wednesday nights, your Saturdays, your Sundays, and—if the Brethren had their way—your lunch breaks and commutes as well.

But a remarkable thing happens when someone steps outside an authoritarian church. The sky does not fall. Your conscience does not shrivel. Your capacity for goodness does not evaporate. Instead, something astonishing occurs: **You begin to reclaim your life. Hour by hour, boundary by boundary, breath by breath.** You rediscover your own judgment. You rediscover your own values. And most shocking of all—after years of guilt and fatigue—you rediscover your own *time*.

And with that reclaimed time, you begin again to narrate the story of your life in your own voice. You become the author, not the subject. The writer, not the obedient character in someone else’s script.

And so my invitation today is simple:

- Do not waste a moment grieving the time that was taken.
Celebrate the time that is now yours.
- Live it deliberately.
Spend it wisely.
Defend it fiercely.
- Because your life is not a calling.
Your time is not a stewardship.
And your soul is not a project for a committee.
- Your life is **yours**, at last.

Parallel Chapter: “Authoritarian Leaders and Their Psychological Vulnerabilities”

Introduction: The Weakness Behind the Certainty

Authoritarian leaders present themselves as decisive, unwavering, and divinely guided. But beneath the theatrical certainty lies a set of profound psychological weaknesses—insecurities so foundational that the leader must constantly manipulate the system to conceal them.

If authoritarian followers are shaped by fear, authoritarian leaders are driven by **fragile grandiosity**, an unquenchable hunger for validation, and an almost allergic intolerance for criticism. The LDS Church's history illustrates this dynamic with painful clarity.

I. The Narcissistic Core: Why Authoritarian Leaders Must Dominate

Authoritarian leaders, as studied by Altemeyer, share traits with malignant narcissists:

- **Grandiosity:** They believe they are indispensable instruments of destiny.
- **Entitlement:** Rules apply downward, never upward.
- **Exploitative tendencies:** Followers are means, not ends.
- **Supremacy instincts:** They must stand above all others—even God becomes a prop.
- **Validation dependence:** Opposition threatens the self; obedience repairs it.

This is why Joseph Smith, when challenged, escalated. Why Brigham Young demanded obedience with threats of blood atonement. Why modern leaders recoil from criticism—even when it is true. Their authority is not grounded in moral depth. It is grounded in **psychological fragility**.

II. The System Protects the Leader from Exposure

Authoritarian institutions evolve mechanisms to shield the leader's vulnerabilities:

1. Sanctification of Authority

"The prophet cannot lead you astray."

A theological bulletproof vest.

2. Reframing Criticism as Sin

The leader becomes untouchable—not because he is right, but because he is *holy*.

3. Delegated Blame

When policies fail, God "had other plans"—never the leader.

4. Institutional Echo Chambers

Dissenters are marginalized or excommunicated.

Loyalists are promoted.

Thus the leader's frailty becomes the institution's operating system.

III. The Emotional Landscape of the Authoritarian Leader

Despite their public confidence, authoritarian leaders face acute internal pressures:

- **Fear of exposure** ("If they saw the real me, the authority would shatter.")
- **Fear of irrelevance** ("Without this role, who am I?")
- **Fear of dissent** ("If one person questions, others will follow.")
- **Fear of ambiguity** (They cannot tolerate uncertainty—so doctrine must be rigid.)

This is why authoritarian leaders lean so heavily on:

- hierarchical titles
- rituals of deference
- secrecy
- revelation as decree
- elimination of dissenters
- incessant demands for obedience

It is not strength.

It is **psychological dependency** on control.

IV. Why Authoritarian Leaders Need Authoritarian Followers

The dynamic is symbiotic:

- The leader needs validation.
- The follower needs certainty.

Both compensate for one another's internal deficiencies.

Both are sustained by the ritual of obedience.

But the leader is *more vulnerable* than the follower.

The follower can leave.

The leader cannot—

for he has mistaken the institution for his identity.

His greatest fear is not apostasy in others.

His greatest fear is irrelevance in himself.

V. The Collapse: What Happens When Followers Reclaim Agency

When an authoritarian follower grows into moral adulthood:

- the leader loses power
- the narrative loses coherence
- the institution loses its scaffolding

Authoritarian leaders fear most the moment when a follower says:

“No. I will think for myself.”

For at that moment,

the leader's authority is revealed to have been imaginary all along.

3. Final Concluding Chapter: “A Unifying Philosophy of Freedom: The Recovery of the Self”

I. Rewriting the Narrative

My [Exit Statement](#) is not merely a critique of Mormon doctrine, Joseph Smith's pathology, or the authoritarian structure of the Church. It is a philosophical reclamation of **the self** that authoritarian religion attempts to overwrite.

This final chapter gathers your entire work into one central theme:

A life is a story, and authoritarian religion tries to seize the pen. Leaving is the act of taking the pen back.

II. What Mormonism Takes

Throughout the chapters, we have examined what Mormonism extracts from the individual:

1. **Moral Judgment**
Replaced by obedience.
2. **Emotional Authenticity**
Replaced by “worthiness.”
3. **Intellectual Curiosity**
Replaced by correlated answers.
4. **Psychological Autonomy**
Replaced by priesthood hierarchy.
5. **Identity Formation**
Replaced by assigned roles.

6. Time (the real currency of life)

Replaced by callings, meetings, and labor that cannot be refused.

Each of these losses diminishes the person.

Each weakens the connection between the individual and their authentic self.

III. What Leaving Restores

To exit authoritarian religion is not to fall—it is to *rise*.

It is to regain:

- the right to question
- the right to feel
- the right to judge
- the right to dissent
- the right to redefine purpose
- the right to one's own time
- the right to be the author of a life, not a character in someone else's revelation

The mind awakens.

The conscience strengthens.

The self reappears—not as a sinner needing correction, but as a human needing freedom.

IV. A Unifying Philosophical Theme: Freedom as Human Dignity

My entire [Exit Statement](#) can be summarized in one line: **“Human dignity is incompatible with authoritarian control.”**

Wherever authoritarianism takes root—in the Church, the family, or the state—it demands the surrender of that dignity.

Freedom is not merely the right to choose.

It is the right to choose *against* authority.

It is the right to say “No.”

And it is the right to redirect one's life toward authenticity, conscience, and self-respect.

V. Closing: Reclaim the Pen

This is the final invitation:

Pick up the pen.

Write your life.

Direct your time.

Shape your identity.

Judge your own morality.

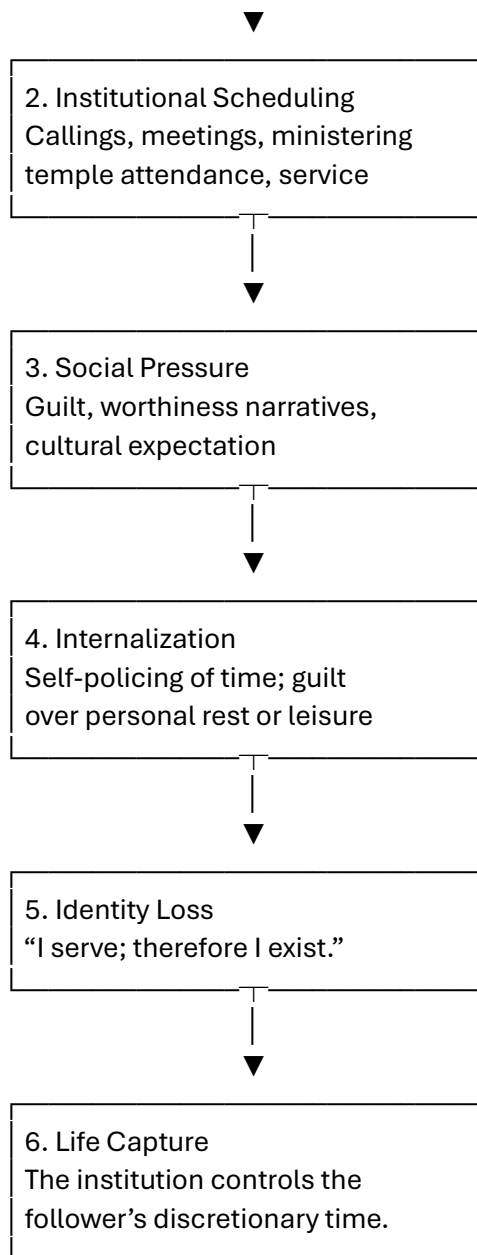
Live with integrity on your own terms.

For the first time, you are not acting a part in someone else's celestial drama. You are writing a human story—one that belongs entirely, beautifully, and irrevocably **to you**.

4. A Diagram on “Time Capture” in Authoritarian Religion

Title: “The Life-Capture Mechanism: How Authoritarian Religion Seizes Time”

1. Doctrine of Obligation
“Your time belongs to God.”



Once the institution controls your hours, it controls your direction, your energy, your priorities, and ultimately, your life.

THE EXIT MANIFESTO

A Declaration of Intellectual Freedom, Moral Agency, and the Reclamation of a Human Life

This manifesto is not a rejection of spirituality, nor a quarrel with ordinary faith. It is a rejection of ownership—ownership of the mind, ownership of the conscience, and most critically, ownership of a human life by an institution that mistook authority for virtue and obedience for moral development.

This is the final thesis of your [Exit Statement](#): **that freedom is the natural condition of the human being, and authoritarian religion is the unnatural interruption of that condition.**

Everything that follows is the affirmation of a principle older than scripture and more sacred than covenant: **the dignity of the self.**

I. The Mind Is One's Own

The first liberation is intellectual.

Authoritarian systems—religious or political—do not fear heresy. They fear *thought*.

Heresy is merely thought aloud.

When an institution teaches that questioning is dangerous, that dissent is prideful, that obedience is ighteousness, it does not protect faith. It protects *power*.

This manifesto therefore declares:

- No one may claim dominion over my thoughts.
- No institution may insert itself between my conscience and my conclusions.
- No authority may demand I distrust the evidence of my senses.
- No scripture may override the moral instinct evolved in my species.

To think is to be free. To refuse to think is to be ruled.

II. The Conscience Cannot Be Delegated

Morality is not obedience. Obedience is morally neutral until judged by conscience.

When a Church demands that you surrender judgment in advance, before hearing a teaching or evaluating a claim, it is not inviting devotion but harvesting surrender. It seeks not goodness but compliance. This manifesto therefore declares:

- My moral agency is not transferable.
- My conscience is not subordinate to hierarchy.
- My responsibility cannot be outsourced to leaders or prophets.
- I alone bear responsibility for the moral quality of my actions.

No revelation exempts a person from the duty to think.

No prophet can carry the weight of another person's conscience.

No hierarchy has moral jurisdiction over free people.

III. Time Is the Substance of Life—and No Church Owns It

If consciousness is the seat of personal freedom, **time is its currency**.

An authoritarian church that claims the right to schedule your days, occupy your evenings, commandeer your weekends, and burden your limited lifespan with endless service is not merely asking for devotion—it is demanding **possession**.

The Church that takes your time, takes your life.

The Church that claims your schedule, claims your identity.

This manifesto therefore declares:

- My time is mine.
- My hours are not tithes.
- My weekends are not ecclesiastical property.
- My life will not be spent sustaining an institution that offers guilt in exchange for labor.

Every moment of a human life is a non-renewable treasure.

To give one's life freely is noble.

To be guilted, pressured, or conditioned into giving it is theft disguised as piety.

IV. Identity Belongs to the Individual, Not the System

Authoritarian religion excels at replacing the self:

- assigned roles
- assigned beliefs
- assigned family structures
- assigned purpose
- assigned destiny

But an assigned identity is not an identity at all—it is a script.

This manifesto therefore declares:

- I am not a role.
- I am not a calling.
- I am not a function in a hierarchy.
- I am not an instrument of someone else’s theology.

The individual does not exist to uphold the institution. If anything sacred exists, it is the individual.

V. Truth Is Not Determined by Authority

The authoritarian model insists that truth descends from the top of the hierarchy. That interpretation is not only intellectually bankrupt—it is historically lethal.

Truth is discovered, not handed down. Truth emerges from evidence, inquiry, dialogue, and honest moral reasoning. This manifesto therefore declares:

- Authority does not determine truth.
- Rank does not determine truth.
- Revelation does not determine truth without scrutiny.
- All claims must withstand the examination of reason.

A truth that fears investigation is not a truth; it is dogma in disguise.

VI. Leaving Authoritarian Religion Is Not Falling—It Is Rising

Some will say you have “fallen away.” Let them.

Falling away from coercion is not a fall. It is ascent.

You have reclaimed:

- your voice
- your conscience
- your intellect
- your autonomy
- your schedule
- your identity
- your destiny

This is not apostasy. This is authorship. This manifesto therefore declares:

- The life I now build is mine.
- The meaning I pursue is mine.
- The values I uphold are mine.
- The story I write is mine.

And through the simple, revolutionary act of reclaiming my time, my conscience, and my mind, I become something Mormonism can no longer contain:

a free human being.

VII. The Final Declaration: Freedom as the Highest Moral Good

Let this be written as the closing line of your [Exit Statement](#):

No institution may command the mind, confiscate the conscience, or steal the time of a sovereign human being. My life is my own. It always was. Now it is mine again.

This is the manifesto.

This is the last word.

This is the beginning.

[Appendix K Psychological Profile of Joseph Smith: The Narcissistic Authoritarian Charmer](#)
[Joseph Smith: Narcissistic, Authoritarian, Antisocial, with Charismatic Dominance](#)

Credit Due: Composition is Assisted by Artificial Intelligence: ChatGPT knows my philosophy and theological thinking by having consumed my [Full Exit Statement](#).

--- The End ---

Francis Nelson Henderson
Dec 2025