

Discovering Life in the Modern Age:
A Study of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints

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Introduction

Debate over prayer in schools, priests convicted of child molestation, the potential of yet another denominational split, and low attendance on Sunday mornings have invaded news cameras across America. At first thought, it appears as if these issues are pointing to the collapse of religion in our society or at least the collapse of traditional religious authority and trust. Amongst this religious wreckage, however, religion is thriving in new forms. Western religion, as our society traditionally accepts it, is on the rise: Roger Finke and Rodney Stark claim that 62% of America was “churched” in 1980 compared to 17% in 1776, and they attribute such success to the revitalization of old traditions and the creation of new ones like the Mormon Church.¹ Also, secular cults, such as the cult of Science, Michael Jackson, Dr. Phil, are emerging as a new religious form.

Modernity and secularization are often the two movements attributed for the collapse of religion, and thus, they should be the center of any study looking at religious growth and failure today. However, instead of looking directly to modernity to understand religion’s fate, it is most helpful to look to the religions themselves. In understanding successful religions today, we can better understand the modern person, which brings a greater understanding of modernity. Which religions have proven successful and what do they tell us about the person modernity produces?

Certainly with the increase of technology and reason in the modern age, some religions have failed, but on the other hand, others—either new or adapted—have succeeded. Finke and Stark take a socio-historical approach to American religions in the

¹ Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 15.

early 1800s and find that within that society there were definite religious “winners and losers.” The old, mainline denominations—the Episcopalians and the Congregationalists—lost membership while the new denominations—the Baptists and the Methodists—grew.² By this shift in religious popularity, the authors assert that religion had not died but instead shifted as people and traditions changed. People have changed as their technological capabilities have progressed just as traditions have changed as they compete in a secular market. In such a market, an individual can express his or her desires in choosing a particular institution, religious or not, over another. A person’s choices in the secularized market are telling of his or her needs.

The development of the secularized world and the modernization of humanity are often attributed to Science, but what Science ultimately shows is that the modern and pre-modern persons have the same fundamental need for security. Max Weber characterizes modernity by the age of Science, which lends many helpful clues to understanding the evolution of the modern perception of the world. Science is the means by which humanity can test, know, and ultimately conquer nature by human means. It strips the unknowable, mystical aspects of religion by providing technology, tools, and clarity for the person.³ Thus, through Science, a person can secure his or her own place in the world. However, the need for security is not a modern characteristic: the pre-modern person created the sacred canopy that Peter Berger describes in order to secure his or her place in the world as well. In this sense, humanity has always constructed its own security—knowingly or not—and those constructed best in a specific context, will

² Finke, 72.

³ Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. (New York: A Galaxy Book, 1958) 150.

flourish most. Security is the fundamental need for all humans, and modernity has only changed how we achieve it.

Thomas Luckmann argues that an individual is unable to secure the world independently, as modernity suggests, and needs an institution—religious or not—in which to place his or her devotion and receive its security in return. Luckmann begins by describing the modern individual by his or her autonomous nature: the individual “is left to his own devices in choosing goods and services, friends, marriage partners . . . in a manner of speaking, he is free to construct his own personal identity.”⁴ He cannot cope with his autonomy and thus puts his faith into secular institutions that replace the role of religion as security in a person’s life. Luckmann calls these “secondary institutions.”⁵ Religion, where it used to be an all-encompassing truth for society, has become a secondary institution among many secular competitors. In other words, ordinary people like the therapist, the Scientist, the boyfriend, or the movie star become the gods of the modern world. Even atheists like Sigmund Freud agree that people cannot cope in an autonomous state without a context in which to place devotion. For example, Freud’s ideal is for the individual to live in the tension of the natural self and the repression of society without the help of others,⁶ but by providing the help of a psychotherapist and a cathartic exercise, the individual admits that living in an autonomous state is impossible.⁷ Thus, counseling becomes a secondary institution that replaces the role religion once played in people’s lives.

⁴ Luckmann, Thomas. *The Invisible Religion*. (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 98.

⁵ Ibid, 104.

⁶ Rieff, Philip. *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 356. Rieff writes on Sigmund Freud.

⁷ Ibid, 345.

As well as counseling, Science, as described by Max Weber, also becomes a secondary institution, and the Scientist becomes to his students what Ernest Becker describes as the “mana-personality.” Becker argues that those in power fascinate people, and people see them as radiating a special aura; however, the leader does not radiate a “mana-personality,” but instead, people ascribe it to him because of their desire to follow a strong figure.⁸ In this way, the Scientist’s students ascribe him a charismatic aura that makes him look less like a teacher and more like a religious figure, which Max Weber certainly did not want.⁹ From these examples, it appears that a person will place devotion into a secular institution and secular leaders because he or she is incapable of securing the world independently.

The modern person also devotes the self to religions in the modern market. Major religions such as Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and various others are not only still practiced but also growing in many places of the world. What allows for their success in the modern age, and how do they compete with secular institutions like Science or counseling? Religions are popular today because a person can construct them according to his or her modern and anti-modern needs; secondary institutions fail when they cannot satisfy a person’s anti-modern needs such as the need for an afterlife and God. To support my assertion, I will study the highly successful Mormon tradition, or the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints (LDS) as it is referred to today, and show that the tradition satisfies human needs while advancing in modernity. The LDS tradition secures the person where modern advances cannot by providing anti-modern historical and communal connections for members, authoritative leaders, structures, and

⁸ Becker, Ernest. *The Denial of Death*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973) 127,128.

⁹ Weber, 149.

teachings, and supernatural answers to the fear of death. The tradition also maintains modern characteristics by allowing members great amounts of control, progress, and autonomy in terms of their destinies and by remaining competitive in the secular market, particularly in the political and economic spheres.

I first approach the topic from a historical and sociological angle; in this approach, I want to show the context from which the tradition grew and the possible sociological reasons that led to its birth and growth. Next, I introduce various metaphysical beliefs of the tradition addressing them anthropologically instead of theologically, meaning I am more concerned about what these beliefs reveal about humanity not God. I want to show that the modern person is not completely modern in that they still have anti-modern or inherent needs, which is evident in the religions they create and join. In the last chapter, I write about the organization of the tradition and show how structural components support the anti-modern and modern needs the metaphysical beliefs address.

In the following chapters, I describe a tradition that appeals to many: the LDS Church was formally organized in 1830 with six members and by 1980, had grown to 4,638,000 members worldwide. Sociologist Rodney Stark projects that the LDS Church will have between 63 to 265 million members in one hundred years, making it the “new world religion.”¹⁰ With such popularity, the LDS Church is clearly meeting the needs of modern people, and by studying it closely we can learn more about human identities today.

¹⁰ White, O. Kendall. “Seduced by the Numbers: The Impact of Growth on Mormon Identity,” (in review for publication, 2003) 6.

Foundations of the LDS Church

“Shocked by what they found, the Mormon elders began to preach the glory of America along with the glory of the gospel” on the first LDS international mission to England.¹¹ As Fawn Brodie indicates in this quote, it is difficult to separate the beginnings of the LDS Church and the ideology of their religion from the ideals of America at the time because LDS is a uniquely American religion. Therefore, it is necessary to start a discussion on the LDS tradition with its modern American context. In understanding the history in which early America and Joseph Smith’s life is embedded, we can more easily understand the people’s need for the religion and its appeal to the modern world. I offer here a brief history of the important events that led to the formation and current growth of the tradition.

History Embedded in Optimism

When the LDS elders visited England in the early 1840s, they witnessed great poverty. The English suffered from a class war, and the churches supported the rich: they charged money for “pew rentals,” so many people could not attend. LDS seats, however, were free. The LDS offered the English poor the opportunity to come to America “on ships chartered by the church.”¹² American opportunity obviously appealed to the people: in the period between 1840-1844, over 10,000 Mormon converts from England came to

¹¹ Brodie, Fawn M. *No Man Knows My History; The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*. (New York: Knopf, 1946) 264.

¹² Stark, Rodney. “The Basis for Mormon Success: A Theoretical Application.” In *Mormons and Mormonism*, ed. Eric A. Eliason, 207-241. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001) 213.

the United States to join the Mormons in Nauvoo, Illinois.¹³ In 1850, 30,747 English made the trip.¹⁴ The optimism and opportunity embedded in American culture in the early 1800s lies in the foundations of LDS conception. Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder and first prophet of the LDS tradition, like the English, suffered great poverty the first half of his life. The English converts, Joseph Smith Jr., and his many followers craved for an American religious movement that provided opportunity and an optimistic future.

The conception of a new nation ignited the optimism of early America. The United States declared Independence from England in July 1776; the nation warred until they officially defeated England in April 11, 1783. With the victory over England, the political leaders of the new country quickly drafted the Constitution of the United States and established an innovative governing system for the states of the Union. The American people were free from English rule, and saw in their futures unlimited possibilities.

History Embedded in Insecurity

Although many early Americans enjoyed an optimistic view of the future, many suffered an insecure present. Joseph Smith Jr. “was born into an insecurity that in a lifetime of thirty-eight years he was never to escape:” he was born into a poor, struggling family in Vermont on December 23, 1805 that enjoyed the post-Revolution optimism but also struggled with the economic depression.¹⁵ The Smith family suffered bankruptcy as New England experienced an economic depression following Jefferson’s trade embargo on France and England in 1807, which preceded more physical loss in the War of 1812. In search of food and money, the Smith family moved from Vermont to New Hampshire,

¹³ Brodie, 265.

¹⁴ Stark, “The Basis for Mormon Success: A Theoretical Application,” 212.

¹⁵ Brodie, 7.

finding nothing but illness, moved back to Vermont, and finally pioneered west to Palmyra, New York. Before departing Vermont the last time, however, Smith and his brothers watched as the creditors tore the family belongings from their helpless mother's hands. Palmyra was naturally an unstable community though: the pioneers were characteristically adventurous and young and were constantly pushing westward.¹⁶ In such insecurity, Smith and his contemporaries would eventually look for authority and answers that could provide stability in their lives.

The personality of the Western frontier coupled with scientific knowledge and technological advances produced a population no longer willing to wait for answers but find them first. In 1825, New York completed and opened the Erie Canal, transforming transportation, business, and opening new opportunities in the West. The American people no longer depended on England, on the land, or the past; they had broken from it and looked to the future with a greater sense of hope and freedom. While farming provided little success for the Smith family—their farm in Vermont was riddled with “barren soil and boulders”¹⁷—Joseph Smith Jr. was a “talented” and “imaginative” young boy. He refused poverty and insecurity for a lifetime; “Joseph was not meant to be a plodding farmer, tied to the earth by habit or by love for the recurrent miracle of harvest.”¹⁸ Smith was swept with the post-Revolution “militant patriotism” of the young country and the enthusiasm of the western New York region—the treasure, the money digging, the mineral rods, the religious fervor and the great success of the Erie Canal.¹⁹

¹⁶ Brodie, 6-12.

¹⁷ Ibid, 7.

¹⁸ Ibid, 18.

¹⁹ Ibid, 11.

However, as technological advances aided the modern American man in farming, trade, and business, it could not supply security for all the people.

As a possible response in early 19th century, the American people experimented with Science and religion, which resulted in what D. Michael Quinn terms the “magic world view.” Science and Reason weakened religious faith where people no longer needed celestial answers for their questions; people tried reconciling new advancements in Science with religious beliefs of old. The belief in and practice of magic resulted; however, magic left too many unanswered questions for the developing society, and people remained in an insecure state. They doubted religious faith but could not secure life without it. Eventually they would come to need a religious faith that allowed for modern advancements but still met fundamental needs; they would need a stabilizing force like the LDS Church.

History Embedded in Magic and Religious Doubt

In his young adult life, Smith began practicing treasure digging. Smith’s ancestors were involved in the Salem witch trials, alchemy, and fortune telling. His father Joseph Smith, Sr. was a “firm believer in witchcraft;” in the 1820s he owned and used a divining rod to seek treasure. “Pomeroy Tucker remembered that Smith conducted his first treasure digging with Palmyra residents in the Spring of 1820, and other of Smith’s neighbors agree that in ‘1819 or ’20, they [the Smith family] commenced digging for money for a subsistence.”²⁰ As a teen, Smith had three seer stones,²¹ but in 1855 Brigham Young, the 2nd President of the Mormon Church, claimed Smith had a total of

²⁰ Quinn, Michael D. *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1987) 112.

²¹ Ibid, 38.

five stones.²² One has been passed from President to President and is currently kept in the President's private vault.²³ After the revelation of the Mormon tradition, which Smith received through a seer stone, several of the Church leaders and members continued to use their stones and divining rods.²⁴ The early 19th century community also used amulets and other healing objects and practiced astrology, numerology, and various other quasi-scientific procedures.²⁵

At the time, the magic worldview was defended as being scientific—a quality for which the modern Americans longed. Knowledge, Science, and technology gave them control over the wild frontier that surrounded them. For Smith, practicing magic even gave him a job. Josiah Stowel, an elderly man from Bainbridge, New York, met Smith in 1824 and was so impressed by the boy's magical abilities—"describing in detail the Stowel 'house and outhouses' in South Bainbridge—that he hired Smith to come with him in search for the Spanish silver in the Susquehanna Valley."²⁶ However, there is no record of Smith actually uncovering any treasure (until he uncovers the religious plates that would soon become the foundation of the new Mormon religion.) Some scientific rationalists argued that divining rods acted in relation to the water or treasure it was seeking, making the practice more scientific and thus, more legitimate. Others however, argued that treasure seeking was a religious exercise: the treasure seeker had to have a godly power to find treasure, and God could use the rod for revelation.²⁷ The mixture of religion and Science that magical practices embody signify the condition of both at that

²² Quinn, 199.

²³ Ibid, 196.

²⁴ Ibid, 204.

²⁵ Ibid, 211-221.

²⁶ Brodie, 28,29.

²⁷ Quinn, 30.

time: Science left the people with many holes they could not fill with their own intellect. Moreover, Science confronted religion with rational thought that led many new Americans to disbelief. In 1776, only 17% of Americans attended church.²⁸ Undoubtedly, the scientific incline coupled with religious decline led to magical practices that failed to satisfy the society, shown by its lack of popularity in following years. This is true for Joseph Smith who in a couple of years following renounced treasure seeking, claiming he had never been able to see into a stone.²⁹

Having given up farming and now treasure seeking, Smith needed a profitable business. While working as a treasure hunter for Stowel, Smith and Stowel stayed on Isaac Hale's farm in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Hale, a famous hunter, at first helped fund Smith and Stowel's treasure seeking, but after no success, he quickly became disinterested and not particularly fond of Smith. However, while at the Hale farm, Smith fell in love with Hale's daughter Emma.³⁰ The two secretly married on January 18, 1827. Despite Hale's dismay, he offered to help Smith in business if he would live with him in Pennsylvania, but Smith hated the farmer's life. That same year, Smith uncovered four golden plates that would make him the most successful religious innovator of early America.³¹ Emma, weathered by bankruptcy, the death of her first child, and hostility over Smith's religious findings, wanted Smith to return to her family farm in Pennsylvania, "the only security their marriage offered."³² However, Smith received a revelation from God that was to leave the farm to preach and to depend on his religious followers to support his family. Emma finally conceded to Smith's will; the couple left

²⁸ Finke, 15.

²⁹ Brodie, 32.

³⁰ Ibid, 29.

³¹ Ibid, 37.

³² Ibid, 89.

the farm in Pennsylvania for Fayette, New York, and Emma never saw her family in Pennsylvania again.³³

The magic worldview, in effect, changed the way the early Americans viewed religion. After experimenting with magic and the modern blending of Science with religion, it would be difficult for Smith and his contemporaries to separate the two. From this point forward, religion needed a metaphysical understanding that incorporated faith with modern advancements: the human ability—his intellect, capability, and strength—would have to be a factor when considering God and the universe. Smith, in beginning his religious life, brilliantly spins a religion with scientific understanding that more effectively satisfies people than magic could at the time.

History Embedded in a Void of Religious Authority

The religious state of 18th century America was not strong. From 1718 to 1775 England sent over 50,000 criminals to the colonies. Men, wild and adventurous, were moving to the frontier, and considering women are generally the heart of religious organizations, such demographics did not contribute to pious lifestyles. Instead, the frontier consisted mostly of vice and sin. In addition, the clergy migrating from Europe were generally poor (that is why they came), and clerical imposters also infested the land.³⁴ On the other hand, the established churches also contributed to the irreligiosity of the colonies. The churches at this time became more intellectual and worldly; Harvard and Yale produced ministers who not only conformed theological doctrine to Reason but also lectured instead preached to their congregations.³⁵ In these ways, the country lacked

³³ Brodie, 89,90.

³⁴ Finke, 32-36.

³⁵ Ibid, 45.

strong religious sentiments, the mainline churches fell, readying the people for a religious revival.

Soon after America won Independence, on January 16, 1786, the political leaders promised religious freedom by passing the Ordinance of Religious Freedom, which eventually became the model for the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights approved in 1791. While some dominant churches of the country, namely the Anglican Church of England, had already split into opposing factions—the Anglican Church split between those who supported the King of England as the Church head and those who did not—the official separation of Church and State encouraged the proliferation of religious sects. Where the established churches failed to reach the common people, new religious sects, namely the Baptists and the Methodists, won converts. Finke and Stark give a variety of sociological explanations as the great success of the emergence of the sects at this time. The new sects were more flexible and mobile, and organized themselves in light of the secular market place in which religions now participated.³⁶ They had democratic leadership that appealed to the common people on several layers. One, they modeled themselves after the new United State government they just fought to establish; an established church closely resembled the King of England’s previous rule in the colonies. Two, democracy enabled the common people to lead: friends, not highly professional clergy, appealed to a greater crowd. And three, the new leaders “preached from the heart;”³⁷ they were associated more with prophets, who are closer to God than the Harvard graduates the Episcopal Church employed.³⁸ The greatest success of the religious sects, however, is found in their marketing techniques. The organizations knew

³⁶ Finke, 72,73.

³⁷ Ibid, 76.

³⁸ Ibid, 73-75.

how to work the religious market the 1st Amendment established. For example, on the frontier, many sects held camp meetings that were strategically planned to bring people together and convert sinners. The scattered people of the countryside would gather from miles to participate, not necessarily for the religious aspect of the meetings but for the social component.³⁹ Often revival meetings are thought of as spontaneous and miraculous, but they were in fact well planned. A Methodist minister, Reverend C.C. Goss, even published a book describing the various marketing techniques needed in converting people.⁴⁰ Thus, where the mainline churches failed in attracting the American people, the sects thrived.

Smith grew up in what is now termed the “Burned-Over District” in western New York, named for being “burnt” by the fire of the Spirit. In the 1740s the Great Awakening swept the land; in the 1790s the Second Great Awakening came through, and enthusiast revivals continued beyond 1825. Whitney Cross describes western New York as a particularly susceptible place for religious revivals compared to those in the eastern part of the state, specifically east of the Catskill and Adirondack Mountains:⁴¹ “western New York was more intensively engaged in revivalism than were other portions of the Northeast.”⁴² Cross compares revivals occurring in the Northeast region from 1815-1818, emphasizing the disproportionately large number of revivals in the Burned-Over District: there were 80 religious uprisings in the Burned-Over District while only 6 in Rhode Island, 15 in Connecticut, 21 in eastern New York, and 64 in Massachusetts. Certainly there are several factors that contribute to the religious enthusiasm in this

³⁹ Finke, 96.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 104.

⁴¹ Cross, Whitney R. *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982) 3-5.

⁴² Ibid, 11.

region. First, emigrants moving west were young, hopeful, adventure-seeking men more susceptible to the enthusiasm of the religious waves that swept the region.⁴³ With such religious fervor, it was improbable that a young settler was unaffected by the enthusiasm; in fact, it is highly probable that he or she had attended and/or joined multiple camp meetings and churches, including Joseph Smith Jr., his family, and friends. Second, a large number of missionaries moved west in order to convert the pioneers and “overconcentrated” their attention to the Burned-Over District. “But even the earliest preachers noted the superior interest in religion in the New England pioneers, compared with others of their flocks.”⁴⁴ Thus, the region was ready for religious creativity and the settlers, with so many choices, were ready to find an authoritative faith with a strong leader.

Smith was born into a Christian dissenter family. Harold Bloom describes Smith’s opposition as a distinctly American: “one way of becoming American was to invent oneself out of a sense of opposition.”⁴⁵ His mother, Lucy Mack Smith, came from a family that stressed religious experience over the church. Lucy, who could be described as a mystic, believed in Antinomianism, which believe that “the inner life is a law unto itself; freedom and integrity of religious experience must all costs be preserved.”⁴⁶ His father, Joseph Smith, Sr., was irreligious and cynical.⁴⁷ However, despite growing up without church-going parents, Smith could not escape the proliferation of new religious sects. Between 1814 and 1830, the Methodists split four times. Plus, “unfettered religious liberty began spawning a host of new religions”: the

⁴³ Cross, 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 14,15.

⁴⁵ Bloom, 88.

⁴⁶ Brodie, 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 3.

Shakers, the Oneidas, the Adventists, and others filled the Burned-Out District.⁴⁸ Smith, however, detested the multiplicity of sects, and the religious leaders of the time. When Smith was 18 years old, his brother died, and the preacher told the family that because they did not go to church, his brother was in Hell,⁴⁹ clearly leaving Smith distaste for religious authority. On the other hand, Brodie indicates that while Smith hated the multiplicity of Christian sects, he was interested in their differences and in preaching his own beliefs: “although contemptuous of sectarianism, he liked preaching because it gave him an audience. And this was as essential to Joseph as food.”⁵⁰ Soon after, Smith received a final revelation from God that would end all religious controversies forever.⁵¹

History Embedded in Shallow Roots

In November 1777, the Congress of the United States first established their authority with the signing of the Articles of Confederation and the United States Constitution was finally passed in 1787. The land was under a new authority with a new President and new laws. However, with the new nation, the people enjoyed no common history; only the Native Americans had strong ties with the land, and the settlers certainly did not accept those as their own. The new American people, including Smith, desired their own history. Smith was especially interested in untangling the mystery of the land and establishing a meaningful history that legitimized the settlers’ position there, thus he produces a history with religious significance with which settlers can resonate.

The first plates Smith uncovered were not religious but historical. In Ohio and Western New York, many Indian remains were buried in large mounds. The relics and

⁴⁸ Brodie, 12 (quotation), 12-15 (information).

⁴⁹ Ibid, 27.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 26.

⁵¹ Ibid, 38.

poetry found in these mounds posed a great mystery to the early Americans; the new settlers thought the remains could not be from the native Indians because they were too civilized for them. Thus, people speculated on the mystery, including Smith, whose mother told wild tales about the history of the treasure mounds and the history of the land. In 1837, the first plates Smith found in Manchester, New York where his parents lived included an extensive history of the American land: a story of Jesus in America and two warring races, which he called the “Book of Mormon.”⁵² Smith wrote that soon after Jesus Christ ascended into Heaven, he came back to visit America where a Hebrew tribe, although now divided, lived. After his earthly visit, the two tribes—the Lamanites, the red skinned evil tribe that represents the Indians and the Nephites, the white good tribe that represents the Hebrews—lived in peace. But because of the Satan’s powers, the tribes began to war, and Nephites lost, leaving the Lamanites or the American Indians to occupy America’s land until the arrival of the European settlers.⁵³

Smith’s American history was not outrageous to the people of the time. In fact, it greatly resembled Ethan Smith’s historical theory in *View of the Hebrews; or Ten Tribes of Israel in America*⁵⁴ and included anti-Catholic rhetoric that resonated with the society. In 1828, many Irish Catholics migrated to the region and worked on the Erie Canal; anti-Catholic sentiments ran high. However, Smith’s historical document was eventually lost: Emma Smith and her friend Lucy Harris were not allowed to see the stones, and both were doubtful of their existence. Harris stole the historical manuscript that her husband Martin Harris had helped to transcribe and destroyed them. She thought if the stones included a revelation Smith could read in his seer stone, he could then reproduce

⁵² Brodie, 34-37.

⁵³ Ibid, 43,48.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 46.

it. In April 1828, Smith replaced Harris with Oliver Cowdery as his new transcriber. Smith received a revelation that he was not to reproduce the history that had already been transcribed; instead, he would continue where he left off, which was the beginning of the religious revelation that soon translated into a successful tradition.⁵⁵

Smith once again peered into his two seeing stones, Urim and Thummim, and started translating the stones again. No one was allowed to see the stones, and in translating them, Smith would put one of his seeking stones into a hat, press his face into the hat allowing no light to get in, and a letter would appear to him. Letter by letter, Smith would call the revelation out to Cowdery who recorded it. The pair began translating the second book on April 7, 1829 and finished by July of the same year.⁵⁶

Although this document is the foundation of the most successful American religion, American scholars on the whole have ignored it believing Smith was delusional and claiming the book to be “formless, aimless, or absurd.” Brodie disagrees: “For the book can best be explained, not by Joseph’s ignorance nor by his delusions, but by his responsiveness to the provincial opinions of his time.”⁵⁷ The founder of the Disciples of Christ, Alexander Campbell, agrees with Brodie that Smith’s work is brilliant in context with the time.

This prophet Smith, through his stone spectacles, wrote on the plates of Nephi, in his Book of Mormon, every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years. He decided all the great controversies: --infant baptism, ordination the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation,

⁵⁵ Brodie, 54-60.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 61.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 69.

fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, external punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of free masonry, republican government and their rights of man. . . . But he is better skilled in the controversies in New York than in the geography or history of Judea. He makes John baptize in the village of Bethabara and says Jesus was born in Jerusalem.⁵⁸

Being a product of this early American culture, Smith felt the need for a history. He was in touch with the feelings of the time and created a history with which people could identify. His history, however, not only rooted him historically, but it also rooted him laterally. A combination of the history and the metaphysical beliefs of the LDS faith create a community and heritage to which the American people could belong.

Embedded is an Answer

Smith grew-up in a society steeped in optimism but plagued with insecurity, doubt, little authority, and no sense of history. Smith, consciously or not, identified these problems and addressed them by founding a religion that speaks to each of these needs, and as a leader, Smith became a tangible answer. “The fundamental condition leading to the new faith was the credulity and spiritual yearning which made people anxious to follow a prophet, whoever he might be.”⁵⁹ Smith became the last prophet of God of the true form of Christianity; he became the religious authority the people needed. He was the tangible manifestation of a new faith that “incorporated contemporary interests,” combined “reason and self-interest,” provided “physical comfort and earthly

⁵⁸ Brodie, 69,70.

⁵⁹ Cross, 143.

abundance,” and supplied the answers to all the disputed religious questions of the time.⁶⁰ Smith was a genius because he understood the context of the time and spoke directly the modern and anti-modern needs of the people by forming the LDS tradition. In the following two chapters, I will explore how these needs are met by LDS metaphysical beliefs and through the organization of the Church. Through this exploration it becomes evident that while people have changed in modern times, they have maintained inherent qualities common to people of all ages.

LDS Metaphysical Beliefs

In *The Sacred Canopy* Peter Berger describes the collapse of societal religion in the face of the modernization and secularization of society. The causes of this collapse are important in understanding the shift from pre-modern to modern notions of the cosmos.

In the pre-modern world, sacred legitimization covered every aspect of life. All human productions were understood in terms of the mystifying meanings placed upon them. Berger uses the example of marriage to explain this phenomenon: marriage, a humanly created institution, is seen as sacred in order to establish it as a societal norm and then legitimize it with sacred meaning. Without sacred legitimization, people would not participate in monogamous relationships, family units would not form, and society would be disordered. Thus, the sacred canopy served as a means through which to order

⁶⁰ Cross, 145.

society.⁶¹ However, the sacred canopy begins to collapse as society learns that institutions are in fact their own creations, not heavenly ordained. As they claim back their creations, their belief in the sacred begins to fade.⁶²

This phenomenon is most easily seen in the modern world in the growing number agnostics or atheists, but where is the collapse of the sacred canopy seen among the religious in America? The growing popularity of the LDS tradition seems to challenge Berger's thesis. In studying the LDS metaphysical beliefs, we find that modernization reveals itself differently. The sacred canopy has not completely collapsed because the modern intellect has not completely conquered the world, thus the LDS tradition still believes in the heavenly realm with Gods and an extensive afterlife. There are modern aspects to the beliefs though, LDS have reclaimed many of the institutions they have created, including the institution of God, Heaven, Hell, and so forth. In a very modern way, the LDS have drawn the sacred canopy closer to themselves, allowing them to control and participate in it more directly, but in an anti-modern fashion, they still adhere to an altered concept of the mystifying forces of the sacred canopy. It is this mixture of belief, anti-modern and modern, that reveals human nature today more accurately: people are neither fully pre-modern nor fully modern; instead they are wedged between the two.

A Modern Sense of Control

Martin Heidegger defines modernity as the emergence of the world as humanity's picture. In this age, an individual stands as subject and watches the objects he places before himself work. This contrasts past times when "man is the one who is looked upon

⁶¹ Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1967) 90.

⁶² Berger, 98.

by that which is.”⁶³ In other words, humanity was formerly nature’s object. Today, nature is humanity’s object. In this way, a thing only comes into being by a person placing it before him or her; it is only real and true if a person knows it and controls it.⁶⁴

The LDS metaphysical beliefs closely reflect Heidegger’s definition. The tradition places this world and the next in front of the self; a person exerts control over God, the population of future planets, the coming of the millennium, and most importantly, LDS control the two most horrifying mysteries—life and death. Like modern humanity Heidegger describes, LDS enjoy control of the world.

From the beginning to the end of physical life, the LDS member controls his destiny. The LDS believe in five stages of life—the pre-mortal, childhood, adulthood, millennial existence, and kingdoms of glory. Beginning with the first stage, the pre-mortal, the LDS assert that life exists before physical birth; in other words, all people exist as spirits before birth. Bruce Josephson says, “humanity did not begin to exist at mortal birth, but existed before birth, and will continue to exist after death.”⁶⁵ To use Smith’s words, “the mind of man is as immortal as God himself.”⁶⁶ Therefore, the unborn already exist as spirits in the spiritual world, which may mean that as spirits, people can control their physical birth on earth. With such belief, LDS manage the most uncontrollable aspects of life, birth. We are not born helpless infants, arbitrarily placed

⁶³ Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology*. Translated by William Lovitt. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1977) 131.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 130-135. He says, “The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture” (134).

⁶⁵ Josephson, Bruce R. *The LDS Worldview: A New Interpretation of Christianity*. (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2001) 27.

⁶⁶ Bloom, Harold. *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 124.

into families or countries; instead, we existed as spirits before birth and took part in determining our own reality.

However, Smith never officially documented the doctrine of unborn spirits; the idea has been passed down orally, allowing for many debates within the LDS Church. In fact, the doctrine conflicts with the idea that God and his wife populate the earth. If a finite God sexually creates humanity, how does humanity exist as spirits before birth?⁶⁷ Through debates, leaders of the tradition have smoothed over the details of this apparent contradiction; the details, however, are unimportant here because both doctrines allow for a substantial amount of control for LDS members. Even if the unborn are not spirits in the pre-mortal realm, there is still a strong sense of control in birth. LDS know more precisely how he was born—physically from God and his wife, just as humans procreate on earth. Further still, LDS members are responsible for creating populations of people in the future; they control the life of people to come.

This idea relates to the LDS belief in an ex-nihilo creation: in the LDS tradition, God does not create humanity from nothing.⁶⁸ A material heavenly Father and heavenly Mother procreated planet earth through sexual intercourse: God is a “real person with a tangible body.”⁶⁹ In other words, God is like the humans, and in fact, God was once a man. In this sense, man and woman create the human race, and thus, an individual controls not only his or her personal birth but also the birth of the humanity.

LDS members also control death. In one sense, the LDS doctrine has abolished death altogether: Theodore M. Burton wrote “ ‘actually there is no such thing as the dead

⁶⁷ Bloom, 124.

⁶⁸ Josephson, 28.

⁶⁹ Lang, Bernhard, and Colleen McDannell. “Modern Heaven . . . and a Theology.” In *Mormons and Mormonism*, ed. Eric A. Eliason, 137-146. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.) 137.

... unless one refers to the mortal body, which returns again to earth.”⁷⁰ The LDS believe that death does not destroy the soul; just as the soul lived in the pre-mortal life, it will continue to live in the post-mortal life. In this way, the LDS have abolished the largest fear inherent in all people—death, according to Ernest Becker. He says, “the fear of death is natural and is present in everyone, that it is the basic fear that influences all others, a fear from which no one is immune, no matter how disguised it may be.”⁷¹ People repress the fear in order to maintain a comfortable life and are thus generally oblivious of the fear in the first place.⁷² However, Becker insists the fear is real, and in response, we deny it. Denying death is a modern need. Previously the sacred canopy and the belief in the sacred cosmos provided meaning to death. Although humanity does not still believe in a sacred cosmos, death is a large aspect of life that modern technology cannot secure, people create metaphysical control to make death less scary. LDS respond to this need by denying the death of the soul and controlling its destination in the spirit world.

In light of progress in the modern age, Max Weber describes death, and consequentially life, as meaningless. A person cannot live in full knowledge that his or her life is meaningless, thus he or she will create a meaningful life and death. People of the past died because they were “satiated” with life; life left no unanswered questions. Today, however, progress leaves an infinite body of knowledge that a person could never conquer in a lifetime. Thus, he becomes “tired” with life but not “satiated.” Progress and advancement will continue with or without the individual, and thus death and life

⁷⁰ Lang, 138.

⁷¹ Becker, 15.

⁷² Ibid, 17.

become meaningless.⁷³ In response, the LDS create a deeply meaningful death: in life and death people participate in God's work.

When the physical body dies, LDS control where the soul lives in the heavenly realm. First, there is no Hell in the LDS afterlife but three degrees of Heaven.⁷⁴ This is a much more optimistic than mainline Protestant Christian beliefs in which doctrine states that all men deserve Hell and will go there after death unless God saves him. In the LDS tradition, no person deserves Hell, clearly, because Hell does not exist; all men deserve Heaven. The three divisions are the Celestial Kingdom, the Terrestrial Kingdom, and the Telestial Kingdom, and the person can control which level he or she achieves. If a person accepts the tradition while on earth, he or she can reach the Celestial glory and achieve a god-like status. If a person dies not accepting but decides to accept after death, he or she will achieve the Terrestrial glory and enjoy the presence of Jesus the Son of God and the Holy Ghost. However, if he or she refuses to ever accept, the person will experience the Telestial glory and only enjoy the presence of the Holy Ghost.⁷⁵ In order to achieve the Celestial Kingdom, the person must exercise his or her right to choose between good and evil. By choosing good and obeying the tenets of the LDS Church, he can achieve god-like status and eventually become God of a personal planet. A person can achieve this without the help of Jesus or God.

One factor that might have contributed to Smith's formation of the afterlife is the death of his brother Alvin. The preacher at the funeral " 'intimated very strongly that he had gone to hell.'"⁷⁶ On top of that agony, the Smith family heard Alvin's body had been

⁷³ Weber, 139,140.

⁷⁴ Josephson, 33.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 33-37.

⁷⁶ Brodie, 27-28.

unburied and dissected, which prompted his father to return to the burial site, unbury his son to find that the body had not been disturbed. Nevertheless, the rumor had done its damage: enraged by the minister's sermon and embarrassed by the rumor, the family was undoubtedly scared.⁷⁷ In Smith's system, Alvin is not perishing in Hell, instead, I suspect that through the LDS doctrine of genealogical baptism, Alvin is believed to be in Heaven with his family. In this way, Smith was able to control what he could not control—his brother's destiny.

LDS control the salvation of others in addition to controlling their personal salvation. First, Smith instituted the practice of genealogical baptism in the LDS tradition through which LDS members can achieve salvation for those who have come before Smith's revelation. South of Salt Lake City is the Granite Mountain Records Vault of the Genealogical Society of Utah that holds billions of names of the dead that LDS constantly work to baptize. Some LDS temples are open all day and night while members pray for the names of the dead and give them the opportunity to convert to the LDS tradition.⁷⁸ In such a bold practice, the LDS show they exert control not only in this world and the next for themselves but also for others.

Second, Smith declares that all babies and young children who die directly enter adulthood in the spirit realm where they progress like other LDS until the millennium, when they return to babies. Mary V. Hill, an LDS member, wrote a book describing the interaction she had with her child Stephen who died at 4 months. Stephen assured his mother that he was in the spirit realm and told her that they would be reunited in "the

⁷⁷ Brodie, 28.

⁷⁸ Bloom, 120,121.

resurrection.”⁷⁹ This is a great example of how LDS know and control the afterlife. As Heidegger says, truth and reality to modern man is only that which he knows and can put before him. Through a supernatural vision, Mary V. Hill knows her son is in Heaven and through her work and belief, will be able to join him again some day.

A Modern Sense of Progress

The LDS metaphysical beliefs show a good deal of the modern person’s desire for progression achieved through hard work. Historian Karl Löwith’s describes the notion of progression towards an ultimate good as modern: Löwith says modern people have a hopeful and progressive worldview, meaning that people are focused on achieving a better future. Humanity is eager to reach the end and believes that that end will be superior to the present.⁸⁰ This notion of hopeful progression is seen in LDS thought in their optimistic view of humanity. For example, LDS believe that God was once a man just as man, through his own merit and strength can achieve godhood. Thus, modern people are progressing towards perfection, power, ultimate control, until they finally become God themselves. Jan Shipps contrasts the LDS conception of Heaven to those of other Christian traditions: “Consequently, the ultimate goal of the Latter-Day Saints is not entirely somehow spent in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven. Mormonism holds up a different goal: ‘eternal progress’ toward godhood.”⁸¹

The LDS belief in the establishment of the millennium is the best example of hopeful progression in the LDS tradition. The Church believes it is currently building the ideal society, a theocratic state called the millennium, which is necessary for the return of

⁷⁹ Lang, 140.

⁸⁰ Löwith, Karl. *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*. (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1949) 19.

⁸¹ Bloom, 123.

Jesus on earth; this belief differs from other Christian traditions in that the LDS are responsible through their own merit for preparing for Jesus' return.⁸² Smith believed he would establish the Kingdom of God on earth during his lifetime: he "had the American concern with the earthly paradise."⁸³ In fact, crowning himself the King of the Kingdom of God, Smith believed he has achieved it. Since that time, it is probable that two other presidents of the LDS Church, Brigham Young and John Taylor, crowned themselves King as well.⁸⁴ In this way, the LDS believe that the history of the world is progressing in a positive manner; the world is growing positively instead of falling into decay, an idea with which other theorists would agree. Not only is society progressing though, it is the progression of LDS individuals who are establishing the millennium; they believe they are capable of achieving works of god-like magnitude on earth.

Thus, LDS have a personal concept of progression as well as a societal one. In describing the afterlife, McDannell and Lang use the term "spirit world" as the place "where the soul develops until the resurrection," or in other words, the establishment of the millennium on earth.⁸⁵ Until the millennium is established though, LDS and non-LDS alike have the opportunity to develop their individual position post-death in this spirit world. "Since there is no judgment at death, evil spirits and those ignorant of the truth are not condemned to eternal suffering. They are given the chance in the spirit world to exercise their free will and decide whether or not to believe in the LDS revelation."⁸⁶ This belief shows two modern aspects. First, the rational, decision-making mind remains intact in the spirit world—an important characteristic for the modern

⁸² Josephson, 32.

⁸³ Bloom, 108.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 89.

⁸⁵ Lang, 138.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 138.

person. Because people progress through personal achievements in this world, it is important that they continue to do so in the next. Second, nonbelievers are given a second opportunity to accept LDS beliefs so that they too can enjoy the higher heavenly kingdoms. It is appealing to the modern mind without the sacred canopy and fearful of death that our decisions on earth are not final; in the spirit world, everyone gets a second chance.

Latter-Day Saints work diligently in the spiritual realm: they “continue to teach, do missionary work, and guide other members in the spirit world.”⁸⁷ Work, to the LDS, is a very important part of the religion: by helping others, choosing good over evil, and obeying the Church tenets, they can progress towards a god-state. There is a vision that Church President Wilford Woodruff (1807-1898) relays about seeing Joseph Smith in Heaven, rushing past him very busily. Woodruff asked Smith why he was so busy, and Smith replied that even in Heaven, there is much work to be accomplished. Through this work, LDS progress towards perfection. Another aspect of progressing towards perfection is continuing to live with your eternal spouse and continuing to procreate. The ultimate goal is for every couple to have their own planet and populate it like the heavenly Mother and Father have populated planet earth.⁸⁸

The emphasis on work in achieving salvation in the LDS tradition is significant point of departure from orthodox Christian thought. In fact, LDS thought sees no need for salvation because humanity does not need to be saved: they deny the concept of original sin and believe humanity is inherently good. The post-Jesus age fell into

⁸⁷ Lang, 139.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 143.

apostasy and needed a new prophet, Joseph Smith, to lead and teach.⁸⁹ Mainline Christianity understands humanity as inherently evil and in need of a Savior God, Jesus Christ, in which the religion centers on God's acts, not man's acts. The LDS focus primarily on Jesus' life and example rather than his crucifixion. LDS believe because human nature is inherently good, a person can work his or her way not to salvation but exaltation.⁹⁰

Therefore, because LDS work in the spirit realm just as they work on earth—remaining physically intact and evangelizing—the spirit world is not very different from the physical realm. For instance, the LDS God who was once a man has a physical, human body.⁹¹ In other words, the spiritual realm and God are very close to humanity, which Martin Heidegger describes as a characteristic of modernity.⁹² Technology and Science has brought the modern age into a time where nothing is distant, where people can control most things. For example, students download and email songs across the world with an effortless click of a button, and terrorist groups on one side of the world coordinate bombings on the other. This shortened distance and extreme access to the world is seen in the LDS access to God: not only is the separation between humanity and God small in terms of the influence LDS have in the coming of the millennium and the progression of the afterlife, but the distance shortens even more as people progress towards perfection and godhood.

A Modern Sense of Autonomy

⁸⁹ Josephson, 67.

⁹⁰ White, O. Kendall, Jr. *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology*, 140-149.

⁹¹ Lang, 143.

⁹² *The Question Concerning Technology*, 135.

Coupling modernity with the secularization of society, Thomas Luckmann describes the emergence of the autonomous individual as “perhaps, the most revolutionary trait of modern society.”⁹³ As the sacred canopy faded during secularization, the public institutions that were formally governed by the sacred cosmos and thus shared by the entire society became privatized into separate spheres, and the sphere of the individual self emerged. People began to understand themselves as individuals instead of in relation to the community. Luckmann says, “The ‘liberation’ of the individual consciousness from the social structure and the ‘freedom’ in the ‘private sphere’ provide the basis for the somewhat illusory sense of autonomy which characterizes the typical person in modern society.”⁹⁴ The fact that a person’s autonomy is “illusory” speaks to the inherent need for community and authority in people’s life, which will be addressed later. Here, the importance is that modern people view themselves as autonomous and desire that freedom; this is what LDS project in their metaphysical beliefs.

The belief that a person can become God and one day rule his or her planet alone is a strong example of modern humanity’s desire for autonomy. The metaphysical belief supported by Luckmann’s definition alone proves to be modern. However, the belief is also supported by the modern context from which the belief arose. In this way, Harold Bloom describes the LDS belief as not only modern but also American.

The LDS want to govern life as Gods alone,⁹⁵ which makes sense considering the historical context from which the LDS tradition comes. The revolutionary Americans were hard working, self-sufficient people who depended on no one. “Smith’s God, after

⁹³ Luckmann, 97.

⁹⁴ Luckmann, 97.

⁹⁵ Bloom, 114.

all, began as a man, a struggled heroically in and with time and space, rather after the pattern of colonial and revolutionary Americans.”⁹⁶ The early Americans broke from England to create a new, more perfect place in America. Smith had the same American ideal of paradise,⁹⁷ yet he struggled to achieve it on earth. As a child, Smith’s family suffered through the economic depression caused by President Jefferson’s embargo on England and France and suffered bankruptcy.⁹⁸ As an adult Smith and his wife Emma could hardly make ends meet: they first moved to Manchester, New York to live with Smith’s parents and then back to Pennsylvania to live with Isaac Hale, Emma’s father.⁹⁹ Although Smith struggled to create his own earthly paradise, he succeeded in establishing a system of beliefs where humanity can create a heavenly one. If LDS work hard in the faith, they are guaranteed to rule a personal planet one day.

Anti-Modern Needs

As Luckmann indicates and Heidegger and Löwith echo, the modern person may appear and desire to be autonomous, but he is fundamentally incapable of living in an autonomous, self-sufficient way. All three thinkers question the modern person’s ability to live in an ever progressing, hard working, and autonomous world. Luckmann understands modern autonomy as illusory because the modern individual inevitably places devotion into an institution to find security and meaning, regardless if it is religious or not. This devotion to what Luckmann terms “secondary institutions” shows people do not desire to exist completely alone.¹⁰⁰ Heidegger thinks humanity needs to be rooted in meditative thinking and reflection; it is dangerous for modern individuals to

⁹⁶ Bloom, 101.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 108.

⁹⁸ Brodie, 7.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Luckmann, 104.

focus only on personal betterment.¹⁰¹ Löwith questions whether modernity can continue under the assumption of optimistic progression while living in a secular and profane world. He argues progression comes from the Christian perspective that includes a hopeful eschaton, but with the eschaton removed in the secularization of society, modernity progresses towards nothing.¹⁰² Thus, modernity lives under the “illusion of progress” that does not exist.¹⁰³ In light of these doubts, we must question whether modern people can exist in these illusions of modernity.

As Luckmann argues in his analysis of secondary institutions, modernity has not completely empowered the individual to fulfill all inherent needs and is thus attracted to institutions that provide meaning, authority, and security he or she cannot personally provide. LDS metaphysical beliefs provide these needs for its members with historical roots, a supernatural canopy, and a religious prophet, which allow for the tradition’s popularity.

An Anti-Modern History

God revealed to Smith a unique North American history that provides deep roots for the LDS that America did not provide at the time. In the account of the Nephite and Lamanites described previously, LDS are the descendents of the Nephite tribe who lost in battle against the Lamanites (who became known as the Native Americans). This narrative provides a strong sense of roots to a previously unrooted people because with the return of the white skin Europeans, the LDS believe that they, as Nephites, have come

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, Martin. *A Discourse on Thinking*. Translated by John. M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 56.

¹⁰² Löwith, 191.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 200.

to claim their land.¹⁰⁴ The history legitimizes the settler's move to the new land, their maltreatment of the Native Americans, and provides a sacred meaning for their settling of the land. They believe North American soil belongs to the Nephites, thus they have returned to reclaim it.

Martin Heidegger and Wendell Berry expand on the need for vertical roots in a time of modern movement and chaos. Wendell Berry writes an interesting essay on the condition of the modern individual who lives without vertical or lateral roots. He compares the pre-modern life to that of the farm: people used to inherit land, depend on the soil and hard work to survive; and when the vertical roots failed, when the soil produced a bad crop, the farmer depended on his lateral roots, his neighbors, for survival. The modern person goes through life unrooted, and because of it, he suffers.¹⁰⁵

On one level, Berry is literal about the importance of the physical land in which we are rooted; meaning that being embedded in the land out of which one grows is important to feeling secure. (Wendell Berry lives on a family farm in Kentucky.) On another level, roots are figurative. Heidegger uses the same metaphor when he addresses the need for meditative thought opposed to modern, calculative thought. He argues the modern individual must reflect, understand his or her surroundings, and appreciate life and life's supports instead of existing in a purely calculative world that focuses only on beneficial production.¹⁰⁶ He quotes Johann Peter Hebel to support his argument: "We are plants which—whether we like to admit it to ourselves or not—must with our roots rise

¹⁰⁴ Brodie, 43,48.

¹⁰⁵ Berry, Wendell. "People, Land, and Community." In *People, Land, and Community: Collected by E.F. Schumacher Society Lectures*, ed. Hildegard Hannum, 142-153. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

¹⁰⁶ *Discourse on Thinking*, 56.

out of the earth in order to bloom in the ether and to bear fruit.”¹⁰⁷ Berry and Heidegger argue people need roots, and the popularity of the LDS Church supports their claims. A sacred and meaningful history appeals to the unrooted, disconnected position in the fast-paced modern world.

An Anti-Modern Divinity

Despite the closeness of the spirit world to the earth and the control LDS exhibit in it, the LDS metaphysical construct still resembles pre-modern religion in that it exhibits anti-modern characteristics. They believe in an afterlife, a God with superhuman powers, and various planets that the human mind cannot prove or know at this time. For instance, intellect does not prove the multiple tiers of Heaven in the LDS cosmos; those who believe must have faith it exists. In some respects, it resembles the sacred canopy Peter Berger describes, but in this modern context, the sacred canopy does not envelope the entire cosmos. LDS do not attribute rain and thunderstorms to God’s wrath any longer because with modern knowledge, they explain such natural phenomenon scientifically. Thus, the sacred canopy only covers that which the intellect cannot explain, especially answers to the mystery of death. Grant Underwood believes the LDS tradition is anti-modern in this way because it is anti-intellectual. He says, “its persistent supernaturalism keeps it intellectually insulated from the acids of modernity.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, LDS supernaturalism has increased rather than decreased like so many other traditions in this century.

If anything, the Latter-Day Saints in the twentieth century have become even bolder in their assertion of their importance of their heavenly

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 57.

¹⁰⁸ Underwood, 204.

theology. The number of books on eternal life increases yearly, Mormon information centers throughout the world dramatize the story of salvation for the non-believing public, and contemporary LDS writers feel comfortable quoting extensively from nineteenth-century visionary accounts. In the light of what they perceive as a Christian world, which has given up belief in heaven, many Latter-Day Saints feel even more of a responsibility to define the meaning of death and eternal life.¹⁰⁹

Faith, religion, and anti-modern thought is positive thought in modernity because religion answers the questions humanity still cannot solve and thus makes him insecure: religion answers the questions of existence and death.¹¹⁰ Modern individuals do not know the fate of the soul after death, thus faith in the supernatural secures LDS by answering this fundamental fear. The fact that modern people still need these answers reveals modern intellect falls short of human needs, and modern people are insecure in and of themselves.

An Anti-Modern Prophet

We have seen previously that LDS enjoy autonomous rule of a planet in their metaphysical system, but such autonomy brings insecurity. A person cannot lead completely alone. In response, the LDS system provides a living, divinely ordained prophet for the people to follow. (The current LDS President is also considered and referred to as Prophet.) People want and need an authoritative leader, a need to which modernity does not cater. “But America was ripe for a religious leader wearing the mantle of authority and speaking God’s word as one ordained in heaven to that purpose.

¹⁰⁹ Lang, 145.

¹¹⁰ Becker, 203.

His mission should be to those who found religious liberty a burden, who needed determinate ideas and familiar dogmas, and who fled from the solitude of independent thinking.”¹¹¹ Just as Smith detested the multiple church splits in the Burned Over District, others did as well, and in this way, Smith, as a prophet of God, provided the answers humanity needs.¹¹²

Becker describes this phenomenon in Sigmund Freud’s term, transference.¹¹³ For example, children see their parents as gods and naturally want to obey them, but as the child grows and this natural feeling lessens, he must transfer the feelings elsewhere. Ferenczi says, “the need to be subject to someone remains; only the part of the father is transferred to teachers, superiors, impressive personalities,” including religious leaders like Joseph Smith.¹¹⁴ Smith’s popularity in his time only strengthens the argument that people crave strong leadership in their lives as a place of security. However, this need for authority met by religion is not peculiar the Burned-Over District. Because every President of the LDS Church since Smith is also the Prophet of God, every LDS member, past to present, has believed in and submitted to the authority of the current Prophet. Clearly, leadership is strong in the LDS tradition, but the success of the tradition lies in the balance of modern and anti-modern characteristics and in this case, the balance of autonomy and submission to authority. Individuals still strive for autonomous rule, but when answers are needed in this lifetime, the current Prophet can provide them.

Therefore, the metaphysical beliefs of the LDS tradition are both modern and anti-modern, catering to both aspects of humanity today. They allow humanity control in

¹¹¹ Brodie, 91.

¹¹² Cross, 145.

¹¹³ Becker, 129.

¹¹⁴ Becker, 131.

the afterlife, progression and exaltation through hard work, and autonomy while fulfilling the needs for historical meaning, supernatural beliefs, and an authoritative leader where intellect fails. The organization and structure of the LDS tradition also serves these modern and anti-modern ideals, which is crucial in a highly secularized society.

Church Organization

The LDS Church emerged from and thrives in a secularized society. It is modern in that it is highly successful in a secularized society, and it markets itself as such. From the package the Church sells to the world, the religion appears fully Christian and fully modern. However, the Church also has anti-modern characteristics that are imperative for growth: they are a close-knit community and are working towards a theocratic state. Therefore, the Church operates in a tension of selling itself as modern so to achieve anti-modern goals.

Peter Berger describes the current state of religion in a highly secularized society, telling how religion has changed from a monopolizing force in the sacred canopy to a competitor in the market place. As the sacred canopy collapsed, a religiously pluralistic society emerged. In such a society like the United States, various Christian sects co-exist and compete with worldly religions like Islam and Buddhism and new cults and public obsessions like MTV and football. Thus, religions exist in separate spheres of the market—the religious market—in which they must compete and sell their products:

religions have moved “from monopolies to competitive marketing agencies.”¹¹⁵

Accompanying the competitive nature of the religious market is a new emphasis on success; without attracting new members, a religion will go out of business. Thus, religions must compete like businesses; they must employ bureaucratic strategies internally, so that the Church runs most efficiently, and externally, so that it can maintain its position in the market place.¹¹⁶

Because religion is now privatized and must compete for members, the LDS Church manipulates its product like other secular competitors. Although it appears the LDS Church compromises its fundamental doctrines, overall, LDS beliefs have remained the same.

Sociologist Rodney Stark responds to Berger’s secularization theory, agreeing that religions now must compete for members but does not think secularization brings death to religion. Instead, secularization leads to “the outbreak of new faiths.”¹¹⁷ The LDS tradition will be successful in modern societies as long as modernization brings extreme secularism, as seen in 19th century America. Thus, without modernization and the consequential secularization, Smith’s efforts would not have succeeded and the LDS Church would not have emerged as it did.

Just as the secularized and pluralistic market readied 19th century America for the introduction of new religions, the LDS Church and other religions depend on secularization to continue today. They depend on the First Amendment to protect their

¹¹⁵ Berger, 138.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 133-140.

¹¹⁷ Stark, Rodney. “Modernization, Secularization, and Mormon Success.” In *In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America*, ed. Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, 201-218. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 1990) 201.

belief systems, even if they are against to the spirit of secularization.¹¹⁸ Smith believed that he was a prophet from God to all people and that he would establish a theocratic state. Still striving for this goal today, the LDS Church use their rights in a secularized market to recruit new members in order to recreate the sacred canopy that has been destroyed. They cannot separate religion from politics and economics because these are key points of entry into the secular market; politics and economics are domains in which the religion establishes itself and through which it will ultimately achieve a theocratic state. While Smith struggled in his life, the Church has been highly successful: “one of Mormonism’s greatest strengths is its willingness to adopt means and strategies to fit changing circumstance.”¹¹⁹

Throughout his life, Smith tested the government on which he greatly depended for religious freedom. His offenses ranged from being “a disorderly person and an imposter” at age 21¹²⁰ to “destroying the press” at age 39.¹²¹ Ultimately, Smith’s belief that he was a prophet of God and his efforts to establish a theocracy lead to his death on June 27, 1844: he along with several other Mormon leaders were imprisoned and then shot to death by a mob of militiamen.¹²² Smith was unable to reconcile the fact he lived in a secular setting that allowed his tradition to grow with his desire to reestablish a sacred canopy. However, Smith succeeded in recruiting members, and his members formed a Church that finally learned to assimilate to American politics, excel in economics, and market its product so that they could become the fastest growing religion today. They

¹¹⁸ Heinerman, John, and Anson Shupe. *The Mormon Corporate Empire*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) 3.

¹¹⁹ Heinerman, 55.

¹²⁰ Brodie, 16.

¹²¹ Krakauer, Jon. *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*. (New York: Doubleday, 2003)

130.

¹²² *Ibid*, 128-132.

have abandoned the explicit desires for theocracy and communism, assimilated and participated in democracy and capitalism with the hopes of someday establishing a theocratic and communistic state.¹²³ Therefore, LDS assimilation into American society through economics, politics, and effective marketing has been imperative to Mormon growth.

Modern Political Involvement

Resisting assimilation into the American political system imposed several hardships upon the Church. They had to join mainstream society without compromising religious convictions, which they brilliantly accomplished through divine revelation by the President, the highest office in the Church and the current Prophet of God.¹²⁴ It is most sacred: not only have Smith, Brigham Young, and other heroes of the faith filled the role as President, but the President is in direct contact with God. He receives revelations from God, and his writings are considered canonical. In this way, the President is able to protect the sacred of the religion while responding to the secular needs of the Church. Thus, “shrouded in the ‘sacred canopy’ of modern revelation, Mormons are free to pick and choose their way into modernity” with the guidance of living prophets.¹²⁵ Divine revelation has allowed the LDS to assimilate successfully into mainstream American politics, and in several ways, the leaders of the Church act not only as religious leaders but also political ones.

Joseph Smith established the doctrine of plural marriages on the precedent of the Old Testament but created a new theological basis for it, promising that “celestial

¹²³ Heinerman, 3.

¹²⁴ Josephson, 75.

¹²⁵ Underwood, 205.

marriages,” those sealed in the LDS temple, will continue in Heaven.¹²⁶ A man’s progression to godhood in Heaven is related to the rate at which he can populate his new planet; the more wives he has, the faster he will progress.¹²⁷ After some initial resistance, LDS men accepted and practiced polygamy. Plural marriages, however, were unlawful in the United States, and for several decades, the LDS resisted and combated the federal government. In 1882, Congress passed the Edmunds Act, which made polygamy and “unlawful cohabitation” offenses worthy of prosecution. At that time, federal agents invaded Utah on “cohab hunts” and jailed about a thousand LDS, but LDS remained defiant. After years of fleeing and hiding from the United States government, the President of the Church through divine revelation declared polygamy forbidden in the name of God.¹²⁸ The disestablishment of polygamy in LDS doctrine is a great example of divine revelation navigating the Church in a secularized society. Externally, the LDS has little choice but to denounce polygamy, and the revelation only benefited the Church. For example, in 1896, the Utah territory, where the LDS had lived separated by mainstream America, became a state after the divine denouncement of polygamy.¹²⁹ LDS members began to move from Utah and participate in mainstream society, which not only led to secular assimilation but also for missionary opportunities.

Political assimilation through divine revelation was also seen in 1978 with a revelation allowing black men to become priests in the LDS tradition.¹³⁰ As racial discrimination became less tolerated in American society, the LDS Church undoubtedly felt pressure to stop discriminating and allow black men into the priesthood. While it

¹²⁶ Brodie, 297,298.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 300.

¹²⁸ Krakauer, 251-252.

¹²⁹ “Seduced by the Numbers: The Impact of Growth on Mormon Identity,” 5.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 6.

seems logical that external pressures from late 20th century America would have affected the denial of priesthood to black men—the NAACP made public statements against the Church and other college teams refused to play Brigham Young University—Bruce Josephson attributes the change to the internal pressures of the Church. He argues internal pressure was greater than the external: denying blacks the priesthood prohibited international growth of the Church, and by including blacks, the Church has grown tremendously.¹³¹ Regardless of the pressure points for the change, once it occurred, LDS further entered mainstream society, and the tradition experienced great international growth.

After the LDS Church abandoned their hopes of a communistic and theocratic state in Utah and joined the American political system, they have cleverly used it as a means to promote their ideals.¹³² The case of the anti-Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the late 1970s is a strong example of the power the LDS carry in American politics. (The ERA reads, “Equality of Rights under the law should not be denied or abridge by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”¹³³) LDS are generally politically conservative; they often vote Republican because that is the party many LDS leaders recommend. When the ERA was proposed, the LDS Church felt threatened, thinking morality would be compromised and they set out to defeat it. Church leaders encouraged women to attend conferences and to vote against the amendment; the LDS women responded. In the 1977 Utah Women’s Conference, about 3,000 women were expected to attend, but with LDS encouragement, 13,000 attended. In result, the conference elected 14 anti-ERA, white delegates to the National Conference in Houston, 13 of which

¹³¹ Josephson, 146-149.

¹³² Heinerman, 142.

¹³³ Ibid, 144.

were LDS. In Nevada, the Church mobilized 95% of LDS residents to vote against the ERA.¹³⁴ Around the same time, many states such as Florida were in a tight decision in ratifying the amendment. This time, instead of sending people, the Church sent money to Florida conservatives for an anti-ERA vote. “This campaign put thousands of dollars into the campaign chests of four Republican state Senate candidates and funded a massive anti-ERA advertising campaign that included printing and distributing 425,000 anti-ERA leaflets.”¹³⁵ Estimates say the LDS raised about 60,000 dollars for anti-ERA conservatives.¹³⁶ These LDS efforts show that the Church is no longer afraid of engaging politically, but in fact they embrace the American political system and use it for their own goals.

Modern Economics

Smith brilliantly combined religion with economics and political power in order to advance the Church: “Joseph has somehow succeeded in wielding two antithetical principles—he had come to identify the goodness of God with the making of money.”¹³⁷ Such combination allows for tremendous growth and competition in the secular market without which the religion could not compete with other institutions. Of about 112 revelations Smith received, 88 were economically relevant.¹³⁸ For example, Smith revealed in January 1841 that God wanted the Mormons to build a hotel in Nauvoo, the growing Mormon city in Illinois that included details such as to the specific amount the Mormons could earn from the stock in the hotel and reserving a suite in the hotel for

¹³⁴ Ibid, 142-150.

¹³⁵ Heinerman, 150.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 151.

¹³⁷ Brodie, 263.

¹³⁸ Heinerman, 77.

Smith and his family.¹³⁹ Nauvoo continued to grow as converts moved in and businesses flourished. Because their ultimate goal is to prepare a theocracy for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the LDS do not separate religion from politics and economics.¹⁴⁰ Instead they engage in them actively, “the Church runs a virtual business empire” with assets estimating 8 billion dollars.¹⁴¹

The LDS Church has invested in numerous companies, but with “extensive investments in radio, television, and space satellites” their primary focus is the communications industry that reaches millions of people worldwide.¹⁴² The LDS entered the industry in 1832 with the publication of their first newspaper. In 1850, they published *Deseret News*, the first newspaper west of the Mississippi River, and ideas for the Deseret Book Company started formulating in 1866. These humble beginnings have expanded: in 1965, the LDS Church owned 300,000 shares in the Times-Mirror Corporation, enough to have some control in the corporation, and in 1985, they owned the Bonneville International, a media conglomerate, three television stations, and 12 radio stations. In 1981, they purchased 500 satellite receiver dish antennas, forming one of the largest television networks. These examples barely illustrate the magnitude of the Church’s economic influence. By investing, purchasing, and creating new businesses, the Church achieves two important goals. First, they make money: 8 billion dollars, estimated in 1985, is only an estimate because the Church does not publish the amount of money they make. Second, with the money and through the multiple corporations they

¹³⁹ Brodie, 263.

¹⁴⁰ Josephson, 107.

¹⁴¹ Heinerman, 76.

¹⁴² Heinerman, 29.

influence, they are able to spread their beliefs and continue in their effort to establish a theocracy.¹⁴³

Not only does the LDS Church run like a corporation, but they also have many members who are individually successful in the economic market that adds to the Church's influence. The Marriots, a devout LDS family, own a large and well-known hotel chain, 14 radio stations, and most likely participate in other business opportunities.¹⁴⁴ Powerful and rich families, like the Marriots, help the Church in a couple of ways. They not only tithe a good portion of the money to the Church, but they also help lead the Church in its economical enterprises. In fact, many of the leaders, including the President, the Council of 12, and other high-ranking officials, have strong business backgrounds. The President of the Church, the most sacred of all positions, directly combines his religious authority with his business savvy. While the Church has always been interested in economic ventures, President Harold B. Lee in 1972 brought the Church to a new corporate level. He employed Crescent, McCormick & Paget, a consulting firm based in New York City to reorganize the Church's financial holdings, their businesses, and the bureaucratic structure of the Church.¹⁴⁵ In 1985, Church President Spencer W. Kimball was a banker and businessman and all of the Counselors and Apostles were businessmen, lawyers, politicians, or held other high power jobs. Again, the Church from Smith and through Lee has been ruled under highly capable businessmen who are able to use their skills in the market place to promote the Church and LDS goals.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 32-55.

¹⁴⁴ Heinerman, 49.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 90.

Modern Marketing

The LDS involvement in the communications industry has allowed the Church to successfully market its product. However, what exactly is the Church marketing? What message does it send to the general public to win members? Not only are the means of competition politically and economically modern, but its message is modern as well. The LDS Church has moved away from a history of negative connotations in order to promote a more sellable product under the guise of mainline Christianity.

In the past few decades, the LDS Church has changed its outward appearances to appear more Christian in order to become more attractive in the market. For example, in 1982, the official name of the Book of Mormon changed from *The Book of Mormon* to *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. In 1992, the Church changed its logo also to emphasize the name of Jesus Christ; it now reads “The Church of JESUS CHRIST of Latter-day Saints.” The Church advertises on television by emphasizing family virtues that few would dispute, and at the end of the message, the announcer says “this message was brought to you by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons.” However, some messages are starting to eliminate “the Mormons.” In 2001, the President of the Church informed LDS bishops to refrain from using Mormon to describe the Church and instead using its full name. These instances show the replacement of the name Mormon with Jesus Christ, which shows the Church’s efforts to market itself with the mainline Christian message.¹⁴⁶

With such marketing, the LDS Church is changing its image; it is no longer satisfied with the Mormon image of the past, especially the image of polygamy. The first statement that ended polygamy indicated polygamy would be discontinued,

¹⁴⁶ White, “Seduced by the Numbers” 14-18.

acknowledging it had once been practiced. Now, Church officials seem to deny polygamy ever occurred. The LDS Church has published a 370-page volume on the life and teachings of Brigham Young with “meticulous concern with the preservation of ‘original spelling and punctuation’” that never refers to Young’s plural marriages or teachings on polygamy.¹⁴⁷ In this example, the Church not only moves away from its history but also denies it. They do not want to be associated with Mormon history because of its negative reputation, thus they market themselves as a mainline Christian denomination that is more readily accepted in the religious market.

In marketing its product, the LDS Church has altered its message: Mormon history and the story of Joseph Smith are now second to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, secularization, as Berger suggests, has altered the face of religion. However, although the outward appearance of the LDS Church appears more Christian, its anti-modern Mormon goals have not changed. While there are some orthodox Christian movements emerging in the tradition as O. Kendall White describes, these movements do not appear to represent the majority. For example, White writes about the neo-orthodoxy movement in the LDS Church in which LDS intellectuals agree more with Protestant theology of grace over works than the tradition metaphysical beliefs of the tradition.¹⁴⁸ However, this movement is not yet normative LDS thought. The materialistic and man-centered metaphysical beliefs described previously still serve as the official foundations of the Church. Therefore, the LDS Church would still be considered a “radical heresy” to Christianity.¹⁴⁹ Thus, the marketing of the religion as Christian does not compromise

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 19.

¹⁴⁸ White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology*.

¹⁴⁹ White, “Seduced by the Numbers,” 17.

average LDS belief; such marketing is only a means to an end. It is a technique to achieve the anti-modern goal of theocracy in a secularized society.

Anti-Modern Community Structure

While it is necessary for the Church to use political, economic, and marketing means to achieve their religious goals in a modern and secular manner, in these efforts, LDS do not forfeit the need of the practitioners to feel part of a special group. As with metaphysical beliefs that bring a history and community to the people, the LDS have constructed insular structures that promote a community feeling for the religion.

Rodney Stark identifies one component of LDS success as their ability to maintain a healthy amount of tension with the outside world. While they market themselves as mainstream Christians, internally they set themselves apart from society. Tension, in general, disallows religions to blend too closely with society, which gives little incentive for a person to stay in a church. On the other hand, too much tension or too many differences with the society may deter people from practicing religion altogether. Thus, Stark suggests religions need to maintain a medium tension, as the LDS have.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps the most beneficial outcome of creating tension with society is the network ties or strong interpersonal relationships that develop within the group: “religious commitment is sustained by interpersonal attachments.”¹⁵¹ Tension lends to network ties because as a group set apart from society, the members will more readily cling to one another. For instance, LDS youth who are forbidden to drink alcohol and caffeine or smoke tobacco will more likely befriend each other because they are set apart from the other children in school. LDS youth maintain a tension with secular society by

¹⁵⁰ Stark, “Modernization, Secularization, and Mormon Success,” 222.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 235.

shunning mainstream culture, which creates stronger network ties within LDS youth and provides for a greater sense of community.

This need for a tension with society shows that society alone does not satisfy people. People join religions that look different than secular philosophies. This is true with the decay in the Congregationalist and Episcopal Church in the early 19th century: because the churches became more intellectual, they blended with secular philosophies and people no longer needed to attend.¹⁵² However, as Stark indicates, this extreme secularization allows for new religious traditions to emerge, traditions that oppose the norms of the time.¹⁵³ People cannot survive in a society that does not provide community with other people. The LDS Church provides a structure in which community is central.

On the local level, the LDS organize in “wards,” which are geographically defined areas that serve the smaller LDS communities. In the context of the wards, LDS share every aspect of their lives; it is the “focus of the social, political, and economic life of the community.”¹⁵⁴ For example, the LDS women who participated in the anti-ERA efforts, gathered enthusiasm on the ward level. High-ranking LDS leaders contact ward leaders who reach the members of each ward.¹⁵⁵ In the anti-ERA example, ward participation was very high, which is not uncommon. In fact, LDS is successful partly because of their high ward participation,¹⁵⁶ and the successes are enjoyed two-fold. First, the Church functions more smoothly with high participation rates, and second, the practitioners feel more secure. The more people participate, the more the ward becomes a community and family, and the more security the practitioners share. “Reflecting the

¹⁵² Finke, 72.

¹⁵³ Stark, 205.

¹⁵⁴ Josephson, 84.

¹⁵⁵ Heinerman, 149.

¹⁵⁶ Stark, 228.

idea of a community family, members of the ward refer to each other as ‘Brother’ and ‘Sister.’”¹⁵⁷ A strong community family is comforting to all people.

Participation is strong because it is important to Church leadership that all people serve: “Many bishops try to get everybody in the ward to serve in leadership positions in the organizations of the priesthood and auxiliaries of the ward.”¹⁵⁸ Within the ward, there are no permanent or paid church offices; “all hold temporary callings to leadership and service.”¹⁵⁹ Priests are not paid but “called,” which indicates a higher commitment level, meaning LDS leaders serve because of religious conviction, not economic security. All males are expected to serve as priests and missionaries.¹⁶⁰ People respond to and enjoy a level of expectation in their lives; it gives them direction, purpose, and usefulness to other people. Thus, LDS men and women are more willing to serve because the ward depends on them. The lay people are responsible for giving “talks” in the Sunday services, making the sermons more personal.¹⁶¹ Personal talks instead of dogmatic preaching draws the ward closer into each other lives, strengthening the community they share.

When they serve, especially when they go on their missionary treks, their beliefs and commitments are reconfirmed. In fact, the missionaries, who travel with a partner for two years, often have little success converting people. Some statistics say only 9 of 1,000 doors the missionaries approach open to them. “In reality, the two-year missionary experience is sort of a rite of passage for pre-college Mormon men (increasingly women are going on missions as well), a tour of duty in an unsympathetic world of the

¹⁵⁷ Josephson, 84.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 85.

¹⁵⁹ Josephson, 83.

¹⁶⁰ Stark, 228.

¹⁶¹ Josephson, 84,85.

unbelievers that reinforces Mormons' difference from Gentiles."¹⁶² The pair also become experts in LDS belief because everyday they engage in discussions about their own faith; they, in effect, become more knowledgeable about their doctrines than most religious people in the world.

The priests visit the homes and families of the ward,¹⁶³ which also attributes to participation levels. This lateral connection between the members of the ward keeps members intact in the community. The idea of lateral roots corresponds with Wendell Berry's call for vertical roots, which I described as important in the LDS belief of a sacred history. Berry's idea of a pre-modern life not only includes the need for vertical roots represented by farming but also lateral roots represented by neighbors and community. It is important to depend on other people because a life alone in the modern age is difficult.¹⁶⁴

Beyond the local ward and its buildings, the LDS have a central physical structure that binds them together. Modeled after the Temple in Utah, LDS have built large and beautiful temples across the world that serve as uniting points for LDS on a more global scale. The temples also serve as physical representations of the LDS community living in tension with the outside world. The temples are highly sacred; no one outside LDS membership is allowed in them. They perform their most religious, esoteric practices there, including celestial marriages and baptisms for the living and the dead.¹⁶⁵ Although LDS market themselves less as Mormons and more as mainstream Christianity, they

¹⁶² Heinerman, 30.

¹⁶³ Stark, 228.

¹⁶⁴ See Wendell Berry's essay "People, Land, and Community."

¹⁶⁵ Heinerman, 97.

maintain many secret rites the outside world will never see. In this way, they do not compromise their internal goals with external political or economic assimilation.

Harold Bloom also weighs in on the importance of community. Bloom claims that Smith's original intent was to form a religion that would become a people. "That, I have come to understand, always was Joseph Smith's pragmatic goal, for he had the genius to see that only by becoming a people could the Mormons survive."¹⁶⁶ Perhaps Smith saw people's need for community, friendship, and strong lateral ties, and regardless if he intended it or not, community has been established. With a desire for a theocratic state and a history of social segregation, the LDS have brilliantly re-entered society maintaining strong network ties.

Therefore, the organizational aspect of the LDS tradition allows for it to become a competing force in the secular market without compromising the internal community and anti-modern goals of the religion. Without participation in the political and economic spheres and the marketing techniques, the LDS tradition would be unable to grow as a religion, and without the tension the tradition maintains with society, the tradition would be unable engage its current members. Thus, the combination of a modern external structure and an anti-modern internal structure is imperative for LDS growth.

¹⁶⁶ Bloom, 83.

Conclusion

Looking at the historical context, metaphysical beliefs, and organization of the LDS Church, the LDS tradition is undoubtedly a religion with modern characteristics. However without the community, sacred history, authority, and divine meaning that the anti-modern characteristics of the religion provide, the LDS religion would not be so successful today. Thus, the success and growth of the LDS tradition show that religion today must adapt to modern needs while maintaining an appropriate amount of anti-modern characteristics.

LDS success also reveals the institutional characteristics people in the modern age need most. Because anti-modern characteristics are still appealing to modern people, we see that modern people are not nor can be fully modern; instead, they have the same inherent needs of their pre-modern brothers and sisters.

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