

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Deception by Design: An Introduction to Mormonism

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The presence of the Mormon Church in the world today demands a clear evangelical witness to the historic teachings of the Christian Church. If, as they claim, the church became apostate after the death of the twelve apostles of the New Testament and the true gospel has been restored through Joseph Smith to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, then mankind needs to heed their



Joseph Smith

doctrine. But, if they are, as one authority describes them, one of the most “... unorthodox theological systems that [was] introduced in the New York hinterland between 1800 and 1850,”¹ then we need to confront them with the true gospel of the Bible.

Milton R. Hunter, Mormon writer and member of the First Council of Seventy, was not likely thinking of his own religion when he wrote about occult mystery religions, as being pagan rivals of Christianity², but the most casual student of Mormonism will recognize that it has elements of both the occult and the mystery religions.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that the first century church had prophets that received revelations from God and a dual priesthood who expressed authority as elders and bishops. They also teach that the church had apostles who ruled over the membership and had a plan of salvation by works, rather than grace.³

They further believe as the apostles died out, divinely appointed authority ceased, and the true doctrine was lost. During the years between the first and nineteenth century, they claim the Church had no divine authority, no divinely approved ministry, and no

¹ Jan Shipps, *The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading Toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith* *Journal of Mormon History*, 1, 1974, 3.

² Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel Through the Ages* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallace Inc., 1945), 38.

³ LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and A Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1979), 32, 37, 82, 146-147, 149-150, 136, 266.

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living prophet.⁴ In the early part of the nineteenth century they claimed the true gospel was restored to the church through revelations given to Joseph Smith, Jr. Sidney Rigdon provided Joseph Smith with the idea of a restored gospel when he joined the Mormons out of the Campbellite movement.

At the death of Joseph Smith, Jr., June 27, 1844, there was a struggle to gain the presidency by several leaders of Mormonism, with Brigham Young emerging as the victor.⁵ In 1846, a large group of Mormons, having been ordered by the State of Illinois to vacate Nauvoo, began their difficult trek across the Southwest to the valley of the great Salt Lake. Later this area would become Salt Lake City. On July 22, 1847, the first group numbering 148 Mormons entered the Salt Lake valley with Young following two days later. Ten other groups followed at different times that year totaling approximately 1,700. During the winter of 1847-48, 2,500 followed the trail to Utah.⁶ Between 1847 and 1887 it has been estimated that 85,220 persons began the journey to the Salt Lake Basin, then in Mexican territory. Six thousand Mormons were buried along the trail.⁷

In 1852, a part of the group remained behind and settled in Independence, Missouri to form the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints-(RLDS). In their Conference meeting April 7, 2000, they voted to change their name to "Community of Christ" to take affect January 1, 2001. They have been referred to as "Josephites," whereas the Mormons of Utah (LDS) were referred to as "Brighamites."⁸

The Community of Christ (CC) group is the second largest body of Mormons still in existence. They reject the doctrines of polygamy, the concept of God as an exalted man, polytheism and the belief that man has the potential to become a god. The CC Church claims to be a continuation of the original church organized by Joseph Smith, April 6, 1830. They emphasize the fact that Smith, in the Doctrine and Covenants, gave revelations providing for apostolic succession (Section 43:2c and 27:4c). In an effort to avoid being labeled "Mormons," the Community of Christ adopted the term "Saints' Church,"⁹ a term seldom used today.

Emma Smith, wife of the prophet, with her four sons refused to follow Brigham Young West. In 1846, a Methodist congregation was organized in Nauvoo by Pastor Jacob Haas that met in the old Mormon Seventies Hall. Soon the congregation filled with German-

⁴ Mark E. Peterson, "Which Church Is Right?" (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, no date), 15-16.

⁵ Jim Kjelgarrd, *The Coming of the Mormons* (New York: Random House, 1953), 19-21.

⁶ Leonard J. Arrington & Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 100-101, 103.

⁷ Maurice Whipple, *This Is the Place: Utah* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 14.

⁸ J.H. Beadle, *Life in Utah* (Cincinnati: National Publishing Co., 1870), 428-429

⁹ No author, "Who Are the Saints?" (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1985), 5.

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speaking members. After attending the Church for a year Emma married her husband, non-Mormon Major Lewis C. Bidamon, in the Methodist Church. In 1848 Emma joined the Nauvoo Methodist Church and remained a member there for twelve years.¹⁰ Some considered it a gesture of contempt for the teachings of her late husband. When her son Joseph Smith III, was elected president of the RLDS in 1860, she united with that organization.

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The Community of Christ Church claims that before his death in 1844, Joseph Smith Jr. appointed his son to succeed him in office as president of the Church. It was generally understood, they further claim, that Joseph III would be his father's successor.¹¹ At the age of twenty-eight during a Church Conference in Amboy, Illinois on April 6, 1860 he was elected president of the Reorganized Church. Reluctantly he accepted the position as President of the Church and continued in that position until his death in 1914. Three of his sons followed him in succession as president of the RLDS church. In 1978 Wallace B. Smith, son of William Wallace Smith, was elected president. Today, Stephen Mark Veazey holds the office of president.

In 1880, a court decision awarded the title of the first temple erected in Kirtland, Ohio, to the RLDS on the basis of earlier revelations and the fact that Joseph Smith III, son of Joseph Smith, was then president. A second court action in 1894 in Missouri named the RLDS as the rightful successor and heir of the original Church.

Steven L. Shields, former missionary in the Republic of Korea for the Utah based LDS, served as a member of the Quorum of Seventy at the RLDS headquarters in Independence, Missouri. He has written of the significant similarities and decisive differences between the two major Mormon groups.

Similarities include the fact that both groups have a large choir. The Community of Christ Church has the 290 voice "Messiah Choir," and the LDS has the 325 voice "Mormon Tabernacle Choir." Both Mormon groups have similar organizational structures, except the presidents of the RLDS are elected by democratic action rather than automatic appointment on the basis of seniority as in the Utah church. Both branches believe that the canon of Scripture is open for additional revelations from their prophets. The Community of Christ and the LDS recognize Joseph Smith Jr. as the first Prophet/President of their church and the Book of Mormon as an inspired book. The idea of a restored church dominates the warp and woof of Mormon theology in both churches.

¹⁰ Almon W. Babbitt to Brigham Young, 31 January 1848, "Journal History," LDS Archives, cited in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 1, 529.

¹¹ John Doyle Lee, *The Mormon Menace* (New York: Home Protection Publishing Co., 1905), 199.

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Both groups teach tithing as a means of supporting their work.

Differences include their view of God. The CC Church believes in God the Father, Christ the Only Begotten Son of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Although they may appear Trinitarian, they are modalist. The LDS believe in many gods and that the Heavenly Father has a resurrected human body. Accompanying this heavenly human god is a mother god who shares in the procreation of spirits that take up their residence in earthly human bodies at birth. Brigham Young taught that Adam was actually God, a teaching refuted by most present day Utah church officials.¹²

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The Mormons of Independence teach that Joseph Smith had only one wife and never taught polygamy. They claim Joseph was always monogamist as testified by Emma Smith, wife of the Prophet, a position difficult to defend in light of the facts of Mormon history. The Utah Mormons practiced polygamy until a Declaration, prompted by national pressure in September 24, 1890, urged members to follow the law of the land. The original church had no secret temple ordinances claim the CC. All ritual was done in open worship. The Mormons in Nauvoo before and after they migrated to Utah under Brigham Young practiced secret rituals in the temple for the elite and more dedicated Mormons, which they maintain are not secret, but sacred teachings. Yet, no one outside these select temple Mormons are allowed inside the temples once they are dedicated.

Mormon historian, Steven Shields, cataloged 216 splinter groups that formed from the original organization established in 1830.¹³ Some of these groups died out with their founders. Others persisted into second and third generations and a few merged with other splinter groups. There are around seven of these sects still in existence. They organized around a follower of Smith who usually received additional revelations or perceived a need for reform in the church that had, according to their beliefs, become apostate under Brigham Young. These groups, with some variance, usually accepted Joseph Smith as a Prophet and the Book of Mormon as sacred.¹⁴ A Christian authority on Mormonism has written:

Following the death of the prophet, the succeeding presidents supposedly were qualified to receive revelations, but few of them did. Brigham Young experimented with the gift, but his attempts seemed not to emanate from the same supernatural source. So he gave up and relied on his own good judgment and

¹² Steven L. Shields, *Latter-Day Saints Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri Herald Publishing House, 1986), 17, 19-20.

¹³ Steven L. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration* (Los Angeles: Restoration Research, 1990), listed in the Table of Contents.

¹⁴ William Edwin Berrett, *The Restored Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1961), 207-210.

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hunches. The presidents and prophets of the past several decades have been much more prone to receive their revelations from the spirit of Dow Jones."¹⁵

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 2010 reported a worldwide membership of 14 million. Of that number almost half are in the United States. The Reorganized Church of Independence, Missouri, reported a worldwide membership of approximately 250,000. This book will deal primarily with the LDS of Utah, with limited reference to the Community of Christ (RLDS) in Missouri.

The erroneous claim that the Latter-day Saints are the fastest growing religious denomination in the world today has been promoted by the LDS Church and supported by journalists who accept the Church's premise. David G. Stewart, Mormon statistician, released a paper entitled "LDS Church Growth Today." The author reveals that the LDS Church has had a steadily declining rate of growth since 1989 in spite of it having one of the largest missionary forces of any religious group in the world.

Although they claim to be the fastest growing denomination in the United States based on reported raw membership figures, authentic data proved otherwise. With one of the highest attrition rates of any religious group in America today, they are losing almost as many people as they are gaining through proselytizing. Stewart believes that many of the new members are lost due to lack of proper indoctrination in the core beliefs of the LDS Church before they are baptized. Another factor flawing the stats is the fact that many are leaving the Mormon Church and are not removed from the Church roll. Another factor is that children of parents where one spouse is not LDS, typed "children of interest," are included on the Church roll even though they have not have been baptized and become members. To further exacerbate the error, the LDS statistics incorporate members from outside the United States whereas most major evangelical denominations do not include such members in their statistics. Those converts gained through foreign missions in evangelical churches remain indigenous to the country in which they are won. While defending his churches doctrinal teaching, Stewart acknowledges the church planting principles advanced by evangelicals.¹⁶ There is another reason that many new converts leave the Mormon Church. When those with some previous connection to biblical doctrine discover some of their very heterodox teachings, which are not likely until after they are baptized, they are unable to reconcile these beliefs with the Bible, and therefore left the Church.

Tim Heaton, in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, recorded that weekly attendance at ward meetings was between 40 and 50 percent in Canada, America and the South Pacific. In

¹⁵ Gordon H. Fraser, *Is Mormonism Christian?* (Chicago: Moody Press 1977), 152.

¹⁶ David Stewart, "LDS Church Growth Today," 24 May 2002: Published Internet Paper, 2002.

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Africa and Europe, the average attendance was 35 percent. Attendance in Asia and Latin American runs around 25 percent. By averaging these numbers David Stewart estimated about 35 percent of the given membership to be about 4 million active members.¹⁷ The concern of many evangelicals today who view the number of people each year being drawn into the maze of Mormonism, is expressed in an article in Christianity Today. Some questionable answers are offered in this article as to "Why Your Neighbor Joined the Mormon Church."¹⁸ Admittedly, the Mormons maintain a close contact with their new-converts. They seek to maintain the family unit, provide programs for their youth and have a large missionary force. However, the writer of the article calls the Mormons a "layman's church." That might have been true in the beginning of the Church however the Mormon organization in Utah is now anything but a layman's church. It is ruled by an exalted hierarchy with the laity having little, if any, input into the course of the church. They still affirm the autocratic administration of their leaders over the membership.

Individual Mormon wards are not autonomous. They do not enjoy the freedom of complete self-rule nor the liberty to question any teaching of the church, and remain in good standing. While there is more freedom now than in the days of Young, the church headquarters in Salt Lake City maintains strict control over its members. Aside from the fact that the Mormons have been forced legally to concede their previous position on polygamy, the place of African Americans in their church, rescinded the blood oaths, and deleted the dramatic presentation of a preacher being in league with Satan in their secret temple endowment, and replaced it with admonitions against those who preach the philosophies of men, they still maintain some extremely unchristian beliefs. The church today remains fixed in its attempt to present itself as the only true church on earth, thus aggressively proselytizing and controlling adherents through their doctrine.¹⁹ Members are discouraged from reading any material critical of their Church or associating with apostates. Those who reveal their doubts will not get a temple recommend admitting them to the secret temple ceremonies, which they believe can ultimately lead them to the exaltation of godhood.

The Mormons may be respected for their emphasis upon family life, their advances in missions, and the care of their indigent, yet they are by doctrine a heretical cult. J.K. Van Baalam succinctly summons us to evangelical witness:

Since, however, Christianity is supposed to be a saltretarding corruption, a leaven that permeates, and a light that shines in darkness, and since only the Christ

¹⁷ Peggy Fletcher, "Keeping Members a Challenge for LDS Church," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 June 2006.

¹⁸ Donald P. Shoemaker, "Why Your Neighbor Joined the Mormon Church," *Christianity Today*, 11 October 1974: 111-116.

¹⁹ William Alexander Linn, *The Story of the Mormons* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963), 2.

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according to the Scriptures is the Light of the World, Mormonism must stand condemned ... it is guilty of the two cardinal sins of our time: first, it identifies the Kingdom of God with a here and now social utopia, and secondly, it fosters the essentially pagan idea that salvation is by works rather than by grace."²⁰

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²⁰ J.K. Van Baalen, *The Chaos of the Cults* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 190.