

MORMONISM IN THE NINETEEN-SEVENTIES:

The Popular Perception

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Perhaps more than the members of any other religious sect, Mormons are preoccupied with their public image. It may be argued that such preoccupation is a form of narcissism unworthy of the Restored Gospel, but given the unfavorable stereotypes of Mormonism that have persisted throughout its history, it is understandable that faithful Latter-day Saints should eagerly welcome sympathetic treatment of the Church and its programs. Unfortunately, members too often ignore the reality that treatment of the Church in the secular press is influenced by editorial policies, the opinions of writers and reporters and the general social trends of the times. These factors can and do impede favorable or even balanced coverage of the Church's beliefs and endeavors.

During the late 1950's and most of the 1960's, the Church was frequently portrayed as being too closely connected with the business community, indifferent to the lack of separation between church and state in Utah, over zealous in its missionary activities, anti-intellectual, racist, inflexible on changing mores and unconcerned about world problems. Although all of these charges continued to be circulated in one form or another, in the 1970's, newspaper and periodical coverage showed a more sophisticated understanding of Mormonism that was often complimentary.

OVERALL IMAGE

A lengthy and favorable article in *National Geographic Magazine*, April 1975, paid tribute to the Mormon pioneers and their descendents for having created a "shining oasis" among the Wasatch Mountains where they have "labored mightily . . . to establish the Kingdom of God." Although author Charles McCarry conceded that their "objective has not yet been achieved," he praised them:

a remarkable civilization, giving a particularly American bloom to music and dance, scholarship and science, industry and agriculture, faith and good works, has taken root in soil that a less believing people than the Mormons, or a less energetic one, might have thought too sour for life. At its center, geographically and in every other way, is Salt Lake City, a spanking clean metropolis of more than half a million.

McCarry had special praise for Utah's excellence in dance, choral and symphonic music, its "scientists and inventors" who "have a foot firmly planted in the future" and the Mormon family. In a direct appraisal of the Church's appeal, he focused on the Robert Clyde family of Heber Valley where 11-year-old Lynda felt "home [was] like heaven." For McCarry, this daughter's "idyllic view of her own life is also a basic tenet of the Mormon faith—that those who prove worthy here on earth will be rewarded with blissful togetherness in the hereafter."

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Clyde, who serves as a State Senator and local church leader while at the same time operating the family sheep ranch, attributed his domestic success to his being able to juggle "appointments around his home life." The "family comes first," and those with whom he is involved "in outside activities soon learn that." Monday nights are something special at the Clyde home: the entire family gathers "for 'family home evening' one Mormon answer to the generation gap." Here, "television silenced, work laid aside, discussions of spiritual matters, songs, games, 'airing of sibling spats' and refreshments allow everyone an opportunity to express their feelings. Sometimes, as 18-year-old Kathy readily admits, "I don't always agree with everything my parents teach us, but I respect them for it." Robert Clyde believes that it is "against human nature to be forced into believing anything. We just try to set the example and hope they [our children] choose to follow it." In McCarry's opinion, this "formula seems to work for the Clydes." The parents cherish the memory of a public speech once rebellious Tom made before leaving on a two-year stint as a church missionary. "I love my Dad," he said unabashedly. "He's always been my idol."

Equally complimentary, *Nations Business* in July 1975 characterized the Mormon's "principal population center, Salt Lake City," as a monument to its settlers—"a booming, beautiful metropolis with a rich heritage, and a seemingly richer future." Attributing much of the city's success to its "high-quality work force," the editors quote prominent executives such as S. C. Johnson, Regional Manager of Sears Roebuck and Co. and President-elect of the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, who remarked that the city had "one of the highest-educated, most work-oriented labor forces" found anywhere. Their stability, according to Harold Steele, President of First Security Bank, derived from the "heritage of the [Mormon] Church."

Nations Business viewed Salt Lakers as conservatives, who voted against urban renewal, fluoridation, liquor by the drink and the union shop. Yet, they were willing to support the cultural needs of a community boasting one of the nation's finest symphony orchestras—Ballet West, the Pioneer Memorial Theatre and the \$10 million Student Activity Center at the University of Utah, which sponsors "such diverse spectacles as a rock concert by the Nitty-Gritty Dirt Band and speeches by conservative William Buckley and liberal Ramsey Clark." The "spectacular snow-capped Wasatch Mountains lend a sense of timeless permanence." Even the prospect of having Mormon missionaries in Utah was viewed positively since so "many nonmembers are moving into the city and state that the Church sees a need to offer the same opportunities to learn about it in Utah that it offers in every state and scores of foreign countries."

Salt Lake City's recent boom, when examined by the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Kansas City Star* and the *New York Times*, prompted differing and less enthusiastic appraisals. Bryce Nelson in the October 31, 1976, *Los Angeles Times* suggested that "despite the decades of improved feelings between religious groups" in Utah, "there is no indication that things will change soon" to invalidate the judgment of writer Neal R. Peirce that Utah is "the most stubbornly cross-grained and individualistic of all 50 states." Laura Rollins Hockaday, travel editor of the *Kansas City Star* on September 26, 1976, devoted considerable attention to Clarissa Young Spencer's autobiographical experiences as the

daughter of one of Brigham Young's "27 wives." She also dealt with the differences between the LDS position and that of the Reorganized Church on polygamy and presidential succession.

Milton Viorst and Jon Nordheimer, in separate articles published less than a week apart in September 1976 issues of the *New York Times*, dwelt on the less attractive elements of growth, the diminishing role of the Church in the temporal aspects of the community, the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the Church's various business ventures and a theology "determined by a dozen old men," which promote social practices that have "become increasingly austere." Characteristic of these latter writings are Viorst's description of the visitor center on Temple Square where an attempt is made to explain

Mormonism's complex theology with an audio-visual display. A sequence of murals, in the style of socialist realism, is linked to flashing lights and somber voices, and the whole is meant to exude pure spiritualism. The result, however, seems more like Jesus in Disneyland.

Viorst does concede that the "center's bad taste is almost expunged by the soaring neo-Gothic Temple of somber gray stone a few steps away."

Despite the lack of rousing support in the preceding discussions, none approaches the stark criticism expressed in Frances Lang's September 1971 *Ramparts* article entitled, "The Mormon Empire." Lang suggests that Mormons have given the CIA and the FBI some of their best men, who "by habit and training are a conservative group . . . tightly entwined with a religion which is stringently hierarchical, profit-oriented, racist, and never likely to embarrass the foreign interests of the U.S., or indeed any capitalist country." Lang criticizes the Church's numerous commercial interests, its policy toward Blacks, its theocratic control over education in Utah, its "suzerainty over the western media, inequitable welfare program, and complete dominance of Utah politics."

A "special report" on the Mormons published in the June 18, 1976 *Times* of London expressed a somewhat differing opinion, suggesting that the Church "is careful not to intervene [in] purely political issues. It states its position clearly, however, when it considers there is a moral or social question involved, and it is obviously a force that has to be taken into account." During the "past few years it has taken stands on such issues as abortion, which it opposes, on women's rights and on state liquor laws." Author Peter Strafford, a *Times*' New York correspondent, perceived Mormons as "sober, industrious people who believe strongly in hard work and helping each other." In an accompanying article Strafford presented a sketch in which President Spencer W. Kimball commented "on the basic beliefs of the Mormon church," its welfare program, wealth, Indian policy, connection with the Reorganized Church and the emphasis placed on the family.

CHURCH LEADERS

The comparative frequency of change in the presidency of the Church since 1970 has subjected both the Presidents themselves and the process of their selection to intense scrutiny by the secular press. David O. McKay, clearly the most respected modern prophet, was praised even when other facets of Mormonism were being criticized. When he died in late January 1970, *Time* was effusive. President McKay was portrayed as a man who had done "more in his 19 year tenure to change the image and direction of the Mormon Church than

any president since Brigham Young himself." Under his leadership, the Church had grown from 1,000,000 to 2,815,000 members and from 191 to 496 stakes. He was considered a global thinker. Although President McKay "used his power with clear authority," *Time* insisted that he was "even better known for his gentleness and good humor."

Tall and strong-voiced, his amiable face framed by a shock of flowing white hair, McKay was an affable new image of Mormonism to a world that had previously seen the Mormon leaders as dour, dark-suited figures. He was perhaps the first Mormon president to treat non-Mormons as generously as members of his own faith.

"In his own generous, enthusiastic way," *Time* continued, President McKay had expanded the "Church's horizons and involvement far beyond the abilities of any successor to contract them. If he had not completely destroyed Mormon exclusivism, he had certainly tempered it with his own remarkable vision of a much wider, friendlier world."

His successor, Joseph Fielding Smith, was greeted with less compassion. *Time* called him a "straightforward but humorless man harking back to the old Mormon image, a stern authoritarian who is not likely to tolerate minor faults in his fellow churchmen or to encourage change." In similar language, *Newsweek* noted that younger Mormons "felt trapped by dogmas fashioned by an established gerontocracy," illustrated by Smith at 93 replacing McKay who was 96 at the time of his death. Perhaps Smith was merely preparing the way for his "heir apparent," Harold B. Lee, next apostle in line for the presidency and a younger man of 70. Nevertheless, Smith might go on for years, "aided by his wife and a spare diet of cereal, milk, and an occasional bite of nippy cheese. A regular riser at 5 a.m., Smith is solid Mormon stock."

When Smith died in July 1972, there was general agreement that it was the end of an era. Although Smith was, *Newsweek* wrote, a "defender of the faith," Mormons were reportedly "unsure as to what their faith must be defended against in the years ahead." The Church was thought to be "in the midst of profound and far-reaching change," possessing "phenomenal vitality." Smith's successor was called the "chief architect of modernization," and at 73, "stocky Harold B. Lee is a mere lad, as Mormon leaders go." Lee was viewed as "more like a businessman than a prophet" with "sharply honed management and organizational skills," enabling the Church to computerize many of its enterprises. One of Lee's long range challenges would be to convince the "Mormon faithful" to continue their support for a missionary program that was costing the Church more than \$15 million annually. Wallace Turner of the *New York Times* on July 9 called the new President of the Church a "veteran administrator of church affairs who is credited with developing and forwarding many innovations." He suggested that one of the major issues confronting Lee was controversy over blacks.

Lee's administrative prowess was seen as far greater than Smith's, but his spiritual leadership was found lacking. *Time* of July 23 quoted a Lee associate as saying that he was a "genius for organization. The Church runs like a great beautiful computer, clicking away. Everything is in its place." Rather than innovation, *Time* predicted a "brisker status quo" under Lee's leadership: He caught the vision of Mormonism as a worldwide movement, and desired to expand welfare to include programs for alcoholics, drug abusers and ex-convicts. Dan L. Thrapp of the *Los Angeles Times* remarked on August 21 that

although Lee was the first businessman to head the Church, he would "guide it the way his predecessors did—largely by revelation." This discussion concludes with President Lee explaining that:

We say to the non-Mormons to whom we speak, 'We are not asking you to put your name on the record. That isn't our concern. We've come to offer you the greatest gift you've ever been given. We are offering you the kingdom of God, which is here for you if you will accept and believe.'

Eighteen months later, the youngest President of the Church in 40 years was dead. While President Lee's tenure as Prophet had been shorter than any of his predecessors, Nelson Wadsworth of the *National Observer* noted on January 5, 1974 that he had streamlined and internationalized the Church. "Following a tradition begun by Brigham Young," *Newsweek* announced the following week, the "elders of the Church of Jesus Christ had met" and selected "Spencer W. Kimball, 78, a grandson of one of the Mormon's original 'Twelve Apostles' " as "prophet, seer, revelator and trustee-in-trust" of the Church's 3.3 million members. There was no speculation on changes that might result from Kimball's succession.

In more pointed language *Time* characterized the Church as a "self-perpetuating gerontocracy," since "tradition" dictated that the presidency be assumed by the senior member of the Council of Twelve. Therefore Spencer W. Kimball was "invited, sustained and ordained," even though he was in tenuous health from open heart surgery and throat cancer. Some Mormons were so concerned about Kimball's uncertain health, *Time* claimed, that they favored a change in the line of succession. They feared that Apostle Ezra Taft Benson, who had "flustered many Mormons with his abrasive public utterances, some of them to John Birch Society audiences," would soon accede to the presidency. Benson's "benediction at the funeral of President McKay was so heavy with right-wing political overtones as to embarrass even the conservative Mormon hierarchy. Now the divisive Benson is next in the wings as amiable President Kimball begins his regime."

Although a successful businessman, "like so many other Mormon leaders," Kimball was thought by *Time* to be pragmatic in his view of missionary work as "a great character builder" and temple work "as a sort of spiritual WPA—a task that keeps older Mormons both busy and feeling needed." The new President was not considered likely to change Mormon views on either women or blacks. Quoting President Kimball, Peter Gillins of the *Washington Post* on January 4, similarly stated that the "traditional policies of the Mormon Church toward blacks and women won't change soon," and reiterated the concern over Kimball's precarious health.

OTHER PROMINENT MORMONS

Of the several other prominent Mormons who have captured national attention in the 1970's, none has been more conspicuous than Pulitzer Prize winning author and columnist Jack Anderson. Since 1972, *American Opinion*, *Life*, the *New York Times*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Playboy*, *Washingtonian*, the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Star* have all run major stories on, and interviews with the man *Newsweek* termed the "most widely syndicated columnist in America and perhaps the most controversial." Anderson has, as William P. Hoar noted in the November 1975 *American Opinion*, "been

variously depicted as America's top investigative reporter, an abstemious former Mormon missionary with a crusader's zeal for morality; the square scourge of Washington; and even the people's watchdog." Hoar himself classified Anderson as,

a man who deals regularly with stolen documents, has been caught red-handed while snooping with wiretapping equipment; operates through the seediest sort of informers; readily releases highly classified documents relating to matters of national security; and has sunk so low as to scavenge in the garbage of the Director of the F.B.I.

Yet no matter how he is portrayed, his influence is rarely contested. "Few reporters ever go from writing news to being news," Susan Sheehan wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* of August 13, 1972, "and no reporter has made the passage more conspicuously than Jack Anderson in 1972." His "notoriety came after 25 mostly unrecognized years of working in Washington, albeit a mere six days a week." As everyone already knows, "Anderson does not muckrack on the Sabbath; he is a practicing Mormon and devoted family man who prefers to spend Sunday in church and at home with his wife and nine children." In a December 30, 1972 interview written by nationally syndicated religion columnist Lester Kinsolving for the *Washington Star*, Anderson expressed "a firm adherence to, and ready ability to argue on behalf of some of the Mormon Church's most unusual doctrines." Kinsolving perceived Anderson as an "active and loyal Mormon," but one who was "no more blindly subservient to the Mormon 12 Apostles in Salt Lake City than is the average American Catholic in regard to an anti-contraceptive Curia in Vatican City." Nevertheless, Anderson was sure there had been "no attempt by the church to shut me up—even though many of its more conservative members may have wanted to try."

Conversely, golfer Johnny Miller was portrayed by *Time* in 1973 as a "straight shooter in every way," an elder in the Church who did not "smoke, drink, overeat or stay up late." Pete Axthelm's *Newsweek* cover story of February 3, 1975, entitled "Miller—Golf's New Golden Boy," depicted Miller as an athlete whose life outside of "golf is built around his family and religion and his hobbies run to the simple pleasures of fishing and hunting." While on the golf tour the "Millers can usually be found in the motel coffee shop, amid high chairs, hot dogs and spilled glasses of milk" instead of at expensive restaurants with the other pros. Miller told Axthelm that, "spending time with the family is really my favorite activity. In the end, how good a parent you are has got to be more important than whether you shoot 68 or 71." The Church, in his opinion, had given him the faith to believe in himself. Axthelm suggests

If a committee of golf instructors, Eagle Scouts and double-knit salesmen ever got together to assemble the ideal composite golfer, it would probably invent Johnny Miller. His golden hair frames a handsome, square-jawed face, and his lean body has the strength and balance of a natural athlete's. His swing is as graceful and consistent as any on the professional-golf tour, and his clean-living image is as flawless as his game.

Other notable feature stories on Miller and his family have appeared in *People Weekly*, *Reader's Digest*, the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Sports Illustrated*.

A different success story, that of "The Latter-Day Osmonds" as *Rolling Stone* called them, was twice a cover feature in 1976. The *Rolling Stone* article of March 11 reported that since "1971 the Osmonds—as soloists and in groups—have received 21 gold record awards from the RIAA for sales in excess of a million dollars, and have sold some 70 million singles and albums worldwide." Their combined annual income is \$10 million. "Each and every Osmond is a devout

member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, a fact that indelibly colors the image, lifestyle and music," of what *Rolling Stone* considered an exceptional family.

"But how real, you might well wonder," Burt Pretutsky asked in an August *TV Guide* article "can a small town Mormon family remain after 17 years of success?" In the opinion of American Bandstand's Dick Clark, who has been promoting their concerts for the past five years, "You simply cannot deal with better people. . . . Their word is as good as gold. What they promise they deliver. I only wish that some of the acid rock groups I've handled had one-tenth the professional and personal integrity of the Osmonds." An obvious question is how their parents protect them "from the various temptations offered to successful goodlooking kids in places like London, Tokyo and Las Vegas." For Mrs. Osmond it is simple.

I have always trusted my children to do the right thing. . . . Our prophet Joseph Smith was once asked how he governed his followers and he said, "I don't. I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves." Their father and I have tried to follow his example in raising our children.

In Washington, D.C. another Mormon family, following similar precepts, has been proclaimed over the past decade as one of the leaders in America's business community. As John G. Hubbell of the *Chicago Sun-Times* observed, "Everybody likes to work for Bill Marriott." "If," as one Marriott employee remarked to the author, "all companies treated their people the way this one does, there would be no need for Social Security, Medicare or anything like that." Hubbell argues that "should Bill Marriott's brand of enlightened capitalism [a share-the-wealth-approach to employee relations] ever become widely adopted there is no telling what altitudes the American economy might reach." At Marriott headquarters in Bethesda, Maryland, the semi-retired native Utahn who has served as board chairman of the Corporation since his eldest son Bill, Jr., assumed the Presidency in 1965, is "spoken of in reverent tones."

Washington Post staff writer Richard M. Cohen, in his four-part December 1974 series, even went so far as to quote a former Marriott employee, saying: "They [his employees] think Mr. Marriott walks a little closer to God than the rest of us. They treat him like a god. They love him." Marriott himself attributes his success to Mormonism. The "Church has kept us tending to business and given us the right ideals and kept us with good habits. It has made it possible for me to do what I have done." The Marriotts, says Cohen, "are fundamental believers in all that Americans consider trite—the family, the church and the free enterprise system." An equally complimentary article was published by the business periodical *Forbes* in February 1971; its title: "The Marriott Story: Mixing Mormon Principles with the Best of Sears, P & G, and IBM, the Marriott Family is Running the Hottest Outfit in the Food and Hotel Business." The focal point of the *Forbes* assessment was an appealing summary of the admirable qualities that have carried J. Willard Marriott and many other Mormons to the forefront of the business world. Marriott, according to *Forbes*, attributed his success first to the Church and then to his wife. *Forbes* credited the harmony and prosperity of the Marriotts to the "unity and thriving success of Mormonism . . . the largest, strongest and certainly the richest made-in-America faith operated by some of the sharpest businessmen in the United States."

By his own admission, Bill Marriott, Jr., like his father, has "no hobbies, no

time for political activity—nothing really but his family, his church and his work. And his work he considers a privilege." In August 1970 he told John Carmody, then managing editor of the Washington Post's *Potomac* magazine, that "hard work and sensible habits are what made this country great." His family, according to Carmody, is "one of those families a great many people in the United States still hope to have. Their church is an integral part of their lives: they truly do pray together and play together."

THE FAMILY AND FAMILY HOME EVENING

It has been popular to characterize the American family of the mid-Twentieth Century as "headed down the drain in a swirl of divorce, drugs, venereal disease, alcohol, adultery and group sex." But as Judy Klemesrud in a June 4, 1973, *New York Times* article pointed out, "for at least one sizable group in American Society, the family is still the thing." The Mormons attack "delinquency and deteriorating morality . . . through a Monday night get-together in the home called the 'family home evening.'" John Dart, religion writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, in equally complimentary language, reported Protestant educator H. Norman Wright's remarks of October 1972, where he praised the "Monday night family studies" of the Mormons as "probably the most creative material published by any church."

An earlier, more personal observation, by Jack Waugh in the *Christian Science Monitor* of April 20, 1971, suggested that there were few lengths Mormons won't go to [to] bind up what might otherwise be broken—be it a home or a heart:

If a Mormon marriage appears headed for the rocks, if the youngest son is in trouble with the law, if tragedy of any sort wrenches a brother's family down the block, a dozen Mormon hands are immediately knocking on the door ready to counsel, intervene, help, conciliate, or cook.

Although Donald P. Shoemaker, in his October 11, 1974, *Christian Century* article, denounced Mormonism as a "concept Christians must reject," he did concede that the Church's tremendous growth resulted from "people seeing in it the very points of appeal that the Word of God says a church should have!" Shoemaker expressed admiration for the genuine love and concern Mormons show their people through the family unit and the family home evening. By contrast, evangelical churches were guilty of fragmenting the family through "numerous meetings and events that are rarely evaluated as to effectiveness." Evangelical Christians were advised to take some of these lessons into their own churches and thus avoid the alleged tragedy of conversion to Mormonism.

GENEALOGY AND TEMPLES

Two topics closely akin to discussions of the Mormon family in the 1970's have been genealogy and temple work. The *Washington Star News*, on August 17, 1974, in an informative examination, told its readers of the "Mormons: Plans for 'Other Side,'" whereby faithful members could enter the Temple and be married for "time and eternity," and have their children "sealed" to them so their family would remain intact in the after life. In addition, Mormons perform the "rites of baptism, marriage and 'sealings' by proxy for their forebears." To complete this work, they have made a massive investment in

genealogy research. "In steel-lined, man-made caves blasted into a granite mountainside near Salt Lake City, the Mormon Church collects and stores miles of microfilm for use by its members in work for the dead." Since the Church was founded in 1830, more than 140 million persons—most of them "on the other side"—have had temple work done in their behalf. "This makes the work valid but not effective," according to Thomas C. Daniels, administrator of the Church's genealogical society. "The person on the other side has the option of accepting them or not." William Willoughby, staff reporter for the *Washington Star*, in similar language wrote on September 1, 1974, that the "Mormon faith cannot be forced upon the dead. At the resurrection they will be given a chance to accept or reject" the work that has been done for them. "All a Mormon on 'this side' can do is hope that a loved one 'on the other side' will not repudiate finally the grace of God."

Milton Viorst in the *New York Times* estimated that 6,500 people every week used the Genealogical Society's various services which were "free to Mormon and non-Mormon alike." In a more thoroughly detailed article published by *The William and Mary Quarterly* in October 1975, Larry R. Gerlach and Michael L. Nicholls wrote that the Church has "assembled the largest genealogical research library in the world . . . and had made a major contribution to the collection and preservation of historical resources." Suggesting that the Church's genealogical record vaults in Little Cottonwood Canyon might be a good shelter during a nuclear catastrophe, *Newsweek* in 1971 posed one "nagging question" which was "metaphorical for the city's central dilemma: if the vaults must ever be used for such a purpose, will the sanctuary be one that is for Mormons only?" Five years later (March 1, 1976) *Newsweek* admitted that the vaults had certain advantages. The numerous records housed there might well contain clues for doctors, physicists and sociologists studying "everything from religious demographics to the sequence of male and female children in families."

For most authors, however, genealogy continues to be principally a tool used by Mormons to bring their ancestors into the Church. Mormons, Nelson Wadsworth declared in *The National Observer* on February 5, 1972, believe in the "eternal nature of the family relationship," and the names gleaned from their genealogical research allow them to perform "vicarious work for the dead" in the Temple.

According to Mormon belief . . . baptism for the dead, the temple 'endowment,' marriage, and the 'sealing of children to their parents' . . . are all ordinances [that] are necessary for man's salvation, even if he must receive them vicariously after he goes to the grave.

The Temple ordinances, Wadsworth, explained further:

involve a course of instruction relating to the Mormon concept of the eternal journey of man, beginning with the creation, then the 'lone and dreary world' from which Adam and Eve were expelled by God, up through the 'Celestial Kingdom,' the highest degree of glory that man can attain after life on this earth.

Recently considerable attention has focused on the construction of the Church's newest Temple in Kensington, Maryland. *U.S. News & World Report* in September 1974, viewed it as "a striking monument" while conceding that comments on its architecture had been mixed. Most critics, however, agree that it is a "fitting expression of the exuberance of an American frontier church that has doubled its membership in 13 years—exploding into a worldwide faith

of some 3.5 million." Other writers such as Benjamin Forgey of the *Washington Star-News*, Wolf Von Eckhardt of the *Washington Post*, Paul Goldberger of the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine viewed it less poetically as an architectural curiosity, almost "Disneyland-like."

Another edifice only a few miles away, the only Mormon chapel in Washington, D.C., attracted momentary attention several months later for a different reason. On March 1, 1976, the *New York Times* announced the Washington Chapel was to be sold. At the time of its completion in 1933, the chapel was "seen as a testament to the end of Washington's hostility toward the Mormons and their abandoned practice of polygamy." The *Times* suggested that when the chapel was finally sold, the "Mormons will have sacrificed more than a building. They will have lost a portion of their own history."

HEALTH HABITS

Meanwhile other Mormons were making history through important articles on an increasingly popular topic—the reputed good health of Church members. A frequently cited study prepared by Dr. James E. Enstrom of the University of California at Los Angeles for the September 1975 issue of *Cancer* showed that the "1970–72 cancer mortality rate among California Mormon adults [was] about one-half to three-fourths that of the general California population," and in the "predominately Mormon state of Utah [was] about two-thirds to three-fourths of the United States rate and the lowest in the entire country." Enstrom's findings were also summarized in the March 1975 *Readers Digest*, January 1976 *Family Circle*, and June 1975, *Let's Live: The Natural Way to Vibrant Health*. In each case Enstrom's findings were used as a basis for highly complimentary discussions of Mormons. Jay W. See, in his *Let's Live* article, introduced the topic of Mormon diet habits by announcing that "Utah, which is about 70% Mormon, is the healthiest state in the union. . . . Utah has virtually the lowest death rate from virtually all common diseases." A major portion of this essay was a knowledgeable explanation of the Word of Wisdom.

Similarly, Bill Davidson in his *Family Circle* story, suggested that Americans could learn much about health from Mormons because they have "significantly lower cancer rate, fewer heart attacks, less diabetes and other devastating diseases than the rest of us." Scientists had found a clue in the eating patterns of Mormons, who fast once a month, eat grain and "fruit in the season thereof" and meat in moderation. In addition, Mormonism is the "most athletic-oriented religion on earth, with physical fitness ordained in the holy writ." Mormons are taught that if they care for their bodies as temples of God, they will "run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint."

And all this doesn't stop with adulthood. On any given weekend the entire state of Utah resembles a vast Olympic village. Almost the whole population seems to be out golfing, playing tennis, skiing, hiking, mountain-climbing, shooting river rapids—receiving 'health in their navel and marrow to their bones.' At the very least, cutting down on coronaries and high blood pressure, both known to be abetted by a sedentary existence. It's hard to find a sedentary Mormon.

According to University of Utah Sociologist Glen Vernon, Mormons lead comparatively stressless lives because of their belief in an afterlife, their strong family units and family home evenings. "In proportion to their total numbers," Davidson reported that there was "a greater percentage of Mormons than any

other religious group getting into *Who's Who in America*. Their higher-education quotient is the best in the country."

Complementing Enstrom's work is the recently published research on "Cancer Incidence in Mormons and Non-Mormons in Utah 1966-1970," by four University of Utah researchers. This study, which originally appeared in the January 15, 1976, *New England Journal of Medicine*, received lengthy discussion in the *Washington Star* shortly thereafter.

TABERNACLE CHOIR AND WELFARE PROGRAM

In the 1970's the Tabernacle Choir and the Church welfare program received continuing praise from the press. In April 1975, Leland Stowe's *Reader's Digest* article (condensed from *Christian Herald*, April 1975) lauded the 375 member choir for performing "musical miracles, [and] bringing joy and inspiration to millions."

At Eastertime, particularly, the inspiration of their voices lingers long among the statues and blooming tulips of Salt Lake City's impressive Temple Square. "I know that My Redeemer Lives," they sing, and "Christ Went Into the Hills to Pray." Visitors, remembering the music, lift their eyes to the surrounding mountainsides, blanketed with the spring-time yellow of the dogtooth violet, and go their way refreshed, born again.

He extolled these unpaid volunteers who rehearse twice weekly and commute thousands of miles every year, "cheerfully paying their own transportation and baby-sitting expenses." He concludes with a brief discussion between world-renowned conductor Eugene Ormandy and choir president Isaac M. Stewart in which Ormandy remarks: "I've heard all the world's great choirs and choral groups. None can compare with the Tabernacle Choir, and its members are amateurs. Why is yours the greatest choir in the world?" Brother Stewart replies: "We have a great conductor, great organists and dedicated members. But the real key is that it is *the Lord's choir*."

Congressman William Springer of Illinois was equally enthusiastic. On October 1, 1971, he praised the Church in the *Congressional Record* as being "among the leaders all over the world in trying to take care of those in genuine need of welfare and welfare supplemental programs." In the United States where "welfare seems to be bordering on chaos," the Mormon church, Springer stated

is attempting to solve its own problems within the scope of its religion. . . . I know no other religious group which is working on this problem of taking care of the members of its own church without application to the Federal Government for assistance. The real surprising thing is that Mormon welfare rolls have shown a steady decline in the past three years, whereas U.S. Government welfare rolls have expanded in a tremendously increasing rate over the same period.

The impetus for his remarks, Springer explained, was an informative article Janice Law, religion editor for the *Houston Chronicle*, had written the previous September 21. In her story Law persuasively argued that the welfare program was "so unique that laymen and government officials from all over the world come to see it in operation at its headquarters in Salt Lake City."

Commenting on the welfare program in 1975, Susan L. M. Hunk, a professor of geography and sociology, argued that given today's economic troubles, "it is the Mormons who seem to have the greatest likelihood of coping as a group with economic dislocation." Her *American Opinion* piece of April 1975 offered the sage advice that in an "integrated economy like ours, no one can expect not

to suffer—but the Mormons are in a better position to tough it out. The rest of us could learn a lot from them." More recently *Washington Star* staff writer William F. Willoughby interviewed President N. Eldon Tanner on the welfare program. This interview, which appeared on the front page of the *Star's* January 24, 1971, edition, together with Willoughby's December 1975 interview with J. Willard Marriott, Jr., and his January 22, 1971 article on the church's purchase of a farm in Virginia, provided an informative, complimentary explanation of the welfare program's purpose.

President Tanner was quoted as saying:

Mormons believe that individuals are responsible for their own support. We don't believe in the dole. It doesn't help one's self-esteem, and the Church that can't help a person's self-esteem and his sense of value is not our idea of what a church should be.

Willoughby concurred: "With a few million more Mormons around, maybe this country's welfare tax burden would be lightened. Then some of us who are taxpayers wouldn't have to work two jobs to keep ourselves going and pay our taxes, too." Actually "we're only taking them from many of the people on the dole who complain they can't find jobs."

Despite an obvious improvement in media coverage, several aspects of Mormon behavior and doctrine are still eliciting adverse reactions. These include the Church's holdings and assets, polygamy, its doctrine prohibiting blacks from holding the Priesthood and its opposition to the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

BLACKS AND THE PRIESTHOOD

By far the most controversial of media concerns is the Church's policy on blacks. In the 1970's this situation was at least temporarily exacerbated by the First Presidency's policy statement of December 15, 1969. This document emphasized the Church's acceptance of the "Negro" in society, its support of equal opportunities and protection and its "Love, compassion and deepest appreciation for the rich talents, endowments, and the earnest strivings of our Negro brothers and sisters," but made it clear that no change was anticipated in Church policy toward blacks.

Whatever its intent, the statement attracted increased criticism. *Newsweek* on January 19, 1970, suggested that while George Romney's presidential candidacy had not been powerful enough to provoke a public statement on the "Mormon belief in the religious inferiority of Negroes," Stanford University's decision to drop Brigham Young University from its athletic schedule was. The Church's response, *Newsweek* argued, was "small comfort . . . for blacks." The same day *Time* reported that the "Black athletes, who precipitated much of the current discussion by protesting games scheduled with Brigham Young University, argue that exclusion is a form of segregation." *Time* continued by explaining that Mormons believed blacks were "descendents of both Cain, the Bible's first murderer, and Ham the disrespectful son of Noah," and were "neutral bystanders (in the 'pre-existence') when others chose sides during a fight between God and Lucifer. For that failure of courage, they were condemned to become the accursed descendents of Cain."

Later the same week the *Christian Century* labeled the Church's most recent affirmation excluding "Negroes from the Priesthood" an "incredibly primitive reassertion of obscurantist doctrine concerning race," and depicted the authors

of the statement as men who were "apparently bound to the literalist white supremacy of Mormon presidents." Although Messers Brown and Tanner had "affirmed that Negroes are entitled to full constitutional privileges as members of society," their claim that the "realm of religion is a wholly separate order of life untouchable by civil rights . . . is a double standard . . . that is an intolerable moral dualism for any Christian body." While *Christianity Today* on January 30 commended the Church for "refusing to let popular protest shape its doctrines," it thought blacks should not feel deprived because they were not eligible for the Mormon priesthood since the Church itself was "tragically misguided." This editorial predicted that in the not too distant future the Church could expect "demands that not only blacks but women also be allowed to receive the Priesthood."

A few days earlier, W. F. Reed in the January 26 *Sports Illustrated* recounted the gathering wave of protest leveled against the statement, and then quoted several non-Mormon athletes at B.Y.U. who expressed similar dissatisfaction. He contended that no one would be happier to see the Church change its policy on blacks than BYU's athletic department. Calvin Trillin, commenting in the March 21 *New Yorker*, said that at least a few people at B.Y.U. entertained the belief that the demonstrations against their basketball team the previous winter had been part of a "Communist conspiracy." Most, however, considered it another illustration of Mormons being persecuted for their religious beliefs.

As many of these reports were being written, President David O. McKay died and *Christianity Today* announced, under the signature of Janet Rohler, that President McKay had told Sterling M. McMurrin in 1954 "It is a practice, not a doctrine, that priesthood be denied to blacks and the practice will some day be changed." McKay's son was quoted as saying that his father had affirmed in 1968 that the statement was "essentially correct." Rohler anticipated no change in the Church's position with the succession of Joseph Fielding Smith. A year later, in March 1971, *Newsweek* suggested that the black question more than any "other single subject seems to dominate" conversations of Salt Lakers.

A positive note was expressed by Wallace Turner of the *New York Times* on April 6, 1972, when he wrote of the special meeting the Church had been holding for black members in Salt Lake City. Although Turner conceded that there had been no change in Mormon policy, the Church was showing "signs of responding to its anti-Negro theology." Six months later, and several weeks after Harold B. Lee became President of the Church, *Time* observed that for "many outsiders the most urgent problem for Mormons is the fact that blacks of African ancestry are still" denied the Priesthood. "Harold B. Lee, the 'revealer,' could theoretically receive the word from God any time."

Lowry Nelson's October 16, 1974, *Christian Century* article addressed the not uncommon view of a Mormon who was openly concerned about the "problem that [was] not likely to go away." Sandra Haggerty, a black columnist and a frequent contributor to the *Los Angeles Times* wrote on July 5, 1974, "Although I have met a few Mormons who attempt to use their religious stance to justify outright racist attitudes and actions, others are somewhat embarrassed by that portion of the doctrine and feel it should be reversed." Subsequently, the Church policy regarding blacks has momentarily been at odds with the Boy Scouts of America and Larry Lester of Vancouver, Washington, a black whose ordination to the Priesthood was declared null and void within hours.

CHURCH'S HOLDINGS AND ASSETS

Amidst the uncertainty and speculation regarding Mormonism and the blacks, there has developed an ever increasing interest in the Church's assets and its use of proven business techniques. Starting with *Forbes'* complimentary piece on the Marriotts in 1971, there has been frequent estimates of the Church's worth. In that article the Church was said to have "at least \$500 million to \$1 billion in real estate and other investments, with a daily income of \$1 million or close to \$400 million a year." The monies derived from the various business enterprises, *Forbes* told its readers, are used by the Church for its church programs, welfare system, educational facilities and worldwide missionary operations. "The payoff," of the latter of these endeavors has "resulted in the tripling of the Church membership in two decades."

Several weeks later, the *Newsweek* of March 11, 1971, explained that within a few blocks from Temple Square, one could see such Mormon-owned establishments as Z.C.M.I., the Deseret Book Store, KSL-TV and "scores of church-owned properties, including a 28-story skyscraper On Main Street, [Brigham Young] himself stands in bronze, hand outstretched toward Zion's First National Bank." Interestingly, *Newsweek* saw "nothing particularly ominous about the domination of a highly prosperous church," and chose not to "quibble with the notion that Salt Lake has benefitted considerably from the traditional virtues of industry, resourcefulness and organization."

The following Spring, *Time* magazine depicted the Church as "rich, rapidly growing but still monolithic." Noting that it was Mormon policy to pay for buildings as they were built, *Time* calculated the Mormon prosperity on the basis of its new "\$30 million world headquarters" in Salt Lake City, though Church authorities remained "mum" on most expenditures. Near the end of 1972, Nelson Wadsworth, religious correspondent for the *National Observer*, wrote that the "gleaming new high-rise Mormon Church-office building" nearing completion in Salt Lake City would "serve as the business headquarters" for the Church. "The new building's contemporary design," in Wadsworth's opinion, reflected the "Church's increasing concern with streamlining its home-office organization, using modern management concepts, computers, consultants, economic surveys and other modern techniques much as any big business would in trying to move into new market areas." Interestingly, these innovations were not viewed as evolving from any economic consideration. The motivation for the Church's open adoption of proven business techniques actually came about because of an overwhelming desire, as President Harold B. Lee put it, to show the world that the "fundamental principles of right living and self-control and sound economic needs, patterned after the Lord's plan of salvation," can be a reality. President Lee conceded in an interview with Wadsworth that some of the Church's biggest problems were centered on its rapid growth. "But we like to wrestle with these kinds of problems because they indicate that the church is not standing still, that the work is going forward."

More recently, *Nation's Business* in its "Bicentennial Salute" to Salt Lake City, attributed much of Utah's well-being to the Church. It reported that the Church had more than 3,000 paid employees, with an estimated income of "more than \$125 million from its industries." A four month study of the Church's wealth by Associated Press, published in the May 14, 1976, edition of the *Washington Post*, placed the Church's gross daily income at \$3 million, at least half of which

was given in the form of tithes and other contributions. "The AP study showed that the gross yearly income of the Mormon Church and the corporations it controls exceeds \$1 billion. At least \$550 million of that is net income that goes directly to the church." The study was "based on available public and church records, interviews, statistics and other business information. The \$1 billion estimate of gross annual income did not include rental from commercial buildings and apartments, undisclosed real estate transactions, interest and dividends from stock investments or large individual donations." According to the authors, David Briscoe and Bill Beecham, the "approximately \$150 million that Howard R. Hughes might have left the Mormon Church is equivalent to less than a month's income for the Mormons, one of the wealthiest religious organizations in the country." Citing essentially the same figures, Milton Viorst, in his *New York Times* article, claimed that the Church was "among the nation's 50 largest corporations."

POLYGAMY

Far less conspicuous, but nonetheless noteworthy in the minds of some, are Utah's polygamists. "The Mormon rams of Brigham Young's polygamous persuasion still exist, but they do not roar: they whisper," according to the October 11, 1971, *Time*. "Scattered across every county in Utah, most numerous in the Salt Lake Valley, live perhaps 20,000 men, women and children who still take literally Young's solemn litany: 'The only men who become Gods, even the sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy.'" These are people who out of necessity keep their lives extremely private because "polygamy is illegal in Utah, as in every state," and because the "Mormon Church excommunicates any of its members who still dare live by what is rather cryptically called 'the principle.'" Morris Q. Kunz, the only polygamist discussed by name in the article, has three wives, thirty children, eight stepchildren, more than 200 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. "Kunz and his fellow practitioners," *Time* explains, are "reinforced by their conviction that they are the defenders of a tenet which the official Mormon Church accepts as fundamental—even though it cannot legally be lived at present." Prosecution is rare because "sons and daughters of old Mormon families" do not want "to testify against their neighbors."

Although most polygamists are less than open about their life-style, Alexander Joseph, the "nation's best-known advocate of polygamy," has received considerable media coverage. Joseph has been excommunicated from the Church as Michael Seiler pointed out in the February 9, 1976, *Los Angeles Times*, "but it is unlikely that he will be prosecuted." According to a spokesman for the Utah State Attorney General's Office, "Joseph is not legally married to any of his [nine] wives," and "therefore is not legally a polygamist." Interestingly, Seiler makes no reference to the Church beyond mentioning Joseph's excommunication. Somewhat more dramatically *Time* introduced the Joseph story to its readers the previous March by announcing that President Spencer W. Kimball in 1974 had declared "the Lord brought an end to [polygamy] many decades ago," but the "divine word [has not yet] reached everyone." *Time* speculated there were "some 35,000 heretical Mormons in the U.S. and Mexico who still practice polygamy." Seiler figured there were "25,000 to 35,000 Americans living in polygamy."

EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

The proposed Equal Rights Amendment continues to languish in at least two areas where the Church has a strong influence. On February 18, 1975, Utah's House of Representatives rejected the proposed amendment to the Constitution after considerable controversy in the local media. Suzanne Dean, in a *Washington Post* article published just before the voting, wrote that "climate for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment has suddenly turned chilly in [Utah] after an editorial opposing it appeared in" the *Church News* of January 11. The day after the Utah House rejected the Equal Rights Amendment, the Nevada Senate reached a similar verdict. Following this vote, Kate Butler, ERA coordinator in Nevada, attributed the defeat to a "raw power play by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, whose members in Nevada number less than 55,000 compared to a total state population of about 600,000." Butler's remarks as quoted by the Associated Press appeared the following morning in several major newspapers including the *New York Times*. The same story also included the comments of State Senator Helen Herr, a leading ERA opponent, who rejected the foregoing criticism by asking: "How in the world can a church stand by and see the family unit threatened?"

That October the third annual "Women Unlimited" conference was held in Salt Lake City. Reporting on the proceedings for the *New York Times*, Grace Lichtenstein perceived a "Paradox in [the] Women's Movement: Feminists Who Are Mormons." For Mormon women the road ahead is "symbolically as hard as the cross-country journey their persecuted ancestors took more than a century ago to reach the Utah desert." Yet, "Mormon women increasingly are standing up for their rights, striving for careers outside the home and questioning longheld religious beliefs"—beliefs of a Church that "denies women entry into the priesthood and opposes the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion and birth control while promoting marriage and motherhood as a women's most divine role."

Expressing a different opinion, Barbara B. Smith, President of the Relief Society, in a May 11, 1976, front page interview with *Washington Star* staff writer Randy Sue Coburn, explained that the "role of women in our church has always been one where women have been given top appreciation and they have been given an opportunity to do everything. It has been that way since the very beginning." The church is opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment "because we feel it is blanket approach in the hope of solving all problems." We also feel that "unless a man is given the [primary] responsibility of providing for his family" the family will be destroyed. In the Bible, women are given the "specific role of nurturing children and raising them. I think it also gives the man the responsibility of leading out in many areas of life. The Lord has assigned men and women to work together and each are equally important, but in different ways."

Senator Jake Garn of Utah, in remarks he inserted in the *Congressional Record* of February 1, 1977, argued that "we must be alert to the effects of the ERA that are not intended, including those depriving lawmakers and government officials of the right, by legal means to honor the vital differences in the roles of man and woman." In his opinion the "undergirding strength of this nation lies in the strength of its families, its home environment; and a breakdown of that foundation can only weaken the country." A better solution is to enact "judicious and wise legislation to correct particular circumstances."

CONCLUSION

In the 1970's the Church has been surprisingly successful in gaining recognition and media coverage on those aspects it would most like to have publicized—integrity, devotion to the Puritan work ethic, the family, genealogy, temples and proper health habits. And the secular press has shown an increasingly sophisticated understanding of these and other aspects of Mormonism. Events which in the past would have called forth derisiveness or flippancy now are treated with interest and insight. Even news coverage of tangential happenings like the Howard Hughes' "Mormon Will," the execution of Gary Gilmore and the Alan Howe case are often treated with more understanding by the secular press than by the Utah-Mormon press. Although writers still tend to avoid in-depth discussion of the diversified backgrounds, talents, interests and personalities of individual Mormons, they nonetheless take their subjects more seriously than in the past. All in all, there is every indication that media interest in Mormonism will continue to flourish.

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