Mormon Psychohistory: Psychological Insights into the Latter-day Saint Past, Present, and Future

Mark Koltko-Rivera

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I was speaking with a fellow Saint and convert at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City. We described ourselves to each other as "Joseph Smith converts." By that, we meant that we had originally been attracted to the church by the breadth of vision of Joseph Smith. The doctrines revealed through the Prophet Joseph seemed to us, in the early days of our conversions, to be breathtaking in scope, with his vision of endless, inhabited worlds and a saga that connected the ancient Adam with twenty-first-century civilization. It had seemed to us, in our first acquaintance with Mormonism, that here was a religion that gave a new meaning to the term "humanistic," a revolutionary faith that was truly ennobling of humanity. Here we felt we had heard a truth both long-known and long-forgotten, that women and men could become not only god-like, but truly gods. And the Prophet himself seemed in some ways an ideal model of prophetic leadership. Joseph was a complex man with a vivid appreciation of the paradoxes and tragedies that color human life, an appreciation that often manifested as compassion, broad-mindedness, and a dedication to the truth above convenience.

It was a delight to share our testimonies with each other at that Sunstone Symposium (not a rare occurrence, incidentally), but the irony of the situation was not lost on us. We were waiting to hear an address by a scholar who had been disciplined at the church university for doing little else than telling truths about LDS history, truths that had been deemed inconvenient by some of the Prophet's administrative descendants. What had happened? How did a revolutionary, humanistic religion give rise,

within just a few generations, to people who were capable of implementing such repressive policies?

There is a host of contradictions between the religion and ethics that were preached by Joseph Smith in the nineteenth century and what we see in turn-of-the-twenty-first century Mormonism. The Nauvoo *Expositor* incident notwithstanding, the Prophet Joseph seemed overall to be tolerant of various points of view, and disdained rigid creeds and orthodoxies.[1] In our day, however, it appears that there is an official, thoroughly correlated system of doctrinal interpretation among Mormons to depart from which is to invite discipline.[2]

These contradictions go beyond simple matters of interpretation. In earlier days, the leaders of the Saints seemed to have been very comfortable in expounding upon distinctively Latter-day doctrines, teachings that were quite different from the teachings of the dominant churches of the day. Today there seems to be more concern about "fitting in" with other religious organizations, sometimes at the expense of LDS distinctiveness. We find, for example, that some aspects of the doctrine of exaltation, the most prominent doctrinal development of the latter part of Joseph Smith's life, are far less emphasized in this generation, almost as if they were an embarrassment.[3]

---

1. A full analysis of the character of Joseph Smith goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, the following incident related by the Prophet Joseph may be considered typical of his approach; consider the implications of the following statement for dealing with differences of doctrinal interpretations in our day:

> Elder Pelatiah Brown . . . has been preaching concerning [one of the figures in the Book of Revelation]; and for this he was hauled up for trial before the High Council.
>
> I did not like the old man being called up for erring in doctrine. It looks too much like the Methodist, and not like the Latter-day Saints. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be asked out of their church. I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammelled. It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine (*History of the Church*, 5:340).

2. Lavina Fielding Anderson, "The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership: A Contemporary Chronology," *Dialogue* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 7-64; "Six Intellectuals Disciplined for Apostasy," *Sunstone* 16, no. 6 (November 1993): 65-73; "Disciplinary Actions Generate More Heat," *Sunstone* 16, no. 7 (December 1993): 67-68; Anonymous, "'Clipped and Controlled': A Contemporary Look at BYU," *Sunstone* 19, no. 3 (August-September 1996): 61-72; Brian Evenson, "Unwritten Rules," letter to the editor, *Sunstone* 19, no. 4 (December 1996): 2-5; Scott Abbott, "On Ecclesiastical Endorsement at Brigham Young University," *Sunstone* 21, no. 4 (April 1997):9-14; "Academic Freedom Organization Investigates BYU," *Sunstone* 20, no. 2 (July 1997): 73-74; Bryan Waterman, "Policing 'The Lord's University': The AAUP and BYU," *Sunstone* 21, no.4 (December 1998): 22-38.

3. A full consideration of this topic goes beyond the scope of this article. However, it is instructive to note the relative paucity of references to the full meaning of the doctrine of exaltation (D&C 132: 19-20) in the public teachings or pronouncements of contemporary church leaders. (For example, the concept that exaltation involves development into godhood was mentioned in only one of the addresses in the most recent LDS General Confer-

It could be argued that this is simply a matter of evolution: times change, and the focus and emphases of the Saints change in order to adapt.[4] Although this is something of a judgment call, it seems to this writer that what we are witnessing over the course of LDS church history involves functional changes in fundamental values. The values espoused by Joseph Smith seem to involve a certain toleration, within broad limits, of differences of opinion. Those limits appear to be much more narrowly drawn today. I take this to be a qualitative difference that indicates not so much evolution as internal contradiction.

This pattern of contradiction appears in the deepest spiritual life of the Saints. The earliest generations of Mormonism saw an acceptance of visionary spiritual experience; it was a time when encounters with divine messengers were publicly savored and cherished. In our generation, the statement of such an experience during Testimony Meeting might result in a worried conference with one's bishop and a hurried referral to a psychiatrist. Saints were once invited to have their callings and elections made sure by way of sacred ordinances (D&C 131:5); now, to even make reference to the existence of such ordinances is to risk administrative displeasure.

Discrepancies also show up in the area of politics. We were once considered so revolutionary as to merit military intervention by the United States Army;[5] now it appears that we are such safe bets that we have a disproportionate representation in the armed forces, the national intelligence establishment, and law enforcement in general.[6] Once upon a time, the Republican Party declared war on Mormonism as the standard bearer of a "relic of barbarism;" now it must consider the Saints to be among the very staunchest of allies.

---

ence [*Ensign* 29, no.11 (1999), where it was noted obliquely.) This is in marked contrast to the bluntness with which this doctrine was proclaimed by Joseph Smith in the King Follett Discourse [Stan Larson, ed., "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *Brigham Young University Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 193-208] and elsewhere ["K[ings] & P[riests] unto God & His Father," *The Essential Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1995), 251-255].

4. I am grateful to Marybeth Raynes for pointing out this line of thinking and for other comments made on an earlier draft of this paper.

5. More detailed descriptions of the historical events to which I refer to throughout this article may be found in standard histories: James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991); Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

6. Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, *America's Saints* (New York: Putnam, 1984); J. Heinerman and A. Shupe, *The Mormon Corporate Empire* (Boston: Beacon, 1985); cp. Thomas G. Alexander, review of *The Mormon Corporate Empire*, by J. Heinerman and A. Shupe, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (1987): 417-418.

Within the church family, it is not considered polite to point out these contradictions. I am reminded of the atmosphere one sees within a dysfunctional family, where the violence or addiction of a family member is obvious to all, but is not permitted to be brought up for discussion. Therapists who deal with addiction have a phrase for this phenomenon: it is called the "elephant in the living room" that no one talks about, the obvious problem around which family members silently maneuver but never explicitly mention. In the same way, many of us in the church family make it a point to not discuss the contradictions inherent in modern Mormonism, and those who persist in doing so are often labeled apostates.[7]

When confronted with a person who exhibits inconsistencies in her or his life, professionals often apply psychological principles of interpretation to this person's present and early experiences. Similarly, with a group such as the body of LDS believers, we can apply psychological principles to see how the vicissitudes of LDS history may have shaped the contradictions of the contemporary Mormon psyche.[8] This sort of effort is the development of a "psychohistory," an inner history, as opposed to the external history upon which most textbooks focus. As is the case with the life histories of many individuals, LDS group psychohistory reflects a combination of normal, developmental milestones and reactions to trauma.[9]

To explain how traumas have affected development, either in the person or in an organization, it helps to have some acquaintance with personality theory, so I shall outline briefly a theory of personality that, I think, offers insights into LDS history. I will emphasize the implications that this theory has for explaining the trials that the LDS intellectual community has been enduring in recent decades, and I shall attempt to

---

7. See note 2.

8. In this article, I confine myself to the LDS church that is headquartered in Utah.

9. It is a theoretical question of no small import to consider the appropriateness of applying developmental theories originally devised to understand the psychology of individuals, to groups and societies, as I do here. A full consideration of this matter transcends the ambitions of this article. However, several theorists have applied motivational theories originally devised for individual psychology to society. One is Abraham Maslow himself (see references in following note). The Jewish people have been the subject of at least two extensive psychohistorical studies: Avner Falk, *A Psychoanalytic History of the Jews* (Madison, NT: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), and Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Mind* (New York: Scribner's, 1977). The historian Peter Gay has argued for a "history informed by psychoanalysis" in *Freud for Historians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Ken Wilber, who has synthesized a number of psychological theories of development into an overarching theory, suggests that the stages of a culture's development parallel those of an individual's [Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything* (Boston, Shambhala, 1996); idem, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (Boston, Shambhala, 1995)]. As a final example, almost any article in the *Journal of Psychohistory* involves the application of Freudian psychoanalytic theory to societal development.

be not only descriptive, but prescriptive. That is, I will not only outline what I think has happened, but what we as a people and as individuals might do about it.

The Motivations of Individuals and Organizations

For a theory of group personality and motivation, I rely foremost on the work of Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), a brilliant psychologist and one-time president of the American Psychological Association, who made major contributions not only to humanistic psychology, but to the study of spirituality integrated with psychology that has become known as transpersonal psychology. Maslow's theories are appropriate, in part, because he is one of the very few major personality theorists who has paid serious attention to spirituality in a positive way. He studied not only the personality of individuals but of organizations as well, and as such his theories seem uniquely suited to a discussion of Mormonism.[10]

Readers who have taken an introductory course in psychology may remember Maslow's famous "hierarchy of needs."[11] Simply put, the theory states that there are several different types of motivations for a person's behavior, and that these motivations rise and fall in importance depending upon the changing circumstances of a person's life. As an obvious example: for someone who is starving, gaining food is much more important than seeking out an opportunity for artistic expression. In particular, Maslow outlined a sort of pyramid of needs, a pyramid of six levels (see Figure 1). Although there are important exceptions, people typically must successfully address the needs that are lower on this pyramid before they feel much motivation in addressing needs higher up. On the other hand, once needs that are lower on the pyramid are largely sat-

---

10. Not all psychologists accept Maslow's theories, especially as applied in this unconventional manner to the lives of groups rather than individuals. I make no apologies here. Overall, Maslow's motivational theory is taught widely and is accepted in virtually every textbook in introductory psychology, motivational theory, and humanistic and transpersonal psychology. His theory of personality and motivation partakes of implicit assumptions, some of which are more consistent with a gospel framework, and some less so. Such is the case with all psychological theories [Brent D. Slife & Richard N. Williams, *What's Behind the Research? Discovering Hidden Assumptions in the Behavioral Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 1995)]. As it happens, I find that Maslow's assumptions are more consistent with a gospel framework, on the whole, than those of any other major personality theorist. The application of Maslow's motivational theory in a historical or developmental context to a society is a natural extension of Maslow's own work [as shown by papers collected in Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 1971), and in Edward Hoffman, ed., *Future Visions: The Unpublished Papers of Abraham Maslow* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 1996)].

11. Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

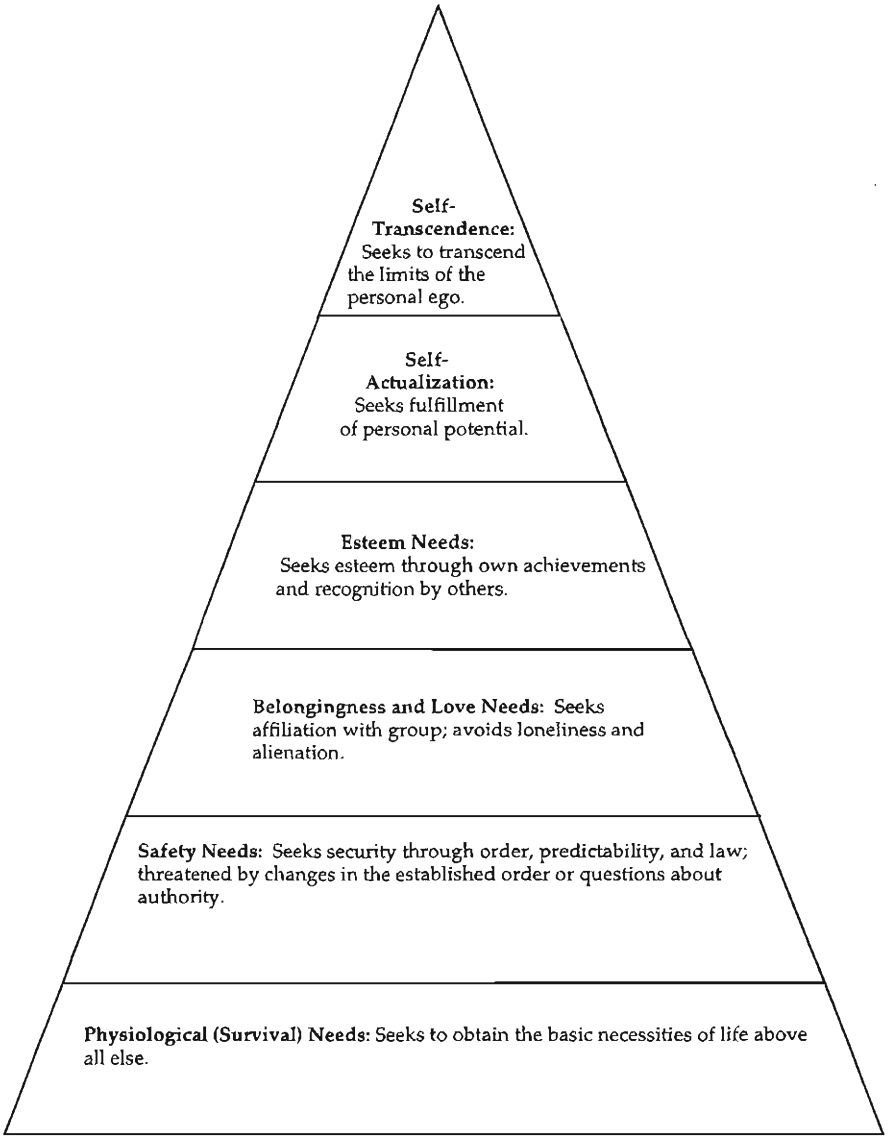

Figure 1. Maslows's Hierarchy of Needs

isfied in a reliable way, needs that are higher up on the hierarchy become quite compelling.[12]

At the base of Maslow's motivational pyramid are the physiological needs. These are the most "prepotent" needs. That is, a person will seek to address these needs before anything else. These are basic survival needs, such as the needs to satisfy hunger and thirst. Once basic survival is assured, the person turns to the need for safety. That is, a person will seek to find or create a life where the world is stable, lawful, predictable, and, above all, safe.

Once the physiological and safety needs have been addressed successfully, a person progresses up the pyramid to levels where different sorts of needs become compelling and must be addressed for the individual to feel happy. Maslow described "belongingness" needs, that is, the need to feel accepted by a group, to love, and to be loved. At lower levels of the hierarchy of needs, the things to be most avoided were hunger, thirst, and threats to law and order. At the level of the belongingness needs, the individual is most threatened by loneliness, and by isolation or alienation from others.

Next to the belongingness needs on the hierarchy are what Maslow called the "esteem needs." Here, the individual feels the need to gain recognition and respect from others. The person seeks to fulfill this need in two ways. One way is to make actual progress in terms of individual competence and achievement. Another is to seek a good reputation and status, recognition and prestige, even as ends in themselves.

The next level of the pyramid is often, but mistakenly, described as the top of the pyramid. This is the level of "self actualization." Here, the need that is most pressing is to live up to one's individual potential. As Maslow put it:

> The specific form that these [self-actualization] needs will take will of course vary greatly from person to person. In one individual it may take the form of the desire to be an ideal mother, in another it may be expressed athletically, and in still another it may be expressed in painting pictures or in inventions. At this level, individual differences are greatest.[13]

(I do not think, incidentally, that Maslow meant to equate the importance of parenthood and athletics in the eternal scheme of things. His point

---

12. It is easy to take the pyramid metaphor too literally. As even Maslow pointed out, it is not the case that needs are completely fulfilled at one level before the individual proceeds to another. It is rather that the predominant thrust of a person's motivation progresses from one level to the next. All needs are present all the time; what changes over time is the relative importance and strength of these needs. What does not change is the sequence that is followed, as needs rise or fall in importance.

13. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 46.

was simply that people see their own potential in different, individual terms.)

It was Maslow's feeling that, once the earlier needs had been dealt with, a person would be unhappy, even miserable, if the need for self-actualization were not addressed. Yet even this is not the highest motivation. Towards the end of his life, Maslow noted that there are individuals who have transcended even self-actualization.[14] Such individuals arrive at the top of Maslow's hierarchy of motivation with a strong, undeniable motive towards not just self-actualization but also self-transcendence. That is, the individual seeks communion with the transcendent, with the Divine, and identifies with something greater than the purely individual self. This is the realm of certain kinds of "peak experiences" and mystical experience,[15] and of identification with humanity or the world as a whole, rather than solely with one's tribe or one's individual self. Far from being self-absorbed narcissists, individuals at the highest levels of Maslow's motivational hierarchy are more typically characterized by selfless, ego-less service to and compassion for others.[16]

Such is Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs as applied to the motivational life of individuals. And while it is usually to individuals that it is applied, Maslow himself saw that this theory could be applied to groups as well. We may, in other words, be able to characterize the behavior of the church and its membership in terms of the types of motivations predominantly at work at a given moment in church history. These predominant needs exert a powerful influence on philosophies of life, values, the commonly held worldview.[17] Our desire to understand "What

14. Abraham H. Maslow, "The Farther Reaches of Human Nature," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 1, no. 1 (1969): 1-9; Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 1971), 282. Despite the identical titles, these texts are utterly different. Concerning common misrepresentation of the final stage in Maslow's motivational scheme, see Mark E. Koltko-Rivera, "Maslow's 'Transhumanism': Was Transpersonal Psychology Conceived as 'a Psychology without People in It'?," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 38, no. 1 (1998): 71-80; Mark E. Koltko-Rivera, "Lying about Maslow: The True 'Top' of the Motivational Pyramid" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 1996).

15. Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (New York: Penguin, 1970).

16. This kind of surpassing concern for the welfare of others on the part of self-transcenders is described by several theorists in transpersonal psychology [Frances Vaughan, *The Inward Arc* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986); Roger Walsh, *Staying Alive: The Psychology of Human Survival* (Boston: Shambhala, 1984); Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan, eds., *Paths Beyond Ego* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1993)]. One important approach to psychotherapy in a transpersonal mode has, as one objective, the nurturing of the client's innate compassion toward other creatures [Karen Kissel Wegela, "Contemplative Psychotherapy: A Path of Uncovering Brilliant Sanity," *Journal of Contemplative Psychotherapy* 9 (1994): 27-51], suggesting that compassion is integral to self-transcendence.

17. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 37, 39.

happened to the church?" is a desire to understand the "why?" behind church history, and we have much to gain from looking at that history through the lens of Maslow's motivational theory.

The History of the Church from a Motivational Perspective

Starting at the Apex: Self-Actualization and Self-Transcendence

The earliest era of church history presents something of a paradox. Despite the invariant sequence dictated by Maslow's theory, a sequence in which self-actualization and self-transcendence cannot be emphasized until other, more basic needs have been met, there is from the earliest days of the church a distinct emphasis on these higher order needs. This is not to say that survival or safety issues were ignored—hardly so, given the hard realities of life on the American frontier and the need to protect the Saints from persecution—but there was, in addition to the predictable concern with survival, a noteworthy stress laid upon self-actualization and self-transcendence.

Herein lies the paradox: it appears that in its early days, the church began with a strong emphasis at the top of the motivational pyramid, rather than building strictly from the bottom up. What sense does this make in terms of Maslow's theory?

Actually, it is implicit in Maslow's writing that the origination (or, as we might say, the restoration) of religious traditions is marked by powerful forces exerted at the level of self-transcendence. As Maslow put it: "The very beginning, the intrinsic core, the essence, the universal nucleus of every known high religion . . . has been the private, lonely, personal illumination, revelation, or ecstasy of some acutely sensitive prophet or seer."[18] For Maslow, such illumination or revelation is an expression of self-transcendence needs. Thus, we would expect that the very beginning of a religious tradition would be marked by a special emphasis involving the top of the motivational pyramid, as it were. The very early history of the church does indeed seem to bear the marks of such an emphasis along with a very necessary preoccupation with survival.

An emphasis on self-actualization is evidenced by the attention paid, beginning with the Joseph Smith period, to education, literature, the arts, and cultural achievement generally—an emphasis that is quite remarkable, given the financial circumstances of the saints and the educational and cultural standards of their surrounding neighbors during this time.[19] For that matter, central statements of the latter-day gospel itself exhibit

18. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*, 19.

19. See the general histories cited in note 5.

the characteristics of an emphasis on self-actualization, with such notions as "men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25), and such public admonitions as Joseph Smith's: "You have got to learn how to make yourselves Gods . . . ."[20] A collateral emphasis on self-transcendence is suggested by the latter-day scriptures themselves, which, as I have discussed elsewhere, bear the marks of mystical experience.[21]

Moreover, the apex of development in LDS religious practice during this period, the temple ceremonies, conveys the overwhelming importance of both self-actualization and self-transcendence. Although a comprehensive interpretation of the motivational and value structures implicit in the temple ceremonies is beyond the scope of this essay,[22] two broad areas of emphasis may be discerned from official and public documents regarding the temple.[23] First, the objective of the temple ceremonies is to help bring individuals to the expression of their fullest potential, as heirs of God, to the extent of becoming gods themselves (D&C 132:20); the temple is, thus, the ultimate expression of the human potential movement[24] and clearly emphasizes the importance of self-actualization. Second, the individual undergoing the temple ceremonies makes commitments of service and self-sacrifice that just as clearly stress the importance of self-transcendence in the motivational life of both the individual and the community.

Subsequent to the Joseph Smith period, however, the story changes. It happens in the life of an individual that a time of intense stress can force that person to focus on a lower level of the motivational hierarchy. As an obvious example, in wartime, the adaptive artist or writer will

---

20. *The Essential Joseph Smith*, 235.

21. Mark Edward Koltko, "Mysticism and Mormonism: An LDS Perspective on Transcendence and Higher Consciousness," *Sunstone* 13, no. 2 (April 1989): 13-19.

22. The definitive work in this area is yet to be published. For attempts at interpretations of the temple that bear on the concerns of this article, see Mark P. Leone, "The Mormon Temple Experience," *Sunstone* 10, no. 5 (1985): 4-7; John M. Lundquist, "C. G. Jung and the Temple: Symbols of Wholeness," in K. Barnaby and P. D'Acierno, eds., *C. G. Jung and the Humanities: Toward a Hermeneutics of Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 113-123; John M. Lundquist, "What is Reality?," in John M. Lundquist and S. D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday: Vol. 1* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 428-438; and writings of Hugh Nibley too numerous to cite individually here.

23. As only two of many accessible examples of official LDS church literature about the temple that make for provocative reading when read with an eye toward discerning self-actualization and self-transcendence as motivational emphases, see James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1962, original work published ca. 1912) and *Temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church Magazines/The Ensign, 1988).

24. The humorless will doubtless wish to point out that the temple ceremonies of the 1840s predate the human potential movement of the 1960s by over a century.

focus more on ensuring personal safety than on artistic creation. As it is with the individual, so it is with the group. In Mormonism, there was indeed a time of cultural stress so intense that it refocused the energies of the group rather thoroughly. Although an emphasis on education, cultural development, and temple work continued to exist to some degree, the major focus of the group shifted heavily toward survival and safety in a way that seriously de-emphasized self-actualization and self-transcendence. This re-ordering of Mormon motivational priorities, the effects of which are still felt today, began during the time of the nineteenth-century persecutions surrounding issues of Mormon uniqueness.[25]

The Era of Survival and Safety Needs

It is fashionable in some circles to underplay the persecutions of Mormonism that occurred in the first sixty years of its existence. But this is simply revisionist history-making, rather like claiming that reports of the Jewish Holocaust were "exaggerations." It is clear that major violent persecutions of Mormons occurred in the nineteenthth century, persecutions in which many individuals were murdered, or forced into life-threatening circumstances to escape terrorism and murder. Joseph Smith himself and his brother Hyrum, the Patriarch, are only the most prominent murder victims of this period. The Mormon mind has been powerfully shaped by Haun's Mill and other massacres, the Missouri Extermination Order, Carthage Jail, the ordeal at Winter Quarters, and the shallow graves left on the exodus to the Salt Lake valley. I am aware of no casualty figures, but it would seem that hundreds, if not thousands, died in these incidents, a notable proportion of the early church population.

However, a kind of grim capstone to these persecutions occurred once the church had settled in Utah itself. The United States Army was sent to occupy the territory, to put down a supposed revolt that was a fiction created by non-LDS government officials. Ultimately, many church members were disenfranchised, the church was virtually dissolved as an organization, most high-level church officials and many local authorities were imprisoned or forced into hiding, and most church property was confiscated. Ostensibly this was done in order to enforce the laws of the land regarding monogamous marriage. However, as the constitutional

25. The phrase "issues of Mormon uniqueness" covers a lot of territory. It has been noted that the persecutions of the nineteenth century were not simply focused on plural marriage, but on a variety of broadly-defined "religious" issues that included "an economic philosophy, and a goal of community-building that inevitably meant political and economic tension with their neighbors. . . . Latter-day Saint spiritual assumptions and practical community goals were, in important ways, inconsistent with American pluralism" (Arrington & Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 62), resulting in prolonged conflict carried out in various ways.

scholar Stephen Carter has noted, what was going on was not law enforcement but persecution.

> When the Supreme Court in 1879 sustained the authority of the state to prosecute Mormons for polygamy . . . one might suppose that the Justices were simply weighing the demands of religious freedom against the general regulatory power of the state. In fact, the Justices were reflecting the anti-Mormon fervor of the age. . . . Mormons, seen as blasphemers, were beaten and sometimes killed, their homes destroyed, their property stolen. . . . The Supreme Court understood perfectly well that the Mormons could not be permitted to be different. Even if it was required by religious belief, the Court wrote, the practice of polygamy was "subversive to good order." In other words, hatred of Mormons caused other people to act disorderly.[26]

What was the result of this history of abuse and persecution? In the framework of Maslow's motivational theory, the church's overall focus was forcibly turned towards matters of physical survival and safety, the foundation of Maslow's motivational pyramid. Certainly at least this much can hardly be considered controversial. It is just common sense to think that mid- to late-nineteenth-century Mormons might be fundamentally concerned with survival and safety. But now we must ask: What are the long-term effects on an organization's being thrust into a struggle for survival? Consider what Maslow had to say about how safety needs can be manifested, and think about it in terms of Mormon history:

> The safety needs can become very urgent on the social scene whenever there are real threats to law, to order, to the authority of society. The threat of chaos . . . can be expected in most human beings to produce a regression from any higher needs to the more prepotent safety needs. A common, almost an expectable reaction, is the easier acceptance of dictatorship or of military rule. This tends to be true for all human beings. . . . But it seems to be most true of people who are living near the safety line. *They are particularly disturbed by threats to authority*, to legality, and to the representatives of the law.[27]

The church was certainly threatened by chaos and annihilation. Apparently in response to this, as a people we "regressed," in Maslow's term. The earliest days of the church had been characterized by a motivational structure in which attention was paid not only to survival and safety needs, but to self-actualization and self-transcendence needs as well. With the onset of the worst persecutions, that motivational structure changed, such that attention was largely withdrawn from self-actualization and self-transcendence concerns, and invested heavily in

26. Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 28-29.

27. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 43, emphasis added.

safety and survival needs. Maslow's theory predicts that the LDS community would be "particularly disturbed" by challenges to its authority structure. Certainly this has come to pass.

Look at it this way. In many an old western movie, a wagon train of settlers is beset by a band of Native Americans. The head of the wagon train cries out, "Get the wagons in a circle!" And the settlers present a united front, fighting for their lives, firing rifles, and preparing for hand-to-hand combat while a shower of flaming arrows falls upon them.

Imagine what would happen if, in the midst of this struggle, one of the settlers were to get thoughtful. "Hold on just a minute here," he or she might say. "We don't know what these people are about. For all we know, these folks just look at us as the agents of a treaty-breaking government bent on building an empire right through their sacred lands. You know, you could really hardly blame them for being upset at us. Maybe we could talk this out—establish a dialogue, that sort of thing."

At this point, the head of the wagon train would look at the thoughtful settler and say something like, "Looks like that one's been chewin' on loco weed. GET YER FOOL HEAD DOWN OUTTA THE LINE O' FIRE!" And should this settler attempt to interfere with the defense of the camp—pushing aside other settlers' rifles, say, as they drew a bead on one of the marauders—the wagon train leader would feel he had little recourse but to restrain or even fire upon the thoughtful settler to protect the group.

Note that the hypothetical thoughtful settler of my example was, in fact, correct. The American government has broken most of its treaties with Native Americans, and, indeed, a case could be made that the marauding party was more in the right than the settlers. But we usually feel that a time of threat to physical survival is not the time to involve oneself in ethical discussions like this. Much as I like what the thoughtful settler had to say, if my life or my family's lives were jeopardized by his or her actions, I, too, would probably try to subdue that person by any means necessary, including the use of lethal force.

Think of this in terms of the church. Due to the crisis of prolonged persecution, Mormonism has adopted a siege mentality, like settlers with the wagons in a circle. In a siege, it is often necessary for the community to act in blind obedience to its leaders. There is no time for discussion or dialogue. Differences of opinion are a threat; anyone who promotes discussion is viewed in essentially the same way as the surrounding marauders, and will seem to have become as one of the wolves who threaten the fold of sheep. The circumstances demand that the people adopt a herd mentality that stresses conformity above all else; to think otherwise is to separate from "Us" and become one of "Them." Such an approach was perhaps necessary for the survival of the church in an earlier age. It is easy to see, however, that this is still essentially the attitude

taken by many church members and leaders in regards to intellectual discourse in the church of today.

The Survival of Past World Views into the Present:

"Now hold it a minute!" some readers might object. "All that persecution happened a long, long time ago!"

Did it really? Yes and no. In terms of the calendar, yes, the active and violent, widespread persecutions and imprisonments ceased over a century ago. But it is not the calendar that is at issue. Events may help to form the attitudes of people born up to a generation after the events themselves occurred, as these events heavily shaped the behavior and conversation of parents who were alive when the events took place. Once those attitudes are formed, they can then influence a person's behavior over the course of a long lifetime. The Japanese have a proverb that reflects this truth: "The spirit of a three-year-old lasts a hundred years."[28] As we shall see in the case of Mormonism, this proverb is literally true.

Let us not forget a simple fact: As we entered the last decade preceding the twenty-first century, all the presidents of the church had been born in the nineteenth. (Only with the recent administration of President Howard W. Hunter, born in 1907, and the current administration of President Gordon B. Hinckley, born in 1910, have we had presidents who were born after the nineteenth century.) First-person accounts of the events that I have described, particularly the federal persecutions in Utah and Idaho, would have been the stuff of dinner-table conversation during the formative years of almost every president of the church to date.

Let us consider the life of the late President Benson as an example of a generation of church leadership, in part because he has had the longest tenure of anyone serving in the prophet's office over the last twenty years. Ezra Taft Benson was born on August 4, 1899; he served a mission in the years 1921 to 1923, and married in 1926. To put this into historical perspective, President Benson was born in the year of the Spanish-American War, one year after the death of Wilford Woodruff, who ended widespread plural marriage (1898), and two years before Teddy Roosevelt became president of the United States (1901). He learned to walk before the Wright brothers learned to fly (1903), and was eligible for baptism just after the first great San Francisco earthquake (1906) and just before the death of Geronimo (1909). He went on his mission three years after the end of the First World War (1918), and one year after women won the right to vote in the United States (1920); he returned from his mission a year before Native

28. D. Galef, comp. and trans., *"Even Monkeys Fall from Trees" and Other Japanese Proverbs* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1987), 54.

Americans were declared U.S. citizens by Congress (1924). In the year he was married, the first motion picture with a soundtrack appeared ("Don Juan," 1926); this was still a year before Charles Lindbergh made the first intercontinental airplane flight (1927). He became a father before the crash of the stock market ushered in the Great Depression (1929), and before the Empire State Building opened for business (1931).

Please understand that I am emphatically *not* commenting on President Benson's capacity to lead the church. Rather, my point is this: If a person's basic approach to life is formed early, say by the age of ten, then the world view of many people in the top level of recent church leadership was already fully formed before most of the modern world was. President Benson's world view was formed at a time that was closer to the administration of church president John Taylor than today's missionaries are to the days of U. S. president John Kennedy.

Yes, the polygamy persecutions are long behind us. But they helped to form the world views of many of the leading ecclesiastical authorities of our lifetime—it could not have been otherwise. That is the way human beings are. However, the persistence of this world view into our own day has created some serious problems for our people. Let me return to the thought of Abraham Maslow in this regard.

> The neurotic individual may be described with great usefulness as a grown-up person who retains his childhood attitudes toward the world. That is to say, a neurotic adult may be said to behave as if he were actually afraid of a spanking, or of his mother's disapproval, or of being abandoned by his parents, or having his food taken away from him. It is as if his childish attitudes of fear and threat reaction to a dangerous world had gone underground, and . . . were now ready to be called out by any stimulus that would make a child feel endangered and threatened. . . .
>
> The neurosis in which the search for safety takes its clearest form is in the compulsive-obsessive neurosis. Compulsive-obsessives try frantically to order and stabilize the world so that no unmanageable, unexpected, or unfamiliar dangers will ever appear. They hedge themselves about with all sorts of ceremonials, rules, and formulas so that every possible contingency may be provided for . . . . If . . . something unexpected does occur, they go into a panic reaction as if this unexpected occurrence constituted a grave danger. What we can see only as a none-too-strong preference in the healthy person, e.g., preference for the familiar, becomes a life-and-death necessity in abnormal cases. The healthy taste for the novel and unknown is missing or at a minimum in the average neurotic.[29]

In light of Maslow's formulations, a significant portion of that part of Mormon history that has made the newspapers over the last decade or

29. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality,* 42-43.

two might be viewed as a neurotic, even post-traumatic reaction. The reality of our situation, as the twentieth century gives way to the twenty-first, is that we need to take a fresh look at a variety of issues: attitudes towards women, power, and authority; the divine feminine; the subtleties of our history; and, our relation to our ecological environment, to mention just a few. However, for some people, it is as if the persecutions were still with us, and any attempts to take a fresh look at our history or our theology or our practices are perceived by these people as threats, in the same way that the thoughtful settler of my parable would be a threat when the wagons were in a circle and the flaming arrows were pouring in. Yet, the arrows are not pouring in; the wagons do not need to be in a circle anymore; and, it is time for us to continue with our journey.

The matter of how to continue our journey is, however, still ahead of us. Right now I would like to consider the question, What did the church have to do in order to survive early threats to its survival, and how do those survival strategies affect us today?

The Ticket to Survival: Identification with the Aggressor

The acclaimed novel and subsequent movie, *Schindler's List*, can illustrate for us how a minority community may cope with a threat to its survival from a powerful majority. In the story, based on a large number of interviews with Holocaust survivors and focused on the activities of the real-life Oskar Schindler, a number of Polish Jews achieved some degree of security by overtly identifying with the purposes of their Nazi oppressors. These people saw themselves as having little choice, and they prolonged their lives by working for, and making themselves useful to, their masters. Some even seemed to take pride in their roles, working, for example, as internal police among the Jewish community on behalf of the Nazi overlords. There is a term from psychoanalytic theory to explain the strategy of such people: "identification with the aggressor."

The basic idea behind identification with the aggressor is quite simple: if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. That is, someone who is being oppressed takes on the attributes, the values, even the persona of those who carry out the oppression. This happened within Mormonism as a response to the era of violent persecution and imprisonment. I shall mention only two of several possible examples of this social mechanism.

I first thought about applying the concept of identification with the aggressor in regard to a question in, of all things, the field of career development.[30] From a historical point of view, something just did not

30. Mark Edward Koltko, "Religion and Vocational Development: The Neglected Relationship" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 1993).

make sense to me. Early Mormons prided themselves on their separation from what they saw as the corruption of the United States government. It is often forgotten in our time that the exodus to the Salt Lake valley was an attempt to put the Saints beyond the grasp of the United States; when the Saints left Nauvoo, the Salt Lake valley was a part of Mexico. In addition, the behavior of the federal government after the arrival of the Saints in Utah did nothing to inspire patriotic devotion, as demonstrated by the Utah War. Yet, there is some reason to believe that a disproportionately large number of Saints now serve in the armed forces, national law enforcement agencies, and the intelligence services of the United States.[31]

This seemed counter-intuitive. Why serve the hand that beat you? The concept of identification with the aggressor helps to explain this paradox. A century after the heyday of Mormon persecution, Mormons appear to be disproportionately represented in precisely the offices under which they were persecuted, or through which Mormons would be persecuted today if the federal government were again to harass us. It is as if, at some unconscious level of social process, Mormons are ensuring that by being in the professions which once harmed them, history will not repeat itself.

Historian D. Michael Quinn was the first to publicly use the concept of identification with the aggressor when he examined a different matter: the paradox of Mormon attitudes towards sexuality.[32]

Consider the doctrine of eternal progression. This doctrine has important implications for Mormon sexuality. The idea that Heavenly Father and Mother have physical bodies and engender spiritual children such as ourselves gives approval to some forms of sexual behavior. Mormonism is unique among Christian denominations in its assertions that God is plural, that the gods have physical bodies, that the gods have gender, that the gods are married, and that the gods procreate.

Given what appear to be statements that some form of sexuality is an important, valuable, and eternal element of human and divine existence, several aspects of contemporary Mormon life appear puzzling. Why are so many Mormons singularly uninformed about sexual matters? Why are Mormon families often unwilling to discuss sexual matters, except to concentrate on what *not* to do?

Quinn used the concept of identification with the aggressor to explain this paradox. The anti-Mormon aggressors of the nineteenth century held to a very repressive form of Victorian morality, at least in pub-

31. See note 6.

32. D. Michael Quinn, "How the Manifesto Changed the Church" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, UT, August 1990; cassette recording no. 085, Salt Lake City, UT: W. T. Recording Services).

lic. By identifying with their aggressors, Mormons adopted the Victorian reticence to discuss sexuality. Indeed, Mormonism has maintained Victorianism long after the Victorian approach virtually died out in the surrounding society.

There are many other examples that could be used to press this issue, especially in the world of politics.[33] The point is this: the threat to the church's very survival created a situation in which it seemed necessary to join the very group which was persecuting the church. This is why, as some well-informed historians put it, "by the end of World War I, if not before, the Mormons were more American than most Americans."[34] This brings us to the next stage of Maslow's hierarchy: the need to belong.

The Era of the Search for Belonging and Esteem

It is interesting to see the way in which anti-Mormon bias continued into the twentieth century. Instead of threatening the very survival or safety of the church, anti-Mormonism adopted a strategy of exclusion. Perhaps the most spectacular examples of this occurred in the halls of the United States Congress. B. H. Roberts was denied a seat in the House of Representatives in 1898, while Reed Smoot's election to the Senate in 1903 was the occasion of a bitter three-year trial, during which the aged president of the church was compelled to appear in a distant court and was held up to public ridicule in the popular press. The image of the church in the popular press continued to be predominantly negative, probably until World War II. Anti-Mormon messages appeared in popular entertainment, such as films, the stories of Zane Grey, and the first of the Sherlock Holmes stories ("A Study in Scarlet," first published in 1887, and in print ever since). The Mormon was clearly depicted as the dangerous Other, the subversive and deviate Outsider.

The message that American society sent to Mormonism during this time was clear: The surrounding society would permit Mormons to survive, but it would not accept them, and would instead vilify and reject them. This was the message that impressed itself upon the consciousness of members of the church who were born as the memories of the polygamy persecutions faded, from the 1900s through the 1930s—and this message had a consequence for the psychohistorical development of the church.

When society sends a message of exclusion, and when physical survival and safety have been assured, the predominant needs that arise are the belonging and esteem needs in Maslow's hierarchy. These are the

33. For nineteenth-century examples, see G. O. Larson, *The Americanization of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1971).

34. Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 184.

needs that were predominant in the church at the time that a new generation of Saints was forming its attitudes and world views, and these are the needs that seem to be most clearly addressed in the policies formed by many within the contemporary generation of church administrators. (The survival and safety needs, however, also remained potent in the motivational life of the community, as is often the case in situations of individual trauma.)

One tries to belong or fit in by seeming to be the same as everyone else, only more so. In a way, the church experience at this stage is like the classic second-generation immigrant experience: the distinctive characteristics of the original culture, however central, are played down, while common elements, however minor, are strongly emphasized.[35] This is what seems to have happened in recent years: Some of our most distinctive doctrines have been underplayed, while we have put on a persona that stresses our identification with classic American values. Some of the doctrines and practices of the church that are most different from a sort of mainstream capitalist Christianity are underplayed in our message to the non-Mormon world. We tend to underplay the doctrine of eternal progression to godhood; we rarely speak among ourselves of some higher ordinances which were common knowledge to an earlier generation.

There is even a darker side to the effort to satisfy the need to belong. I quote again from Maslow:

> This stage can be characterized by the profound hunger for groupiness, for contact, for real togetherness in the face of a common enemy, *any* enemy that can serve to form an amity group simply by posing an external threat.[36]

Surely one way to fit in with American society is to seek to identify with its prejudices. And against whom are those prejudices directed? For three intense decades it was surely Communism, but fear of Communism has abated, and meanwhile, as Richard Hofstadter has demon-

---

35. In this sense the LDS experience bears some similarity to the Jewish experience in America where the Reform movement dominates. The Reform movement began in Europe as an attempt, on the part of another persecuted religious minority, to come to terms with modernist values and lifestyles. Reform Judaism discarded the use of traditional Hebrew in liturgy as well as dietary and dress practices that distinguished Orthodox Jewry from their non-Jewish neighbors. A number of doctrinal positions were also de-emphasized or altered (e.g., the belief in the importance of the hereditary priesthood, the belief that the only true Temple is that erected at the direction of the Lord in Jerusalem). Although contemporary LDS religion is not as far removed from the early church as Reform is from Orthodox Jewry, there are suggestive parallels. It is of particular interest to note that, as of this writing (late 1999), the leadership of the Reform movement in America has voted to reintroduce some of the institutions it had abandoned, as in the limited reintroduction of liturgical Hebrew.

36. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 44, emphasis in original.

strated in a Pulitzer Prize-winning study, intellectuals have been perceived as a threat to American society for as long as there has *been* an American society.[37] This can be seen in the realms of politics, education, popular culture, and organized religion over the last two centuries, so the anti-intellectual prejudice is ingrained in American thinking. It is also no surprise that people who call the gender power structure of society into question, such as feminists, are also perceived as a threat to society at large.

Surely if one wished to unite with middle-of-the-road American prejudices, one could do no better than to join with middle-of-the-road America in its condemnation of intellectuals and feminists. The extraordinarily vituperative attacks made on these groups in recent years by some church leaders should be considered in this light. These attacks may be seen both as attempts to "keep the wagons in a circle" against an outside threat, and as attempts to fit in and belong with American culture at large.

Let us now focus on the need for esteem, a need which follows closely upon the need to belong in Maslow's scheme. As I mentioned earlier, Maslow noted that this need is addressed in two general ways: by actually achieving mastery and competence in the world, and by seeking after recognition as an end in itself. Both of these are abundantly in evidence in recent church history.

The power given to the Departments of Correlation and Public Communications demonstrates the value that we place on presenting a united front and our best possible face to the world, even when that process involves a certain cosmetic massaging, distortion, or suppression of the truth. One way to read the tragedy of the Hofmann affair is that Hofmann could flourish because of the desire of several members of the church hierarchy to maintain good appearances at all costs.[38] The church lionizes members who appeal to the mass American popular culture, such as sports and entertainment figures, much more than it recognizes anyone who has the bad luck to gain attention from the intellectual community by winning something like the Pulitzer Prize for making a permanent contribution to the culture.[39] The organization has come to emphasize spin control (e.g., the scandal involving the late Elder Dunn[40]) and external achievement (e.g., numbers of convert baptisms).

---

37. Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1963).

38. Linda Sillitoe and Allen Roberts, *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 546.

39. "BYU Rejects LDS Pulitzer Prize Winner as Speaker," *Sunstone* 16, no. 4 (March 1993): 69.

40. I have been chided elsewhere for bringing Elder Dunn's name into this discussion, given that this was a matter involving individual transgression and individual repentance.

Where Do We Go from Here?

What does this psychohistorical analysis tell us about Mormonism and its future? I feel that there are two contributions that this kind of analysis makes. First, it makes sense of apparent contradictions in the past and the present of the church (see Figure 2). Second, and perhaps more important, it suggests possible futures. In the remainder of this article, I shall focus on the latter point: potential futures and how they might be attained, first from the perspective of the organizational leadership of the church, then from the perspective of the individual Saint.[41] Maslow's model of motivation is implicitly a model of human development. All developmental models are at heart prescriptive; that is, these models lay out a scheme for how development *ought* to proceed, with deviations from that scheme being, by definition, instances of arrested or pathological development. In that spirit, Maslow's model carries some implicit prescriptions for the current situation within Mormonism.

The Leadership Perspective

Institutional Mormonism seems to be at a crossroads. As one possible choice, it may continue to emphasize the lower end of Maslow's hierarchy, and concentrate on issues of survival and safety, belongingness and self-esteem. This alternative has consequences.

What is the problem with all of this? Do we not want to survive? Should we not want to be safe? Is there something wrong with wanting to belong? Do we not want to look good to the world and feel good about ourselves? There isn't anything wrong with any of these things—unless they become ends in and of themselves. As I mentioned earlier, when the satisfaction of the lower needs on Maslow's hierarchy becomes an end in itself, this constitutes arrested development; it is a subversion of the mission of the church.[42]

An emphasis on survival and safety, when our survival and safety are not really at stake, serves only to divide us from one another. It forces

---

I do not wish to focus in the slightest on the behavior of the late Elder Dunn; but on a real world example in which some church administrators attempted to make a scandal disappear entirely without reflection or discussion. This, I firmly believe, was a mistake.

41. Here, I am moving from the role of psychosocial analyst to that of junior-grade social engineer, or as some might say, "ark-steadier." The original "ark-steadier," however, did that which was forbidden (Num. 1:51; 2 Sam. 6:6-7). We are not forbidden by the Lord to speak out or act on the issues raised in this essay. Indeed, we might say we are required to take the initiative in considering matters of such importance (D&C 58:26-30).

42. On the other hand, in Maslow's scheme, self-actualization and self-transcendence *are* appropriate ends in themselves. In the gospel the essence of the plan of salvation might be expressed in terms of self-actualization or "magnifying one's callings and gifts," and of self-transcendence or "achieving exaltation," by losing one's life in order to truly find it.

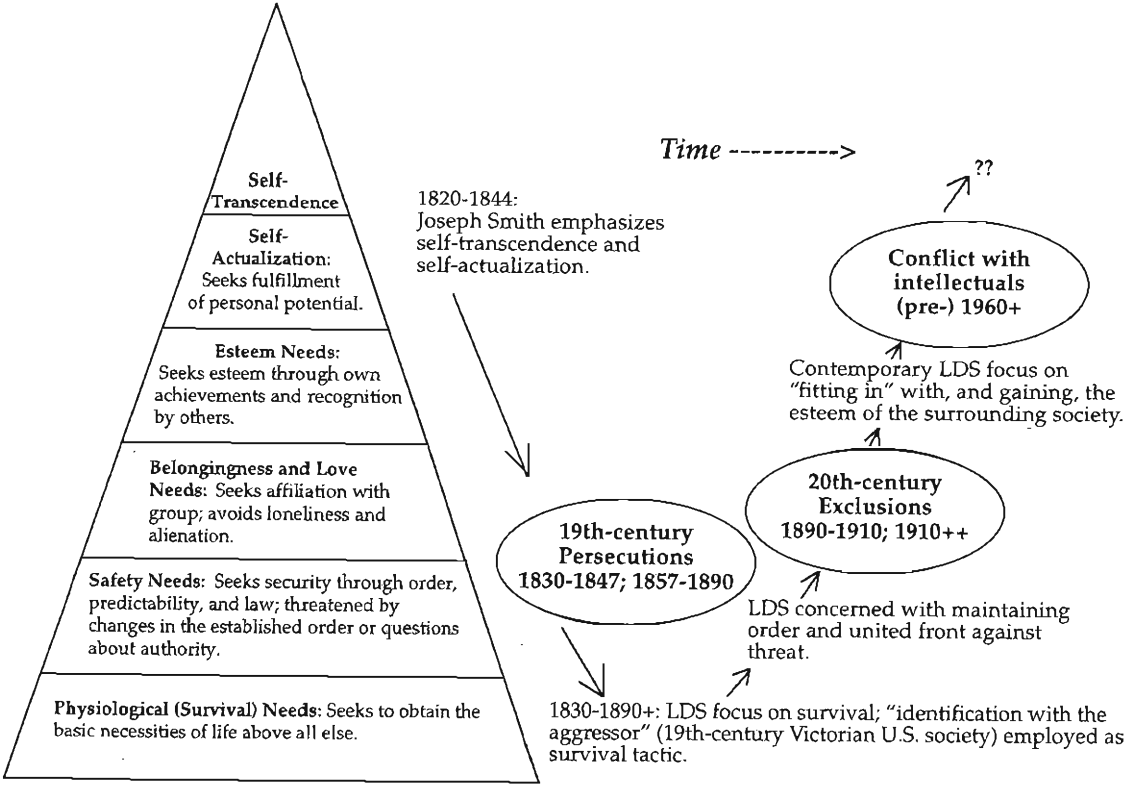

Figure 2. Maslows's Hierarchy of Needs Aligned with Eras of LDS History

the church to cast aside some of its best minds and to under-use the talents of a great number of its members. I am not saying that intellectuals or others who have been recently vilified are heroes or "good guys," or that anyone is a "bad guy." I am saying that we all lose when we label and stigmatize people. We wind up valuing conformity over the search for truth, and nothing could be more damaging to the development of a mature spirituality or more untrue to the spirit of the doctrine of Joseph Smith.

An emphasis on "fitting in" with the surrounding culture forces us to be untrue to who we are and what we stand for. We stand for a radically different vision of Christ and community than that embodied in the values of mainstream American society. An emphasis on gaining recognition from, and "fitting in" with, contemporary American society—or virtually *any* society—forces us to ignore the real and rich complexities of our history and the legacy of our doctrinal heritage. To go further, regarding the other way in which esteem needs are worked out, an overbearing emphasis on achievement forces us to concentrate on the external rather than on the spiritual, which is by nature internal; such an emphasis is behind the abuses of the "baseball baptism" era[43] and many others as well. It is an old and archetypal tale, but one we have not learned well enough: When we focus on fitting in with, and gaining recognition from, others as a primary goal, when we focus on externals, we lose our collective soul.

An alternative would be for the church to choose consciously to realign its institutional focus, that is, to invest more energy in, and put more value on, the motivational levels of self-actualization and self-transcendence. Certainly there are disadvantages to such a choice. A culture that made self-actualization and self-transcendence important parts of its institutional agenda would have to put up with a great deal in the way of idiosyncrasy. However, a non-exclusive focus on self-actualization and self-transcendence would have several distinct advantages as well.

The church and its programs run on service. Individuals whose motivational life emphasizes self-transcendence are particularly given to lives of service—not in order to fit in with others (the belonging needs), nor to get the leadership of the Priesthood or Relief Society off their backs (cynically, the survival and safety needs), but because service is what life is about for people working at the level of self-transcendence. It may be particularly appealing to those with a statistical approach to faithful living to note that a church with a strong emphasis on self-transcendence would see rates for home and visiting teaching skyrocket. Enoch's Zion, which had "no poor among them" (Moses 7:18), would

43. D. Michael Quinn, "I-Thou vs. I-It Conversions: The Mormon 'Baseball Baptism' Era," *Sunstone* 16, no. 7 (December 1993): 30-44; Richard Mavin, "The Woodbury Years: An Insider's Look at Baseball Baptisms in Britain," *Sunstone* 19, no. 1 (March 1996): 56-60.

seem to be working from a motivational basis heavily weighted towards self-transcendence.

At least in American society, where levels of education have risen precipitously over the last two generations, the church can, by putting more emphasis on self-actualization, broaden its appeal to a group of people who, by and large, expect and want to think for themselves at the same time that they want to receive spiritual direction. These are not mutually exclusive alternatives, either from the perspective of the upper reaches of Maslow's pyramid or from the perspective of the gospel (D&C 58:26-30). What would be required would be a very different institutional approach to issues of intellectual and artistic endeavor. There would need to be a non-defensive, "let us reason together" (D&C 50:10) attitude towards scholarship and a tolerance for artistic endeavor that some will no doubt regard as "edgy" and "out there"—changes which seem reasonable to educated people in general, but which would reflect a major sea-change in institutional attitudes in the church.

A focus on actualization and transcendence would allow for a more full blooming of the Mormon artistic and aesthetic impulse. True art, even true gospel art—*especially* true gospel art—has to be able to investigate questions and issues freely. Mormonism is, I believe, particularly well-suited as a framework for the creation of great art.[44] But this potential can best come to fruition from a position that emphasizes self-actualization and self-transcendence. No one creates great art when trying to look good to someone else. No one creates great art whose overriding concern is fitting in with, or gaining applause from, some crowd. And, for that matter, no one creates great art or great scholarship when he or she feels constrained by the possibility of ecclesiastical discipline.

There is one overriding advantage for Mormonism in paying attention to the upper reaches of this developmental model. As has been pointed out earlier, the root of great religious traditions tends to lie at these levels. Focusing on the lower needs in the motivational hierarchy at the expense of the higher ones cripples us in attempting to fulfill our spiritual mission because a large element of any spiritual mission deals with the transcendent, and that is best addressed by the self-transcendence stage of Maslow's hierarchy.

It could be argued that all of this is an unrealistic expectation from a sociological point of view. The sociology of religion notes a phenomenon called "the institutionalization of charisma." To oversimplify, this refers to a situation in which religious organizations start out with charismatic leaders and ecstatic experiences, and over time the charismatic power becomes

44. Mark Edward Koltko, "Constrictions, Potentials, and Margins: Thoughts on Mormon Writers," *Wasatch Review International* 1, no. 2 (1992): 109-118.

vested in offices, not individuals, while self-transcendence is expressed through ritual, rather than personal experience. From this point of view, it would be unthinkable for an institution to deliberately re-empower individuals by focusing on self-actualization and self-transcendence.

To my way of thinking, however, this is only a partially accurate analysis in that it describes well the syndrome of events that must follow if a religious institution does not have—or make use of—access to ongoing and widespread revelation. There is at least the potential within Mormonism to function in a way that defies the typical course of religious organizational development, in the same way that physical resurrection will defy the typical course of decomposition. This can come about through the change in world view that accompanies a change in motivational emphasis. As Maslow pointed out, the world simply looks different to people (and, by implication, to organizations and groups) who emphasize different parts of the motivational continuum.[45] If the church leadership decided to invest its motivational emphasis in the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy, the empowerment of the individual would not seem so much of a threat.

Another sociological objection which might be raised to the program set out here is that it requires too much tolerance within the current social situation of the church. The church is seeing spectacular success in missionary work, but especially so in areas with less education and pronounced survival needs. What sense would it make to adapt an institutional focus away from this success and toward self-actualization and self-transcendence?

It is important to note that self-actualization and self-transcendence are "downwardly compatible." That is, an individual or a group that works from an actualization/transcendence position can adapt to focus, as needed, on survival and safety concerns. The reverse is most certainly *not* true: an individual or group that works primarily from lower positions on Maslow's hierarchy will not successfully address the higher needs. Thus, the church will not lose its ability to help its new converts survive (physically or as members in the church) if it adopts a higher motivational focus. Rather, it will gain the added ability to address the needs of more people in a more comprehensive way.

Let me now turn to the question, What would the church look like if it functioned primarily at the stages of self-actualization and self-transcendence? This is difficult to answer, precisely because these stages are places where idiosyncratic differences are most prominent, as I mentioned earlier. However, perhaps that is the key: individual differences are most valued at these stages. When we understand Zion's "one heart

45. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 37, 39.

and one mind"-edness (Moses 7:18) as a unity of direction rather than as a massive mental cloning (the Stepford fantasy written large), we will be well on the way to being a self-actualizing society in the church. We would value individual differences in more than a lip service sort of way, and would not be threatened by the differences in thought, interpretation, and culture which trouble some in the church now. We would understand that the process of dialogue is a legitimate and important path to truth, and we would give real credence to the statement of Joseph Smith that "by proving contraries, truth is made manifest."[46] We would not be so concerned with fitting in or being accepted by the surrounding society, and would revel in our uniqueness and difference in doctrine and thought. This, I suspect, would be the time of our Miltons and our Shakespeares.

The Individual's Perspective

However, rather than "dream of our mansions above," let us consider (in characteristically Mormon action-oriented fashion) what we might possibly *do* to help the process along. That is, what can we as individuals do to help the church progress to functioning primarily at the stages of self-actualization and self-transcendence? I have both negative and positive advice.

Recall the ancient Hippocratic adage: "First, do no harm." The world view of some leaders still appears to be focused on avoidance of perceived threat, and there is no point in feeding into that expectation. Tactics of confrontation and angry defiance will not get us anywhere. We can disagree without being disagreeable and challenge assumptions without being unnecessarily confrontational.

To echo an ancient Talmudic principle: "Do not separate yourself from your people."[47] I have been pained to hear of the voluntary withdrawals from membership of some members in response to some church leaders' stance toward intellectuals. While I do not judge these people, this behavior seems to me counter-productive if what one wishes to do is to help in the development of Mormon society. The kingdom of God may be somewhat dysfunctional, but that dysfunction does not release us from our responsibility to help build and establish it.

In addition, we must avoid making a reverse error. Those who stigmatize intellectuals seem to place adherence to so-called "orthodoxy" above a mature appreciation of the truth. But it is important not to make

46. Quoted in Eugene England, *Dialogues with Myself: Personal Essays on Mormon Experience* (Midvale, UT: Orion/Signature Books, 1984), 10.

47. *Al tifrosh min ha-tsibur*. Talmud tractate *Pirkei Avot* ("Ethics of the Fathers") 2:5. Cp. Philip Birnbaum, *Daily Prayer Book* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1949), 485-486.

the opposite mistake. Intellect is only a tool, and it does not deserve to be venerated in its own right above the virtues of a Christian life. It is easy for intellectuals in any society to set themselves apart as a sort of aristocratic upper class of the mind[48] above the mass of people and the clear counsels of the Lord. Scripture condemns this attitude explicitly (2 Nephi 9:28). One challenge facing Mormon intellectuals is to maintain their faith and practice above reproach, both to serve God with all their minds (D&C 4:2) and yet simultaneously "consider themselves fools before God" (2 Nephi 9:42). Although not an easy task, it is one that many intellectuals valiantly engage.[49]

I have said that we can disagree without being disagreeable. On the other hand, in terms of positive advice, it is important, where necessary, to actually disagree, to stand up and be counted in the proclamation of values and principles you deem important. In the face of speech or leadership styles that emphasize a siege mentality and conformity, we can promote values of open-mindedness, self-actualization and self-transcendence, in the way that we conduct ourselves in our personal associations, in our callings, our home and visiting teaching, our talks, and lessons or discussions in church classes. We can make it a point to support these values from the scriptures and from the teachings and life of Joseph Smith and other prophets. Much can be done, over time, by reemphasizing these values in the church at the local level.

To continue on a positive note, let me suggest that we remember our spiritual roots. We should keep in mind that the true spiritual roots of Mormonism find nourishment in the higher levels of Maslow's needs hierarchy. Thus, we can commit ourselves to improving our own talents and assisting others in improving theirs. We can commit ourselves to nurturing our spirituality and that of others. It is a peculiarly Mormon folk delusion that we see the church as the source of our spirituality; the result of this distorted thinking is that if we have difficulties with the organization, we neglect our spiritual growth. One's difficulties with the administration, even if these difficulties were to result in excommunication, do not in any way release one from the need to heed the call to spirituality. This call comes from the Lord, not from any group of people, not from any organization.

We can apply our imaginations to thinking about what the church would be like if it functioned at the higher levels of the needs hierarchy, and then manifest that visualization in our callings and homes. If enough

48. J. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

49. Anderson, "The LDS Intellectual Community," p. 23; A. L. Mauss, J. R. Tarjan, and M. D. Esplin, "The Unfettered Faithful: An analysis of the DIALOGUE subscribers survey," *DIALOGUE* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 27-53.

of us act in such a way as to promote individual development, dedication to the truth, and emphasis on service and a mature, searching spirituality, then this will affect the course of any organizations that are a part of our lives. In the spirit of self-actualization, we can focus on defining and exercising our talents and potentials, without a lot of concern for what others will think. We have within us universes of potential. Although there are practical issues in daily life to be addressed, we can adopt the sort of "fourth generation" time and life management skills originally promoted in the corporate world, and use these to carve out personal time and resources to devote to the development of our creative talents.[50] The more people who do this locally, the better. One writer, or artist, or artisan, or performer in a ward may be considered "eccentric." Four is an artists' collective.

It is important to pursue self-transcendence on an individual level. One of the best ways to do that is to engage regularly in a contemplative practice, such as meditation. Latter-day Saints are at something of a disadvantage in this regard, in that we have not yet had restored to us a particularly Mormon contemplative tradition, although the temple ceremonies have unrealized potential in that regard. (The development of such a tradition would be one of the more important developments of twenty-first century Mormonism.) However, in this era, it is usually possible to find some instruction in these areas in an atmosphere that is at least not opposed to the LDS spiritual path.[51] Moreover, it is crucial that contemplative development be expressed in service, which may take expression within or outside of typical church channels. It is here that self-transcendence begins to reshape the world.

Finally, I would counsel patience. There is some reason to believe that a new generation of church leadership is rising, a generation not be-

---

50. Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First* (New York: Simon & Schuster/Fireside, 1994); Hyrum W. Smith, *The 10 Natural Laws of Successful Time and Life Management* (New York: Warner Books, 1994). As a psychotherapist, I regularly recommend these books, with success, to individuals who have difficulty finding time or resources to fulfill their creative potentials.

51. For example, the Shambhala training is a non-sectarian, "secular" way founded by the late Chögyam Trungpa that allows people of any or no religious background to learn a form of Tibetan Buddhist meditation without engaging in Buddhism proper [Chögyam Trungpa, Shambhala: *The Sacred Path of the Warrior* (Boston: Shambhala, 1984); Cynthia Kneen, *Shambhala Warrior Training* (audio tapes; Boulder, CO: Sounds True Audio, 1996)]. These and other Mindfulness meditation approaches can be found, taught in many cities in the United States and Europe, at the least. Several Latter-day Saints have also told me of fulfilling experiences in the study of more traditionally Jewish Kabbalistic forms of meditation, which are taught on the east and west coasts especially by such teachers as David A. Cooper [*God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism* (New York: Riverhead/Penguin Putnam, 1997)] and Edward Hoffman [*The Heavenly Ladder: The Jewish Guide to Inner Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985)].

holden to the issues that were so compelling for earlier generations. I have been particularly encouraged to see a much-increased emphasis on humanitarian aid in LDS disaster relief and in health and literacy missionary work. This kind of work is *not* characteristic of a siege mentality even when there are other indications that a siege mentality is still alive and well.[52]

It has been noted that in science, new paradigms of explanation do not take hold because eminent scientists become persuaded; rather, the new paradigms succeed because a new generation arises that is not so attached to older, inadequate ways.[53] We can expect much the same thing. But we can help the process along by keeping the questions and ideas alive that are important to us. In this way we fulfill the condition of an ancient proverb from Jewish mysticism, a proverb that has much relevance for the development of Mormonism: "The upper world moves in response to the lower world" (Zohar I, 164a).[54] Ultimately, it is from the "upper world" that the power to transform Mormonism must come; we invite this power into the life of the church when we make a space for self-actualization and self-transcendence, tolerance and intellectual curiosity and exploration, in our lives and in our behavior, both personal and public.

52. Jacob Neusner, "A World Sect," letter to the editor, *Sunstone* 22, no. 1 (April-May 1999): 2.

53. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

54. Sperling and Simon, trans., *The Zohar*, 2nd ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1984), Vol. 2: 129.