

glance, the image symbolically suggests that this is the last dispensation and that all the writers included in the collection are products of these latter days. On second glance, though, the clocks also appear to be thermometers. That symbolism is equally appropriate, as each of the stories included in this collection takes the temperature of a certain spot in the deep waters of worldwide Mormonism, and the temperature may change, given the shifting sands of everyday events and the unfathomable molten core beneath the surface.

Some of the stories have historical settings. Two examples are Doug Thayer's horrifying "Wolves" set during the Great Depression but focusing on the question of blood atonement and Phyllis Barber's "Bread for Gunnar," which addresses the challenge of polygamy. Others, however, are as current as today's newspaper. These stories take place in contemporary Utah, where modern Mormons struggle to find reason and meaning behind unexpected upheavals or even just the daily grind of raising children and living life. Notable examples are Margaret Blair Young's "Zoo Sounds" and Bruce Jorgensen's "Measures of Music."

In geographical contrast, two stories take place in contemporary Africa. In Paul Rawlins's "The Garden," a missionary runs for his life and hides in a poor black man's vegetable patch. In "Quietly" by Todd Robert Peterson, a new convert is asked to dedicate the grave of a man found killed by Hutus and hanging upside down in a tree.

All fiction, of course, deals with mortals trying to navigate the conditions of mortal life that are no more comprehensible for being universal. We are born, we age, we die. We are subject to pain, affliction, and temptation. We cannot know the minds and hearts of others except for what they tell us or what we sense. Conflict is inevitable. These stories ask whether being a Mormon can save you, anchor you, break you, make you crazy, or bring you unspeakable joy. The manifold answers have as much to do with varying faith, knowledge, thought, and personality as they have to do with the nature of Mormonism itself.

Each story seems to plumb the depths of what it means to come in contact with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, either regarding it as a peculiar feature of peculiar people, or embracing the complexities of faith and the hardship which

that faith sometimes brings in its wake. Some question policies of the past. "White Shell," by Arianne Cope, illustrates ways that the Indian Placement Program, instituted by well-meaning Mormons, affected many lives for better but also for worse. Darrell Spencer's "Blood Work" seems to say that being a Mormon can make you crazy. Brian Evensen's "The Care of the State" suggests that being a Mormon can anchor you, while allowing that we're all untethered in some way or other.

All the stories are thought-provoking, questioning, artistic, and eloquent; many transcend the confines of "Mormon" fiction. These are stories from mature writers who see the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in navigating the shoals of mortal life, whether their characters are clasp the iron rod or barely acknowledging its existence. Birth, death, divorce, conversion, living Mormon precepts, twisting them, relying upon them, or leaving them—all the conflicts of a Mormon's mortal life are here.

In her "Preface," Angela Hallstrom quotes Eugene England, to whom the book is dedicated, who said of his 1992 collection of Mormon short fiction, *Bright Angels and Familiars*: "Mormonism insists that divinity continues to reveal [truths] to prophets and further understanding of [these truths] to all people. One crucial way such insight can come, I believe, is through the telling of stories." These stories participate in that quest for revelatory storytelling, and invite thoughtful readers along for the journey.

LDS Youth in an Age of Transition

Bruce A. Chadwick, Brent L. Top, and Richard J. McClendon. *Shield of Faith: The Power of Religion in the Lives of LDS Youth and Young Adults*. Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2010. 367 pp. Tables, figures, appendices, and index. Cloth: 24.99. ISBN: 0842527613

Christian Smith with Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 355 pp. Tables, figures, appendices, and index. Cloth: 24.95. ISBN: 0195371798

Reviewed by Boyd Jay Petersen

One of the most difficult and perilous times in a life is the transition from childhood to adulthood. Moving into the freedoms of adult life while still relying on parents to pay the bills creates tensions within the adolescent even as it brings frustrations for the parents. How does one make the leap from dependent to dependable, from reactionary to responsible? And will religious faith survive, go stagnant, or flourish through these changing roles and identities?

Two recent sociological studies reveal important insights about LDS youth and their generational culture. One is by non-Mormon scholars Christian Smith, a professor of sociology and director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at Notre Dame, and Patricia Snell, a doctoral student and assistant director of the center. The other is by BYU scholars Bruce Chadwick (emeritus professor of sociology), Brent Top (professor of Church history), and Richard McClendon (associate director of Institutional Assessment and Analysis). Parents, educators, and adult leaders of LDS youth would all benefit from reading them.

While focusing on young people of varying religious traditions and levels of religious participation, *Souls in Transition* introduces readers to the values, behaviors, and larger culture of young people in the United States, statistically comparing them by denomination. The book is a follow-up to *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), a book Smith co-wrote with Melina Lundquist Denton, which reported on the ongoing National Study of Youth and Religion, a longitudinal study involving 3,290 phone interviews and 267 personal interviews in forty-five states which tracked the faith and practice of thirteen-through-seventeen-year-olds surveyed between 2001 and 2005. *Souls in Transition* looks at the same youngsters, now ages eighteen through twenty-three, as they transition into adulthood, a period characterized by complexity, confusion, and instability.

The term used in scholarly literature to describe this demographic—those between eighteen and twenty-nine—is “emerging adults.” Perhaps as a sign of my own encroaching codgerdom, however, I was sometimes tempted to place a question mark after

the “emerging” or scare quotes around the “adult,” as these young people appear to prolong the teenage years into adulthood by postponing careers, marriage, and family; avoiding most civic responsibility and political service; and aimlessly drifting in casual group relationships.

Social changes over the past few decades—an increasingly competitive world economy, an unstable job market, and the growing need for advanced educational training—may explain much of this generational drifting. Despite these changes, Smith and Snell note that, in general, these emerging adults are no less believing than previous generations but in practice have little use for organized religion.

The de facto religion of this generation, as Smith labeled it in *Soul Searching* and as it continues to manifest itself in the lives of these youth five years later, is “moralistic therapeutic deism” (MTD). A sort of civic religion, MTD incorporates the beliefs that God exists, that it is important to be kind to each other, that our ultimate goal should be personal happiness, that God is seldom personally involved in individual lives, and that the good go to heaven when they die (154–56). MTD results, Smith and Snell believe, from emerging adults having largely absorbed the greater societal beliefs in individualism, multiculturalism, and relativism to the point that they see little difference among various religious denominations and have little use for organized religion beyond teaching a basic code of conduct that, once learned, renders religious practice obsolete.

Within this generational worldview, Smith and Snell note “considerable diversity” (294) that roughly breaks down into six typical categories of religious inclination. First, “committed traditionalists” (15 percent of those surveyed) are devoted to and practice their particular religious tradition. Second, “selective adherents” (30 percent) believe and practice some parts of their religious tradition but ignore others. Third, the “spiritually open” (15 percent) are uncommitted to a religious tradition but are receptive to and somewhat interested in spiritual or religious ideas. Fourth, the “religiously indifferent” (25 percent) neither practice nor oppose any religious tradition. Fifth, the “religiously disconnected” (5 percent) have little or no contact or association with re-

ligious people, ideas, or groups. And finally, the “irreligious” (10 percent) are skeptical of or reject religion in general.

Unlike *Souls in Transition*, Chadwick, Top, and McClendon’s work focuses specifically on LDS youth and reports on various surveys conducted between 1990 and 2004. Thus, the data are a minimum of six years old; and unlike the NSYR study, these are not surveys that track the same individuals over the course of time. One set of data derives from questionnaires sent to LDS high school students in six regions: suburban Utah County; rural Castle Dale, Utah; the East Coast; the Pacific Northwest; Great Britain, and Mexico. Interestingly, strong correlations appear among the youth in all these regions, and the authors note that, regardless of culture, “active LDS youth [are] engaged in much less antisocial or immoral behavior than less-active youth” (5). The book also incorporates data from surveys of 1,000 men and 500 women who had returned from LDS missions and 380 men who had not served missions; interviews with fifty unwed mothers in Utah County; and students at BYU-Provo, BYU-Idaho, and BYU-Hawaii. Unfortunately, a strong bias appears in many of these surveys: inactive and disaffected LDS members were much less likely to participate. Nevertheless, the authors are still able to make some valid generalizations about the religiosity of LDS youth.

After an introductory chapter explaining the dimensions of religious belief surveyed in later chapters, Chapter 2 analyzes data from the high school students, BYU students, returned missionaries, and non-missionaries, comparing the findings with similar data from national studies to juxtapose the religious beliefs and practices of LDS youth and those of their non-Mormon peers. Chapters 3 through 6 are based primarily on the surveys of the high school students and focus on delinquency, education, self-esteem, and “sexual purity.” The authors incorporate data from the surveys of returned missionaries and non-missionaries into the chapter on education, and they fold the responses from the interviews with unwed mothers into the chapter on sexual behavior.

In Chapter 7, the authors look at the dating and marriage practices of BYU students, compared with those of a nationwide survey of graduating seniors. I found this to be the least insightful chapter, since BYU students are already a self-selected group and are not exactly comparable to all graduating high school students. The re-

sults of these particular surveys are, in my opinion, quite predictable, with BYU students hanging out and hooking up less, dating more, and being more concerned about marriage. In Chapters 8, 9, and 10, the authors look at family life (both the demographics and dynamics), the long-term effects of missionary service, and mental health by examining data from a 1999 survey of men and women who had completed missions two, five, ten, and seventeen years earlier. They compare these data to a 2000 survey of LDS men and women who did not serve missions as well as relevant national surveys. Unfortunately, the data from the survey of non-missionaries are the most strongly biased in the book, due to the low response rate (12 percent of men and 31 percent of the women). As the authors note, “Those who had physically and emotionally withdrawn from the Church are vastly underrepresented” (343).

Despite these deficiencies, however, the book’s statistical analyses are rigorous, the reporting is honest and open, and the results are insightful and revealing. *Shield of Faith* is a fine work of scholarship. While the authors are eager to point out the many places where LDS youth are doing better than their non-LDS peers, they are also candid about places where LDS youth are falling short. Accessible to the layperson and written for a general LDS audience, the book nevertheless lays out the data and methodology in a meticulous and scholarly fashion.

Both *Souls in Transition* and *Shield of Faith* reveal some very good news about LDS youth; however, it is the BYU volume that reveals the group’s most significant challenges. Both books suggest changes we might make in our culture, offer comfort and advice to parents, and provide encouragement for young people to remain committed to their faith.

Souls in Transition provides abundant good news about LDS youth. Mormons had a higher retention rate than any other denomination as young people transitioned into adulthood, with 72 percent of the LDS survey participants self-identifying as LDS five years later (109). A majority (59 percent) say their faith is “very important” to them, which ranks LDS youth just below black Protestants (72 percent) and just above conservative Protestants (57 percent) (113). LDS youth have the highest rates of church attendance (60 percent), personal prayer (54 percent), Sabbath observance (71 percent), and daily scripture reading (23 percent). They

exhibited somewhat fewer risky behaviors like substance abuse or premarital sex (258). They are less likely to doubt God's existence and have fewer doubts about religion in general (120, 124). They are more likely to be "committed traditionalists"; and perhaps most fortunately, they are actually more likely to become *more* religious rather than less religious during the difficult transition to adulthood (166, 126). Yet despite the number of traditionalists, LDS youth are less conflicted about evolution than their conservative Christian peers, with 53 percent believing that God created the world through evolutionary processes (122).

Shield of Faith offers much of the same good news and more. It shows that LDS youth have a high level of commitment to publicly and privately practicing their religion (32). They exhibit lower delinquency levels than their non-Mormon peers (74). They have a dramatically lower rate of premarital sex—11 percent for boys versus 58 percent for boys nationally; 19 percent for girls versus 59 percent for girls nationally (201). Activity rates of LDS youth correlate with higher academic achievement (135). Male returned missionaries are more likely to marry, avoid divorce, gain a higher education, have a higher socioeconomic standard, and remain active in the Church than those who do not go on missions (265–92). Similar results are reported for female returned missionaries, except that the likelihood of their not marrying is statistically the same as the national average. (This finding may be skewed, however, since, as the authors acknowledge, the data from non-missionaries are selective.)

Of particular interest in light of several studies that have noted a higher rate of antidepressant consumption in Utah, the researchers found no evidence that LDS members experience depression at a higher rate than others in the United States and that "those with higher private religious behavior were less likely to experience depression" (311–12). However, since the data pool surveyed was relatively young—returned missionaries who had been home for two, five, ten, and seventeen years and a group of non-missionaries of similar ages—this study may not be focusing on a demographic that experiences depression at a higher rate.

One weakness of *Shield of Faith* is that the authors fail to note whether something like Smith's moralistic therapeutic deism exists for LDS emerging adults. I believe something very much like

it is found in the culture, and I also believe that the fact LDS youth are less conflicted about evolution than their similarly conservative peers suggests that they may be absorbing something from the mainstream culture that conservative Protestants are resisting—that they are more accepting of science, technology, and change. Perhaps we can speak of Mormon moral therapeutic deism and look to cultural changes affecting our youth as a sign. Perhaps young Mormon moral therapeutic deists have a greater acceptance of science, which may, in turn, lead them to encounter less cognitive dissonance as they enter college and discover other theories that seem to conflict with religion. As they absorb other elements of MTD from the broader culture, it may also lead LDS emerging adults to be less concerned with whether birth control is taboo or whether gay marriage is wrong. Likewise, they may come to look to their leaders with a more critical appreciation for their words, believing that sometimes a prophet speaks as a prophet, and sometimes he speaks as a man. They may come to see a need for a greater role for women in the Church.

Furthermore, it may lead some to downplay the belief that the LDS Church is the one and only true church on the earth. We may expect to see more young Mormons taking the buffet-table approach to religion, selecting the parts of their own tradition that work for them, rejecting others, and incorporating ideas and practices from other religious faiths to create a sort of designer faith for the individual. It is also tempting to speculate that, if more substantial data were available from the survey of non-missionaries, MTD might account for much of the disaffection from the Church.

But there is also bad news in these surveys, most of it found in the BYU-published *Shield of Faith*. While LDS youth are involved in fewer status offenses like underage drinking and smoking, they are just as frequently involved in school fights, property offenses like shoplifting and theft, and cheating on exams (87, 98, 100). The authors note: “It is disturbing that 10 percent of the LDS young men and 7 percent of the young women admit, or perhaps brag, that they have physically hurt someone so seriously that they required medical attention from a doctor. It is disturbing that over 5 percent of the boys and about 2 percent of the girls claim they

have used a weapon like a gun, knife, or club in their attacks on other students” (83).

Less disturbing but equally surprising is that only 30 percent of LDS young men serve missions nationwide (15) and that fewer than half of the young men who do not serve missions remain active in the Church (55). It is not surprising but sad to discover that young women report lower feelings of self-esteem than young men (170–71) and that their church attendance is somewhat lower than that of young men (33). Even sadder is the finding that LDS young women are more sexually active than LDS young men (9). Startlingly, the primary reasons they give for losing their virginity are drifting into it (“it just happened,” 48 percent), feeling pressured (either “coerced or raped,” 25 percent), or hoping it would strengthen a relationship with a boy (17 percent). The authors note the tragedy that, of the 45 LDS unwed mothers surveyed, “all but one initiated sexual activity for reasons other than their own sexual feelings” and express alarm that many LDS young women “confused sex with affection, acceptance, and belonging” (212). Finally, despite the encouraging statistics showing LDS youth outdoing the youth of other denominations, it is sad that we are losing over a fourth of our young people, quite likely more, as they mature into adulthood.

These studies suggest several institutional and cultural changes we might make to help our youth transition to adulthood. First, it appears that we need to broaden our definition of “morality” in LDS culture. LDS youth are certainly getting the message from parents, Church leaders, and Church educators that sexual purity is important. They are, for the most part, doing an admirable job of saving sex for marriage. However, the fact that a not-insignificant portion of these same young people do not see cheating, fighting, bullying, shoplifting, and theft as integral to a moral life suggests that we are failing them in serious ways. Morality is about right conduct, not just sexual behavior.

Given a broader view of morality, we would perhaps also lose the close connection many LDS youth see between the Church and conservative politics. Unaddressed in either of these two studies but a subject of a growing body of research, as Robert Putnam and David Campbell have noted, is the fact that an increasing number of religiously disaffected youth “have been alien-

ated from organized religion by its increasingly conservative politics.”¹ The widespread resistance to the LDS Church activities in the political world of California’s Proposition 22 and Proposition 8 and the divisions that it caused in families and congregations is evidence, I believe, that the youth of today do not universally think the same way their parents did on these issues. Second, *Shield of Faith* suggests that it might be advantageous to encourage more of our youth to serve missions. Recent rhetoric about “raising the bar” for LDS missionaries may have left some young people feeling that missionary service is either too demanding for them or more “optional” than it was in the day of President Spencer W. Kimball’s “every young man should serve a mission.” With the strong positive effects of missionary service, whether direct or indirect, being so pervasive and extended, encompassing spiritual faith, emotional health, educational achievement, and marital success, it seems apparent that we should strive to get every young person, male and female, to serve a mission. However, the fact that 70 percent of our young men do not serve missions (and over half of that 70 percent drop out of Church participation) suggests that we might need alternate forms of missionary service that will accommodate more young people or special ecclesiastical ministering to foster faith in those who do not serve.

It also seems clear that our young women need more than they are currently getting in their Young Women’s programs and singles wards. The fact that their Church attendance lags, that their self-esteem droops, and that they feel pressured to have sex (it’s unclear how much of that pressure is coming from LDS young men), suggests that there is a need for a stronger Young Women’s program and a larger role for young women within the Church. It also suggests that young women need to be taught about sexual purity in different ways than we do at present, ways that address, as Kathryn Soper has recently observed, the “psychological motivators” that may be primary for young women, rather than just the “physiological motivators,” which may be more salient to young men.²

Our culture might also want to downplay the frequent discussion of how “special” this generation of young people is. Summarizing a significant amount of social science research, Chadwick, Top, and McClendon suggest that efforts to promote self-esteem

may lead, not to higher achievement but to narcissism (167). They point out that it is as likely for a person with high self-esteem to be caught cheating as it is for that person not to cheat, or to bully rather than standing up for someone being bullied. Those with high self-esteem may actually be more prone to risky behaviors like drinking and drug abuse (166). In short, self-esteem is not the panacea that many educators and self-help gurus once thought it was. Our youth are frequently fed a diet of self-esteem-promoting pabulum about how special they are as a result of being born in the last days, belonging to “the one true Church,” or serving a mission. While Chadwick, Top, and McClendon note that self-esteem is somewhat lower for LDS youth than it is for their non-Mormon peers (169), I suspect, based on my interactions with LDS college students, that their spiritual self-esteem, their sense of religious superiority, may border on spiritual narcissism. I sense an increasing attitude that, because they are members of “the one true Church,” these students think they intuitively know everything there is to know about everything religious.

Finally, these studies suggest that our LDS singles wards may, in some ways, be counterproductive. At an age when religion should help these young people internalize their faith and become more adult by providing them with more service opportunities and responsibilities, we are moving them into wards where they can “hang out” but where they have little accountability or responsibility. Furthermore, I have personally seen how easy it is for young people to get lost between wards when they have two or three bishops who may be responsible for them. Here in Utah Valley, we often have student wards, singles wards, and family wards with overlapping boundaries and plenty of inactive or partly active youth.

Still, parents can take a great deal of hope in the findings of these studies. First, both books confirm that parents have a strong influence on their children, whether directly or indirectly, into adulthood. Many researchers have in recent years made light of parental influence on teens, arguing that peer groups have a larger impact. But as Smith and Snell note, “Religious commitments and orientations of most people appear to be set early in life and very likely follow a consistent trajectory from that early formation through the adolescent and into the emerging adult

years” (247–48). The religious lives of parents, coupled with social connections within the congregation, lead to personal religious beliefs and practices that tend to remain throughout life. The role of parents is vital, but it’s a role of helping the young person internalize faith rather than coercing it. Chadwick, Top, and McClen-don note, for example, that the greatest influences on whether a young person will have premarital sex are public religious practice (church attendance), peer pressure, pornography (for boys only), and “parental regulation” (setting rules, ensuring compliance, and administering discipline) (205, 207, 213). As the authors put it, “Parents need to foster in their teenage children the internalization of beliefs, opinions, principles, values, and attitudes that are consistent with gospel and societal values” (113). Both studies certainly support Church teachings urging parents to hold regular family prayer, scripture study, and family home evening.

Nevertheless, statistics cannot predict an individual’s behavior, and some LDS youth will stray from the faith. It’s hard for parents to not feel responsible, feel as if they have failed, or look back with regret on what they might have done differently. The Mormon ideal of righteous eternal families can make such remorse even more painful. Smith and Snell offer hope: “When parents are seriously religious, want their children to be seriously religious, and have raised them to be so, the emerging adults’ desire to have a good connection with their parents tends to encourage them to continue to affirm and practice their religious faith, even if perhaps in a less intense way” (85–86). Furthermore, as emerging adults move into the stability of adult life (or, alternatively, if their lives disintegrate into broken relationships, drugs, or sexual license), the stability of religion often becomes more attractive (84–85). Ultimately, parents may take additional comfort in the essential optimism of Mormon theology—its prospect of near-universal salvation (as opposed to exaltation) and near-universal eternal reward.

Finally, both of these studies present objective encouragement to young people to stick with their religion. Numerous practical values derive from maintaining a religious life, including higher academic achievement, higher self esteem, lower rates of depression, marital stability, closer family relationships, fewer

risky behaviors, healthier lifestyles, and more satisfaction in life. As Smith and Snell put it, “Emerging adult religion—whatever its depth, character, or substance—correlates significantly with, and we think actually often acts as a causal influence producing, what most consider to be more positive outcomes in life” (297). Or in the words of Chadwick, Top, and McClendon, “religion matters” (321).

Notes

1. Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, “Walking Away from Church,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/oct/17/opinion/la-oe-1017-putnam-religion-20101017> (accessed November 4, 2010). The article discusses a point the authors make in their book *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010). While Putnam and Campbell do not rely on Smith and Snell’s work, they do cite it and share many of its conclusions.

2. Kathryn Soper, “Why Standards Night Is Substandard: Teaching Sexuality to the Young Women.” Patheos, September 15, 2010, <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Standards-Night-Is-Substandard-Teaching-Sexuality-to-the-Young-Women?offset=0&max=1> (accessed November 12, 2010). A wonderful resource for teaching young women about sexuality is the post by Lisa Butterworth, “13 Articles of Healthy Chastity,” *Feminist Mormon Housewives*, November 3, 2010, <http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org/?p=3354> (accessed November 12, 2010).