

“FAST FROM THAT WHICH IS NOT PERFECT”: FOOD ABSTINENCE AND FASTING CURES IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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Content warning: This article contains references to disordered eating and bodily harm.

Orlean

Beginning in March 1935, Orlean Kingston documented her rigorous fasts and visionary experiences that revealed the proper diet for the kingdom of God.¹ In her first entry on the subject, she wrote, “We fasted every other day. I grew very weak. One night after fasting all day I was in such misery from hunger and weakness I could not sleep nor rest. I prayed twice for strength, spiritual strength when it seemed as though 2 [Clyde Gustafson] came home from 1’s [Elden Kingston] place with

1. This article uses “Orlean” to refer to Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson. Many people in the DCCS either had or adopted the last name “Kingston,” including Orlean’s father, brothers, and leadership. While she took “Gustafson” as her married name, she shared this name with her sister wife, who is mentioned in Orlean’s diaries and this article. For both of these reasons, the decision to use her first name was based on a need for clarity. In conversations with members and former members of the religion, she is referred to simply by her first name. Her first-name basis indicates that her legacy is well-known in the community.

a bowl of food appearing something like candy.”² A dark spirit struck her as she ate the food, and a painful sound buzzed through her ears. “I fought and prayed to be delivered,” she wrote. “It seemed like it would choke me. It left as quickly as it came. I thanked my Heavenly Father for the deliverance and the spiritual food he had allowed me to eat. I slept till morning still feeling as though I had eaten a meal.”³ From the day of this revelation onward, Orlean developed a fasting regimen that became a common practice in her religious community.

In her work on American Christianity and diet, R. Marie Griffith has argued that food abstinence is one of the most “enduring and elastic devotions aimed at bodily discipline.”⁴ Food abstinence was historically a method of bodily discipline that transformed the body into a vessel more capable of spiritual insight. This was the case for Orlean, whose diary entries reveal a lifelong interest in food abstinence for its spiritual and health benefits. Orlean Kingston never hid her poverty, a possible material explanation for her intense interest in food and proper nutrition. However, she never mentioned this as the direct cause of her fasts. Her primary concern for the body was rooted in her faith and revelatory experiences. Bodily and spiritual well-being were intimately connected, and her food preferences, or lack thereof, stemmed from divine encounters.

2. March [1] 1935, Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson History, N.p. N.d. Photocopy in author’s possession. 8. The leadership in the Davis County Cooperative Society use a system of “numbered men” to designate the organization’s hierarchy. As the founder of the movement, Elden was number 1. Orlean’s husband, Clyde Gustafson, was number 2. Charles Kingston was number 5. Orlean Kingston noted that the numbers corresponded with not only increased leadership duties but also increased sacrifice: “To those who have the lower numbers much more is expected than the ones that come in later on” (Dec. 5, 1937, Orlean History, 66).

3. March [1] 1935, Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson History, N.p.

4. R. Marie Griffith. *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 24.

In the Davis County Cooperative Society (DCCS), the small Mormon group incorporated in 1941 by Orlean's brother, Elden Kingston, food abstinence became most controversially associated with a forty-two-day fast. During his tenure as the leader of the group, John Ortell Kingston, "Brother Ortell" as followers faithfully called him, planned frequent forty-two-day fasts and instructed his followers to do the same. Charts and outlines of the regimen instruct to fast one week dry (no water), one week with water, two weeks on grape juice alone, and thirty days (at least) on raw food. Those who participated tracked their physical and spiritual "goals" for their fast along with the outcomes. Written instruction and testimony of the fast credited male leaders of the community with the revelation for the fast and the spiritual strength they received from participation: "Brother Elden talked about fasting in the first of the Order. He likened our bodies to a blacksmith shop. When things come in to be fixed we are working on something else so we put the things in the corner instead of fixing it."⁵ John Ortell Kingston fasted for an extended period at least once a year. Other accounts include the groups' patriarch, Charles W. Kingston, who cited the fast as the reason for his long life.⁶ Always present in the accounts was the testimony of priesthood leaders who received temporal, physical, and spiritual knowledge to better lead the faithful. Notably absent are the experiences of women.⁷

This article reframes the DCCS's fast not as the product of male revelation but as the embodiment of a woman's religious life. While Orlean is mostly invisible in the historical record outside of devotional literature, she produced a discernible impact on the community. Like women mystics who came before her, Orlean was both celebrated and

5. "Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing." N.p. N.d., 2. Photocopy in author's possession.

6. "Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing."

7. "Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing."

chastised for her devotional food abstinence and subsequent visions.⁸ The sister of the DCCS's founder, Orlean spent years fasting, receiving subsequent visions, and documenting dreams associated with food abstinence. Through the later years of her life, Orlean painstakingly experimented with what she believed was the ideal diet for communion with the divine, a more complete Word of Wisdom. Her diaries reveal a woman whose embodied devotion often confused her small religious community and whose belief in a perfected body raises contemporary questions about religious women's pathologized faith. Had Orlean been a Mormon man, she might have been a prophet. Nevertheless, her largely invisible and ultimately broken body is the foundation for one of the DCCS's most controversial marks of the Kingston devotional body.

The Kingdom of God

Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson was excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on September 28, 1933, a year after her husband was excommunicated for teaching and practicing polygamy after the Second Manifesto. She was twenty-one and charged with "apostasy from the teaching as set forth by the present authorities of the Church and insubordination to church ruling."⁹ Although she was not permitted to speak during the proceeding, she left resolved in her mission to always follow the teachings of Joseph Smith. Like others at the time, Orlean was not deterred by the hearing and continued religious engagement with Mormonism. On the night of her excommunication, she met Joseph Smith in a vision. He offered Orlean the distinct impression that "all we had to do was follow Brother Joseph but to get to the same place he was we would have to die like he

8. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 112.

9. Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson History, N.p. N.d. Photocopy in author's possession. 3.

did.”¹⁰ Smith spoke to Orlean and other people in the dream about the required sacrifice and dedication of Mormonism. After receiving his comments, she met Smith at the edge of a body of water, got in a boat, and crossed to the other side. Smith, Orlean believed, remained her guide outside the church he founded.

By the time of Orlean’s disciplinary hearing, excommunications of polygamous families were increasingly common. Charles W. Kingston, Orlean’s father, was one of the individuals excommunicated for practicing polygamy. Kingston was a homesteader in Idaho Falls who “had been watching conditions in the L.D.S. Church and saw that all was not well.”¹¹ According to Orlean’s account of the events, her father believed that the Church had “apostatized and broken the everlasting covenant” when they announced the end of polygamy, a principle Orlean believed was a fundamental element of her faith.¹² Kingston was not alone, and soon he became one of the many polygamous Mormons who came into communication with Charles Zitting, John W. Woolley, and Lorin C. Woolley, men who eventually led the earliest iteration of the Mormon fundamentalists movement.¹³ Through the recollections and publications of these men, as well as extensive time spent studying Church history, Kingston became convinced of the centrality of plural marriage and the authenticity of John Taylor’s 1886 revelation. He further believed he was among the men called to perpetuate plural marriage into the Millennium. He affirmed this during both his meeting with his temple president, Elder George F. Richards, and later at his disciplinary hearing. His comments sealed his fate in the Church.

Shortly after the disciplinary hearing that ended his Church membership, Kingston received a vision of God the Father, who appeared to him clothed in a plain dark suit. The vision was a watershed moment

10. Sept. 28, 1933, Orlean History, 4.

11. Sept. 28, 1933, Orlean History, 27.

12. Sept. 28, 1933, Orlean History, 27.

13. Charles W. Kingston, “My Life’s History,” 9.

for Kingston and a moment that shaped the community's attire of plain coveralls for successive generations. Kingston recalled, "Strength and power flowed from him through my right arm into my body. He began to talk to me and the words were powerful and sweet. Such words I had never heard so powerfully expressed before, and I wondered who this powerful stranger could be. He made it known to me that my action before the High Council was approved."¹⁴ Like other men excommunicated in the 1920s and 1930s for the practice of polygamy, removal from the institutional Church did not necessarily mean the end of his Mormon identity. Rather, his excommunication from the LDS Church was the catalyst for his longstanding involvement in the fundamentalist movement.¹⁵

Kingston's vision came at a difficult time. Most notably, his Idaho Falls homestead failed and forced him into industrial labor in the railroad industry. The precarious financial situation led him to southern Utah, where he met J. Leslie Broadbent, the leader of the Mormon fundamentalist movement, to inquire about participation in the consecration effort that sought to revive nineteenth-century Mormon communitarianism.¹⁶ Despite the Kingston family's interest, Broadbent turned them away.¹⁷ In her later recollections of this experience, Orlean

14. Charles W. Kingston, "My Life's History," 190.

15. See Cristina Rosetti, "'Hysteria Excommunicatus': Loyalty Oaths, Excommunication, and the Forging of a Mormon Identity," *Journal of Mormon History* 47, no. 3 (2019): 22–43.

16. See Brian Hales, *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006); and Craig L. Foster and Marianne T. Watson, *American Polygamy: A History of Fundamentalist Mormon Faith* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2019); and Dean L. May, "One Hear and Mind: Communal Life and Values among the Mormons," in *America's Communal Utopias*, edited by Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

17. Charles W. Kingston, "My Life's History," June 1, 1938. N.p., available online at <https://www.dccsociety.org/dccs-history/my-lifes-history-by-charles-w-kingston>.

penned a diary entry about the Broadbent ordeal, centering the spiritual elements of the refusal:

If a smaller key is turned by using it under the wrong direction how much greater and quicker would the priesthood be taken away if used under wrong direction and how much harder to repent and receive it again. Look how easy the L.D.S. Church lost it and the Broadbent faction in S.L.¹⁸ This is why it is so important to always keep the spirit of the Lord and be able to distinguish between the two spirits no matter how close the evil one is able to come and appear as the spirit of the Lord. The evil one has a duplicate for everything that the Lord has and we must be able to judge between so we will not be deceived.¹⁹

In Orlean's telling, the priesthood guides the faithful in the right direction. The right direction for Orlean's family was toward a unique priesthood claim, not the extant Mormon groups. There is little contemporary information about why the United Order in southern Utah denied the Kingston family.²⁰ One current member of the DCCS explained that,

18. Orlean is referring to the main body of fundamentalists, under the leadership of J. Leslie Broadbent. Members of the group had been on good terms with Broadbent earlier—he sealed Orlean to Clyde Gustafson in 1931—but by this point had separated.

19. November [1], 1934, Orlean History, 15.

20. See Charles W. Kingston, "Why I did not join the Woolley Group, Woods Cross, Utah March 5, 1967," 3, photocopy in author's possession. In Kingston's account, he learned that the Woolley group was teaching a doctrine referred to as "virgin sacrifice" that the group attributed to Joseph Smith. The doctrine asserted that it was "lawful for a man to take virgin and force her to live with him and it did not matter who this girl married afterwards; she still belonged to the first man, even though she was forced to live with him the first time." This accusation led to three dreams that Kingston later told Zitting. In the final dream, he was taken to the home of Zitting's newest wife and found a bathtub filled with human waste. He took the tub to a creek near Zitting's home to clean it and found that the entire creek became contaminated. From this dream, he gathered that the doctrine of virgin sacrifice had "corrupted the whole group. That they were all teaching it secretly" (5). Despite Kingston's claim, there is no evidence of this doctrine being taught by either Joseph Smith or the Woolley group.

while the family sought participation in Broadbent's organization, Elden Kingston simultaneously claimed priesthood authority that countered Broadbent, leading to mutual disinterest. Contemporary recollections from descendants of both groups corroborate Orlean's inclination that the denial was a matter of contested authority.

The denial by Broadbent did not deter Kingston from his consecration mission. As happened to many polygamous Mormons, internal and external economic conflict devastated the Kingston family. The Great Depression created economic difficulty that caused particular hardship among large families.²¹ This hardship was among the initial catalysts for the early fundamentalist movement's interest in reviving Joseph Smith's vision for Zion.²² Internally, polygamous Mormons who sought to retain the practice of polygamy were excommunicated from the LDS Church and did not qualify for the Church's new welfare program.²³ A lack of national and institutional support made polygamous people particularly vulnerable when the nation struggled. Cooperative living was the solution.²⁴

21. While most of Orlean's visions were religious or dietary, one dream specifically focused on the financial state of the group, "I dreamed there was employment for \$10 a day at a certain place" (Apr. 17, 1939, Orlean History, 60).

22. See Joseph W. Musser, *The Economic Order of Heaven: Setting Forth True Communism-Socialism-Capitalism as Ordained by God for the Economic Salvation of His People* (Salt Lake City: Truth Publishing Company, 1948).

23. See Randy Powell, "Social Welfare at the End of the World: How the Mormons Created an Alternative to the New Deal and Helped Build Modern Conservatism," *Journal of Policy History* 31, no. 4 (2019): 488–511.

24. According to Orlean Kingston's recollection of Church meetings, consecration was a doctrine first espoused by Jesus Christ. Its removal from the earth coincided with the gradual apostasy of the Church after the death of the apostles. "In the time the Savior was crucified when the mountains moved all the wicked were killed and only those left that would conform to the laws of the Savior. He established the law of consecration etc. and the people lived it until about 200 years A.D." (Dec. 5, 1937, Orlean History, 66).

Charles Kingston was the first in his family to receive a visitation by God. However, it was not until his son Elden began receiving revelations while seeking guidance for his consecration effort that an organization formed around the family.²⁵ As recorded in "The Sacred Things of the Order," a short document that provides a brief history of the visitation, Elden Kingston took his scriptures and blanket up a mountain near his home to pray in an act that amounted to the "greatest striving that had ever taken place between God and man."²⁶ During this meeting, Kingston was overcome by the spirit of God and recorded, "I got an enduring testimony that this order that he started is in deed the Kingdom of God that he would establish on the Earth and his second coming."²⁷ As Kingston prayed on the mountain, a divine personage met him in the silence. "Sometime during the night he was awakened by someone standing at his side. He was lying on the ground. There was a light radiation from this Heavenly Being. This being had him read in the 42nd Chapter of Isaiah, the first 8 verses."²⁸ Through this revelation, Elden became assured of his position as the rightful man called to lead God's people through the world's end.

25. Unlike others at the time, Elden's eventual authority claim was not found in the succession line of Benjamin F. Johnson or Lorin C. Woolley but was based on a visitation that bestowed divine authority. Elden's experience mimics the experience of later fundamentalist leaders who claimed divine visitation as the catalyst for their movement. The most notable examples include James D. Harmston and the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days, Roger Billings's Church of Jesus Christ in Zion, and Alex Joseph's Church of Jesus Christ in Solemn Assembly.

26. "The Sacred Things of the Order." N.p. n.d., 1. Photocopy in author's possession.

27. "The Sacred Things of the Order," 1. Note that throughout the article, spelling and grammatical errors in quotations were not edited.

28. "The Sacred Things of the Order," 2.

According to accounts of this event from the group he founded, the personage charged Elden to organize the kingdom of God.²⁹ The outcome was the Davis County Cooperative Society (DCCS), first organized in 1935. The organization formally registered with the state of Utah in 1941. The stated purpose was the promotion of “the economic welfare of the membership,” who could “increase their talents and abilities by utilizing their united funds and efforts for the purchase, distribution and production of commodities and the performance of sources in their interest in the most economical way.”³⁰ In fulfilling this mission, the Cooperative believed they could establish lasting peace and abolish bloodshed. In her account of a Bible class led by Elden the year after the formation of DCCS, Orlean explained the timeline of the formation in terms of biblical prophecy:

1935 marks the time when the seed was sown. 1936 marks the time when it is up above the earth and can be seen. It took one year for the seed to germinate.

360 =time
 +720 =times
 ±180 =half a time
 1260 years of darkness
 1830 Church started
 -1260 time, times and half a time
 570 A.D. When the gospel left the earth
 570
 +1290 2nd date in Daniel, time of darkness 1860
 570
 +1260 first date in Daniel
 1820 when Church commenced

29. Today, the “Kingston group” operates with a three-tiered structure of Kingdom, Family, and Church, with the DCCS and Latter Day Church of Christ operating in different capacities and with different membership. During Orlean’s life, and in her own recollections, the DCCS was synonymous with the Kingdom of God.

30. “DCCS Articles of Information,” Sept. 16, 1941, available online at <https://www.dccsociety.org/dccs-history/dccs-articles-of-incorporation-1941>.

1860
-1830
 30 years difference in dates in Daniel
 1335 blessed is he who comes at this date.
 1335
+ 570
 1905 When Michael stood up and began to plow the ground.
 1936 is date on the great pyramid. It says "even the angels in heaven
 will not know this date. It was revealed to Brother 1 after this
 work commenced in 1935.
 1936 —It had grown till people of world noticed it. 1905
+ 30 years difference in dates in Daniel
 1935 The date the Kingdom of God started in the earth.³¹

A new dispensation began when the personage bestowed authority on Elden, amounting to something that positioned itself as more of a re-Restoration than simply another of many movements.³²

Over time, the emerging group reimagined Elden Kingston as the prophesied figure who would "set in order the house of God" and the one who held the priesthood authority necessary to seal plural families after the Second Manifesto.³³ On Elden's twenty-sixth birthday, Orlean recorded an account of a young man who went to the mountains and undertook a period of striving, a term Orlean used as shorthand for extended prayer and fasting. During this period, "He was shown that Brother 1 would become the one mighty and strong and would work under the direction of the prophet Joseph Smith. . . . He was also shown

31. Apr. 2, 1938, Orlean History, 74–75. This timeline mirrors other fundamentalist leaders who spoke on sacred time, including Francis Darter.

32. Brian Hales, *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism*; Foster and Watson, *American Polygamy*, 378. "Re-Restoration" was used by James D. Harmston and his followers in reference to the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days.

33. Doctrine and Covenants 85:7. See Brian C. Hales, "John T. Clark: The 'One Mighty and Strong,'" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 46–63.

that as soon as he was prepared he would be called to go on a mission to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. We hope that many more such men soon come into the order for in this day the Lord will gather his elect from all over the earth.”³⁴ As the man with the sealing keys and full claim to authority, Elden established a strict hierarchical leadership system based on obedience to priesthood.³⁵

Later doctrinal development based on Elden’s visions that shaped the trajectory of the new faith only furthered the Cooperative’s divergence from other Mormon fundamentalist groups, especially the Woolley group. Most notably, Elden claimed a direct lineage to Jesus Christ, which afforded him unquestionable standing in the group.³⁶ His apparent genetics was not a new argument among Mormon leaders and afforded him “unlimited health” according to faithful members of the group.³⁷ The health claim, however, did not always materialize. In 1948, Elden was diagnosed with cancer. He died the following year and was succeeded by John Ortell Kingston (Ortell Kingston, or “Brother Ortell”), who married Orlean’s daughter, making his first wife his niece. With this marriage, Ortell initiated a history of close family marriages intended to “perfect his own bloodline.”³⁸

Interrogation of Kingston bodily practice often begins and ends with the allegations of incest that stemmed from Ortell’s marriages

34. Hales, “John T. Clark.”

35. Elden taught a doctrine that became known as the “Law of One Above Another,” which instructed the faithful to obey those above them in the priesthood. In her diary, Orlean explained a Bible class instruction where Elden taught the principle: “He showed how necessary it was for him to be one with those above him and how necessary for us to be one with those above is” (Jan. 4, 1940, Orlean History, 86).

36. Hales, *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism*; Foster and Watson, *American Polygamy*, 385.

37. Foster and Watson, *American Polygamy*, 385.

38. Foster and Watson, *American Polygamy*, 386.

and eugenic experimentation.³⁹ However, in the quest toward physical and spiritual perfection, regulations regarding the body were not only sexual. Fasting and dietary restrictions became a hallmark of the DCCS and associated with the creation of Kingston embodiment. The body became the site of DCCS religious production and identity through these religious practices. Explaining the importance of "green drink," a thick comfrey concoction consumed by members of the group, one former member explained, "I remember hearing sermons from Ortell and other people about how sacred and important green drink was. . . . It really became entangled with your spirituality and strength of faith."⁴⁰ Like green drink, fasting and dietary restriction, even to the point of death, became markers of the most righteous.

The Word of Wisdom Diet

Fasting became part of Mormon practice in 1832 when Joseph Smith received a revelation for the Saints to "continue in fasting and prayer from this time forth."⁴¹ The Latter-day Saint body strengthened through fasting, and the mind became "more active" to better focus on spiritual things.⁴² From the earliest years of the faith, the physical and spiritual were intimately connected, most exemplified by Smith's teaching on a material deity. The faith collapsed any divides between the carnal and spiritual that remained among the Protestants around them and

39. Ortell's interest in bloodline ultimately led to experimentation on cows at the dairy farm owned by the DCCS. The "results" garnered through these experiments were translated onto people in the group, who sought to retain a perfected bloodline through incestuous marriage.

40. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022.

41. Doctrine and Covenants 88:76.

42. "Chapter 25: Fasting," *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011).

created a religion marked by embodiment.⁴³ As part of the early fasting practice, Latter-day Saints instituted a fast day, one Sunday per month designated for food abstinence and collecting an additional offering for the poor. On these days, Latter-day Saints gathered to offer “worshipful, inspirational accounts of God’s blessings in their lives,” strengthened by their weakened bodies.⁴⁴

Like others in the nineteenth century, Mormons “blended their own sense of spiritual discipline with material concerns about health and longevity.”⁴⁵ In addition to his teachings on fasting, Joseph Smith received a revelation in 1833 that shaped contemporary Mormon beliefs about diet and health. The revelation, known as the Word of Wisdom, outlined a system of health based on moderation and an emphasis on grain and seasonal produce. According to R. Marie Griffith, Mormon dietary restrictions and fasting became the “most lasting and, at least until very recently, most vigorous model of regular Christian fasting in the Anglo-American world.”⁴⁶ Currently, most members of the LDS Church interpret the revelation as a restriction on alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea. Outside the LDS Church, the Mormon health code expanded in some groups that added insights based on continuing revelation.⁴⁷ These expansions included increased attention to fasting.

43. Benjamin E. Park, “Salvation through a Tabernacle: Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt, and Early Mormon Theologies of Embodiment,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 1–44.

44. Griffith, *Born Again Bodies*, 38.

45. Griffith, *Born Again Bodies*, 47.

46. Griffith, *Born Again Bodies*, 47.

47. “Word of Wisdom,” *Gospel Topics* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011). While the LDS Church is the largest Mormon group and promotes the most common interpretation of the Word of Wisdom, other Mormons support varying perspectives on food and beverage based on their own revelations or contemporary interpretation of the nineteenth-century passage. For example, the Righteous Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints upholds the LDS Word of Wisdom but adds prohibitions on chocolate and pork.

While a member of the LDS Church, Orlean followed the Word of Wisdom and favored fasting as a spiritual and physical discipline. However, her practices around food changed in 1935 when she recorded a revelation she received that outlined a more complete Word of Wisdom based on foods that were most and least beneficial to the body and soul. The revelation was not an isolated instance. For the rest of her life, Orlean received visions, revelations, and dreams that offered her direct spiritual encounters to guide her life. These experiences were, at times, so powerful that they influenced the group beyond her immediate family. Orlean's diaries do not provide much information about the development of her interest in fasting. However, early dreams and revelations on the subject corresponded with the loss of her child, Elaine, who died at seven and a half months of age.⁴⁸ In these early years, her food abstinence and interest in health correlated with a desire to have more children, "Last night I dreamed that for 9 months I ate soaked wheat mixed with whole wheat flour with milk on for breakfast. Some raw vegetables for dinner and fresh fruit for supper. At the end of this time my fourth baby was born. She came within 15 minutes of the first warning without any pain. It seemed like it was easy to eat this way."⁴⁹ While a fourth baby did not arrive as revealed in her dream, a concern for the body, future posterity, and the spiritual benefits of a correct diet remained a lasting part of her religious life.

Central to Orlean's transcribed revelations were strict fasts and a raw diet of foods in their "natural" state. She gave particular attention

48. When Orlean contemplated the loss of her daughter, it often accompanied contemplation on the resurrection and the salvation of both body and soul. For example, in 1946, she wrote, "I dreamed different times she was resurrected and given to me. I never realized the resurrection was quite like this but when something is dead and decayed it is of no use to us so it is only natural that the resurrection should be another chance to take a body and save that body. The body is saved through obeying the word of wisdom, the spirit is saved by keeping the commandments of God, thus saving both body and spirit which together comprises the soul of man" (Jan. 30, 1946, *Orlean History*, 135).

49. Apr. 21, 1938, *Orlean History*, 72.

to avoiding salt and honey and promoted mono meals, using “only one food for each meal.”⁵⁰ Her spiritual insight into food ultimately led to detailed instruction on a complete Word of Wisdom diet that would sustain the well and heal the sick. By preparing food with “singleness of heart,” Orlean learned that her fasts would “be made perfect.”⁵¹ In this way, food preparation and combination became a spiritual science that nurtured a fit body to accommodate a fit soul. In 1940, she outlined the complete Word of Wisdom diet as follows:

The food combinations are:

Don't mix fruits and starches together.

Don't mix starch and protein together.

Don't eat of any one food until you are full.

Leave the table hungry

This brings us back to the following combinations. 1 starchy vegetable and 2 or more non starchy vegetables, protein and non starch and fruit, Wheat for breakfast.

Vegetables for dinner (starch with non starch)

Fruit for supper.

Don't mix two starchy foods such as bread and potatoes or winter carrots and potatoes or rice and potatoes etc. or rice and bread.⁵²

In addition to the above restrictions, Orlean learned that God called people to eat at least half of their food in an “unrefined” state. This excluded bread and milk, foods that frequently appeared in her diaries. By following this outline, the individual could receive the “added strength even strength promised in the word of wisdom . . . as the scriptures tells us and we will have health.”⁵³

50. June 25, 1935, Orlean History, 14. In a conversation with two current members of the DCCS, they explained that this is not representative of the group's view of food. However, several of Orlean's descendants continue to follow her instruction and eat like her.

51. July [1], 1940, Orlean History, 98. In her diary entry on food preparation, Orlean summarized D&C 59:18.

52. July [1], 1940, Orlean History, 98

53. July [1], 1940, Orlean History, 98

While Orlean did not hold the priesthood, her revelations on food and health were not only for her. The corporeal nature of her visions demonstrates the complex way women's spiritual insight acts within Mormonism. Through revelation, she learned that the health code she received would become the model Word of Wisdom for the entire kingdom of God. In one dream, she saw herself eating foods that were not compliant with her revealed diet. As she ate bread and sweets, she saw her brother Elden, who spoke to her in words of affirmation, "It seems hard sometimes to be the only one in the order to be eating this way (meaning the raw foods) and sometimes I start craving other food so hard I go and take some."⁵⁴ In response to her difficulty, Elden assured her, "When Our Heavenly Father sends an innumerable company of angels to join the church of the first born down to work in the fields with us then you'll have plenty of company in your eating."⁵⁵ She saw everyone rejoice in eating according to her diet. With time, she learned through revelation, "Knowledge of health is coming to this people and I am reminded of a prophecy that says, 'The day will come when it will be a sin to be sick because of the laws of health that everyone will know.'⁵⁶ Orlean was not formally a "prophet" or holder of priesthood keys, but her prophecy included everyone.

Orlean held authority through her influence on the people around her. One such woman was "Sister Beecie," a member of the DCCS whom Orlean described as a "very spiritual woman and servant for all." She confirmed Orlean's revelatory instruction through her dreams.⁵⁷ Orlean explained, "Sister Beecie dreamed: When secondary foods such as milk, eggs, butter and cheese are eaten then those cells have to change it and in so doing many of them die. But when live food such as fruits are eaten raw, then these cells multiply very fast[.] Secondary

54. Jan. 15, 1940, Orlean History, 88.

55. Jan. 15, 1940, Orlean History, 88.

56. Jan. 15, 1940, Orlean History, 88.

57. Oct. 13, 1049, Orlean History, 102.

foods are not included in the word of wisdom on this account.”⁵⁸ Although referenced as sick in several of Orlean’s recollections, Sister Beecie learned about the diet given through revelation and developed an interest in the promised spiritual insights.

Orlean’s dietary restrictions did not convince everyone. For some, the diet raised more questions than answers. Early in her devotional practice, leaders in the DCCS grew concerned and encouraged her to eat more than small quantities of raw foods. In one instance, her brother and spiritual leader Elden approached her and instructed her to “eat everything.”⁵⁹ This confused Orlean, who believed she “learned by the spirit” to avoid foods that were counter to her revealed Word of Wisdom.”⁶⁰ Elden’s concern is unsurprising and mirrors religious men in history who sought to modify women’s devotional practice out of concern for “weaker” bodies’ participation in strict ascetic practice.⁶¹ This concern, at times, was internalized by women, who then cautioned others about the practices that initiated their religious experience. Similarly, Orlean often encouraged other women in the community to eat as they wished and not follow her ascetic practice. By the time Elden confronted Orlean, she had been on her strict diet for two years. Out of obedience to her priesthood leader, she began to eat as Elden suggested.

Orlean’s obedience was short-lived. The night Elden approached her, she received a revelation explaining her leadership’s concern. From her dream, she learned that the problem was not necessarily her diet. The problem was the confusion it caused among her coreligionists. This revelation materialized in the growing discord in the community over her diet. In one instance, she upset her mother, who felt “the

58. Jan. 15, 1940, Orlean History, 88.

59. June 19, 1940, Orlean History, 96.

60. June 19, 1940, Orlean History, 96.

61. Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 85.

children were starving because they desired to eat as I [Orlean] did.”⁶² In response to the disagreement with her mother, Orlean took to prayer and received a vision that instructed her against confusion and making people feel bad for their food preferences. In the dream, she saw her mother, who explained, “You sure made me feel bad when the children didn’t eat. It sure hurt me.”⁶³ She sought her mother’s forgiveness and, like she did when confronted by her brother and priesthood leader, began to eat more than raw food. Like her obedience to Elden, this was similarly short-lived.

Considering Orlean’s continued fasting, Elden tried a second approach. Six years after she began following her Word of Wisdom, he attempted to explain that all foods are acceptable so long as they are consumed in limited quantities.⁶⁴ Limited food became an obsession for Orlean, a woman preoccupied with food. Today, some argue that this new preoccupation led to her early death. Her dreams confirmed Elden’s instruction. “I see now the meaning is that we can eat of every kind of food if we use mainly the word of wisdom foods and eat awful light on the others (secondary foods and meats). In other words he [Elden] was anxious that I be awful careful, be careful and eat light of those that are not so good for us. Concentrated foods are to be eaten sparingly according to their concentration. Natural foods can be eaten at all times.”⁶⁵ In this instance, her revelation coincided with her spiritual leadership. Over time, she ate less food.

Despite her interest in Elden’s opinion about diet and belief in his role as the priesthood authority on earth, her revelations eventually came into conflict with his instruction. In these moments, she cast aside

62. Oct. 20, 1940, Orlean History, 104. One former member of the community recalled concern over Orlean’s diet while pregnant, noting that she sometimes ate only one grapefruit per day.

63. Oct. 20, 1940, Orlean History, 104.

64. July 1, 1941, Orlean History, 115.

65. July 1, 1941, Orlean History, 115.

her leader's spiritual insight in favor of her own. "In other words if I receive light and truth and don't follow it and continue on in my old way then this light would go to my condemnation. Before I would be sinning in ignorance but now know of my sins for, we are to make our bodies as tabernacles of cleanliness where the spirit of the Lord will delight to dwell."⁶⁶ Based on her diaries, food and health was the only area of her life where she chose to counter her leader's revelation with her own.

Like Catherine of Siena and early women mystics who used rigorous food deprivation as a source of spiritual insight and subsequently justified their food abstinence by spiritual revelation, Orlean became increasingly convinced that her abstinence was not purely spiritual. In some instances, she went so far as to liken incorrect food consumption to suicide.⁶⁷ As she learned from her dreams, fasting was a medicine that healed the sick and strengthened the well. One evening, after an intense day of work, she had three glasses of milk, one at the home of a DCCS leader.⁶⁸ After she arrived home, she began to worry that she had not done the right thing by consuming milk. She went to sleep but awoke with a severe illness. A dream of a Fourth of July parade accompanied her illness. She had the impression that, unlike the others in the dream, she was not supposed to be in the parade. It was fine for the others to participate but not for her. If she participated, she would become gravely ill. The interpretation followed: "Thinking about this dream I got up and I felt well again except that my head still ached. I

66. July 1, 1941, *Orlean History*, 115.

67. Oct. 31, 1941, *Orlean History*, 118. In an earlier dream, Orlean saw a man tell her, "If you figured you were doing right by eating as you have been then you will be forgiven, but if not.' He shook his head just as if to say if not then it was just too bad for me" (July [1], 1940, *Orlean History*, 97). The threatening tone of the dream implied that she would die if she did not obey the strict dietary outline she received through revelation.

68. Apr. 5, 1940, *Orlean History*, 90.

prayed and told the Lord I understood and would try and do right. I knew that I had done wrong by taking the milk. . . . I knew that I had done wrong by taking the milk."⁶⁹ Despite her leader's warning to avoid a restrictive diet, Orlean was not supposed to eat everything. Confusion among other community members was not a concern for her. She was not like the others.

That Your Fasting May Be Made Perfect

Despite her leader's concern, Orlean increasingly relied on her revelations to guide her food intake, cutting her food consumption to about twelve ounces of food per meal.⁷⁰ Despite the weakness and pain that stemmed from her diet and long workdays, which she acknowledged, she believed her body was "renewing itself" through her fasting and diets.⁷¹ She explained, "This key is the key to the word of wisdom. It has been given to me, now I can take it and use it and receive health. . . . Thank you Father in heaven that you have seen fit to bestow upon me this wonderful knowledge and help me to put aside the worldly things that I may gain the health and strength and hidden treasures of knowledge which is promised therein. I ask in Jesus, Name Amen."⁷² Her prayers were answered time and again as she gained insight into the spiritual world, which offered more insight and accolades for her food abstinence. Each time, she attributed her spiritual health to her fasts. "I might say that the spirit of the Lord has been with me almost constantly and many have been the times it has spoken to me and revealed new

69. Apr. 6, 1940, Orlean History, 91.

70. Oct. 8, 1941, Orlean History, 117.

71. Oct. 8, 1941, Orlean History, 117. The most frequent manifestation of renewal for Orlean was the improvement of her eyesight (Nov. 13, 1938, Orlean History, 76).

72. Nov. 13, 1938, Orlean History, 76.

knowledge and truth. Many are the fasts I have been on.”⁷³ Eventually, these many fasts transformed into the extended fasting regimen that became part of DCCS religious life.

Early in her fasting practice, Orlean received insight into the people who joined the DCCS. They were people willing to sacrifice and strive for God, even to extraordinary limits. “We must be careful who comes and joins the order. They must be willing to make sacrifices and strivings of the Lord. This is the method always been used to get knowledge form [*sic*] the lord. Moses spent 2 forty-day periods fasting and praying. Jesus spent 42 days striving.”⁷⁴ In her work on diet in American Christianity, R. Marie Griffith argues that devotion is a “religious experience with limits,” with the limits intended to strengthen one’s connection with both a religious community and the divine. As Robert Orsi notes in his work on women’s devotion to the patron of impossible causes, painful situations bring individuals to the brink of their physical capacity and sometimes beyond.⁷⁵ While Orlean did not document her own forty-two-day striving period, she received insight into a thirty-four-day fast, during which time the “spirit of the Lord is very close to me [*sic*].”⁷⁶ In addition to the spiritual strength she received from her weakened body, she also documented several fasts and the subsequent health benefits.⁷⁷

Over time, a 42-day period of striving (i.e., fasting and prayer) became a practice of the righteous in the DCCS. While not commonly done by everyone, it was believed that the practice would “prove your

73. Jan. 30, 1946, Orlean History, 133.

74. Nov. 1, 1934, Orlean History, 17.

75. See Robert Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women’s Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996).

76. Jan. 30, 1946, Orlean History, 134. As her diaries stated before, Orlean specifically noted her improved eyesight from the fasting.

77. Jan. 30, 1946, Orlean History, 134.

devotion," as one former member noted.⁷⁸ He explained, "My maternal grandmother started manifesting MS in her early 30's and she'd do it [an extended fast] every few years. She's mid-eighties now. She credits the fasts and diets."⁷⁹ Through the extended fasts, the body of believers, both literal and metaphorical, became the location where membership in the community solidified. At the same time, their harsh bodily discipline became the foil by which they understood themselves in opposition to the LDS Church. "We used to mock them for their one-day fasts. Their one day fast is only 24 hours, at most. We'd eat regular dinner the night before, at around 7. Then nothing that night or the next day and then the following morning we'd wake up and break it with water, frozen pineapple juice, and later a small salad with vinegar and broth. BEST MEAL EVER!"⁸⁰ In health practices, as elsewhere, the fundamentalist movement has defined itself in relation to the movement they separated from after the end of polygamy.

The outline for correct fasting practice used by contemporary members of the DCCS credited priesthood leaders with the creation of the practice, "Brother Ortell usually planned going 42 days. However some of the time he went longer and a few times he had to shorten it because he didn't have the strength to continue. Most of the time, I went 42 days. Twice I went on a four week program. This was one week dry, one week with water, two weeks on grape juice and then 30 days (at least) on raw."⁸¹ Today, the forty-two-day fast includes one week with no food or water, two weeks with just water, and three weeks with grape juice. Following the fast, the individual spends ten days carefully breaking the fast with raw food. In a supplementary document on the

78. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022. The idea that the fast is not for everyone was confirmed by a current member of the DCCS who explained that he had not completed a forty-two-day fast.

79. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022

80. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022

81. "Information on Fasting," N.p. N.d., 1. Photocopy in author's possession.

importance of fasting circulated within the community, the author explains, “Before you fast you must be sure that it is done under the direction of the Lord. By doing this, you will have His protection and help during the fast.”⁸² The fast is not without risk and warrants caution even for the most devout believer.

In addition to crediting Ortell’s leadership with the forty-two-day fast, the DCCS’s instruction for fasting highlighted the experience of priesthood leaders who used the fast for various purposes and received varying degrees of spiritual and physical benefit for their sacrifice. In “Information on Fasting,” instructions for the practice cited Elden, who “talked about fasting in the first of the Order.”⁸³ The overview also mentioned Ortell, who “paid a big price for all the secrets of knowledge he received. But because we haven’t had to go through the same trial and error studies and sicknesses and pain he has gone through we haven’t always appreciated this knowledge like we should.”⁸⁴ At certain times in his life, he fasted “just to keep alive.”⁸⁵ Notably absent from the DCCS’s document on the origin of the fast was Orlean and the rigorous experimentation she conducted with her own body for the spiritual benefit of the community despite the fact that remnants of Orlean’s practices remain part of DCCS practice. This includes her regulation on salt and sweeteners.

The DCCS was not alone in using rigorous fasts in the mid-twentieth century. When the DCCS fast developed, long-term food abstinence was becoming increasingly common, especially among men. R. Marie Griffith writes that between 1890 and 1930, during the Progressive Era, the people most associated with fasting were men, who

82. “Information on Fasting.”

83. “Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing,” N.p. N.d., 2. Photocopy in author’s possession.

84. “Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing.”

85. “Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing.”

framed fasting as demonstrating virility and success.⁸⁶ This period is distinct from older periods, where devotional food practices occupied a more prominent role for women.⁸⁷ The gendered aspect of the DCCS fast was significant for its lack of women's involvement and because it allowed practitioners to escape pathologizing. Because the forty-two-day fast in the DCCS became associated with men, it more easily moved beyond concern over disordered eating, which marks Orlean's memory among former members of the DCCS. Much like the fasters of the Progressive Era, who "ate plentifully when not fasting, refused food only at set intervals and for bounded durations, and carefully marked their behavior as masculine," DCCS men avoided clinical stigma.⁸⁸ This experience of Kingston men is contrary to Orlean's legacy, which is often riddled with concern over undiagnosed anorexia. The line Orlean drew between fasting for spiritual insight and "diet" blurred throughout Orlean's life, exacerbating the already present concern for her physical and mental health. For example, in 1940, she began referring to the fast as a "diet," even lamenting when she "failed":

December 26, 1940 Again I have failed to keep my diet

December 31 Again I have failed.

January 1, 1941 New Years Day. I'm fasting again this morning as I again feel sick because of disobedience.⁸⁹

The absence of Orlean in DCCS literature on fasting is further significant given the priesthood's continual worry about her fasting practices. Despite growing concern over her diet and the confusion it caused, she wrote to Elden to offer advice and insight she received through her dreams. On December 15, 1939, early into her fasts, Orlean spent the evening writing a letter to her brother about the dreams and

86. Griffith, *Born Again Bodies*, 112.

87. Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

88. Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 113.

89. Dec. 26, 1940–Jan. 1, 1941, Orlean History, 105.

visions that informed her choice to avoid cooked foods and only eat food in its “natural state.”⁹⁰ Based on her dream, she revealed, “In Moses’ time I [the Lord] commanded my people to eat Manna. In Nephi’s time; to eat meat. During the Millennium, I will give them all the good things of the earth, meat, manna, fruit, vegetables, etc., but you must eat them as I *have made them*.”⁹¹ Given the group’s current dietary practices, it is likely that at least some of Elden’s spiritual insight on fasting and the Word of Wisdom came from Orlean. Her letter to Elden and litany of dreams associated with fasting complicate the gendered nature of revelation in Mormonism and the role of women in Progressive Era fasting practices.

The outcomes of the forty-two-day fast were not always positive. This remains the case among contemporary members of the DCCS. People who eventually left the DCCS recall Orlean’s later life and wonder if the fasts ultimately cut her life short. However, the adverse outcomes are seldom discussed, as with other spiritual practices that risk death. When they are discussed, they offer glimpses of harrowing displays of dangerous devotion. “They don’t talk about the failures,” explained a former DCCS member in an interview. “But, the success[es] are definitely faith promoting. I remember sitting in public school biology classes and being told that a human couldn’t survive more than 3 days without water. Imagine hearing that as a ‘true saint.’”⁹² By “failures,” this former member recalled a step-grandfather who “went delirious at the end and chewed his finger-tips off” or multiple members in recent years who died from the fast that sought to call upon God to alleviate the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. He explained, “My paternal grandmother had leukemia and instead of sending her to the Dr, they had her do the 42 day fast. She died under 60 pounds and her flesh would tear if you touched her.”⁹³

90. Dec. 15, 1939, Orlean History, 83.

91. Dec. 15, 1939, Orlean History, 84.

92. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022.

93. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022.

Unlike hagiographic accounts of Orlean's life from the faithful, others recall Orlean as an anorexic woman who tragically sacrificed her life for the DCCS. These recollections are not wholly distinct from Orlean's imagining of herself. Early in her fasts, she dreamed that "someone said if you keep on eating like you are you will die as a sacrifice to the order (as Joseph Smith did)."⁹⁴ Thinking through Orlean's memory, a former community member recalled the illness that Orlean experienced after ending a "grape diet" too quickly. Orlean did not offer details about this diet. However, it bears similarities to *The Grape Cure*, a book originally published in 1927 that advocated for an alternative medical practice known as "grape therapy."⁹⁵ Despite the claim that the fast led to Orlean's early death, she maintained her staunch belief in the fasts and the revelations that taught her the importance of food abstinence and its spiritual benefit.

Orlean died in 1956 at the young age of forty-four. She dedicated her life to fasting from "that which is not perfect for that which is perfect."⁹⁶ Although Orlean's leaders questioned her fasts, she retained her belief in a more perfect Word of Wisdom until the end. Members of the group remember Orlean as a great Saint who strove to attain latter-day perfection in both body and soul. But, more than a mere memory, Orlean's legacy survives in her many relatives who retain parts of her dietary practice, including abstinence from "unnatural" foods and long fasts. Through relatives who became prominent members of the group, her revelatory practices became common.

Conclusion

Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson's diary entries are primarily about food. However, a deeper look reveals an account of women in Mormon fundamentalist doctrinal development. Her daily documentation

94. Dec. 14, 1939, Orlean History, 84

95. See Joanna Brandt, *The Grape Cure* (self-published, 1925).

96. Feb. 3, 1946, Orlean History, 135.

of dreams and visions centered her own body in making religion. Although she did not hold a leadership position in the DCCS or have access to institutional authority, Orlean's dreams and visions had a lasting impact on the devotional practices of the community. While largely invisible from the historical record outside of faithful conversations, her revelations developed a complete Word of Wisdom that offered the community insight on the importance of a fasting body to attain physical and spiritual nourishment. Inspired by her own bodily experimentation, Orlean became convinced of the intimate connection between physical health and spiritual life. Her example influenced, confused, and worried her coreligionists and leaders, who seemed unable to comprehend her devotion. Nevertheless, her legacy remains in many DCCS families who use her dreams and revelation to guide their contemporary health practices.

Like women mystics and visionaries before her, Orlean's revelations came at the cost of her health. Her short life sheds light on the nature of health practices in religion, further illuminating the pathologizing divide along the lines of gender. Had Orlean been a man, she would likely have been listed in the DCCS devotional literature for fasting, with less speculation on possible anorexia. She might have also been a prophet. For this reason, the revelations that mark her life raise questions about women's authority in hierarchical religions. Orlean was the first in the community to receive revelation on foods such as salt, honey, and milk, foods avoided by some members of the DCCS. Guided by the spirit, she wrote to her brother, the founder and named leader of the DCCS, and encouraged a dietary system for the community's spiritual and physical health. Much of these insights still guide DCCS families. Through her daily recollections, Orlean portrayed an experience of Mormonism where personal revelation can supersede male leadership, and where bodily practice develops around a woman's embodied religious life.

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