

Mormonism: Christian or Cult?

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Mormonism, known as *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (with headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah -- a state that is now 70% Mormon), was officially founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844). Smith claimed to have had a personal visit from God the Father at the age of 15, who introduced him to Christ.¹ Jesus then supposedly told him not to join any church because they were all wrong and all the Christian church's doctrines "were an abomination" (*Joseph Smith -- History 19, Pearl of Great Price*). After Smith's murder in 1844, Brigham Young took the cult to Utah, where there is now a major University named after him, and the number of Mormons exceed one million. The Mormon Church currently claims about 11 million baptized members worldwide (5.2 million U.S., ranking it 5th among the largest 25 U.S. denominations), up from about 2.5 million in 1970. Over the last decade, nearly 300,000 individuals over the age of eight have joined the Mormon Church every year. Membership is expected to grow to over 23 million over the next two decades. It is growing fastest in Latin America and Asia. Official publications include *Church News*, a weekly 16-page newspaper, and the *Ensign*, a monthly magazine.

The Mormon Church collects at least \$6 billion a year from its members, and generates at least another \$5 billion in sales from its various business enterprises; total church assets exceed \$30 billion. (At least 100 companies are controlled by the Mormon Church, and some estimate its total annual revenues in excess of \$20 billion! The church also owns 18 radio stations in the U.S.) Part of the Church's income goes to operate an elaborate internal welfare system so its members avoid any governmental assistance. The Mormon Church also has a 58,000-plus missionary force working in more than 160 nations in 102 languages. The Church's Provo, Utah, 26-acre Missionary Training Center receives 500 new missionaries a week into its 3-9 week intensive missionary training program. (All boys, once they turn 19, are expected to dedicate two years of their lives to missionary service.) Fielding missionaries is a \$500 million per year effort and currently reaps more than 300,000 new converts each year. Nevertheless, only about 46% of Mormons attend a church meeting at least once a month. (The clean-

cut image that Mormons have attained has been a major factor in the attractiveness of the Mormon Church to outsiders. They are forbidden to drink coffee, tea, and alcoholic beverages, and use tobacco products.)

The Mormon church (LDS) is organized so that one prophet leads the church. Beneath the prophet in authority is the Council of the Twelve Apostles. A third group of men are called the First and Second Councils of the Seventy. All of these men together are called the General Authorities. Local churches are called *Wards* or *Stake Centers* and meet for worship in what the Mormons call "meetinghouses." The *Temples* are not for worship, but are used for ceremonies for the living and the dead. Less than ten percent of all LDS members are allowed to enter these structures.

As of year-end 2002, there were 114 operating temples of Mormondom worldwide, with another 14 under construction or approved (albeit less elaborate than the 50 temples in existence at the end of 1997). (Approximately 65,000 members must be in an immediate area to qualify for a temple.) Temples are required for Mormon marriages and for proxy baptisms of ancestors. Most people assume Mormon temples are places of worship. This is not true. Only secret, occult rituals for the living and the dead are performed there, and Mormons think they must perform them to have eternal life. It is tragic that over eleven million Mormons think they need secret handshakes, oaths, incantations, and rituals, which originated in occultic Scottish Rite [Freemasonry](#), in order to be with God in heaven! (In the final years of Joseph Smith Jr.'s life, he became a "worshipful master" in the Masonic Lodge.)

Many today are under the false impression that Mormonism is merely another Christian denomination, when in actuality, Mormon beliefs are not only unbiblical, but *anti-Christian*. Below are the highlights of what Mormons believe concerning their source of authority, the Trinity, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin, salvation, and heaven and hell:

1. Source of Authority. Mormonism teaches that the canon of Scripture was not closed when the Bible was completed. They have three sources in addition to the Bible, all of which they believe contain God's revelations -- the *Book of Mormon* [2](#) (changed in more than 4,000 places since 1830), *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price*. However, Mormons follow the teachings of these three books even when they contradict the Bible. For example, Mormonism teaches that the Bible is the Word of God "as far as it is translated correctly." Then whenever a Mormon belief contradicts Scripture, the Mormons say that particular part of Scripture is translated incorrectly, and that the correct translation is in one of the Mormon scriptures (*The Maze of Mormonism*, p. 131). Thereby, the Bible is rejected as the infallible Word of God. [e.g. "The Bible is considered usable, but suspect due to its many errors and missing parts" (Articles of Faith No. 8, *Ensign*, January 1989, pp. 25, 27).

2. Trinity. Mormonism teaches polytheism (versus monotheism taught in the Bible), believing that the universe is inhabited by many gods who produce spirit children. Joseph Smith declared, "I will preach on the plurality of Gods. I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 370). Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie spoke about the Godhead in this way, "Plurality of Gods: Three separate personages: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a God, it is evident, from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of Gods exists. To us, speaking in the proper finite sense, these three are the only Gods we worship. But in addition there is an

infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods" (*Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 576-577).

3. God. In Mormon theology, the god of our planet is believed to have once been a man on another planet, who through self-effort and the help of his own father-god, was appointed by a council of gods in the heavens to his high position as the god of planet Earth, and now has a physical, resurrected, glorified body. Mormonism teaches that through the atonement of Christ and by their good deeds and "holy" living, men can one day become gods, and with their multiplicity of "goddess wives," populate their own planets. (This is what the celestial marriage and the Mormon temple vows are all about.) Mormon theology, therefore, humanizes God and deifies man.[3](#)

4. Christ. Mormonism acknowledges the divinity of Christ, but as noted above, Mormon doctrine on what constitutes divinity falls seriously short of the Biblical standard. Mormonism teaches that Jesus, Lucifer, and all the demons, as well as all mankind, are actually all spirit brothers and sisters, born in the spirit world as spirit babies to our man-god Heavenly Father and his goddess wives. Mormon leaders have consistently taught that God the Father ("Adam-god") had sexual relations on earth with Mary (his own spirit daughter), to produce the physical body of Jesus. Early Mormon apostles also asserted that Christ was a polygamist, and that His wives included Mary and Martha (the sisters of Lazarus) and Mary Magdalene.[4](#)

5. Holy Spirit. In Mormonism, a distinction is drawn between the Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit. As LDS Apostle Marion G. Romney stated: "The Holy Ghost is a person, a spirit, the third member of the Godhead" (*Ensign*, May 1977, pp. 43-44). The sixth LDS prophet, Joseph F. Smith, explains that the Holy Spirit is not a person but rather an impersonal force: "You may call it the Spirit of God, you may call it the influence of God's intelligence, you may call it the substance of his power; no matter what it is called, it is the spirit of intelligence that permeates the universe" (*Mormon Doctrine*, McConkie, pp. 752-753).

6. Sin. In Mormon theology, it is not quite clear how the first humans, Adam and Eve, came to live on this earth and received bodies, but somehow they did and began the process of human procreation, whereby bodies are produced for their spirit children. But at the very beginning of the process of human generation, sin entered necessarily. The earthly bodies of Adam and Eve were intended to be immortal tabernacles for their spirits, "but it was necessary for them to possess through mortality and be redeemed through the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ that the fullness of life might come." Therefore, they disobeyed God's commands. Since the fall of man was necessary, it became necessary for men to disobey God in order to do His will. Adam's fall, thereby, was a fall "upward."[5](#) Concerning the transmission of sin to Adam's posterity, Mormons take a negative position -- they believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression. Having rejected the doctrine of the imputation of the guilt of sin, Latter-Day Saints likewise repudiate the transmission of inherent corruption or original sin.

7. Salvation. Mormon theology teaches that the atonement of Christ was essential to our salvation and eternal life with God, but that it is **not** sufficient. Christ's shed blood on the cross provides for universal resurrection of all people, but does not pay for personal sins; according to Mormonism, only Christ's blood shed in the Garden of Gethsemane atones for personal sin. Besides faith in Christ, complete and permanent repentance of all sin as well as many good works are required.[6](#) Mormonism also teaches

that one must be baptized in water to be saved ([baptismal regeneration](#)), and that salvation will also be available in the next world for those "missing-out" in this one. Therefore, Mormons avidly pursue genealogy and practice baptism for the dead.⁷

8. Heaven and Hell. Mormonism teaches that there are three degrees of glory: Celestial (for good Mormons able to cease sinning in this lifetime -- see endnote #6 below), Terrestrial (for good people who do not comply with all the teachings of Mormonism), and Telestial (for those who have lived unclean earthly lives). (See also *Mormon Doctrines*, p. 348.) Mormonism teaches that there is a hell, but only for the "sons of perdition," a very small number of souls that cannot be redeemed. According to Mormonism, then, the vast majority of mankind will be "saved," though it should be obvious that no one will make it to the Celestial Kingdom. [Blacks used to be totally out of the equation: "Black people are black because of their misdeeds in the pre-existence" (*Three Degrees of Glory*, LDS Apostle Melvin J. Ballard, p. 21); "The Negro is an unfortunate man. He has been given a black skin. But that is nothing compared with that greater handicap. He is not permitted to receive the priesthood and the ordinances of the temple, necessary to prepare men and women to enter into and enjoy a fullness of glory in the Celestial Kingdom" (Elder George E. Richards). In 1978, however, the Mormon Church announced that God had lifted his curse from the African race.]

9. Temple Rituals. A typical temple ceremony would take place as follows: "The ritual began in a small cubicle where we had to strip completely. We then put on 'the shield,' a poncho with a hole for the head, but open on the sides (similar to a hospital gown). We went through a series of 'washings and anointings,' as various parts of our bodies were touched by elderly temple workers who mumbled appropriate incantations over them. Our Mormon underwear, 'the garments,' are said to have powers to protect us from 'the evil one.' It had occult markings, which were so 'sacred' that we were instructed to burn them when the garments wore out. The endowment ceremony mocked all doctrines held to by Biblical Christianity, and Christian pastors were portrayed as servants of Satan. We had to swear many blood oaths, promising we would forfeit our lives if we weren't faithful, or if we revealed any of the secrets revealed to us in the temple ceremonies. We were made to pretend by grotesque gestures to cut our throats, chests, and abdomens, indicating how we would lose our lives. We were never told who would kill us! The inference was, and history testifies to, that it would be the Mormon priesthood." (Testimony of a former Mormon.) [Note: The blood oaths and portrayal of Christian pastors were removed in April of 1990, despite the fact that the ordinance was purported to have been given originally by a revelation and was never to be changed.]

10. More from the Mouths of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

Joseph Smith

"God made Aaron to be the mouthpiece for the children of Israel, and **He will make me to be God to you** in His stead, and the elders to be mouth for me; and if you don't like it, you must lump it" (*Documentary History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp 319-320).

"**I have more to boast of than ever any man had.** I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, **nor Jesus** ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as **I**" (D.H.C., vol. 6, p. 408-409).

"**The whole Earth shall bear me witness that I**, like the towering rock in the midst of the ocean, **which has withstood the mighty surges of the warring waves for centuries, am impregnable** ... I combat the errors of ages; I meet the violence of mobs; I cope with illegal proceedings from executive authority; I cut the gordian knot of powers, and I solve mathematical problems of universities, with truth -- diamond truth; and **God is my right hand man.**" (D.H.C., Vol. 6, p. 78).

"And **I prophesy in the name of the Lord God of Israel**, unless the United States redress the wrongs committed upon the Saints in Missouri and punish the crimes committed by her officers that **in a few years the government will be utterly overthrown and wasted and there will not be so much as a potsherd left, ...**" (D.H.C., vol. 5, p. 394). [This prophecy was made in May of 1843, and the United States government has not been overthrown and wasted.]

"Here then is eternal life -- to know the only wise **and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves**, and to be kings and priests to God, the **same as all Gods have done before you...**" (*Teachings of the Prophet, Joseph Smith*, p. 346).

"In the beginning, **the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they** came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it" (Ibid., p. 349).

"The **greatest responsibility** in this world that **God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead**" [Our God of the Bible has forbidden us to have anything to do with the dead (Deut. 18:10,11)].

Brigham Young

"I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they **may not call Scripture**. Let me have the privilege of correcting a sermon, and **it is as good a scripture**" (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 13, p. 95; also see vol. 13, p. 264).

"I say, rather than the **apostates** should flourish here, **I will unsheath my Bowie knife, and conquer or die**. [Great commotion in the congregation, and a simultaneous burst of feeling, assenting to the declaration.] **Now, you nasty apostates, clear out**, or judgment will be put on the line ... If you say it is right, raise your hands [All hands up], let us call upon the Lord to assist us in this, and **every good work.**" (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, p. 83)

"I could refer you to **plenty of instances where men have been righteously slain, in order to atone for their sins** ... This is loving our neighbor as ourselves, if he needs help, help him, and if he wants salvation and it is necessary to spill his blood on the earth in order that he may be **saved, spill it.**" (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 4, p. 220). [Many were killed under what is called the "Blood Atonement Doctrine" Leaving Mormonism was one of the sins that the blood of Jesus could not atone for, and a person's own blood must be shed by Mormon priests as an atonement for sin.]

"I intend to meet them on their own grounds. ... **and if any miserable scoundrel comes here, cut their**

throats." [And they obeyed; a wagon train of innocent men, women, and children were massacred at Mountain Meadows under the orders of Brigham Young. They were passing through Utah, and Brigham thought they were from Illinois where Joseph Smith had been killed. Many more were "atoned."]

"**Gold and silver grow**, and so does every other kind of metal, **the same as the hair upon my head or the wheat in the field; ...**" (JOD., vol. 1, p. 219).

"Who can tell us of the **inhabitants of this little planet** that shines of an evening, **called the Moon?** ... So it is with regard to the **inhabitants of the Sun.** Do you not think it is inhabited? I rather think it is. **Do you think there is any life there? No Question of it;** it was not made in vain." (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, p. 219).

"Do you think **we shall ever be admitted as a State into the Union without denying the principal of polygamy?** If we are not admitted until then, **we shall never be admitted.**" (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, p. 269). [The Edmunds Act was passed in 1882 forbidding polygamy in the territory, and only then was Utah allowed to enter the Union. At that point the LDS church officially gave up polygamy. Another false prophecy from the Mormon prophet!]

"I think these preliminaries will satisfy me, and I feel prepared to take my text. It is the words of Jesus Christ, **but where they are in the Bible I cannot tell you now**, for I have not taken pains to look at them. I have had so much to do, that **I have not read the Bible for many years.** I used to read and study it, **but did not understand the spirit and meaning of it ...**" (1854 Conference discourse, October 8). [Brigham Young obviously did not understand the Bible, and neither do any of the other Mormon prophets!]

* In recent years, Mormon leaders, including the church's modern-day "Prophet," Gordon B. Hinckley, have sought to align the LDS' public teachings and practices with those of politically correct, global ecumenicism. But it is only until recently that Mormons wanted to be called "Christians," preferring not to be included with Christian denominations, which Joseph Smith Jr. said were, "all wrong ... all their creeds were an abomination in His sight, and that those professors (Christians) were all corrupt" (*Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith, 2:18-19); Mormons have preferred to be called "saints." However, in the recent years, the LDS church has spent millions of dollars in an intense "PR" campaign aimed at moving the Mormon church into the mainstream of Christianity. The political and economic benefits of Mormons being included in the mainstream of Christianity are obvious. Further, for Mormons to be accepted as traditional Christians would greatly aid in proselytizing the members of Christian denominations into the LDS church. This is why the LDS church is trying so hard to present itself as Christian and is trying to overcome the stigma of being a cult (9/16/96, *FBIS*, "Are Mormons Christians," by Cooper P. Abrams III). Moreover, Mormons let it be known in early-2001 that they no longer wanted to be referred to as "the Mormon Church," "the Latter-day Saints Church," or by "LDS Church." If the name must be shortened, "the Church of Jesus Christ," or "the Church" is acceptable, they said (3/19/01, *USN&WR*).

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This report has been excerpted and/or adapted from two sources: (1) "[The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#)," Rick Branch (Watchman Fellowship Profile, 1993); and (2) *Examining & Exposing Cultic & Occultic Movements*, Jack Sin, "What is Wrong with Mormonism," April 2000, pp. 21-25.

Endnotes

1 The Bible lists six identifying marks of false prophets, any one of which is sufficient for identification: (1) through signs and wonders they lead astray after false gods (Dt. 13:1-4); (2) their prophecies don't come to pass (Dt. 18:20-22); (3) they contradict God's Word (Isa. 8:20); (4) they bear bad fruit (Mt. 7:18-20); (5) men speak well of them (Lk. 6:26); and (6) they deny that Jesus, the one and only Christ, has come once and for all in the flesh (1 Jn. 4:3), thereby denying His sufficiency in all matters of life and godliness (2 Pe. 1:3). Most cults are founded upon false prophecies, which, if pointed out, offer an effective way to open blind eyes and rescue cultists. Mormonism boasts of its prophets -- but they have all been false. In the course of 18 years, founding prophet Joseph Smith made 64 specific prophecies. Only six of them were fulfilled -- fewer than 10 percent. Many of his proclamations dealt with the future of his church. For example, in August of 1831 he stated that God had told him, "The faithful among you shall be preserved and rejoice together in the land of Missouri." In September of 1832, he stated that the city of Independence would become the "New Jerusalem ... even the place of the temple, which temple shall be reared in this generation." Six years later the Mormons were driven out of Independence. No temple was built there. Eventually they were driven from Missouri and settled in Utah. In 1833, Smith prophesied that the United States would suffer unparalleled multiple disasters ("pestilence, hail, famine, and earthquake") which would sweep the wicked (non-Mormons) off the land, leaving Mormons safe in their Zion haven in Missouri. Instead, they fled to Utah. Among Smith's many other false prophecies was the declaration in 1835 that Christ would return within 56 years and many living then would "not taste of death till Christ comes" (*History of the Church* [Vol. 2], p. 182; [Vol. 5], p. 336). Smith's successor, Brigham Young, prophesied that the Civil War would not free the slaves. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

2 The *Book of Mormon*, purported by Joseph Smith Jr. to be "inspired by God," is the most famous of specifically Mormon "scriptures." Smith concocted the preposterous yarn that an angel named Moroni (pronounced ma-roe-nee) appeared to him in 1827 and told him of some golden plates hidden in a hillside near Palmyra, New York. From these plates, Smith supposedly translated the *Book of Mormon*. [Published in 1830, this was to become the first of many scriptures for the Mormon Church. By this time, Smith had also officially organized the LDS Church and was gaining a following. Over the next ten years, the church headquarters would move to Kirtland, Ohio; Independence, Missouri, and Far West, Missouri. Finally it would find a resting place in Nauvoo, Illinois.] In actuality, the *Book of Mormon* is a fraud, having been plagiarized from the Bible, from Shakespeare, from the pope's *Essays on Man*, from the Westminster Confession of Faith, and from other leading authors of the last few hundred years prior to Smith's death. Despite its plagiarisms, the *Book of Mormon* contradicts the Bible in hundreds of places (9/95, *Maranatha Baptist Watchman*). [\[Back to Text\]](#)

3 Joseph Smith explained, "I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ Himself did" (*LDS History of the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 305). "The Father has

promised us that through our faithfulness we shall be blessed with the fullness of his kingdom. In other words we will have the privilege of becoming like him. To become like him we must have all the powers of godhood; thus a man and his wife when glorified will have spirit children who eventually will go on an earth like this one we are on and pass through the same kind of experiences, being subject to mortal conditions, and if faithful, then they also will receive the fullness of exaltation and partake of the same blessings. There is no end to this development; it will go on forever. We will become gods and have jurisdiction over the world, and the world will be peopled by our own offspring. We will have an endless eternity for this" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 2, p. 48). [\[Back to Text\]](#)

4 Brigham Young stated, "The birth of the Saviour was as natural as are the births of our children; it was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood, was begotten of his Father, as we were of our father" (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 8, p. 115). Mormon Apostle McConkie explained, "And Christ was born into the world as a literal Son this Holy Being; he was born in the same personal, real, and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. He was begotten, conceived and born in the normal and natural course of events (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 742). Jesus, according to Milton Hunter of the LDS First Council of the Seventy, is the brother of Lucifer: "The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the world was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the Savior of mankind" (*The Gospel Through the Ages*, p. 15). [\[Back to Text\]](#)

5 On June 8, 1873, speaking from the Salt Lake City Tabernacle, Brigham Young said, "The Devil told the truth ... I do not blame Mother Eve. I would not have had her miss eating the forbidden fruit for anything. ..." Another Mormon president declared, "The fall of man came as a blessing in disguise... We can hardly look upon anything resulting in such benefits [i.e., godhood] as a sin." Incredibly, Mormonism is based upon the belief that Satan's central lie is the gospel truth! [\[Back to Text\]](#)

6 See: (1) *Book of Mormon*: 3 Nephi 27:13-27; Moroni 10:32-33; Mosiah 15:26-27; Alma 12:14-28; 34:32-35; 1 Nephi 3:7; (2) *Doctrine & Covenants*: 14:7; 58:42-43; and (3) *Miracle of Forgiveness* (Kimball): pp. 206-210, 313-315, 321-322, 354-355. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

7 Mormons believe that everyone who lives and dies on this earth goes to a place called the Spirit Prison, except faithful Mormons, who go to Paradise. Mormon Spirit Missionaries go down from Paradise to the Spirit Prison and teach the Gospel of Joseph Smith to the lost Christians and others there. Those who accept Mormonism must remain in prison until a worthy Mormon performs certain essential rituals, called "Ordinances," for them in one of the Mormon Temples. Then they are released from Spirit Prison to join the Mormons in Paradise. Since these rituals or Ordinances require a physical body to be washed, anointed, baptized, etc., they can only be performed by a living person in the place and manner prescribed by Deity, acting under Universal (Mormon) cosmic laws. [\[Back to Text\]](#)

The Other Mormon Church (RLDS)(Community of Christ)

We are often asked about the "other Mormon church" that is headquartered in Independence, Missouri. The questions vary from: "are they a cult?" to "what is the difference between them and the Utah Mormons?"

The answer to the first is easy. YES, they are a cult.

The answer to the second is a bit more complicated. The RLDS (Reorganized Latter Day Saints) actually had its start after the assassination of Joseph Smith Jr., the founder and prophet of all LDS churches. After his death in 1844, there were many men who rose up and declared themselves to be the true prophet to replace Smith. Many of these new "prophets" began their own version of the "only true church." In fact, there have been over 100 distinct groups claiming to be the church that would end all controversy about the "restored" gospel. The RLDS is the largest of these spin-off groups.

When Brigham Young led most of the "saints" to the Salt Lake Valley in Utah, several leaders, who did not accept Smith's revelation on polygamy, branched off and formed the RLDS church. One of these men, Jason Briggs, who had been an elder in the LDS church in Nauvoo, Illinois, had his own revelation that Joseph Smith III (Joseph Jr.'s son) was the one to rightfully assume the mantle of "prophet." He, along with about 300 others, followed Emma Smith (Joseph Jr.'s first and only non-polygamous wife), to Independence, Missouri. At first, Joseph Smith III refused to take on the job of prophet, but he later relented and became the official head of the RLDS church on April 6, 1860. Its official publications are the monthly magazine *Saints Herald* and the bimonthly *Restoration Witness*.

Similar to most other churches which claim Joseph Smith Jr. as their founder, the RLDS Church is led by a Prophet and his counselors. These men are known collectively as the First Presidency. In addition, the RLDS Church has a Council of Twelve Apostles. There are lesser offices in the RLDS Church such as Bishops, Elders, etc. An RLDS *Fundamentalist* or *Restorationist* is one who believes the *Book of Mormon* is historically and theologically accurate. They also believe the RLDS Church, as defined by Joseph Smith III, is the only true church.

Since its founding, each RLDS prophet had to be a descendent of Joseph Smith Jr. This was not a problem until Prophet Wallace B. Smith failed to produce a male heir. But, the god of the RLDS was not to be foiled by this unfortunate turn of events; he "revealed" to Wallace in 1984 that it was now acceptable for women to hold the Mormon priesthood. Since Wallace does have daughters, it seemed likely that the next prophet of the RLDS church would be a prophetess. However, Wallace B. Smith retired several years ago, and for the first time in the church's history, a person not in direct lineage of Joseph Smith was appointed to be president -- Grant McMurray.

Strange as it may seem, the RLDS church has built its doctrinal statement on points of disagreement with the doctrine of the Utah Mormons. Unlike the Utah Mormons, they do not accept polygamy, marriage for time and eternity, that men can become gods, and blood atonement as taught by Joseph Smith Jr. Rather, they blame all these errors on Brigham Young. Here they had to change history, because both Young and Smith practiced and taught those things, semi-secretly until Smith's death. Later, Young taught all this in public without blushing. But, the RLDSs have plenty of heresies of their own.

Historically, the RLDS has taught the following doctrines:

- The RLDS versions of the *Book of Mormon* and the *Doctrine and Covenants* are considered to be scripture. They also accept Joseph Smith's rewritten version of the Bible, the Inspired Version [I.V.], as scripture.
- Complete apostasy of the early Christian church (*Fundamentals*, F. Henry Edwards, pp. 175-210).
- Joseph Smith Jr. was a prophet who restored God's church (*D&C* 1:4a and 1:5d-e).
- Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods were restored (*History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Vol. 1, pp. 34-35).
- Baptism for the remission of sins (*D&C* 39:2a-b, 16:4e).
- Zion will be established in, and Jesus will return to, Independence, Missouri (I.V. of Gen. 7:20-25, *D&C* 57, *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3, p. 710).
- Heaven has three levels (*D&C* 76:5-7).
- Those who do not hear the RLDS gospel in this life will have another opportunity in the next (*D&C* 76:6c).

Of the Holy Spirit, Kurt Goedelman of Personal Freedom Outreach, writes, "While it is easy to find stated that the Father and Son are regarded as persons in RLDS literature, it is difficult to find references to the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost) as a person. Rather, He is mainly regarded as 'the living power and presence of God'" (*Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 7).

Unlike the Mormon Church, most RLDS members view the *Book of Mormon* as a 19th century product (*Position Papers*, pp. 103-112). The RLDS version of the *Doctrine and Covenants* also contains additional and different revelations than will be found in the Mormon version. In addition, they do not use the *Pearl of Great Price* as do the Utah Mormons.

In recent years, the RLDS Church has avoided viewing the Restoration of the Church as an actual historical event. In a speech given at the First Presidency Meetings in 1979, it was stated, "When we are honest about our own personal and corporate history, we realize that the apostasy and the Restoration were not events that happened one time in history but rather are processes continually at work among us" (*Presidential Papers*, p. 28). Thus, by denying the Restoration was an actual historical event, the RLDS Church has undermined the very foundation upon which all of Joseph Smith Jr.'s later work depends and, thereby, undermining their own foundation.

Even these RLDS' doctrines that had been cast in stone are giving way to modern day liberalism and New Age thinking. Paul Edwards, the dean of the Park College Graduate School of Religion and Temple School Center director, has stated that each member must look to his or her own **existential experience** for a basis of truth. They should not base their beliefs on the *Bible* or even the *Book of Mormon*, for each individual must form his own belief founded on his experiences. The Bible is considered a springboard for each person to form his or her own theology without help from any authority. Here is a quote from Edwards: "One of the most important needs for RLDS people today is to look existentially at *primary experiences* as the starting point for their theological activity." (Emphasis ours.)

Simply stated, Edwards is advocating that each individual view theological truths from a personal, subjective perspective, rather than from an historical, objective perspective. Instead of beginning with the Bible, or even RLDS scripture, such as the *Book of Mormon* and/or *Doctrine and Covenants*, the

RLDS dean of theology recommends that each believer looks to his or her own existential experience for a basis of truth. Based on this idea, it would be difficult for the RLDS hierarchy to adopt any single Statement of Faith; for each individual would interpret those beliefs in his own existential way. Echoing Edwards' views, Anthony Chvala-Smith, who received his Ph.D. from Marquette University, "explained there can be no 'perennial theology, only a theology of wayfarers'" (Ibid., p. 9). Thus, each believer in the RLDS religion is left to stumble in darkness, making their own way through the maze, with no help from higher authorities. Finally, Robert Mesle, professor of religion at Graceland, in speaking about the place of the Bible in RLDS theology, stated, "We need to be teaching our young people to be responsible, discriminating readers of scripture (who) use scripture as a springboard not a trap" (Ibid.). In RLDS theology, the Bible is simply a beginning point for the individual's personal theology. The important source for theological truth is not God's word, but rather that subjective, existential experience. It is felt by many cult researchers that this ambiguity of doctrine may be due, in part, to both the on-going controversy between Fundamentalists and Liberals within the RLDS Church and the church's tendency to reflect the latest social trends.

#This article ("The Other Mormon Church -- RLDS") as been excerpted and/or adapted from an article in the January 1997 *Mount Carmel Outreach* newsletter; and from "[Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints](#)," Craig Branch (Watchman Fellowship Profile, 1996[?]). On April 7, 2000, members of the RLDS voted at its world conference to go by a new name: **Community of Christ**. The new name took effect April 6, 2001. [\[Back to Top of RLDS\]](#)