

Conclusion – Progress of Mormonism

In the early years of its development, the church looked toward the imminent second coming of Jesus Christ. By 1835 when Joseph Smith planned to organize a quorum of twelve apostles, he said that Christ's return would not occur for fifty-six years. Later in Nauvoo, Smith indicated that he was not sure of the meaning of the words spoken to him, except that some event would occur forty years in the future.

As has been shown, prior revelatory texts were codified to reflect the changing times in the early Mormonism. Certain ideas were modified because of new insights, and events did not turn out as anticipated since the time of the original revelations. The alterations did not occur all at once. It was a gradual and slow process. It appears that no one complained at the time and the record of the modifications appeared in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. Many histories of Mormonism continue to use the 1835 revisions in their individual publications.

There are various Restoration churches that believe and teach from the Book of Mormon. They include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Community of Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church of Christ (Temple Lot), churches of Christ (with the Elijah Message), the Remnant Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and other organizations, branches, and groups.

The largest church is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with world headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah. It is known for the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Temple Square, LDS Family History Library, and the Conference Center. Congregations meet in ward meeting-houses worldwide. Wards are grouped into geographical units known as stakes.

Looking at the Restoration movement as a whole provides a broad expanse of how things have operated. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Community of Christ, and the Church of Christ (Temple Lot), doctrines and practices throughout the years have been downgraded, omitted, or rejected.

Some members have tried to produce a denial of historical facts in the prior, lived-out history of the saints. This attempt has created a division among those seeking the mysteries of the kingdom. One of the best-known examples is in regard to individuals known in LDS circles as fundamentalist Mormons—that is, those who profess to follow teachings taught by priesthood leaders in prior generations. Doctrines such as Adam-God (Adam being God the Father), blood atonement, and plural marriage are examples of both denials and affirmations.

LDS Church

The LDS endowment ceremony itself is another example. The endowment has been modified throughout the years by removal of portions of the ceremony considered by prior generations as sacred. In this way, the ceremony has been streamlined and thereby deflected public criticism.

The LDS Church, as a worldwide religious organization, has realized the growing problem of inactivity in wards, stakes, and missions. Guidance to church members can be less authoritarian and more inclusive. Old ideas need to be brought up to date with openness and less criticism of others. Religion is personal; and when certain ideas are promoted, members can become extremists. This has happened in the past and is occurring in many countries in the

world. Hate crimes, whether produced by the written word or spoken from the pulpit by religious leaders, have no place in today's society.

Patterns

Certain patterns mentioned in this book have emerged that are important. For example, Joseph Smith said an angel told him about gold plates before going to the hill. While in Nauvoo he spoke about the angel who commanded him to enter into plural marriage. In 1828 Smith worked on an alphabet for the Book of Mormon and seven years later commenced an alphabet to the Book of Abraham. When questioned in 1834, he mounted his horse and rode away, and likewise in 1842, when in conversation at Nauvoo, he again departed on a horse without responding to a question about writing on papyrus.

When religious texts were produced, Joseph Smith used the KJV Bible as the standard text and incorporated its words into the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham. Also when times got tough, we find that in Kirtland and in Nauvoo a printing press was destroyed. Freedom of the press was infringed upon through questionable methods. The surprising thing is that many newspaper articles and books reported statements and historical events with striking accuracy. Of course, there were inaccurate claims and theories about Mormonism then as now.

People do not live in isolation from their historical and cultural situation. They are influenced by their own time and place. The origins of Mormonism are closely tied to the Joseph Smith Sr. family. It also includes other individuals who came in contact with representatives of the fledging movement. Even though we have moved far away from that day, Latter-day Saint heritage is linked to the America of the early decades of the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s.

Some of Joseph Smith's ideas were wrong and some of his religious writings were inaccurate, but his influence has made a permanent impact on believers in his mission. He is revered as a prophet by modern church leaders and members. They regard the Book of Mormon and Smith's prophetic ministry as a guide to obtain heavenly treasures.

With the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the past thirty years, the future still holds a period of growth. With people seeking a religion with a stable organization, preaching family values and friendship, it is only proper that they welcome an organization that gives many directives from the top. By joining the church, an individual joins a society. People take on the image of pioneers, a persecuted people, and the idea that they have found the truth.

It takes many years for an organization that believes in modern revelation to accept historical facts. Some examples follow. The Kinderhook Plates, for many years, were believed to be genuine (1843-1981) but are now known to be a hoax. The Horus Papyrus (Breathing Permit) is an Egyptian document, rather than a record written by Abraham. The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham are funerary documents as indicated in 1861. Joseph Smith was a glass looker and treasure seer as mentioned in articles and books.

There is room for improvement, such as acknowledging that the excitement of religion that Joseph Smith mentioned in his official account was the Palmyra revival of 1824-25. Another historical event to affirm is that the original Church of Christ organized by Joseph Smith occurred in Manchester, Ontario County, New York on April 6, 1830.

Joseph Smith believed that he spoke with supernatural beings. Whether he did is ultimately left to each person as a matter of faith. It is hoped that those studying Mormonism will keep an open mind as they advance to a deeper understanding of the early days of the movement.

One of the earliest principles for church membership was that of obedience to leadership. This is stated in a revelatory message delivered on the day the church was organized concerning what Joseph Smith would reveal to them.

Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words, and commandments, which he shall give unto you, as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me: For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith; For by doing these things, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you: Yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you; and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory. (LDS D&C 21:4-6; RLDS D&C 19:2)

As mentioned, after Smith's death, the majority of church members followed the leadership of senior apostle Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Young presided over the affairs of the church for thirty-three years (1844-77) and made a permanent mark on the movement.

Young was succeeded in church leadership by individuals who were members of the Quorum of the Twelve. Tradition holds that, after the death of a church president, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve will become church president.

LDS Corporation of the President

Though a corporation sole was established for the Presiding Bishop in the State of Utah, it was considered needful to establish a Corporation of the President. This was accomplished in 1923 by church president Heber J. Grant. Two important sections of the Articles of Incorporation of the Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are cited below:

The object of this corporation shall be to acquire, hold and dispose of such real and personal property as may be conveyed to or acquired by said corporation for the benefit of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a religious society, for the benefit of religion, for works of charity and for public worship. Such real and personal property may be situated, either within the State of Utah, or elsewhere, and this corporation shall have power, without any authority or authorization from the members of said Church or religious society, to grant, sell, convey, rent, mortgage, exchange, or otherwise dispose of any part or all of such property.

Sixteen years later in 1940, Heber J. Grant made an amendment to the Fourth Article of Incorporation that included wording which related to succession:

But in the event of the death or resignation from office of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or in the event of a vacancy in that office from any cause, the President or Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of said Church, or one of the members of said Quorum thereunto designated by that Quorum, shall, pending the installation of a successor President

of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, be the corporation sole under these articles, and the laws pursuant to which they are made, and shall be and is authorized in his official capacity to execute in the name of the corporation all documents or other writings necessary to the carrying on of its purposes, business and objects, and to do all things in the name of the corporation which the original signer of the articles of incorporation might do; it being the purpose of these articles that there shall be no failure in succession in the office of such corporation sole. (Original in State of Utah Archives, Salt Lake City)

When a new church president is ordained and set apart to his office, the president or acting president of the Quorum of the Twelve certifies the ordination to the state for the new president to continue the office of corporation sole.

Missionaries

Missionaries are called to perform service in many countries throughout the world. The program is to perform baptisms of those who accept the message of the restored gospel. After exercising faith and repentance, the convert is baptized by immersion and confirmed a church member and receives the gift of the Holy Ghost. Male members can be ordained to either the Aaronic or the Melchizedek Priesthood. The sacrament (Lord's Supper) of bread and water is usually served each Sunday. Various activities and services are attended to during the week.

For some young members, missionary work becomes their rite of passage in being away from home for the first time. A number of individuals figure they will obtain a testimony on their mission. The same principles as taught in the 1830s are expounded with additional emphasis on prophetic leadership, the Word of Wisdom, tithing, and church service. One problem area has been converts who drop out of activity shortly after baptism.

Temple Work

Besides missionary work to obtain converts, the LDS church builds temples for higher ordinances for faithful church members. For example, missionaries prior to going on their mission receive a ceremonial washing and anointing, are officially clothed in the garment of the holy priesthood, and progress through what is known as the endowment. They make promises and covenants, thereby receiving certain signs and handclasps that are necessary to enter the celestial kingdom. Another ceremony is marriage in the new and everlasting covenant for time and all eternity. This is known as temple marriage where a man and a woman are sealed together. An even higher sealing, though limited in number, is the second anointing where couples are promised, if faithful, their eternal reward.

A unique aspect of ordinances performed in Latter-day Saint temples is work for and in behalf of the dead. To become a savior on Mount Zion, the saints are told they must perform by proxy a baptism, washing, anointing, clothing with a new name, (if for a deceased male, then also priesthood ordination), and receive and make the endowment covenants for the named deceased person. Marriages (sealings) are also performed for couples who have died.

When LDS temples are open, you may see faithful church members bringing their suitcases to the temple. In the suitcase is white clothing including temple robes. Temples are located throughout the world. Since the salvation of church members is linked to those who have

died, there is special interest in genealogy. Not only do non-members compile family histories but church members are admonished to do their own. Name extraction from various civil and religious records is another way to obtain names for proxy temple work.

Worship

One of the special interest of Latter-day Saints is the spiritual confirmation that the church is true. Missionaries maintain the truthfulness of the church as they seek for converts and encourage those studying the gospel to pray about their message. If the Book of Mormon is true, then Joseph Smith is a prophet, the church is represented as true, and for the larger branches of Joseph Smith churches, their current president is a prophet.

Once a month a fast and testimony meeting is held in wards. Testimonies are given relating to an individual's life, that the church is true, that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, and that the church president is also God's prophet. Having a testimony that one knows certain church-related beliefs is reinforced over and over again.

The importance of the role of Joseph Smith is overwhelming. The church has emphasized that Smith is a prophet and that, if that is not so, there is no truth to it. This concept is constantly expressed at church conferences and meetings. Many church members put explicit trust in Joseph's story of finding and obtaining the gold plates for translation purposes. To some members, if Joseph Smith did not procure the plates from the Manchester, New York, "Hill Cumorah" then there is no truth in Mormonism.

One thing is certain: The story of the plates was believed by Smith's family and close friends. Since Joseph Smith did not use the plates while dictating the Book of Mormon, there may need to be a new emphasis relating to Smith's story. The story may have been told to get people to believe who had religious questions and looked forward to a restoration of the New Testament church in their own lifetime. Since parts of Joseph Smith's history of his religious experiences have been canonized, any change is a difficult process.

The role of Joseph Smith in Latter-day Saint history and theology continues to overshadow other services the LDS church provides. Mormonism is built on the teachings of Smith as he is considered a prophet who restored the church and brought forth the Book of Mormon as an inspired record for humankind. It is enough to have a tangible book to emphasize how it is impossible for anyone to produce it. Devotion to Joseph Smith is kept alive today as he is the basis of the church's religious authority.

Shortly after Smith's death, William W. Phelps published a hymn in the *Times and Seasons* titled "Joseph Smith" to be sung by the saints. The first stanza and chorus can be heard today:

Praise to the man who commun'd with Jehovah,
Jesus anointed "that Prophet and Seer,"
Blessed to open the last dispensation;—
Kings shall extol him, and nations revere.

CHORUS—Hail to the Prophet, ascended to heaven,
Traitors and tyrants now fight him in vain,
Mingling with Gods, he can plan for his
brethren,

Death cannot conquer the hero again.

With advanced technology, especially through the internet, the history, beliefs, and life experiences of Latter-day Saints are made available to those who search the web. Like searching for a book at a library, an individual looks for reliable information. Most church sites only include what they want you to know, rather than explaining their faith experiences. History is usually utilized in order to further the continuing function of the organization.