

Latter-Day Saint Kinship: The Salvific Power of the Family

Louisa Fowler

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Thesis Advisor:

Professor Christopher Vecsey

Defense Committee:

Professor Benjamin Stahlberg

Professor Steven Kepnes

## Introduction

Since its inception in 1830, the people of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Days have evoked reactions from the public, ranging from confusion to outrage. In turn, the Church community has struggled to fit into secular society. The Church has constantly worked to craft and improve its relationship with the world. Recently, in 2018, Latter-Day Saint President Russell M. Nelson explained that the “Lord has impressed upon [his] mind the importance of the name he has revealed for the Church.” Latter-Day Saints reject the title ‘Mormons,’ asking

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on, from before birth until after death, showing that one never walks alone, but rather is constantly with one's family.

Within these pages, readers will come to understand Latter-Day Saint love and kinship. The romantic, familial, and platonic love within Church communities will be illustrated and analyzed to form an understanding of how a people connect and relate in accordance with the ultimate relationship, which is with Heavenly Father. In other words, because Latter-Day Saints

finish exactly where she started. This is true, too, for all Latter-Day Saints. They began their

fighting to have their voices heard within their tradition. Thus, my study of religion has also been a study of love.

My experience with a Senior Seminar is slightly atypical in the Religion Department. I took Professor Vecsey's seminar, Navajo Creation Stories, my first year, rather than RELG 411, Senior Seminar in Religion, which is now normally required of Religion Majors. My thesis is driven by my experiences and passions in the breadth of my course material, rather than the framework of the 411 course. I decided to write a thesis about family, kinship, love, and relationship to close the loop on four years of studying religion and love.

I am fascinated by the idea that belief in a higher power, and relationship to an unseeable, unknowable, almighty force, draws us closer to those beside us. I have seen, time and again, that God orients us toward each other, making us communal and loving. This has, of course, proven to be true within the Latter-Day Saint religion. This, more so than any other tradition I have studied, is a religion of family and of love, as expressed in theology, ecclesiology, and sociology. It is a religion of holding close to those beside you, who are necessary for your -- and their -- salvation while focusing always on God. For Latter-Day Saints, love and piety go hand in hand, inextricably linked. However, the love of this religion is often quite limited, leaving behind those who do not fit the exact mold of the religion family mem ÒM.

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## Approach

The purpose of this paper is to transition the reader from an uninformed outsider of Latter-Day Saint religion and culture to an educated observer. My approach is phenomenological, exploring expressions and manifestations of the deeply held beliefs and ethics of the Latter-Day Saints. To understand why this group and its members behave the way they do, I dive deeply into their history, theology, current teachings, and their portrayal of themselves in academia and on social media. I also examine what non-members say about them in news media, sociological studies, and critical academia. I study scriptures, memoirs, biographies, news reports, academic papers, and speeches. Through a synthesis of this information, I hope to display how religious belief drives the everyday experience.

This is a paper about how family dictates why people are the way that they are, and behave the way they behave. It seeks to transform an atypical, mysterious, and confusing religious group, into a familiar, comprehensible people by shining a light on the family unit that sits at the center. It examines Latter-Day Saint family life through history in order to understand how it has evolved and changed while consistently being the religion's most valued aspect. I discovered in my research that Latter-Day Saint family values are deeply theological. The relational and familial aspects of the Latter-Day Saint experience are influenced by their teleological, ethical, and cosmological understandings. I aim to consider all these dimensions of Latter-Day Saint reality.

To understand a group of people is to search and to listen. To search is to seek out information through meticulous study; it is to engage in a conversation with the available literature. It is to dig for answers. To listen is to allow information to present itself. It is to learn what a person has to say without enforcing one's preconceptions upon the material. It is to gather the information that one finds. My questions drove my search; the information discovered beyond my questions forced me to listen.

In summation, the approach of this study is both concrete and abstract. I found answers to my questions, as well as answers to questions I had not asked. My commitment to both searching and listening helped me to understand the living body of Latter-Day Saints' lives. It led me to realize that for the members of this Church, the family is absolutely everything. When organized just right, it is the key to salvation and exaltation in life after death. I went searching for two categories of sources: one that would tell me about spirituality, and one that would tell me about family. Through listening I found that no distinction existed between the two. Everything I read about family pointed me toward religion, and all spiritual teachings I found were centered around the family. The two were impossible to separate. It became clear that Latter-Day Saints will not enjoy the fullness of heaven without their family-- it is impossible. Because of this, Latter-Day Saint familial and social practices are in fact exercises in spirituality. To love and to relate to a brother, mother, or spouse, is to stretch one's hand towards God within this Church. To love one another is to love Heavenly Father Himself.

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## History of the Church

“At last count, there were more than eleven million Saints the world over, and Mormonism is the fastest-growing faith in the Western Hemisphere. At present in the United States there are more Mormons than Presbyterians or Episcopalians. On the planet as a whole, there are now more Mormons than Jews. Mormonism is considered in some sober academic circles to be well on its way to becoming a major world religion--the first such faith to emerge since Islam.” -Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*

To consider why the social and familial practices of Latter-Day Saints are what they are, it is important to know the religion’s origins. Since its beginning, the Church has worked to share what its members believe to be Jesus Christ’s restored gospel with the earth before Christ’s Second Coming. From this gospel, the Church began to preach the principles of a sacred, polygamous family, which outraged non-Latter-Day Saint Americans. From its very beginning, the Church practiced unique, religious family values that set them apart from their contemporaries. However, before one can dive into the Church’s marriage practices, one must understand how the Latter-Day Saints came to be and how they established themselves in the world.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints began in 1830 in Fayette, Seneca County, New York, when the Book of Mormon was revealed to Joseph Smith by the Angel Moroni. Ten years prior, in 1820, God and His son Jesus appeared to Joseph Smith in his bedroom. They promised him that if he acted faithfully then, “further light would be revealed to him.”<sup>2</sup> Then, in 1827, God sent the Angel Moroni to lead Smith to the hills of Cumorah, where he found a set of metal plates and magic translation tools known as a Urim and Thummin. Smith translated from ancient Egt fto"#

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By 1830, five thousand copies of these translated texts had been printed under the title the Book of Mormon, named after the ancient prophet Mormon who originally transcribed the story told in the book. The scripture tells the story of a group of people known as the Nephites whom God led to Indigenous America to spread His Church across the world. When Smith first published it, six men found it to be true, and the group of them built a Church based upon the teachings of the Book of Mormon. They referred to themselves as the Saints of Latter-Days because they believed themselves to be restoring Jesus Christ's true Church to earth before His Second Coming. The group resided in New York until 1831 when Joseph Smith was divinely commanded to gather more members in Ohio and then Missouri.

When the Latter-Day Saints settled on the banks of the Mississippi River in Missouri, they attempted to build a utopian and independent religious community. Early members of the Church began practicing polygamy at this time and the United States Government was actively trying to squelch their freedom to do. A series of violent conflicts occurred between Latter-Day Saints and citizens of Missouri over the group's polygamous practices, leading to the Mormon War of 1838, which left the Church community defeated. In response, Joseph Smith petitioned President Martin Van Buren, as well as the Senate Judiciary Committee, to protect the Latter-Day Saints from future violence. The government denied Smith and his Saints protection, leading to years of antagonism between the Church and the U.S. government. Thus, in opposition to Van Buren, Smith ran for president in the 1844 race. His campaign ended when he was killed by an angry mob in Missouri that year. His leadership and prophet status within the Church was taken over by Brigham Young.

The Saints, “persecuted, robbed, and murdered, fled to Illinois, and built the city of Nauvoo. In 1846, they were driven by armed mobs and compelled to flee west of the Rocky Mountains,” to settle in the Mexican province that would become Utah territory.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1850s, the Latter-Day Saints moved on to Salt Lake City, where they would build the modern-day Zion. Brigham Young yearned to create a Latter-Day Saint empire in the intermountain West, beyond the reach of the federal government. He wanted Church members to be as far away from the government as possible so that they could practice polygamy and their other religious principles in peace. He called this haven ‘Deseret’ after the Book of Mormon term for a beehive, a symbol of industry and community.

In their western empire, the Latter-Day Saints built a symbol of industry and

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of doctrine known as the Plan of Salvation, the Latter-Day Saint theology details precisely where people come from and where they will go once they die. The Plan of Salvation is at the center of Latter-Day Saint theology and therefore at the center of family life as well.

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### Section 1: Plan of Salvation

“I was raised to believe in a spirit world, that life exists before the earth and will continue to exist afterward, that each human being, bird, and bulrush, along with

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spirit beings. She did not live with her family. Instead, her Heavenly Father was the head of the large family of which all spirit beings were a part. She cared for all of her spirit brothers and sisters and relied on Heavenly Father to guide her. Though she and her spirit siblings were considered favorably by their Heavenly Father, they were inferior to Him, lacking His total goodness and absolute divinity. These were not His peers, but His children, of the same divine ‘stuff’ as Himself, but not as far along in their maturation.

During the pre-existence, Heavenly Father taught the young woman and all other spirit children His principles and commandments that led to utter happiness and goodness. Although His teachings helped the spirits to grow in intelligence, they could never be perfect like their Heavenly Father. Therefore, Heavenly Father developed and taught His spirit children a Plan of Salvation that would allow them to grow in spiritual perfection, through the endurance of humanly trials, and return to Him spiritually stronger than how they left. As Heavenly Father was crafting the Plan of Salvation, He used two of the young woman’s spirit brothers and sisters, Adam and Eve, as a litmus test. They were the first to receive human life. They were first man and woman, but also first relationship, a model for all future pairings of men and women that would endure Heavenly Father’s plan together. Heavenly Father allowed Adam and Eve to dwell in the Garden of Eden, still in His presence, and still blissfully ignorant of the distinction between good and evil. Without the responsibility of this knowledge, the two could depend on Him instead of each other. What Heavenly Father did give Adam and Eve was free agency or the freedom to choose. His only rule was that they could not eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If the first couple could obey this commandment, they could remain in the Garden, and all of their spirit brothers and sisters would join them. There would be no need for







Having championed the Plan of Salvation, the young woman and her spirit siblings passed through a ‘veil of forgetfulness’<sup>9</sup> at birth, causing them to lose the memory of their pre-existent life and enforce their separation from Heavenly Father. By forgetting her previous spiritual life, the young woman will have to rely on her free agency, and her connection to her family, to draw her back to the Celestial Kingdom. Prior to passing through this veil, the young woman actively and willfully agreed to have particular spirit siblings as her human family members. In the wake of Adam and Eve’s togetherness, Heavenly Father taught that the family would guide one another back to His kingdom. The young woman’s family is eternal. Just as Joseph Smith saw his brother in the same kingdom to which he was headed, she will be reunited with her loved ones in Celestial Glory after death. Her earthly mother, father, spouse, and children will remain hers forever. While on earth, the young woman will rely on her family to walk with her around the running track, back toward her Heavenly Father. As she travels forward, the young woman and her family will mature spiritually by engaging in the rituals of the Church that seek both to worship and emulate Christ and to seal themselves closer to each other. The more Christ-like they become, and the closer their bond is, the closer they will travel toward the Celestial Kingdom.

It is believed that when Joseph Smith established the Church, he restored the priesthood to men. The priesthood, first granted to Adam, Jesus’ apostles, and now all Latter-Day Saint men, is the power to grant blessings on behalf of Heavenly Father. The most common use of the priesthood ordinance is to seal, or bind two beings together for eternity. Sealing rituals include baptism, in mM

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Through the restoration of the priesthood, which aids humanity in establishing eternal relationships, Latter-Day Saints understood that Heavenly Father was asking them to utilize their

the earth, and all Heavenly Father's spirit children are called back to Him, each child of Heavenly Father will undergo the final judgment, being reviewed for faithfulness and the ability

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building of family relationships is to exhibit faith in Heavenly Father. The young woman will learn that to be sealed to her family is the most crucial step she will take in moving toward the Celestial Kingdom. It is perhaps the only way to guarantee that she will be reunited with her Heavenly Father.

The Latter-Day Saints' Heavenly Father seems to expect that all His children will marry and have children, creating more opportunities for His spirit children to travel together back to His kingdom. This presumption drives Latter-Day Saints to prioritize family rearing during their material life. As more spirit children are brought into the material world, and taught Heavenly Father's Plan of Salvation, more spirit beings will make it back to the Celestial Kingdom. Starting with the legacy established by Adam and Eve, each family acts as a guide to one another throughout the material life. Familial relationships allow human beings to mature together as they encourage righteousness from one another through engagement in priesthood sealings. These sealings are what bless humanity with ability to grow in spiritual perfection. Because all members of the family were together in the Celestial Kingdom during the pre-existent life, it is part of Heavenly Father's plan that they will remain together upon their return. Pis

make her way back to where she started. None of this is possible without her family, who was

begins by stating that “marriage between a man and woman is ordained by God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”<sup>12</sup> The Proclamation warns that “the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”<sup>13</sup> With this proclamation it became clear that family values are not cultivated in the home, but rather in the Church. The familial and the relational aspects of Latter-Day Saint life is not personal, nor cultural, but purely religious.

On the local level, laymen with priesthood authority act as the mouthpiece for Church authorities, delivering teachings and running meetings at the local wards, or meetinghouses. When the young woman, attends events at her local ward, or meetinghouse, she will learn from priesthood holders the specific functions of family life and how to participate in it. They will provide her with spiritual guidelines on how to behave in regard to matters of sexuality, gender, marriage, and childrearing. On Sundays, various men who are ordained with the priesthood will stand at the pulpit and teach about what the scripture commands in regard to family. The young woman will be taught prayers that are centered around family life. She will also learn that if she fails to properly participate in family life, she risks being alienated from her loved ones and her Heavenly Father after death. From a very young age, there will be no question in her mind that a well-structured, traditional family, is absolutely essential to exaltation, or spiritual advancement toward Heavenly Father.

Perhaps the most important teaching of the Church is that all people should marry and have children with their spouses. Marriages that take place in the temple, where couples can be



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the Celestial Kingdom without a spouse of the opposite gender. Having children is essential in that it fulfills Heavenly Father's desire to send all of His spirit children to earth so that they might grow in perfection. Thus, the bonds of family are not just social, but spiritual. Still, there are temporal qualities and dynamics within a family that the Church expects its members to uphold.

The Proclamation of the Family is very specific about gender dynamics within a marriage. It describes gender distinctions as “essential characteristics of an individual's identity and purpose.”<sup>17</sup> The gender divide exists as such:

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households. The priesthood gives men administrative power not only in the Church but also in the household. However, there are also aspects of Latter-Day Saint theology that are egalitarian in regard to gender. For instance, in temple marriages, the man and woman are both granted into an order of the priesthood through the covenant of marriage. Both husband and wife are given

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both before the Protestant Reformation and after, marriage was meant for this world, not the world to come. This is not the case for Latter-Day Saints, who began practicing their particular form of marriage in the mid-1800s. They considered marriage to be central to their priesthood's restoration on this earth, in that the power to eternally bind one man and one woman together forever, was at the core of Heavenly Father's wish for humanity. Marriage does not end with death, but rather continues on to the Celestial Kingdom. It is a part of Heavenly Father's eternal, predetermined purpose for humankind, not merely a temporal byproduct of life on earth. To be married to one's particular spouse is to fulfill the plan of God. This notion relies on a Latter-Day Saint couple's promise "to be each other's companion, and uphold the duties of husband and wife in all respects, henceforth and forever."<sup>21</sup>

Heavenly Father revealed to Joseph Smith that eternal marriage is an institution of heaven, first established between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden through the authority of the everlasting priesthood. When Adam and Eve fell from their Heavenly Father, their togetherness was all that they had to find their way back to Him. It is through this event that marriage became vital to salvation. With this knowledge, Smith taught that marriage was more than a social function-- it granted immortality and eternal life. He wrote in the scriptures that persons who kept the covenant of marriage would become holy in the next life, and those who did not would be deficient.

Although our young woman has learned that marriage, and the proper engagement within it, is vital to her moving forward toward the Celestial Kingdom, her experience would not have been the same had she lived at the Church's beginning. What has married life been for

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<sup>21</sup>Flake, Kathleen. "The Development of Early Latter-Day Saint Marriage Rites, 1831-53." *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 1 (01/2015, 2015): 77-102.p.82

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Thus, Heavenly Father directed Joseph Smith to sam

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most disarming attack the U.S. government made against Latter-Day Saints came with the ratification of the Edmunds Tucker Act in 1887, which:

disincorporated the church and the fund that it used to bring converts to Utah. No longer would the church be able to own mines, farms, or factories. The federal government seized all church property valued over \$50,000...[and] required couples to secure civil marriage licenses, prohibiting children of plural marriages from inheriting property.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of this legislation, Latter-Day Saint women became the heads of their homes, farms, and businesses, as their husbands had to go into hiding. Financial struggles, loneliness, secrecy, disappointment, prosecution, and imprisonment all tested the endurance of the Saints. They feared that:

the next anti-polygamy law would take away the vote from all men, not just those who participated in plural marriages. At that point, with all Latter-Day Saints unable to vote or hold public office and with Church finances in ruin, the Utah territory would be fully under the control of non-Latter-Day Saints. Perhaps the Gentiles would even take over the temples.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, in 1890, the same year that the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that laws against polygamy did not conflict with religious freedom, Church president Wilford Woodruff ended the religious sanctification of plural marriage with his Woodruff Manifesto. Still, after this manifesto, many members continued to live within their plural marriages. In reaction, the Church issued a Second Manifesto in 1904 that promised to excommunicate any members who still practiced polygamy.

Today polygamy continues to be a reality in Latter-Day Saint fundamentalist groups, the largest of which is known as the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS). The group has 9000 members and exists primarily in Colorado City and on the Utah-Arizona border. The

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<sup>27</sup>Vile, John R. *Late Corporation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints v. United States* (1890). The First Amendment Encyclopedia; <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/171/late-corporation-of-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints-v-united-states>

<sup>28</sup>Talbot, Christine. *A Foreign Kingdom: Mormons and Polygamy in American Political Culture, 1852-1890*. Vol. 1 University of Illinois Press, 2013.



group also has members in Eldorado, Texas, and in South Dakota, Nevada, British Columbia, and Mexico. Within the FLDS community, men will legally marry one woman and then take several other wives in religious sealing ceremonies. Although the marriages are not civilly recognized, they are thought to be celestially significant. The FLDS church teaches that “men require three or more wives to enter into the highest level of heaven in the afterlife” and that “obedient participation in a polygamous marriage and bearing as many children as possible are the requirements deemed necessary for women to enter into the highest level of heaven.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, because the group believes that marital partners are decided not by the participants, but by a prophet who receives revelations from Heavenly Father, polygamy operates as a system of arranged marriages, in which leaders can reward or punish men in the community by assigning or denying them wives. Critics have found that many underage females are forced into marriages against their will. Currently, the FLDS leader Warren Jeffs is “sentenced to life in prison for sexual assault of a child under age 14.”<sup>30</sup>

The official Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints does not recognize the FLDS as legitimate. Here, there exists a schism, which occurs in many churches when there is a disagreement over fundamental questions that are at the crux of the group’s teaching. For instance, in the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church experienced a schism over papal authority. The power of the Pope is a

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In the late 1800s, Smith was also preaching that Latter-Day Saints were not meant to simply marry, but to marry and have children who would be sealed to them for eternity. He proclaimed that marriage between man and woman is essential to Heavenly Father's Plan of Salvation, in part because children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be raised by a father and mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Smith taught that in having children, parents participate with Heavenly Father in furthering the development of pre-mortal spirits. As discussed in regard to the Plan of Salvation, Latter-Day Saints believe that each family has a predestined number of children. Therefore, to prevent oneself from having children would be to deny Heavenly Father's plan. His plan was to create families, not simply married couples. As a result, Latter-Day Saint couples have an abundance of children. Since some of the first Latter-Day Saints settled in Utah territory, their fertility has been above the national average. This is due in part to the fact that Latter-Day Saint "women delay using contraceptives until after the birth of their first child and use contraceptives [only] to space out their children thereafter."<sup>34</sup> In other words, Latter-Day Saints use contraception not to prevent pregnancy, but rather to time their pregnancies intentionally.

Whereas national trends demonstrate that higher socioeconomic status is correlated with fewer children, for Church members, the higher the family income, the more children a couple is likely to have. Parents will also be instructed by the Church on the proper way to raise their children. The young woman's parents will follow a pattern of Church-mandated rules as they M-ncy, butr

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'home evenings' to strengthen family ties.'

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the gospel, especially on Sundays, during which many families make an effort to honor the Sabbath day.

It is abundantly clear that the Church emphasizes the family. The most recent General Conference, a biannual meeting of all Church members, emphasized the family more than any other topic. Additionally, the Church-owned Brigham Young University recently changed its curriculum to include a mandatory course on the eternal family. Evidently, the Church expects a universal family experience for every Latter-Day Saint. However, about 20% of adult members are single. Very few of the Church-facilitated conversations about family-life and marriage are inclusive of single adults. In reaction to this issue, a symposium was organized in 2015 by members of the Church living in New York City. The event addressed the experience of single Latter-Day Saints. One of the most prominent topics was the Singles' Wards, congregations organized solely for members who are not married. These wards are exactly like 'regular' family wards in terms of structure, organization, and teachings. However, there is also an emphasis placed on attendees meeting other single people within the ward, so that they can get married. One symposium participant reported that "it would seem that the sole purpose of living and breathing in Singles' Wards is to catch the attention of some other living, breathing person with whom you can spend eternity."<sup>38</sup> This experience was said to bring about enormous pressure and forced-bonding. The symposium also uncovered the sad reality that "much of the public acknowledgment of single people in the Church today begins with the notion that they are a problem, that singleness is something to be fixed."<sup>39</sup> To be single is to be excluded from the highest realm of heavenly glory. It is also considered to be a failure to do everything that

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<sup>38</sup>Proctor, Mariah. "What is the Purpose of Singles' Ward?" *Meridian Magazine* (9/8/2015).

<sup>39</sup>Christensen, Clayton Bowman, Matt Harris, Sharron. "Recap of 'of One Body: The State of Mormon Singledom.'" *Dialogue A Journal of Mormon Thought* (6/25/2015).



Church educates the young woman and teaches her to be a faithful Latter-Day Saint, it will continuously urge her to keep her family at the front of her mind.

By the age of three, the young woman will be expected to contribute to weekly Sacrament Meetings, or worship gatherings held on Sundays. She will deliver mini-talks and bear her testimony to the congregation as part of the Church's Primary Program. This is the equivalent of Sunday School, that Latter-Day Saint youths participate in until they are six.

At the age of six, the young woman will join the Young Women program, which is entirely separate from the Young Men program, until she is seventeen. Both programs meet after Sacrament Meetings on Sundays and then again during the week, for an activity known as Mutual. The purpose of Mutual is different for boys and girls. For girls, the purpose is to grow in home-making skills. Our young woman will learn to sew, cook, and garden. Spiritually, she will prepare to become worthy to enter the temple as an adult. To be temple worthy is to be able to receive the ordinance of a marriage sealing. Young women make arts and crafts that focus their attention on entering the temple for marriage. In figures A. and B., one will find an example of such crafts.

For boys, the purpose of Mutual is to prepare to be ordained with the Aaronic Priesthood at the age of twelve. This is a stepping stone to the Melchizedek Priesthood, which young men are ordained with at the age of seventeen, allowing them to practice sealings. With the Aaronic Priesthood, young boys are able to serve within their ward as a bishop, priest, teacher, or deacon. They can administer the sacrament of bread and water on Sunday, gather tithings from the congregation, and perform home visits to sick or inactive members. The Aaronic Priesthood is



conferred by the laying on of hands by a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Young girls are not able to be ordained with any priesthood role.

Both the Young Women and Young Men programs prepare girls and boys for family life. For girls, home-making, and preparation for women temple sealings position them to be wives and mothers. For boys, the Aaronic Priesthood is a stepping stone towards being able to create eternal families through the process of sealing. Furthermore, by growing in their leadership within the Church, young boys are also growing in their ability to serve an institution that encourages strong family bonds.

Finally, young men and women's programs merge again at the age of fourteen, and the teens participate in a four-year program known as Seminary. Our young woman and her fellow students will meet every morning before school to study the four bodies of Latter-Day Saint scripture: the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price in a rotating order. The Church considers the purpose of Seminary to be "to help students understand and rely upon the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven."<sup>40</sup>

These intense programs drive great loyalty to the Church among young people. In 2002, the National Survey of Youth and Religion found that 71% of Latter-Day Saint youths attended weekly church services compared to the 40% national average. Latter-Day Saint youths also reported that they would continue to practice their religion even if their parents did not, at a rate of 70% compared to a 40% national average. Such high levels of engagement from young people

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<sup>40</sup>The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. *The Purpose of Seminary*.  
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chastity. She will be taught that pre-marital sex is forbidden because sexual intercourse is “ordained by God for the creation of children and for the expression of love within marriage.”<sup>43</sup>

Within the Book of Mormon, it is taught that “sexual sins are more serious than any other sin except murder and denying the Holy Ghost.”<sup>44</sup>

The Law of Chastity, for Latter-Day Saints, forbids not only sex outside of marriage, but also between two individuals of the same sex. The Church cites that the Bible, particularly the Book of Romans, to claim that these behaviors are contrary to the purpose of human sexuality.<sup>45</sup> Because Latter-Day Saints view heterosexual marriage and childbearing to be essential steps toward the Celestial Kingdom, they understand homosexual activity to exclude people from the salvific nature of family life. “For the Strength of Youth” also condemns pornography by ordering young people not to “view, read, or listen to anything that depicts or describes the human body or sexual conduct in a way that can arouse sexual feelings.”<sup>46</sup> In terms of dating and relationships, young people are expected to avoid passionate kissing, lying on top of one another, or touching private parts. In order to avoid impure urges, it is encouraged that young people only go on dates in big groups.

If the young woman were to break the law of chastity, she would be expected to confess her sins to her local bishop, or the leader of her local ward. However, these sorts of conversations have become increasingly controversial in recent years. Many Latter-Day Saints have recently expressed discomfort with an older man sitting “alone in a closed-door conversation with a

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<sup>43</sup>The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. *Chastity*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/chastity?lang=eng> (accessed 2/25/2020, 2020).

<sup>44</sup>Alma 39:3-5

<sup>45</sup>Romans 1:24-32: **¶**In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men

younger woman, or even a teenage girl, talking about, of all things, sex.”<sup>47</sup> Annually, children as young as twelve have private meetings with their bishop where they are interviewed about their testimony, church attendance, and adherence to the law of chastity. These meetings entail probing questions about the specific sexual acts that the child engaged in-- questions that many Latter-Day Saints consider to be outrageous.

People are uncomfortable due to the tremendous power differential-- adult to youth, authority to follower, and in some cases, male to female-- which can fuel trauma and shame from a young participant. One woman, interviewed by *The Salt Lake Tribune*, recalled that when she confessed behaving inappropriately with her high school boyfriend, her bishop’s questions grew increasingly intrusive. He began asking her questions such as, “Were you dressed or did you unclot?” and “did he reach a climax?”<sup>48</sup> She also reported that he asked her where she put her hands and where she was touched. Aside from a few unofficial online petitions, there is very little action being taken against these interviews between bishops and young people.

Following the law of chastity, as it is described in “For the Strength of Youth”, is meant to prepare young people for a pure entry into eternal marriage in the temple. Once the young woman has completed Primary, Young Men and Women, and Seminary, she will be ready for the next milestone of growing up within the Church: entering the temple. Latter-Day Saints typically marry in their early twenties, which requires receiving a temple ordinance that prepares one to be sealed to their spouse by the power of the priesthood. Entering the temple is considered the pinnacle of a lifetime within the Latter-Day Saint religion. Starting in the primary program,

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<sup>47</sup> Peggy Fletcher. “Some Parents and Therapists Report”



prioritize the family most actively and perfectly one must follow the rules of the Church. The family comes first, but so does the Church.

Section 3 ImacsUUS/ 4USFoW%"cI@SFoW%"cIBUSE@

## Social Media Posts



Figure C., Saints Unscripted YouTube Channel.





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## Section 4: Apostasy

“How sweet is the assurance, how comforting is the peace that comes from the knowledge that if we marry right and live right, our relationship will continue, notwithstanding the certainty of death and the passage of time.” -Gordon B. Hinckley, former President of the Church

Through its education program, the Church creates a clear script for the young woman to follow in order to live a life that is family-oriented, and thus worthy of the Celestial Kingdom. She has learned through Primary, Young Women, and Seminary, that her eternal connection to those who were with her in her pre-existent life is what will lead her to Heavenly Father. However, as Latter-Day Saints are moving through life toward the Celestial Kingdom, the path, which has previously been illustrated as a running track, proves to be filled with hurdles. There are many opportunities for one to stumble, and to fall further from Heavenly Father, even from within the Church. Oftentimes, the hurdles arise as urges to behave in ways that are not aligned with the Church’s family values. Any time that one chooses not to participate in a family that is worthy of eternal sealing, one is thought to move farther away from Heavenly Father. If the young woman’s words, beliefs, or behaviors strayed from or directly opposed the Church’s doctrine, she would become labeled as an apostate and would be excluded from returning to Heavenly Father after death.

The Church defines apostasy as a situation when individuals or groups of people turn away from the principles of the gospel. It believes that this form of treachery began when:

after the deaths of the Savior and His Apostles, [when] men corrupted the principles of the gospel and made unauthorized changes in Church organizations and priesthood ordinances. Because of this widespread apostasy, the Lord withdrew the authority of the priesthood from the earth. This apostasy lasted until Heavenly Father and His Beloved

Son appeared to Joseph Smith in 1820 and initiated the Restoration of the fullness of the gospel.<sup>51</sup>

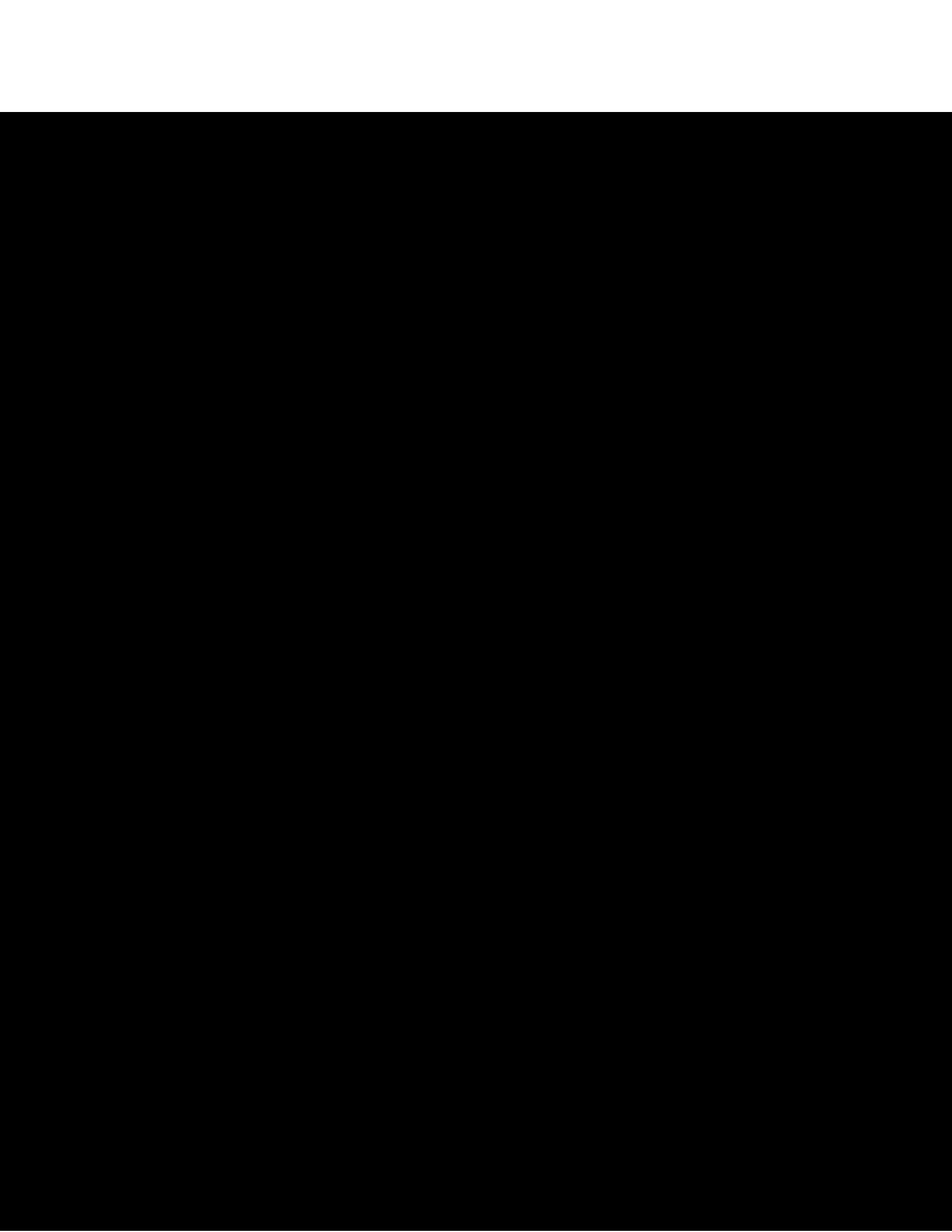
Today, there is a litany of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that can result in a member of the Church being charged with apostasy, and ultimately excommunicated. Many of these missteps are directly involved with the way in which one approaches family life. For instance, in the past few decades, members have been excommunicated for engaging in homosexual relationships and advocating for the inclusion of women in the priesthood. All of these conversations that the Church apostates are engaging with suggest an alternative to the Church's strict directions surrounding marriage practices and gender dynamics.

In 2015, the Church officially labeled individuals in same-sex relationships as apostates and forbade children in their households from being baptized. Then, in 2019, Church authorities rolled back their previous policy. Emma Green, a writer for *The Atlantic*, reported that “under the new policy, same-sex marriages are still considered a ‘serious transgression’...but not definitively apostasy. The children of LGBTQ couples can now be baptized.”<sup>52</sup> In essence, the teachings on queer sexuality have not changed, but the language has become gentler.

Apostasy is not, however, reserved merely for queer individuals, but their allies as well. John Dehlin, a Ph.D. in clinical and counseling psychology created a podcast called Mormon Stories in 2005 to talk about cultural and historical issues in the Church. His podcast deals with issues such as same-sex marriage and bishops' suspicious sexual conversations with young members. In 2015, Dehlin faced a charge of apostasy and was excommunicated for his open online criticism of Church teachings. His experience came right on the heels of a human rights

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<sup>51</sup>The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. *Apostasy*.<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gosa>





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## Section 5: Death

“Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die.” -Doctrine and Covenants, 42:45

As the young woman completes the loop around the running track, having grown up, as well as married and raised her own children in the Church, she will die. Yet this does not mean the end of her journey, but rather a ] d

When the young girl is dying, her father or brothers will use their priesthood authority to anoint her with oil and seal her to the Celestial Kingdom. Once dead, her mother and sisters will prepare her body for burial by dressing her in her sacred temple garments, given to her when she first received her temple ordinances. Then, the young woman's family will begin to guide her to the Celestial Kingdom during her funeral service. Her family will bury her because Latter-Day Saints believe that burial ensures that the body and spirit can be resurrected as one, as is taught in the scriptures. Then, the young woman's funeral service will be focused on honoring Jesus Christ, in order to orient the deceased toward her Savior. The rite will be held under the authority of the priesthood and will be considered an official Church meeting, rather than a family gathering. Therefore, the music, speeches, and prayers will not be chosen by her family, but by the Church leadership. The eulogies will not reflect on the young woman's life but preach Latter-Day Saint doctrine. The young woman's family will not be asked to deliver any original words, but simply give a family prayer and dedicate the grave. If members of the family do decide to speak, they will be obliged to adopt a tone of reverence and teach the principles of the gospel. They will be discouraged from telling stories or speaking in a way that lacks spirituality and reverence. In fact, overly joyful or humorous speech is discouraged as Latter-Day Saints believe that they are very close to God at the time of death. There are tender feelings and spiritual communications which are easily lost if there is no spiritual reverence.

The Latter-Day Saint funeral helps Church members to construct their sacred family on a cosmological scale as it symbolizes both the transition from the material life to the Celestial Existence and the ability of the family to stay connected with those who have passed on. Though the funeral service does not explicitly emphasize the family through personal eulogies, it displays

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baptisms, in which members reach back into the past, and practice baptisms for their ancestors who have long been dead. Through these proxy baptisms, Latter-Day Saints believe that their actions have a direct impact on the salvation of their late family members. They believe that they can retroactively save those who did not repent and accept Christ's gospel during their lifetime.

The young woman would have grown up knowing that in order to save as many family

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power and authority to seal people together in relationships that persist beyond death. Again, on July 12, 1843, Heavenly Father revealed to the Prophet, Joseph Smith:

Verily verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife according to my word, and they are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, according to mine appointment, and he or she shall commit any sin or transgression of the new and everlasting covenant whatever and all manners of blasphemies and if they commit no murder, wherein they shed innocent blood yet they shall come forth in the first resurrection and enter into their exaltation.<sup>57</sup>

These revelations gave way to the understandings that once individuals were sealed together, they could never totally fall away from the grace of God. Through the very act of being together in an Adam and Eve inspired kinship bond, people can be saved. The glory of the family relationship was stronger than any sin and thus could wash it away. From that point on, Smith declared that individuals would not be sealed into the Celestial Kingdom alone; instead they

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could not possibly be about both the religious and the familial as distinct concepts, as these are not separate entities within the Church. This thesis is about family life as religious practice. For Latter-Day Saints to relate to somebody through marriage and family is a form of prayer, and engaging in sacred rituals is a way of solidifying family bonds.

As our young woman explored sealings, polygamous marriages, the law of chastity, and all of the ways that one can be labeled an apostate, she learned that the only way to complete her loop around the running track was through a family structure that was meticulously crafted by the Church. Nothing about the Latter-Day Saint family is an accident. From the time that Adam followed Eve out of the garden, to when Joseph Smith took multiple wives, until all families are united in heaven, each step brings families closer together but also closer to their Heavenly Father.

It was once intended that this paper would illustrate how the kinship structure of the Latter-Day Saints came to be as a consequence of the religion. But over time it became obvious that family life is the religion. It is the way back to the Celestial Kingdom. It is the Plan of Salvation.

## Coda: Latter-Day Saint Feminism

“How badly I wanted to belong as I had when I was a young Mormon girl, to be simply a working part in the great Mormon plan of salvation, a smiling exemplar of our sparkling difference. But instead I found myself a headstrong Mormon woman staking out her spiritual survival t

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Brigham Young University in his speech *A Style of Our Own: Modesty in Dress and Its Relationship to the Church*, which labeled the “immodest dress worn by young [Latter-Day Saint] women and their mothers as contributors to the breakdown of moral values in America.”<sup>60</sup>

Kimball’s speech became the catalyst for a larger conversation within the Church about modesty.

In the 1960s, Church leaders became increasingly concerned with having women dress in a way that reflected the ideals of chastity and femininity. Following Kimball’s example, Elder Mark E.

Peterson delivered a talk to the Relief Society, the Latter-Day Saint women’s philanthropy

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Plan of Salvation. If women are not wives and mothers in the way that the Church asks them to be, they risk their own, as well as their families' salvation.

Fortunately, in this author's view, our young woman is not alone. There exists within the world of academia a host of Latter-Day Saint women dedicated to answering questions like the young woman's. They explore feminist ideologies within the context of Latter-Day Saint tradition. But are their efforts futile? Is it possible for women to be both faithful Latter-Day Saints and feminists? Feminism, the belief that access to opportunity should not be predicated upon gender, seems to stand directly at odds with the Latter-Day Saint notion that men are called upon by Heavenly Father to hold the priesthood, and women are meant only to be mothers, and nothing else.

The question of whether women can be both feminists and Latter-Day Saints is divisive not only between Church authorities and Latter-Day Saint feminists but also among the women themselves. Three scholars, Curtis Greenfield, Pauline Lytle, and F. Myron Hays conducted *A Phenomenological Study of [Latter-Day Saint] Mothers Who are Career Professional Women*. In the opening lines of this paper, they state that the Church “upholds a cultural expectation for women of their community to remain unemployed outside the home and to dedicate their early adulthood to bearing and raising children.”<sup>64</sup> And even though many modern Latter-Day Saint women do work outside the home, they are counseled by Church leaders on the local, national, and even global levels to do so only out of financial necessity. These theological and cultural expectations lead working mothers to struggle as various aspects of their identity and livelihood pull them in opposing directions. This conflict can cause depression, stress, anxiety, and anger.

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<sup>64</sup>Greenfield, Curtis, Pauline Lytle, and F. Myron Hays. “Living the Divine Divide: A Phenomenological Study of Mormon Mothers Who are Career Professionals.” *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 16.1 (2016).p.1



Women in the Church cannot pursue careers without risking social alienation from their religious peers. Greenfield, Lytle, and Hays found through their study that Latter-Day Saint mothers with careers experienced exclusion, judgment, and criticism from other women in their wards who did not have jobs. In this social climate that often breeds shame, many Latter-Day Saint women grow to feel that they cannot have both a thriving professional career and a healthy involvement with their Church.

Still, there are women who do boldly and publicly identify as both feminists and Latter-Day Saints. This begs the question: can our young woman belong to a Church whose teachings often explicitly impede feminism? She would have to endure social ostracism, threats of a severed relationship with Heavenly Father, and neglect from religious authority. In order to reclaim her faith, she would have to seek out a feminist community and a more personal relationship with Heavenly Father. Ultimately, she would find that empowered faith is possible. She can be a feminist through the development of a more authentic relationship with God that is not dictated by human authority.

The entirety of the young woman's religious experience is vulnerable to the decision of the Church authorities, who have the ability to receive divine revelation from Heavenly Father. With this ability, Church leaders facilitate the young woman's intimate relationship with her God. They become a necessary medium through which to connect personally with the divine. Latter-Day Saints take the official decrees of their authorities to be the Word of Heavenly Father and thus grant these men a degree of reverence that would otherwise be reserved for Him. Church authorities, as a mouthpiece for Heavenly Father, can easily penetrate the bubble of the young woman's individuality and privacy. Then, when Church authorities silence and oppress

her, it is particularly harmful as the oppression is seen as coming directly from Heavenly Father.

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their children in the Church and were now simply asking for more respect and justice. Kimball never responded to her letter.

If our young woman were to do her research, she would find that Latter-Day Saint feminist communities have existed throughout history and are not just a product of the modern era. By honoring the legacy of brave women through time, she might expand her community to all Latter-Day Saints who have acted in favor of female empowerment. She would likely discover Susa Young Gates, who in 1886 was granted permission to publish *The Young Woman's Journal* by Church President Wilford Woodruff. Gates wanted her journal to serve “as an outlet for the literary gifts of the girl members...while representing the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>66</sup> The magazine featured articles about health and hygiene, dating tips, etiquette, and other topics that concerned young women in the Church. While *The Young Women's Journal* published content that reinforced the binary gender roles that the Church supported, this magazine also raised women's voices outside of the home and into the public sphere. It was a medium through which Latter-Day Saint women could talk to each other and have their voices heard.

As our young woman builds her community, she can grow from feeling isolated and silenced to feeling seen and heard by other feminists. Then, she can begin to reestablish a relationship with Heavenly Father as well. Only this time, Heavenly Father assumes a form that is safe and affirmative, rather than intrusive and driven by oppressive Church authorities. By listening to the stories of other Latter-Day Saint feminists, our young woman will find that in the

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human companionship, to personal experiences of meeting with a more compassionate Heavenly Father.

Joanna Brooks candidly moves in her speech from discussing community to musing about Heavenly Father's view of women. She calls to action her fellow Latter-Day Saint feminists, telling them, "We need to develop our personal and collective spiritual independence...[because] God wants better for us."<sup>67</sup> Brooks is introducing a God who empowers Latter-Day Saint women, rather than the God introduced by Russell M. Nelson and M. Nelson Ballard in the opening paragraphs of this essay, designed to keep women small. Brooks embarks on a mission to empower women to seek out religious truth in the scriptures and the Holy Spirit, rather than from human authority. She is simultaneously honoring the history and tradition of Latter-Day Saint faith and adopting a distinctively feminist voice.<sup>68</sup>

Heidi Hart, in her memoir *Grace Notes*, joins the conversation on a more regretful note. She details her experience within the Latter-Day Saint Church that surely could have used the solidarity and affection that Joanna Brooks posits in her speech. Hart describes a yearning for a female God, who might help her to find her voice, both as a Latter-Day Saint and as a woman. She remembers asking her mother:

about a rumor [she'd] heard from a friend, that there really was a Mother in Heaven. 'Maybe there is,' [her] mother said, 'but we don't know anything about her.' I got the idea that I shouldn't ask too many questions about this invisible woman in the sky. Sometimes I had the urge to pray to her, to talk, to ask her about Heaven, but I never dared...I carried this longing for years into adulthood, as I became more and more uneasy in a church that withholds its priesthood from women. I projected my sense of lack onto the God I wanted to believe in.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Brooks, Joanna. "Morm

Like Joanna Brooks, Hart had a childhood of not knowing that Latter-Day Saint feminism existed, and left the Church before its feminist communities became established and interconnected. Thus, Hart never realized how real and present Heavenly Mother is to many of her fellow Latter-Day Saint women. Her notion of an ‘invisible woman in the sky’ is not only rooted in her imagination. Rather, Latter-Day Saint scripture posits that “while there is no record of a formal revelation to Joseph Smith regarding a Heavenly Mother, some early Latter-Day Saint women recalled that he personally taught them about a Mother in Heaven.”<sup>70</sup> Still, the possibility of a Heavenly Mother is swept under the rug as the Church teaches members to pray only to Heavenly Father. Though Heidi Hart did not realize it, Latter-Day Saint feminists often work to cultivate a relationship with their Heavenly Mother despite the Church’s vague presentation of Her.

In her article “Heavenly Mother: The Mother of All Women” Blaire Olster asserts that Heavenly Mother’s unique esthetic of feminine deity offers Latter-Day Saint women a divine parent to relate to.

She imagines a:

Heavenly Mother, as the mother of all women, [who] holds multitudes under her wings. Hers is the face that is reflected in the motherly woman, the independent woman, the infertile woman, and the queer woman.... Her image is the image of all those that choose the label woman.<sup>71</sup>

Olster is illustrating a Heavenly Mother who supports not only cisgender, heterosexual mothers, but all underrepresented and marginalized women as well. She is calling Latter-Day Saints from the fringes to tell them that there is a God for them too. Olster is expanding on Joanna Brooks’

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<sup>70</sup>Smith, Joseph. *D*

call for Latter-Day Saint women to build a supportive community with each other, as well as to find their feminist ideals rooted in the theology of the Church, even when they are as hidden and secretive as Heavenly Mother.

Latter-Day Saint, feminist, and scholar, Jennifer Basquiat explains that throughout the Church's history, various authorities, such as Apostle Rudger Clawson, have recognized that both men and women have a need to worship and adore a Mother in Heaven. By recalling the words of powerful men who emphasize a female God, she is calling Latter-Day Saints to find feminist ideals within the Church's existing theology. She makes a clear distinction that those who are fighting for a more feminist Church,

are not challenging the totality of [Latter-Day Saint religion]....Rather, they wish to expand the selective historical tradition to include feminist experience and events that have historically been denied representation, as well as to leave the door open for further revelation concerning women and the priesthood.<sup>72</sup>

A recognition of Heavenly Mother, Basquiat argues, would empower women to leave the home and become active members of their community. It would put them on a more level playing field with their male counterparts.

As the young woman listens to Jennifer Basquiat, Blaire Olster, and the other Latter-Day Saint feminists, she will learn to develop a relationship with her Heavenly Father or Heavenly Mother without the man behind the pulpit as the mediator. She will thus find an alternative to the invasive, judgmental, and oppressive Heavenly Father that had previously made her feel silenced. Her new Heavenly Father or Mother will be a source of empowerment and support, encouraging her to remain faithful despite being silenced by Church authorities. Although this experience of oppression would drive many from the Church, the young woman will have the

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<sup>72</sup>Basquiat, Jennifer. "Reproducing Patriarchy and Erasing Feminism." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 17.2 (2001).p. 28



collapse. Take, for example, the practice of collecting tithes. Latter-Day Saints are expected to pay one-tenth of their income to the Church. The authorities make decisions, according to revelation, on how to spend this money. Most typically, the money is used to build and maintain temples or support missionary work.

If Latter-Day Saint feminists develop a more personal relationship with God, rather than knowing him only through Church authorities, then their incentive to trust male authorities with their tithings will crumble. Without the influx of cash, the Church's power will diminish. As these women learn that their Church holds both sexist and oppressive figures and compassionate, feminist thinkers, they will feel empowered to give their energy, money, and support to those structures and ideas within the Church that liberate, rather than diminish the woman's experience.

Our young woman, through radical staying, has the power to challenge the powerful men within the Church. Radical staying means demanding authorities to use their closeness to God to lift women up, rather than keep them down. It means asking Church leaders to recognize that their role in their relationship between a member and God is one that grants them access to the most vulnerable aspects of the member's 'self'. The young woman can engage in radical staying by acknowledging the existence of Heavenly Mother within her Church's tradition. She can allow Her to lead her to hold more active roles, in and out of the Church. Because of women's ability to receive divine revelation establishes them as mediators between the human and the divine, they must take a step back and allow the human-divine relationship to take up spac]-MMMMMMM"M



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