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World Religions

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Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Religious Movement

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, most commonly referred to as LSD Church or the Mormon religion. Despite the growing popularity of the religion, many people lack understanding of the beliefs and history of the church. It is a relatively new religion, officially created in 1830, compared to Catholicism which dates back to the first century. The history of the church begins with a man named Joseph Smith.

Born in 1805 in a poor farming community in Vermont, Smith and his family soon moved to western New York. While living there he attended Methodists revival camps in the nearby forests, which sparked his interest in religion and the Bible. Soon after in the spring of 1820, Joseph Smith had recorded that he had his “First Vision.” This vision involved an image of Jesus and God in a grove of trees, in which they instructed Smith to reject the other existing churches at the time. Then three years later in 1823, Smith claims he was visited by an angel three times. This angel was Moroni; Moroni commanded him to find and translate ancient records which were written on plates of gold. This took Smith years to track down and eventually translate. It was translated into 500 pages which later became known as the Book of

Mormon. Soon after the publication of the book, the church held its first organized meeting in Fayette, New York on April 6th, 1830. (Crawley)

By 1831, Joseph Smith led his followers from New York to Kirtland, Ohio where missionaries had gone out to spread the new teachings of the Latter-Day Saints. Others set out even further west to Missouri to share the word. Kirtland soon had a population of close to 2,000 members of the church. The church was facing a lot of religious and political turmoil which caused them to constantly be on the move. In Missouri, the Latter-Day Saints were met with anger and violence from many of the prior settlers. To help with these violent attacks, Joseph Smith led what is known as “Zion’s Camp” on a journey to aid the Saints that had been kicked out of their community. (Crawley) “Zion’s Camp” is comparable to calling for military back-up. The attempt to win their land back was a failure. Eventually, there was an “Extermination Order” from Governor Lillburn W. Boggs of Missouri against the Saints. The order, placed in 1838, declared, “The Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the state if necessary for the public peace-their outrages are beyond description.” (Kimball) The next spot for the Latter-Day Saints to move to was Nauvoo, Illinois. While settled in Nauvoo the Latter-Day Saints community prospered.

Illinois politicians were aware of the power that Latter-Day Saints held in voting, because of this they met most of Smith’s demands. The first of these demands being to give Nauvoo a city charter. Nauvoo soon grew to be the third largest city in Illinois as well as form the second largest militia in America. (Kimball) As the Latter-Day Saints power became evident, residents in Illinois became angry and wanted them out. Political and economic power was not the only reason that people began to oppose the Latter-Day Saints. Polygamy, the practice of having one more than husband or wife at a time, began to be more apparent and rumors were

spreading to other communities. The primary reason for the Latter-Day Saints leaving Illinois would be the murder of Joseph Smith. Charged with treason against Illinois and the U.S. Constitution, he was thrown in jail. In June of 1844 a mob charged into the jail and killed Smith. This shook the Latter-Day Saints and soon they realized Illinois was no longer safe.

Brigham Young, one of Smith's most devoted followers, was the next leader of the church. In 1846 Young led the Latter-Day Saints West, crossing through the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains. The land was ideal since it was isolated and away from any possible violence. On July 24th, 1847 Young and his followers arrived in what is today's Salt Lake City, Utah. (Dykman) Over the next year the church would be challenged to create their own food, homes and find water. By September 1848 the city had reached around 6,000 people. (Dykman) By 1850, Brigham Young became governor and militia commander of Utah. By governing the area more like a theocracy and giving church ideals precedence over civil law, this caused problems with the federal government. In 1857, President James Buchanan sent out troops to the Utah Territory to help protect the governor who would take Young's place. (Poll) This is often referred to as the Utah War, even though no battles even took place. This conflict was resolved in 1858 when Brigham Young accepted the terms to leave office and let the new governor take over. From then on, the Latter-Day Saints still faced opposition up until about 1896. Laws were passed in Utah and Idaho to keep Saints from voting, owning property or holding public office. Along with laws that were strictly prohibiting polygamy. Finally, the church announced to end polygamy which helped allow Utah to finally become a state in 1896. (Taylor) The 20th century brings the Latter-Day Saints less opposition and more growth and expansion throughout the world. Missionaries are sent out to China, Japan, Russia and India. Europe already had a strong

Mormon population due to missionaries being sent out during the 19th century while being kicked out of Missouri.

One of the most controversial ideas to Christians was that Saints believed that the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit) were three separate entities. However, Christians saw the Holy Trinity as one divine and coexisting spirit. In the Bible, John 4:24 states that “God is spirit”, however Latter-Day Saints see God as an actual being that can be touched. In Doctrine and Covenants (a book of scripture in the church) it says, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s.” That’s another difference, the Bible is considered the only book that holds the word of God. However, Latter-Day Saints accept the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price to be scriptures. (Religions) A common misconception of many people is that Latter-Day Saints still practice polygamy, however as stated before this was outlawed in the late 1890’s. Similar to Christianity marriage must be monogamous, one man to one woman. It is important to note that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is considered a Christian denomination.

The ethical dimension according to Smart is a regulation of behavior of adherents in a certain religion. This dimension outlines what is right and what is wrong in the eyes of the church. One example of a practice that would fall under the ethical dimension is the dietary restrictions that Latter-Day Saints have. The revelation given to Joseph Smith in 1833 promoted abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, caffeinated soft drinks and illegal drugs. (Brodd)

This would become known as the “Word of Wisdom.” These restrictions are believed to help keep the body healthy in order to obtain physical and spiritual blessings. According to the revelation those who follow the “Word of Wisdom” will “receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones & shall find wisdom & great treasures of wisdom and knowledge even hidden treasures.” (McBride)

Smart's ritual dimension involves actions and ceremonies that people perform that serve a religious purpose. These acts could be prayer, acts of worship, songs and truly show how followers experience their faith. Rituals in the Latter-Day Saints community are very important. Some of the most important being baptism and marriage. Baptism is the first step in becoming a member of the church and attaining salvation. Latter-Day Saints can also baptize deceased family members who were not part of the church to help them gain retroactive salvation. (Brodd) One other ritual that is performed is the process of endowment. Endowment is for adults in the church who are provided with insight and perform rituals within the temple to obtain knowledge on how to enter the “Celestial Kingdom.” (Lyon) During endowment rituals followers are given sacred undergarments that must be worn day and night to keep the temple close to not only their body, but their mind as well.

The doctrinal dimension of religion are the official, systematic teachings of a faith. This dimension provides an outline for the connection between the divine and humans. The examples of the doctrinal dimension are The Bible, The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. The Bible however, is the Authorized King James Version, because the Christian Bible is seen as having mistakes and changes from the original text. (Religions) Next, the Book of Mormon is the key scripture that Latter-Day Saints get their faith and beliefs from. It

is believed that Moroni's son, Moroni, had buried gold plates in what is now New York that contained the text. It is when Joseph Smith was visited by Moroni that he was told to recover the gold plates, thus bringing to life the Book of Mormon. (Brodd) Another scripture that Latter-Day Saints use in their faith is the book of Doctrines and Covenants. This document contains the revelations that God gave to the prophet Joseph Smith. Throughout the book the core commandments of the Latter-Day Saints are outlined. According to Joseph Smith, Doctrines and Covenants is the "foundation of the Church in these last days, and a benefit to the world showing that the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom of our Savior are again entrusted in men." (Church) Lastly, another scripture that falls under the doctrinal dimension is the Pearl of Great Price. At the time, around 1842, many important articles about the Church were not accessible to the people. Smith had the idea of creating the Pearl of Great Price to help put those articles in circulation. The contents of the book include selections from the Book of Moses, The Book of Abraham, translation of the testimony of Matthew by Joseph Smith, history of Joseph Smith and finally Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. (Church)

From a small beginning of only six followers in New York, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has grown to over 15 million followers. (LDS) From a turbulent past, the Church's community still holds strong. To this day there are still people who look negatively at the Latter-Day Saints, whether it be a conflict of beliefs or common misconceptions. However, it is important to respect and try to understand the complexity and devotion that is involved in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

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