

The Effect of Mormon Organizational Boundaries on Group Cohesion

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Approaching the Church in organizational terms requires a perspective different from focusing on its spiritual role and mission. The German sociologist Georg Simmel framed the problem in this way: "On the one hand, religion stands in contrast to the whole substance of human life; it is the counterpart and the equivalent of life itself, aloof from its secular movements and interests." On the other hand, however, "religion takes sides among the parties in the secular life" and as such it "is an element of secular life alongside all its other elements."¹ As an organization, the Church is subject to the same dynamics as any other institution; focusing on its organizational aspects can help explain certain facets of its history that might otherwise be less clear.

One of the most basic organizational issues — one which conditions the nature of an institution, its internal cohesion, and the relationship with its environment — is how boundaries are formed and maintained. For an organization to exist it must distinguish itself from the larger society and from other social groups; it must establish boundaries between itself and its surroundings.² Boundaries vary considerably from one organization to another, but probably the most important distinction is their firmness. In a loosely bounded organization entry or exit is relatively easy and frequent, and membership involves general support but few required duties. In a firmly bounded one, access to membership is more difficult and leaving the organization is infrequent; a member subjects him/herself to a greater degree of organizational discipline

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¹ Georg Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations*, Kurt H. Wolff and Reinhard Bendix, trans. (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1955), p. 158.

² See William R. Dill, "The Impact of Environment on Organizational Development," in Sidney Mailick and Edward Van Ness, eds., *Concepts and Issues in Administrative Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp. 94–109.

and assumes more commitment to the group. The links between members of a loosely bounded organization are generally weaker than those between members of a firmly bounded one.³

The establishment and maintenance of boundaries are very much related to group cohesion. Firmly bounded organizations have a higher level of internal cohesion, while more loosely bounded ones are less cohesive. The more difficult it is to gain membership, the stronger the bonds that link those who have been accepted. Likewise, the more cohesive the group, the more difficult to gain admittance.⁴

Before examining those elements that contribute to the strong boundaries that characterize the Church, it is important to keep two factors in mind. First, defining who is a member of the Church — i.e., who is included within its organizational boundary — is more complicated than merely checking membership records. Although the Church has very specific definitions of membership, many are counted as members who do not consider themselves such, and the strength of their commitment varies. The use of the term “jack” Mormon and the designation of members as “active” or “inactive” reflect this problem.⁵ Second, the relative significance of the various factors that have contributed to the firm organizational boundaries and sense of group cohesion has changed over time, reflecting the fact that the Church itself has changed considerably since its founding in 1830. Six elements stand out as most significant in contributing to Latter-day Saint boundaries — Church ritual including temple ceremonies, unique doctrines and beliefs, a strong sense of community, conflict with other groups, the practice of polygamy, and the dietary restrictions of the Word of Wisdom.

THE ROLE OF RITUAL

Ritual serves both to mark accession to membership and to maintain a sense of group identity.⁶ A number of rituals are important in the Mormon

³ The firmness of boundaries of organizations is an important factor in classifying them. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, trans. (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 139–43, refers to “open and closed relationships”; Meyer N. Zald and Roberta Ash, “Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay, and Change,” *Social Forces* 44 (March 1966): 327–41, refer to “exclusive” and “inclusive” organizations.

⁴ See Elliot Aronson and Judson Mills, “The Effect of Severity of Initiation on Liking for a Group,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 59 (Sept. 1959): 177–81; Harold B. Gerard and Grover C. Mathewson, “The Effects of Severity of Initiation on Liking for a Group: A Replication,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 2 (1966): 278–87; and Jacob E. Hautaluoma and Helene Spungin, “Effects of Initiation Severity and Interest on Group Attitudes,” *Journal of Social Psychology* 93 (1974): 245–59.

⁵ On this problem of defining organizational membership in analytical terms, see David Horton Smith, “Organizational Boundaries and Organizational Affiliates,” *Sociology and Social Research* 56 (July 1972): 494–512.

⁶ Two good articles which discuss the social functions of ritual are Edmund R. Leach, “Ritual,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan and the Free Press, 1968), 13: 520–26, which suggests a number of roles and explanations of ritual; and Abraham Kaplan, “The Meanings of Ritual: Comparisons,” in Truman G. Madsen, ed., *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1978), pp. 37–56, which argues that ritual provides the symbolic expression of a way of life. Though Kaplan focuses on Hassidic Judaism, its relevance for Mormonism is evident.

context: Blessing and naming of children, baptism, confirmation, communal worship, the sacrament, and particularly the temple ceremonies. Baptism takes on greater importance as a boundary-establishing act with Latter-day Saints since, unlike some other religious groups which practice adult baptism, this rite is considered valid only when performed by authorized Mormon priesthood officers in the prescribed manner. Also, steps are taken to insure that an adult candidate for baptism both understands and is willing to accept the beliefs and practices of the group; those not willing to make such a commitment are excluded. Baptism is perhaps most powerful in establishing boundaries since it symbolizes the death of the old self and the return to life as a new person "assuming another mode of being" which "is inaccessible to those who have not undergone the initiatory ordeals."⁷

The importance of the baptismal rite in establishing Latter-day Saint boundaries has assumed greater importance in more recent times. During the nineteenth century, adult baptism by immersion was more common in other religious groups than in this century. Furthermore, within the Church the importance of one's initial baptism was minimized by frequent rebaptism. For awhile, Saints were routinely rebaptized when they arrived in Salt Lake Valley after 1847; and during the great reformation of 1856-57 most were again immersed. It was common for individuals to be rebaptized before going to the temple or in connection with some special event in their lives; until at least 1900 the Church provided a special form for recording rebaptisms. In this century, baptism into Church membership has assumed greater significance as it has become less common with other religious groups and as the practice of rebaptism has been discontinued.

Another ritual element that contributes to the establishment and maintenance of boundaries is the sense of communion developed through participation in regular worship services. Although the ritual of Mormon services is less formalized than in most other religious groups, communal worship plays a similar role. Group solidarity is encouraged through joint worship — singing of hymns, public prayer, mutual exhortation by members of the congregation, and particularly partaking of the sacrament. This latter act is intended for Church members only, although in recent years Church leaders have given less emphasis to its exclusivity. Public profession of faith is a particularly significant aspect of Mormon ritual, and one that is less common in other denominations. It takes several forms, the most common of which is bearing testimony in the monthly fast and testimony meeting.⁸

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. xii, xiii. On the significance of baptism as a boundary device see also Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of "Cargo" Cults in Melanesia* (New York: Schocken, 1968), p. 252; Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Commitment and the Internal Organization of Millennial Movements," *American Behavioral Scientist* 16 (Nov.-Dec. 1972): 236-37; and Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 93-96.

⁸ On the importance of public professions see Kanter, "Commitment and Internal Organization," p. 237, and Takie Sugiyama Lebra, "Millennarian Movements and Resocialization," *American Behavioral Scientist* 16 (Nov.-Dec. 1972): 210-11. The sharing of

Temple ceremonies, a unique element in Mormon boundedness, play a greater role because they are secret, exclusive rites for a select group. Simmel wrote that a secret, regardless of content, serves the social function of welding the sharers of it into a special group.⁹ Another unique aspect of the temple ritual is the wearing of temple garments. Unlike other religious groups who wear some external symbol of their religious devotion (e.g., a prayer cap), the special clothing worn by devout Latter-day Saints is concealed from public view beneath regular clothing.

THE DOCTRINE AND BELIEF SYSTEM

Another important aspect in the process of establishing organizational boundaries is belief or doctrine. Philip Selznick, in a study of the tactics of the Soviet Communist Party, has shown the central role of ideology (belief/doctrine) in securing full commitment. Ideological indoctrination creates a separate moral and intellectual world for the believer, which helps insulate him/her from external influences and at the same time facilitates his/her integration into the organization.¹⁰

The first aspect of Mormon ideology that contributes to boundary creation and maintenance is a series of unique doctrines: belief in the Book of Mormon, modern scriptures and continuing revelation, contemporary prophets, the Latter-day Saint concept of God, the pre-mortal existence of man, man's eternal nature, the view of the afterlife, and others. These beliefs create a unique *Weltanschauung* that binds Mormons together and excludes those who do not share it. When individual Latter-day Saints do discuss their religious beliefs with nonmembers, the purpose is generally to win converts, which in turn tends to emphasize LDS boundaries.¹¹

A related aspect of Mormon doctrine, though not unique to Latter-day Saints, is the proclivity to see the world in bifurcated terms — God/Satan, righteous/wicked, elect/damned, salvation/damnation, faith/doubt, we/they, saints/gentiles. The doctrine, in fact, is much more complex than this. The view of the afterlife, for example, includes a broader gradation of rewards than traditional Christian conceptions. Nevertheless, the good/evil dichotomy is a pervasive and persistent theme, and further reinforces Mormon boundedness by pitting the member against those not numbered among the Saints.

spiritual experiences and personal trials ("self-disclosure" in the terminology of psychologists) is a particularly important factor in contributing to group cohesion. See Barry J. Kirshner, Robert R. Dies, and Robert A. Brown, "Effects of Experimental Manipulation of Self-Disclosure on Group Cohesiveness," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 46 (1978): 1171-77.

⁹ Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, Kurt H. Wolff, ed. (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 330-76.

¹⁰ Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952), pp. 17-73. Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entlaesst ihre Kinder* (Cologne: Kiepenheir und Witsch, 1955), is the autobiographical account of a former communist, which illustrates the role of ideology in boundary establishment.

¹¹ See Joseph F. Zygmunt, "Prophetic Failure and Chiliastic Identity: The Case of the Jehovah's Witnesses," *American Journal of Sociology* 75 (May 1970): 942-43.

When the beliefs of a particular group differ substantially from the accepted consensus of the larger society, certain social processes can contribute to the maintenance of these "deviant" beliefs. Among the more important of these is the tendency for members of the group to associate and identify with those who share their beliefs and to isolate themselves from and disparage those whose beliefs differ.¹² Religious sociologist Peter L. Berger observes that "only in a counter community of considerable strength does cognitive deviance have a chance to maintain itself." It "must provide a strong sense of solidarity among its members (a 'fellowship of the saints' in a world rampant with devils) and it must be quite closed vis-a-vis the outside ('Be ye not yoked together with unbelievers'). In sum, it must be a kind of ghetto."¹³

THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Abandonment or renunciation of the old social ties and the forging of new ones within the Mormon circle is an important factor in establishing a sense of community. In some cases old ties are severed as parents and former friends refuse further association with those who become Mormons. Although this is not unique to Latter-day Saints, there are two distinctive Mormon aspects. This first is the emphasis on gathering during the first century of the Church's existence. When individuals became members, they physically left their old homes and existing social networks to join Church members elsewhere. Second, addressing each other in kinship terms (i.e., brother and sister) thereby suggests a new family in the Church, an idea buttressed by the doctrine that Latter-day Saints are Israelites through adoption or descent. Thus, blood ties as well as social ones bind the faithful.

Sacrifice of resources and time cements individuals to the group, and this too has contributed to Mormon boundaries and cohesion. In the last century, some or all material possessions were turned over to the Church, while other wealth was lost through frequent moves or mob persecution. Members were encouraged to make these contributions with such statements as "a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation."¹⁴ Sacrifice is unifying: The more it costs a person to do something, the more valuable he/she will consider it to justify the psychic expense.¹⁵ While sacrifices required of Latter-day Saints today are less than those of the last century, the time and money expected are significant, particularly in comparison with other religious groups.

¹² J. L. Simmons, "On Maintaining Deviant Belief Systems: A Case Study," *Social Problems* 11 (Winter 1964): 250-56. See also Daniel Glaser, "The Differential Association Theory of Crime," in Arnold Rose, ed., *Human Behavior and Social Processes* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1962), pp. 425-43.

¹³ Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1970), pp. 17-18.

¹⁴ Attributed to Joseph Smith, *A Compilation Containing the Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: N. B. Lundwall, n.d.), p. 58.

¹⁵ Kanter, "Commitment and Internal Organization," pp. 226-28.

Sharing similar experiences has also contributed to the sense of community. Among the most significant elements in this regard were the trek to the Great Basin and the effort there to establish an isolated and self-reliant kingdom of God. Making the trek itself became, as Wallace Stegner has called it, "a rite of passage; the final, devoted, enduring act that brought one into the kingdom."¹⁶ The migration was also a dramatic and symbolic act of renunciation and abandonment of the old social order for Church members — the flight from Babylon to establish the new Holy City.¹⁷ The gathering in the Mountain West further contributed to group cohesion because mutual assistance was necessary for its success. Cooperation was certainly an important aspect of the Church community's way of life before 1846, but the rigors of the trek and conditions in the Great Basin required a degree of mutual help that had not been as essential before and probably would not have been as necessary in a more hospitable region. The Church played the major role in organizing and directing the economic life of the region in ways that strengthened group cohesion.

The fact that the Church failed in its effort to establish an isolated and self-sufficient kingdom may have been more important in strengthening group boundaries than would have been the case if it had succeeded. The permanent stationing of U.S. Army troops in Utah after 1857, the exploitation of the area's mineral wealth by non-Mormon mining interests soon after the Latter-day Saints arrived, and the coming of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 forced the Church to intensify its unsuccessful effort to maintain economic autonomy and social isolation, resulting in a heightened awareness of Mormon/non-Mormon distinctions and contributing to a growing sense of community. With the mobility and rootlessness of contemporary society, the Church has come to play a greater role as a community for families and individuals separated from relatives and friends. Today every local congregation is a ready-made community, an *ersatz* family into which its members are readily absorbed.

CONFLICT AND PERSECUTION

One of the most important factors defining a group's boundaries is conflict with its surrounding environment.¹⁸ Facing a common enemy tends to draw members of a group together, providing a single focus of concern for individuals and subgroups which otherwise may have little in common. This is in part due to the tendency for conflict to externalize hostility and aggression that might otherwise be directed inwardly toward other group members. Conflict permits the polarization of emotions — love can be expressed toward members of a group sharing a common identity, while hostility and anger are directed toward external enemies.

¹⁶ Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 1.

¹⁷ See Lebra, "Millennarian Movements and Resocialization," pp. 208–9.

¹⁸ Two works are particularly relevant on this topic: Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations*, pp. 13–123, and Lewis A. Coser, *Functions of Social Conflict* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1956), which relies heavily on Simmel's work.

In the face of external conflict, a group will react to internal dissensions in one of two ways: (1) it can constrict its boundaries by demanding that members exhibit greater conformity to its rules and ideology; or (2) it can expand boundaries by ignoring internal differences and seeking to bring in persons from competing organizations or factions.¹⁹ In general, large inclusive organizations (e.g., American political parties and the Roman Catholic Church) tend to expand boundaries in conflict situations, while smaller, more exclusive ones (e.g., radical political parties and religious sects) tend to constrict boundaries. When a group attempts to establish more rigid boundaries, a member whose commitment is uncertain is usually seen as a threat to the group's cohesion. Those unwilling to accept the more stringent demands of membership required in situations of conflict are expelled. This leaves the organization smaller but with a higher level of cohesion and more firmly defined boundaries.

Conflict with other groups has led to Latter-day Saint boundaries becoming more rigid. During the life of Joseph Smith, Mormons encountered the hostility of their neighbors in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. The causes and nature of these conflicts are not relevant here; the important fact is that Latter-day Saints considered themselves a persecuted and embattled minority of the righteous, beset on all sides by the forces of sin and evil. During these early crises, many members and leaders were expelled from the Church or voluntarily left in large numbers. The core that remained was smaller but significantly more cohesive.

After the Church established itself in Utah, conflict intensified. The Church's difficulties with the federal government were principally over the scope of federal authority, and were, in fact, similar to the fundamental issue behind the U.S. Civil War and Reconstruction-era conflict. Within the Church, conflict arose largely over the issue of polygamy, though it was political control and not Mormon morals that was at the crux. Group boundaries became firmer as the institution and its members responded to external threat. The abandonment of plural marriage and changes in the Church's political attitudes were responsible for the eventual resolution of the conflict, but the sense of persecution has dissipated only gradually.²⁰

In some cases the unity of a group is lost when it no longer faces a common enemy. In others, "unity, while it originates in conflict and for the purposes of conflict, maintains itself beyond the period of the struggle." This is true if the conflict serves to articulate latent relationships and unity that already exist; thus, conflict becomes "more the occasion of unifications which are required

¹⁹ On organizational strategies in conflict situations, in addition to Simmel and Coser, see Howard Aldrich, "Organizational Boundaries and Inter-Organizational Conflict," *Human Relations* 24 (Aug. 1971): 279-93; and Zald and Ash, "Social Movement Organizations," pp. 336-37.

²⁰ A study of the consequences of conflict upon Mormon cohesion is the 1922 Ph.D. thesis of Ephraim Edward Erickson, published as *Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1975). Two works on the Mormon-U.S. government conflict are Gustave O. Larsen, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1971), and Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1970).

internally than it is the purpose of these unifications.”²¹ In the case of the Church, persecution and conflict during the first seventy years of its history played such a role. This era of intense conflict emphasized elements of cohesion that have continued to contribute to internal unity and a firm sense of boundedness.

Periodic problems between the Church and government officials or external groups have kept a sense of conflict alive and call forth quotations from former Church leaders made during earlier times of conflict with warnings about future trials of faith. Recent examples include the criticism of the Church by civil rights groups in the late 1960s for failure to grant blacks the right to hold the priesthood and even more recently by feminists, for the Church’s stand on women’s issues.

POLYGAMY AND TEMPLE MARRIAGE

As mentioned earlier, the practice of polygamy played a unique role in Mormon boundary establishment. From 1831 when the initial revelation was given to Joseph Smith until 1852 when the Church publicly announced the doctrine, it was secretly taught to selected members and a few began to practice it during the early 1840s in Nauvoo.²² When it was a secret teaching known only to a limited number, polygamy contributed to elite cohesion during a difficult time in Church history. The most lasting impact, however, was the consequence of its public practice from 1852 until the turn of the century when official sanction was withdrawn.

The best current estimate is that from 1850 to 1890, no more than 5 percent of Mormon men, 12 percent of Mormon women, and 10 percent of Mormon children were members of polygamous families.²³ Those who did enter into polygamous marriages, however, were generally Church leaders,²⁴ and those not part of polygamous families nevertheless tended to believe in the doctrine and accept it as the model for Latter-day Saint marriage and family life.

Plural marriage had an impact on Mormon boundary establishment in three ways. First, since it violated accepted Christian and American social conventions of the time, it served to separate those individuals who were willing to give highest loyalty to the Church from those whose stronger allegiance lay elsewhere. The initial reaction to the concept by Church members was similar — most were reluctant to accept it, even the closest associates of Joseph Smith.²⁵ Those who subsequently embraced it, however, thereby made

²¹ Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations*, p. 101.

²² A great deal has been written on the practice of polygamy. For a review of the literature, see Davis Bitton, “Mormon Polygamy: A Review Article,” *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977): 101–18.

²³ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 199. Stanley S. Ivins gives an analysis of the shifting involvement of the Church membership in polygamy over time in “Notes on Mormon Polygamy,” *Western Humanities Review* 10 (Summer 1956): 229–39.

²⁴ See Kimball Young, *Isn’t One Wife Enough?* (New York: Holt, 1954), p. 107; Nels Anderson, *Desert Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), pp. 402–3.

²⁵ John Taylor, who subsequently headed the Church, noted that after being taught the principle, the Quorum of the Twelve “seemed to put off, as far as we could, what might be

an unequivocal commitment to the Church, while many who could not accept it left.

Second, the practice emphasized the distinction between Mormons and all others and symbolized the renunciation of ties with the broader society. By rejecting and violating the conventional rules and norms in so important an area as sex and marriage, Church members reinforced their act of separation and linked themselves together in shared defiance of the established order. The emotional enthusiasm of an intentional break with convention "welds the devotees together in a new fraternity of people who have deliberately flouted the most sacred rules of the old society," binding them together "against all who still hold the old beliefs."²⁶

A third function of polygamy which strengthened organizational boundaries was its effect in weakening the exclusivity of the marriage relationship. Lewis Coser notes that "stable sexual ties [are] a threat to total allegiance and commitment" and in stable utopian communities "the complete elimination, or at the very least the decided de-emphasis, of dyadic [i.e., two-person] sexual relations provided the form of organization in which commitments would not be diverted from the one central purpose of fashioning an ideal all-encompassing community." In focusing commitment on the organization rather than the family, "celibacy and promiscuity, though opposed sexual practices, fulfill identical sociological functions."²⁷ Among nineteenth-century American utopian communities, the Shakers practiced celibacy, while in the Oneida community "complex marriage" involved men and women cohabiting for short periods of time but without establishing long-term relationships.²⁸ Even in seventeenth-century Puritan society, where marriage and family life were important features, "there were strong proscriptions against the development of very strong emotional bonds between spouses; husband and wife were supposed to like each other, but not too much."²⁹

Polygamy served a similar purpose among Mormons. Simmel argues that the larger the number in a group, the more difficult it is to establish and maintain intimacy. The addition of a third person to a dyad completely changes the nature of the relationship; the qualitative leap comes with the addition of

termed the evil day." B. H. Roberts, *The Life of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), p. 100. Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young, the two men who subsequently had the largest number of wives, both had difficulty accepting the practice. See Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1945), pp. 321-28; and the Brigham Young sermon reported in the *Journal of Discourses* 26 vols. (Liverpool and London: F. D. Richards 1854-86), 3:103.

²⁶ Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, pp. 249-50.

²⁷ Lewis Coser, *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment* (New York: The Free Press, 1974), pp. 136, 138, 139.

²⁸ See Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); and Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias—the Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

²⁹ Yehudi Cohen, "Social Boundary Systems," *Current Anthropology* 10 (Feb. 1959): 113.

a third person (a second wife) while the addition of subsequent individuals (wives) has much less impact because the dyad has already been broken.³⁰ Even under ideal circumstances, the sharing of affection with more than one wife would not permit the development of as close a relationship as a husband and one wife could achieve. Even in nonpolygamous families, the knowledge that plural marriage represented the ideal family model may well have contributed to a certain reserve in marital intimacy. Objective accounts of the effects of plural marriage on the husband-wife relationship are few, and persecution led most of those who wrote or spoke publicly about the practice to defend it. There are some personal accounts, however, which suggest that polygamous marriages were less intimate, less personal, less exclusive, and less privileged than monogamous marriages.³¹

Brigham Young, possibly recognizing that under polygamy the intimate husband-wife relationship of monogamous marriages was difficult, if not impossible, counseled women to focus their attentions on their children and service to the Church community. They were encouraged to play an active role in building up the kingdom through projects such as silk culture, operating cooperative retail establishments, home production and manufacture of as many of their needs as possible, and the practice of medicine, teaching, and other professions.³² As polygamy weakened the exclusivity of the marriage relationship, it helped strengthen the community.

The abandonment of the practice of polygamy raised the possibility that strong marital relationships could compete with loyalty to the organization, but the doctrine of celestial marriage serves to mitigate this. The celestial (i.e., temple) marriage relationship can continue in the hereafter, but only if the partners are faithful to the Church. This doctrine has assumed more importance as marriage increasingly takes on greater social and psychological significance and its economic aspects become less important.

Related to marriage practices are Latter-day Saint sexual standards which differ significantly from those manifested by society. They too are an aspect of contemporary Mormon boundaries, but their observance or nonobservance does not involve as public a reaffirmation as do other boundary elements. The growing importance of sexual conduct in boundary establishment is evidenced

³⁰ Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 118–44.

³¹ Ellen Spencer Clawson, first wife of Hiram Clawson, wrote to a friend, "I never thought I could care if Hiram got a dozen wives," but when he took his third, she said, "I feel as if I had lost him. . . . It makes my heart ache to think I have not the same love, but I console myself with thinking it will subside into affection, the same as it is with me." See S. George Ellsworth, *Dear Ellen: Two Mormon Women and their Letters* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1974), pp. 32–33. Mary Jane Mount Tanner, the wife of Myron Tanner, wrote in her memoirs, "I have lived fifteen years in polygamy, which is a severe trial to our fallen nature, but God has sustained me, and I feel to rejoice that I am counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake." Cited in George S. Tanner, *John Tanner and His Family* (Salt Lake City: John Tanner Family Association, 1974), p. 405. Another personal account that gives insight into the author's experience as both child and wife in polygamous families is Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1969).

³² Brigham Young's attitudes on these issues are discussed in Jill Mulvay Derr, "Women's Place in Brigham Young's World," *BYU Studies* 18 (Spring 1978): 384–95.

by the emphasis given to sexual transgression as grounds for action of Church courts.³³

THE WORD OF WISDOM

While polygamy was one of the main features of Mormon boundary establishment and maintenance during the period 1844–1900, the Word of Wisdom has played a prominent role since then. It is common to find dietary restrictions serving as boundary mechanisms in many religions: practicing Hindus do not eat meat, faithful Moslems avoid alcohol and pork, and of course the best known dietary limitations are those followed by the Jews.³⁴ Significantly, the Jew-gentile distinction — and the dissolving of that distinction — was symbolized by Peter's vision in which he was commanded to eat "unclean" foods (Acts 10:9–17; Lev. 11:2–47).

Although the injunction that Latter-day Saints abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and hot drinks was given in 1833, it was described as "a word of wisdom" and treated initially as good advice rather than a commandment. While the Church adopted a policy that a member should not hold a leading position if he/she did not observe the requirements after having been taught them,³⁵ in practice the Word of Wisdom did not receive great emphasis during the early period of Church history.³⁶ After the settlement in the Great Basin, initial emphasis on abstinence came largely for economic reasons. Importing tobacco, coffee, tea, and alcohol was expensive and contributed to an outflow of money, which was in short supply in the quasi-barter economy that existed among the Mormons. Further emphasis on living the Word of Wisdom came with the arrival of the transcontinental railroad in Utah. Church leaders sought means to raise cash to pay rail fares for bringing Latter-day Saints from Europe, since the railroad would permit a more efficient gathering. The method decided upon was to discourage the importation of luxuries, including coffee, tea, tobacco, and liquor, and to urge contribution of the money thus saved to help bring the poor to Zion.³⁷

It was not until the twentieth century, however, that the Word of Wisdom came to assume greater importance in Mormon boundary establishment. The

³³ See Lester Bush, "Excommunication and Church Courts: A Note from the General Handbook of Instructions," *DIALOGUE* 14 (Summer 1981): 80–88.

³⁴ A very insightful article on the boundary functions of Jewish dietary laws is Jean Solter, "The Dietary Prohibitions of the Hebrews," *New York Review of Books* 26 (14 June 1979): 24–30.

³⁵ Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., comp. and ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), p. 117n.

³⁶ See Paul H. Peterson, "An Historical Analysis of the Word of Wisdom" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972).

³⁷ Brigham Young called upon members to produce these products themselves or do without them. When families were called to establish settlements in Southern Utah in 1861, among the crops to be produced in order to insure self-sufficiency were tobacco and grapes for the production of wine and brandy. In fact, because of the quantity of grapes turned in as tithing that would otherwise spoil, Church tithing offices in St. George and elsewhere in the region entered into wine production. See Leonard J. Arrington, "Economic Aspects of the Word of Wisdom," *BYU Studies* 1 (Winter 1959): 37–49; and his *Great Basin Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 216, 222–24, 238, 240, and 250.

contemporary emphasis on the Word of Wisdom began with the administration of President Joseph F. Smith in 1902.³⁸ The importance of the Word of Wisdom as a boundary device is in part due to changes in values of the wider society, in particular with regard to temperance. Through the first part of the twentieth century, Mormon abstinence was not unique, since most Protestant denominations were advocates of temperance. The repeal of Prohibition in 1933, however, reflected a change in society's attitudes. Since that time, American social consensus has increasingly rejected temperance, and Protestant groups (e.g., Methodists) which previously championed abstinence have quietly dropped such views.³⁹ As the social values of the wider society shifted, Mormon abstinence from alcohol appeared in sharper relief. Proscription of the use of tobacco and hot drinks has likewise emphasized differences.

The Word of Wisdom is significant in contemporary boundary establishment because in social interaction a common convention is to share a drink — an alcoholic beverage, coffee, or tea. Practicing Mormons are continually called upon to reaffirm their religious commitment in front of non-Mormons. In a study of Melanesian "cargo" cults, Peter Worsley notes that if believers do not physically withdraw and separate themselves from the unconverted, they show their dedication to the new movement by adopting "diacritical signs and symbols — songs, badges, dances, dress, ornaments, etc. — which emphasize their separateness and dedication."⁴⁰ For Mormons, the Word of Wisdom has become such an outward symbol of separateness.

There are current indications, however, which suggest that in this area the views of Mormons and broader society may again be converging. Recent years have witnessed a U.S. government campaign against smoking, a "back to nature" movement has stressed the evils of caffeine (resulting in caffeine-free coffee and colas), and campaigns have been launched against the consumption of alcohol (encouraged by the high incidence of alcohol-related automobile fatalities). The continuation of this trend could have the effect of minimizing the importance of the Word of Wisdom as a boundary mechanism, even if Church leaders continue to stress observance, because the Mormon position is becoming less unique.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MORMON BOUNDEDNESS

The factors that we have discussed are not the only ones to play a role in establishing and maintaining Mormon boundaries and group cohesion, but

³⁸ Thomas G. Alexander, "The Word of Wisdom: From Principle to Requirement," *DIALOGUE* 14 (Fall 1981): 78–88. See also Robert J. McCue, "Did the Word of Wisdom Become a Commandment in 1851?" *DIALOGUE* 14 (Fall 1981): 66–77.

³⁹ See Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1963); Joseph H. Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement, 1900–1920* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us from Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York: Norton, 1976); and James G. Hougland, Jr., James R. Wood, and Samuel A. Mueller, "Organizational 'Goal Submergence': The Methodist Church and the Failure of the Temperance Movement," *Sociology and Social Research* 58 (July 1974): 408–16.

⁴⁰ Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, p. 252.

they are among the most important. Their relative significance has shifted over time, however. Individual differences also exist. For one person, for example, acceptance of the unique doctrines of Mormonism may be the most important factor in bringing him into the group; for another it may be the Word of Wisdom or a sense of community.

Furthermore, there are differences in the perceived importance of boundary mechanisms depending on one's relationship to the Church. For Mormons, participation in temple rituals plays a very significant role in indicating a high level of organizational commitment. Formal expulsion from the group (i.e., excommunication) also takes on greater meaning for members. To outsiders, ritual has less value since its meaning is not shared, but the aspects of daily behavior observed through contact with Mormons — polygamy, the Word of Wisdom — are given greater importance. Baptism is a boundary device that is perceived as significant both by those inside and outside the Church.⁴¹ For boundaries to be most effective they must be perceived both by those inside as well as those outside the group. The fact that the various elements contributing to boundaries and group cohesion assume different relative importance to members and nonmembers is less significant than the fact that firm boundaries are perceived on both sides.

Firm boundedness and a high level of group cohesion have important consequences for the Church. First, unless an organization has firm boundaries it can be overwhelmed by its environment with the addition of new members.⁴² By establishing rigid membership requirements and maintaining a high degree of group cohesion, it can add new members with less disruption to the nature, goals, and structure of the group. Between 1850 and 1900, Church membership increased from approximately 52,000 to 284,000, an average of 34 percent per decade. In 1980 membership reached 4.6 million and from 1900 to 1980 growth averaged 43 percent per decade. During the 1950s Church membership grew by 52 percent; in the 1960s by 73 percent; and in the 1970s by 58 percent.⁴³ These recent increases in Church membership have been less difficult than they might have been without the organizational development of earlier periods which prepared the institution for growth.

A second consideration is that the changing nature of the religious experience of Mormons makes organizational ties more important now than previously. In a study of Wilford Woodruff, Thomas G. Alexander notes that after the Nauvoo period, "the basic nature of mystical experience changed from open supernatural experiences [visitations, healings, speaking in tongues, etc.] to personal revelation, dreams, inspiration, and . . . insights" connected with Church activities.⁴⁴ The organization has come to play a much more significant role in the religious life of the membership; and greater importance is

⁴¹ See Jan Shippis, "An Inside-Outsider in Zion," *DIALOGUE* 15 (Spring 1982): 153–55.

⁴² Aldrich, "Organizational Boundaries," p. 289.

⁴³ Membership figures are from *1983 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1982), pp. 214–16.

⁴⁴ "Wilford Woodruff and the Changing Nature of Mormon Religious Experience," *Church History* 45 (March 1976): 69.

increasingly attached to aspects of organizational maintenance, boundaries, and group cohesion.

Third, many social movement organizations over time pass through a process sociologists refer to as "institutionalization" and "goal displacement." When an organization achieves an economic and social base in society, its original charismatic leadership is replaced, a bureaucratic structure emerges, and officials acquire a stake in preserving the organization irrespective of its ability to attain original organizational goals. Consequently, an accommodation of organizational goals to the dominant social consensus occurs, the primary activity of the organization becomes maintenance of its own existence, and power is concentrated in the hands of an oligarchy.⁴⁵ This is not an inevitable process, however, and all organizations do not necessarily undergo it. Sociologists Mayer Zald and Roberta Ash argue that "the more insulated an organization is by exclusive membership requirements and goals aimed at changing individuals (rather than changing society), the less susceptible it is to pressures for organizational maintenance or general goal transformation."⁴⁶ While the Church as an organization has not been immune from institutionalization, the degree to which this process has been minimized is in significant part due to the establishment and maintenance of exclusive membership requirements and firm boundaries.

Fourth, the extent to which the Church successfully avoids secularization is also in part due to the firm boundaries and internal cohesion established and maintained during its history. Secularization is the process by which aspects of social life and culture are removed from domination by religious institutions and ideas. It affects cultural life and thought and is most evident in the decline of religious content in the arts, philosophy, and literature. This process is most apparent in the rise of science as an autonomous, thoroughly secular, perspective on the world,⁴⁷ and has come to affect directly religious, as well as economic and social life. Protestant and Catholic theologians have sought to reconcile the growth of secularism with their own theologies through "demythologizing" Christianity, translating the Christian message into "modern" terminology, seeking to reconcile science and religion, and explaining the demise of the supernatural. As the social consensus continues to shift towards an increasingly secularized *Weltanschauung*, group cohesion and firm boundedness of Mormonism contribute to minimizing such influence among Latter-day Saints.

Thomas O'Dea observed that of the many American religious groups founded during the first half of the nineteenth century, Mormonism "alone has avoided the stagnant backwaters of sectarianism."⁴⁸ The factors which

⁴⁵ Zald and Ash, "Social Movement Organizations," pp. 327-28; Weber, *Economic and Social Organization*, pp. 363-73; Roberto Michels, *Political Parties* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1949); and F. Stuart Chapin and John Tsouderos, "The Formalization Process in Voluntary Organizations," *Social Forces* 34 (May 1954): 342-44.

⁴⁶ "Social Movement Organizations," p. 332.

⁴⁷ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1969).

⁴⁸ "Mormonism and the Avoidance of Sectarian Stagnation," in *Sociology and the Study of Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1970).

he suggests as most responsible for this are ones which necessitated or permitted accommodation and adjustment between the Church and the larger American community. At the same time, however, it is clear that this accommodation has not resulted in Mormonism's being absorbed into the American religious mainstream. Those elements that have contributed to the sense of separateness, which are discussed here, are among the most important in explaining why the Church, despite a degree of accommodation and adjustment, has remained outside general religious consensus.



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