



In the 1890s, the Mormons renounced polygamy and took the road to All-Americanism.

THE MORMONS' PROGRESS

Unlike other religions, whose origins are half lost in remote centuries, Mormonism is relatively young. The Mormons began building their Kingdom of God on Earth little more than 150 years ago, and their history—so relatively brief, so fully documented—has scarcely known a moment free from controversy. From their espousal of polygamy in the 19th century to their advocacy today of conservative politics, the Mormons have lived at the center of disputes. Yet Mormonism has always seemed, as Tolstoy observed, *the* particularly American faith. Here Malise Ruthven charts the Mormons' remarkable progress from outsiders of the 19th century to "super-Americans" today, and explains why this American church is now the fastest-growing religion in the Third World.

by Malise Ruthven

Late one evening in May 1989, in the narrow, cobbled streets of La Paz, Bolivia, two Mormon missionaries were shot and killed by three terrorists in a yellow Volkswagen. In a handwritten statement delivered to local newspapers, a little-known group inspired by a 19th-century Indian hero claimed responsibility for the murders. There had already been more than 60 attacks on the Mormon church by revolutionary bands in Latin America. This, however, was the first—but not the last—time that missionaries were singled out for assassination.

That Mormons should find themselves targeted as agents of "Yankee imperialism" is hardly surprising in light of the church's recent past. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) is one of the wealthiest and most powerful institutions in the

United States, with investments amounting to billions. Its clean-cut, youthful missionaries in their white shirts and black ties seem as representative of American values as the executives of Citibank and other American institutions that have been attacked by guerrillas. Nor is this simply a matter of arbitrary association. Mormon missionaries are widely suspected of having connections to right-wing, authoritarian governments in Latin America. Returned missionaries, with their knowledge of foreign languages and experience of living abroad, are known to be preferred material for recruiters of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. In their rare public pronouncements on political questions, LDS leaders invariably speak the language of conservative patriotism.

It was not always so. Despite their present-day image as archetypal Yankees, the Mormons were long perceived as un-



Joseph Smith receives the golden plates from the Angel Moroni in September 1827. Smith later translated the plates into the Book of Mormon.

American in their clannishness, in their utopian socialism, and in the hard battle they fought, and eventually lost, to preserve the sacred principle of polygamy or plural marriage. It is ironic that this 19th-century folk religion of primitive Christian “seekers” should now be practiced by people who by virtue of their education and prosperity belong to the American elite.

Today the Mormons are regarded—and regard themselves—as bearers of classic American values: thrift, self-help, industriousness, sobriety. “Super-capitalists” and proselytizers for free enterprise that they are, they nevertheless seem to reject the individualism upon which American capitalism is predicated. If the Mormon church is as American as McDonald’s or Disneyland, it is also as un-American in its collectivist instincts as the very communist menace its

leaders have been wont so earnestly to denounce. Indeed the word “church” in the usual sense of a body of believers that meets on Sundays for common worship seems wholly inadequate to convey the reality of this vast corporate enterprise embracing both the living and the dead.

Throughout its history, wrote the Catholic sociologist Thomas O’Dea three decades ago, Mormonism has been “both typical of the larger American setting in which it existed and at the same time peculiarly itself.” The Mormons’ bland, super-American image covers, but does not quite conceal, an astonishing story of mystery and persecution, violence and deceit, license and ecstasy that links the Mormons of today to their founder, Joseph Smith (1805–44). To understand the Mormons of the present, it is necessary to open again the pages of that peculiar and fascinating history.

History is a problem for all religions. The canonized account of a religion’s origins is frequently at odds with versions obtained from alternative sources or inferred through textual analysis. In the case of the Mormons, the problems of origins are unusually acute, since the religion emerged in the third decade of the 19th century, during the age of print. The controversies surrounding its origins therefore are not safely lost in the myths of antiquity. From the beginning, there were opposing Mormon and anti-Mormon views about the founding of the church and the career of the founding prophet, Joseph Smith. Today, through the work of scholars both inside and outside the church, the two lines of historical narrative have come closer together.

The authorized *History of the Church* that Joseph Smith dictated in 1839 when he

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had established himself as the leader of a thriving religious community differs on significant points of chronology and detail from earlier writings of Smith, his mother Lucy, and his contemporaries, both Mormon and anti-Mormon. (Mormons, incidentally, retain a familiar relationship to Joseph Smith, still today referring to him as Joseph or the Prophet Joseph, never as Smith.) In the canonized history, the 14-year-old Joseph, a virtuous seeker after religious truth, prays for guidance in a wood near his upstate New York home in 1820 and is rewarded by a vision of the Father and the Son. After being told that his sins are forgiven, he is warned against joining any of the existing sects, "for all are wrong." In a subsequent theophany, on September 21, 1823, Joseph claimed to have been visited by an angel named Moroni (a name that Mormons tactfully refrain from rendering in its adjectival form).

Moroni, Joseph would learn, was the last of a great race of Nephites, descendants of the ancient Hebrews who had crossed the ocean and landed in the Americas in biblical times. In due course Moroni led the young man to a nearby hill where he found a book "written upon golden plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from whence they sprang." After some setbacks due to his own disobedience, Joseph was permitted to take the plates home, where in the spring of 1829 he "translated" them using a pair of sacred stones called the Urim and Thummim. The "translation" eventually appeared as the Book of Mormon, which Joseph, with financial assistance from a local farmer, arranged to have printed by a local press in 1830.

The account emerging from the labors of revisionist historians reveals a picture that is at once more complex and more plausible. Mormonism had its origins among settlers in western New York State,

most of them poor farmers who had migrated from New England in search of cheaper, more productive land. Among them was the Smith family. The Smiths belonged to a class of religious seekers whose search for the gifts of the spirit included treasure digging and various occult activities. The folk religion of New England, transplanted to New York, had roots that extended back to the 16th century and the age of radical Puritan dissent, when many people held that all existing churches were irredeemably corrupt. Unlike the 19th-century followers of Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, two leading "restorationists" whose followers eventually merged to form the Disciples of Christ, these seekers remained attached to noninstitutionalized religion in which magic, condemned by the clergy, was a major element. Although Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph's mother, briefly flirted with Presbyterianism, the family remained attached to its occult practices. Joseph had a seerstone that he used to divine buried treasure; he could pronounce spells which invoked spirits (as distinct from angels), including one that led him to the golden plates that duly appeared as the Book of Mormon. The date of Moroni's visitation—the night of the autumnal equinox—was of crucial occult significance.

Whatever the provenance of the plates (and Joseph sensibly returned them to their angelic custodian before any antiquarians could examine them), there are scholars within the Mormon community who no longer believe that Joseph Smith translated them according to the normal meaning of the word. It is now widely accepted that Joseph sat, his face buried in a hat with his "peepstone" inside it, while his scribes sat on the other side of a blanket draped across the room so they would not be able to see the plates.

The Book, when published, was equipped with two lots of testimonials—

that of the Three Witnesses (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris), who claimed to have seen the plates through the "grace of God the Father," and that of the Eight Witnesses (all members of the Smith and Whitmer families), who claimed not just to have seen but to have "hefted" them as well. Of the Eight Witnesses, Mark Twain remarked: "I could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified."

To the reader who encounters it without benefit of faith, the Book of Mormon appears to be a rather inexperienced attempt at biblical pastiche, with characters modeled on the kings, judges, and prophets of the Old Testament engaged in moral and physical battles in the New World. These struggles reach their apotheosis in Christ's visit to the Americas, where he preaches, performs miracles, and lays the foundations for the church. The Book foretells a new prophet whose coming will herald the Millennium: The whole human race will then be redeemed and the Native American "Lamanites," whose dark skins are the mark of sin, will be rendered a "white and delightsome" people again. (Recent editions of the Book of Mormon substitute the less offensive word "pure" for "white.") The Book contains large portions of the King James Bible, including 12 chapters from Isaiah and three from Matthew. The style is extremely repetitious and the command of 17th-century English style is decidedly weak in places. ("And it came to pass that I did make tools of the ore which I did molten out of the rock," records the Prophet Nephi in one of the books bearing his name.) Mark Twain, taking his cue from the Book of Ether, called the whole production "chloroform in print."

For an ancient book there are some embarrassing anachronisms, such as references to horses, sheep, cattle, and pigs that

were not present in the Americas prior to the Spanish conquest. A number of scholars inside the Mormon community now concede that Joseph's "translation" reveals a variety of contemporary influences. The account of American origins reflects the widely held view among 17th-century Protestants that Native Americans must be descended at some point from peoples mentioned in the Bible. The legend of Christ's visit to the Americas goes back to the Spanish conquistadors.

Yet for all its borrowings and obvious infelicities, the Book of Mormon is a remarkable work. Couched in the language of the King James Bible, it places the Western Hemisphere at the center of the plan of divine redemption and emancipates the United States from the sacred history of the Old World. Although there are vestiges of Calvinist notions of depravity, the theology is optimistic. In almost Manichaean terms, the Book of Mormon suggests that evil is only the necessary corollary of good, existing independently of God. The notion that the fall from the Garden of Eden (which Mormons believe was located in Missouri) was a tragic event is alien to Mormonism, as is the notion of original sin. If Adam had not transgressed, there would have been no human race: "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy."

To Smith's immediate family and some of his contemporaries, the Book itself—and the speed with which it was dictated (75 working days)—was proof enough of its divine provenance. It was not just the Book, however, that persuaded numerous contemporaries that Smith was the "restorer" of the true church of Christ after a lapse of 18 centuries. America's Jacksonian Age, when a "common man" could become president, saw in the religious revivals a movement directed against the professional clergy. Popular, emotional preaching responded to, and abetted, changes in work-

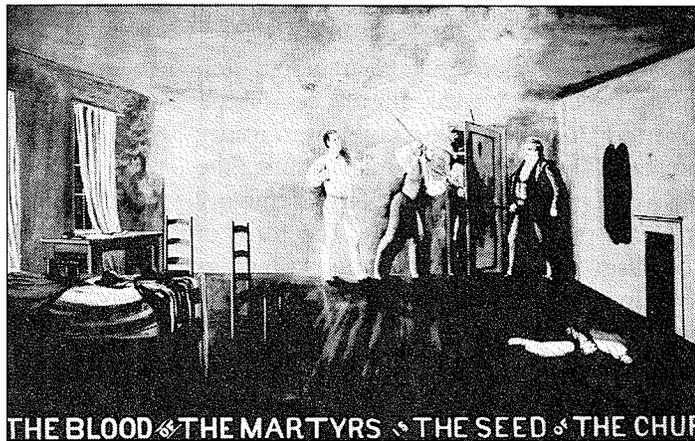
ing patterns, especially in western New York, which was opening up to industry after the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. There were so many revivals in this area that the Methodist circuit riders, despairing of new conversions, named it the Burned-Over District. Expectations of the Millennium—an abiding theme since the first Puritan settlers had landed in Massachusetts, confident that God was about to destroy the Babylons of England and Rome—were growing. William Miller, who carefully correlated all the begettings in the Bible to Archbishop Ussher's date of Creation (9 A.M., October 26, 4004 B.C.), concluded that the Second Coming would take place between March 1843 and March 1844. Thousands of Christians put on their ascension robes and gathered outside Rochester and other cities, awaiting the Rapture. The failure of Jesus to meet this rendezvous with the faithful became known as the Great Disappointment.

Unlike Miller, Smith was sensibly imprecise about dates. He articulated the prevailing millennial anxieties while taking practical steps to assuage them. Like his forebears in Massachusetts, he prepared for Kingdom Come by building Kingdom Now. Joseph Smith, observes historian Klaus Hansen, "out-Jacksoned the Jacksonians by proclaiming that the common man could become a god."

Paramount in Smith's thinking was a concern with authority. In 1829, he inquired of God who had the authority to baptize—a question that concerned many other primitive Christians at the time. As an answer to his prayers, he and Oliver Cowdery claim to have received the two or-

ders of priesthood, the Aaronic and Melchizedek, which were bestowed upon them by heavenly messengers who identified themselves as John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John. The following spring Smith officially launched the Church of Christ, which later changed its name to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, underscoring the imminence of the Second Coming. Shortly thereafter, a divine revelation commanded him to move (in 1831) to Kirtland, Ohio, where a dissident Campbellite preacher, Sidney Rigdon, was baptized along with his group of Christian communitarians. The conversion gave the Saints a much-needed boost, bringing their number to more than 2,000. The first missionaries were soon sent to England, where the prospect of a new Zion in America had a special appeal for distressed millworkers in Lancashire, Wales, and the West Country. By 1850, the Mormon community in Britain had grown to 30,000.

To convert the "Lamanites" (Indians) a number of Saints moved to Jackson County, Missouri, where Joseph dedicated the site for the restored Temple of Zion in 1831. Here, however, the Saints encountered serious and systematic persecution:



THE BLOOD ♦ THE MARTYRS ♦ THE SEED ♦ THE CHUR

A persecuted people: Joseph Smith (in white) and his brother were murdered by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, on June 27, 1844.

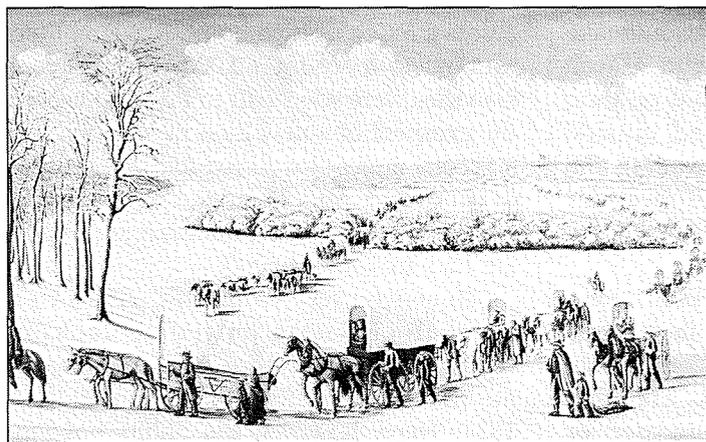
Other settlers despised their weird theology and feared their collectivist social ideals (which they expressed by voting for candidates en bloc). In 1838, Joseph and his fellow elders were arrested and charged with treason, Mormon property was confiscated, and a number of Mormons were massacred. After compliant jailers allowed the Prophet and his companions to escape, he rejoined the Saints at the city of Commerce on the Illinois shore of the Mississippi, near the confluence with the Des Moines River.

This second Zion, which Joseph renamed Nauvoo, became a thriving city of

temple rituals that lead to life in the hereafter. (Nowadays, the temple recommend takes the form of a card that one must produce to be admitted to a temple.)

At Nauvoo, the Prophet built a neoclassical temple high on the bluffs overlooking the river. He also became Nauvoo's largest individual proprietor: the owner of its hotel and store, treasurer and trustee-in-trust for the church, as well as mayor and lieutenant general of the Nauvoo Legion—a rank he celebrated by wearing resplendent gold-and-blue uniforms. At Nauvoo, as the Prophet, he perfected the esoteric temple

rites, adapted in part from freemasonry, that linked the living with generations of the dead in a vast continuum that stretched from before Creation into a timeless future in which men would become gods. Ancestors were baptized by proxy so that the living could be joined to them in the afterlife. This practice is still conducted by the Mormon church, aided by a fully computerized genealogical data bank—the world's largest. About 350 million dead people are believed to have



During the exodus from Nauvoo in February 1846, the Mississippi River froze over solidly enough to allow wagons to cross. Mormons liken the event to the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea.

12,000 that rivaled Chicago in population and prosperity. A weak Illinois legislature granted Joseph almost plenipotentiary powers. The city's 2,000-man militia, the Nauvoo Legion, became the largest military force in the state of Illinois. The form of socialism practiced in Missouri, known as the Law of Consecration and Stewardship, was replaced by the "lesser"—but more practical—law of tithing, which still stands today. Only Saints of good standing who regularly pay their tithes, normally 10 percent of pretax income, are granted the "recommends" that ensure access to the

been posthumously baptized, including kings and emperors, all the signatories to the U.S. Constitution, all the presidents of the United States, not to mention some of the denizens of Hollywood.

At Nauvoo, Joseph also codified the theocratic church organization that persists, with modifications, to this day. The Mormon church is a lay church, which combines the Catholic gradations of hierarchy with the Protestant idea of the priesthood of all (male) believers. Boys make up the lesser Aaronic priesthood, men the higher Melchizedek priesthood. A bishop is

in charge of the ward or congregation; the larger unit, equivalent to a Catholic diocese, is the stake—a term taken from the Book of Isaiah, which likens Zion to a tent and its people to stakes. Presiding over the church are the General Authorities, consisting of the Quorum of the Seventies, the Twelve Apostles, and the president. As “Prophet, Seer and Revelator,” the president is entitled to receive revelation. The church’s structure reflected a shift in Joseph Smith’s vision from that of a restored apostolic church toward the notion of a restored People of Israel.

There was never much chance that 19th-century American society would tolerate a polity so inimical to its institutions. Small utopian religious experiments—such as John Humphrey Noyes’s free-love community in Oneida, New York, where all were saved and hence unable to sin—could be left alone since they threatened nobody. But during Joseph Smith’s lifetime Mormonism was becoming a power in the land. Aware of this, Smith began to cast around for uninhabited territories where the Saints might build their Kingdom unmolested by the “Gentiles”—a term that Mormons have only recently dropped from their lexicon. He tried to maintain his autonomy by selling Mormon votes to the highest bidder: This worked for a time but ultimately antagonized both Whigs and Democrats. Joseph then launched his own bid for the presidency of the United States. His campaign was cut short by his assassination in 1844 at the hands of a lynch mob in Carthage, Illinois, where he and his brother Hyrum (who was also killed) were being held on charges of treason.

It was not just politics, however, that brought Joseph down, but polygamy. Although the Book of Mormon denounces polygamy—“Behold David and Solomon truly had many wives and concu-

bines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord”—the principle of celestial or plural marriage seems to have been practiced by Joseph himself even before he moved to Nauvoo. The recollections of Saints who later left the church, as well as of some women who became his plural wives, leave little doubt that the tall, young, good-looking, charismatic leader had a roving eye. This tendency was bitterly fought by his wife Emma, who would never accept that “the principle” came from God. Joseph, however, was not simply exploiting his prophetic charisma for personal gratification. Like more recent cult leaders, he used sexuality to bind his followers to him. For women who entered “the principle,” there could be no turning back in Victorian America; likewise for the select group of leaders who took plural wives, loyalty was virtually guaranteed. Rumors of polygamy that began in the anti-Mormon press culminated in a major exposé within Nauvoo itself. Smith was taken into custody in 1844 for ordering destruction of the press on which this exposé had been printed.

From the first, it was remarkable how Joseph Smith managed to incorporate the “celestial order of marriage” into his theological design. The justification of polygamy involved the Mormons in a theology radically unlike any other Christian sect’s—indeed, so different that many outsiders, from the 19th century to the present day, have charged the Mormons with not being Christians at all. Even the Mormon conception of divinity is radically different from the God of the New Testament. Joseph Smith spoke of God as having once been a person with “a body of flesh and bones as tangible as a man’s.” The most famous Mormon aphorism says, “As man is, God once was; as God now is, man may become.”

God too, so Joseph taught, had been polygamous and had had carnal relations with virtuous women and together they had

MORMONISM AND FEMINISM?

At the naming ceremony for my infant daughter, I called myself a "feminist" and was chastised by my family and other congregants. I mention my Mormon faith to feminist friends and am met with scoffs of "Isn't that the church that defeated the Equal Rights Amendment?" Both camps, then, agree: "Mormon feminist" is an oxymoron. But is it?

Mormon women today seem in many ways like their conservative counterparts in evangelical Christianity. We are encouraged to marry young, to honor husbands and fathers as the head of the household, to devote our lives primarily to the task of childbearing and childrearing. We are not encouraged to develop a career (except as a safety net against widowhood) and are positively discouraged from working outside the home.

But historically, socially, and theologically, we are fundamentally different from, even antithetical to, evangelical Christians. Nineteenth-century Mormonism was a radical critique of Christianity, just as it was of American culture: My ancestors rejected individualistic enterprise for communalism, democracy for theocracy, monogamy for polygamy.

Ironically, although polygamy was viewed with profound disgust or pity (one East Coast observer remarked that a polygamist's wife was "either an oriental doll or a domestic drudge, with neither impulse nor impetus towards an individualized existence"), it actually helped produce some of America's earliest feminists. Mormon women in Utah published their own newspaper, the *Woman's Exponent*, and they ran their own independent organization, the Female Relief Society, without interference. Utah women were the first women in the United States to vote in a public election. Inside the church, they preached, gave healing blessings, led organizations, and voted

with men to sustain the leaders. Outside the church, they attended medical school and were among the first to join the National Council of Women. I recall stories of my great-great-grandmother, Rachel Ivins Grant, who converted to Mormonism, left her wealthy New Jersey family, and made the trek west on her own. She became the sixth wife of Jedediah Grant, raised her son Heber J. Grant (a future church president) by herself, and later was president of her local Relief Society for 40 years while almost entirely deaf.

To be sure, 19th-century Mormonism had its patriarchal doctrines and practices. A man's religious standing was measured by the number of his wives and children, as if they were his possessions. Nonetheless the combination of absent or shared husbands and the many practical necessities of pioneering life freed these polygamous wives from the stultifying roles of typical Victorian women.

A subservient role for women was, in fact, not native to Mormonism but was grafted on from outside. After the Great Accommodation beginning in 1890, Mormonism was transformed (slowly but dramatically) from a prophetic condemnation of fallen society into a self-preserving embrace of American society in all its conventions. In the 20th century, Mormon women—now in the typical monogamous marriage—were encouraged to retreat into the domestic sphere. The ecclesiastical leadership (read: men) began reducing all independent operations of female churchmembers. Women could no longer give blessings, and the Relief Society was placed under the authority of the priesthood's leadership. Those elements of Mormon theology were stressed that emphasized an eternal division of roles.

During the 1970s, when the feminist movement reemerged in earnest, young female Latter-day Saints began to look to their

procreated "spirit children." The Supreme Being, the Godhead, in Mormon theology is thus a kind of divine man, rather resembling Jesus in Christianity—a more connubial and carnal Jesus. Jesus himself, in Mormon theology, is more like an elder brother

who, for all his compassion and suffering, is insufficient by himself to ensure human salvation—which is why Mormon temples are not adorned with crosses but with angelic trumpeters. (Later Mormon theologians have also suggested that Jesus was polyga-

foremothers for role models. A group of Boston women launched *Exponent II*, consciously modelled after the 19th-century women's journal, to comment on political and theological questions. And in 1978 when blacks were given the priesthood, women began to ask the next logical question: Why not us?

So what does the future hold? There is an increasingly vocal minority of educated American women urging more leadership roles for women. Unlike other Christian women, Mormon feminists have a theological rallying point in the Mormon belief that God has a cocreator, a Mother God. As it is in heaven, we ask, why not on Earth? And, finally, simple economics may accomplish what feminism and theology fail to do. Childrearing in America is expensive today, and Mormons generally have more than the average number of children. In addition, Mormons tithe to the church, and they support their children on proselytizing missions. Such realities are requiring that many women work outside the home just to survive. The number of Mormon women in the workforce is rapidly approaching the national norm of 50 percent.

In response to these pressures, there have been some significant changes. In 1990, the temple ceremony was changed so that women can now pray at services. There is an annual all-church women's meeting; there are more professional women among the Relief Society leaders. The church leadership urges men to recognize the needs of their wives, including intellectual and emotional needs.

On the other hand, the church is growing

fastest in the Third World, where, as LDS sociologist Marie Cornwall noted, "The patriarchy of Mormonism is a gentler, kinder form of [already existing patterns of] male dominance." Indeed, the traditional Mormon roles, which have the husband successful at work and the wife raising children at home, seem quite desirable to Third World women—a reason for joining the church.

I struggle to balance competing ideas and impulses in myself. There are days when I sit in adult Sunday school class seething while a teacher compares marriage to a smoothly run corporation. ("Every good organization must have a president, and that would be the husband, and a vice-president, and you know who that would be.") I rankle when I hear the regional representative (parallel to a Catholic bishop) suggest over the pulpit that our drug addiction problems are caused by the existence of day care. At such times I daydream how very pleasant it must be to be a Quaker. But then I hear the voices of six generations of Mormon foremothers whispering to me of their struggles and their endurance, and I know I will never leave. How ironic all this is: It is precisely my Mormon desire to reform the world into a "kingdom" that makes me chafe at the typical Mormon view of women; it is my Mormon optimism that makes me believe that change, even heroic change, is possible. Indeed, it is my Mormonness that makes me a feminist and makes it hurt to be one.

—Peggy Fletcher Stack



Peggy Fletcher Stack is Associate Editor of Books and Religion.

mous, "united" with Martha and the two Marys.) Salvation and entry into heaven depend less upon Jesus' martyrdom, or upon God's grace, than upon how man uses his free will while on Earth. This belief in free will, writes the University of Utah's Sterling

M. McMurrin in *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (1965), "exhibits the affirmative qualities relating to the capacity of human reason and the possibility of free moral endeavor that characterized Enlightenment thought in the early

part of the 19th century [and] that today lie at the foundations of the typical secular humanism that has issued from American intellectual life."

Mormon theology was thus in tune with the music of 19th-century America. A popular idea of the time portrayed a "New Adam," a new American free of Old World sin and born to fresh chances. Likewise the Mormons, in this same optimistic spirit, envisioned a race of "spirit children" who would be born not depraved and sinful but free and good. The Jacksonian common man was beginning to feel in himself a manifest destiny, the power to conquer the entire continent. Mormon theology went one better: Its spirit children would not simply master a new continent but could become gods too. To do so, however, it was first necessary to get born, that is, for the spirit children to acquire mortal bodies.

For this reason, polygamy was a virtue, and virtuous were the men who practiced it. Having more wives meant siring more children and bringing more spirit children into this world, thus earning greater "exaltation" in the afterlife. There, in the Mormon scheme of things, humans retain their personalities and, reunited with their spouses, continue to grow in knowledge and purity until they achieve godhood, organizing new planets and spawning spirit children of their own. This bit of theology also helps to explain the heavy Mormon emphasis on traditional family values today.

Mormonism may today resemble a conservative Christian sect, but its 19th-century theology smuggled into Christianity some strange notions indeed: a materialistic God, a carnal Christ, and, of course, polygamy. It was to rebut the century-old charge that Mormon theology hardly constitutes a form of Christianity that the church, in 1985, added to the Book of Mormon the subtitle "Another Testimony of Jesus Christ."

Given the turmoil engendered by polyg-

amy, Joseph's assassination probably saved the movement. A martyred Prophet was much more valuable than a living impostor, which was what a growing number of apostates had come to consider him. The martyrdom, however, brought a struggle for leadership in its train, in which the issue of polygamy was decisive.

To escape the increasing hostility of anti-Mormons, a majority of the Nauvoo Saints followed Brigham Young on his epic hegira across the Great Plains during 1846 and '47 to found another Zion in the Great Salt Lake Valley. Unreconciled to polygamy, Joseph's widow Emma remained with her children in Nauvoo, and her son Joseph Smith III became president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS). The RLDS church has remained a relatively small group; today it has a membership of about 250,000, based in Independence, Missouri. Like the Shiites of Islam, the Reorganites are legitimists who feel that their Prophet's progeny were cheated of the leadership. Still led by a member of Joseph's family, Wallace Smith III, they say of their Utah rivals: "They have the Kingdom, but we have the King."

Brigham Young (1801-77) was a very different character from Joseph Smith. Stern, authoritarian, and patriarchal, he had little of the Prophet's captivating charm or charismatic wit. When ordered by Joseph to take a second wife, he vehemently objected, saying that he "desired the grave." One of his daughters, who became a prominent suffragette, described him as a "Puritan of the Puritans." Nevertheless, he quickly recognized the value of polygamy in binding the Saints to him politically. Before he left Nauvoo he had married 12 women, including several previously "sealed" to Joseph Smith. Eventually he would marry 16 "connubial" wives who

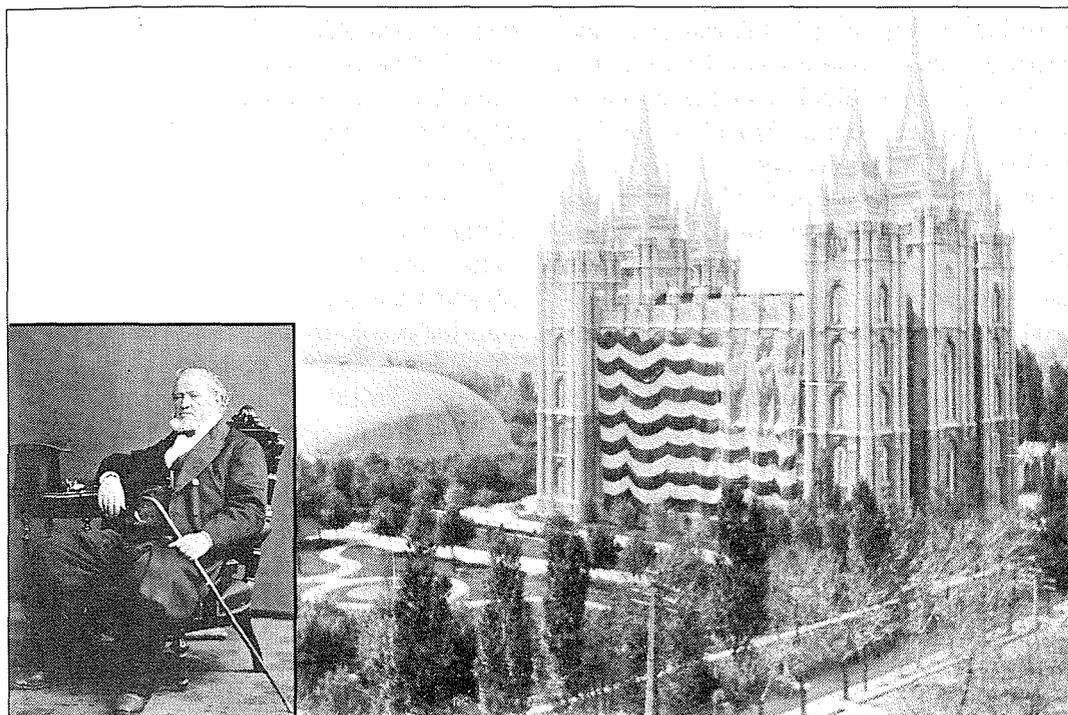
bore him a total of 57 children and nine "nonconnubial" wives whom he took into his household; in addition, he had about 30 women "sealed" to him. Apart from his formidable administrative and practical skills, he appears to have had a talent for mimicry. During the struggle over the succession, before a meeting of 5,000 Saints, he used the accents and mannerisms of Joseph to such effect that many testified they saw the Prophet's mantle fall upon him.

Under Brigham Young's leadership (1844-77), the Utah Mormons rebuilt the Kingdom. Young adopted Joseph Smith's imaginative priestly system to colonize the desert. Through the Perpetual Emigration Fund he brought new Saints from Europe up the Mississippi and across the Plains to the Great Basin. There were serious setbacks when hundreds perished through hunger, disease, and the onset of winter. Young also had to abandon his plan for a Mormon State of Deseret comprising all of present-day Utah and Nevada and parts of Idaho, Wyoming, Arizona, and southern California. But in general the Mormon he-gira proved the most successful attempt at centrally organized settlement since the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony: By the end of the 19th century it had brought in about 90,000 immigrants, mainly from Scandinavia and Britain. During the Mexican-American War of 1848, Young shrewdly offered Washington the services of Mormon volunteers. In 1850, after Mexico ceded Utah and other lands to the United States, he was named governor of the new Utah territory. His generosity was no small factor in the appointment.

This halcyon period of complete autonomy under Young's governorship was not to last. The Prophet's introduction of polygamy had placed his followers in an impossible dilemma. By 1852, the church was no longer able to conceal polygamy from the monogamous majority of the faithful nor

from federal officials, and leaders began to preach "the principle" openly for the first time. Yet once it was out in the open, any hope for autonomy within the Union was doomed. In 1856, the new Republican Party demanded the abolition of polygamy along with slavery as "twin relics of barbarism." The Democrats, not wishing to imply that their support for slavery meant support for polygamy, became equally shrill in their denunciations of Mormon marriage practices. In 1857, convinced that the Mormons were in rebellion, President James Buchanan appointed a new governor of Utah, whom he sent out with an escort of 2,500 troops. Brigham Young called up the Mormon militia, and for several weeks the so-called Mormon War was a stalemate. The whole community began moving by wagon train toward southern Utah until a compromise was reached. The soldiers were posted away from Salt Lake City.

While the U.S. Civil War took the pressure to abandon polygamy off the Mormons, its outcome ensured that the Republicans would eventually address the second of barbarism's "twin relics." As early as July 1862, President Abraham Lincoln had signed the Morrill Anti-bigamy Act into law. In *Reynolds v. The United States* (1879) the Supreme Court stated that religious belief did not allow disobedience of the law. When the Mormon leaders defiantly refused to abandon the practice, Congress passed the Edmunds Act (1882), providing severe penalties for polygamy and "unlawful cohabitation." Though only a minority (about 20 percent) practiced "the principle," and some even hated it, the Saints were unanimous in upholding it. To have done otherwise would have been tantamount to declaring Joseph Smith a false prophet. And when nearly 1,000 men, and some women, were jailed for "unlawful cohabitation," the Saints' memories were stirred, recalling the old anti-Mormon cru-



In 1896, a huge flag was draped across the Salt Lake Temple to celebrate Utah's statehood. Brigham Young, who led the Saints to Utah, is shown in 1876, a year before his death.

sades in Missouri and Illinois.

Yet the church was becoming wealthy. The California Gold Rush and the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad brought thousands of Gentiles into the Great Salt Lake Valley. The Mormons' highly restrictive economy, combining the advantages of private enterprise with those of communal solidarity, fostered community cooperatives, cooperative railroads, textile mills, clothing factories, tanneries, ironworks, furniture factories, and wholesaling and retailing establishments such as ZCMI (Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution)—a name that survives in Salt Lake City's best-known department store. In many of these enterprises the church was a corporate investor. The main source of its wealth, however, was tithing: By the mid-1880s, tithing receipts from the faithful had reached an impressive \$500,000 a year.

It was Zion's worldly wealth that made it vulnerable. In 1887 the antipolygamists in Congress seized the church by the financial and economic jugular: They passed the Edmunds-Tucker Act which, in addition to harsh civil and criminal penalties for polygamists, ordered the dissolution of the Mormon church as a legal corporation and the confiscation of most of its property. The leadership capitulated. In September 1890 President Wilford Woodruff issued the famous Manifesto, in which he stated that the church had stopped teaching plural marriage and would not allow anyone to enter into the practice any more. The Manifesto, which Woodruff privately stated to be a revelation from God, was reluctantly endorsed by the church's General Conference a few days later. The Manifesto finally opened the way to Utah's achieving statehood in 1896.

The surrender was for some years in-

complete: Church leaders continued to practice polygamy in secret, and a number of Mormon colonies were established in Mexico to keep polygamy alive. But the Manifesto marked the beginning of a radical shift in Mormon self-identification during which the Mormons remade themselves into archetypal Americans. In 1904, in order to quell rumors that were threatening to unseat Utah's Senator Reed Smoot, the president of the church, Joseph F. Smith, announced that any member of the church who continued to practice polygamy would be excommunicated. The principle of polygamy was preserved in Mormon theology, but it was reserved for heaven, where all faithful men may enjoy several wives. But state authorities in Utah took the lead in prosecuting earthly polygamists. The campaign reached its climax in 1953, when Arizona officials, allegedly bribed by a \$100,000 payment from the Utah church, raided a polygamous community in southern Utah just across the state line. Fathers were jailed; children were torn from their mothers and placed in foster homes. Most of the nation's press was outraged—except for the church-owned *Deseret News*, which insisted that intervention was justified “both for the welfare of the children and society.” This was an astonishing comment on a divine principle that had been taught by the Prophet and his successor, and for which two generations of Mormons had paid with blood and anguish.

In recent times, the more relaxed sexual climate prevailing in the United States has rendered the prosecution of polygamists much more difficult. There are now said to be at least 20,000 Mormon “fundamentalists” who practice polygamy in Utah, with a smaller number in the neighboring states of Idaho, Arizona, and Montana. The church still excommunicates them and takes steps to ensure that plural marriages are not contracted in the temples.

This *volte face* on polygamy was not the only accommodation the Mormons made. On the economic front the socialist, cooperative enterprises that had been such a major feature of Zion were gradually abandoned. Former objections to the selfishness encouraged by the capitalist system were forgotten. Thus while the 1899 edition of James E. Talmage's authoritative *Articles of Faith* could still describe the church's plan to establish “without force or violence . . . a natural equality, to take the weapons of despotism from the rich, to aid the lowly and the poor,” in later editions these passages were watered down to vague references about “the misuse of wealth.”

By abandoning socialism as well as polygamy—the two shibboleths that had defined the church—the Mormons were able to change from a millennial experiment into a model of the American Dream. The pariahs of the 19th century, after the Great Accommodation of 1890, steadily and by degrees turned themselves into the super-Americans of today.

A century further on, the Mormon conversion to All-Americanism is virtually complete and is perhaps best symbolized by the fact that Brigham Young University (BYU) is a perennial contender in that most American of all pursuits, college football. The Cougars appear to the public at large as perhaps a bit unnaturally squeaky-clean, but no stigma attaches to the school's Mormon character, and indeed one might say that it is barely remarked. To think of the Cougars as, say, the Fighting Mormons, would be absurd.

As the experience of countless other faiths and sects attests, the achievement of affluence and a degree of comfort and acceptance is often achieved at the price of diminishing zeal among the believers and even a marked falling away from the faith. The Mormons have not been immune to

PORTRAITS OF ZION

In its promotional literature, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints carefully projects a clean-cut image of its members: Mormons are presented as hard-working, middle-class folk, with mothers who stay at home to care for their children and youngsters who shun drugs and premarital sex. They lead a life of "quiet competence and self-assurance . . . envied for its closeness," as one Mormon ad put it. Everyone is "always smiling, always happy."

Certainly there is much that is appealing about this vision, promulgated over the years in the church's regular *Reader's Digest* advertising campaign. Converts are streaming to Mormonism—at an average rate of about a quarter of a million annually during the 1980s. (However, researchers believe that up to one-half of all new members become inactive within five years of joining.) The post-World War II era has witnessed a sevenfold increase in membership. The church now claims more than seven million adherents worldwide, four million in the United States alone, where Mormons now outnumber the mainline Episcopalians and Presbyterians. Almost one-third (1.3 million) of the American Saints live in Utah, with other concentrations in California (716,000), Idaho (293,000), Arizona (236,000), Washington (184,000), and Texas (148,000). The largest foreign groups are in Brazil (302,000), Chile (266,000), Peru (159,000), and the Philippines (213,000).

Some of Mormonism's superior qualities are unambiguous. The Word of Wisdom, the official church guidelines governing the behavior of members, contains strictures against alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine that clearly improve quality of life. Studies show that the average Mormon male lives six years longer, and the average Mormon female three years longer, than their Gentile counterparts. The state of Utah (which is at least 70 percent Mormon) ranks 49th in rates of death from cancer and heart disease and dead last in deaths due to cirrhosis of the liver.

But some of the same facets of Mormonism that provide its strength—the obligations to the church, the rigid framework of morality, the strong sense of community—can also be sources of frustration for Saints.

At home, the dual demands of career and church are sometimes a cause of strain. In addition to the many hours of church service each family member is expected to perform,

the pressure to procreate and bring "spirit children" into the world places economic burdens on home life. There are indications that Mormons may be resisting the church's call to have large families. Since 1980, Brad Barber, Utah's state director of data, resources, and demographics, told the *New York Times*, Utah has experienced a "dramatic decline in fertility," from 3.2 to 2.5 births per woman. (The average for all U.S. women remained steady at 1.8.) Mormons are also delaying starting families. During the same period, the mean age of a Utah woman at the birth of her first child increased by more than a full year, to 23.3. But Mormons still tend to have large families: The average Mormon family size is 4.61, more than twice the national average.

Part of the reason for the fertility decline is that Mormon women are joining the general march into the workplace. In 1987, Church President Ezra Taft Benson cautioned women against postponing motherhood, saying that "material possessions, social convenience, and so-called professional advantage are nothing compared to righteous posterity." But the church also urges its members to tithe (10 percent of pretax income) and to foot the bill for their children's two-year mission service (about \$350 monthly per child). As University of Utah business professor Karen Shepard puts it, "When economic imperatives say, 'You work, you work.'" Today, about half of all married Mormon women (compared with 57 percent of their non-Mormon counterparts) work at least part-time outside the home.

The Mormons are, by and large, a prosperous people. Their loyalty and strong work ethic, their "team-player" attitude instilled by long years of experience in church organizations, make Mormons good employees. But the many hours a week devoted to church duties can limit the amount of extra time that can be devoted to a job, thus limiting prospects for promotion. The church does not disclose much data on members' income, but a survey was conducted in the early 1980s and summarized in the Mormon *AMCAP Journal* in 1986 by Kristen L. Goodman and Tim B. Heaton, of the LDS Correlation department and Brigham Young University (BYU), respectively. It showed that almost 47 percent of Mormon households had incomes over \$25,000, and more than nine percent brought in over \$50,000. In the United States as a whole, only

39.5 percent of all households made over \$25,000, and just six percent were in the over-\$50,000 bracket. Thus, while it may not be the norm for a Mormon to achieve the breakthrough success of Kay Whitmore, president, chairman, and CEO of Eastman-Kodak, or U.S. National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, it is certainly common for individuals to at least gain the quiet respectability of the middle class.

As Goodman and Heaton point out, the Mormons have not been entirely spared poverty: Like the rest of the nation, they have experienced the "feminization of poverty." Female-headed families, about one-third of them poverty-stricken, are not as rare as one might expect. They comprised five percent of all Mormon households in the early 1980s, compared with about 10 percent of all households nationally. The church does not condone divorce, but it does not excommunicate members if they split up. Utah's divorce rate (4.6 per 1,000 population) is about the same as the national average (4.8). According to the Goodman-Heaton survey, however, about one-third of all Mormon marriages will end in divorce; the national average is 50 percent. Another study, by retired Purdue University sociologist Harold T. Christensen, suggests

that the level of devotion to church practices is closely tied to a given marriage's chances of survival. Christensen found that among couples who married "for time and eternity" in a Mormon temple, the divorce rate was only two per 1,000 couples. By contrast, 13 of every 1,000 marriages performed in civil ceremonies ended in divorce. Christensen believes that puritanical upbringings and the emphasis on early marriage and large families are to blame for many of these failed marriages.

The church devotes a great deal of effort to encouraging the faithful to follow the proper course. From the time they are children, for example, Mormon males are taught to anticipate their mission, usually undertaken at the age of 19. As then-president of the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, Joseph J. Christensen, explained in 1981, "Attraction between the sexes is as strong as ever between the

ages of 19 and 21. We set these young people apart as missionaries and they learn that they can control these drives." The mission also helps to instill Mormon values. LDS statistics indicate that 97 percent of returned missionaries pay tithes and conform to the church's high standards of moral purity. Moreover, 95 percent go on to seal their marriages in temple ceremonies. (Mormons who marry in temple ceremonies tend to be older and better-educated than those who do not, another factor that contributes to the strength of these marriages.) Mormon women don't always see former missionaries as ideal mates. "For two years they have been mouthing canned sentences like programmed mannequins," complained one female BYU graduate student in *Newsweek*, and J. Bonner Ritchie, a psychologist at the university, agrees that many "have a hard time analyzing complex issues or coping

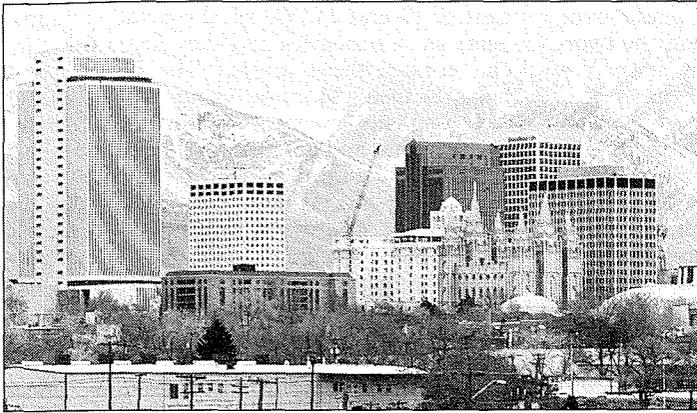
with intellectual ambiguity." Nevertheless, 64 percent of the men marry within three years of completing their mission, nearly one-third within 12 months. Many of them find mates at BYU, where half the upperclassmen are returned missionaries. Not surprisingly, about 45 percent of BYU's freshman women don't return for sophomore year, many

because they have married and begun having children.

How close to reality the ideal promoted in *Reader's Digest* finally seems largely depends on which group of Mormons one looks at. Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, in their 1984 book *America's Saints*, identified at least eight distinct segments of Mormon society, ranging from Iron Rodders, who "see God's hand, through the Prophet, in everything and search for the right way to enter the Celestial Kingdom," to "ex-Mormons, not necessarily excommunicated Mormons, but all those who have made their break in one form or another, both with the church and with their cultural birthright." In between lies a vast group of adherents who "maintain a delicate balance between the church and the outside world, between faith and knowledge, change and compromise, expectation and reality."



Pioneer Park, in Salt Lake City.



The Salt Lake City skyline: The tower at left houses the church's administrative headquarters; at right is the Salt Lake Temple.

this tendency, yet it is remarkable how successfully the church has sustained itself and grown. Now, however, its very strength is stirring up problems of a different kind. The church's phenomenal success in finding new converts to the faith in the Third World may eventually threaten its efforts to sustain itself at home.

All of this, however, seems far away from the clean, well-tended streets of Salt Lake City. Here in the Mormon heartland, the All Mormon—Utah is perhaps 70 percent Mormon—and the All American seem to coexist comfortably. Yet there are just enough pieces that do not fit to remind one that the merger is not quite complete—the oddly futuristic neo-Gothic and neo-Baroque mélange of the Salt Lake City Temple, the recorded bird songs that accompany the WALK signs at pedestrian crossings to inform the blind that they may proceed in safety, and the almost Swiss tidiness of the downtown area.

It is instructive to compare the Latter-day Saints with members of other conservative American sects or denominations. Superficially, there does not seem to be much to distinguish them. The style of dress is not very different from what one might find among Southern Baptists, for example, ex-

cept perhaps that it is a little more formal: suits for men, with button-down collars and ties; print dresses for women with short sleeves and high necklines designed to cover the mysterious temple garments—a kind of body stocking stretching from below the neck to above the knee and embroidered with cabalistic symbols—that both genders must wear to protect them from evil. The antiseptic look one encounters in Mor-

mon homes, with everything just right and few objects suggestive of personal idiosyncrasy or supererogatory pleasure, is not far from the “sparkling linoleum and perfect teeth” that journalist Frances FitzGerald found in Lynchburg, Virginia, the power base of TV preacher Jerry Falwell.

The values of Mormons and Christian fundamentalists are virtually identical. Mormons support the family, hard work, sobriety, and patriotism. They are against anything that smacks of “permissiveness”—such as abortion, homosexuality, premarital sex, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and gambling. Dress and honor codes at BYU, Mormondom's intellectual bastion, would, with minor changes, fit Jerry Falwell's Liberty University: short hair for men, modest garb for women, no drink, drugs, homosexuality, or sex outside marriage.

BYU's students, however, appear a good deal more chic and confident than Liberty's: Smart shirts, designer jeans, and elegant midlength dresses fall within the code. About 30 percent of BYU's 27,000 undergraduates are married, which helps solve the problem of sex. In fact, many Mormons from the diaspora attend BYU primarily to choose the mates to whom they shall be sealed unto eternity. The BYU

undergraduates receive a much better academic education than their counterparts at Liberty University. "A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge," the Prophet Joseph said, and Mormons want to be saved. The nation of farmers Brigham Young created in the intermountain West is now one of the most highly educated denominations in the United States, along with Jews and Episcopalians. This is one of the larger reasons for the Mormons' notable material success in this world. In the race to join the ranks of the middle class, they are well ahead of the fundamentalists.

It is here, in fact, that a second crucial difference between Latter-day Saints and conservative Christians lies. When members of other conservative churches move up the social and economic ladder, they often switch denominations in a liberal direction: Southern Baptists now living in the affluent parts of Dallas become Methodists or Presbyterians; middle-class Catholics in Massachusetts suburbs forsake their Irish priests for Congregationalist ministers. Some middle-class, educated Mormons do drift away from the church, but they rarely apostasize to the extent of joining another denomination. A person who ceases to attend sacrament meetings or to visit the temple may still remain a "cultural" Mormon, just as a nonobservant Jew will confidently continue to regard himself as a Jew.

This distinctive Mormon cultural identity is partly sustained by kinship. Between 1880 and 1960, after the first wave of convert-immigrants had settled down in Utah, Mormonism grew less by conversion than by natural increase. By 1960, there were still only 1.7 million Mormons, an increase of slightly more than tenfold stretched over 80 years. (The Mormons now number 7.3 million thanks to an energetic global proselytizing effort.) Bounded by geography and the sense of being a persecuted people apart, the Saints created a kind of nation

within the United States in which the ties of culture and faith were reinforced by intermarriage. Most of the General Authorities were the sons or grandsons of pioneer stock. Families of pioneering stock tend to be interrelated, constituting an elite that runs the church and dominates the wider community. One may almost speak of a Mormon patrician class that regards Zion as its fiefdom.

In this patriarchal society, family authority is contained within and buttressed by the church. Other churches are conservative in their attitude toward male-female relations: Christian fundamentalists everywhere cite St. Paul's directive to the Ephesians (5:22,23) that wives must submit to their husbands "for the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church." But Mormon theology takes female subordination a step further by denying women the priesthood of all believers and by insisting that Mormons gain "exaltation" primarily from their roles as parents. "Unsealed" or childless men and women have an inferior status in the afterlife, where they will act as ministering angels to their more fortunate brethren and sisters. The stress on homemaking is compounded by the perfectionism into which fundamentalists, secure in God's grace, may sometimes lapse: Homes must be super-clean, meals must always be wholesome and regular, children well-behaved and perfectly turned out. Not surprisingly, as occasional newspaper and television stories attest, for some Mormon women the stresses endured at home finally become intolerable.

The church's authority is maintained by a strong set of obligations imposed upon the Saints. Until recently, the average Mormon household had duties that would engage at least one family member every day of the week: the Women's Relief Society, the Young Women's or Young Men's Mu-

tual Improvement Association, ward, priesthood, Sunday School, and sacrament meetings. In addition to these regular duties adult Mormons are required to make "home teaching" visits to other LDS households at least once a month; by these means "weaker brethren" who are lagging in the faith have every possibility of being led back into the fold by their peers. All told, an observant Mormon family may still devote about 14 hours a week to church-related activities.

Mormons are expected not only to participate, but to administer and lead. "If anyone gets to be 35 and hasn't been president of something, there's something wrong with him," observes Sterling McMurrin. "The church puts a great deal of stress on standardization and organization . . . The administrative ability of the average Mormon is very strong because a Mormon kid starts to be an administrator when he is six or seven years old."

The communal, village traditions of the 19th-century Saints survive in the Mormon ward, which has been successfully adapted

to the suburbs where most Mormons now live. The average ward consists of about 250 people—a small enough group for members to know each other by name. In the Utah heartland, most members are fourth- or fifth-generation Mormons, all from the same vicinity. Ward houses serve as community centers. They are equipped with basketball courts and other recreational facilities for the young. The ward bishops have their offices there, where they hear confessions; counsel parents, children, divorcees, and singles; and conduct the annual interviews for temple "recommends." Many social and leisure activities are built around the ward: fundraisers, scouting expeditions for the boys, high school graduation parties. The ward is an extended family; through it, people share their triumphs, their anxieties, and their aspirations.

At a ward Sunday sacrament meeting an outsider can taste Mormonism in both its blandest and most bizarre manifestations. The chapel or meeting house is usually plain, clean, and somewhat Scandinavian

THE WORLD BEYOND SALT LAKE CITY

Mormon missionaries, as seen by James Fallows, in U.S. News & World Report (May 2, 1988).

The most forlorn-looking foreigners in Japan are the Mormon missionaries. Apart from sumo wrestlers, they're the easiest people in the country to pick out. Shorthaired and typically blond young American men, dressed in dark pants and plain white shirts, usually pushing a bicycle with one hand while holding religious books in the other, can't exactly melt into the Asian mass.

At first I was inclined to view the Mormons the way the Japanese seem to: as well-meaning young people whose perseverance was admirable, but who should stop trying to convert the natives since the natives were plainly uninterested. I would still lay heavy odds against Mormonism's ever becoming a force in Japan.

But I've come to respect what the mis-

sion experience does for the young Mormons. Soon after their 19th birthday, most Mormon young men spend two years as missionaries. (Very few young women went on missions until the 1970s; now they make up about one-eighth of the total.) About two-thirds go to other countries, while the rest work in the United States. Nearly all live on family savings—in addition to saving for college, Mormon families put money away for their sons' mission years.

Many of the missionaries are from small towns in the most inward-looking parts of the United States; they are plunked into a foreign society and, unlike most American businessmen or soldiers, are expected to deal with foreigners in the local language all day, every day. Language skill is the most

(in marked contrast to the temples, where a blend of more ornate styles of futurism hold sway). The pews are filled with children, neatly dressed, the girls in frocks, the boys in shorts and socks. There are hymns and prayers, of course, but individuals also address the meeting: A music student plays her instrument; a leader from a Mormon Boy Scout troop gives a halting account of a weekend camp; a visitor from the capital says how happy he is to be back among kin. It all seems strangely unspiritual, yet typically American in the celebration of success and achievement, in the open, sometimes sentimental, expression of feeling in public. But suddenly Mormon peculiarity appears. A bereaved parent expresses, without apparent signs of grief, the certainty that a lost child is happily ensconced in the Celestial Kingdom; a man testifies that he "saw" and "spoke with" his deceased great-grandfather. Saints speak of the dead as if they were living, in a way that reveals the Mormon worldview in all its concreteness and materiality.

Of necessity, the extraordinary bonds of

faith and collective cultural identity that make Mormon networks so effective also separate the Saints from even their neighbors. The formal boundaries between Mormon and Gentile are drawn by the Word of Wisdom, an advisory revelation from Joseph Smith that counsels the Saints not only against alcohol and tobacco but also tea and coffee. Sainly indulgences tend to focus on ice cream and other sweet things. At Christmastime the windows of ZCMI, the church-owned department store in Salt Lake City, are filled with displays of Utah's canyons and mountains done in sugar and sweets.

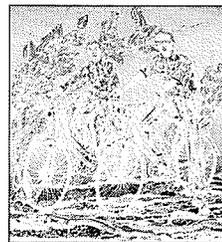
The Word of Wisdom may inhibit close social contacts between Mormon and Gentile, but it allows Mormon communities to flourish in the most unlikely places. Thus a substantial community of Saints thrives in the midst of the Babylonian glitter of Las Vegas. On the other hand, the church's evangelical agenda encourages friendship with the unsaved. Mormons are urged to use their social contacts with Gentiles to proselytize, by doing such favors as baby-

obvious result of their foreign exposure. Of the Americans I've met in Asia who can operate deftly and successfully in the local language, a disproportionate number have been Mormons. The country's highest density of foreign-language skills is not in Cambridge or Berkeley but on the BYU campus. Brigham Young University, where 95 percent of the students are Mormon, teaches 46 languages. Of the 27,000 students, an astonishing 1,000 can speak Chinese, Korean, or some other Asian language. If the U.S. is worrying about how to cope with a confusing, multilingual, Asian-ascendant world, the Mormons are well equipped to help.

But the missionaries learn something more than language. Like most Peace Corps veterans, returned missionaries often seem to have changed when they come home. Mormonism is of course an evangelical faith. But compared with members of other

true-believer religions, former Mormon missionaries are in my experience more tolerant, less preachy, more willing to listen and gently persuade. It would be hard to be preachy after living among Chinese or Indians who have gotten along for thousands of years before Christ with their own gods and see no reason to change now.

The former missionaries also seem deepened simply because they've had to give two years of their lives to a cause other than advancing their own careers. I think that their missions make America a wiser, more competitive country and certain Americans stronger, better people.



sitting, running errands, and lending lawnmowers.

Mormons are inclined to speak two languages, one for Saints, the other for Gentiles. Insider discourse may indirectly question dogma while celebrating it with a common fund of jest and allusion; outsider discourse tends toward affirmation and apology. When argument is exhausted, even Mormon intellectuals will startle outsiders by stating that the Book of Mormon is true because they have received a personal testimony to that effect. The ramparts of Zion may be invisible, but they still form a barrier between Mormon and Gentile. Few non-Mormons are aware of the extent to which, behind the glass walls that separate them from Gentiles, sacred nostrums may be questioned by the Saints or ironically celebrated. Cartoonists such as Calvin Grondahl of the *Ogden Standard-Examiner* and Pat Bagley of the *Salt Lake Tribune* (see p. 45) mercilessly satirize Mormon life in books that sell thousands of copies. Nothing is treated as sacred, from the flour that Mormon housewives store in their cellars in preparation for Armageddon to the eternal destiny awaiting overweight sundae guzzlers in the Cholesterol Kingdom.

As fulcrums of authority and personal ties, the wards and stakes of Zion support formidable human networks. In 1977 and '78, for example, Mormon Relief Society ladies were bused in droves to states all over the Union to help defeat the Equal Rights Amendment. When a sudden thaw in the spring of 1983 caused massive flooding (and \$200 million in damages) in Utah, Mormon volunteers rushed forward to fill sandbags, build makeshift barriers, and remove mud. Governor Scott M. Matheson boasted: "The Mormon church has the best grapevine in the world. One phone call to the church . . . [and] the people come out in droves."

The church's grapevine is also highly ef-

fective in business (see box, p. 43) and politics. In Washington, D.C., Saints have been prominent since one of Utah's first senators, Reed Smoot, became the trusted friend of Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover. The Saints in the nation's capital may be less numerous than members of other denominations, but they are more tightly organized. Using the jargon of their profession, CIA officers speak of a "sisterhood" of personal connections among the 50,000 Latter-day Saints in the Washington area with links in all branches of the administration. The network came to attention during the Watergate scandal, when it was found that E. Howard Hunt, one of President Richard Nixon's "plumbers," had recruited some young BYU graduates as spies. Three Mormons have held influential posts in the Bush administration: National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, Roger Porter, presidential assistant for domestic and economic policy, and the president's former scheduler, Steve Studdert. All three are reputed to be workaholics.

As one would expect, Mormon influence is generally exercised on the right. On Capitol Hill the voting records of Jake Garn and Orrin Hatch, Utah's two Mormon (and Republican) senators, testify to a consistent support for conservative causes, though Hatch has recently begun to concern himself with child-care issues. But when a conflict arises between the clarion calls of Mormondom and patriotism, Zion may prevail. A classic example occurred during the early 1980s when the U.S. Air Force wanted to place 200 MX nuclear missiles on underground railroad tracks in the Utah-Nevada desert. Normally hawkish Mormons rebelled. President Spencer Kimball complained that "one segment of the population would bear a highly disproportionate share of the burden . . . in the case of attack." President Ronald Reagan appointed a special committee to study the

LDS, INC.

In Salt Lake City, the church headquarters building towers over the temple. It is a bit of symbolism that few have missed.

The church publishes no annual budget, but it is clearly a massive economic enterprise. John Heinerman and Anson Shupe estimate in *The Mormon Corporate Empire* (1985) that the church had total assets of \$7.9 billion in 1983 and income of \$2 billion. That would put it on a par (in terms of income) with the likes of DuPont and Mobil Oil. Yet Mormon leaders draw salaries more like those of Japanese corporate executives than American ones: Then-President Spencer W. Kimball was paid perhaps \$75,000.

The church's assets include temples and lesser meetinghouses around the globe; Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, and other educational facilities; historical properties such as the original Joseph Smith farm in Manchester, N.Y.; a large portfolio of stocks and bonds; massive cattle ranches and other agribusiness enterprises in Utah and other states; commercial real estate; and various media properties. Besides the Salt Lake City *Deseret News*, which serves as a "house" newspaper, the church owns two major television stations in the West, KSL-TV in Salt Lake City and KIRO-TV in Seattle, and profitable radio stations in Salt Lake City, Seattle, New York City, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, and San Francisco.

But by far the largest source of income for the church is still the tithes and offerings of the faithful. These accounted for about 75 percent of the church's income in 1983, according to Heinerman and Shupe. Despite an apparent decline in the proportion of Mormons who pay the full 10 percent tithe, giving still "amounts to a large share of church revenues because many [Mormons] give beyond their tithe share. Such dedicated members believe that if they give more, the Lord will be more generous in return." The church can also count on the generosity of a number of wealthy members, such as hotel magnate J. Willard Marriott.

The church's prosperity helped fuel the past decade's enormous growth in membership, and some believe that the impoverished converts of Latin America will strain the church's financial resources, especially if they rely upon the church's generous charities. But Mormon values may also do for the converts what they did for the founders. "Among the Mormons," scholar Leonard J. Arrington writes, "things temporal have always been important along with things eternal, for salvation in this world and the next is seen as one and the same continuing process of endless growth. Building Zion, a literal Kingdom of God on Earth, has therefore meant an identity of religious and economic values."

matter, and it was decided that Wyoming would be a more suitable site. The committee's chairman was Brent Scowcroft.

In Utah, the church's political influence is so pervasive that it does not even need to take a public stand on certain issues. The Utah state legislature, which is virtually all male and Mormon, recently passed the most restrictive antiabortion law in the United States. The church said nothing: The legislators knew where it stood.

One should not imagine, however, that Mormonism remains monolithic and unchanging. Affluence and education have taken a certain toll of Mormon certitude, as some Saints retreat

from the obligations of Mormon worship—it is said (though this is difficult to confirm) that fewer than half of the Mormons in Salt Lake City are tithing—while others question the lore and legends upon which the faith is built.

Official church history, for example, has come under increasingly skeptical scrutiny. In 1966, a group of Mormon scholars established the Mormon History Association and sought access to the thousands of historical documents that the church had placed off-limits. In 1972, the hierarchy appointed Leonard J. Arrington, a Utah State University economist and one of the founders of the association, as church historian. With a team of historians, Arrington set out to pro-

duce a detailed, 16-volume history of the church, using all the documents that had been hidden away in the church's archives. Before many years had elapsed, as Robert Lindsey writes in *A Gathering of Saints* (1988), "Word was passed to Arrington's historians that they were going too far, that some of their research was bordering on betrayal of the church . . . [T]he General Authorities complained directly to the historians that their scholarship too often depicted early leaders of the church in ways that they said would diminish their stature in the eyes of contemporary Mormons." In 1980, the General Authorities canceled the plans for the multivolume history. The church's history department was transferred to BYU, where it could be more closely controlled, and important archives were closed. "Those of you who are employed by the church have a special responsibility to build faith, not destroy it," conservative Apostle Boyd K. Packer told the historians. "If you do not do that, but in fact accommodate the enemy, who is a destroyer of faith, you become in that sense a traitor to the cause you have made covenants to protect."

The depth of the hierarchy's anxiety over historical matters was revealed later in the 1980s, when church leaders became entangled in an embarrassing case involving forged documents. One of these documents was a letter purportedly written by a close friend of Joseph Smith's indicating that magic (in the form of a white salamander) rather than revelation had led Joseph to the golden plates that he translated into the Book of Mormon. Church officials acquired the so-called salamander letter and other documents, apparently fearing that they might be real and intending to conceal them from the inquiring eyes of scholars. The incident came to light when Mark Hofmann, the man who sold the letters, began trying to cover his tracks by killing off the

intermediaries with letter bombs. He murdered two people and seriously injured himself.

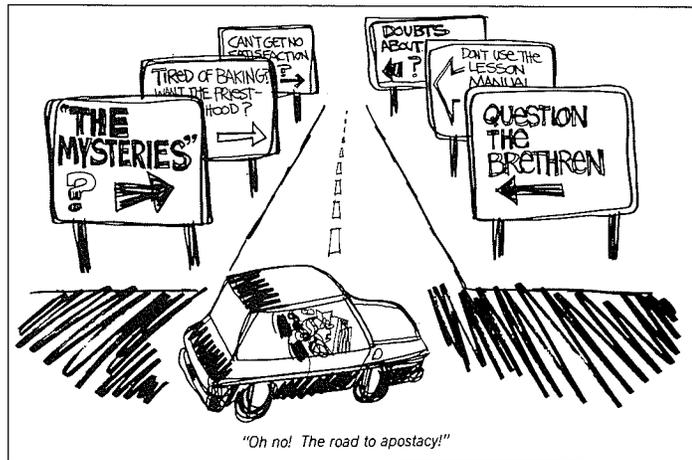
Yet the church has also continued to accept, and, at arm's length, to endorse, the New Mormon History, which still flourishes, though it is more restricted than in the past. The church seems to prefer to have it both ways. After all, the combined circulation of *Sunstone* and *Dialogue*, the principal magazines of the Mormon intelligentsia, is only some 10,000; the church puts the number of converts entering the church each year at more than 300,000. The church's evangelical organs are inclined to treat potential converts to a version of the Mormon saga that overlooks the more complex historical facts. Visitors to Hill Cumorah, where Joseph claimed to have found the golden plates, are treated to the "world's largest pageant" where a thousand Mormon volunteers re-enact a Disneyland version of the Joseph Smith story using a battery of special effects, including an audio system that digitally processes the voice of God to 15,000 megawatts.

In Protestant churches where the demands of the liberal elite conflict with the more populist, evangelical agenda, the tensions have usually led to denominational splits. Such problems are now dividing the Southern Baptist Convention. The Mormon church, however, is much stronger institutionally than any Protestant church of comparable size. Ecclesiastically, it combines the congregational ballast of Protestantism—the priesthood of all (male) believers—with the elasticity that Catholicism derives from tradition and hierarchy. Priesthood in Mormonism is not confined to a sacerdotal class somehow independent of society, like the celibate Catholic priesthood. It is distributed through the whole active male membership. Power in

Mormondom is both authoritarian and democratic, elitist and populist. Faced with the competing claims of the liberal intelligentsia and the evangelical wing represented by the missionary program, the church has a strategy of trying to honor both. Thus in response to a low-key campaign by Mormon women and a desire to gain more ecumenical acceptance from other Protestant churches (many of which regard Mormonism as a non-Christian "cult"), the church recently amended the temple ceremonies. Women are no longer required to pledge obedience to their husbands. A ritual in which non-Mormon clergy are portrayed as the hirelings of Satan has been eliminated. These measures have been welcomed by liberals, without seeming to cause too much disquiet among conservatives.

The strategy seems, by and large, to work. In an article some years ago, the *Denver Post* quoted a Salt Lake City Mormon named Kathy Vernon, who said, "The problems of history and doctrine are interesting and amusing, but they are not earth-shaking and they do not affect the fact that my Young Women's girls are making decisions in high school on whether or not to go to college, or on how to be a good person, or on how to make a contribution in society. And that is the level that my religion takes in my life."

Yet her approach was not one of pure pragmatism. Every month, the *Post* reported, Vernon went to the Salt Lake City Temple, showed her identity card, changed in a basement locker room to clothes of purest white, and took part in Mormon ceremonies for the dead.



Inside humor: Mormons frequently have a few laughs at their own expense thanks to Salt Lake Tribune cartoonist Pat Bagley.

"To me," she said, "going to the temple is one of those things I do because I believe in the church—maybe not understand it completely—but believe in it."

Typical of the church hierarchy's shrewd handling of change was the "correlation" drive of the 1970s. Partly in deference to the increasing number of Mormons living in the diaspora who found it hard to meet their commitments, correlation reduced the demands on Mormon leisure time. Activities formerly spread over the week were consolidated into a three-hour "block" session on Sundays. A Monday Family Home Evening, in which parents and children gather for prescribed prayer and family activities, was instituted to ensure that Mormon men, who devote much of their free time to church-related activities, spend time with their families. But correlation also reduced the autonomy of the wards and the scope of their activities, limiting, in the eyes of many, freedom of action for women as well as the range and diversity of the "cultural Mormonism" that some of the elite lean on to reinforce their faith. Sunday school lessons from the scriptures were coordinated for the whole church. More recently, the changes have been fol-

lowed up by a turning of the financial screws: Wards no longer raise part of their own budgets but instead receive a fixed per capita subsidy from Salt Lake City.

Ironically, the church's successful navigation through the perils of its material success in this country may be most jeopardized by its spiritual success abroad. Since the 1970s, the church has aggressively sought converts in the Third World. Unlike missionaries from other churches, career professionals who devote as much money and energy to caring for the needy as to the saving of souls, Mormon missionaries are all volunteers, mostly young men aged 19 or 20. For them the two years of missionary work, with the rigorous boot-camp-style training preceding it, is a rite of passage between graduation and marriage, adolescence and adult life. Their remit is conversion, not the elimination of suffering. The number of missionaries continues to grow—about one-third of the eligible males volunteer. There are now some 40,000 in the field, and they produce results, especially in Latin America.

The astonishing revelation that was vouchsafed to President Spencer Kimball in 1978, admitting blacks to the priesthood after years of bitter controversy, opened the way toward a radical shift in the church's composition. In 1970, 82 percent of church members resided in the United States or Canada; by 1989, the proportion had declined to 59 percent. At the current rate of growth, only 43 percent of Mormons will live in North America by the turn of the century. More than half will reside in the Third World, 40 percent of them in Latin America.

The "browning" of the church has serious financial implications. Because of the decline of tithing in the heartland, more of the money for the church's growing evangelical efforts abroad will have to be pro-

vided by income from investments. The shift of focus toward the newly converted also has theological consequences. As the young Mormon missionaries compete for souls in the religious marketplace with evangelists from other churches, the uniqueness of the Mormon tradition—its primitivist heterodoxy, its 19th-century progressive humanism dressed in biblical garb—seems likely to come under increasing strain. Already, faced with hostile religious propaganda from evangelical Protestants, the church is de-emphasizing the more heterodox aspects of Mormon theology, such as the progress toward godhood and the carnality of Jesus. Emphasis is placed on the Book of Mormon, which belongs to the earlier more "Christian" phase of Joseph Smith's career, before his inventiveness, and that of his more imaginative followers, took Mormon theology into more exotic realms.

As it approaches the Christian bimillennial, the LDS church can expect to face tensions in several areas. The most pressing is likely to be the conflict between ethnic Mormons and the nonwhite converts, especially in Latin America. Some ethnic Mormons, secure in an identity buttressed by culture and kinship, are beginning to demand liberalization of practice and doctrine. As in other American churches, the issues of women in the priesthood, the rights of gay people, and the needs of the growing number of singles in the church are coming to prominence. It cannot be long before awkward questions about marriage, sexuality, and even social justice are raised in sacrament meetings and Sunday school.

Like the conservatives in Rome around Pope John Paul II, the white-haired Mormon leaders around 91-year-old President Ezra Taft Benson know that theological liberalism, especially in sexual matters, must weaken the moral hold that bishops have

over their wards. And liberalization in these areas would run counter to the requirements of an expanding Third World church. While a sizable proportion of the ethnic Mormon elite may want a Mormonism that no longer seems stuck in the 1950s, the Latin converts want something closer to the version in the church's *Reader's Digest* advertisements. They are, to continue the Catholic analogy, more Catholic than the pope.

The Mormons' Yankee image may invite the distrust and enmity of some Latins, but it is also a source of attraction: For every Mexican or Bolivian who hates America, there is someone who wants to make it across the fence to El Norte. Although the church can no longer offer the benefits of physical transportation to Zion through the Perpetual Emigration Fund, it can appeal to these sentiments vicariously—offering clean, American-looking meeting houses, exotic futurist temples equipped with high-tech video displays, and a theology that above all else canonizes the family, providing the convert with a sense of kinship.

The sexual differentiation at the heart of the temple ceremonies and the exclusion of women from the priesthood are far from being obstacles to conversion in a culture

steeped in machismo. To relinquish these distinctions would make Mormonism more liberal than the Catholicism from which most of the Latin converts are refugees. It is not liberalism—with its ethic of individual choice in politics, lifestyle, or destiny—that converts in Latin America seek when they join the LDS or other evangelical churches. What they want, like the new fundamentalists everywhere, is certainty and the sense of community that certainty brings. Nor are the new converts, as they grow in the church, likely to be interested in recovering the socialist legacy of Mormonism that intrigues some of the faith's intellectuals. The supercapitalist image of Mormonism, the hope it offers of wealth and worldly betterment, is precisely its appeal.

Will the ethnic Mormons loosen their leverage on power, allowing the newly converted to rise to the top? Short of a major institutional upheaval, this seems unlikely, at least for the foreseeable future. In a new spiritualized version of the church's teaching, "Zion is wherever there are Saints." But for the gerontocrats and corporation men who run the church, Zion is still as concrete and tangible as the church offices that rise above the Salt Lake Temple, dwarfing its granite pinnacles.