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The Changing Image of Mormonism

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Since 1950, the mass media have contributed to changing the image of Mormonism in the public mind. Such is the argument put forth by Dennis L. Lythgoe, who is a Teaching Associate, Department of History, University of Utah, and Sunday School teacher in the University Ninth Ward, Salt Lake City.

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> The ultimate fate of American minorities is to become tourist attractions.... But the tourist boom means the same thing in Utah that it means in Vermont, the same thing it means wherever the past has been piously "restored," roped off, and put on display -- not the vitality but the decadence of a way of life.

Such is the devastating indictment of Mormonism by Christopher Lasch in the January 26, 1967, *New York Review of Books*; and such an assessment accurately reflects the drastic change in the image of Mormonism as seen through popular periodical articles from 1950 to the present. Though these articles are sometimes alarmingly subjective, they suggest a general public reaction to the practices of Mormonism. It may be useful from an introspective viewpoint to summarize these observations and offer some tentative conclusions as to their worth. Oddly enough, they illustrate an evolution from a favorable impression of a thriving church accommodated to or seriously confronting contemporary society to one of an introversionist sect. Although a gamut of opinions is available, there is ample evidence to indicate a definite shift.

In 1951, *Life* exemplified the respect held for Mormons by referring to them as a group whose business sense did not detract from their religious devotion or eagerness to help others.[1] The image of the successful and respected Mormon had crystallized. Impressed with Mormon accommodation to the world, *Newsweek* and *Business Week* in 1951 both commended the opening of a new warehouse for Z.C.M.I. department store and praised its modernity. *Coronet* in 1952 saw Mormonism as a paradox, claiming few Mormons to be wealthy even though the Church itself is one of the richest in the world. A similar attitude was found in the *New York Times Magazine*, which expressed awe at the extensive business holdings and obvious wealth of Mormonism. A later article in a 1957 *Business Week* labeled the business involvement unique and traced it to the "Mormon passion for self- sufficiency."

This favorable impression with respect to business enterprise and material success began to wane in the late 1950's. Particularly disturbing to critics was the expense incurred in building projects, notably temples. When the New Zealand Temple and College and the London Temple were completed in 1958, criticism was intense. *Time* tartly reported the rankled feelings of Protestants in New Zealand who bitterly complained of the eight million-dollar college. The Mormons were considered "invaders" and accused of extravagance and false religious values. "I'd like to come here for a holiday," remarked a woman touring the London Temple prior to dedication.

Commenting more specifically with respect to values, *Newsweek* in 1962 estimated a one million dollar a day cash flow from Mormon enterprises. It asserted that "even true believers" sometimes question the extreme involvement in money matters. Mormon authority Henry D. Moyle, of the First Presidency, was quoted as saying, "We are not averse to making a profit, but it is not our main motive." And a 1967 *Time* observed tersely that the actual total earned through Mormon business was a "closely guarded secret." A Congregational minister writing in the Christian Century in 1965 referred to Mormon business with disgust, declaring that such a vast empire could be duplicated by any church in a few years' time if commercial operation were considered part of its purpose. A 1965 *U.S. News and World Report* traced a typical day in the life of a Mormon who sought news from a Mormon paper, entertainment from a Mormon television station, loans from a Mormon bank, learning for his children from a Mormon university, and even his

1 The following popular periodicals carrying articles on Mormonism from 1950 to the present were consulted for this study: Business Week, June 25, 1951, Nov. 23, 1957; Christian Century, Oct. 30, 1963, Dec. 2, 1964, July 14, 1965, Sept. 29, 1965, May 4, 1966, Nov. 30, 1966, Feb. 8, 1967; Coronet, April 1952; Fortune, April 1964; Look, Jan. 21, 1958; Life, April 23, 1951; Nation, Dec. 6, 1952, Jan. 3, 1953, April 6, 1963; New Republic, Jan. 7, 1967; Newsweek, June 25, 1951, Aug. 20, 1951, Jan. 22, 1962, June 17, 1963, March 6, 1967; New York Review of Books, Jan. 26, 1967; New York Times Magazine, April 1952, April 15, 1962; Saturday Evening Post, Oct. 11, 1958, April 1, 1961; Theatre Arts, Dec. 1958; Time, May 26, 1958, Aug. 18, 1958, Sept. 15, 1958, April 13, 1959, June 22, 1959, Nov. 28, 1960, Aug. 11, 1961, Jan. 19, 1962, Dec. 21, 1962, Oct. 18, 1963, June 18, 1965, Aug. 26, 1966, April 14, 1967; U.S. News & World Report, Sept. 26, 1966.

employment from the Church itself. In short, the Church was said to be operating a totalitarian regime. Though the Church's financial involvement has troubled these writers, the matter is of little concern to many Mormons, who rarely question such involvement and generally feel it to be a peripheral issue.

Of interest to some writers is the annual *Book of Mormon Pageant* produced in Palmyra, New York, each summer. For instance, *Newsweek* and *Time* observed in 1951 and 1958 that the pageant was highly professional and indicated Mormon respectability. In a 1952 article entitled "Those Amazing Mormons," *Coronet* spoke in glowing terms of the general success and integrity of Mormons, calling them "vigorous and independent." It further assessed the faith as a "way of life" characterized by complete participation.

While outlining the flourishing Mormon system, *Look* in 1958 commented significantly on Mormon adjustment to the social scene. Mormons have been called a "strange" people, it claimed, but they are not strange--only different; and "the right to be different is the essence of the American dream." Complimenting them specifically on their ability to adjust to the world, it declared that "whenever assimilation could be squared with the fundamental tenets of their faith," Mormons have willingly done so. Such social adjustment is perhaps overshadowed by the *New York Times Magazine*'s 1962 observation that "no religious group in America 'lives' its religion with such emphasis." However, in 1967 *New York Review of Books* complained of too much assimilation, noting that when Mormons were different from their neighbors, "their neighbors hounded them mercilessly." It was only when they gave up the "distinguishing features" of their faith that they fit into society as just "another tolerated minority," thus losing their religious impact.

An interesting admiration for the men of importance in Mormondom is evident in the fifties. In an editorial published in *Nation* in 1952, Ezra Taft Benson, a member of the Twelve Apostles, was characterized as ". . . the best in the social tradition of the Mormon Church, which is of course, high commendation." Further, he was called "intelligent, honest, forthright" and even "almost too good to be true." The *New York Times Magazine* noted that "Mormons are respected citizens" and even in some cases hold high offices outside of Mormonism, such as those of Elder Benson, Arthur Watkins, and Wallace Bennett; while *Look* observed in 1958 that the list of prominent men is impressive. As late as 1964, *Fortune* called the Church a "rich organization whether measured in tangible assets or men." By 1965, however, Elder Benson's public image had developed completely new dimensions. He was criticized severely in the Christian Century for his claim that the civil rights movement in America is Communist inspired, and was labeled as the leader of the Church's "right wing."

Specific comment on individual leaders of Mormonism has been sparse. Catching Joseph Fielding Smith as he was traveling in Brazil ". . . where missionaries have baptized 30,000 converts," *Time* noted in 1960 that Mormonism has progressed from a "persecuted rebel sect to one of the most dynamic congregations in Christendom." Calling President Smith a "fiery doctrinarian" who has numerous books on "Mormon dogma," it said that he knew that one day he would "be prophet and would communicate directly with the Lord." President Smith's image was in the process of flux, as can be seen by *Time's* 1963 reference to him as "a stern, old-fangled moralist." The same magazine called the present prophet David O. McKay "a kindly ascetic" who has stimulated astonishing growth in the Church; yet his real strength was attributed to his great toleration for others.

A keen awareness of the Mormon welfare program is evident in the fifties. Mormons are especially respected, according to the *New York Times Magazine* in 1952 for determination to "take care of their own." A 1958 *Look* called them a "self-reliant society," distributing ready aid to any member in need, while the *Saturday Evening Post* hailed the Mormons for having no need to call on other means of relief, a practice rooted in the notion that idleness and waste are sinful.

From a cultural point of view, Mormons attract only the best of reviews, with an entertaining smattering of misconceptions. Mormon "liberalism" shocks other denominations, according to a 1952 *New York Times Magazine*, because of their indulgence in singing, dancing, music, and the theater. Tying culture with morality, *Look* observed that at the Church-sponsored institution Brigham Young University, no girl appears at a dance in an immodest gown, there are no bottles or cigarettes, no necking or rowdyism, and the dance is opened and closed with a prayer and a hymn.

Certain that Mormons are ". . . the dancingest denomination in the country," a 1959 *Time* spoke of their belief in dancing as productive of health both of body and spirit. Though other faiths may frown on them, "Mormons encourage dancing, lest the Devil find other work for them." In an obvious exaggeration, it remarked that each of the "1400 chapels holds a dance every Saturday night." Adding complimentary remarks, *Theatre Arts* in 1958 estimated that no religious group in the country is as dedicated to the theater as the Mormons.

A later year, 1962, witnessed further questionable observations on morals and dancing. The *New York Times Magazine* commented that Mormons are known for their "high moral quality," then made reference to a supposed Mormon tenet that the temple garment must continuously touch the body. Even when taking

a bath, the *Times* asserted, Mormons must be careful not to "release the old garment" until the new one is partially covering the body. Further, an erroneous method for recognizing "a good Mormon girl" was explained as overheard from a Mormon to a gentile. One should simply look for "a roll just under the top of her off-the- shoulder dress" which is no doubt "the garment pushed down an inch or so." The author apparently believed that all Mormon girls wear the garment, regardless of age or marital status. A similarly erroneous report on another issue was featured in *Time*, which reported that President McKay had relaxed the smoking rule in the Church. Converts no longer must give up smoking, ". . . although they are often assigned to jobs as Boy Scout leaders or Sunday School teachers, where the need to give good example constrains them to abandon the habit voluntarily."

Comments on Mormon missionary work became the first obvious example of the return of criticism. In 1961, a peak year in Mormon proselyting, *Time* observed that in Britain the Mormons had doubled their membership during the previous year to 40,000, with 1200 baptisms the previous month. Converts did not undergo "vigorous instruction"; rather, they needed only to declare themselves in harmony with the basic doctrines. Mormon missionaries were said to avoid doctrine in conversation and return often to such logic as "We know we can't convince you, but we'd like to ask you to make the effort to ask God about the truth of what we are saying." A year later, in an article entitled "Salesman Saints," *Time* indicated a distaste for Mormon "hard sell" proselyting techniques.

Church and state relations comprised another prominent area of criticism through the sixties. The accusation was prevalent that although church and state are not officially united, the Mormons nevertheless control Utah politics. The *Saturday Evening Post* observed in 1961 that "Utah and Mormons are still primitive in many ways," asserting that politics is controlled largely with Church influence. Making a particular reference to President McKay's endorsement of Richard Nixon in 1960, the *Post* estimated that 95 percent of all state and local officials are Mormon, with such membership being a distinct asset. A more flexible attitude was expressed by the *New York Times Magazine*, which took for granted Church control of politics in a state known to be 70 percent Mormon. It claimed that this power "is not grossly abused," as demonstrated by the election of J. Bracken Lee, a non-Mormon, as governor. A Salt Lake politician was quoted as saying, "You don't have to be a Mormon to win an election in Utah, but it helps." The *Times* qualified its stand with the assertion that non-Mormons who have been elected have "courted the Mormon vote," and listened to Mormon suggestions. *Fortune* and the *Christian Century* also noted the wide political control exercised by the Church in Utah. According to a 1966 article in *U.S. News and World Report* the Church as a whole is comprised of conservative politicians. The author cited the First Presidency's letter to the eleven Mormons in Congress protesting possible repeal of the Right-To-Work law in 1966. Ironically "the supposedly rigid conservatism is not solid" since seven of the eleven members voted for repeal of the law.

As a balance to these accusations, the *New York Review of Books* in 1967 commented perceptively on George Romney's candidacy for the Presidency, asserting that the fact that he would be considered a serious candidate indicates not the growing power of Mormonism, but its distinct assimilation in society. Neither John Kennedy's Catholicism nor Romney's Mormonism could pose any serious threat to the political life of the nation. Yet the implications are serious, the magazine noted, because it suggests religion's loss of influence in public and political affairs. Since religious questions are thought to be matters of private belief, they are considered to have no bearing on public life.

A hint of future heated criticism of Mormons for their resistance to social change is seen as early as 1958. Writing of social adaptation, *Look* observed that Mormons ". . . are clannish and well ordered," and thus have difficulty in "breaking away or non-conforming, even if they want to." This suggestion of backwardness in social change illuminates the image of Mormonism with respect to racial relations. As early as 1953 the attitude of Mormons toward Negroes was discussed in periodical literature. In a letter to the editor of *Nation*, a woman told of "flagrant race discrimination" exemplified by the Mormon-owned Hotel Utah's refusal to accommodate Negro delegates to a convention.

Time became openly hostile in 1959 by prefacing an article with the pointed assertion that most churches consider all men equal before God. However, said *Time*, there is "one notable exception–the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." In 1963 criticism grew in intensity as the Negro problem became the most heatedly and frequently discussed practice of Mormons. *Newsweek* carried an article emphasizing the Mormon practice of barring Negroes from the Priesthood. President Hugh B. Brown was quoted as saying, "The whole problem of the Negro is being considered by the leaders of the Church." However, he emphasized, "We don't want to go too fast in this matter." Obviously, Mormon Negroes were ill-advised to become elated, for "gradualism still seemed to be the main theme."

The same year, *Time* called Mormons "ideal citizens" in many ways--"wholesome, industrious, thrifty, devoted to social welfare and higher education," but distinctly "unsympathetic" toward the Negro. Referring to Mormon belief that changes come only through revelation, it claimed ". . . revelations are as hard to define

as they are to coax up on order." Though David O. McKay had been prophet since 1951, said *Time*, he has "never admitted that God spoke to him." Further, few Mormons were said to have hope that such a revelation would come to President McKay's probable successor, Joseph Fielding Smith, who has commented that "Darkies are wonderful people." *Time* concluded with a quotation from Mormon political science professor J. D. Williams, in which he said that the liberal Mormon is uneasy and hopes "that continuous revelation will provide the way out."

A review in *Nation* of John Stewart's apologistic work *Mormonism and the Negro* also accused the Church of being slow to change. Claiming that most agitation within the Church has come from people in the twenty through forty age group, it speculated the Negro policy could be reversed when the generation achieves power, because many will be embarrassed by Mormonism's "inherent racist tendencies." In a heated editorial, the *Christian Century* in 1964 labeled the policy a "devilish distortion of scripture" with "no biblical, historical, or anthropological" proof. Obviously irked at President McKay's recent prediction that no change was forthcoming, the *Century* attacked the policy as "legend invented by the white man to justify his oppression and exploitation of the Negro," and called it ironical that Mormons should allow color to be a mark of status.

A 1964 *Fortune* noted Mormonism's belief in free civil equality for all people, as Hugh B. Brown had said, anything less "defeats our high ideal of the brotherhood of man." Yet the Church was said to view the Negroes as "second-class theological citizens," which had become embarrassing to many Mormons who considered the practice the most severe moral problem facing the Church. The article continued by quoting Sterling McMurrin, a Mormon and Dean of the University of Utah Graduate School, who called the Church "a practical lot," suggesting that when Mormons become "fully committed to something, the will of God manages to become known." Closing on a bright note, *Fortune* complimented Mormons for being "vigorous, optimistic, and life-affirming" and hoped for a speedy solution to the problem.

The *Christian Century* published an article in 1965 which criticized the Church's refusal to take a stand on civil rights, claiming that when threatened with demonstrations at every mission headquarters, the leaders finally consented to hear the case of the NAACP. Though Church leaders had made firm stands on the Right-To-Work Law and Liquor-By-The-Drink, they refused to do so with respect to civil rights, insisting it was not a moral but a political issue. "Few Negroes are interested in membership on such conditions" of subordination, claimed a Congregational minister in the *Christian Century*. He cringed at the announcement that no change was imminent in the doctrine, and concluded that Mormons will continue to "resist social change."

Mormons are "committed to a certain degree of built-in segregation" because of their practice on Negroes and the Priesthood, said a 1965 *Time*; and the *Christian Century* in a 1966 editorial attacked the Negro problem with renewed vigor. "Racism is always repugnant," it declared, "but it seems especially so when clothed in religious rationalism." Further, the editors moralized, "Clearly the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a long way to go in the area of racial justice."

In a disarmingly naive article in the *New Republic* in 1967, the Book of Mormon is blamed for tea, coffee, polygamy, and predestination. Moving into value judgments, the author, in reviewing Wallace Turner's *The Mormon Establishment*, decried the Mormon "belief" in blood atonement, the Negro doctrine, and most of all, what Turner called the ". . . totalitarian concept that men, by surrendering the direction of their thinking, as well as their conduct, to some exterior authority may escape the fearful burden of moral responsibility. If God cursed the Negroes, the matter must be taken up with God; we can do nothing about it."

Turning its attention to Romney, a recent *Newsweek* described his response to a confrontation from the Salt Lake Ministerial Association, who asked if he would disclaim the Church stand on the Negro. Romney emphasized, according to *Newsweek*, that he would not touch the practice because it "would inject the Church into public affairs." He pointed to his own enviable record in civil rights, but his interrogator was not impressed. Investigating the problem further, Newsweek affirmed that Negroes cannot hold the Priesthood; nevertheless, the practice need not, according to Mormon leaders, interfere with progress in civil rights. Church officials claim 200 Negro members and yet these "have never been available for press interviews" and the Church's missionary efforts have "traditionally avoided Negro communities." NAACP leaders in Utah have sadly commented that "the Church is the state and the state is the Church."

In a recent *Time*, the problem was characterized as the "doctrine most under fire within the Church." J. D. Williams was quoted as calling it "unchristian, theologically unsound" and productive of hostility. *Time* also quoted Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, a Mormon who described himself as "deeply troubled by the issue." Romney has "refrained from calling for a change in the doctrine in deference to the authority of his Church's Elders." Many Mormon liberals are confident that continuing civil rights pressure will provoke a new revelation, just as changing social conditions led to a revelation on the abandonment of polygamy in

1890.

Finally, in reference to Mrs. Romney, the *Christian Century* in 1967 rendered another outspoken editorial, criticizing her for defending her church while admitting it is discriminatory toward Negroes. She said, "The Negro cannot attain the Priesthood, and I am sorry, but he will get it." Yet, the editors continued, President McKay declared in 1964 he will not "get it"-- "not while you and I are here." Obviously, says the writer, such a problem illustrates discrimination that imputes inferiority to Negroes: "It is ridiculous to say otherwise." The editors concluded that as a member of a church with an " . . . indefensible tenet, Mrs. Romney has a burden to carry."

A final problem seen in periodical literature is the growing schism in Mormonism on intellectual grounds. First evidence of such criticism appeared in 1963 when the *Christian Century* announced that coping with the intellectual was the "most acute" problem in Mormonism. In an interesting observation of the same year, *Nation* noted that Mormonism has been slow to change because ". . . its leadership is conservative, in part because it relies on seniority and tends to put old men into positions of power and leave them there until they die."

Commenting further on the nature of Mormon leadership, a 1965 *Christian Century* classified it into two factions--liberal and conservative. Hugh B. Brown was called "the leader of the twelve apostles' liberal faction," while Joseph Fielding Smith and Ezra Taft Benson head the conservative wing. The Negro problem was blamed for sharpening these factions, and it was predicted that many Mormon liberals and intellectuals will suffer recriminations. "Even Apostles will fall victim." Exercising speculation into Elder Benson's Mormon conference remarks, the author quoted him as saying traitors could easily emerge in the Church, and interpreted that statement as an obvious reference to only one person--Hugh B. Brown. Striking an optimistic note, the author concluded that defeat will come to the Mormon conservatives, unless the cause of social justice becomes a race conspiracy.

In a 1966 editorial, the *Christian Century* quoted Hugh B. Brown declaring all men to be equal in rights regardless of race or color and labeling racial pride a dangerous barrier to peace. Some thought this might mean change in Church doctrine, but President Brown had "voiced such sweet sounding sentiments before." The change must come by revelation and neither David O. McKay nor his "heir apparent, Joseph Fielding Smith" seemed receptive to a revelation on race. The article closed with a hope that the more liberal faction would win out--"with or without help from on high." Though not as caustic in its appraisal, a 1967 *Newsweek* painted a similar picture of the hierarchy, classifying them into the previously mentioned liberal and conservative camps, but adding a third--the moderates.

In a review of Turner's *Mormon Establishment*, the *Christian Century* in 1966 noticed that "like any conservatively oriented church only recently graduated from sect status, the Mormons face the problem of accommodating their intellectuals, who are growing in number because of an emphasis on education and travel." The reviewer agreed with Turner's assessment of intellectual fervor as the long-range problem, with the Negro situation the immediate one. The latter, however, he thought to be of crisis proportions, and needing solution as a basis for solving the former. *Time* included an article describing the establishment of a Mormon intellectual journal in a 1966 issue noting skeptically that "unquestioning belief rather than critical self-examination has always been the Mormon style." Contrasting it with "house organ" literature issued by the Church, *Time* characterized such a journal attempt as "cautious" in its approach, yet so unusual in Mormonism that one Church leader declared: "*Dialogue* can't help but hurt the Church." Nevertheless, *Dialogue's* editors were described as confident that Mormons have nothing to fear from self-appraisal. *Time* concluded by quoting *Dialogue* editor Eugene England, "A man need not relinquish his faith to be intellectually respectable, nor his intellect to be faithful."

New York Review of Books in 1967 said that Mormons' present conservatism is a "conservatism of an economic elite" rather than an intrinsic quality of Mormon doctrine, which originally promoted an "egalitarian" rather than a conservative form of social organization. Further, it accused Mormons of sacrificing those aspects of their religion that they found "demanding or difficult." Though abandoning their Utopian ideals, Mormons have managed to retain their "absurd theology," which, though fundamentalist in most respects, can now face the world with the "comforting illusion that religion is an affair of the spirit alone, having nothing to do with the rest of life."

The Church was categorized as undergoing a "testing time" by a 1967 issue of *Time*. Mormonism, it said, is being "prodded out of its old ways by a new generation of believers." Though they are loyal to the faith, they are worried about the "relevance of Mormonism" and question some of the policies of the "venerable, conservative hierarchy." A more serious complaint, perhaps, is ". . . that Mormonism is too much concerned with the perfection of its own organization, too little with the problems of the world." J. D. Williams was quoted as arguing, "It's time that the Church indicated its concern for more things than simply internal structure and processes."

Mormons have become accustomed to favorable publicity through the comfortable image projected in the fifties; it was a welcome change from an extensive background of persecution. The image reflected was one of admiration and respect. The public was pleased that Mormons had learned to adjust to the world and become thoroughly enmeshed in the social and cultural scene. It was evident through their material and business accomplishments, integrity, prominent men, and welfare plan that Mormonism offered much to recommend it. Its prophet, David O. McKay, was respected as a man of high integrity and toleration for others. Even before the end of the fifties, however, a disturbing return to criticism emerged. Throughout periodical literature critical articles attacked the missionary system and the alleged church-state relationship between Mormonism and Utah's politics. The Mormon policy on Negroes and the Priesthood, the liberal-conservative split in the hierarchy, and a seeming trend toward anti-intellectualism probably received the most attention. Mormonism was severely criticized for failure to adjust to social change and to become productively involved in the problems of the world.

Though physical persecution has not returned, the criticism of the sixties is ominous with respect to Mormonism's changing image. Perhaps Mormon history has reached full circle as new evidence is produced to reflect an alienation of society from Mormon practice. Obviously, such a development is a prime example of the conflict that can arise through the interaction of religion and its environment; as a sociological problem, its implications present impetus for serious study.

One prominent idea can be inferred from these articles: reasons for past persecution of Mormonism are in some ways closely allied with reasons for current criticism. They are both at least partially rooted in the accusation that Mormons have tended to withdraw from society. Certainly in the Missouri period of Church history hatred of Mormons was greatly agitated by Mormon refusal to actively participate in the customs of the community. In Jackson County, for instance, Mormons refrained from the traditional Sunday marketing activity, a time Missourians used to display and sell goods and associate with each other. Mormons were thought to be arrogant for avoiding this economic and social contact, and for providing their own economic sustenance. Obviously, desire to correctly observe the Sabbath partially motivated Mormons in abstaining from participation, but they took genuine pride in keeping to themselves in these matters; and thus the cogency of the charge of withdrawal from society can readily be seen.

Over the years, however, we as Mormons have modified our ideas on society and self-sufficiency. Since the abandonment of polygamy, we have been largely assimilated into the social and cultural scene and have, from a sociological standpoint, accommodated to society. This, understandably, has even been a chief objection of many apostate groups, who have left Mormonism on grounds that it has adjusted too much to society, and has forsaken spiritual values for secular ones. But while accommodation has disturbed some Mormons, it undoubtedly has pleased many outsiders, as evidenced by the height of favorable publicity accorded the Church in the 1950's. Actually, the praise of these years bothered a good many Mormons because of their conviction that the continuing presence of criticism is a corresponding sign of the validity of Mormon principles. As a result, a dangerous immunity to criticism has developed within the Church, creating complacency in religious matters. Missionaries still enjoy telling experiences gained in foreign lands where they were thrown out of doors, sprayed with hoses, or threatened with clubs. Such experiences have long been a sign of excellence within Mormon circles, and persecution itself the hallmark of progress. We are, after all, a "peculiar people," and enjoy emphasizing it. We are continually instructed in Priesthood quorums and Sunday School classes to be forthright and outspoken about that peculiarity, to admit readily our membership in the Church and adherence to its beliefs when seeking employment, serving in the armed forces, or while otherwise participating in "the world." Thus, the Mormon concept that we should thrive on being "different," and its attendant criticism, has always been strong.

I would submit that this kind of feeling is dangerous, because it tends to subordinate reason and morality to tradition. Many Mormons today undoubtedly would easily ignore criticism on such charges as being concerned with wealth or too little concerned with racial intolerance, because they believe that the world and the Church are at separate poles. In their view, there should be no connection between religious and secular matters. On the other hand, it would seem reasonable to believe that consistent criticism is at least partially sincere, and perhaps indicative of genuine weaknesses in our approach. We could profit from sufficient introspection to decide if the impressions are accurate enough to warrant change. Such analysis could even improve our approach to living within the context of Mormonism. It would seem that we are so hardened to the presence of critical comment that we fail to take into account the positive nature of it. Yet in other aspects of life we take pains to respond to constructive criticism, for we realize that it is the very basis of success, especially vocationally. Even though the Church is operated in large measure through the human element, it is too often considered exempt from such criticism.

In other words, this approach provokes the question, Can we afford to live in a vacuum? Can we afford to ignore criticisms, no matter how unfounded they may be? Naturally, in the articles cited in this study there are many comments and impressions that are completely erroneous. But there are also many probing accounts productive of genuine insight into Mormonism and some of its current problems. For instance, if the missionary system is being attacked by an outsider, should this not tell us that some thoughtful changes might aid proselyting success? If we are being attacked for impropriety and inconsistency for dabbling as a religion in power politics, could we improve our effectiveness with people by analyzing such involvement and altering it if it is inappropriate? If the world is viewing us as a people completely oblivious to the racial crisis confronting the nation, would we not do well to reconsider our attitudes and actions--and our complacency? If we are thought to be anti-intellectual, would it not re-vitalize our religion to examine the charge and try to achieve a more even balance? These are questions of significance to Mormonism. The answers measure how successful Mormonism is becoming in coping with change. To be relevant to modern society and thus attractive and challenging to the people it can help, Mormonism must creatively deal with the problems of the world-- not through the imposition of authoritative power but through teaching, calling to repentance, and exemplary serving.

Throughout the history of the Church, the Second Coming of Christ has been feared imminent. Particularly in early days, Mormons were sure they had only a short time before the millennium overtook them, and so their lives were geared to that eventuality. But as the years have advanced, such a notion has been pushed into the background with the explanation that an exact time is simply not known. Perhaps this belief could be partly to blame for withdrawal by early Church members in the Missouri years. Recent evidence implies the return of preparations for the end; concern is mounting in the Church for the importance of food storage, living one's own life well, and preparing for a return to Missouri. Such emphasis would seem a convenient excuse for Mormons to avoid the problems of the day as they retreat into their own world. Retreat in the face of serious challenge is at variance with Christ's belief in the ultimate value of all men, and his concern for their salvation and development.

A second problem that should be considered is the *cause* of such shifting emphasis in the Mormon image. There are undoubtedly multiple causes involved, making it difficult to accurately assess their significance. The continuing growth and wealth of Mormonism itself would naturally breed conflict, for religions have never been considered the proper fountainhead of wealth in America. For a church to be highly involved in business enterprise seems to many Americans contradictory to basic Christian ethics. It is not difficult to conclude that the more wealth the Church acquires, the more adverse criticism may become. Similarly, attacks on Church and state relations are obviously based in the American belief that religion has no rightful place in power politics. Therefore, Mormonism projects an un-American image by its seeming influence as a power structure in Utah's politics. But these areas are some that have been consistently discussed through the years, and therefore they do not reach the heart of the matter.

A minor reason for renewed criticism could conceivably be jealousy toward Mormonism's steady growth and success. This is certainly manifest by religious writers, such as those appearing in the obviously biased *Christian Century*. But these writers also judge Mormons on the supposition that their religious ethics do not agree with the standard ones of the day. Ministers writing in a religiously oriented periodical have occasionally allowed a self righteous prejudice to show through in their analysis of Mormon success. But since these instances are rare, they suggest only minor influence. Another factor is the development of a press more openly critical than at any time since the Progressive Era in America, when muckraking articles made social criticism fashionable. Obviously, editorials and interpretive articles today are slanted through both individual and group biases. They are also strongly analytical, perhaps as a direct result of changing times and of internal dissensions in the country.

However, the obvious precipitating factor of the return of criticism is the increasing public awareness of "the Negro problem." Mormons have lived with the policy denying Negroes the Priesthood for some time without receiving serious criticism, first because it was not generally known or understood, and second, because racial unrest in the country had not been severe. With the racial crisis rising to prominence as the nation's most imposing internal threat, it is to be expected that public attention would focus on the Mormon attitude toward race. A Christian religion seeming to ignore the great moral issue of the day, both by sanctioning prejudice in doctrinal form internally, and by refusal to take a civil rights stand, is often judged unfit to claim the Christian name; in short, such a religion is said to be hypocritical. Clearly, race is the dominant clue in understanding mounting criticism toward Mormons. In most of the critical articles considered, some mention was made of the problem; and in the great majority of those appearing in the 1960's, it took pre-eminence.

It would seem safe to assume that the race problem has generated criticism on all fronts. Writers who would normally have given Mormons a healthy evaluation began to question other facets of the religion with

the backdrop of race always in prominent view. As a result, the Church hierarchy was criticized where it was formerly praised; the Church was judged backward and anti-intellectual, because it would not adopt reason and reconsider its stand on basic moral issues. In short, Mormonism as a whole has become questionable to these writers, through a chain reaction caused by disenchantment in connection with the race issue. It is only logical that one disturbing flaw would inspire a second look at the entire system. These writers seem to be saying that if the Church is so badly at fault on this important moral issue, how can it be trusted in other areas of religious importance?

In addition to civil rights, the candidacy of Governor George Romney for the Presidency no doubt had an important effect. Many articles were devoted completely to an analysis of Romney the man and candidate, with inescapable reference to his religious views. Perhaps Romney's disappearance from the national political scene will have a noticeable effect on future appraisal of Mormons, since as a candidate with a supposedly progressive view on civil rights, his image inevitably involved the dilemma of the race problem. Obviously, criticism was generated mostly from the combination of his candidacy and racial unrest in the country.

It is not the object of this paper to measure the degree of sincerity of the writers involved in assessing Mormonism. Such an evaluation would be possible only through in-depth interviews with individual writers and studies of their backgrounds to determine biases. Nevertheless, it must be assumed that such biases do exist and do play an essential role in their evaluations. As a result, some articles would perhaps have political motivation at the base of their conclusions. All of the periodicals must be digested in light of their format and biases. *Time* and *Newsweek*, for instance, are famous for their terse and frank observations on all matters of current interest, while the *Christian Century* must be read with special regard to the particularly subjective religious viewpoint it represents. And the *New York Review of Books* perpetually projects a highly critical point of view in all subject areas.

A study of these opinions on Mormons nevertheless has genuine significance. First of all, criticism can be considered ominous when it casts aspersions on the credibility, relevance, or effective challenge of our religion to modern day life. If such indictments be valid, they are well worth serious study, for any organization, religious or otherwise, can become dangerously steeped in tradition. Hopefully, most Mormons value their religion because it gives added direction to life not found elsewhere. In other words, Mormonism is a practical religion, loved and honored because of its seeming relevance to life. On these grounds, it is our responsibility, whether we be in leadership or lay positions, to carefully consider others' opinions. While revelation must be accepted as the foundation of our faith, it nevertheless functions through practical application. A quick perusal of the Doctrine and Covenants will disclose to the unconvinced reader that Joseph Smith received all of his revelations through response to an expressed need. The Lord has waited for His people and His prophet to evaluate their problems and even arrive at a proposed decision before providing divine sanction. Perhaps understanding these problems as observed and analyzed even by others can impel us to better follow those familiar channels.

If Mormonism is relevant to modern living, we should make it known to the public in a convincing manner. Obviously, our shedding of polygamy indicates our ability to change. Such changes may be wholly evident in other areas today, if we would but be self-effacing enough to objectively and analytically examine our religion. I would submit that the religion we honor should be just as subject to critical evaluation as any facet of our personalities or vocations. When taken seriously and in a context of love and faith, criticism can bring nothing but improvement and hope. Perhaps it is time for more Mormons to step out of seclusion and become actively engaged in the ever- increasing problems of the world by using practical religion and the continued relevancy of Mormonism to bring enduring solutions.