

THE PRINCIPLES OF MASS MOVEMENTS

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How to combat the idea that a cult was started by God

Whether you are young or old, if you have never seen a mass movement, you just witnessed one. The recent victory of Barack Obama as President Elect certainly triggered my choice for this month's subject.

And no, this will not be about Obama or politics, nor am I saying whether he was my choice. Nevertheless, our country has never seen such a generation of excitement like this in a long time. In awe, I watched the huge numbers of people shouting, waving flags, and exhibiting their desperate need for change and a hope to return to America's original ideals. In the eyes of the people, Obama's unique presence and talent to express idealistic principles illustrated the kind of man it takes to start a distinctive and successful movement.

Below, you will discover an interesting comparison as to why his campaign was so successful to that of the principles of all mass movements—in particular, stage 4, the appearance of a visionary, aptly named, "The Man of Words." Since all later, progressive stages of a mass movement, which often take years to develop, are also included, whether there will prove to be any similarities in them to our own nation down the line, remains to be seen.

What I am presenting focuses solely on the Mormon Church, In particular, explains the rise of Joseph Smith's movement and why the Mormon Church continues to be successful. Please note that what is presented is not meant to infer that there is any comparison between Barack Obama and Joseph Smith other than the principles involved for a new leader to be successful.

Below is Chapter 6 from my book, "*Out of the Cults and Into the Church.*" for those who have already read it, it may prove to be an interesting re-read.

Written in the form of a novel, it contains dialogue between myself and four other characters. They are:

Elizabeth: Former Moonie (Unification Church)
Richard Former Hare Krishna (ISKON)
Judy Former Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)
Myra Former Mormon

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How to combat the idea that a cult was started by God

Myra stared at me with a kind of *I dare you* look. "The Mormon Church's continued success," she emphatically stated, "proves it was started by God, or else it would have died out!" Her declaration was a jolt that took me off guard.

It was Saturday afternoon and I was rushing through the mall, anxious to make another appointment. Hurrying through the food pavilion, I tried to ignore the aroma of freshly baked cinnamon rolls and the appeal of Asian delicacies, but my steps faltered in front of the pizzeria-- I decided I had time.

As I was taking in the wedge-shaped slices with their rounds of pepperoni, chopped olives, and melted cheese, someone tapped me on the shoulder.

"Oh, hi Myra," I smiled, turning around. "Looks like we have the same weakness, huh?"

Myra nodded with a feeble smile. "I tried to call you."

"Well," I said, ignoring my inclination to ask her what was wrong, "we might as well get something to eat and sit down." I rummaged through my purse for my wallet. "My treat, but I have to warn you, I'm in a hurry."

After paying for our pizzas, we headed for one of the small tables beneath the glass domed rotunda. It was then she lowered the boom.

"Well?" Myra asked. Do you have an answer for the Mormon Church's success? Can you explain why, if it's false, it hasn't died out?"

I sighed. I had almost forgotten how a former Mormon could be gung ho for Christ one minute, and then besieged with doubts the next.

"Oh Myra," I instinctively said, "I thought you were doing so well." It was the wrong thing to say. I should have known her question wasn't so much a challenge, as a plea.

Myra bristled. "Well, the book of Daniel says the stone of God's Kingdom would roll on and consume everything else until it filled the whole earth. Well, the stone sure didn't roll on during the dark ages when Christianity fizzled out. I haven't found a Christian yet who can reconcile that with the Mormon Church's membership of over thirteen million!"(1)

I knew where she got her argument. Similar to other cults, the Mormon Church had purposely created a myth that its continued success proves a divine origin. So well grounded is this belief, that it naggingly and persistently clings to the back of an ex-cultist's mind causing serious reservations about staying in Christianity.

Christians, trying to refute this claim, often say, "Your cult is successful because it's satanic--and Satan has great power." But, it isn't a convincing answer. I had to come up with something better. I needed to offer Myra an alternative to viewing her former church's longevity and success.

"I think we need something to drink," I quickly suggested. Seven Up?" Myra nodded.

As I weaved around potted palms and back toward the concession stands, I used the time to gather my thoughts. When I returned, she had mellowed somewhat.

"Of course," Myra began, "this doesn't mean I'm giving up on Christianity or losing my faith. I just, uh, need some answers, you know."

"Well, rest assured," I said, setting our drinks on the table, "there is an answer--one that will completely dismiss this erroneous idea. But, it's somewhat complex and takes more time than we've got here, especially in this noisy mall. However, let me say this.

"The claim of divine origin has nothing to do with a cult's success. There is one predominant reason for a cult's longevity. Now, admittedly there are other contributing factors, such as offering salvation by works rather than facing one's sinful condition, but I'm talking about a reason most are unfamiliar with.

A cult's success, rather than being attributable to God's presence, is due to certain key

principles which, if a cult follows, will automatically make it prosper."

"But what are they?" Myra questioned anxiously.

"Tell you what. I have an appointment, so I'll give them to you at our next meeting. If you're concerned about this, maybe the others are too. In the meantime, go to the library and get Eric Hoffer's *True Believer* and read it. It's a small book. It'll prepare you for what I'm going to cover." I was relieved at her eagerness.

"I've got to go now," I said, looking at my watch. I gave her a pat on the back and flashed her a reassuring smile.

Dumping my food wrappers into a nearby refuse container, I headed for the exit. My mind was moving fast. I had lifted her depression, roused her interest, and now I had the chore of preparing material to answer one of the most crucial questions a former cultist can ask: *How can I explain my cult's apparent success, if it isn't of divine origin?*

The next day I poured over my books, including old notes taken from Hoffer's book. Finally, I was ready.

As Myra came through the door that evening, she informed me she was half way through Hoffer's book, and Melanie was on the waiting list. Richard, Judy, and Elizabeth, also showed interest.

"I'm anxious to hear about this," Judy began, "because Myra's question puzzles me too. I haven't met a Christian yet who can give a satisfactory answer. But," she grinned, "I rather suspect you've got one, judging from the pile of stuff you have on the table!"

"You're right," I said. "What I hope to give all of you is another way of viewing your cult's longevity and success.

But first, I'd like to explain how I happened across Hoffer's book. I was browsing in a library, shortly after I left the Mormon Church, at the time I was struggling with this very same question--so, his book was a godsend.

"However, I have to warn you, that while Hoffer has valuable insights on explaining what generates a mass movement and why an organization continues to survive, I don't go along with his philosophical stance."

"Which is?" Judy asked.

"He doesn't state any. Rather, he has a very cold, Machiavellian, detachment in his analysis of mass movements--also the people who compose them. He portrays political expediency above morality and ascribes no divine inspiration to the success of Christianity. He views its success no differently than the success of any other organization. However, he appears to have purposely done this. In his own words, he admits his book 'passes no judgments, and expresses no preferences. It merely tries to explain.'⁽²⁾ Perhaps he, as a new writer, thought his book would have more appeal by not expressing a personal opinion.

"But," I concluded, "he offers some good insights by describing the principles which are common to all movements. And, when I compared the history of the Mormon Church to what he was espousing, I couldn't help but marvel at the way it applied. It, at least, offered a plausible answer for a cult's success.

"For Myra's sake, I'm going to use the Mormon Church as a model, but I'm sure Richard and Elizabeth will benefit from it too.

"Another reason for using the Mormon Church," I added, "is that no other American cult has grown as fast--it's the best example of a cult extending beyond the first and second generation. I'm more familiar with Mormonism, and it would become too burdensome if I tried to cover the Hare Krishnas and Unification church. But since the principles apply to any cult movement, by the time we finish, all of you will see that the claim of divine origin has absolutely nothing to do with a cult's prosperity."

We settled into the front room and I began my presentation:

"Although there are many facets to what Hoffer presents, I am only choosing certain highlights which I believe apply to this subject.

"His main thrust is that whether a movement is political, revolutionary, nationalistic or religious, its success is inevitable as long as it applies certain principles in each of the predictable stages it will encounter. Since cults are movements, this applies to them as well."

"According to Hoffer, there are always special conditions that must precede each stage in order to make people receptive to a movement." Reaching for my chart that illustrated stages 1 and 2, I placed it on the easel. "If these two stages come into existence," I said, "the rise of a movement is inevitable:

Stage 1: *Lethargy, boredom, unrest, or a critical situation* from which people need to be delivered. They will have a strong desire for change.(3)

Stage 2: *A Need to find meaning, purpose, and hope through change.* If the need is because of lethargy, boredom, or unrest, then purpose and meaning will be achieved through finding a holy cause. If because of an existing crisis or dissatisfaction, they seek it through deliverance (which may be a new religion), or some one or thing which offers hope for change.

Judy interrupted. "I think we're all more interested in religious movements. Can you give us an example of one in history that was started by these preconditions?"

Before I could speak, Richard jumped right in. "Sure, the Exodus!"

"Right on, Richard," I said, pleased. "And, do you know the reason the Hebrews were willing to follow Moses? Although in this case it wasn't boredom, but dissatisfaction, he offered hope for change in the midst of their critical situation. And God allowed the critical situation to escalate for his own purpose. If they had been living peaceably in Egypt, had not been in bondage and not in need of a deliverer, nothing could have made them leave for some promised land. Hope for change, was the drawing card that made it possible for Moses to unite a bickering, disruptive, backbiting group, into a successful movement.

"The same thing precipitated the early Christian movement. The Jews, at the time of Jesus, were also in crisis. They had been without a major prophet for four hundred years and Roman law was unbearable. This made the hope for a deliverer uppermost in their minds. They were ripe for a movement led by a long awaited Messiah. If they had not been in crisis, there would have been no inclination to follow Jesus. They were, as Eric Hoffer states, hungry for a 'Man of Words' who would deliver them out of their situation. Once again, Hoffer to the contrary, God had his hand in that.

"Now, at the time of Joseph Smith, in 1823-1830, if anyone wondered about the future of his new group, one only needed to examine the prevailing conditions, and would have known it would take hold. Just before Smith's movement started, a critical situation existed resulting from

a mixture of many factors that demanded change--a change that people felt was crucial."

Judy interrupted. "But, what caused this condition?"

"The inevitable aftermath," I said, "from the previous movement--America's 1734-1810 Great Awakening, which produced revival under such great men as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield.

"But as with all revivals, excitement eventually wanes and a period of boredom, dissatisfaction, crisis, or a host of other needs follow which cry out for change. This is evident, because by 1780 the climate reverted back to how it was before 1734. This was also evident after 1843, when the second coming didn't take place as William Miller and the other Millennialists predicted. Because of this over-blown expectation, disappointment and dissatisfaction set in, which contributed to their susceptibility to the world-wide 1858 world-wide revival which occurred later.

"In Smith's time, there were periodic revivals here and there into the early 1800s, which was considered the beginning of the second Great Awakening. But a significant part of that awakening occurred around 1830. It began in Boston and New York, extending to the borders of Texas. Later, that territory was called the 'burned-over district' because so many revivals had swept through.

"But like other post-revivalist periods, it found the people tired of the individualism they had reaped. They became spiritually insecure, dissatisfied with the status quo,(4) and found themselves discontented with the cold formalism of the churches. The latter, however, is usually an inevitable product of any religious movement. Hoffer mentions it, also Bernard A. Weisberger in his study of the American revivalists, *They Gathered at the River*. Weisberger states, 'What is conceived in ecstasy must be reduced to form, doctrine, ritual and organization in order to perpetuate itself.'(5) We'll see this principle proves itself in the Mormon movement as well.

"The people, restless, and hungry for truth and a personal experience,(6) were also upset over the inroads of modern thought and the new sciences--especially the Industrial Revolution which challenged their farming habits and shattered their Garden of Eden image of the country. They needed some kind of movement that would maintain the already prevalent concept of America as the home for the new Zion.

"As true in human nature, when people become discontented, they always look for causes outside themselves to solve their problems. In this instance, they felt that to find new purpose and meaning, they needed to align themselves with some holy cause. And, as with all holy causes, a leader is essential. They needed someone, preferably with an authoritarian voice from heaven, to pull it all together for them.

"Everything considered, it was, as Hoffer points out, a critical situation from which they needed to be delivered. And, since dissatisfaction always promotes expectation, these two elements made them ripe for a new religious movement that promised a coming kingdom.(7)

"After joining a movement, people acquire something very important--a new identity. This is no more evident than when new converts are asked to identify themselves. Rather than giving their first and last name as is customary, they give the name of their affiliation: *I'm a Baptist!* or *I'm a Lutheran!* It's no different in cults: *I'm a Mormon!* *I'm a Hare Krishna!* Secondly, they acquire an enduring strength."

"What do you mean?" Elizabeth questioned.

"When a new identity is established, prestige is gained. With prestige comes a power that

gives almost supernatural strength to the spirit and soul. This strength can best be illustrated by World War II concentration camps.

"Those in the camps who proved the strongest and more able to bear deprivations, were those who identified themselves as members of a party such as the Communists, priests and ministers of a church, or members of some 'close-knit national group'. Those who were individualists, 'caved in'."(8)

"There are strong psychological needs filled when people belong to a movement: identity, strength, power, purpose and meaning. And it's my opinion that because a cult fills so many of these needs, that what established Christians often consider a cult's satanic hold on an ex-cultist, may actually be the cultist's psychological hold on the cult. The cult member doesn't want to give all that up.

"Now I'm going to give you the principles which the Mormon movement specifically complied with in order to successfully perpetuate and maintain itself.

"The Mormon Church claims, as do other cults, to have been divinely initiated. But remember Stage 1--a movement arises, not always because God initiates it but because there is a culture crisis of some sort where the people look for a change.

"Myra, since you have the book, why don't you read page 103 where Hoffer explains this." Myra quickly flipped through her book. Clearing her voice, she began:

"The leader cannot create the conditions which make the rise of a movement possible. He cannot conjure a movement out of the void. There has to be an eagerness to follow and obey, and an intense dissatisfaction with things as they are, before movement and leader can make their appearance. When conditions are not ripe, the potential leader, no matter how gifted, and his holy cause, no matter how potent, remain without a following." (9)

"Well then," Myra exclaimed, "That means Joseph Smith's movement wasn't successful because God sent an angel with gold plates or because Jesus supposedly appeared to him. It was because the critical situation of 19th century America called for a religious movement like Mormonism!"

"Right. And if the conditions don't exist, neither the movement or its leader have any power to sway people to join. But, in this instance, the conditions were there and it led to Stage 3:

Revival: A restoration of vigor and activity that relieves the crisis situation, by offering hope for change.

"But," I said, "even if conditions are right and revival is inevitable, revival cannot be sustained without Hoffer's 'Man of Words' in Stage 4:

Man of Words arises: Can be a revolutionary leader; fanatic or visionary. Gives people what they are hungry for. He does not reform, but presents something new.

"Of course, Joseph Smith wasn't the only Man of Words to arise at that time. Do you recall the popular preachers of that period?"

"Yep!" Richard quickly responded. "I remember my history teacher emphasizing the flapping robes of William Miller and his promise of an 1843 millennial reign. . . and Daniel Nash whose voice carried half-a-mile and 'could pray a horse from one pasture into the next.'"(10)

"And," Judy added, "Charles Grandison Finney with his whirling arms and majestic stares."

"You're both right. In addition, there was Lyman Beecher and many others. Revival was going on, which soon led to stage 5:

People follow. Joining, they have a preoccupation with unity, self-sacrifice, and a need to identify with something great or eternal--something bigger than themselves.

"They were eager for something--anything--that would unify them and to which they could commit themselves. By embracing what they saw as a holy cause, they found a strengthened life full of purpose and meaning.(11)

Judy interrupted. "It sounds like what you're saying is that the doctrines these 'Men of Words' taught made no difference. Any new concept would have turned the people on."

"Well, yes and no. When people are hungry, it's their concerns they're mainly preoccupied with. But on the other hand, what a Man of Words proclaims has to reflect the people's needs. Hoffer says, as true with all gifted propagandists, that the Man of Words 'brings to a boil ideas and passions already simmering in the minds of his hearers.'(12) "Joseph Smith knew exactly how to appeal to the people. For example, there was an idea already prevalent about America having a 'manifest destiny'. This greatly influenced Smith's doctrines. In addition, nineteenth century America already held an Adamic nostalgia with a concept of America as Paradise, the home for the new Jerusalem. These concepts were also reflected in Smith's teachings.

"He also said Christ's coming was near, and they were to prepare America for its change to its paradisiacal condition. He claimed that Jackson County, Missouri, the new Zion, was the original Garden of Eden before the continental drift, and would be Christ's headquarters. Meanwhile, other preachers were claiming it was Maryland and Georgia. He said those joining his movement would be a chosen people with a promised membership in a ruling elite where they would change the future of the world. Who wouldn't want to be part of that?"

"Smith also taught a work ethic borrowed from Jonathan Edwards, 'collaboration with God' in a gospel that would fill the whole earth. All of this naturally called for feelings of the most dedicated sacrifice and commitment."

"Modern day Mormons today," Judy interrupted, "would be offended if someone said that the beliefs of early American culture had a decisive effect in producing Mormon doctrine. They believe Joseph Smith's revelations came straight from God, having nothing to do with the historical climate. This is certainly proving interesting."

"Any rising mass movement that is to succeed," I continued, "must offer a close knit organization. This is because people have a passion to 'belong.' In addition, they must also be able to integrate all kinds of converts. In this respect, the Mormon movement appealed to people of many denominational backgrounds.

"To Catholics it offered a hierarchy with an authoritarian head who claimed the power of revelation. To Methodists, it offered their own hymns and a system of Bishops. And to Millennialists and Campbellites it offered a new dispensation.(13)

"In addition, if people were wondering which movement to align themselves with, Smith's amazing pronouncements of angels and contact with heaven, confirmed people's unconscious desire of thinking their situation could be solved if only God Himself would speak from heaven. As Mormon Historian Thomas O'Dea states, it was 'nothing short of a reopening of the heavens to Americans'.(14)

"You'd think," interjected Melanie, "that he would have turned people off talking about polygamy."

"Smith didn't preach his bizarre beliefs in the beginning," I replied. "Like all fanatical leaders, doctrines like this come later after the adulation of members is secured.

"But even in the face of strange doctrines, there is an essential ingredient which makes members bond."

"Stage 6 . . . the presence of a devil!" Myra quickly chimed in. "I'm reading the book," she whispered to the rest.

"Right," I smiled, pleased with her enthusiasm. This stage plays a crucial role:

Necessity for a devil, opposition, or enemy: Dedication and commitment always thrive best when opposition exists. The leader, therefore, establishes who the enemy is. Opposition acts as a strong uniting factor, promoting a sense of cause.

"Mass movements can rise and spread without belief in a God,' I said, quoting Hoffer, 'but never without belief in a devil.'(15) This is because, 'the strength of a mass movement is proportionate to the vividness and tangibility of its devil.'(16)

"Even when Hitler was asked whether he thought the Jew must be destroyed, he answered: 'No . . . we should have then to invent him.'" Hitler further explained that 'it is essential to have a tangible enemy, not merely an abstract one'.(17)

"For Mormons," I continued, "the result of having an enemy was unification, cohesion, perseverance, toughness, vitality--and it magnified their cause. Although Mormons try to prove they had an enemy because of the axiom, 'Persecution always follows the righteous', this isn't why persecution came to them. It came because they established an enemy.(18)

"And they had an enemy, because new movements usually teach concepts contrary to traditional norms. As time went on, Mormonism's unique doctrines of polygamy, politics, extra-biblical revelation, and members flaunting their elitence as God's favorites, was reason enough to make non-Mormons the enemy. Persecution strengthens and a good leader knows how to keep this going. Mormon converts bonded together even more closely and were willing to die for their new beliefs, as evidenced in Stage 7.

Dedication of followers: Full commitment to one's cause.

"But even though a movement, up to this point, has all these necessary ingredients, it reaches a stage when the Man of Words has to be replaced.

"This was the case with Smith. Like other Men of Words, he lacked certain attributes to keep the movement going. He could only carry it so far. The movement's continued success would have to depend upon someone else.

"The Man of Action," Myra said.

"Brigham Young!" Judy responded.

"Yes, Stage 8:

Man of Action arises: A necessary change if the movement is to survive. He is a man of practicality and law, and replaces the Man of Words.(19)

"As Moses was succeeded by Joshua, and Peter was followed by Paul, Joseph Smith was replaced by Brigham Young. I'm not comparing them as spiritual equals, just describing the process.

"Without these Men of Action, movements would probably die. Whether Smith had been murdered or not, Brigham Young, man of practicality and law, was necessary to carry the group to its successful colonization of the west.

"But gradually, after they arrived in the western basin, like other movements, the principles that originally stimulated them began to diminish--excitement was dying. Brigham, realizing the newness was wearing off and that he could no longer depend upon members' enthusiasm to keep things going, knew he had to do something--and fast. He tried various tactics which led into the next two stages:

Institutionalism and hierarchy. The Movement changes from being free and charismatic, to a legalistic church. (Stage 9)

Blind obedience and coercion. Force is now necessary to maintain the movement's membership. (Stage 10.)

"Mormonism, like early Christianity, entered its institutionalized period and went into bondage under authoritarian dictatorship. Brigham established a legalistic process whereby leaders and members became more subject to him. He depended less and less upon the faith of the members, and more and more upon force and coercion. 'Duty was to be prized above devotion'.(20) 'The genuine Man of Action,'" Hoffer says, "'is not a man of faith, but a man of law'(21) who must wield a sharp sword.(22)

"With institutionalism, blind obedience and combining of church and state, came fixed boundaries, rigid duties, strict dress standards, legalism, and a squelching of the movement's spirit. There was also a change from a democratic system of voting for leaders, to a new system subtly designed to give authorities more power. And, as typical Man of Action, Brigham saw to it that his new system was accomplished through fear tactics.

"Much like the Inquisition the Avenging Angels, also called Danites, was organized. It was a group to which the execution of "Blood Atonement" was delegated. In addition to chasing non-Mormons out of the territory with threats of murder, they kept members fearful of leaving. Mormons who dared oppose the leadership or committed sins such as violating their temple covenants, were potential Blood Atonement victims. Brigham may have been a tyrant; but, without his efforts as Man of Action, Mormonism would not have survived. That stage brought on:

The Dark age. The church loses its creativity and freedom, and becomes stagnant. Fear reigns. (Stage 11)

"One would think the church would fold, but fortunately for most movements, this stage is always followed by a period of rebirth:

Renaissance. Liberation and creativeness. A major change bringing renewal. Legalism, discipline and blind obedience relax. (Stage 12)

"Often a renaissance occurs because, as Hoffer notes, 'an active movement cripples or stifles the creative spirit.'(23) After the movement ceases its active phase and becomes an institution, there is a 'craving to fill the void left by the lost or deserted holy cause.' Therefore, a 'creative impulse' arises.(24) Like the Christian Renaissance, Mormonism's renewal occurred in the cultural explosion of 1967. The Mormon Arts Festival was inaugurated, creating "an image of vitality, sensitivity and vigor."(25) Their youth began to excel and achieve 'national and international stature in the dance, the theater, music and the graphic arts, painting, the plastic arts and the literary arts.'(26) In addition, higher education was stressed, and members were happy. The Church was quite proud of what was taking place and soon acquired a new goal--

world acceptance. They expanded their fine arts and concentrated on making contact with leaders of both governments and traditional churches.

"As the hierarchy relaxed its grip, free thinking began to expand. This was no more evident than in two magazines to which Mormon scholars contributed: *Dialogue: a Journal of Mormon Thought*, and *Brigham Young University Studies*.

"Although these magazines gave the cult a new intellectual image their historians, who were in love with historical integrity, began to expose discrepancies. Not with the vigor of anti-Mormon exposes', but from an intellectual angle. Not only did the new wave cause members to think for themselves, but these scholarly articles provoked mass inquiry into the church's history and theology. The Church's divine claims were being questioned and many were beginning to see holes in what had previously been presented to them as facts.

"Members began to suspect a cover up in the church's sacred stories--especially after Utah University Professors began to uncover and print suppressed documents from the Church's archives.(27) This was like opening Pandora's box. Members began to ponder over what Mormon historian Thomas O'Dea describes as "the mythology and the stupidities" of Mormonism.(28)

"Historical expose's alone, however, were not responsible for planting the seeds of apostasy. It was because the church was growing weak--it was no longer exerting strong, authoritarian, control.

"True to Hoffer's analysis that says a movement will always be successful while it exerts strong control but will lose members when it becomes weak, apostasies increased. When members of a cult leave, it is not because they want to be free of control, but because they are discontented with the weaknesses. When an ex-cultist longs to return, it's usually for the controlled life.

"Leaders, realizing they needed the kind of influence they had in earlier years, saw the importance of reviving an old principle to guarantee its survival:

Reinstitution of blind obedience. (Stage 13)

"In this stage, leaders planned a careful campaign. Through speeches, sermons and official publications, they began to emphasize faith over reason. They adamantly opposed Mormon scholars' assertion that 'truth is determined through the intellect and supported by empirical data'. Instead, they declared that 'reason' and its proofs were valid only if it confirmed the claims of Mormon revelation. 'The major qualification for the historian of Mormonism . . . [was] conviction, not competence.'(29) Free thinking scholars, threatened with ex-communication, were pressured to withdraw research papers--they quietly obeyed. Authors, who uncovered damaging facts about the early church were banned from speaking at church meetings. The administration at Brigham Young University was 'forbidden to publish in any independent LDS journal or speak at meetings of Mormon intellectuals'.(30) They began to comply.

"But, the damaging evidence had already been published. To thwart this, leaders began making the following statements to the membership:

Our individual, personal testimonies are based on the witness of the Spirit, not on any combination or accumulation of historical facts. If we are so grounded, no alteration of historical facts can shake our testimonies.(31)

"Members on the brink who wanted their doubts eliminated, jumped on the new bandwagon. Reconciling the dissonance of 'fact versus faith', they said to themselves: *These historical 'facts' which are causing my friends to apostatize are somehow not facts at all but, rather, a clever*

plot of Satan to lead me away from the truth. God is more pleased with blind faith and a testimony that is not swayed by contradictions.

"The campaign was effective. Things settled down and the Mormon movement began to prosper again. But the scholars' intellectual integrity wouldn't let the matter rest. Once more they rose up and in the wake members began questioning again. Church control had to become stronger.

"In 1993, according to the *Salt Lake Tribune*,⁽³²⁾ a major purge believed headed by Apostle Boyd K. Packer (nicknamed 'Darth Packer')⁽³³⁾ began to acquire information against these dissidents in a "clandestine manner".⁽³⁴⁾ *The Strengthening the Members Committee*, which some members call the church's intelligence agency, were suspected of acquiring "monitored speeches, writings and activities of those suspected of apostasy"⁽³⁵⁾ and passing them on to high church officials.

"Every effort was made to "cover-up" the fact that it was being directed from the "highest levels of the church."⁽³⁶⁾ This led to the actual excommunication of some, including lay members who asked too many questions or stated facts dangerous to the faith of other members. It was a warning to members."

Melanie interrupted. "In view of all this, do you think the Mormon Church will ever die out?"

"No," I replied. "I believe it will continue to survive, not because it had a divine origin or because God is necessarily sustaining it, but because it has and will continue to exert strong control, promote fear in its membership--in other words, utilize all the necessary principles and strategies to successfully get through each stage it encounters. A movement will prosper without God, if they:

- * follow the necessary principles as established in the stages of all successful mass movements;
- * change structure and leadership at crucial points;
- * meet the sociological needs of its general membership;
- * maintain tight control; and
- * make periodic accommodations to society.

"Movements that do not comply with these principles," I said, "eventually disintegrate."

"What does *periodic accommodation* mean?" Richard asked.

"That means giving up a belief or practice that society frowns upon. The Mormon church's first accommodation was in 1890 when it gave up polygamy and economic separation. In 1978, they appeased the civil rights movement by allowing Blacks to hold the priesthood. And lastly, they deleted material from the temple ceremony which was offensive to traditional churches.

"Accommodation is crucial for a movement to maintain itself if it wants to survive beyond the first and second generation."

There was silence for a few long seconds. Laying my notes on the table, I studied their faces. Then Judy spoke.

"This is all pretty heavy stuff. But it certainly presents the Mormon Church in a new light--all cult movements for that matter." Turning to Myra, she said, "I want to read Hoffer's book when

you and Elizabeth get through."

"I'm going to buy my own book," Richard interjected. "I'm going to study it and note as many applications to ISKCON as I can." (37) Elizabeth declared she was going to do the same for the Unification Church.

Myra gave a deep sigh. "Wow, if I had known all this when I first came out, it sure would have eliminated my hang up over this divine origin thing. I could have saved myself a lot of grief. Too bad more ex-Mormons don't understand this."

I had to agree.

"All of this is pretty impressive, Myra said soberly. It's hard to believe that the Mormon Church's assertion that its success proves God's endorsement, bound me to it that much."

"Myra, how do you really feel at this point?" I asked.

"Well," she mused, "I feel different somehow. Seeing the Mormon Church as just another movement, throws it into a whole new different light. I don't have that same feeling of obligation to go back. I feel strangely detached like--I know, free!"

She hesitated for a few seconds then suddenly blurted out, "John 8:32! I never knew what it meant until now! It says if you *know the truth, the truth will set you free!* That's what's happened! Because I know the truth about what makes a cult prosper--and that divine origin has nothing to do with it-- I'm free from being tied to it! The Scripture really works!"

Myra was so elated over her new insight, that she asked, "Do you think that it was the Holy Spirit that called that Scripture to my mind? In John 14:26, Jesus said, 'the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things.'"

I grinned. "I'm sure of it, Myra."

The remainder of the evening was spent sharing experiences where the truth of God's Word brought freedom in a particular area.

Convinced that their cult's longevity and prosperity did not prove a divine origin, eliminated a major problem for them. But, it did not mean all other problems were dissolved.

NOTE TO THE READER: In my book, *Out of the Cults and Into the Church*, a section is included at the end of this chapter, entitled, "How Can Christians help?" It is for Christians who are trying to help ex-cultists make the transition out of their cult and into Christianity who are questioning their cult's longevity. I have not included it here.

Until next time.
Janis

END

ENDNOTES

1. The membership count, as of August 2007 was 13,193,999, a 2.5% increase over its 2006 total of 12,868,606.

2. Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*, (A Mentor Book, The New American Library, 4th printing, May 1962) Hoffer, preface (no p.n.). Copyright, however, is with Harper and Brothers, 1951
3. "'People,' says Hoffer, 'who are not conscious of their individual separateness, as is the case with those who are members of a compact tribe, church, part, etcetera, are not accessible to this need for change.'" Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*, (New York, Harper & Row, Perennial Library, 1962), 54.
4. Clifton E. Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1960) 334.
5. Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River: The story of the great revivalists and their impact upon religion in America* (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1958) 130.
6. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, (Garden City, NY, Doubleday & Co., 1975) 575.
7. Ahlstrom, 574.
8. Hoffer, 61.
9. Hoffer, 103.
10. Weisberger, 106.
11. Hoffer, 54.
12. Hoffer, 98
13. William J. McNiff, *Heaven on Earth: A Planned Mormon Society*, (Oxford, Ohio: Mississippi Valley Pr, 1940), 48-49.
14. Thomas O'Dea, *Sociology and the Study of Religion: Theory Research, Interpretation*. (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 149.
15. Hoffer. 86.
16. Hoffer, 86.
17. Hoffer, 86. See also Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), 234.
18. Hoffer, 86.

19. Hoffer.
20. Hoffer, 136.
21. Hoffer, 136.
22. Hoffer, 98.
23. Hoffer, 140.
24. Hoffer, 140.
25. Leonard J. Arrington, "Views From Within and Without." Brigham Young University Studies, W74, 14:140-153.
26. Arrington, 14:140-153.
27. "Crisis in LDS History," Utah Lighthouse Ministry, Salt Lake City, Utah, Salt Lake City Messenger, Jan. 1986, No. 59, 33.)
28. Thomas O'Dea, The Mormons, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), 237.
29. James L. Clayton, Dean of the Graduate School of the University of Utah, "On the Different World of Utah," Vital Speeches of the Day, n.d., 190.
30. The Inner Circle, (Marlow, Oklahoma: Utah Missions, June 1986), No. 6, Vol. 3.
31. "Crisis in LDS History," Messenger, January 1986, 59:33.
32. "Mormon Inquisition?", Salt Lake City Messenger, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, November 1993, Issue No. 85:8, 9. See also The Mormon Purge by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, available from Utah Lighthouse Ministry, P.O. Box 1884, Salt Lake City, UT 84110.
33. Ibid., 85:9.
34. Ibid., 85:8.
35. Ibid., 85:6.
36. Ibid., 85:8.
37. International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

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