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## Does Our Charity Begin and End At Home?

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# THE XENOPHOBIC MORMON

By *M. Barker*

Soviet and Mormon societies have much in common. They both involve authoritarian systems with extensive programs of education and socialization to promote the values of the institution (the Communist party and the Mormon Church, respectively) at all levels of the community. In both cases, these values involve doctrinal tenets, ritual and symbolism, and require a high degree of participation within the system by all its members. The two are highly secretive in terms of access to and dissemination of historical and ideological documents and allow little, if any, observation into the central decision-making process of the central hierarchy. Without disclosing debate, they present themselves externally as a unified group.

I do not mean to suggest that there are not important differences between the two, for in the most significant ways they differ on both means and ends. Yet they share a particular paradox which allows for a more acute comparison—a rescue/recluse dilemma. Both ideologies contain an action clause which creates a sense of mission within the community: to save the outside world from the injustice of capitalism for the Soviet, or from the wickedness of the natural man for the Mormon. Such a mission implies contact, involvement and circulation in the outside society in order to educate, persuade and convert; yet both the Soviet and Mormon societies suffer from xenophobia (fear of the outside community); thus both societies remain secluded and insulate themselves from outside influences. Rescue implies going outside oneself, while reclusion implies drawing inward.

I realize that the inclination toward seclusion is much stronger in large Mormon communities. In areas where Mormons are few, it may be weak or non-existent. Perhaps the tendency does not exist outside of Utah or the Western region. I am also aware that many Mormons defy this inclination and freely associate within

and without the Mormon culture. Nevertheless, such a tendency does exist and is worth discussion.

The Soviet society holds the outside world at bay and views foreigners with suspicion due to both their historical experience and ideological tenets. The Russian nation has experienced a long history of foreign invasion and domination including the Mongol conquest under Genghis Khan, partial occupation by Poland and China, and more recent invasions by Napoleonic France and Nazi Germany (with whom they had previously signed a non-aggression pact).

Marxist-Leninist ideology incites suspicion of the capitalist in particular, describing him as a parasite who lives off the suppression and exploitation of the working class and uses the government to aid him in that end. It is largely the capitalist system to which aggression and war are attributed. With the demise of the capitalist order and the spread of socialism, the world may evolve into communism in its fullest sense and thereby experience peace and harmony.

The Mormon form of xenophobia is also in part a product of the Mormon historical experience including the Haun's Mill massacre, the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, the Mormon extermination order in Missouri, mob violence which led to the migration west, the disenfranchisement of Mormon property by the national government and the intrusion of federal troops into Utah. However, both structural and doctrinal internal factors may have a greater impact on Mormon seclusion than the historical experience, and make it difficult to overcome the tendency. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the factors which contribute to the isolationist tendency, the consequences for Mormon society and a possible alternative.

In my home in Salt Lake City, people often speak of the many cultures and countercultures in the community. A broad distinction is often made between Mormons and those labeled by Morm-

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ons as "non-members" or "Gentiles." I became aware of the extent of the separation between the two as I looked around my neighborhood and tried to identify the families that lives on our street. Without fail, I was able to name all the Mormon families (which are many); and yet I only knew one non-Mormon family, whose name I could not readily recall. Similarly, when a Mormon family recently moved into our neighborhood, we took over dinner and quickly became acquainted. However, a non-Mormon single man moved in next door some months ago, and I have yet to meet him; and so I realize that my own family, including myself, has not totally overcome Mormon seclusiveness. We are not alone, however; often when I am with others driving home on their street I have asked "Who lives there?" and received the reply, "I don't know, but they're not members." A friend of mine and I have gone so far as to identify typically Mormon restaurants or social gathering places in Salt Lake, and those less frequented by Mormons.

Given the structural framework of the Church, it is natural for Mormons to associate together. Mormonism is more than just a value system. It is a way of life, a communal religion which one cannot fully practice alone. Instead one must participate with the group, which involves a large time commitment. Participation includes weekly church attendance and the accompanying meetings which according to one's church assignment, may include monthly home teaching and visiting teaching, regular temple attendance, quarterly welfare assignments, board meetings, occasional firesides, service projects and ward parties. It encompasses both the spiritual and social life of the Mormon, including ward basketball and summer camps for the youth, Relief Society luncheons and homemaking projects, high priests and elders quorum parties. It is natural that Mormons should feel a sense of family within the group and that close friendships should develop.

The many social and spiritual activities and commitments that foster a sense of community for Mormons, however, often leave non-Mormons out. Because participation in the Church is so pervasive, Mormons have little incentive to go outside of the Church for social contact.

Just as there are communal requirements which bring Mormons together, there are also forbidden social practices which may pose obstacles for Mormons outside their own circles. Three of

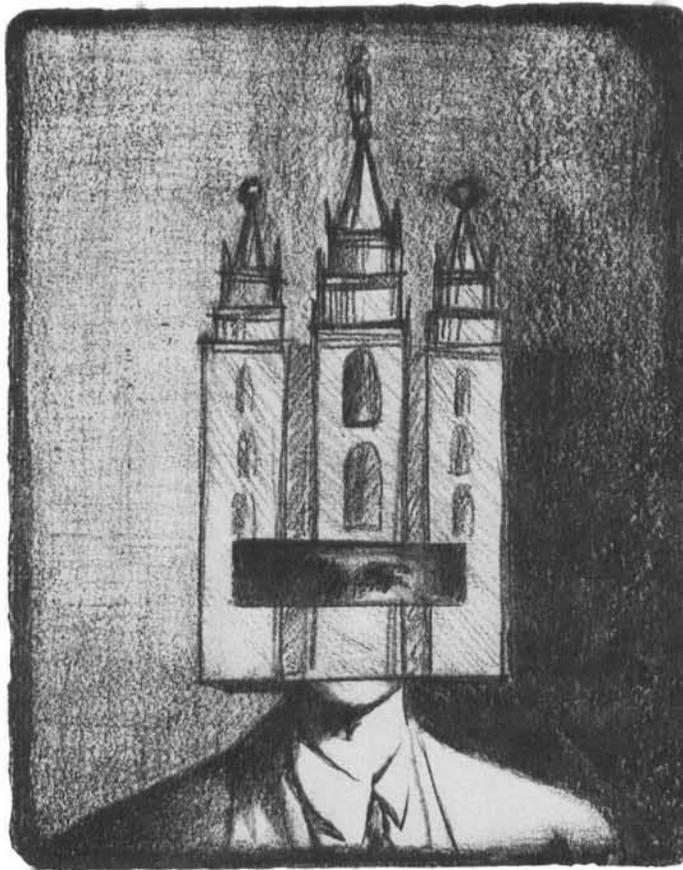
the most common may be the Word of Wisdom (prohibition of coffee, tea, cigarettes and alcoholic beverages) the proscription of sexual activity outside marriage, and social activities which may take place on Sunday. Although these values are not unique to Mormons, they may come between Mormons and others in their social lives. This problem may be more acute for the young, especially in dating situations.

Youth poses a unique problem in Mormon social life. Parents are often concerned that their children cultivate friendships which will bolster their faith, especially in the formative years. Sensitive to the influence of peer group pressure, they may encourage their children to keep their associations within the Mormon community. The emphasis on temple marriage often leads Mormon youth to restrict dating to partners who are active in the Church. The Church encourages such practices through the programs of the Young Men and Young Women Organizations, Young Adults, Young Special Interest groups and student wards. In their book *America's Saints*, authors Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley claim that this integral system was deliberately created to keep Mormons from the "influence of the outside world" (p. 53), since the Saints "remain and want to remain a people apart" (p. 32).

Along with the social practices forbidden to Mormons is Paul's injunction to "abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thess. 5:33). It is thought that Paul may have been concerned that weaker members of the new faith would falter as they observed other members doing such things as buying meat from the pagan temples under the assumption that they had participated in the activities within the temple walls. The purchasing of meat from the temple would not have been considered a transgression, but the appearance of having transgressed was perhaps deemed unwise. In a contemporary setting it may be interpreted to mean that one should avoid bars, clubs, certain parties or other environments and circumstances in which it may appear that one is partici-

pating in activities considered taboo by Mormon standards despite the accuracy of such inferences. Implicit and explicit appeals of this nature are frequent in Church manuals and tend towards further isolation of Mormon society.

The strong missionary fervor of Mormonism encourages members to associate with non-members, but only on Mormon terms.



The extensive member-missionary programs center on bringing the non-member onto Mormon ground. These programs include inviting a non-Mormon to a family home evening, ward party, special fireside, or Temple Square. Mormons are actively challenged to identify and pursue friendship with non-Mormons for the purpose of converting them (a deceiving, superficial and potentially harmful program) and within the missionary committee of the ward, activities are designed around the interests of a targeted non-Mormon in order to gain his interest.

More disturbing, however, is the biased way in which Mormons often view non-Mormons. A subtle prejudice which may develop towards the non-member through the failure to separate one's judgments of actions from judgments of individuals. Analysis of a popular phrase in Mormonism best exemplifies this idea. The phrase "Be in the world but not of the world," faces the reality that Mormons must coexist with other groups, but cautions that they need not compromise Mormon codes of behavior. The definition of what constitutes "the world" however, is left rather vague. A recent Relief Society class defined behavior as dishonesty, adultery, fornication, smoking, drinking, and drug abuse as being "of the world." Others frown upon those whose appearance is not considered standard. The problem arises as one moves from judging special actions and appearances as being "of the world," and applies those judgments to specific individuals. While certain actions may be considered worldly, it does not necessarily follow that those who participate in such actions are to be labelled as worldly. Life is too complex for such simple distinctions, and yet too often Mormons become caught up in them. They may quickly judge one whose habits or behavior does not conform to the Mormons code without taking into account the values with which he or she was reared, the insights gained from his or her own experience in life, or the obscurity of many Mormon standards. Instead, they assume that the background training and experience of all people are equal. This is not uncommon among members of the Church itself who have different perceptions of orthodoxy. They may neglect to observe whether a person has fostered values not dependent upon a specific type of religious instruction for their development, if he lives by truth as he has come to understand it. I am reminded of Saul who persecuted early Christians in the belief that he was serving God. His intentions were sincere, but his understanding was not complete.

Mormons tend to stress externals; BYU's dress code is a prime example, measuring spirituality by the length of one's hair, the design of one's slacks, and a clean shave. I often wonder if we are portraying the image we desire, whether we can look past a cigarette, levi's and long hair to what a person thinks and feels. It is a common trap to fall into, given that appearances have become so important in our society and make it so easy to categorize individual persons. The prophet Samuel was susceptible to the deception of appearances on one occasion, when the Lord informed him that "The Lord does not see as man see, men judge by appearance, but the Lord judges by the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

The biases and prejudices which sometimes appear in Mormon society are often fostered by Mormon doctrine itself (or more precisely, what is believed to be Mormon doctrine). Of the many sources I encountered for support of my argument, I have selected writings of Brigham Young, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Bruce R. McConkie because they are the most illustrative. In Elder McConkie's book *Mormon Doctrine*, he makes a disturbing connection between spirituality, race and blood:

Racial degeneration, resulting in differences in appearance and spiritual aptitude, has arisen since the fall. . . . If we had a full and true history of all races and nations, we would know the origins of all their distinctive characteristics. . . . The race and nation in which men are born in this world is a direct result of their pre-existent life (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd edition, p. 616).

In this passage, Elder McConkie establishes that racial groups have different capacities for spirituality, which may be attributed to genetics (as will be more evident in the following passages) and is directly related to previous behavior. It is unfortunate that he uses the term aptitude, implying that there are limits to one's spiritual capacity rather than the notion that one's capacity may expand to unlimited heights. Elder McConkie goes on to say:

. . . the Lord sends to earth in the lineage of Jacob those spirits who in pre-existence developed an especial talent for spirituality and for recognizing truth. . . .

Since much of Israel has been scattered among the Gentile nations, it follows that millions of people have mixed blood, blood that is part Israel and part Gentile. The more of the blood of Israel that an individual has, the easier it is for him to believe the message of salvation. . . . (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 81).

These passages reiterate the tie between spirituality and genetics to the systematic calculation that it is not just whether or not one has the proper blood, but how much and in what ratio. I begin to wonder how much of this blood I have and whether I can blame intermarriage of my ancestors for my present doubts and failings.

President Joseph Fielding Smith, quoting President Young, connects the righteousness of the Prophet Joseph Smith with the purity of his blood:

His descent from Joseph that was sold in Egypt was direct, and the blood was pure in him. this is why the Lord chose him and we are pure when this blood-stain from Ephraim comes down pure ( *Doctrines of Salvation*, III, 248).

To make it clear that these passages are to be interpreted literally and not symbolically. I quote:

But if someone whose blood was wholly of Gentile lineage were converted, he would be adopted into the lineage of Abraham and Jacob and become of the house of Israel (Abraham 2:9-11).

That this adoption involves a literal change in the converts blood was plainly taught by the prophet ( *Mormon Doctrine*,

p. 357).

This idea is reiterated by President Smith as he poses the question, "Is the lineage of Ephraim traced through blood relationship, or is it traced by the believing class?" to which he answers in favor of the former (*Doctrine of Salvation*, III, p. 247). In the question, however, he seems to acknowledge that there may be a difference between the believing class and the blood relationship which would seem to contradict the former statements.

I am moved from being disturbed to appalled as conclusions are drawn from such analysis. According to Elder McConkie:

...[I]n a broad general sense, caste systems have their root and origin in the gospel itself, and when they operate according to the divine decree, the resulting restrictions and segregation are right and proper and have approval of the Lord (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 107, 114 2nd ed.).

While acknowledging that "God is no respecter of persons," Elder McConkie contradicts himself by stating:

...Deity in his infinite wisdom, to carry out his inscrutable purposes, has a caste system of his own, a system of segregation of races and peoples (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 108, 114, 2nd ed.)

Other passages point to the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race as being "the sons of Ephraim," who not only are of the House of Israel, but are the heirs of the birthright (Widtsoe, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 437). Members of the Church claim to belong to the House of Israel, largely through the same birthright lineage (*Doctrines of Salvation*, pp. 248-249).

From these citations we can deduce that: 1) a connection is made between blood, genes and spirituality; 2) one's capacity for spirituality and ability to discern truth is largely determined by the percentage of the blood of Israel in one's veins; 3) some races are more spiritual than others, with the strong implication that they are superior; 4) those of the Anglo-Saxon race have a greater quantity of the blood of Israel; 5) Joseph Smith was chosen because his blood was pure; 6) one's position in this world (encompassing the notion of blood and race) hinges on one's performance in the pre-mortal life and is according to God's "caste system;" 7) Mormons are among the highest caste, given that they are of the House of Israel and largely of the birthright lineage.

Prejudices such as these often become more pervasive in Mormon culture and may bias one's view of the non-Mormon. If a Mormon believes that he has been blessed with the birthright lineage of Ephraim, and if he believes it is because he excelled in the pre-mortal life, he may think the opposite of his non-Mormon associate. If he believes that spirituality is in any way connected with one's blood, and that evidence of the blood of Israel is one who can discern truth, he may conclude that his non-Mormon associate may not have much of the blood of Israel, given that he has not discerned the truth of the gospel (evidenced by his lack of membership in the Church) and hence must not be as spiritual

as his Mormon counterpart. He may, therefore, deny or fail to seek out his companionship.

Analysis of this type has the frightening ring of Hitler's National Socialism, which also connected physiological characteristics (blood in particular) with intrinsic spiritual qualities. Hitler deduced from this notion that the Aryan race was superior both physically and spiritually, while other races (those of Jewish background, in particular) were considered degenerate, in varying degrees, in both categories.

Despite the title of Elder McConkie's book, I do not believe such speculation is Mormon doctrine. I consider myself in good company. John the Baptist, in mocking the Pharisees and Sadducees for such notions, claimed that God could raise children of Israel from the stones (Matt. 3:9). On one occasion, Brigham Young states:

God has created of one blood all the nations and kingdoms of men that dwell upon the face of all the earth...whatever their color, customs or religion...the blood of all is from the same element (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 57).

Although it is apparent that we are all in varying stages in our spiritual growth, and while it does not appear unreasonable that we may have been placed in situations in this life according to our talents and needs, it does not follow that the two are connected in any distinguishable pattern. Nor do I see spirituality as being constant, the underlying assumption of such arguments; rather it fluctuates over time. Furthermore, if I were going to speculate and I considered a Mormon upbringing an immense advantage in gaining spirituality, I would most likely conclude that the weaker spirits need the blessing most.

If there is anything to be made of Old Testament allusions to tribal designations and the House of Israel, I would be more inclined to interpret such passages as either the symbolic speech of a God who attempts to relate to man according to his ability to understand within his cultural framework, or the inculcation of folk notions into scripture over time. I do not think it appropriate to lift such passages out of their cultural context and would therefore take into account the writer's environment, along with its values and traditions, as he tried to interpret spiritual messages. I would apply the same criteria to Joseph Smith given that such romantic notions were prevalent in the nineteenth century.

Perhaps if the concept of tribe and race has any significance outside of the ancient cultural context and beyond mere symbolism, it may apply to specific roles or division of labor in the preparation for the return of the Savior, rather than spiritual adeptness and though in specific instances it is recorded that there were prophets who were called, due to their obedience, before they were born, this does not justify a generalization that the rest of us have been categorized according to any "caste system" due to pre-mortal merits.

There are scriptures, however, which may also foster a biased view of the non-Mormon. Among them are Christ's affirmation that "my sheep shall hear my voice" (John 10:27) and the parable

of the sower found in Matthew, chapter 13. These passages may lead one to believe that if a person as been exposed to the Church and yet failed to respond, that they are not the "sheep of the fold" and perhaps have "rocky" or "shallow" spiritual ground, unsuitable for the gospel seed. If this perception exists, it may contribute to the tendency of Mormon society to remain secluded.

Four fallacies are evident in interpretation of this kind: 1) such beliefs rest on a narrow interpretation of what constitutes distinguishing or responding to the voice of Christ. Rather than focussing on those who accept the particulars of Mormondom, a broad definition may encompass all who live by the moral teachings of Christ and others; 2) the tendency to connect knowledge with spirituality, assuming that there is a positive correlation between membership in the Mormon Church (with the accompanying knowledge of the gospel) and character development or internalization of values and their emergence in actions; 3) it involves a simplification of the conversion process which is illuminated through consideration of men like Elder B.H. Roberts, prominent Mormon theologian and scholar, who, nevertheless, struggled throughout his life to remain faithful given his doubts; 4) it assumes a static view of spirituality which labels others as believers or non-believers without accounting for growth over time or its changing nature.

Nevertheless, such biases are prevalent. Recently I heard two remarks which illustrate this prejudice made publicly in a Church meeting. The first instance involved a councilor in a stake presidency addressing a student ward sacrament meeting. He was discussing the importance of choosing the proper associates and related that when he returned home from his mission he had informed his former friends that he could no longer associate with them as they had not been living by the standards of the Church.

In a Sunday School class, while discussing the topic of friendships and associations outside of the Church, one member of the group stated that it is wise to associate with the "best" or the "cream of the crop," given that Christ had surrounded Himself with "spiritual giants."

Non-Mormons also feel the prejudice. As one young couple commented, "You try to get acquainted and they ask what ward or stake you belong to. You don't know and the conversation drops off and gets real superficial after that."

There are advantages, however, to keeping within Mormon social circles. One need not worry about leading others astray, as was Paul's concern, or of possibly encountering unnecessary temptations. It also may serve as a safeguard of one's reputation. As one associates in social settings that do not conform to Mormon standards. The risk is present that others will assume one also participates in activities which violate those standards. I have been concerned as I have heard through the grapevine about how wild I have become. Despite such safeguards, disadvantages exist which outweigh the possible advantages. Such action may distance one from the larger society and thus lose the benefit of others' insight and experience, association, challenges and criticisms. The Church reputation suffers as it is often misunderstood and perceived as being self-righteous, superficial, rigid and

anti-intellectual, which is not in the interest of a missionary church.

I would suggest instead, that the greatest benefit comes when one expands one's ideas and reduces limitations to outside associations. This may involve an attitudinal as well as a behavioral adjustment. It calls for a non-condescending posture and the ability to view others as individuals with unique life experiences which may add insight to one's own world view, rather than through institutional lenses that categorize large groups for function purposes, but which may be superficial and inappropriate on an interpersonal level. It involves more than mere tolerance, which retains an air of superiority, and instead moves toward appreciation of others and what they may contribute.

In practical terms, it would involve interacting freely in society and a willingness to relate to non-Mormons on what may be seen as their terms; attending parties and other recreational environments that may not conform to Mormon standards without having to compromise oneself.

A biblical model of integration of this type may be found in examining the life of Christ, who was often criticized for his willingness to interact with a wide range of social groups including ecclesiastical leaders (Pharisees and Sadducees) conservative political figures (Nicodemus of the Sanhedrin), publicans or tax collectors (despised as being agents of an imperial government and of which the Apostle Matthew was one); women, (regarded as second class citizens); Gentiles (such as the centurion mentioned in Matthew, chapter 8); the rich, such as Joseph of Arimathea; and those judged to be sinners.

It is not obvious that His sole intent in such social relations was for instruction. While obviously a primary factor, given His spiritual role, Christ also attended weddings, parties, dinners and had the reputation among some as being "a glutton and a drinker, a friend of tax-gathers and sinners" (Matt. 11:19). Instead of requiring the people to be present at the temple or come to surrounding hillsides to enjoy His company, He instead mingled in their social circles.

It is the diversity of interaction of this type which allows for an enlarged circle of friends and the free exchange of ideas for mutual benefit. There are theological advantages of exposure to a variety of thought. According to John Stuart Mill, unchallenged beliefs become rote dogma whereas by subjection to criticism, they are further defined and strengthened. Mill also stated that when ideas conflict, it is most likely the case that both contain partial truth and therefore, much may be gained through their interaction. ( *On Liberty* )

Mormons need not suffer from xenophobia. Though they have been subjected to intense persecution in the past, they do not differ from many other groups in this respect. While the Church may demand a large time commitment, it may also be worthwhile to spend the time and energy to enlarge one's social circles beyond Mormon boundaries. Finally, despite both subtle and salient prejudices within Mormon society, as one broadens one's associations, it may be evident that previous categories and beliefs about others are inaccurate and rewarding friendships may develop.

